

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	262068
Site Address:	Land Adjacent To 9a Weller Drive Wokingham
Expiry Date:	27 September 2026
Site Visit Date:	18/09/2026
Proposal: Prior approval submission for the installation of an essential replacement electronic communications apparatus comprising slimline lattice mast, 3 no. aerials, 2 no. transmission dishes, 1 no. GPS aerial, radio equipment housing and development ancillary to radio equipment housing.	

PLANNING POLICY/LEGISLATION

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

Section 55	Provides that 'development' includes the carrying out of building operations on land, and 'building operations' includes structural alterations or additions to buildings.
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Section 57	Planning permission is needed for all development of land.
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Section 187a	Enforcement for breach of conditions
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The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)

Section 7	Prior approval applications: time periods for decision
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Article 3	In conjunction with Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A grants planning permission for electronic communications code operators for the installation, alteration or replacement of any electronic communications apparatus and development ancillary to radio equipment housing.
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Article 4	Provides that the planning authority may give direction to restrict the effect of Article 3
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PLANNING HISTORY

There is no relevant Planning Application or Planning Appeal History to the current application (i.e. being substantially the same development).

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Property Services – No comments received.
WBC Environmental Health – No comments received.
WBC Highways – No comments received.
WBC Landscape and Trees – No comments received.
WBC Public Rights Of Way – No comments received.
WBC Emergency Planning – No comments received.
WBC Ecology Newts – No comments received.

WBC Ecology – No comments received.

External

Office for Nuclear Regulation – No comments received.

Civil Aviation Authority – No comments received.

Natural England – No comments received.

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received.

West Berks Emergency Planning Officer – No objections.

AWE Burghfield – No objections.

Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust – No comments received.

REPRESENTATIONS

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

APPRAISAL

Proposal and Planning History:

The proposal seeks the installation of an essential replacement electronic communications apparatus comprising slimline lattice mast, 3 no. aerials, 2 no. transmission dishes, 1 no. GPS aerial, radio equipment housing and development ancillary to radio equipment housing.

It should be noted that the application is a re-submission by the same applicant, following a similar proposal submitted under planning reference 252762 at West Court Land, Wokingham, RG40 4QF. That application was refused in December 2025 on the grounds of visual and landscape harm, impacts on the SANG and SPA mitigation, highway safety, and insufficient evidence that suitable alternative sites had been considered. It is understood that the decision is currently subject to an appeal under reference APP/6011060.

The factors for consideration when assessing this application is whether or not the proposed development would fall within the parameters and restrictions of A.1 and A.2 of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).

The applicant has advised that their existing base station at Church Farm (TVY048) must be removed because the landowner has secured permission for an agricultural building and served a formal Notice to Quit, requiring the site to be vacated. This action will leave a critical gap in the Airwave TETRA network, which provides secure communications for emergency services. The applicant further explains that without a replacement site, large parts of Finchampstead and surrounding areas would lose the required in-building coverage, severely compromising public safety and national security by preventing reliable communication between emergency responders and control rooms.

The proposed site at Hogwood Industrial Estate will provide E2-level radio coverage to most of the surrounding area, meaning the essential +15dB level of coverage

required by the emergency services will remain available inside the majority of buildings across the towns and surrounding districts. However, there will be a reduction in coverage in parts of eastern and southern Finchampstead. These areas are expected to have E1 or +5dB coverage, which is not sufficient to provide reliable in-building radio coverage for emergency-service personnel.

Despite this reduction, the replacement station will still meet the contractual level of service required for the area. The change is therefore considered an operational compromise rather than a complete loss of service.

Site Description:

The chosen position for the telecommunications equipment is on land adjacent to 9a Weller Drive to the south-east. The proposed mast and associated equipment are to be erected on a section of soft landscaping within the industrial area and immediately adjacent to a small woodland. There are residential properties within the wider area, with the closest at a housing estate sited some 90m to the north-east.

APPRAISAL UNDER PART A.1			Yes	No
s.55	1	Does it constitute development?	✓	
s.191	2	Would it be contrary to an enforcement notice?		✓
s.187a Art.3 (4)	3	Would it be contrary to any condition imposed by any planning permission granted or deemed to be granted?		✓
Art.3(5)	4	Are the building operations involved in the construction of the original development lawful?	✓	
Art.4	5	Is there an 'Article 4 Direction' in effect for the site?		✓
Sch.2 Cl 16, Pt. A	6	Does it involve development by or on behalf of an electronic communications code operator for the purpose of the operator's electronic communications network in, on, over or under land controlled by that operator or in accordance with the electronic communications code, consisting of— (a) the installation, alteration or replacement of any electronic communications apparatus, (b) the use of land in an emergency for a period not exceeding 18 months to station and operate moveable electronic communications apparatus required for the replacement of unserviceable electronic communications apparatus, including the provision of moveable structures on the land for the purposes of that use, or (c) development ancillary to radio equipment housing.	✓	
Ground-based apparatus				
A.1(1)(a) and (b)	7	Does the electronic communications apparatus (other than a mast), excluding any antenna, exceed a height of 15 metres above ground level?		✓
A.1(1)(c)	8	Does the mast, excluding any antenna, exceed a height of— (i) 25 metres above ground level on unprotected land;		✓

		or (ii) 20 metres above ground level on article 2(3) land or land which is on a highway?		
Apparatus on masts				
A.1(3)	9	Does the height of the mast (including the apparatus installed, altered or replaced) exceed any relevant height limit specified in paragraph A.1(1)(c)?		✓
Ground or base area				
A.1(7)	10	Does the electronic communications apparatus (other than a mast, antenna, any apparatus which does not project above the level of the surface of the ground or radio equipment housing) exceed an area of 1.5m ² ?		✓
Radio equipment housing				
A.1(9)	11	Does the radio equipment housing involve: (a) development that is not ancillary to the use of any other electronic communications apparatus; (b) the cumulative volume exceeding 90m ² ; or (c) on any article 2(3) land, or on any land which is, or is within, a site of special scientific interest, any single development would exceed 2.5m ³ , unless the development is carried out in an emergency?		✓ ✓ ✓
NOTES UNDER PART A.1				
8) The proposed structure has a maximum height of 27.5 metres. This excludes antennas. Other apparatus would be installed at a height of less than 15m above the ground. It would not be sited on Highway land. 8a) While the applicant has indicated that the proposed mast would be a 'replacement' for the existing mast at Church Farm, the proposal itself would not replace and existing at the application site. Indeed, the existing mast at Church Farm is approx. 1.75km away. Hence, A.1(1)(d) and (e) are not relevant. 9) As 8 above. 10) The cumulative site area of the ground based apparatus would exceed 1.5sqm. However, the proposed cabinets fall within the definition of radio equipment housing and are therefore excluded from this calculation. 11) The radio housing equipment is ancillary in nature and less than 90sqm; nor would any single item of development exceed 2.5 cubic metres. It does not fall within article 2(3) land or a site of scientific interest.				
APPRAISAL UNDER PART A.2				
(1) <i>Class A(a) and A(c) development is permitted subject to the condition that the siting and appearance of any antenna or supporting apparatus, radio equipment housing or development ancillary to radio equipment housing are such that the effect of the development on the external appearance of that building is minimised, so far as practicable</i> The proposed mast would be 27.5 metres in height, with antennas mounted at the top.				

The mast and associated equipment would be enclosed within a fenced compound of approximately 55m². The compound would be located adjacent to the 4.3-metre-high buildings forming part of the Hogwood Industrial Estate to the south-east, with woodland to the surrounding area containing trees ranging from approximately 12 to 18 metres in height.

Although the proposed mast would project above parts of the existing tree canopy by up to approximately 10 metres, the surrounding mature woodland would provide a significant degree of visual screening when viewed from the wider area. Given the secluded nature of the site, its location within the Hogwood Industrial Estate and the mature tree cover along the site boundaries, the mast would not be readily perceptible from public vantage points or the wider landscape.

In any case, the mast and associated cabinets and equipment would primarily be visible from within parts of the industrial estate. In this context, the development would be viewed against an established industrial backdrop and would not appear out of place or incongruous within the existing setting. The relatively contained compound and existing mature vegetation would further limit the visual prominence of the development. Overall, the proposal is unlikely to result in significant adverse effects on the character or visual amenity of the surrounding area.

Consideration was given to alternative sites, including those within the immediate vicinity. These were discounted for technical reasons, a lack of suitable space, or because the relevant landowners were unwilling or unable to accommodate the equipment. Whilst the Case Officer still considers that limited robust justification has been provided for discounting these alternative sites, the proposed site is nevertheless considered to be one of the better options overall. On this basis, prior approval is required and is given.

Trees and Landscape

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy development plan states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and Policy CP3 seeks to maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species.

Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan aims to protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features.

The application site lies within designated TPO-1458-2012, which comprises a wooded area containing trees of mixed species, age and size surrounding a small pond.

The supplementary information states that the proposal would utilise a non-ground-penetrating, gravity-based design solution, meaning that no reinforced concrete foundation would be excavated into the ground. While this is noted, the absence of conventional foundations does not in itself demonstrate that the proposed development would have no impact on the protected trees. The submitted site plan also indicates the removal of an existing sapling to facilitate the proposal.

The proposed fence would be located approximately 4-5 metres from the stems of the nearest protected trees and therefore is likely to be within their Root Protection Areas. At this proximity, arboricultural information is necessary to establish the potential impact of the works, including any disturbance to roots arising from installation, construction activity, access, storage or changes to the ground surface. Accordingly, notwithstanding the stated non-ground-penetrating design, an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and appropriate tree protection information would be required to demonstrate that the proposal can be undertaken without causing harm to the protected trees or their RPAs.

Consequently, the proposal fails to demonstrate that existing nearby trees, including those protected by a TPO (1458-2012) would not be adversely affected by the development. In the absence of sufficient arboricultural information and appropriate tree protection measures, the proposal is therefore considered unacceptable in respect of its impact upon existing trees, contrary to the aims of policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy, policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan and Section 19 of the NPPF 2026.

Ecology

Policy CP7 of the Core Strategy requires the conservation of sites for nature conservation in accordance with national, regional, county, and local biodiversity action plans. Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan requires the incorporation of new biodiversity features, buffers between habitats and species of importance and integration with the wider green infrastructure network.

The site is an area of grassland at the rear end of an area of industrial units. A District Licensing Officer on behalf of NatureSpace has reviewed this application and notes that the proposed site lies directly adjacent to an area of woodland to the north and north west. There is a relatively large pond within this woodland and less than 20 metres to the north of the site - this is directly connected to the proposed site by the woodland other vegetated habitat. The site also lies within a red Zone on the NatureSpace Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Map.

Government guidance on Great Crested Newt protection and licences advises activities that can cause harm include:

- maintaining or restoring ponds, woodland, scrub, or rough grassland,
- removing dense vegetation and disturbing the ground,
- removing materials like dead wood piled on the ground,
- excavating the ground,
- filling in or destroying ponds or other water bodies.

Based on the supporting information, a small tree will be removed and the siting will require local pruning although no further details are provided on the extent of this pruning. No ecological information has been submitted with the application and given the location of the proposed works and vegetation clearance and ground disturbance, further information is needed to demonstrate that the proposals will not result in adverse impacts to GCN and the surrounding trees

In the absence of sufficient Ecological information, it has not been demonstrated that the development has taken into account the possibility of Great Crested Newts, a protected species, being present on the site, or that the proposed works would not result in harm or disturbance to any individuals or their habitat, contrary to Policies CP3 and CP7 of the Core Strategy, Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan, Section 19 of the NPPF 2026 and Paragraphs 98 and 99 of Circular 06/2005.

- (2) *Class A development is permitted subject to the condition that any electronic communications apparatus provided in accordance with that permission is removed from the land or building on which it is situated as soon as reasonably practicable after it is no longer required for electronic communications purposes; and such land or building is restored to its condition before the development took place, or to any other condition as may be agreed in writing between the local planning authority and the developer.*

This would form a condition on the 'prior approval' decision if granted.

- (3) *Class A development...on unprotected land where that development consists of—*

- i) the installation of a mast;*
- ii) the alteration or replacement of a mast which, when completed—*
 - (aa) is taller than the mast which existed prior to such alteration or replacement; and*
 - (bb) exceeds a height of 20 metres above ground level;*
- iii) the construction, installation, alteration or replacement of radio equipment housing, where the volume of any single development exceeds 2.5 cubic metres,*

is permitted subject, except in case of emergency (in which case only paragraph A.3(12) applies), to the conditions set out in paragraph A.3 (prior approval).

The main individual cabinets do not exceed the 2.5 cubic metre limit.

APPRAISAL UNDER PART A.3

- (1) *Before making the application required by sub-paragraph (4), the developer must give notice of the proposed development to—*
- a) any person (other than the developer) who is an owner of the land to which the development relates, or*
 - b) a tenant of an agricultural holding any part of which is comprised in the land to which the application relates*
- (2) *Notice must be given by or on behalf of the developer as follows—*
- a) by serving a signed and dated notice on every person described in sub-paragraph (1) whose name and address is known to the developer, stating—*
 - i) the name of the developer;*
 - ii) the address or location of the proposed development;*
 - iii) a description of the proposed development (including its siting and appearance which includes the height of any mast);*

- iv) *a statement that the developer will apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required as to the siting and appearance of the development;*
- v) *the name and address of the local planning authority to whom the application will be made;*
- vi) *a statement that the application is available for public inspection at the offices of the local planning authority during usual office hours;*
- vii) *a statement that any person who wishes to make representations about the siting and appearance of the proposed development may do so in writing to the local planning authority;*
- viii) *the date by which any such representations should be received by the local planning authority, being a date not less than 14 days from the date of the notice; and*
- ix) *the address to which such representations should be made; or*
- b) *if the developer has been unable to ascertain the names and addresses of every such person after taking reasonable steps, by local advertisement.*

The application submissions state this has been complied with and there is no planning reason to consider this is not the case. Therefore the requirements of part (2) are satisfied.

- (3) *Where the proposed development consists of the installation, alteration or replacement of a mast within 3 kilometres of the perimeter of an aerodrome, the developer must notify the Civil Aviation Authority, the Secretary of State for Defence or the aerodrome operator, as appropriate, before making the application required by sub-paragraph (4).*

The site is not within 3km of an aerodrome.

- (4) *Before beginning the development described in paragraph A.2(3), the developer must apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required as to the siting and appearance of the development.*
- (5) *The application must be accompanied by—*
 - a) *a written description of the proposed development and a plan indicating its proposed location together with any fee required to be paid;*
 - b) *the developer's contact address, and the developer's email address if the developer is content to receive communications electronically;*
 - c) *evidence that the requirements of sub-paragraph (1) have been satisfied where applicable; and*
 - d) *where sub-paragraph (3) applies, evidence that the Civil Aviation Authority, the Secretary of State for Defence or the aerodrome operator, as the case may be, has been notified of the proposal.*

This application forms this requirement and the relevant documentation has been provided.

- (6) *Subject to sub-paragraphs (8)(b)(ii) and (c), upon receipt of the application in accordance with sub-paragraph (5), the local planning authority must—*
- a) *for development which, in their opinion, falls within a category set out in the Table in Schedule 4 to the Procedure Order (consultations before the grant of permission), consult the authority or person mentioned in relation to that category, except where—*
 - i) *the local planning authority are the authority so mentioned; or*
 - ii) *the authority or person so mentioned has advised the local planning authority that they do not wish to be consulted, and must give the consultees at least 14 days within which to comment;*
 - b) *in the case of development which does not accord with the provisions of the development plan in force in the area in which the land to which the application relates is situated, or which would affect a right of way to which Part 3 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (public rights of way)¹²⁴ applies, must give notice of the proposed development, in the appropriate form set out in Schedule 2 to the Procedure Order (notice of applications for planning permission)—*
 - i) *by site display in at least one place on or near the land to which the application relates, for not less than 21 days, and*
 - ii) *by local advertisement;*
 - c) *in the case of development which does not fall within paragraph (b) but which involves development carried out on a site having an area of 1 hectare or more, must give notice of the proposed development, in the appropriate form set out in Schedule 2 to the Procedure Order by local advertisement and either—*
 - i) *by site display in at least one place on or near the land to which the application*
 - ii) *relates, for not less than 21 days, or by serving notice on any adjoining owner or occupier;*
 - d) *in the case of development which does not fall within paragraph (b) or (c), must give notice of the proposed development, in the appropriate form set out in Schedule 2 to the Procedure Order—*
 - i) *by site display in at least one place on or near the land to which the application relates for not less than 21 days, or*
 - ii) *by serving notice on any adjoining owner or occupier.*

Prior approval is required but parts (b)-(d) are not applicable in this instance.

- (7) *When determining the application made under sub-paragraph (4), the local planning authority must take into account any representations made to them as a result of consultations or notices given under paragraph A.3.*

There were no representations made by any occupiers of neighbouring properties, local councillors parish councils.

- (8) *The development must not begin before the occurrence of one of the following—*
- a) *the receipt by the applicant from the local planning authority of a written notice of their determination that prior approval is not required;*
 - b) *where the local planning authority gives the applicant written notice that prior approval is required—*

- i) *the giving of that approval to the applicant, in writing, within a period of 56 days beginning with the date on which the local planning authority received the application in accordance with sub-paragraph (5);*
- ii) *the expiry of a period of 56 days beginning with the date on which the local planning authority received the application in accordance with sub-paragraph (5) without the local planning authority notifying the applicant, in writing, that such approval is given or refused; or*
- c) *the expiry of a period of 56 days beginning with the date on which the local planning authority received the application in accordance with sub-paragraph (5) without the local planning authority notifying the applicant, in writing, of their determination as to whether such prior approval is required.*

Prior approval is not required in this respect and this forms part of the assessment of this application.

- (9) *The development must, except to the extent that the local planning authority otherwise agree in writing, be carried out—*
 - a) *where prior approval has been given as mentioned in sub-paragraph (8)(b)(i), in accordance with the details approved;*
 - b) *in any other case, in accordance with the details submitted with the application.*
- (10) *The agreement in writing referred to in sub-paragraph (9) requires no special form of writing, and, where that agreement is in place, there is no requirement on the developer to submit a new application for prior approval in the case of minor amendments to the details submitted with the application for prior approval.*

This would form a condition on the 'prior approval' decision if granted.

- (11) *The development must begin—*
 - a) *where prior approval has been given as mentioned in sub-paragraph (8)(b)(i), not later than the expiration of 5 years beginning with the date on which the approval was given;*
 - b) *in any other case, not later than the expiration of 5 years beginning with the date on which the local planning authority received the application in accordance with subparagraph (5).*

This would form a condition the 'prior approval' decision if granted.

- (12) *In the case of emergency, development is permitted by Class A subject to the condition that the operator must give written notice of such development as soon as possible after the emergency begins, to—*
 - a) *the local planning authority; and*
 - b) *in the case of development carried out on land which is, or is within, a site of special scientific interest, to Natural England¹²⁵.*

Not applicable.

- (13) When computing the number of days in sub-paragraphs (6)(b)(i), (6)(c)(i) and

(6)(d)(i), any day which is a public holiday must be disregarded.

Noted.

Masts and health

In accordance with Policy C01 (1) (c) of the NPPF 2026, a Health and Safety Statement and Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines was submitted with the application. This confirms that the proposal would comply with acceptable levels of Radio Frequencies (RF's) as outlined by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) Public Exposure Guidelines. In addition to any RF's generated by the proposed mast, the submitted ICNIRP certificate takes account of the cumulative effect of the RF emissions from all base stations in the vicinity of the application site.

Whilst no objections have been received in relation to health concerns, the fears associated with any unproven health risks have been carefully considered in assessing this application but have been balanced against the submitted technical information, in particular the ICNIRP certificate, which has been provided by the applicant. The government's advice is clear on this matter in that local authorities should not seek to determine public health safeguards if the proposal meets the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

Furthermore, the site is not adjacent to what are perceived to be particularly sensitive uses, with no schools, nurseries or playgrounds within close proximity of the proposal. Therefore, it is considered that there are no exceptional circumstances in relation to this application that warrant elevating the status of perceived health risks as a material consideration above that of other approved base stations within suburban areas of Wokingham or, indeed, against the advice provided within the NPPF outlined above.

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:	Prior Approval required but Refused.
Date:	7 September 2026
Earliest date for decision:	24 September 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>MC</i>
Date:	25.09.2026