

Planning Statement

Cousins House, 1-3 Reading
Road, Finchampstead,
Wokingham, RG27 0RP

Prepared For
Mr S Makombe

5501
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bell cornwell

CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

Bell Cornwell LLP, Unit 2, Meridian Office Park, Osborn Way,
Hook, Hampshire RG27 9HY

01256 766673 | info@bell-cornwell.co.uk | bell-cornwell.co.uk



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Retrospective planning permission is sought for

Change of use of the building from Class Eg(i) to a Patient Transport Service building
(Use Class Sui Generis)

At

Cousins House, 1-3 Reading Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG27 0RP.

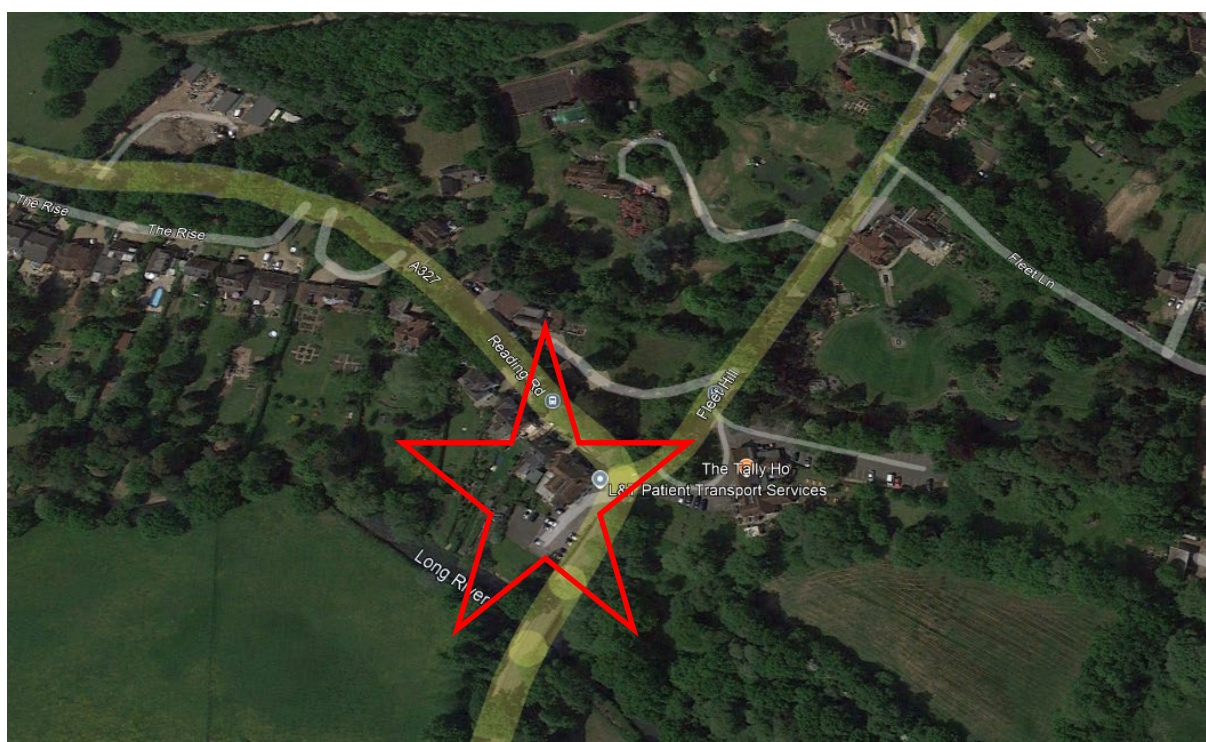


Figure 1 - Aerial image taken from Google Maps to show the site in the centre of the star and its surroundings

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 1.2 Cousins House is located on the corner of The Street and Reading Road with Fleet Hill branching off to the northeast. The site comprises a large building in the northern section with vehicular entrance to the east off the bend of the A327. Car parking is to the south.
- 1.3 Within the blue land there an area of grass that leads down to the footpath that runs along the banks of the Long River.



- 1.4 The site is at the southernmost edge of Wokingham Borough before the start of Hart District Council. The site is located close to Eversley. Eversley has around five separate settlement boundaries that identify the main clusters of development for the area. The site is located around 80m to the north of Eversley settlement boundary as shown in Figure 1 below. It is just within the administrative area of Wokingham where Eversley is within Hart.

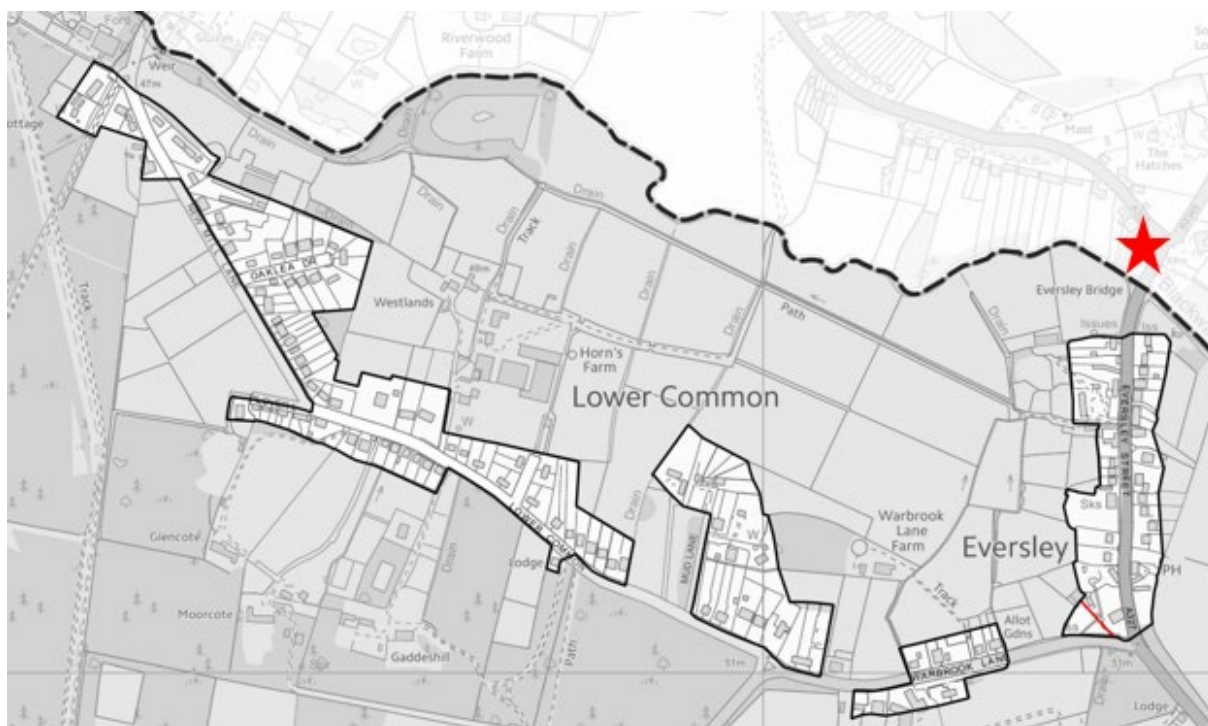


Figure 2 - Extract from Hart District Council Local Plan: Strategy and Sites 2016-2032 Inset Map 8

- 1.5 The site is at the end of a line of existing residential properties and has the Tally Ho pub directly opposite the site. Whilst predominantly residential in the immediate vicinity, there are some different services and facilities nearby. There is a bus service that passes the site and travels to Finchampstead and up to the major development area to the north where there are further services and facilities.
- 1.6 In terms of site constraints, the site is located within the countryside. It is within the AWE 12km zone. The site is within the 5km Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area zone. The site is within Flood Zone 2 and 3 as the River Blackwater flows east/west along the southern boundary of the site. Here there is a footpath. The site is not within any landscape designations. The Council identify that the site is within a



constraint for Archaeological Sites, Local wildlife consultation zone, ordinary watercourse zone, Main River DRN Consultation Zone, Landscape Character Assessment Area, Bat Roost Habitat Suitability location, Green Routes and Riverside Paths location and Contaminated Land Consultation Zone.

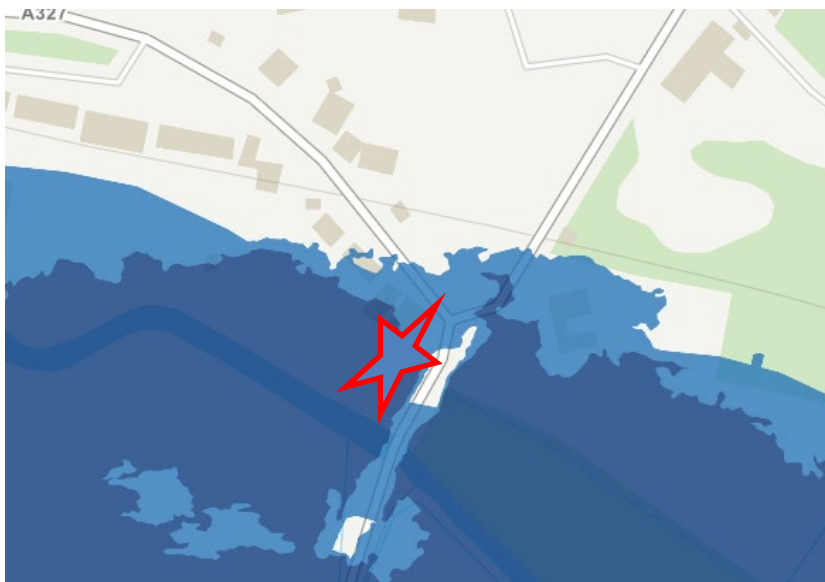


Figure 3 - Extract from the Flood Map for Planning website (Flood Zone 2 - light blue and Flood Zone 3 - dark blue)

- 1.7 The lawful use of the existing building is an office, Class Eg(i). This was accepted in the determination of planning application 242418. We do not believe there are any conditions restricting the use to solely office and so, the use could, without planning permission change between any of the uses listed within Class E of the Use Class Order.

PLANNING HISTORY

- 1.8 A review of the online planning register reveals the following planning history:
- O/1996/64043/O – Erection of 13 Dwellings - Approved
 - RM/1999/68978 – Reserved Matters for the Erection of 13 Dwellings – Approved 21 May 1999
 - F/1999/69162 – Proposed Demolition of Existing Buildings and Erection of 22 Dwellings with Roads and Services – Refused 30 April 1999
 - F/2007/2672 – Proposed first floor rear extension – Approved 2 January 2008



- F/20008/0928 – Proposed first floor side/rear extension to existing offices – Approved 4 June 2008
- F/2013/0031 – Application for the extension of the car park at Masdar House (retrospective) – Approved 27 February 2013
- 170615 – Full planning application for the change of use from B1(a) to C3 residential, comprising 3 x 1 bed apartments and 4 x 2 bed apartments on the existing office building – withdrawn Feb 2019
- 240893 – Full application for the change of use from an area of grassland to create additional hardstanding parking spaces and access for vehicles - Refused 26 June 2024. There were four reasons for refusal on the decision notice:
 1. Unacceptable and unsustainable location
 2. Encroachment into the countryside
 3. Flood Zone 2 and 3 adjacent to the River Blackwater, insufficient information to demonstrate any exceptional circumstance through a Flood Risk Assessment
 4. Absence of an arboricultural survey
- 242418 – Full application for a change of use from offices (Use Class E(g(i))) to a Patient Transport Service building (Use Class Sui Generis), along with the extension of the existing car park to provide an additional 5no. parking spaces (part retrospective) – refused 28 May 2025. There were five reasons for refusal:
 1. Unacceptable and unsustainable location
 2. Encroachment into the countryside
 3. Flood Zone 2 and 3 adjacent to the River Blackwater, insufficient information to demonstrate any exceptional circumstance through a Flood Risk Assessment
 4. Absence of an arboricultural survey
 5. Noise impact and associated detrimental impact on nearby residential amenities due to 24/7 use of the site.

PROPOSAL

- 1.9 Planning permission is sought for the change of use of the building from Class Eg(i) to a Patient Transport Service building (Use Class Sui Generis) at Cousins House, 1-3 Reading Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG27 0RP.



- 1.10 There are no proposed changes to the building, or to the existing area of car parking.
- 1.11 The building is used as a headquarters for LNT Patient Transport Services. LNT Patient Transport Services is a non-emergency patient transport service that operates across Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.
- 1.12 The company is made up of approximately 25 members of staff. Of this one is part time. There are two directors who are sometimes on site and sometimes at meetings or working from home.
- 1.13 The staff are predominantly drivers who are medically trained to work with stable but unwell patients, not critical patients. These drivers are based at the building awaiting a need to travel to pick someone up and transport them between two places home/hospital/nursing home etc.
- 1.14 There are few office workers typically around two. The office workers work typical office hours, between the hours of 0800 and 1800.
- 1.15 The ambulances used to transport patients are parked at the site and stay on site overnight if not in use. Staff travel to and from the site in their own vehicles. There are around 12 ambulances and two small cars also.
- 1.16 The drivers work shift patterns. The business can run into the night potentially until 0200. There is no one residing on the site overnight. The staff waiting for calls wait within the building. The staff work shifts 12 to 0000.
- 1.17 No members of the public visit the site; there are no transactions that take place at the site and there is no money held on the site.
- 1.18 The ambulances, whilst fitted with sirens do not use their sirens.



2 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act require that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 2.2 Wokingham Borough Council Development Plan Documents of relevance comprise:
- Core Strategy (CS)
 - Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD)
- 2.3 There is no Neighbourhood Plan of relevance for the area.
- 2.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) are both material considerations. There are a few adopted Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) which may be of relevance.

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

- 2.5 Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development) of the Core Strategy is the overarching policy that looks to protect the environment, secure adequate infrastructure on and off-site and achieve a high-quality design that protects existing and future residents.
- 2.6 Policy CP9 (Scale and location of development proposals) of the Core Strategy requires proposals to be of a scale that must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility.
- 2.7 Policy CC01 (Presumption in favour of sustainable development) of the Managing Development Delivery Document (Local Plan) 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.



- 2.8 Policy CC02 (Development Limits) of the Managing Development Delivery Document (Local Plan) defines the settlement limits for each settlement. It advises how edge of settlement developments should be considered.
- 2.9 Policy CP11 (Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside) of the Core Strategy looks to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. There are set criteria where development outside settlement policy boundaries will be permitted.
- (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.
- 2.10 In the determination of planning application 242418 it was questioned whether the proposed use was linked to a rural enterprise, and it was ultimately determined that there wasn't enough information available to suggest it was meaning the Council didn't feel it complied with (1) of the policy. However, the Council failed to consider the existing lawful use of the building properly. The existing use is offices which are not required to be linked to the countryside or a rural enterprise. Furthermore, whilst technically countryside based on planning mapping, the site is in reality not within a truly rural location. As discussed above, there are houses along the road, some businesses, a public house across the road and it is only a short 80m walk into the settlement boundary. We therefore question whether it is appropriate to place too much emphasis on criteria (1) and a pragmatic approach should be taken taking including consideration the extant lawful use of the building and its lack of connection to the countryside. The fallback position is a material consideration.



- 2.11 The previous planning application looked to extend car parking provision south, and this was a concern to the Council. Historically the car park has been the tarmacked area to the south/south east of the building. In 2013 planning permission was granted for an extension to the car park out to the west (ref: F/2013/0031). The applicant understands that there are significant concerns with cars parking over the entirety of the site and this is not their intention, hence why the area is not included within the red line. This planning application only looks to change the use of the building and the historic, lawful area of hardstanding. The concerns regarding the impact of extended hardstanding do not apply to this planning application. (2) of the planning policy is thereby met as there is no expansion of the development proposed.
- 2.12 It was previously acknowledged by the Council that the proposal would operate within an existing building which is appropriate for conversion. This element of the Policy was previously identified as being met and the Council was satisfied it complied with (3).
- 2.13 Previously the Council considered criteria 6 of Policy CP11 also. The officer report noted that development may be permitted if it constitutes an essential community facility. Paragraph 4.17 of the Core Strategy provides further detail as to the definition of a community facility, stating “*Community facilities include development for health, including preventative social care and community support services), education, play and leisure or culture together with libraries, village/community halls and religious buildings*”.
- 2.14 As set out in the *Proposal* section of this planning statement, the proposed use of the building is serving a community support service. The business plays a vital role in moving people safely between the community and hospitals where the NHS ambulance services cannot accommodate the demand. Without this necessary service, many people would struggle to move safely between locations due to their personal circumstances, health, access to suitable means of transport etc. The proposal also complies with (6) of Policy CP11 as it is for a community facility that is



important to support those in need within the community. As already noted, it is re-using an existing building,

- 2.15 The assessment above demonstrates the proposal complies with Policy CP11 if you appropriately take into consideration the existing use of the site which is offices and has not therefore been linked to a rural business.
- 2.16 So, whilst the development is outside the settlement, it is on a site that previously benefits from planning permission and so as the proposal will not extend development on the site it is acceptable.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND DESIGN

- 2.17 Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development) of the Core Strategy seeks to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and CP11 states that proposals outside of development limited will not normally be permitted, except where, inter alia, it does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings.
- 2.18 Policy TB21 (Landscape Character) of the Managing Development Delivery Document requires proposal to 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. It states that proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.
- 2.19 The site is in Landscape Character Area A3: Blackwater River Valley. A key characteristic is the valley landscape dominated by the River Blackwater which is located to the south of the site. The alluvial nature is said to contribute to the character of the area.
- 2.20 As discussed above, the site is previously developed with an existing building and hardstanding. The proposal looks to solely change the use of the building and land going from Class E to Sui Generis. There are no physical changes proposed to the site. The scheme will ensure the retention of the undeveloped grassed area between the hardstanding and the river footpath.



- 2.21 The proposal will not therefore alter how the site appears and so, it is compliant with the policies as it would not change the design or appearance of the site.

NEIGHBOURING AMENITY

- 2.22 Policy CC06 (Noise) of the Managing Delivery Development Document (Local Plan) and Appendix 1 requires consideration to be given to potential noise impacts from developments to protect noise sensitive receptors.
- 2.23 It is noted that with planning application 242418 concerns were raised by neighbouring residents.
- 2.24 The existing use of the site is an office. It is not clear whether there is a restriction on the hours of use. Our research suggests there isn't, and the report for 242418 doesn't specify a restriction. The proposed Sui Generis use is potentially a 24/7 operation. There were previously concerns raised about the increase in noise generation due to the increase in the car park due to an additional amount of traffic movements to and from the site. It was the expansion of the existing that led to the conclude that there may be an unacceptable impact on the adjacent residents.
- 2.25 As noted above, this proposal is different to that previously considered. There is no expansion proposed and there is therefore no intensification of the use. The vehicles do not use sirens. The noise is limited to vehicles entering and exiting the site. Over the course of a nighttime this is typically limited to two vehicles. The impact of this is limited and would not result in a detrimental impact on the quality of life of the adjoining residents. The proposal complies with Policy CP6.

FLOODING AND DRAINAGE

- 2.26 Policy CC09 (Development and Flood Risk (from all sources) of the Managing Development Delivery Document (Local Plan) notes the need to take flood risk into consideration.
- 2.27 The application site is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3. There are no physical changes to the site which has an existing lawful use as an office. A flood risk



assessment is submitted with the planning application. This concludes that there would be no additional impact on flood risk potential because of the change of use.

- 2.28 There is an existing building and car park on the site. The proposed use for the site continues to utilise the building as the office for the business. This therefore remains in the same vulnerability classification as the existing use. Car parks are also considered a less vulnerable use, and the existing car park is to be retained as a car park. There are no members of the public visiting the site. The vulnerability of the site isn't altered and so, and the application for a change of use meaning there is no requirement to go through a sequential test/exception test process.

HIGHWAYS, ACCESS AND PARKING

- 2.29 Policy CC07 (Parking) of the Managing Development Delivery Document (Local Plan) requires an appropriate level of off-street parking on the site to prevent off-site parking issues.
- 2.30 The proposal achieves 20 car parking spaces on the site. As identified above, there are 12 ambulances and two cars associated with the business. At any one time there are eight members of staff on site. There remain six car parking spaces available for staff private vehicles. Staff try to lift share where appropriate through shift patterns aligning.



3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Planning permission is sought for the change of use of the existing building and car parking from an Office Class E use to a Sui Generis Use for a Patient Transport Service. No changes are proposed to the building or the car parking.
- 3.2 This planning application differs from previous planning applications which have been refused as this application doesn't look to make any physical changes to the site. It is purely an application to change the use of the site.
- 3.3 Taking into consideration the specifics of this proposal against the lawful use of the site there would not be an increase in landscape harm, nor would there be any harm to surrounding trees and vegetation. The proposed use remains a less vulnerable user and with no changes to the site being proposed there is no resulting impact on the flood risk potential of the site. The proposed use would not give rise to an unacceptable amenity impact that is detrimental to nearby residents.
- 3.4 The proposal is a community facility that is looking to re-use an existing building and its associated car parking. The lawful office use operating from the building didn't have to be connected to the rural environment and so, it would be unreasonable for the Council to require only a rural business to operate from the building in the future. It is inappropriate for the Council to conclude that the proposed use should be located within settlement limits.