

DESIGN ACCESS AND PLANNING STATEMENT**EXTENSION TO OFFICE BUILDING – BEECH COURT, WOKINGHAM ROAD, HURST
RG10 0RQ****1.00 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.01 Beech Court was built as a single building providing 12 office suites in 2004. It is an attractive property designed in a courtyard form and with a design and appearance which reflects its rural location. Built on the site of a former plant nursery, it has a single point of gated access to Wokingham Road. The premises are owned by the applicant Moore Commercial Investments Ltd. Units 1, 2 and 3 are occupied by a single occupier.
- 1.02 The proposed development is a modest extension to the existing building for Class E(g) office use. It is designed to replicate the character and appearance of the existing building with the same height, proportions and external materials. The site is previously developed land (PDL).
- 1.03 Spread over two floors within a 1.5 storey building (upper floor within roof) the scheme adds 126sm of floorspace. It is relevant to note that 100sm could be added in a slightly lower extension as Permitted Development not requiring express planning approval. This scheme has a ground floor/footprint of 73sm.
- 1.04 While the application site is restricted to the area where development is proposed, the entire Beech Court office building currently has a GEA of 2181sm. The addition of 126sm equates to an increase of less than 6%.

2.00 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.01 Beech Court is a well contained, fenced and gated office site to the east of Wokingham Road Hurst. The majority of it sits behind frontage detached housing. The site boundaries are well landscaped and a pond is contained within the open area east of the building.
- 2.02 The area where development is proposed lies at the eastern end of the building and can be accessed direct from the existing car park. It will be an extension to Unit 2, which is itself now integrated internally with Units 1 and 3. The development area is currently hard surfaced and used as 4 parking spaces and a paved sitting out area.
- 2.03 Surrounding land is generally used as paddocks or residential gardens. Large trees and hedges screen the development area from public views from the east, north and south. The existing building blocks views from the west.

3.00 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT – SCALE AND DESIGN

- 3.01 As is evident from submitted drawings, the extension has been designed to fit seamlessly with the existing. The ridge height is slightly lower than a similar hipped gable on the northern elevation. Proportions, fenestration, materials are all identical to the existing building.
- 3.02 Units 1, 2 and 3 are used as one office by a single occupier. The proposed extension will add 126sm of floorspace to the existing.



Character of existing building, to be replicated in extension

4.00 ACCESS AND PARKING

- 4.01 Beech Court currently includes 101 defined parking spaces. These are shared between being allocated to specific units, unallocated and visitor spaces across the site. The existing floorspace of 2181sm requires provision of 88 spaces for a rate of 1 space per 25sm, and the addition of the 126sm extension will increase this requirement by 5, while removing 4 current spaces in the construction area.
- 4.02 Post development, the requirement to comply with adopted standards will be 93 spaces, with 97 available. This exceeds the adopted standard by 4 and is sufficient to meet all needs. 2 additional cycle parking spaces are provided close to the new extension – the whole site is behind security gates eliminating risks of theft.
- 4.03 There will be no alteration to existing access and turning arrangements. The security gates are set back to allow a vehicle to wait offroad at the entrance, and space remains for a vehicle to drive past the new extension to reach other existing parking spaces.

5.00 ECOLOGY AND LANDSCAPING

- 5.01 A report by Sam Watson Ecology is provided in support. The extension will not impact on an existing habitat as it is located on an area currently hard surfaced, with the exception of a small raised planting bed of less than 25sm, and is surrounded by further hard surfaced areas (parking and drive).
- 5.02 As part of the regulatory framework that underpins BNG, the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 set out specific exemptions from BNG for developments that meet certain conditions. Pertinent to this site is Section 4 of the regulations which relates to de minimis exemptions.
- 5.03 Based on the results of the habitat survey, the proposed development is assessed to meet condition 1 of Section 4 as no priority habitat will be affected. Indeed, there are no priority habitats anywhere within the study area. In addition, the proposal is assessed to also meet condition 2 in that it does not impact greater than 25 square meters of habitat with a biodiversity value of greater than zero or greater than 5m of linear habitat. In this case approximately 14sm removed, as illustrated on Drawing 0098-2402-1. This impact is below the 25sm threshold above which BNG would be required. On the basis of the factors outline above, the development is assessed to meet the conditions for exemption from BNG.
- 5.04 The report includes consideration of any potential impacts on bat habitats within the existing roofspace and tiles, and concludes that negative impacts are unlikely- the two floors inside the building leave only a small roof void within this 1.5 storey building and there are no gaps within cladding materials. To deliver a net improvement the report recommends bat and bird boxes on the new extension.
- 5.05 No existing trees, hedges or green space (all outside the redline application site) will be affected.

6.00 FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE

- 6.01 The proposed development is in Flood Zone 1 according to the Environment Agency mapping with a low risk of riverine or surface water flooding.
- 6.02 Existing on site drainage infrastructure is adequate to accommodate the additional foul and surface water flows and has a connection to mains drainage in the Wokingham Road.

7.00 DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND NPPF ISSUES

- 7.01 The site lies in an area outside a defined settlement in the countryside. It is however comprehensively built up as a courtyard development set within an established landscaped framework. It is directly accessible from the primary road network and a high proportion of staff are locally based.
- 7.02 The current Development Plan is aging and is due to be replaced by the emerging Local Plan, which has yet to progress to Examination. An updated NPPF was published at the end of 2024, with minor clarifications subsequently. The new NPPF supports the Government objective of economic growth.
- 7.03 The NPPF supports the growth of all types of businesses in rural areas even when they are outside existing settlements or not well served by public transport:

88. *Planning policies and decisions should enable:*

a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, new buildings;

89. *Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.*

- 7.04 The application is a small extension to existing office premises but does not extend the site into a greenfield area. It meets the NPPF criteria for Previously Developed Land as set out in Annexe 2:Glossary. By making more effective use of brownfield land it contributes towards the protection of greenfield land.
- 7.05 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. Policy CP11 of the Borough Core Strategy states that, in order to protect the distinct identity of settlements and maintain environmental quality, proposals outside development limits will not normally be permitted, except where, inter alia:

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.

7.06 In relation to Criterion 1), the existing office use is long established and sustainable, as proven by its successful occupancy and operation over the last 20 years.

7.07 In relation to Criterion 2), despite being in the countryside in planning policy terms, the proposed development would relate closely to existing built form and would be a modest extension of the existing building on PDL, avoiding encroachment on open countryside. It is therefore in accordance with policy CP11.

7.08 Considering NPPF and Development Plan Policies on landscape and character, the extension will replicate the scale and appearance of the existing main building, which is sympathetic to its rural location and low rise character. There are no impacts on the amenity of neighbours due to siting at the rear, separation from neighbours and intervening soft landscaping. The NPPF supports sustainable new development for employment uses.

7.09 There are no limitations on hours of use for the existing building and it would be unreasonable to impose such restrictions on this modest extension in the same Use Class.

8.00 CONCLUSIONS

8.01 This scheme proposes a modest extension to an established employment building within a well contained site. Delivery will contribute towards local economic growth and will have no adverse impacts on neighbours or the landscape. The site will retain its attractive developed character appropriate to a rural area.

8.02 Planning permission is requested without unduly onerous Conditions.

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