

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251912
Site Address:	Silver Birches, Heath Ride, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3QJ
Expiry Date:	14 January 2026
Site Visit Date:	10 October 2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 1 no. detached dwelling with 2 no. carports, front wall and entrance gates and associated landscaping, following demolition of the existing dwelling and outbuildings.	

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 CP7 – Biodiversity 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 CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM3 - Protection of Habitats and Species DM4 - Protection of Designated Landscape DM5 - Protection of the Countryside DM10 - Flood Risk DM15 - Site History
Wokingham Borough Local Plan	CE7 – Low carbon and renewable energy generation C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging

Update (LPU)	
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
251783	Householder application for the proposed erection of swimming pool and associated garden house.	Withdrawn 01/12/2025
250144	Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed erection of a detached pool house including lower ground floor level, outdoor swimming pool and associated structures to rear.	Refused 21/03/2025
20582	Single storey rear extension to provide utility room and playroom/bedroom.	Approved 30/01/1984

CONSULTATION RESPONSES
Internal
WBC Environmental Health – No comments received. WBC Drainage – No objection, subject to conditions. WBC Highways – <u>Original consultation</u>: Request further information. <u>Following re-consultation</u>: Front wall/gates and access acceptable, parking arrangements acceptable, EV Charging points, Cycle provision and Refuse collection point still applicable. WBC Landscape and Trees – <u>Original consultation</u>: No objection, subject to conditions. <u>Following re-consultation</u>: Maintain no objection, subject to conditions. WBC Public Rights Of Way – No comments received. WBC CIL – CIL liable. WBC Ecology Newts – No objection, subject to Informative. WBC Ecology – No objection, subject to conditions. WBC Waste Services – No comments received.
External
Natural England – No objection.

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received.

South East Water – No comments received.

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	<u>Original consultation:</u> Objection. Concerns relate to: - Overdevelopment of the site. - Design is out of character with the street scene, contrary to FNDP Policy D3, 1b and by virtue of the height and design, the front gates are unsympathetic for the area. <u>Revised plans re-consultation:</u> No comments received.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received.
Neighbours	One letter of support.

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site consists of a detached bungalow, detached garage and detached outbuilding set within a large plot on the northern side of Heath Ride. There is also one recently erected outbuilding located to the rear of adjoining neighbour, Little Oak.

The site is located within countryside. The central section and rear edges of the site are covered by Woodland Tree Preservation Order (TPO) 874/1997. This covers all trees of whatever species. There is also a Single TPO - 289/1985, T4 (Turkey Oak) which is not within the site but close to the western shared boundary along with Group TPO - 0289-1985 which covers 11 Birch and 4 Oak trees.

Heath Ride is a classified Public Right of Way – Restricted Byway (FINC24). A public right of way is a highway over which the public have a right of access along the route.

The property is set back a substantial distance from the road and set back from the established building within the vicinity.

Proposal:

This application seeks approval for the removal of the existing dwelling, garage and outbuildings and the erection of a four-bedroom, three storey (including basement) detached dwelling. Also included is an external staircase to access the basement and external steps to the rear to access the garden with retaining walls incorporated to the rear and side of the property.

The property would incorporate sustainability features such as a living wall, green roof, air source heat pump and solar panels.

A new front boundary wall and gates are proposed along with a scheme for hard and soft landscaping across the site.

Note:

The original submission included a full two-height dwelling with basement, two detached carports and a 2m solid front wall and entrance gates. Following discussions with the applicant, revised plans were submitted to reduce the height of the main dwelling, remove the carports and 2m front boundary treatment. The revised plans now propose two integral basement parking spaces accessed via two car lifts, a low-level front boundary wall with metal railings and a tall metal gate.

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 (MDD) 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.

In this instance, the site is located outside settlement limits within the countryside. Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy (CS) does not permit development outside of development limits except if in the case of residential development, it involves extensions to existing dwellings or replacement dwellings, does not lead to excessive expansion away from the original building, does not result in inappropriate increases in scale, form or footprint and would bring about environmental improvement.

A replacement dwelling in countryside is acceptable in principle. For the reasons set out in this report, the proposed dwelling is considered acceptable in terms of scale and form, would bring about environmental improvements and would not lead to excessive expansion away from the original building, thus, is compliant with CS Policy CP11.

The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan (FNP) was adopted in September 2023 and covers the area of Finchampstead Parish. Policy AHD1 only allows development outside of development locations where it is supported by national and borough planning policies. Supporting text at paragraph 5.5 in the FNP states that development outside development limits will be supported when considered against the criteria set by CS Policy CP11, or successor. For the reasons set out in this report, the proposal is considered to meet the requirements of Policy CP11.

Character of the Area:Siting and scale

Heath Ride is a private, single-track lane which consists of mostly detached dwellings set within substantial plots. The application site and surroundings appear spacious and verdant which maintains an open character to the countryside setting. The existing dwelling, garage and outbuildings are proposed to be demolished and replaced with a large, two-storey dwelling with basement.

As existing, the property establishes a setback building line as it is already setback approximately 26m from both side neighbouring properties. The replacement dwelling would be set along the same building line as the existing property which is approximately 47m setback from the road.

The existing dwelling, garage and outbuildings would be removed to facilitate the erection of a four-bedroom detached dwelling. The existing dwelling is a mid-twentieth century bungalow and is modest in proportion and appearance. In its existing form, the dwelling holds limited architectural or historic merit and makes a limited contribution to the character or appearance of the surrounding area.

Architectural styles and materials used along the road are varied, with no single prevailing character, contributing to a diverse streetscape. While many of the older period properties are constructed from traditional brick and pitched roofs, there are many later additions to the road which include mid-twentieth century housing and more recent schemes which have included modern extensions, alterations and replacement dwellings. As such, the evolving street scene is one where no single architectural style or building form predominates.

CP3 of the Core Strategy states that proposals should be of an appropriate scale of mass, built form and character. The Council's Borough Design Guide (BDG) SPD gives advice on residential developments. Policy CP11 states that the development should not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original building.

The proposed dwelling would be contemporary in design and larger than the existing property, however, its scale, massing and layout are considered appropriate within the context of the site and surrounding development. Given the presence of several modern and recently constructed dwellings along the road, the proposal would not appear incongruous or visually intrusive. Examples include Alba, Honey Dene, Bluebell House, Victoria House, Pine Lodge, Friars Lodge and Green Fern. All of which add and contribute to a varied local character with no dominating style.

The Council's Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), adopted June 2012, identifies a 50% increase in volume as being acceptable for replacement dwellings in countryside. However, this guidance relates to single-storey development, which does not include the proposal. Nevertheless, the SPD generally seeks to minimise the impact of buildings on the countryside.

The Local Parish object to the proposed development stating that it represents an overdevelopment of the site and the design being out of character with the street scene. These matters have been carefully considered, having regard to the size of the plot, the siting of the dwelling, the design approach and the level of associated development. While the proposed dwelling would be large, the plot is substantial and adequate amenity space would be retained, well in excess of typical standards, sufficient parking is proposed and the proposed layout allows for soft landscaping and visual relief around the building.

While it is acknowledged the footprint of the replacement dwelling would mark a significant increase from the existing building, this matter must be assessed in terms of its perceived scale, visual impact and impact on the character of the countryside, rather than volume and footprint alone.

The proposal includes a three-storey building with an overall height that would maintain the same approximate 4.3m height as the existing dwelling. A key feature of the

proposed design is that a substantial proportion of the increased floorspace is accommodated below existing ground level. By setting the basement and a significant portion of the ground floor into the site, results in a reduced visual presence when viewed from Heath Ride. Consequently, the apparent scale of the dwelling above ground level is markedly less than might otherwise be expected from the overall footprint and internal floorspace.

This design approach results in the dwelling reading as a one and a half storey building above ground level which would ensure that the proposal would not appear overly dominant or intrusive within the street scene, despite the large increase in size.

The proposed materials include stone, timber cladding, timber detailing, glazing and a green roof and living wall. R21 of the BDG provides guidance on sustainable design for new residential development. It states that development should use construction methods and materials that are not only fit for purpose and make a positive contribution to design quality, character and appearance, but also contribute to the sustainable use of resources. The proposed materials would relate well to the surrounding natural landscape and woodland and would prioritise sustainable materials and construction practices to reduce the environmental impact of both demolition and new build activities. The submitted Sustainability Statement outlines how the building fabric has been designed to prioritise responsibly sourced, low-waste materials, including FSC-certified timber and products with recycled content, as well as being designed for durability and easy maintenance to extend its lifecycle and reduce future waste. Overall, the proposed materials would be of high-quality and sympathetic to the countryside setting.

Due to the contemporary nature and distinctiveness of the proposed materials, it is reasonable and necessary to condition that samples and details of the proposed materials are supplied to the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development to ensure the external appearance of the building is acceptable.

Countryside:

In terms of its relationship with the countryside, the proposal is set within a generous plot and maintains appropriate separation from boundaries and neighbouring properties. The siting and massing of the dwelling, combined with the retention and enhancement of landscaping, ensure that the development sits comfortably within its surroundings and would not result in an unacceptable degree of visual harm or urbanisation. The proposed contemporary design approach that has been adopted is considered acceptable in this location. CS Policy CP11 (5) states that in the case of replacement dwellings, the proposal must bring about environmental improvements, or not result in inappropriate increases in scale, form or footprint of the original building.

In this instance, the modern design approach incorporates sustainability measures that would bring about environmental improvements when compared to the existing dwelling. These include the installation of an air source heat pump to provide low-carbon heating, photovoltaic solar panels to generate on-site renewable energy, and a green roof and living wall which contribute to biodiversity enhancement, improved insulation and reduced surface water runoff. The green roof and living wall would also assist in visually softening the appearance of the dwelling within the landscape, reducing its perceived mass and helping it to integrate into its countryside setting. In

addition, these features will provide ecological benefits by creating habitats for wildlife and contributing to local biodiversity which aligns with CS Policy CP1 which promotes development which contributes towards the goal of reaching zero-carbon developments and on-site renewable energy features.

The proposed dwelling would also deliver improved energy efficiency standards, which would significantly reduce operational carbon emissions when compared to the existing dwelling. The replacement of an older, less energy-efficient building with a highly insulated contemporary dwelling, incorporating renewable technologies represents a clear environmental gain.

Although the replacement dwelling would be significantly larger than the existing dwelling, the development would not result in unacceptable harm to the character of the countryside. The environmental improvements arising from the proposal carry significant weight in the planning balance and directly respond to the criteria set out in CS Policy CP11, which supports replacement dwellings where they lead to environmental improvements.

In conclusion, while the proposal represents a large replacement dwelling, the increase is not considered to result in an inappropriate form of development when assessed in visual and landscape terms. The containment of a large portion of the accommodation below ground level significantly reduces the actual and perceived bulk and ensures that the development does not undermine the open character of the host site or wider countryside. The proposal would also achieve a high standard of sustainable design which would deliver meaning environmental improvements. In accordance with CS Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11, the proposed design, siting and sustainability features are therefore considered acceptable and compliant with the local development plan.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Overlooking:

There are two balconies proposed at first-floor level in the front elevation to serve two bedrooms. Due to the setback position of the host dwelling from Little Oak and Little Acorns, the proposed balconies would be approximately 5m further to the rear than the rear building lines of both adjoining properties. The balconies have been designed to ensure privacy is maintained to neighbouring occupants through the installation of privacy screens walls to the side of each balcony. This will limit views sideways and into the adjoining sites and prevent any direct overlooking. In addition, the ground floor is partially sunk into the site, resulting in the first-floor level being set noticeably lower than that of a conventional full-height two-storey dwelling. Consequently, the overall height and overlooking potential of the balconies are reduced when compared to typical first-floor spaces. Given the reduced floor level and proposed privacy walls, it is concluded that the balconies would not result in any material or harmful loss of privacy.

There is also a first-floor balcony proposed in the rear elevation to serve a bedroom. As with the front facing balconies, the first-floor level towards the rear of the proposed dwelling is also set noticeably lower than that of a conventional full-height two-storey dwelling. As such, the proposed rear balcony would be sited approximately 1.05m above ground level and would provide only limited views of the far ends of neighbouring gardens by virtue of the significantly setback location of the host dwelling. Therefore, it

is concluded that the proposed rear balcony would not generate any detrimental loss of privacy impacts to neighbouring amenity.

Loss of Light & Overbearing:

The northwestern and southeastern flank walls would be between 1.2m and 2.1m from the shared side boundaries. Page 47 of the BDG sets out minimum separation distances to maintain privacy and limit a sense of enclosure. A minimum of 1m is recommended between flank walls and side boundaries for one and two storey buildings. The proposed dwelling is compliant with this guidance.

The proposed height of the dwelling would measure approximately 4.3m which is the same height as the existing hipped roof bungalow. The full 4.3m height of the built form would be moved closer to the shared boundaries, however, the building adopts a flat roof design which significantly reduces its overall height when compared to a conventional pitched-roof dwelling. In addition, the ground level is partially sunk into the site, further lowering the effective height and visual mass of the building as perceived from surrounding properties.

As a result of this design approach, the proposed dwelling would present a low-profile form that sits comfortably within the site and does not appear unduly oppressive when viewed from neighbouring land. The reduced height ensures that the development would not obstruct daylight to neighbouring windows or amenity spaces.

Taking these factors into account, it is concluded that the proposal would not give rise to any unacceptable overbearing or overshadowing impact.

Noise:

The proposal includes the installation of one air source heat pump. As no details of the unit have been submitted, it is necessary to impose a condition relating to specification details. This will be required prior to the installation of the unit in order to protect neighbouring residential amenity.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The proposal includes changes to the existing site entrance and parking arrangements. The council's Highways officer was consulted and requested further information relating to the position of EV charging points, refuse collection points and a fire tender vehicle entering and leaving the site. They commented:

"According to Manual for Streets, the maximum carrying distances for households (30m) and refuse collection operators (25m) from the collection point.

The proposed development is accessed through the existing private drive along a private road; Heath Ride, and the proposed bin store is circa 50m from the kerbside of Heath Ride, the applicant is required to confirm if the existing refuse collection arrangement remains suitable for the proposed dwelling...

As the new dwelling has a larger building footprint which the furthest point of the dwelling is situated circa 86m away from the carriageway, the applicant has to demonstrate the manoeuvring of a fire tender vehicle entering and leaving the site access in forward gear to within 40m reach to the furthest point of dwelling.

Each new dwelling will be expected to provide a minimum of one EV Charging Point under the latest Building Regulations (Approved Document S). This shall be indicated on a plan”.

The proposed access, front boundary treatment, visibility splays and proposed parking arrangements are considered acceptable.

Therefore, the applicant is advised to contact the council’s Building Control Team to ensure compliance is achieved for the points raised above.

Flooding and Drainage:

The application site is in flood zone 1 with the southern part experiencing low risk of surface water flooding. The council’s Drainage officer was consulted and raised no objection to the proposal, subject to a condition to secure drainage details. They commented:

“We note from the application form that surface water runoff- will be managed via soakaway while foul will discharge into an existing foul sewer network.

We would have no objection to the principle of the development, as represented by proposed location plan drawing 9218-100 Rev 6 dated 18/08/2025 but as drainage details have not been provided, we would recommend this via condition”.

Drainage details will be secured via condition to ensure that the development does not increase flood risk from surface water run-off.

Landscape and Trees:

The application site is located in countryside and there are protected trees on site. A Tree Protection Plan and Arboricultural Impact Assessment was submitted to support the application. The council’s Landscape and Trees officer was consulted and re-consulted following the submission of revised plans. They commented:

“Revisions have been made to the boundary treatment to the front of the site and height of dwelling above ground level which has been reduced to the front of the site.

The main concern from the Landscape Consultant was the height of the front boundary wall and gates adjacent to Heath Ride which were shown as a wall being 2m high and a solid gate at 2.4m high. The revised drawing – Drive Site Access Gate and Wall (9377-129 Rev 6) now show a low brick wall (0.8m high) with slatted metal fencing up to 2m with 2m high brick piers and slatted 2m high gate. This design is much more visually permeable allowing a view towards the dwelling and landscaped front garden which is more characteristic of Heath Ride. This is now acceptable”.

They have recommended that conditions are attached to any grant of approval which relate to the retention of trees, the protection of trees and a scheme of hard and soft landscaping. The proposed development is in a countryside location where the character and appearance of the rural landscape is a key planning consideration. Due to the extent of the proposed built form, it is considered necessary to control the treatment of the site in order to ensure that the development integrates satisfactorily

with its surroundings and does not result in undue harm to the rural character of the area. Furthermore, the site contains mature trees and vegetation which makes a positive contribution to the character of the local area. Given the proximity of construction works to retained trees, it is reasonable and necessary to impose conditions relating to the protection and retention of the existing trees.

Overall, the landscaping and tree protection conditions meet the relevant tests for planning conditions in that they are necessary and relevant to the development hereby permitted. They are therefore justified in the interests of visual amenity and landscape character, in accordance with national and local plan policy.

Ecology:

The application site is located in an area that contains bat roost suitable habitat, nesting potential for breeding birds and is connected to reptile suitable habitat. An ecology assessment and emergence bat survey were submitted to support the application. The council's Ecology officer was consulted and raised no objection to the proposal, subject to conditions. They commented:

"I agree with the application ecologist's assessment that the site itself has negligible potential for roosting bats. However, the on-site treeline that connects to the deciduous woodland to the north provide suitable conditions for bats, functioning as an important wildlife corridor connecting surrounding areas of priority woodland habitat.

Given that the adjacent connecting woodland offers foraging, commuting, and potential roosting opportunities, a Lighting Plan will be required to ensure that these habitats are not adversely affected by artificial lighting associated with the proposal. Bats are European Protected Species, protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. It is an offence to kill, injure, or disturb bats, or to damage or destroy their breeding or resting sites. In line with national guidance and Policy CP7 – Biodiversity of the Wokingham Core Strategy, developments that may impact species of principal importance—such as bats—must include appropriate mitigation measures. In this instance, for appropriate mitigation, a detailed lighting plan will be required...

The site also lies approximately 340m southeast of a lowland heath, a recognised reptile habitat. Between the heath and the site, there is only a main road, a narrow strip of residential properties, and intervening open land that could act as a dispersal corridor. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that reptiles could potentially utilise the site. In accordance with Wokingham Core Strategy Policy CP7: Biodiversity, where development may directly or indirectly impact species of principal importance, planning permission should only be granted if appropriate mitigation measures are secured to prevent harmful effects. Additionally, under the Habitats Directive Annexes, maintaining the favourable conservation status (FCS) of reptiles is a key legal requirement.

Therefore, I accept that a detailed reptile mitigation strategy to maintain FCS could appropriately be secured through a planning condition...

I agree with the applications assessment that the site provides nesting potential for breeding birds. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is a criminal offence to remove, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird and their eggs. The PEA does not

state that any trees or vegetation is to be removed for this proposed development. To ensure policy compliance with national legislation, I recommend a Protection of Breeding bird's condition. This is to ensure that any nesting birds are not impacted by the development by works taking place outside of nesting season, or if that is not possible, having an ecologist to carry out an inspection prior to vegetation removal".

As is recommended, it is reasonable and necessary to attach the conditions to ensure that protected species are not adversely impacted by the proposed development.

Conclusion:

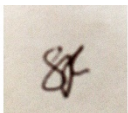
For the reasons set out in this report and subject to conditions, the proposal is acceptable in principle as it complies with local policy, the NPPF, local guidance and is recommended for approval.

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 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:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approved
Date:	7 January 2026
Earliest date for decision:	16 December 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	12.1.25

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Countryside

Public Rights of Way – Restricted Byway (FINC24)

Bat Roost Habitat Suitability

Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone Red

Landscape Character Assessment 2019 - Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands

Tree Preservation Orders Served –

- TPO-0289-1985 – Group
- TPO-0289-1985 – Single
- TPO-0874-1997 – Woodland

Finchampstead Ward

Finchampstead Parish