

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	241900
Site Address:	Land South of Old Bath Road Sonning, RG4 6GQ
Expiry Date:	3 October 2025
Site Visit Date:	8 April 2022 (220663) & 31 January 2025
Proposal: Application to vary condition 2 of planning consent 220663 for the proposed erection of 57 dwellings following demolition of the existing dwellings (Access, Layout, Scale and appearance to be considered). Condition 2 refers to approved plans and details and the variation is to change the site layout and associated details. The proposal also includes a request to vary the S106 to remove the age-related occupancy restriction.	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP17 – Housing Delivery
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB05 – Housing Mix TB06 – Development of Private Residential Gardens TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	The JMWP is not relevant to this type of planning application.
Wokingham Borough	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy

Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS4 – Development within or adjacent to minor settlements SS10 – Meeting our housing needs C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging H1 – Housing mix, density and standards H12 – Residential development of existing private gardens NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sonning Parish Design Statement

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
241899	Application for non-material amendment to planning consent 220663 to remove the wording "suitable for older persons accommodation" from the description.	Approved – 17/09/2025
220663	Outline planning application for the proposed erection of 57 dwellings suitable for older persons accommodation following demolition of the existing dwellings (Access, Layout, Scale and appearance to be considered).	Conditionally Approved subject to S106 – 12/05/2023
213022 (Not implemented)	Reserved Matters application pursuant to Outline planning permission 201833 with Appearance and landscaping reserved for the proposed 57 dwellings suitable for older persons accommodation (Use Class C3) with consideration of means of access, layout and scale to be determined. Following demolition of existing dwellings. (Appearance and Landscaping to be considered.)	Conditionally Approved subject to S106 – 07/01/2022
201833 (Not implemented)	Outline application with Appearance and landscaping reserved for the proposed 57 dwellings suitable for older persons accommodation (Use Class C3) with consideration of means of access, layout and scale to be determined. Following demolition of existing dwellings.	Conditionally Approved subject to S106 – 30/07/2021

CONSULTATION RESPONSES
Internal

WBC Environmental Health: No comment
WBC Drainage: No objection
WBC Highways: No objection
WBC Economic Prosperity & Place (Community Infrastructure): No objection
WBC Landscape and Trees: No objection subject to conditions
WBC Ecology: No objection subject to conditions

External

Natural England: No comments received
Southern Gas Networks: Advice regarding services
SSE Power Distribution: Advice regarding services
Thames Water Utilities Ltd: No comments received
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust: No comments received
Crime Prevention Design Advisor: No comments received
South East Water: No comments received
Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue: Advice concerning vehicular access
BOB ICB NHS Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Sonning Parish Council object on the following grounds: - Removal of age restricted occupation would have a significant material impact on traffic movements, on-site parking provision and related highway safety matters. - Loss of amenity space to facilitate increased on-site parking provision, insufficient for future occupants. - Impact on previously approved affordable housing contribution, needs to be reassessed in full. - Loss of open countryside views and impact on character of the area. - Objections to original consent on accessibility, environmental impact and loss of privacy remain valid. - The Sonning Neighbourhood Plan needs assessment shows a clear demand for homes for older people in Sonning. There is no need for additional family units. <i>Officer's Comment: The Sonning Neighbourhood Plan is at a draft stage and has not formally been adopted as part of the local development plan. As such, it holds no weight at this stage.</i> - Increased pressure on local infrastructure including school places. - Risk of individual flats being purchased and let as small HMOs/student occupancy. - Recent events show existing drainage within the area is insufficient. Following the submission of revised plans, re-consultation was carried out on 08/11/2024. Sonning Parish Council submitted additional comments on 22/11/2024 which re-
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	iterated their previous objections.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours/Local Residents	14 comments received (not including duplicates) objecting on the following grounds: - Overdevelopment of the site. Scale and design of the built form is out of character with the street scene and the surrounding historic village setting. - Loss of privacy and adverse overlooking impact on neighbouring properties worsened by removal of age-restricted occupation. <i>Officer's Comment: No changes to the approved elevations of the blocks (including the fenestration) are proposed under this application. The proposed amendments to the approved plans consist of changes to the site layout and minor internal alterations only.</i> - Loss and mismanagement of existing mature trees and landscaping. Proposed soft landscaping would not adequately compensate for or mitigate this loss, and is a degradation from the approved layout. - Insufficient on-site parking provision would cause disruption on local roads. - Increased impact on traffic movements and associated highway safety matters. - The site falls within an unsustainable location with insufficient access to shops and services and limited public transport options. - Community Infrastructure Levy and Affordable Housing payments agreed under the original consent must be revisited if the age restriction of occupants is removed. <i>Officer's Comment: The approved scheme is fully CIL liable and the proposed amendment does not alter this. Affordable Housing matters are discussed in the 'Other' section of the report below.</i> - A needs assessment prepared for the draft Sonning Neighbourhood Plan demonstrates there is a need for housing for elderly persons in Sonning. <i>Officer's Comment: The Sonning Neighbourhood Plan is at a draft stage and has not formally been adopted as part of the local development plan. As such, it holds no weight at this stage.</i> - Concerns regarding the change in site ownership, the nature of the new owner(s) and the applicant for this application being a different company than the applicant for the original consent. <i>Officer's Comment: These are not material planning considerations. The LPA has a duty to assess all applications on their own merits.</i> - The change to non-age-restricted housing under this application is not clear in the submitted documents.

	This change would cause more disruption to neighbouring properties particularly in terms of noise disturbance, traffic and light pollution. This is a significant change to the original consent which requires a full re-assessment of the development of the site. - Increased strain on local infrastructure including school spaces and healthcare facilities. - Increased strain on the existing drainage system within the area which has recently failed. - Proposed amenity space is insufficient for unrestricted occupation particularly families. - Increased impact on environmental concerns including waste generation and pressure on local green spaces and ecological networks. Following the submission of revised plans, re-consultation was carried out on 08/11/2024. 10 further comments (not including duplicates) were received which re-iterated the objections outlined above.
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APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is located on the eastern edge of the defined settlement boundary of Sonning. The site (circa. 1.18ha in size) currently comprises three large, detached dwellings known as 'Red Lodge', 'The Range' and 'The Lawns' plus their shared private access road. The existing dwellings are set well back from the highway (Old Bath Road) and are well screened with mature trees and vegetation along most site boundaries.

The site's eastern boundary immediately abuts the site of a very large three storey building that currently operates as Sunrise Nursing Home, an assisted living and care home. Further east lies the Redingensians Rams RFC, with Sonning Golf Course to the south. To the west lies a cluster of residential development including the fairly recently constructed cul-de-sac of four dwellings which are also served off Old Bath Road. Generally, residential dwellings in the surrounding area predominantly comprise of a suburban and large, detached form.

Proposal:

This application seeks to vary condition 2 of outline planning consent 220663. Condition 2 relates to the approved details and the proposed variation is to allow various amendments to the approved site layout including the provision of additional parking spaces, plus alterations to the internal layout of the approved blocks in connection with the removal of the age-related occupancy restriction of the development once complete. No changes are proposed to the external scale, siting or appearance of the 3no. approved apartment blocks or the number of residential units they would contain (57no.).

A Deed of Variation to the S106 Agreement relating to consent ref 220663 to remove the occupancy restriction was completed on 10th September 2025.

Preamble:

The removal of the age-related occupancy restriction of the development, once completed, was approved under a Non-Material Amendment (NMA) application (ref 241899) which was submitted alongside this Section 73 (S73) application. As a result, the description of development has been updated to remove reference to the accommodation being specifically for older persons. This revised description has been carried over into this S73 application.

The removal of the age-related occupancy restriction from the description of development was fully assessed under the NMA application. In summary, it was concluded that allowing unrestricted occupation (in terms of age) would not materially affect the operative part of the planning consent; namely, the delivery of 57 residential dwellings (Use Class C3). It would also not alter the established principle of development on the site or require significant changes to the approved scheme. Therefore, the amendment was deemed non-material. A Deed of Variation to the Section 106 Agreement associated with the original consent (ref: 220663), formally removing the age-related occupancy restriction, was completed on 10 September 2025.

This S73 application proposes relatively minor changes to the approved site layout, including increased parking provision and de minimis internal alterations to the apartment blocks. These changes reflect the approved removal of the age-related occupancy restriction.

No changes are proposed to the approved bulk, scale, siting, or appearance of the apartment blocks, nor to the overall quantum of development or the size of individual residential units. While several comments on this application have raised concerns about these aspects of the approved scheme and suggested a full reassessment of the scheme is required, the scope of this S73 application is limited. Only the proposed amendments and their impact on relevant material planning considerations can be assessed; elements of the scheme that remain unchanged cannot be re-evaluated.

It should also be noted that the approved scheme was granted outline consent, with landscaping details reserved. As such, the landscaping shown on the revised plans is indicative only. Full landscaping details will need to be submitted and considered separately through a Reserved Matters application.

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.

The principle of the re-development of the site to create 57no. residential units contained within 3no. apartment blocks has already been established by the grant of outline consent 220663 dated 12/05/2023. The proposed amendments to the approved scheme are acceptable in principle subject to the following assessment of the relevant material planning considerations.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.

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. Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD Local Plan set out the parking standards for development, noting that these should be regarded as a starting point with each site assessed on its own merits. P3 of the Borough Design Guide SPD notes that parking spaces are to be a minimum of 5m x 2.5m. P3 of the Borough Design Guide SPD notes that parking spaces should be safe and convenient, close to the dwelling and sited to minimise impact upon safety.

No changes are proposed to the approved vehicular access point off Old Bath Road. Concerns regarding potential increased traffic movements associated with unrestricted occupation are duly noted. The Council's Highways Officer has reviewed the application and is satisfied that the traffic generated by the development following completion would not have an adverse impact on the wider highway network, including any potential increase associated with the unrestricted occupation of the units (in terms of age).

Following substantial discussions between the applicant and Officers, a revised site plan was submitted showing 80no. parking spaces for the development, an increase of 13no. spaces compared to the approved scheme. A smaller parking area comprising 20no. spaces would serve Block A, with the remaining 60no. spaces serving Blocks B & C. Across the site, each dwelling would have 1no. allocated spaces each (57no. total) with 12no. visitor spaces and 11 no. unallocated spaces.

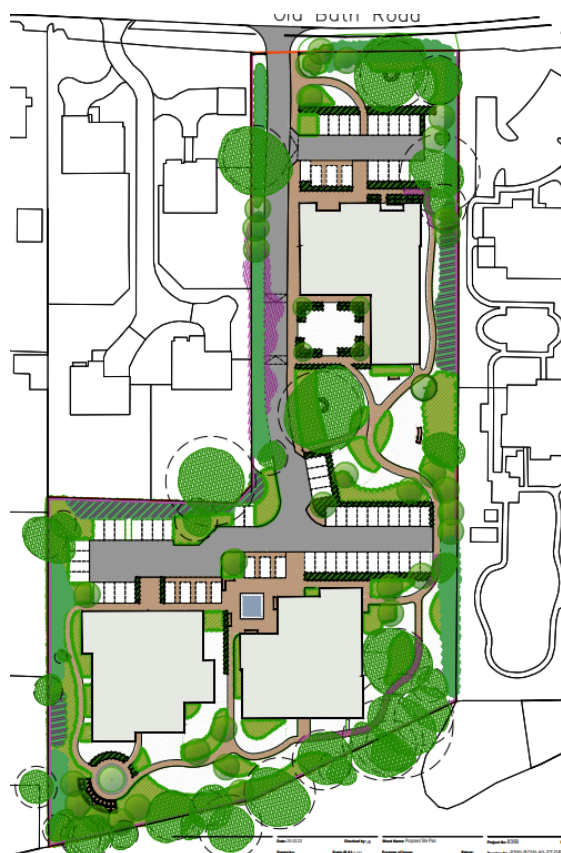
The Council's Highways Officer has reviewed the proposed parking provision and raised no objection, concluding that the amended scheme would meet the Council's parking standards. There is also no objection to the layout of the parking areas. As such, the proposal remains in compliance with MDD Local Plan policy CC07. Condition 16 of the original consent which requires the submission of Parking Management Strategy will remain, this will secure the specific parking arrangements including the provision of EV charging points. Condition 15, requiring the submission of full details for cycle parking provision, will also remain attached to the varied scheme to promote sustainable transport modes.

Overall, the proposed changes to the parking provision to accommodate the usage by the occupants meets policy requirements, while no adverse impact on highway safety matters has been identified.

Character of the Area, Landscaping and Trees:

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy requires developments to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. 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. 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.

As discussed, no changes are proposed to the bulk, scale, siting and appearance of the approved apartment blocks. Landscaping is also reserved for consideration at a later stage, meaning that details shown in the submitted plans are largely indicative. Following discussions between the applicant and Officers, a revised site layout plan was submitted and this was re-consulted on. Further concerns on the layout were received and in response an additional revised plan (Rev.C) was received on 03/01/2025 which significantly changed the layout of the proposed parking area fronting Block A and is overall more akin to the approved layout plan. A comparison of the revised site layout plan and the approved plan is shown below.



Approved Site Layout Plan



Proposed Revised Site Layout Plan

The Council's Landscape Architect has reviewed the revised plan and raised no objection, concluding that their concerns regarding the layout of the parking area fronting Block A have been resolved. These parking spaces have been consolidated into two rows, akin to the approved scheme, resulting in an appropriate set back from the site's boundary fronting Old Bath Road. This retains an appropriate green buffer fronting the development which will soften its overall visual impact as viewed from the street scene and contribute to a garden character within the northern part of the site.

Across the site, the overall layout has been tweaked to ensure that any hardstanding (indicative at this stage) does not encroach the root protection areas of the retained trees, including the TPO protected trees within the curtilage of 'The Lawns', which contribute significantly to the landscape character of Bath Road. While the parking provision fronting Blocks B & C has been increased, the proposal retains sufficient soft edges at all site boundaries and there are still sufficient green buffers within the site to mitigate the overall visual impact of the scheme.

Overall, it is considered that the amended scheme achieves an appropriate balance between facilitating the need for more parking spaces while not adversely affecting the development's impact on local character and the need to deliver green infrastructure enhancements. Additionally, further details including a full landscaping scheme and a landscape management plan will be agreed at the Reserved Matters and Discharge of Condition(s) stages of the development. The proposed amendments therefore would not introduce any additional harm to the character of the area or landscape character in accordance with policies CP1 & CP3 of the Core Strategy.

Ecology:

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF is clear that new development should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by minimising impact on and providing net gains for biodiversity. 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.

Following initial discussions with the Council's Ecology Officer, a revised Addendum to Bat Activity Surveys report (Crossman, 14/11/2024) was submitted in support of the application. This report confirms that an additional bat surveys will be carried out within the bat activity season prior to the intended commencement of the development, as required by Natural England, to ensure that the necessary Bat Licence can be issued prior to works commencing on site. The Ecology Officer has raised no objection to this approach.

While the increase of on-site parking provision will reduce the area of planting on site, it is not considered to have a significant effect on bat foraging and commuting habitat in the wider landscape context. Proposed boundary planting alongside the retained trees will provide a foraging and commuting resource and a continuous habitat linking the site to the surrounding landscape. Concern was initially raised by the Ecology Officer regarding external lighting serving the parking areas and the potential impact on bats. However, Condition 6 ensures that no external lighting will be implemented on site without the Council's consent to protect the natural environment.

Subject to acceptable full landscaping details being secured via the Reserved Matters application, and compliance with the other relevant conditions, the proposed amendment would not have a material effect on protected species or harm the development's contribution to biodiversity net gain in accordance with the NPPF and MDD Local Plan policy TB23.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Core Strategy Policy CP3 states that development proposals should not result in a detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life. Given the nature of the proposed amendment, there are no concerns in respect of additional loss of light, overbearing or overlooking impact over and above the original permission.

Objections have been received in respect of noise disturbance on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers because of the increased parking provision and comings and goings to the site compared to the original permission. It is acknowledged that there will be some additional noise impact arising from the proposed amendment. However, this would not cause substantial or adverse disturbance to neighbouring properties as it would be transient rather than persistent noise, i.e., the main noise impact will be as the engine turns on and then cars drive away.

Additionally, the additional parking spaces are positioned amongst the approved layout, with no decrease in separation distance from the approved parking areas to the boundaries shared with neighbouring properties to the west/north-west. The Council's Environmental Health team have raised no objections in respect of noise impact, and it is also noted that noise mitigations relating to the construction period are secured via conditions 7 & 8.

As such, the proposed amendment would not introduce any adverse impact on neighbouring amenity over and above the original permission in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP3.

Residential Amenity for future occupiers:

The proposed amendment will not impact on the approved internal floor space of each residential dwelling. Proposed minor internal layout changes relate to the change in function of approved communal areas to reflect the unrestricted occupation (e.g., a gym instead of a guest suite) which is acceptable.

Objections have been received in respect of the reduction of external amenity space for future occupiers, and its unsuitability for a development with unrestricted occupation (in terms of age). As the additional parking provision is situated within the approved parking areas, the proposed amendments does not result in the reduction in size of the four communal garden areas (one on the site frontage, one to the rear of Block A and two at the rear of the site). Landscaping details is a reserved matter, however the revised site layout plan shows a betterment of the communal area at the site frontage and the removal of an indicated bowling green to the rear of Block A (creating more usable space for general garden activities including play).

It should also be noted that irrespective of the age of occupants, the development comprises solely 1 and 2 bed apartments which would likely not be optimal for occupation by larger families seeking accommodation in 3+bed residential units. Therefore, the likelihood is that there will be a low percentage of children occupying the site. Nonetheless, the proposed areas of open space would still provide adequate amenity space in principle, with further details to be secured at the Reserved Matters stage.

Other:

The proposed amendments do not impact any other material planning considerations relating to the approved development. The impact of the overall development on other matters will remain mitigated by the other conditions attached to the original consent which have not been amended, e.g., drainage matters will be approved in full when discharging conditions 22, 23 & 24.

With the exception of the removal of the age-related occupation restrictive covenant, the S106 agreement relating to the original consent has not been altered. As such, there remains a late stage viability review within the S106 which allows the Council to recover any improved return for Affordable Housing contributions to a policy compliant level, resulting from the open market sale of the dwellings, prior to occupation.

In light of the above assessment, and all comments received, the application is acceptable and is therefore recommended for **approval**.

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, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. 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 2025
Earliest date for	22 November 2024

decision:	
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>HMM</i>
Date:	3 October 2025

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

- Limited Development Location (Countryside directly to the south/rear of the site)
- Affordable Housing Thresholds
- Bat Roost Habitat Suitability Model
- Tree Preservation Orders
- SSSI Impact Risk Zones
- Green Routes and Riverside Paths Consultation Zone
- Risk of Flooding from Surface Water Zone (mostly 1 in 1,000-year extent)
- Minerals Site Consultation Area
- Replacement Mineral Local Plan