

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	242829
Site Address:	Nutbean Farm, Nutbean Lane, Swallowfield, Wokingham, RG7 1XL
Expiry Date:	20 January 2025
Site Visit Date:	18 December 2024
Proposal: (Part Retrospective) Full application for proposed mixed use agricultural and equestrian storage building, extension to hardstanding yard area and change of use of hay and straw store to stable.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Listed Building
Affordable Housing Thresholds
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – **Countryside**
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone – **Green Risk Zone**
Minerals Site Consultation Area
Nuclear Consultation Zone – **12km Zone**
Tree Preservation Orders
Landscape Character Assessment Area
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones
Listed Building Buffer Zone

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area 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 CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking

	CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB22 – Sites of Urban Landscape Value TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List National Design Guide

PLANNING HISTORY Including Nutbean Farmhouse		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
232574	Application for submission of details to comply with the following conditions of planning consent 202713 dated 21/12/2020. Condition 3 relates to external materials, condition 5 to protection of trees, condition 6 to a programme of archaeological work and condition 7 to a method statement for the basement.	Approved: December 2023
232575	Application for submission of details to comply with the following conditions of listed building consent 202714 dated 21/12/2020. Condition 3 relates to external materials and condition 4 to a method statement for the basement.	Approved: December 2023
231586	Full application for the proposed change of use of land and 2no. buildings from agricultural to a dog day care business and associated canine exercise area, plus extended vehicular access/yard area and changes to fencing (part-retrospective).	Approved: September 2023
231580	Full application for the proposed erection of an equestrian storage building and associated yard area. (Part Retrospective)	Refused: September 2023
222124	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent 211975 dated 09/12/2021. Condition 3 external materials.	Approved 25/08/2022
221537	Application to vary condition 1 of planning consent 211975 for the proposed change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian plus erection of 2 no. stable buildings with associated hardstanding, the creation of a manège and extended vehicular access (part retrospective). Condition 1 refers to the approved details and the variation is to allow	Approved 24/06/2022

	an increase the pitch of the roof of the approved stable buildings from 16 degrees to 30 degrees to allow for a clay tiled roof to match nearby buildings (part retrospective).	
220941	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent 211975 dated 09/12/2021. Condition 2 Programme of Archaeological Works 3 External materials 5 Manure Storage 8 Protection of Trees 9 Landscaping.	Split Decision 10/05/2022
212304	Application to vary condition 2 of planning consent 182838 for the proposed erection of an ancillary outbuilding following demolition of existing shed. Condition 2 refers to the approved documents and the variation is to allow changes to internal layout and fenestration including addition of 2 no. rooflights. (Retrospective).	Approved 24/08/2021
211975	Full application for the proposed change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian plus erection of 2 no. stable buildings with associated hardstanding, the creation of a manège and extended vehicular access (part retrospective).	Approved 09/12/2021
210284	Full application for the proposed change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian plus erection of 2no stable buildings with associated hardstanding and creation of a manège.	Withdrawn 13/05/2021
202714	Application for Listed Building consent for the proposed single storey side extension to dwelling with glazed infill, plus the erection of basement with 1no. rooflight.	Approved 21/12/20
202713	Householder application for the proposed single storey side extension to dwelling with glazed infill, plus the erection of basement with 1no. rooflight.	Approved 21/12/2020
190061	Application for the submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent 182838 dated 28/11/2018: 3. Materials.	Approved 06/02/19
182838	Householder application for the proposed erection of an ancillary outbuilding following demolition of existing shed.	Approved 28/11/18

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Drainage – No objection subject to a condition
WBC Highways – No objection
WBC Landscape and Trees - Objection
WBC Built Heritage Officer – No objection
WBC CIL – Non liable development
WBC Ecology – No comments

External

None

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	No comments received
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description: The application site is a sloping 2.37 hectares (5.86 acres) field located within the designated Countryside.

The west of the site comprises of Nutbean Farmhouse, which is a Grade II listed building. To the south-west of the farmhouse is a vehicular access, a residential outbuilding and pond.

The field to the east of the main residential dwelling on the site (subject to this application) was previously in use for agriculture but was granted a change of use to equestrian in December 2021 under planning consent 211975. This change of use also approved the erection of 2no. stable buildings with associated hardstanding, the creation of a manège and an extended vehicular access. The approved equestrian use is for a private leisure use for the occupiers of Nutbean Farmhouse only and this is secured by condition. The equestrian use does not comprise a commercial enterprise.

The site is within the River Blackwater Valued Landscape and the L2 Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Landscape Character Area (LCA), a high quality landscape of moderate sensitivity and limited capacity for change.

Proposal Description: It should be noted at this stage that the description of development has been amended to be more precise and better reflect the proposed scheme. This has not been confirmed with the Agent, however, it does not fundamentally change what is being applied for or the nature of the decision.

In accordance with the above, this application seeks planning permission for the proposed erection of a mixed-use storage building, an extension of the existing hardstanding serving the yard area, and the change of use of a hay and straw storage area to create a larger stable. The application is part-retrospective as the hardstanding approved through application 211975 has already been extended by a further 4 metres compared to what was previously approved, while the works described as a change of use has also been undertaken.

This application follows the refusal of application 231580, which comprised a fundamentally similar development as currently proposed, however, with changes to the siting, use and scale of the storage building and a slight reduction in the additional hardstanding. The previous application was refused for the following two reasons:

1. The proposals represent excessive encroachment of development that would fail to conserve and enhance the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside for which there is inadequate justification. The development has a harmful urbanising impact on the character and appearance of the countryside due to the presence of significant height, bulk and mass of built form and hardstanding to the detriment of its visual amenities. The proposal is contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy 2010, Policies CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2012.
2. The proposals, by reason of their scale and inappropriate design and siting, is out of keeping with the rural valley and pastoral landscape character of the surrounding area. It has a detrimental impact on the landscape and is harmful to the visual amenity of the area. The proposal has an urbanising impact on a previously development field that is inappropriate in this location and detrimental to the established tranquil character. The proposal does not retain or enhance the condition, character and features of the River Blackwater Valued Landscape and Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Landscape Character Area. The proposal is contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy 2010, Policies CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2012.

This application has been submitted on the presumption that these reasons for refusal have been overcome through the revised scheme and the changes as described above. Notwithstanding the previously refused scheme, this application will be assessed on its own merits.

The proposed storage building would measure approximately 17.7m long by 7.0m wide and would be approximately 3.34m to the eaves and 5.1m to the ridge. The building would have a floor area of 117.5sqm, which would equate to a volume of approximately 437m³. It would have a traditional hipped roof with clay tiles, horizontal timber cladded walls and barn style door openings on the south-eastern elevation.

The building would be used for two main purposes; the first is for hay and straw storage which would take up approximately 46sqm of the building's internal footprint. The second is for the storage of equipment and vehicles used in association with the equine use, which consists of the following: (Table taken from the applicants Planning Statement).

Equipment	Use
McCormick X4 tractor	Required for pasture management fieldworks. Including: • Harrowing; • Topping; • Seeding; • Fertilising; • Rolling; • Spraying; • Hedge cutting. (some of the tractor equipment is currently rented, but will be purchased over time)
JCB 516-40 Loadall tele-handler	For moving hay and straw at the holding. For moving and loading manure. For moving temporary field shelters.
Crop sprayer	For spraying off weeds/pests when horses aren't grazing.
Hedgecutter	For maintaining hedgerows at the holding.
Roller	Tractor drawn - For flattening land which has become boggy and poached during the winter.
John Deere Compact tractor 1026R	Standard agricultural tractor too large to use on manège. Small compact tractor required to pull manège grader.
Manège grader	Used to flatten and maintain surface of manège.

The floorspace required for this equipment has been calculated to total 31sqm. An additional 50% buffer has been allocated for turning/manoeuvring space.

Principle of Development:

Policy Context:

Core Strategy 2010:

The site lies within the Countryside as designated in the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy. Core Strategy policy CP11 states, 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 in certain circumstances. These exceptions are:

- 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 improvement; 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.

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDDLDP) 2014:

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.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024:

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.

Assessment

For the proposed building to be considered compliant with exception 1 of policy CP11, all the equipment/materials stored in the building would have to be associated with the lawful equine use of the land. Through the previous application, concerns were raised by the LPA that this was not the case, with several of the items/machinery that were stated to require storage being considered not to require permanent use or storage on the site and were more akin to builders machinery. In response, the updated Planning Statement for this application has removed reference to the dumper, excavator, forklift and hand tools, and these have also been removed from the storage calculations in Appendix 3 of the Statement. On this basis, it is now considered that the listed items and machinery are required for the maintenance of the equine holding, such that compliance with requirement 1 of policy CP11 has been demonstrated.

Notwithstanding the above, the floor space allocated for the storage of machinery is almost identical to that proposed through the previous application, with it now stated that there is a requirement for an additional 50% allowance for manoeuvrability, despite only 30% being allocated previously and fewer items being stored and/or manoeuvred. Subsequently, the overall footprint of the building is comparable to the building previously proposed, despite the intention to store less machinery and equipment.

With regard to the retrospective change of use of the existing hay and straw storage room to a stable, this has meant that additional storage for hay and straw is now required elsewhere on the site. In first dealing with the change of use itself, it is noted that the justification put forward for this alteration is that the conversion was required to house the applicants fifth horse, as there is no alternative accommodation.

However, elsewhere in the statement, where it discusses the requirement for additional hay and straw storage, it states that the single stable and tack room located in the north-west of the holding, which was previously used for hay and straw storage, is no longer available following the change of use to a dog daycare enterprise, approved under application reference 231586 in 2023.

This appears to be contradictory, because if the stable now lost to the dog daycare enterprise was used for the storage of hay and straw, then it is unclear where the fifth

horse was being housed previously and/or why there would be a requirement for an additional stable. In any case, there is now a larger allocation for the storage of hay and straw (46sqm) within the proposed building compared to the previous scheme, with no justification for this increase, particularly given there are now fewer horses compared to the time of application 211975.

In light of all the above, there remains unsatisfactory and unclear justification for a storage building of the size proposed, and it is considered disproportionate to the use and size of the land, which is a modest equestrian site purely for private use.

Whilst it has been acknowledged that the storage building meets the requirements of criterion 1 of CP11, the wording of the policy is clear that any development proposal must comply with criteria 1, 2 and 3 to be considered acceptable in principle. The proposal clearly leads to excessive encroachment and expansion of development away from the original buildings. It is accepted that the volume of the building has been reduced from the previous proposal, however, the building proposed is 17.7 metres in length and would protrude that same distance from the existing yard area into undeveloped grassland. Original buildings are defined in the NPPF. None of the buildings on the site are original in this context. The proposed development is therefore unacceptable in principle and is contrary to CP11(2) of the Development Plan.

Character of the Area: With regards to well-designed places, paragraph 135 of the NPPF states planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

Paragraph 187(b) of the NPPF requires that planning applications enhance the natural and local environment by 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.'

Policy CP11 supports development in the countryside only where it maintains the high quality of the rural environment. Policy CP1(1) similarly only supports development that maintains or enhances the high quality of the environment, with policy CP3 supporting development of an appropriate mass, layout, built form, height and character to the area CP3(a) and which makes a positive contribution to the sense of place contributes to the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings CP3(f).

The Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document provides further guidance for developers with general guidance that development should respond positively to its site and local context (G1) and respond positively to the local character of the area (G2).

The National Design Guide section B1, paragraph 67 also states that the built form of well-designed places should relate well to:

- the site, its context and the opportunities they present;
- the proposed identity and character for the development in the wider place;

Despite adopting a stepped down element, the proposed storage building would still predominately be of an appearance that is greatly similar to the building proposed through application 231580. It would have an elongated hipped roof form with a ridge height of approximately 5.1 metres, with external materials identical to match those proposed previously. In comparison, the existing stable and store buildings on site have gable roofs with ridge heights of approximately 3.85 metres and utilise unstained timber cladding. This contrast was noted through the previously refused scheme, where it was stated within the Officer Report that:

“It is unclear why these design choices were made for the new building as whilst the material choices are in-keeping with the rural character of the site and surrounding area, it would lead to a clear visual disparity and departure from the form of the existing buildings.”

It is considered that the most notable change from the previous application and the current one is the relocation of the storage building. Having previously been sited on land to the east of the yard area and further north than the existing L-shaped stable building, it is now intended to sit to the south-west of the stable buildings, between the existing menage and yard area. The applicant considers that this would reduce the impact of the building on the landscape as it would be positioned on lower ground level, and therefore appear subservient to the existing stable buildings.

The LPA do not agree with the conclusions drawn above. As acknowledged within the previous Officer Report, the existing buildings are both modest in footprint and height and have a cohesive spatial relationship, creating a small, open courtyard area on the edge of the field that ensures minimal impact on views from Nutbean Lane. In contrast, the storage building as proposed would be highly visible from Nutbean Lane and would disrupt the modest pattern of development established by the existing buildings, due to its excessive footprint and comparatively large ridge height. The siting of the building, now being on slightly lower ground level than previously proposed, would not significantly alter the buildings prominence from Nutbean Lane. In fact, the revised siting of the building would increase the extent of built form as seen from views within the lane, with its perpendicular relationship with the existing stable buildings essentially creating a long line of built form.

Further to the above, whilst it could be argued that the revised siting reduces the level of encroachment into open countryside, by virtue of its position within the coalesce of development caused by the existing menage and stable buildings, alternatively, the visual impact could be considered to be worse. This is because the intention to sandwich the building into a small area of land between the yard area and menage would appear as an extremely cramped form of development, out of character with the existing modest scale and pattern of development, thus increase the urbanising effect of the proposal.

The Planning Statement seeks to further justify the proposal using the submission of a landscape mitigation plan, stating that this would provide screening for much of the development. As similarly noted within the appraisal of application 231580, whilst some views would be obscured, the sloping topography of the site towards the south and the significant height of the proposed building means that views of the structure would still be afforded from Nutbean Lane. It is noted that the landscaping already planted along the boundary of the site adjacent to Nutbean Lane has provided very little in the way of effective screening of the wider site.

Landscape Character

Policy TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan states that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues. Proposals should retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

The site is within the River Blackwater Valued Landscape and L2 Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Landscape Character Area (LCA), a high quality landscape of moderate sensitivity and limited capacity for change. This valued landscape takes and its demonstrable physical attributes which would take this site beyond “mere countryside” and should be considered as more important than Countryside falling outside of this Valued Landscape designation.

A significant characteristic feature of the valued landscape is the lack of development and this significant increase in built form in addition to the existing stables and stores on the site has a significant impact on this landscape of principle importance. Nutbean Farm, alongside 4 other notable listed buildings, is noted in the Valued Landscapes Assessment (2024) for this Valued Landscape due to the historic general lack of development surrounding it.

The landscape is summarised in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA 2019) as:

“A discrete elevated landscape of small hills and knolls. The higher areas are wooded, with a distinctive coniferous element interspersed with pastures with arable farming on the lower slopes. Timber framed farmhouses and brick built cottages are linked with a network of winding rural roads and lanes.”

The landscape strategy in the WBLCA is to: ‘to conserve and enhance the existing wooded and secluded character’. The key aspects to be conserved are ‘the views, intimate pattern of pastures, tranquillity and dark skies, woodland and arable farmland and rural settlement pattern linked by narrow lanes’. The strategy advises that ‘Marginal farmland and paddocks should also be enhanced’.

In terms of development, the aim is to ‘conserve the sparse settlement pattern, and maintain the low density of development ...’.

The provision of another building on site would result in the further expansion of buildings away from the existing buildings and fails to address any requirements of the Landscape Character assessment. The proposal does not enhance the condition,

character or any feature contributing to the landscape and would further encroach into the open surrounding countryside. Whilst the overall scale of the building has been slightly reduced from the previously refused application (ref: 231580), the footprint and design of the building is of great similarity. In any case, when considering the current scheme in isolation, it is clear that it would fail to enhance, or retain, the condition, character and features that contribute to the surrounding rural landscape.

Built Heritage: No objection has been raised by the Built Heritage Officer, as from a heritage stance, the existing stables and that of the proposed new storage building are located well away from the listed farmhouse, such that these structures would not harm its setting.

Equine Grazing Needs: Grazing needs are set out in paragraph 1.2 of DEFRA's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids (dated December 2017) states: The area of pasture required per horse will depend on the type of grass, ground conditions, time of year, type of horse and degree of pasture management employed. As a general rule, each horse requires approximately 0.5 – 1.0 hectares (or 1.25 to 2.5 acres) of grazing of a suitable quality if no supplementary feeding is being provided.

The proposed building would require approximately 0.02ha of land currently used for grazing horses. The loss of this land would mean that the site would have 2.08ha remaining to graze the five horses at the farm. It is not considered that such a minimal protrusion into grazing land would unacceptably harm the welfare of the horses on site, especially as 2.1ha was considered adequate for 6 horses under application 211975 and the number of horses on site has now decreased from 6 to 5.

Neighbouring Amenity: The nearest residential dwelling is approximately 175 metres to the south-west. As a result, there are no concerns on neighbouring amenity grounds.

Trees: It is noted that due to the revised position of the storage building, it is now very close to a hedgerow and existing trees, some of which that are protected by TPO1310/2009. It appears that the storage building is located just outside of the Root Protection Areas of these protected trees, however, as no tree information has been submitted with the application, a proper assessment cannot be made. Had the application been recommended for approval, further information on this matter would have been requested.

Highway Access and Parking Provision: The proposed building would provide agricultural storage of machinery and dry storage for hay/straw, which is stated to be ancillary to the existing use of the land. On that basis, there would be no significant associated impact on the highway network as a result of the proposal. The existing access would be utilised, and this is considered acceptable.

Flooding and Drainage: The site is located within Flood Zone 1. WBC Drainage have no objections in principle providing drainage details are conditioned for submission prior to the commencement of development. This would be added to the decision notice if the application were to be recommended for approval.

Ecology: Upon submission of this application, WBC Ecology informally raised concern regarding the Biodiversity Net Gain documents submitted in support of the proposal, mainly relating to whether the landscaping improvements were within the submitted red line. Whilst no formal objection was received from the Ecologist, it is likely that the LPA would have required further information on this matter if the application was recommended for approval.

Conclusion: Having carefully considered the proposed scheme on its own merits and in relation to the previous refusal for similar development at the site, the adverse impacts previously identified remain. The relocation of the storage building and its marginal reduction in scale does not adequately address the previous reasons for refusal. The proposal still represents the excessive encroachment of development away from original buildings within the countryside to the detriment of the countryside setting and the landscape character of the surrounding area. On this basis, the reasons for refusal imposed on application 231580 have not been overcome by the submission of this amended scheme.

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:	N/A
Recommendation:	Refuse
Date:	20 January 2025
Earliest date for decision:	23 December 2024

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	20 January 2025