

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251105
Site Address:	The Sapphire Centre, Fishponds Road, Wokingham, Wokingham, RG41 2QL
Expiry Date:	3 July 2025
Site Visit Date:	30 August 2024
Proposal: Full application for proposed extension to the rear of the existing APACOR facility by connecting with an existing commercial building to the rear, with associated works.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Water Utility Consultation Zones
 Contaminated Land Consultation Zone
 Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
 Core Employment Areas – Molly Millars Industrial Estate
 Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Wokingham (Major Development Location)
 Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone – Green Risk Zone
 Nuclear Consultation Zone
 Landfill Gas Consultation Zone
 Landscape Character Assessment Area
 SSSI Impact Risk Zones
 Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones
 Historic Flooding Points Consultation Zone

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 CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP15 – Employment Development
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 TB11 – Core Employment Areas TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
212350	Full application for the proposed erection of a new 3No storey commercial building following partial demolition of existing building and reconfiguration of site to include additional parking.	Approved 23/03/2022
221421	Application for non-material amendment to planning consent 212350 for changes to the proposed elevation treatments, roof profile and fenestration.	Approved 26/05/2022

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments received
WBC Drainage – No objection subject to condition(s)
WBC Highways – Objections
WBC Landscape and Trees – No comments received
WBC CIL – General CIL commentary
WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received
WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

None consulted

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	No comments
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	One resident raising the following concerns: - Proposals would impact parking provision, not enough space on site to avoid impacts onto access road for other units.

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site consists of 2no. industrial buildings currently under B2 (Storage

and Distribution) use located on Fishponds Road, Wokingham. The Sapphire Centre fronts Fishponds Road to the north-west, whereas the Codan building is accessed via a rear access road that extends off of Eastheath Avenue to the east.

The site's surroundings are predominantly industrial and commercial in nature and this is reflective of the site's location within the Molly Millar's Industrial Area, a Core Employment Area as recognised by the Council's Development Plan.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks approval for the proposed erection of a two storey link extension between the Sapphire Centre and Codan Building, plus alterations to the rear parking courtyard.

The Sapphire Centre and the Codan Building are Use Class B8. The extension proposed between the two is proposed to be used as a factory/storage space that is classed as a mix between Use Class B2 and B8.

Principle of Development:

Policy Context:

Core Strategy 2010:

The site is located within Molly Millar's Industrial Area, a Core Employment Area as defined by Policy CP15 of the Core Strategy. Policy CP15 states that development for business, industry or warehousing will be permitted, including the expansion or intensification of existing employment uses provided it is within a Core Employment Area. Policy CP15 also states that any proposed changes of use from B1, B2 & B8 should not lead to an overall net loss of floorspace in B Use within the borough.

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.

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 (MDDL P):

MDDL P Policy TB11 relates to Core Employment Areas identified within Policy CP15 of the Core Strategy.

MDDL P Policy CC04 states that planning permission will only be granted for proposals that seek to delivery high quality sustainably designed and constructed developments.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan.

Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. It goes on to confirm that '*Significant weight*' should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

Paragraph 87 confirms that decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations.

Assessment:

The proposal involves development associated with business, industry and warehousing within a Core Employment Area and results in a net increase in B2 floorspace. The development is therefore supported in principle by Policy CP15 of the Core Strategy and TB11 of the MDDL P.

Character of the Area:

The application site is located within an established industrial and commercial park where buildings, boundary treatments and accesses serve their intended primary commercial purpose.

The proposed extension would adopt a flat roof form like the two buildings it would infill between. The elevations of the building would have metal cladding and linear windows, abutting the south-western site boundary that is well vegetated.

Overall, the scale of the infill extension remains commensurate with both the buildings it would infill between and the surrounding industrial estate. Its siting and set down nature from the two main buildings would also limit its visual prominence within the street scene, rendering it almost invisible from all public viewpoints.

The changes to the rear courtyard would negligibly harm the visual amenities of the area and they would be well screened from any public viewpoints.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Overlooking:

The first floor of the extension would include several windows that would overlook either the site's courtyard or the adjacent office buildings (Rubra 1 and 2). The overlook onto the courtyard is acceptable and fleeting/skewed outlooks onto the adjacent office buildings also raises no unacceptable overlooking concerns.

Loss of Light & Overbearing:

The extension would abut the site boundary shared with Rubra 1 and 2 which are office buildings. It is acknowledged that permission was granted in 2018 to convert Rubra 1 into 22no. residential flats (reference: 180674) but this permission has not

been implemented and has since lapsed.

Overall, the extension would retain a 21 metre separation distance from Rubra 2 and 32 metres from Rubra 1. Both would also be screened by the existed vegetated border. There is therefore no anticipated adverse loss of light or overbearing impacts anticipated.

The applicant should be mindful if any residential applications adjacent to the site are submitted prior to an application for the proposed works.

Noise:

The application site is located within an established industrial and commercial park and there are no residential properties within a legible distance. The increase in B2 floorspace in the industrial estate is therefore not anticipated to harm any adjacent occupiers by reason of noise.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Policy Context:

Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that:

- a) Provide for sustainable forms of transport to allow choice;
- b) Are located where there are or will be at the time of development choices in the mode of transport available and which minimise the distance people need to travel;
- c) Improve the existing infrastructure network, including road, rail and public transport, enhance facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, including provision for those with reduced mobility, and other users;
- d) Provide appropriate vehicular parking, having regard to car ownership;
- e) Mitigate any adverse effects upon the local and strategic transport network that arise from the development proposed;
- f) Enhance road safety; and
- g) Do not cause highway problems or lead to traffic related environmental problems.

Policy TB20 (Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use) of the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Framework states that:

‘Planning permission will only be granted for commercial development proposals that demonstrate there is no significant impact on highway safety.’

Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that in assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, it should be ensured that:

- a) sustainable transport modes are prioritised taking account of the vision for the site, the type of development and its location;

- b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;
- c) the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code⁴⁸; and
- d) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree through a vision-led approach.

Paragraph 116 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.

Paragraph 117 states that within this context, applications for development should:

- a) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport, with layouts that maximise the catchment area for bus or other public transport services, and appropriate facilities that encourage public transport use;
- b) address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport;
- c) create places that are safe, secure and attractive – which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter, and respond to local character and design standards;
- d) allow for the efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles; and
- e) be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.

Parking Provision:

This application, whilst primarily involving the extension proposed, it involves alterations to the rear parking area/yard of the Sapphire Centre and the Codan Building. The total floorspaces of the buildings can be seen below:

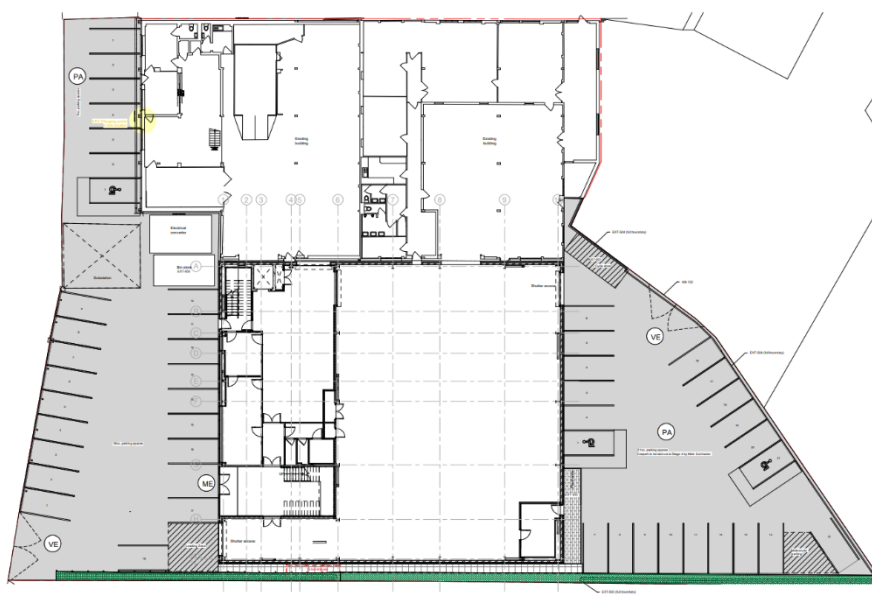
- The Sapphire Centre (Existing, Use Class B8) – 2285sqm
- Codan Building (Existing, Use Class B8) – 840sqm
- Proposed Extension (Use Class B2/B8) - 1100sqm
- **Total – 4225sqm**

As per the Council's Parking Standards, the table below outlines the requirements for the site. It should be noted that the calculations for the new extension have been based on the expectation that it would be primarily used for B2 purposes (i.e. a worst case scenario basis) as the parking requirements are more substantial than B8.

Building	Floorspace (sqm)	Use	Parking Spaces Required	Cycle Parking Spaces Required	PTW Parking Spaces Required

Sapphire Centre and Codan Building	3225 (combined)	B8	25	16	3
Proposed Extension	1100	B2	25	5	2
Total	4225	N/A	50	21	5

When the Sapphire Building was first given permission under consent 212350, the approved parking plan included 47 parking spaces, which was reduced to 46 upon the consent of Discharge of Conditions application 220940 (landscaping plan below).



Condition 18 of consent 212350 prevents additional internal floorspace without prior written permission; the reason for imposing the condition was to prevent an over-development of the site and to ensure adequate parking.

The application form states the site only has 19 spaces currently but from both the Case and Highways Officer's visits, the layout seen above was implemented and fully occupied during the daytime. Photos of car parking occupancy on 11th June 2025 is provided below:



The number of spaces proposed under this application totals 34, a shortfall of 12 spaces compared to that approved for 212350/220940, despite an increase of 1100sqm of B2/B8 floorspace. It is also a shortfall of 16 spaces upon that required when the additional floorspace is taken into consideration. Due to this notable shortfall in the required parking provision, the LPA are concerned that the lack of parking provision on-site will lead to the overspill of parking onto Fishponds Road and surrounding roads within the Molly Millers Industrial Estate, to the detriment of Highway Safety.

Further to the above, seven of the proposed car parking spaces on site plan do not provide suitable manoeuvring space to ingress/egress each of the car parking spaces. The aisle only measures 2.62m wide which will not be sufficient to allow vehicles in and out. An aisle width of 6.0m would be required (As per paragraph 8.3.51 of Manual for Streets). The layout of these spaces also differs from the way they have been recently constructed on site.

Aisle Manoeuvring Space)	Constructed Parking Layout

Additionally, the car parking spaces shown on the site plan measure 2.4m x 4.8m and do not appear to comply with the WBC Minimum Space standard of 2.5m x 5.0.

With regards to cycle parking, the transport statement states that a total of 14 cycle parking spaces are currently provided in the form of 7 Sheffield Type stands and this will remain for the proposed site. The transport statement states that although the size of the building is increasing; the number of staff is not and therefore the likely

operations will not increase no. of cycle parking spaces required. The WBC Parking Standards require 21 cycle parking spaces for 4,225sq.m of B2 or B8 Industrial Use and therefore there is also a shortfall in cycle parking provision.

With regards to HGV parking, the Highways team require dedicated parking bays for lorries/vans on site. These are not provided on site, nor does the site appear to have suitable capacity to accommodate a greater number of deliveries associated with a larger warehouse and increased no. of goods on site (or larger vehicles). On a site visit, two delivery vans were observed blocking the access and were required to reverse into the site. This is shown in the photo below:



The applicant's transport statement and associated addendum technical note acknowledge the increased parking demands associated with the development but ultimately conclude that there would be no adverse harm to highway safety. The reasoning for this surrounds the fact that APACOR, the applicant, are not intending to expand their operations with additional staff.

Whilst the lack of employee expansion at this time is noted, the LPA need to consider the potential for future occupants/tenants of the building, whose requirements may be much more expansive than APACOR's. Furthermore, APACOR could decide to increase staff in the future which the Council could not control.

A personal permission for APACOR is not considered appropriate in this instance; the NPPG outlines that a condition limiting the benefit of the permission to a company is inappropriate because its shares can be transferred to other persons without affecting the legal personality of the company.

The LPA further acknowledge that the site is located within a highly sustainable area with access to rail and bus links, plus other sustainable transport modes. This provision is however not considered sufficient to overcome the substantial parking shortfalls, largely due to the fact that the on-site parking provision that currently exists is commonly fully occupied, provision which the development would reduce.

Overall, the proposed development fails to provide a suitable number of car parking spaces in accordance with the adopted Wokingham Council Parking Standards. The development would lead to additional on-street car parking which would result in obstruction of footways, visibility splays, turning heads, access for emergency vehicles and/or block the freeflow of traffic to the detriment of Highway users' safety.

The development is therefore considered contrary to Wokingham Core Strategy Policy CP6 and Paragraphs 115, 116 and 117 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Access and Visibility:

With regards to vehicular access onto Fishponds Road, the application demonstrates a visibility splay for vehicle speeds of 10mph or 2.4m x 12.5m from the proposed site access (due to the presence of on-street parking). Manual for Streets Table 7.1 indicates that a visibility splay of 2.4m x 12.5m is only suitable for a vehicle speed of 10mph. Paragraph 7.5.8 of the Manual for Streets states that: *'Below around 20m, shorter SSDs themselves will not achieve low vehicle speeds: speed-reducing features will be needed'*.

The consultant's technical note quotes Manual for Streets advice which states *"Parking in visibility splays in built-up areas is quite common...in some circumstances, where vehicle speeds are low, some encroachment may be acceptable"*. The consultant omits the sentence of Para 7.8.5 which states that *'Ideally defined parking bays should be provided outside the visibility splay'*. The applicant has also not submitted any speed survey evidence which demonstrates vehicle speeds are low; the circumstance in which MfS advises encroachment of parking bays might be acceptable. The Highways Officer observed vehicles travelling at speeds exceeding 20mph past the site, suggesting the 10mph visibility splay is not suitable.

The consultants technical note also states: *'It is also arguable that on-street parking acts as vehicle calming, meaning vehicles are likely to travel at lower speeds as a result'* and thus the consultant ignores the MfS advice which states *'Below around 20m, shorter SSDs themselves will not achieve low vehicle speeds: speed-reducing features will be needed'*.

The existing access is at a point where the visibility is substandard due to the presence of on-street parking, and visibility cannot be provided in accordance with the Manual for Streets visibility standards for a 30mph road. No mitigation has been proposed to reduce vehicle speed and the lack of appropriate visibility at the intensified access junction would cause a highway safety problem which would create conflicts between vehicles and other highway users.

The development is therefore considered contrary to Wokingham Core Strategy Policy CP6 and Paragraphs 115, 116 and 117 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Turning Space:

WBC Highways require swept path analysis which demonstrates that the site can accommodate a 16.5m long articulated vehicle. This has not been provided, and WBC Highways are not satisfied that there is suitable turning space within the site to accommodate a vehicle of this size. The LPA would have no control over use of 16.5m articulated vehicles on site and vehicles of this size are often used in

association with B8 Warehousing land use.

The application includes swept paths of a 10m long rigid lorry. The swept paths show there is not suitable turning space within the existing car park for delivery vehicles. A rigid lorry would need to reverse into the site to exit in a forward gear; or enter in a forward gear and then reverse out. These manoeuvres were not supervised/controlled by a qualified banksman.

The applicant's technical note response does not improve turning/loading space for a 16.5m articulated vehicle. The response does not address the possibility that a larger B2/B8 Warehouse could attract a different owner/user who would then have permission for B8 use with a 16.5m articulated lorry. The response states *'Despite the increase in floor area we are not increasing the intensification of the site. Access onsite by 16.5m long articulated vehicle is not currently required for the proposed development type'*.

Overall, in the absence of adequate information, the proposed development does not provide adequate parking, loading, unloading and manoeuvring space for delivery vehicles associated with B2 industrial and B8 Distribution uses. The proposals would result in delivery vehicles being stationed on the public highway or reversing onto the public highway to achieve ingress/egress to the site.

The proposals are therefore considered contrary to Core Policy CP6, Policy TB20 of the Wokingham MDD Framework and Paragraphs 116 and 117 of the NPPF.

Flooding and Drainage:

The site is located within Flood Zone 1 but has a history of flooding. WBC Drainage have no objections to the drainage strategy proposed, subject to a condition requiring the final strategy to be submitted to the Council for approval. This condition will be imposed on the decision notice.

Landscape and Trees:

The proposed development would have no impact on existing vegetation adjacent to or within the site. There are therefore no objections on these grounds. A landscaping scheme condition is not considered necessary as opportunities/locations for such provision is severely limited by reason of the predominant areas of hardstanding.

Ecology:

Bats:

The site is located within a Bat Roost Suitability Habitat, but the nature of the proposals would not exhibit features attractive to bats nor the existing buildings on site. There are therefore no anticipated impacts on this protected species.

Great Crested Newts:

The site is located within a Green Risk Zone for Great Crested Newts. The

development proposed would be sited on areas of existing hardstanding and therefore there are no anticipated impacts on this protected species.

Employment Skills Plan:

The proposed development involves the creation of 1100sqm of new B2 floorspace. MDD Local Plan Policy TB12 states that development proposals for 10 or more dwellings or 1,000m² of non-residential floorspace should be accompanied by an Employment and Skills Plan to show how the proposal provides opportunities for training, apprenticeships or other vocational initiatives to develop local employability skills required by developers, contractors or end users of the proposal.

Such a plan will be secured via an S106 legal agreement prior to the determination of this application.

Planning Balance and Conclusion:

The LPA acknowledge the development's acceptability in principle as per the Core Strategy, owed to the site's location within Molly Miller Industrial Estate (a recognised Core Employment Area) and the resulting increases in B2/B8 floorspace within it. This expansion is also supported on a national level, with the NPPF stating that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. There is also potential, if the application is refused, that the applicant and their business may need to locate elsewhere.

Notwithstanding the above, it is the LPA's view that the proposed development would have an adverse impact on highway safety by reason of:

- a lack of parking provision
- a lack of visibility for vehicles exiting the site
- a lack of turning space for large vehicles (HGVs etc)

These concerns in turn would lead to additional on-street car parking which would result in obstruction of footways, visibility splays, turning heads, access for emergency vehicles and/or block the freeflow of traffic. Paragraph 116 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, which is considered the case in this instance.

Taking into consideration all potential scenarios, APACOR's use of the site is on the lower scale of intensity when it comes to employee numbers. Any increases in the intensity of operations on site would further exacerbate the areas of harm raised above.

Whilst the economic benefits of the development are acknowledged and are afforded significant weight in the planning balance, the adverse harm to Highway Safety anticipated attracts substantial weight due to the wider impacts on the highway network, contrary to both local and national policy.

As such, when engaging the planning balance, the areas of harm highlighted are considered to outweigh the benefits of the proposed development. The development is therefore recommended for refusal.

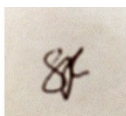
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):

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, 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:	Not required
Recommendation:	Refusal
Date:	1 August 2025
Earliest date for decision:	4 June 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	7.8.25