

3rd January 2025

PLANNING STATEMENT

**Copper Beeches,
Bath Road (A4),
Knowel Green, RG10 9UT**

Introduction

The following Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for change of use from bed & breakfast accommodation to residential apartments with the addition of an additional apartment within the existing footprint of the building.

History

The property was purchased by Mr & Mrs Gorecki in 1994.

The property was then converted from Bed & Breakfast accommodation to Class C3 residential apartments soon after, where it has remained up to present day.

The existing 8 apartments were converted in 9 apartments during this conversion and have been rented out to tenants ever since. Evidence of separate Council Tax payments dating back to 2008. Council tax has been paid prior to these dates, which the Local Authority will have records of as proof.

Existing Building

The property is set in 2 acres of land off the A4 in Knowle Green. The application site is within green belt but not in a conservation area.

The existing property is not a listed building.

Approved Planning History

<u>App No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Decision</u>	<u>Description</u>
230133	23/03/23	Approved	Householder application for the proposed alterations to the separate dwelling at the rear of the main building including a single storey side extension, following demolition of the existing greenhouse (Retrospective).
162196	10/02/2016	Approved	Application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the use of land adjacent to dwelling as a domestic garden.
151702	08/04/2015	Approved	Application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the use of building as dwellinghouse.

PROPOSED

This application is for a 'Change of Use' application for the retrospective conversion from Class C1 to Class C3 use and the proposal of an additional apartment. This apartment was built at the same time as the conversion and has been in residential use for over 20 years.

Design

The design alterations are internal only for the additional apartment. No part of the additional apartment changes the external appearance or the volume of the building..

Planning Policy Context

In accordance with Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, development control decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This section sets out the relevant planning policies of the development plan and supplementary planning policy documents to be considered in the determination of this application.

The site is located close to the village of Hare Hatch and within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC). WBC is currently working towards the production of a new Local Plan Update. In the absence of an adopted Local Plan Update, the Development Plan for the purposes of assessing proposals for this site comprises the Wokingham Core Strategy (January 2010) and the Management Development Delivery (MDD) Plan (February 2014). In addition, relevant supplementary guidance is provided in the form of the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (May 2010), Infrastructure and Delivery Contributions SPD (October 2011) and the Borough Design Guide SPD (June 2012). National planning policy is also relevant in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and to a lesser extent the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

The NPPF was revised at the end of 2024 but continues to promote the presumption in favour of sustainable development at Paragraph 11, which for the purposes of decision-taking means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF states that there are 3 dimensions to sustainable development: an economic role, a social role, and an environmental role.

Paragraph 85 sets out how policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, considering both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. 13 At Paragraph 87 the Framework sets out clear advice to decision makers that decisions should enable:

c) the expansion or modernisation of other industries of local, regional or national importance to support economic growth and resilience.

Paragraph 131 states the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

14 Paragraph 142 emphasises the importance of Green Belts with the fundamental aim of policies being the prevention of urban sprawl by keeping the land open.

Paragraph 143 states that the Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Paragraphs 153-160 guide decision makers when assessing proposals affecting the Green Belt. It confirms that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Footnote 55 however expands on this statement by providing the following guidance:

“Other than in the case of development on previously developed land or grey belt land, where development is not inappropriate.”

Paragraph 155 confirms that (our emphasis in bold):

“The development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where:

- a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;
- b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;
- c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and 15
- d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the ‘Golden Rules’ requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157.”

The 2024 NPPF on page 73 explains that:

“For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, ‘grey belt’ is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. ‘Grey belt’ excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.”

Paragraphs 161 – 186 provide advice on meeting the challenge of climate change and seeks to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding by directing development away from areas at highest risk, but where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

Paragraph 192 states that development should seek to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.

Paragraph 196 seeks to ensure that new development is appropriate for its location by preventing unacceptable risks from pollution.

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010)

The Core Strategy was adopted in January 2012 and sets out the Council’s overarching strategy for development in the Borough up to 2026. In the context of adopted Core Strategy, the site is located within open countryside and in the designated Green Belt. The key policies relevant to the proposed development and the site and set out as follows:

Policy CP1 – ‘Sustainable Development’ states that the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment of existing stock will be supported where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change.

Policy CP3 – ‘General Policies for Development’ states that development should relate positively to the character of the site and surrounding area. Development proposals should provide a functional, accessible and adaptable scheme. Proposals should not

have any detrimental impacts on residential amenity, landscape quality and ecological interests

Policy CP6 - 'Managing Travel Demand' states that permission will be granted for development schemes that provide sustainable forms of transport to allow choice in modes of travel. Development sites should be well connected to the existing pedestrian and cycle network; and should be well related to existing public transport opportunities. Proposals should provide appropriate vehicular parking in accordance with the Council's standards.

Policy CP11 - 'Proposals outside Development Limits' (including countryside and Green Belt land) emphasises the need for development to maintain the quality of the environment and states that permission will not be granted outside of the normal limits unless:

- It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it 17 contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and
- It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and
- It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or
- In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;

Policy CP12 - 'Green Belt' states that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Paragraph 4.59 details that one of the key features of Green Belts is their permanence. Paragraph 4.60 of the Core Strategy states that within the borough's Green Belt any proposal that supported.

Management Delivery Development Local Plan (2014)

The Management Delivery Development was adopted in February 2014. It sets out detailed policies to be used in the determination of planning applications. The key planning policies in the Management Delivery Development Local Plan relevant to the proposed development and application site are set out as follows:

Policy CC01 - 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development' reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the NPPF. Planning applications that accord with the policies in the development plan will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Policy CC04 - 'Sustainable Design and Construction' states that planning permission will only be granted for proposals that provide a high quality sustainably designed and constructed development. The policy seeks BREEAM compliance for all new non residential proposals for more than 100sqm gross non-residential floorspace. The 18 policy also requires all new development, including conversions, alterations and extensions, to incorporate suitable waste management facilities including on-site recycling.

Policy CC07 - 'Parking' states that permission will only be granted where the proposals demonstrates how the proposed parking provision standards are met and that the new scheme retains an appropriate overall level of off-street parking. Policy CC10 - 'Sustainable Drainage' states that all development must ensure that surface water arising from the proposed development is managed sustainably. This must be demonstrated through either a Flood Risk Assessment or a Surface Water Drainage Strategy.

Policy TB01 - 'Development within the Green Belt' states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. There is a presumption against inappropriate development unless very special circumstances can be presented to justify the development in accordance with the NPPF.

Supplementary Planning Policy Borough Design Guide SPD (2012) –

This provides guidance on the design of developments and promotes well designed developments which complement the character of areas to which the applications relate.

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2010) – This provides clarification and interprets existing policy relating to climate change, energy efficiency, energy conservation measures, renewable energy sources, reducing carbon emissions and inclusion of flood minimisation measures in proposals for new development.

Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule (2015) – Wokingham Borough Council adopted a CIL charging schedule in 2015. GTO's operations are a mixture of Class B1, B2 and B8 use which falls under the 'All other types of development' as a development type in the CIL Charging Schedule. The proposed use therefore has a zero CIL liability.

Conclusion

The proposed change of use has no floor space increase or external alterations to the existing facades.

The apartments have been rented out for over 15 years with Council Tax payment evidence provided within this report.

This application has no affect on the Bio-diversity of the land or Green Belt land.