

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261216
Site Address:	Elmlands, Little Hill Road, Hurst, Wokingham, RG10 0TG
Expiry Date:	11 September 2026
Site Visit Date:	7 July 2026
Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use of part of the existing paddock to residential garden, erection of a detached outbuilding, plus installation of ground-mounted PV panels.	

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 CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP7 – Biodiversity 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 CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List A Design for Hurst

PLANNING HISTORY

981397- Proposed Change Of Use Of Residential Store To B1(B) Use (Graphic Design Studio)- Approved 6 May 1989

990495- Proposed Single Storey Side Extension To Office Building- Approved 9 April 1999

021676- Proposed demolition of existing front porch & insertion of front window. Single storey side and front porch extensions, Front dormer window plus raising of roof height to link and pitched roof at rear over part conservatory- Approved 21 August 2002

121390- Proposed erection of a single storey front porch extension, front dormer window extensions and raising of roof infill section to create additional access, plus

new door to side, demolition of existing front porch and repositioning of front door to dwelling- Approved 19 October 2012

210778- Householder application for the proposed erection of garage, two carports and machinery store following demolition of existing garage- Approved 18 May 2021

222110- Householder application for the proposed insertion of 2no. additional dormers to the existing roof, the addition of a roof light, plus the erection of a rear balcony to first floor, and changes to fenestration- Approved 19 August 2022

252662- Householder application for the proposed single storey rear extension replacing conservatory, single storey side extension and changes to fenestration. Approved 12 January 2026

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health: Require further information

WBC Drainage: No objection subject to conditions

WBC Landscape and Trees: Require further information

WBC Ecology Newts: Require further information

WBC Ecology: Require further information

External

None consulted

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council has concerns that it is in conflict with WBC CS Policies CP1, CP3, CP6, CP9 and CP11.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description: The application site is located outside of development limits, within the designated countryside. Sited on an expansive plot, the site consists of a large two storey detached dwelling and a large single storey garage, car port, and machinery store.

It is noted that the applicant confuses curtilage with residential garden land. Curtilage is an area around a building; it is a matter of fact and degree and is not a use of land that can be applied for, although there are circumstances in which this area can change over time. The description of development has been updated to reflect the proposal as a change of use of land to residential use.

The specification of the heat pump was provided on 13/08/26, its proposed location

was not shown on the plan nor included in the description of development. As such, this matter has not formed part of the assessment.

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.

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.

Countryside: The site is located outside settlement limits in the countryside and is therefore to be considered under Policy CP11 of the adopted Core Strategy which states that development outside defined settlement boundaries will be strictly controlled. Where acceptable in principle the countryside can accommodate some forms of development without detriment provided that the development type, form and design are sensitive to the location.

The application proposes the change of use of part of an existing paddock to residential garden land associated with Elmlands together with the erection of an outbuilding and ground-mounted solar array.

Policy CP11 seeks to strictly control development outside defined settlement boundaries. Where acceptable in principle, the countryside can accommodate some forms of development without detriment provided that the development type, form and design are sensitive to the location. Policy CP11 also states that in order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:

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 improvements; or
4. In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;
5. In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i. Bring about environmental improvements; or
 - ii. Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building
6. Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;
7. Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

The proposed development does not fall within any of the above listed criteria (1-7). The development is not a country-based enterprise contributing to the enjoyment of the countryside; the development causes excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from existing buildings; the development does not comprise a conversion, residential extension, replacement dwelling, essential community facility or affordable housing. The detrimental impact on the countryside in this location/encroachment into an open pastoral field causes harm to the character of the area which is not outweighed by any other benefits.

It is noted that the change of use to residential use is not specifically excluded by policy CP11 but nonetheless the objective of restricting expansion of development is relevant in this case.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Chapter 4: Achieving sustainable development states "...limiting development away from settlements to help safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside".

Policy S5 states that only certain forms of development should be approved outside settlements, as set out in the policy. These should be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects. A change of use of agricultural land to residential garden does not fall within this list.

The proposed development is unacceptable in principle and is an unsustainable form of development within the countryside contrary to both CP11 and S5.

The application proposes the change of use of paddock land to residential garden land together with the erection of a leisure outbuilding and ground-mounted solar array within the countryside. The proposal does not fall within any of the forms of development supported by Policy CP11 or Policy S5 and would represent an unjustified expansion of domestic development beyond the existing built form associated with the dwelling. As such, the proposal would result in encroachment into the countryside in a location where the principle of development is not supported by policy.

Accordingly, the proposal is considered unacceptable in principle and conflicts with Policies CP1 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, Policy CC01 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan and Policy S5. The detailed harm arising from the encroachment and urbanisation of the countryside is considered in the character and appearance section below.

Character of the Area: R1 of the Brough Design Guide states "*Residential development should be designed to contribute positively towards the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area*".

RD1 of the Borough Design Guide states "*New development should retain, incorporate and enhance features that contribute to landscape character, including field patterns, trees, hedgerows and characteristic rural features*".

RD2 of the BDG states "*Development associated with villages or hamlets should*

retain, enhance and incorporate characteristics of the existing settlement pattern.”

The proposal would extend the residential garden of Elmlands well beyond its established residential envelope and into land that currently forms part of the surrounding paddock and wider countryside. The existing paddock contributes positively to the rural character of the area, reflecting the prevailing pattern of development. The introduction of an enlarged residential use, together with the proposed gymnasium outbuilding, ground-mounted solar array, patio, orchard and associated domestic activity, would erode the open and undeveloped character of the paddock and introduce a more domesticated and urbanised appearance into the countryside. Thus, harming the character of the area.

It has already been established that due to the significant distance from Elmlands that the proposal would lead to excessive expansion and encroachment into the rural open countryside. The residential plot is clearly defined by the post and rail fencing. The proposed development is clearly contrary to the character of the area due to the encroachment of development away from Elmlands itself, with the proposed residential extension and external solar array, the proposal would represent a noticeable intensification of domestic form and activity on the site. Therefore, the introduction of the outbuilding outside of the residential garden would be at odds with the prevailing countryside character.

As can be seen below, the prevailing pattern of development along Little Hill Road is not one of extensive residential estates set within large private grounds, but rather individual dwellings occupying defined residential plots surrounded by paddocks, grazing land and woodland. The surrounding countryside forms an important part of the character of the area. By extending the domestic garden into the adjoining paddock and introducing further domestic structures and activity, the proposal would blur the established boundary between private residential land and the countryside, undermining the existing settlement pattern and rural character of the area.



The additional built development would overly urbanise the land and negatively impact the spacious and rural character of the residential development along the lane and the surrounding paddocks. The proposal would not maintain or enhance the quality of environment contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of Core Strategy and Policy S5 of NPPF and Sections 4 & 8 of the BDG.

Neighbouring Amenity: Elmlands is neighboured by Littlewood adjacent and Sangraee across the road. All three spaces lie in an open parcel of land encompassed by large, mature trees.

Given the significant separation distances from the nearby dwelling and single storey nature of the outbuilding it would not result in harmful overlooking, overbearing or loss of light.

In terms of the ground-mounted photovoltaic panels, it would be screened by the existing fencing along the site boundary, thus not resulting in glare to neighboring dwellings or road users.

Outbuilding Use: The outbuilding to the north-west of the main dwelling contains a gymnasium and WC. The building is physically detached from the main dwelling and could be accessed independently without entering the house or disturbing its occupants. However, whilst the outbuilding does not contain the facilities necessary for independent day-to-day living and therefore would not function as a separate dwelling, its location outside the established residential curtilage of Elmlands means it cannot reasonably be regarded as an incidental building serving the dwellinghouse. Rather, it forms part of the wider proposal to extend domestic development into the adjoining paddock land. It cannot be regarded as an incidental domestic outbuilding and instead represents an extension of domestic built form into the countryside.

Flooding and Drainage: The site is located within Flood Zone 1, which is defined by the EA as land having a low probability of fluvial or tidal flooding. The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) advised that insufficient information had been submitted regarding the management of surface water runoff and requested a Drainage Strategy Report to demonstrate how runoff arising from the development would be managed. However, having regard to the limited scale of the proposal, consisting of a relatively small outbuilding, ground-mounted solar panels and ancillary domestic works, it is not considered that the development would generate a significant increase in impermeable area or materially increase surface water runoff from the site. Furthermore, much of the site would remain permeable paddock and garden land. Whilst the LLFA comments have been noted, it is not considered reasonable or proportionate in this instance to require a detailed Drainage Strategy Report and the proposal is not considered to give rise to an unacceptable flood risk or drainage concern.

Landscape and Trees: The site lies within the C2: Hurst River Terrace Landscape Character Area as identified in the Council's Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). The assessment identifies as a valuable landscape attribute the *"peaceful and open character of the undeveloped arable and pastoral landscape"*, which provides a rural setting and sense of separation from nearby urban areas. The assessment also identifies as a key issue the pressure for residential development and the resulting *"incremental suburbanisation of buildings"* which has the potential to erode rural character and the distinction between settlements.

The proposed incorporation of paddock land into the residential use, together with the erection of an outbuilding, installation of ground-mounted photovoltaic panels and associated domestic features, would materially alter the character and function of the land from open pastoral paddock to domestic garden. Whilst each individual element may appear relatively modest in isolation, their cumulative effect would introduce additional domestic activity, built form and paraphernalia into land that currently contributes to the open rural landscape.

The proposal would therefore diminish the contribution that the paddock makes to the peaceful and open character of the Hurst River Terrace landscape and would represent a form of incremental suburbanisation specifically identified as a pressure within the Landscape Character Assessment. As such, the development would fail to retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape and would conflict with Policy TB21 of the Local Plan, which requires development to respond positively to the Landscape Character Assessment and retain or enhance landscape character. The proposal would also fail to recognise and conserve the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, contrary to Policy N2 of the NPPF.

Policy TB21: Landscape Character states *"proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape"*.

The proposal would not retain or enhance the character of the landscape. Instead, it would extend the residential development into paddock/agricultural land; introduce a outbuilding, solar array, patio, orchard and raised planting beds; increase the visual influence of domestic activity and built form within the countryside; and erode the

contribution that the paddock currently makes to the rural landscape setting.

Accordingly, the proposal would fail to retain the existing landscape character and would materially alter the role and function of the land from open paddock to domestic garden use.

NPPF Policy N2: Improving the natural environment

1. To contribute positively to the natural environment, and support nature's recovery, development proposals should:

- a) Consider the environmental qualities of land proposed for development, including habitats, landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside
- d) Conserve and enhance existing natural features of visual value

The proposal conflicts with these objectives because the paddock is a landscape feature contributing to the rural setting of the property; the development would diminish the visual distinction between residential use and countryside; it would introduce domestic and urbanising influences into the landscape; and it would fail to conserve the existing rural character of the site.

The development would therefore fail to retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape and would be contrary to Policy TB21 (Landscape Character). Furthermore, the proposal would fail to adequately recognise or conserve the landscape character and intrinsic beauty of the countryside, contrary to Policy N2 of the NPPF.

The Officer requested further information, including an Arboricultural Impact Assessment, to assess the impact of the development on existing trees and other landscape features and raised concerns regarding the scale and siting of the proposed leisure building within the countryside. However, given this fundamental policy objection, it is not considered necessary or reasonable to seek further arboricultural information, as such information would not overcome the in-principle concerns regarding the expansion of the residential use and associated development into open countryside.

Ecology: The Council's Ecology Officer requested further information relating to Biodiversity Net Gain calculations, habitat categorisation, arboricultural impacts and supporting ecological documentation. The consultee also advised that additional information would be required regarding habitat management, species mitigation, lighting impacts and biodiversity enhancements before the proposal could be considered acceptable from an ecological perspective.

The comments are acknowledged. Notwithstanding the matters raised by the Ecology Officer, the application is recommended for refusal due to the unacceptable encroachment of residential development into the countryside. As the proposal is considered unacceptable in principle, it is not considered necessary or proportionate to pursue the further ecological information requested. The submission of additional biodiversity, arboricultural or mitigation information would not address or overcome

the fundamental conflict with Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy arising from the extension of the residential use and associated domestic development into open countryside

Ecology Newts: The development falls within the red impact risk zone for great crested newts and the officer requested either a Reasonable Avoidance Measures strategy or participation within the NatureSpace District Licensing Scheme prior to determination. The consultee concluded that any risks to Great Crested Newts could be managed through precautionary measures.

These comments are noted. The ecological consultee has not raised an objection in principle to the development and considers that any ecological impacts could be appropriately addressed through mitigation measures. However, given the recommendation to refuse planning permission on countryside policy grounds, it is not considered necessary to seek further ecological information or mitigation details, as such information would not overcome the identified conflict with Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy.

Environmental Health: Environmental Health raised no significant concerns regarding air quality, contamination, odour, waste or general amenity impacts but requested further information relating to the specification, siting and predicted noise levels of the proposed ground source heat pump.

Whilst the specification of the heat pump was provided on 13/08/26, it's proposed location was not shown on the plan nor included in the description of development. As such, this matter has not formed part of the assessment and carries limited weight in the overall determination of the application.

Other matters:

The Council's position is consistent with a number of appeal decisions concerning the encroachment of residential development into the countryside. It is acknowledged that some of these appeals were decided prior to the introduction of the NPPF2026, however as identified in the principle of development section of this report, the key policy S5 does not support wholesale expansion of residential development within agricultural land via a change of use thus the introduction of the NPPF does not fundamentally change the conclusions of these decisions.

In particular, the decision relating to application reference 200396 and subsequent appeal APP/X0360/W/20/3255314 supports the position that the extension of domestic development into the countryside can adversely affect visual amenity, disrupt the established pattern of development and harm the character and appearance of the surrounding rural area.

Similarly, in appeal APP/X0360/W/16/3158467, which related to the extension of residential land into adjoining amenity land, the Inspector concluded that the proposal would result in unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area which could not be adequately mitigated through additional landscaping.

More recently, at Fairview Bungalow, Forest Road, Binfield (Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/21/3285010 Appeal R), the Inspector found that a detached garage

located on open land away from the original buildings constituted an expansion of development into the countryside. The Inspector concluded that the development represented an expansion of development away from the original buildings, created a sense of overdevelopment and enclosure, contributed to the cumulative urbanisation of the wider site and caused significant harm to the character and appearance of the countryside. Importantly, the appeal site was already more developed and contained substantially more built form than the present application site, yet the Inspector still concluded that the development caused unacceptable countryside harm and conflicted with Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11.

Whilst each application must be determined on its own merits, the circumstances of the current proposal are comparable in that it would extend domestic development beyond the established residential area associated with Elmlands and into adjoining paddock land. The proposed outbuilding, solar array and associated domestic features would similarly urbanise land that presently contributes to the character of the countryside, erode the distinction between the dwelling and the surrounding open land, and undermine the established pattern of development along Little Hill Road. Accordingly, significant weight is attached to these appeal decisions in reaching the recommendation on the current application

Planning Balance

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The proposal would provide additional private amenity space for the occupants of Elmlands and facilitate renewable energy generation through the installation of a ground-mounted photovoltaic array. The proposed outbuilding is of a modest scale, would appear subservient to the host dwelling and adopts a form and appearance broadly reflective of rural outbuildings. These matters weigh in favour of the proposal.

However, the development would extend the residential use substantially beyond its established extent into land that presently forms part of the surrounding paddock and wider countryside. The proposed change of use, together with the introduction of an outbuilding, solar array, patio, orchard and associated domestic activity, would materially alter the character of the land from open paddock to domestic garden. The proposal would erode the clear distinction between the residential use and the surrounding countryside, resulting in the urbanisation and domestication of rural land and diminishing the contribution that the paddock makes to the character, appearance and landscape setting of the area.

The proposal would therefore fail to maintain or enhance the quality of the environment and would be harmful to the established settlement pattern, landscape character and intrinsic beauty of the countryside. Consequently, the development is contrary to Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy; Policy TB21 (Landscape Character); the objectives of N2 (Improving the Natural Environment); C2: Hurst River Terrace Landscape Character Area as identified in the Council's Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) and the design principles contained within the Borough Design Guide, in particular Policies R1, RD1

and RD2.

While there are benefits associated with additional residential amenity space, a modest incidental outbuilding and renewable energy generation attract some weight, these are private benefits only and given the existing large garden associated with the property these are limited. The benefits are outweighed by the identified harm to the character and appearance of the countryside and landscape character. On balance, the proposal conflicts with the development plan when read as a whole and there are no material considerations which indicate that planning permission should be granted.

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:	Refusal
Date:	9 September 2026
Earliest date for decision:	24 June 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	10 September 2026

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Insert where relevant