

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261866
Site Address:	Warren Crest Farm, Wick Hill Lane, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3PY
Expiry Date:	6 October 2026
Site Visit Date:	24 August 2026
Proposal: Full application for the proposed improvement of the existing highway access.	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB25 – Archaeology
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	The JMWP does not apply to the scale of development proposed within the site's location.
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way ER3 – Supporting the rural economy NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE3 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design

	DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH5 – The historic environment DH6 – Archaeology
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
261620	Prior approval submission for the proposed installation of a new track to provide access to farm buildings and fields.	Prior Approval Not Required – 03/08/2026
242129	Full application for a proposed access, including formation of new trackway, improvement of existing track, and installation of new gates.	Conditionally Approved – 29/08/2025

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Highways: No objection subject to conditions
WBC Landscape and Trees: No objection
WBC Ecology: No comments received

External

Berkshire Archaeology: No objection

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Finchampstead Parish Council raised no objection.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The site comprises an existing access point close to the junction of Wick Hill Lane and Jubilee Road, together with the southern end of an informal, largely unsurfaced route serving Warren Crest Farm. The farm is an agricultural holding of approximately 29 hectares. The site lies outside settlement limits in the open countryside. Agricultural fields lie to the south and south-east, woodland lies to the east, and the settlement of Finchampstead North lies to the north and west.

Proposal:

This application proposes the improvement of the existing highway access including the realignment of the existing access point and field gate, and the realignment and

surfacing of the existing access route, at its southern end, to create an access track. The track is to be surfaced in compacted stone.

The proposal overlaps in part with the development approved under planning permission 242129 which remains capable of implementation. It would realign and resurface the southern section of the existing route serving the farm buildings and fields. Under prior approval 261620, the Council confirmed that prior approval was not required for a new track providing access to the farm buildings and fields. It is understood that the current proposal would be implemented together with the works considered under 261620, instead of planning permission 242129.

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

As the site lies outside settlement limits in the designated countryside, Core Strategy Policy CP11, 'Proposals Outside Development Limits (including countryside)', is relevant. The policy seeks to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. It does not ordinarily permit development outside settlement limits unless the relevant criteria are met. In this case, the relevant considerations are whether the proposal would support a diverse and sustainable rural enterprise and whether it would avoid excessive encroachment or expansion away from the original buildings.

- 1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and
- 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and
- 3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement;

The NPPF 2026 came into effect on 17th August 2026 and introduced National Decision-Making Policies (NDMPs). Policy S3 establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For proposals outside settlements, Policy S5 provides the decision-making framework for applying that presumption for sites outside of a defined settlement boundary. Policy S5 states that only certain forms of development should be approved outside settlements, including: (a) development for agriculture. It therefore needs to be established whether the proposal is reasonably necessary for agriculture.

Firstly, it must be acknowledged that the proposal would support a sustainable rural enterprise through supporting a working farm. The applicant has submitted a case

outlining the Agricultural Need for the proposal within the submitted Planning Statement. This includes the need for a safe and reliable access to allow efficient operation of a working farm, ease access for large farm machinery and HGVs upon which the farm is reliant. It is argued that the proposal would remove the shortcomings of the existing access arrangement which are a significant constraint on the farm business, and conflicts with other uses of the byway.

When reviewing the site's planning history there is no evidence to suggest that the agricultural use of the site has ceased. Circumstances have not changed on site following the Council's previous assessment under the extant permission (ref. 242129) which would indicate that the agricultural use of the wider site has permanently ceased. The agricultural need for the proposed development can therefore be accepted. This conclusion is based on the submitted agricultural justification, the established agricultural use of the holding, the nature and scale of the machinery identified, and the relationship of the proposed access to the farm buildings and fields. The proposed works have a functional and proportionate relationship with the agricultural use.

The physical alterations associated with this proposal are fairly limited to the resurfacing and slight realignment of the existing access route to create a formalised access track, plus the realignment of the site's existing southern access. As such, the proposal complies with Core Strategy policy CP11 and NPPF policy S5 and is acceptable in principle subject to an assessment of the impact on the character of the area, highway safety and all relevant material considerations.

Character of the Area:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high quality design. R1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area. R12 of the Borough Design Guide SPD states that boundary treatments should be designed to contribute positively to the character of the area and to the quality of the public realm.

There are no material differences between the current proposal and the plans approved under application ref 242129. The proposed timber double cross gate serving the realigned southern access point would retain the permeability of the existing boundary treatment and is characteristic of field access gates within the site's rural setting. Moreover, the gate would be set further back from the highway than the existing metal gate to be removed (by approximately 23 metres), further mitigating the visual impact of the amendments to the site's southern access point.

The proposed access track mostly follows the route of the existing unsurfaced route, with the exception of a minor realignment of the central section. As such, the proposal would not create any new gaps in the hedgerows which mark the boundaries of the fields within the site or further dissect the agricultural fields the track would service.

In terms of its appearance, while the track would formalise the existing access route and be more visually prominent, it would be surfaced with crushed stone which would

be softer in appearance than more heavy-duty alternatives such as tarmac or scalplings. Moreover, public views of the development would be very limited to vantage points from the highway access point where it would be viewed in the context of the adjoining vehicular highways.

Overall, the proposal would have a fairly limited impact on the rural character of the area and an acceptable visual impact in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP3.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Due to the scale and nature of the proposed development, and the site being located a considerable distance away from any neighbouring properties, there are no concerns relating to potential impact on neighbouring amenity in terms of loss of light, overbearing or overlooking. In terms of potential noise impact, any increase in traffic would not have a discernible impact on amenity in the context of traffic already passing along Jubilee Road (a classified 'B' road).

Highway Access and Safety Matters:

NDMP policy TR6(4) of the NPPF states that development proposals should be refused if they would have an adverse impact on the transport network or an unacceptable impact on highway safety. Core Strategy policy CP6 concerns issues relating to highway safety and access, stating that planning permission will be granted for schemes that, amongst other requirements, provide appropriate vehicular parking, enhance road safety and do not cause highway problems.

The proposed alterations to the site's southern access point comprise its slight repositioning to the east of the existing vehicular access and the formation of the access track joining with Wick Hill Lane. The access point would be located in close proximity to the junction of Jubilee Road (a classified 'B' road) and Wick Hill Lane (a single track private road). Jubilee Road meets Wick Hill Lane on a sharp bend.

There are no material differences between the current proposal and the plans approved under application ref 242129. The Council's Highways Officer has raised no objection, subject to all works including the off-site traffic signs being implemented prior to the first use of the access. This is secured via conditions.

The swept-path analysis shows that a 19-metre tractor and hay wagon turning left from the site would cross into the opposing lane. This is an adverse highway-safety consideration. The Highway Authority has nevertheless concluded that the effect would not be unacceptable, having regard to the anticipated low frequency of movements by vehicles of this size and the proposed warning signs. Substantial weight is afforded to that technical advice. Subject to the signs and access works being provided before first use and retained thereafter, the proposal would not result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety in accordance with NDMP TR6 and Core Strategy policy CP6.

Flood Risk and Drainage:

The works would introduce a compacted-stone surface and alter the alignment of the

access. Having regard to the limited area involved, the permeable nature of the proposed finish and the absence of evidence that runoff would be discharged onto the highway or neighbouring land, the proposal would not materially increase flood risk. Subject to the access being constructed in accordance with the approved details, the development accords with MDD Policies CC09 and CC10.

Landscape and Trees:

MDD Local Plan Policy TB21 requires consideration of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment. Proposals must retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape. The site is located within Area N2 'Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland' of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBCLA) (2019) which is a high quality landscape within high sensitivity and a low capacity for change. The landscape strategy includes to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character and dark skies, and the aim of development is to conserve the coherent pattern of settlement and avoid the spread of urban built form including roads into the area.

Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan aims to protect green infrastructure networks, promote linkages between public open space and the countryside, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping. There are no protected trees within the site, however trees and vegetation on and adjacent to the site's boundaries are important to the verdant setting and should be retained and protected in accordance with policy CC03.

Mature trees and vegetation define the site's southern boundary adjoining the highway, with the existing access point located within a small clearing between the adjacent woodland to the west and a line of mature trees on and adjacent to the boundary to the east. It appears that there has been some clearance of vegetation in recent years.

There are no material differences between the current proposal and the plans approved under application ref 242129. This re-submission is supported by updated Arboricultural information (Venner's Arboriculture, December 2025) which confirms that the relocated access would not result in the loss of any additional trees, and that there is no vegetation within the visibility splays. As there will be no additional loss of vegetation, the proposal complies with the aforementioned policies and the Council's Landscape Architect has raised no objection.

Ecology:

Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan requires the incorporation of new biodiversity features, buffers between habitats and species of importance and integration with the wider green infrastructure network.

The submitted arboricultural information demonstrates that retained trees and vegetation can be protected, but it does not itself establish the absence of effects on protected or priority species. Having regard to the limited footprint, use of an existing route, absence of identified vegetation removal and compliance with the Arboricultural Method Statement, there is no evidence of a likely significant ecological effect. A

precautionary informative should require works to stop and specialist advice to be obtained if protected species are encountered. Subject to the works being carried out in accordance with the submitted Arboricultural Method Statement, there would be no direct or indirect harm to protected species and habitats as a result of the development in accordance with policy TB23.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is now mandatory for major and minor planning applications unless the proposed development meets the exception criteria set out in paragraph 17 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 and The Environment Act 2021 (Commencement No. 8 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024.

From 6 August 2026, BNG does not apply to planning applications for developments where the site area within the red line boundary is 0.2 hectares or below. In this case, the site area is 0.04 hectares and therefore the development does not have to demonstrate that there would be a net gain of 10% or more following the development.

Archaeology:

Policy TB25 of the MDD Local Plan states that where development is likely to affect an area of high archaeological potential or an area which is likely to contain archaeological remains, the presumption is that appropriate measures shall be taken to protect remains by preservation in situ.

The application site does not fall within an identified area of high archaeological potential. However, its southern boundary is in close proximity to The Devils Highway Roman Road. As there is a potential for archaeological remains to be damaged by ground disturbance, the extant permission (ref 242129) is subject to a condition requiring the submission of, and agreement to, a Written Scheme of Investigation prior to the commencement of the development.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (John Moore Heritage Services, September 2025) has been submitted in support of this application. Berkshire Archaeology have reviewed the report and raised no objection, confirming that it lays out an appropriate approach for the completion of the works. The pre-commencement condition attached to the extant permission has subsequently been resolved. Compliance with the submitted WSI is necessary to make the development acceptable and should therefore be secured by condition, including the approved programme of fieldwork, analysis, reporting, dissemination and archive deposition. An informative alone would not secure those requirements.

Planning Balance and Conclusion:

The proposal accords with the development plan when read as a whole. It would support the continued use of an established agricultural holding and its limited physical effects would not cause unacceptable harm to countryside character,

landscape, highway safety, amenity, trees, biodiversity or archaeology, subject to compliance with the recommended conditions. The identified vehicle overrun into the opposing lane attracts limited adverse weight. However, in light of the restricted scale and frequency of movements, the Highway Authority's technical assessment and the secured mitigation any impact on highway safety would be limited and would not warrant a reason for refusal in this instance.

On balance, the application is acceptable and is therefore recommended for **approval** subject to conditions.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Not Required
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	1 October 2026
Earliest date for decision:	3 September 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	02/10/26

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

- **Countryside**
- **Landscape Character Assessment Area – Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland**
- **Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones – 5km Zone**
- **Badger Setts Consultation Zone**
- **SSSI Impact Risk Zone**