

PLANNING REF : 262274
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 75
: York Road, Newbury, Berkshire
: RG14 7NR
SUBMITTED BY : Dr Catia Antunes
DATE SUBMITTED : 05/10/2026

COMMENTS:

Planning Application 262274
Land at Microsoft Ltd, Thames Valley Park Drive, Earley, Wokingham,
RG6 1WG

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a resident of West Berkshire writing to object to the above application. Although I do not live adjacent to the site, the harms in question are not confined to Earley. The applicant's own Energy Strategy acknowledges that the proposed natural gas fuel cells lock in a high, non-improving emissions profile, and the voluntary Environmental Statement predicts significant adverse carbon effects at regional level. These emissions undermine the net zero commitments of every Berkshire authority, including my own. The development's peak demand of approximately 110MW places pressure on the regional electricity network on which West Berkshire residents also rely, and the planning balance advanced by the applicant explicitly invokes Berkshire's regional character. As a Berkshire resident, the environmental cost of this scheme falls on me and my community in exactly the ways the submitted documents describe.

1. Greenhouse gas emissions and the end date for gas. The applicant proposes to power the first phase with natural gas fuel cells until a larger grid connection is available, with 2037 given as the earliest date for that connection. The submission also assesses retaining the fuel cells beyond 2037, which means fossil fuel generation on this site has no guaranteed end date. Permission should not rest on an aspiration to switch to grid power. If the Council is minded to approve, any consent must include a binding, enforceable mechanism requiring fuel cell removal or fuel switching by a fixed date, with penalties for non-compliance.

2. Inconsistent and unreliable environmental evidence. The Energy Strategy quotes 42.5MW of fuel cell capacity while the Utilities Statement quotes 49.9MW. The predicted "no significant residual effects" for noise and air quality are the applicant's own modelling outcomes and are conditional on operational plant meeting proposed limits. Before determination, the Council should require these discrepancies to be reconciled and should secure independent verification of the noise and air quality assessments, including worst-case testing and maintenance running of backup diesel generators.

3. Strain on energy and water infrastructure. Peak demand is estimated at approximately 110MW. The local grid cannot currently supply this, which is the stated reason for the gas strategy. Reading Borough Council has already warned that data centre demand on energy and water networks could compromise delivery of planned development in the Local Plan area. The applicant should

demonstrate, with evidence from the network operator, that committed grid capacity exists, rather than resolving the problem by locking in a decade of on-site fossil fuel generation.

4. Noise, air quality and amenity. The parameter plan permits data halls, cooling plant and generator flues up to approximately 30.5 metres in height. Cooling apparatus, substation equipment and standby diesel generators will operate continuously or during testing and outages, creating potential noise, vibration and particulate impacts for residents in Earley and neighbouring parts of Reading. I ask that any consent include strict, monitored noise limits at the nearest residential receptors, limits on generator testing hours, and a funded independent monitoring regime with published results.

5. Overstated economic benefits. The project website claims at least 115 operational roles, but the submitted Economic Benefits Statement estimates 40 to 65 gross direct on-site jobs. For a development of this energy intensity and environmental cost, that is a weak employment case, and the figures presented to the public should not carry weight beyond what the submitted evidence supports.

6. Biodiversity, drainage and heat reuse. The biodiversity net gain figures are forecasts dependent on delivery and long-term management, not secured outcomes. The site carries localised surface water flood risk, and the proposed heat reuse network has no secured delivery partner. These claimed benefits should be treated as aspirational unless made binding through conditions or a legal agreement.

7. Determination of an outline application. Because all matters except access are reserved, granting outline permission would commit the principle of a gas-powered data centre of this scale while deferring the details that determine its actual impact. Given the acknowledged carbon effects and the absence of binding commitments on fuel switching, grid transition, heat reuse and biodiversity delivery, I ask the Council to refuse the application. If the Council is minded to approve, I request as a minimum: a fixed end date for fossil fuel generation secured by condition or Section 106 obligation; binding heat reuse provisions; enforceable noise and air quality limits with independent monitoring; and secured biodiversity management for a minimum of 30 years.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Catia Antunes
75 York Road
5 October 2026