

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	260684
Site Address:	Longmoor Lodge, Park Lane, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 4PT
Expiry Date:	15 July 2026
Site Visit Date:	11 June 2026
Proposal: Full application for the installation of solar panels plus ancillary battery outbuilding, construction of pond and associated landscaping (Retrospective).	

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 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 CC09 – Development and Flood Risk 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 DM14 - Ancillary development DM15 - Site History
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	CE6 – Reducing energy consumption in existing buildings CE7 – Low carbon and renewable energy generation
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
241476	Householder application for the proposed alteration and extension of the existing detached garage to create first floor habitable accommodation facilitated by the insertion of 3no. dormers, 3no. rooflights, solar panels, plus the erection of a single storey side extension to create a covered link between the garage and the main dwelling.	Approved 18/09/2024
231349	Householder application for the proposed erection of a single storey side and rear extension to existing garage, including changes to fenestration and the insertion of a first floor to create habitable accommodation, plus the erection of an outbuilding.	Approved 07/12/2023
021156	Proposed erection of one replacement dwelling. Demolition of existing dwelling.	Refused 06/08/2002
010053	Proposed erection of dwelling and garage pool complex. Demolition of existing dwelling.	Refused 02/07/2001
001453	Proposed two storey extension to dwelling and single storey extension.	Application Withdrawn 12/04/2000

CONSULTATION RESPONSES**Internal**

WBC Landscape and Trees – Objection. Concerns relate to:

- The loss of trees across the site.
- The solar panels are not compatible in the Countryside location.

WBC CIL – No comments received.

WBC Ecology Newts – No objection.

WBC Ecology – No comments received.

External

None.

REPRESENTATIONS

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

APPRAISAL**Site Description:**

The application site comprises an area of countryside located to the rear of and in the ownership of Longmoor Lodge. The area of land subject of this application is located approximately 142m southeast of the main dwelling. Approximately 25m east of the site is California Country Park. The site comprises an area of gravel approximately 35m

in length and 20m in width. Installed on the gravel are 12 rows of ground mounted solar panels. To the south of the solar panels is an outbuilding that contains the solar storage batteries. Along the western edge of the gravelled area is a strip of grass with a laurel hedgerow in front. In front of the hedging is a pond surrounded by a wildflower meadow.

Proposal:

This application seeks approval for the retrospective laying of hardstanding (gravel), installation of floor mounted solar panels and the erection of a detached battery storage outbuilding. The development falls outside the residential curtilage of Longmoor Lodge.

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.

The proposed development is located within Wokingham Countryside and classified as a rural location. It is therefore limited by the principles outlined in policy CP11 of the Core Strategy (CS). Policy CP11 aims to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment and states proposals outside of development limits will not be granted planning permission except where it contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprise and does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from original buildings.

In terms of the principle of development, the proposal does not fall neatly within any of the categories of development supported under CS Policy CP11, which seeks to strictly control development outside defined settlement limits in order to safeguard the countryside and maintain the separate identity of settlements.

The development site lies outside settlement boundaries and beyond the established residential curtilage of the host dwelling, and the proposal is not directly provided for within the policy's specified exceptions. However, it is important to recognise that the overarching purpose of policy CS CP11 is to resist forms of development that would lead to encroachment, intensification of built form, or unsustainable patterns of growth. In this instance, the development does not comprise the creation of additional residential units or habitable floorspace and would not result in an increase in population or activity on the site. Consequently, it would not give rise to increased reliance on private vehicle use or materially alter travel patterns associated with the land. The proposal is therefore materially different from the types of development that CP11 principally seeks to restrict.

Furthermore, the scheme delivers environmental enhancements in accordance with CS Policy CP1 through the introduction of a biodiversity-led landscaping strategy, including a pond designed to support great crested newts and the establishment of wildflower meadow planting, thereby improving the ecological value of the site.

The installation of ground-mounted solar panels on gravel hardstanding also contributes positively towards renewable energy provision and aligns with the Council's

Climate Emergency Action Plan. In this regard, significant weight should be afforded to paragraph 167 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which supports proposals that improve energy efficiency and promote low carbon technologies, including solar energy infrastructure.

Taking these factors together, while the development does not strictly accord with the detailed criteria of CP11, it is considered acceptable in principle when assessed against the wider objectives of the development plan and other material considerations.

Character of the Area:

The application site is situated within the open countryside beyond defined settlement limits, in a location characterised by a strongly rural and verdant landscape. The development is positioned to the rear of the wider landholding, set approximately 235m from Park Lane, and is therefore well removed from the public realm. As a result of this significant setback, combined with the absence of any public rights of way to the rear of the site, the development is not readily visible from publicly accessible vantage points. The site itself lies adjacent to areas of established woodland and marshland, with the edge of California Country Park located approximately 25m to the east, reinforcing the perception of a densely vegetated and natural landscape setting. The surrounding area is therefore defined by extensive tree cover, wetland features and open woodland, contributing to a tranquil and undeveloped rural character.

Within this context, the introduction of the ground-mounted solar panels has a limited visual presence. The panels are installed at a low level on gravel hardstanding and are enclosed by laurel hedging, with additional substantial natural screening provided by the surrounding woodland along the site boundaries. As such, opportunities for wider views of the development are minimal.

In addition, the already constructed outbuilding, which houses the batteries for storing the solar energy, is modest in scale, being single-storey and measuring approximately 3.5 metres in width by 4 metres in length. The outbuilding has been sensitively sited adjacent to two existing stable outbuildings, ensuring that the built form remains consolidated and does not appear as isolated development within the wider countryside. Its construction in green metal sheeting further assists in assimilating the structure into its verdant surroundings, whilst also providing a durable, long-lasting finish.

Furthermore, the associated landscaping works, including the creation of a pond and wildflower meadow, serve to integrate the development into its surroundings and reinforce the prevailing natural character of the area. These enhancements provide ecological benefits and contribute positively to the landscape setting, with the Council's Ecology Officer noting that the pond increases the suitability of the site for great crested newts and may function as a breeding pond, whilst the meadow planting and hedgerow establishment support species movement and foraging opportunities. Overall, the character of the area remains one of a rural, well-screened and biodiverse landscape, within which the development is discreetly accommodated.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Overlooking, Loss of Light & Overbearing:

By virtue of the nature and siting of the proposed development as well as there being no residential properties within proximity to the site, there are no concerns of this nature that would arise from the proposed development.

Landscape and Trees:

The Council's Trees and Landscape Officer was consulted on the application and has raised an objection. The concerns are twofold: firstly, that part of the solar panel infrastructure is understood to fall within land designated as the Longmoor Bog and Woodland Local Wildlife Site, and secondly, that tree removal has taken place on the land in recent years to facilitate the development, resulting in a perceived reduction in woodland cover and associated habitat.

In response, it is noted that the application site is positioned immediately adjacent to an established corridor of cleared land running along the eastern boundary, which extends for approximately 145m in length and 30m in width. This clearance is associated with overhead pylons and electrical infrastructure and is required to be maintained free of significant vegetation in the interests of safety and operational compliance. As such, the siting of the solar panels alongside this existing cleared strip does not introduce an isolated or incongruous area of tree loss within an otherwise continuous woodland but instead relates to an already modified landscape context.

It is acknowledged that some tree removal has occurred within the red line area prior to the submission of this application. However, the site does not contain any trees subject to statutory protection, and Local Wildlife Sites, whilst of clear ecological importance, are non-statutory designations which rely on the planning system to secure their protection and enhancement rather than having direct legal protection.

Furthermore, available aerial imagery indicates that the application site has comprised a largely cleared and managed area for several years, rather than an intact section of dense woodland, and therefore the present assessment relates specifically to the current condition of the red line area.

In assessing the proposal, it is also necessary to consider the nature of the development and its potential effects on retained vegetation. The solar panels are ground-mounted, low in height, and do not require substantial or invasive foundations. As a result, there is no evidence to suggest that the development would adversely affect the root protection areas of adjacent trees or lead to long-term harm to the surrounding woodland structure.

Significant weight is also given to the proposed and implemented landscape enhancements within the site. The introduction of a pond, areas of long grass, and wildflower meadow planting provides tangible biodiversity benefits and strengthens connections to the surrounding woodland and Local Wildlife Site. Such features are widely recognised as effective measures for supporting wildlife, with wildflower meadows in particular providing rich habitats for pollinators and associated species. These enhancements align with the aims of CS Policy CP7 and MDD Policy TB23, which seek not only to protect but also to enhance biodiversity and green infrastructure networks.

Taking all of the above into account, whilst the concerns raised by the Trees and Landscape Officer are acknowledged, it is considered that the development, by virtue of its siting adjacent to an existing cleared corridor, its limited physical impact on retained trees, and the delivery of meaningful biodiversity enhancements, would not result in significant harm to the character, function or integrity of the surrounding woodland. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in landscape and tree terms.

Ecology:

The application site is located within an amber risk zone for Great Crested Newts (GCN) and falls within the Longmoor Bog and Woodland Local Wildlife Site, a non-statutory designation of local importance for nature conservation. In this context, the proposed development must be assessed against CS Policy CP7, which seeks to conserve and enhance biodiversity assets, including habitats and species of principal importance.

Whilst Longmoor Bog Local Nature Reserve lies outside the application site, approximately 39m to the east, the site itself forms part of the wider Local Wildlife Site network and is therefore sensitive in ecological terms.

The submitted Great Crested Newt Impact Statement (Philips Ecology, April 2026) considers the baseline conditions of the site. Section 3.5 advises that the habitat previously present in the area now occupied by the solar infrastructure and pond was likely of limited suitability for GCN, assumed to have comprised predominantly short-mown grassland. However, the report acknowledges that there is some potential for previous terrestrial habitat to have supported GCN, given historic indications of more structurally diverse vegetation. As such, the Ecological Assessment recommends that any potential habitat loss should be mitigated through on-site habitat enhancement or, alternatively, through District Level Licensing.

In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and the duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, the ecologist identifies appropriate measures to enhance biodiversity within the site. These include the provision of improved terrestrial habitat, incorporating areas of rough grassland connected to adjacent woodland and the wetter grassland corridor to the east, thereby maintaining and enhancing habitat connectivity. The management of existing grassland to allow longer growth, with potential for increased botanical diversity, is also proposed to support GCN foraging. Furthermore, the provision of a shallow, natural pond within the site is identified as a key enhancement, offering potential breeding habitat alongside increased foraging opportunities.

Whilst the retrospective nature of the application means that mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements do not apply, the applicant has nevertheless implemented the recommendations set out in the GCN Impact Statement to deliver voluntary ecological enhancements. These measures align with the objectives of CS Policy CP7 and MDD TB23, both of which seek measurable improvements to biodiversity.

The pond has been introduced to the north-west of the solar array and is surrounded by areas of long grass and wildflower meadow planting. This landscaping establishes

a continuous corridor of suitable habitat linking the site to the adjacent woodland to the north and the wider Local Wildlife Site, thereby facilitating species movement and foraging. The Council's GCN Ecology Officer has raised no objection to the development and notes the ecological enhancements, noting that the pond is likely to increase the suitability of the site for GCN and may provide a breeding resource, whilst the meadow planting and hedgerow establishment improve movement and foraging opportunities.

Overall, whilst the precise baseline ecological value of the site prior to development is not fully evidenced due to the retrospective nature of the application, the implemented works clearly deliver biodiversity enhancements. The provision of new habitats, improved connectivity and potential breeding opportunities represents a net benefit for GCN and other species. These ecological gains are afforded significant weight in the planning balance and weigh in favour of the proposal.

Other:

For the reasons set out above and subject to conditions, the proposal is acceptable as it accords with local plan policy and guidance.

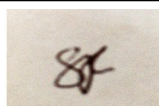
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a 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:	Approval
Date:	16 June 2026
Earliest date for decision:	11 June 2026

**Recommendation agreed by:
(Authorised Officer)**



Date:	13.7.26
--------------	----------------

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Outside Development Location – Countryside
Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area – 5km
Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone – Amber
Local Wildlife Site - Longmoor Bog and Woodland, California Country Park
Landscape Character Assessment 2019 - Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands
Finchampstead Ward
Finchampstead Parish