

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Application Number:	252968
Site Address:	Moor Green Barn, Lower Sandhurst Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3TJ
Expiry Date:	12 February 2026
Site Visit Date:	21/01/2026
Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use of land to residential along with change of use of the existing building to an independent dwelling with associated changes to fenestration.	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB05 – Housing Mix TB06 – Development of Private Residential Gardens TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB12 – Employment Skills Plan TB20 – Service Arrangements and Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation

and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM3 - Protection of Habitats and Species DM5 - Protection of the Countryside DM9 - Protecting Health, Safety and Amenity DM10 - Flood Risk DM12 - Sustainable Transport Movements
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS10 – Meeting our housing needs H1 – Housing mix, density and standards H6 – Self-build and custom build H12 – Residential development of existing private gardens FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE3 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH6 – Archaeology HC1 – Promoting healthy communities HC5 – Environmental protection HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
252293	Application for a certificate of existing lawful development for use of the existing building as Office Use Class E (g)(i)	07/11/2025
160159	Householder application for proposed new access.	30/03/2016
120501	Erection of a replacement dwelling with associated access and parking, following demolition and removal of existing dwelling and ancillary buildings.	10/09/2012

CONSULTATION RESPONSES
Internal

WBC Drainage – No objection subject to conditions
WBC Highways – No objection subject to conditions
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection
WBC CIL – Advice provided
WBC Ecology Newts – No response received
WBC Ecology – No objection subject to conditions
WBC Waste Services – No response received
WBC Cleaner and Greener – No response received

External

South East Water - No response received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council

Objection: -

The site represents inappropriate development outside of and unconnected to any development limits within the countryside and is contrary to Policies D2, IRS4 and ADH1 of the FNDP, with no provision for protecting Thames Basin Heath, contrary to FNDP Policy IRS5.

The current plans for the site appear to address only part of the available land and it is unclear what the plans are for the remaining area since this is not addressed in this application.

The site was originally part of the adjacent property Moor Green Farm. The current structure was apparently built as part of the Moor Green Farm development and intended apparently to be the store for the biomass & heating system for the replacement new house. Prior to the sale of the new house the land related to this application was fenced off and became the property now known as Moor Green Barn. As such the one-for-one property replacement for the site has already been utilised.

The applicant has claimed that the current structure became an office and has been in regular use as such for several years. This fact is disputed by locals and immediate neighbours who have claimed that office use was at least minimal, if any, over the period concerned.

This fact therefore challenges the claims made in this application, that traffic volumes would significantly reduce (by 50%), should a residential property be built. We would suggest that the claimed reduction in traffic volumes from office to residential be discounted. It is more likely to increase.

The application site is within an unsustainable location in a

	countryside location with no local facilities accessible within a safe and reasonable walking distance contrary to policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, Policies CC01 and CC02 of the MDD Local Plan, the Borough Design Guide SPD and the National Planning Policy Framework. The nearest village, Finchampstead, no longer has any facilities except for the pub which no longer hosts a shop. Car usage is a must. There is no provision for electric vehicle charging, contrary to FNDP Policy ES1. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	Six Letters of objection have been received which are summarised as follows: • Building has not been in commercial use • Disagree with transport statement reducing traffic • Site only has 12 vehicle movements per year • Proposal not in keeping • Ecology concerns • Thames Basin Heath SPA impacts • Site is within a Green Corridor • Narrow access and lane • Inaccurate and misleading information • Application should not have been validated • Setting a precedent for other similar development • Surface Water Flooding Issues • Drainage Concerns • No landscaping details/information • Unsustainable location • Dwelling has already been replaced on the site

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is located within the designated countryside, along Lower Finchampstead Road. The site contains a split level, part sub-terranean office building of which lawfulness was granted under application: 252293.

Site History:

The building on site subject to the proposed conversion is of timber construction and was formally a pump room for the adjacent dwelling, Moor Green Farm. This was renovated under replacement dwelling planning permission: 120501. Further to completion of Moor Green Farm, a second access was granted under Householder planning permission referenced: 160159.

When the former owner sold Moor Green Farm, its former grounds (acreage to the rear of the dwelling) and the application site were subdivided and were no longer associated with the residential use. The second access as above began to serve the application site in isolation given the grounds were both physically and functionally separated from Moor Green Farm. At point of subdivision a new planning chapter was created which removed the historic residential use and curtilage associated with the original dwelling.

A Planning Enforcement (ref RFS/2017/083954) investigation into the alleged unauthorised development on land adjoining Moor Green Farm was opened on 18th October 2017 and closed on 19th August 2021. The investigation concluded that the building known as Moor Green Barn had been in situ for more than 4 years; was used for storage purposes, and no business use was occurring there. Therefore, there was no breach of planning control, and the enforcement case was closed.

With respect to the application site, once this subdivision occurred, the applicant's owner begun using the old pump room as an office for business purposes, subsequently naming the application site "Moor Green Barn". The certificate of lawfulness referenced: 252293 confirmed this use.

Planning Unit(s):

In the case of *Burdle v Secretary of State for the Environment* [1972] 1 WLR 1207 Bridge J took the opportunity to set out clear criteria for determining the correct planning unit. He identified 3 criteria for determining the correct planning unit, which are set out below:

- (a) Whenever it is possible to recognise a single main purpose of the occupier's use of his land to which secondary activities are incidental or ancillary, the whole unit of occupation is considered.
- (b) Even though the occupier carries on a variety of activities, and it is not possible to say that one is incidental or ancillary to another, the entire unit of occupation should be considered.
- (c) Where there are two or more physically separate and distinct uses, occupied as a single unit, but for substantially different and unrelated purposes, each area used for a different main purpose (together with its incidental and ancillary activities) ought to be considered a separate planning unit.

It is appreciated that whilst the site has a visually enclosed green area encapsulated by a brick wall, the certificate of lawfulness only granted permission for the office itself and no direct curtilage, nor the access which serves both the wider land unit and building.

Notwithstanding this, the site physically functions as one planning unit and no other activities occur on the land above basic maintenance. Accordingly, the site is considered to form one compound planning unit notwithstanding the separate uses within it (E(g) and Agricultural).

Fallback Position:

The applicant's submitted Planning Statement outlines that the office use has a realistic fallback position utilising the prior approval process to convert the existing building to residential under class MA.

To explore this position, firstly it is pertinent to note that no extant prior approval, approval exists for the application site and therefore the criteria outlined within Class MA have not been demonstrated to apply to the site insofar as for the LPA to grant its prior approval for the development. Secondly, it is noted that the Class MA mechanism does not permit a curtilage the size of that applied for within this submission, and the use of the dwelling would be limited to the existing scale of the building.

Accordingly, whilst the Class MA mechanism may apply to the proposal (which has not been confirmed by extant approval), this is not a realistic fallback prospect that could be implemented at time of submission. Accordingly, it is afforded no weight to the proposal.

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

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.

Policy CP9 of the Core Strategy and CC02 of the MDD Local Plan states that proposals will be permitted within development limits where the scale of the application reflects the facilities and services within the settlement. The development plan steers most developments to sustainable settlements with the best services, facilities and infrastructure. The definition of development limits recognises the consistent approach in planning to identify appropriate and sustainable areas for development.

With reference to the application site, it is located outside of settlement limits and within the Borough's designated countryside, however, given its location adjacent to a major development location does benefit from these surrounding services. Irrespective of the site's sustainability credentials (to be discussed later in this report), proposals in the designated countryside must be assessed against Core Strategy Policy CP11 (Proposals outside Development Limits).

Policy CP11 states that development proposals will not normally be permitted in the countryside except where one or more of the specified exceptions apply:

- 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; or
- 4) In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;
- 5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i) Bring about environmental improvements; or
 - ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
- 6) Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;
- 7) Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

As none of the exceptions given in Core Strategy Policy CP11 apply to this proposal, they would not form a basis to support this scheme. However, due regard should be had to specific purpose of this policy, which is to maintain the sense of separation between settlements and to maintain the quality of the environment. In this respect, given no additional operational development is proposed above changes to fenestration the quality of the environment would be preserved. Further, the site is located along a residential road outside of settlement limits and conversion of the existing building would introduce a more compatible use for the area, as well as retain the separate identity of settlements given its location. In this respect, the proposal does not stand contrary to the overarching aims of CP11 despite the in-principle conflict with the spatial strategy.

Local Plan Update:

A Revised Growth Strategy for the Local Plan was consulted on between 21 November 2021 and 24 January 2022. This work followed the increased uncertainty around delivering the Grazeley Garden Town and legislative changes affecting emergency planning requirements at AWE Burghfield.

When considering the weight to be afforded to Wokingham Borough Council's emerging Local Plan Update (LPU), Paragraph 49 of the NPPF (2024) requires regard to be had to:

- the stage of preparation;
- the extent of unresolved objections; and
- the degree of consistency with the NPPF.

The Regulation 19 version of the LPU was published for consultation in late 2024. The Regulation 22 submission occurred in February 2025. Further to independent examination, hearings commenced in November 2025. Stage 1 occurring in early 2026, and Stage 2 hearings commenced in March 2025. Given the moderately advanced stage of preparation of the eLP its policies within are afforded limited/moderate weight.

The site at current lies outside settlement limits and is not proposed to be captured by the extension of these limits within the eLP, thus development as proposed is not supported by SS2 of the eLP. However, unresolved objections remain on substantive grounds and only limited weight can be applied the emerging spatial strategy for the location of new development at this stage.

Joint Minerals and Waste Plan

A small portion of the site to the south is within the defined MSA for Sharp Sand and Gravel (river deposits). Policy M2 of the JMWP aims to seek to protect mineral resources against unnecessary sterilization by non-minerals development. The proportion of the site forming an MSA covers a minimal area and a 3 hectare threshold is reflected in the supporting text under Policy M2, which states "*A minimum plot size of 3 hectares will apply in the safeguarding process to avoid repeated consideration of prior extraction where this can be assumed to be uneconomic, due to the small size of the parcels of land involved.*" In this respect, no prior extraction is required, nor could be viably pursued, in particular as no operational development is proposed to disturb the ground.

Housing Delivery and Supply:

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF (2024) establishes the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Where there is no five-year housing land supply, or where the most important policies for determining the application are out-of-date, the 'tilted balance' should be engaged.

The Council's most recent published full assessment of the housing land supply position is the 'WBC Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement at 31st March 2025' which concluded a demonstrable deliverable housing land supply of 2.5 years. The

tilted balance is therefore engaged which in turn reduces the weight of spatial policies within the Development Plan which are concerned with the location of new housing.

Whilst the proposal would constitute a limited addition to housing land supply of one single dwelling, it contributes nonetheless and the tilted balance remains engaged.

Conclusion:

Whilst the proposal is located outside of settlement limits and is not offered in-principle policy support from the Development Plan, the proposal would maintain the quality of the environment and not trigger any settlement coalescence. The proposal would introduce a more compatible use to the area, which is predominantly residential in character, reduce trip generation (when contrasted against its existing office use) and be solely contained within the confines of the existing building, resulting in no physical or spatial encroachment into the countryside. Accordingly, adopting a balanced approach including the reduced weight to the Development Plan's spatial policies, the principle of development is considered to be acceptable.

Character of the Area:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high-quality design. R1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area.

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF requires that planning applications enhance the natural and local environment by 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.'

R1 and RD1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area and R11 requires a coherent street character, including in terms of scale, rhythm, proportion and height.

R9 and NR5 of the Borough Design Guide SPD note that height, bulk and massing should respond to the local context and the prevailing heights in the area.

The character of the area surrounding the application site comprises predominantly large residential dwellings and wetland open space. Lower Sandhurst Road itself which the site is accessed from is a single-track road connecting back road which links Crowthorne, Sandhurst and Finchampstead.

The site and existing office use is currently at odds with the prevailing character of the area, given the building's single storey scale, lawful use as an office and modest timber appearance (no examples of commercial use along the road), however, the plot depth (running to an existing brick wall) is broadly consistent with that of the residential form and the existing building does not disrupt any solid building line given the variety along

Lower Sandhurst Road. Conversion to a residential dwelling with a modest curtilage would not change this relationship but rather promote a more consistent character that exists at current within the area with respect to occupation.

Whilst it is noted that the proposal would not result in form that is more locally appropriate with respect to its limited scale and nature as a split-level bungalow, it is pertinent to consider the site's existing baseline which is nearly visually identical to the proposal. Thus, re-use of the built fabric is not considered to result in any greater visual harm than the existing building.

By virtue of the existing building's layout, it is suitable for conversion without the need for additional extensions/ reconstruction which are not permitted by this decision. The submitted floorplans outline that two bedrooms can be facilitated meeting the Nationally Described Minimum Space standards which would provide a satisfactory standard of amenity for future occupiers as well as positive access to natural light.

The proposal would retain the existing built fabric of the office, with the majority of the amendments to make it permanently habitable carried out internally. The only amendments to the building externally would be the addition of 6 new windows to permit additional light to both floors. The plans nor planning statement outlines which materials these are to be constructed with, so a condition has been appended to the recommendation.

The proposed conversion of the existing office building to a residential dwelling would not substantially change the appearance of the site, nor would it be appreciable from the street scene given the presence of large boundary fencing and gates of circa 2 metres. In this respect, the introduction of a more compatible use in a predominantly residential area is acceptable and accords with CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy and the Borough Design Guide.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The proposal by virtue of its relatively isolated position on the plot, notably separated from residential dwellings (c46 metres front to flank) would not have any overbearing, overshadowing or overlooking impacts. Whilst the new windows and use are proposed obliquely facing Moor Green Barn in part, this distance combined with boundary treatment and changes in levels would mitigate any perceived impact of overlooking.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Access and Traffic Generation

The existing access and driveway are to be retained, which remain suitable for the proposed dwelling. This would be captured under the change of use element of the proposal and permit residential access, which would sport a lower trip generation than the lawful office use as per the MDD Local Plan.

The applicant has demonstrated the manoeuvring of a fire tender vehicle entering and leaving the site access in forward gear to within 40m reach to the furthest point of the dwelling. No objections are raised in this respect.

Parking

According to the WBC Car Parking Standards, the development of such scale in Village location will require two driveway parking for each dwelling within the red line boundary. Each parking space should have minimum dimensions of 5.0m x 2.5m.

The proposed driveway has ample spaces to meet the parking provision required, which is acceptable.

EV Charging Points

Each new dwelling will be expected to provide a minimum of one EV Charging Point under the latest Building Regulations (Approved Document S).

Cycle Provisions

According to the WBC Parking Standards, two cycle parking allocation will be required per dwelling for 4-5 habitable rooms.

The applicant has indicated direct access to the rear garden, cycle store or garage of suitable sizes for cycle storage on the plan. Thus, no objections are raised on this basis.

Refuse Collection Strategy

According to Manual for Streets, the maximum carrying distances for households (30m) and refuse collection operators (25m) from the collection point.

The applicant has provided a plan showing refuse access that is acceptable and no objections are raised on this basis.

With the above in mind, no objections have been raised on highways safety grounds.

Locational sustainability:

CP6 of the Core Strategy requires development to provide for sustainable forms of transport to allow choice, in locations 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.

CP1 of the Core Strategy requires development demonstrate how they support opportunities for reducing the need to travel, particularly by private car in line with CP6.

In terms of pedestrian movement, Manual for Streets (MfS) identifies that walkable neighbourhoods are generally characterised as having a range of facilities within a 10-minute (about 800 metres) walk which residents may comfortably access on foot.

Turning to national policy paragraph 110 of the NPPF provides greater flexibility in considering that “...opportunities to maximise sustainable travel solutions will vary

between urban and rural areas...". Notwithstanding, this does not override the need to prioritise sustainable transport solutions within a reasonable proximity to development.

The site is relatively unsustainable in its location which conflicts with CP1 and CP6 as a starting point and fails to follow the guidance within MfS. Whilst it is close to areas of outdoor amenity space (i.e. Horseshoe lake and Moor Green Lakes) it is circa 2.6 km away from the nearest primary school and local facilities (Sandhurst high street).

Whilst the application site is marginally closer to Finchampstead Village at circa 1.5 km, this local centre has limited commercial activity and thus cannot be relied upon for day-to-day services. Furthermore, the closest bus stop is circa 1.2 km away from the site and accessed via an unlit, single track road. This stop serves the 145 service which provides 1 bus every 2 hours, thus a poor service when assessed against CP6. This would result in future occupiers relying heavily on the private motor vehicle contrary to the Development Plan.

Notwithstanding the above, the proposal would result in a net reduction in trips when contrasted against the existing office use which in turn minimises the need for employees to travel to the site for work.

The TRICS database suggests a generation rate of between 10 and 14 traffic movements per 100m² per day for office buildings. For the current building (81.9m²) this equates to a daily generation of between 8 and 11 traffic movements. The applicant has justified that given occupation of the existing office building 12 daily traffic movements can be applied to the site, which is not disputed by WBC Highways. Typically, a 2 bedroomed house will generate between 4 and 6 traffic movements per day so the proposed conversion could result in a reduction of between 6 and 8 traffic movements (circa 60%) per day. As such, the conversion whilst no less car reliant than the existing use, would result in a reduction of use of the existing trips to and from the site per day.

Whilst the site is considered unsustainable in terms of its reliance on the private motor vehicle, the weight afforded to this conflict is limited given it is only intended for two occupants and comprises a single dwelling, particularly considering the net reduction in trips (made as existing using the private motor vehicle to the site). This is returned to within the planning balance.

Amenity Space:

The proposal includes the change of use of part of the existing agricultural land surrounding the existing office building to create a residential garden. This would be 18x37 metres which is sufficient to undertake outdoor activities in accordance with the Borough Design Guide and thus is not disproportionate or unacceptable for future use.

Flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of flood risk from historic flooding.

Policy CC10 of the MDD Local Plan requires sustainable drainage methods and the minimisation of surface water flow.

The application site is in Flood Zone 1 and low risk from surface water flooding according to the EA mapping. As the built footprint is not proposed to change, there is no increase in impermeable area. This said, no Drainage details have not been provided, and the existing drainage details has not been mentioned within the submission, thus a drainage plan and strategy are required (including foul connections) prior to first occupation of the dwelling.

Landscape and Trees:

TB21 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of landscape character, namely that proposals retain or enhance these features.

The built form is not proposed to change on site, and whilst the proposed use will inevitably lead to a small degree of residential paraphernalia, this would not be visible from the wider landscape or public vantage points given the notable screening, boundary treatment and the set back of the existing building/ curtilage. No objections have been received from WBC Trees and Landscape with respect to impact on landscape character.

Turning to arboricultural matters, there are no protected trees on the site, although the site has a setting that is screened with tree planting to the western and eastern boundary. Notwithstanding, there would be no harm to existing landscape features. WBC Trees and Landscape raise no objection with respect adverse impact on any vegetation and accordingly the proposals comply with CC03 of the MDD Local Plan.

Ecology:

Biodiversity Net Gain:

Biodiversity Net Gain is mandatory for major and minor planning applications unless the development meets the exception criteria set out in paragraph 17 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024. and The Environment Act 2021 (Commencement No. 8 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024. In the event planning permission is granted, and the exceptions do not apply, paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 grants permission subject to the condition “(the biodiversity gain condition”) and that development may not begin unless:

- a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and
- b) the planning authority has approved the plan.

The proposal would not create any additional built form and would re-use the existing areas of previously developed land on site. Accordingly, it meets the de-minimis exemption of The Environment Act and thus statutory net gain does not apply. In an absence of a response from WBC Ecology, this approach is not disputed.

Protected Species:

All bat species are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended. Under this legislation it is an offence to deliberately or recklessly to destroy or damage their roosts, or to disturb, kill or injure them without first having obtained the relevant licence for derogation from the regulations from Natural England in England.

The Ecology Officer is satisfied that the bat survey methodology and effort are adequate for the Ecologist to conclude that the building has low bat roost suitability and that bats are currently likely to be absent. Furthermore, the ecology officer supports the mitigation and enhancement recommendations. However, the Ecologist states that nest boxes should be installed “within the extended ownership” but fails to consider that the property is proposed for private sale and no additional blue-line land is shown on the location plan. In addition, the Ecologist has also failed to consider suitability of the site for protected common reptiles and invertebrates including Stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*, particularly the wood store.

If the application is approved planning conditions securing implementation in accordance with the Bat Roost Assessment Executive Summary and Section 4 and submission and approval of and on-site scheme of ecological enhancements, and external lighting scheme and removal of permitted development rights are imposed to ensure wildlife and biodiversity are maintained in line with the NPPF and local plan policy CP3, CP7 and TB23. Subject to these conditions, no objections are raised in this regard.

Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area

The application site is located within the 5km zone of the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area. The Thames Basin Heath is a qualifying European site. Policy CP8 of the Core Strategy focuses on the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area and outlines when mitigation is required. In the 5km zone, all residential proposals that include a net increase of 1 or more dwellings are required to provide mitigation for the TBH SPA.

This site is approximately 2.5 km from the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, which is a protected European wildlife site. Due to this type of application, a planning obligation cannot be applied, thus the proposal does not include any measures to avoid or reduce harm to this protected area, it is therefore classed as habitats development.

Without proper mitigation, the council cannot be confident that the development would avoid damaging the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. This is required under Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations and Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Mitigation proposed is for residential development (located within the 5km and 7km buffer zones) to contribute towards Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace which aims to direct residents away from the SPA and rather into the SANG, thereby reducing footfall and pressure on the SPA.

SANGs are new or existing open spaces designed to attract visitors away from the SPA by providing an enjoyable natural environment for recreation. The expectation is that by providing these alternative areas for outdoor recreation, there will not be an increase in recreation pressure on the SPA as new households can use the SANG instead of the protected heathland. SANGs are high quality open space that will remain in perpetuity.

A contribution towards SANG is required per dwelling and this is dependant on the number of bedrooms in each dwelling. Each dwelling will also have to pay a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) contribution. SAMM is a project delivered by Natural England to implement messages, wardening and education across the TBH SPA and promote the use of SANGs. SANG and SAMM contributions are secured via a S106 legal obligation.

Based on the current SANG and SAMM rates, the contribution required for a scheme of 1 x 2 bedroom dwelling would be circa £ 2,884.59.

As a result, and subject to a legal agreement to secure appropriate mitigation, the proposal would accord with Policy NRM6 of the Southeast Plan and Policies CP8 and CP4 of the Core Strategy. The applicant is agreeable to this contribution and will be secured via a S106 legal agreement.

Planning Balance:

The proposal would create one additional dwelling which contributes to the Borough's housing land supply currently at 2.5 years. This weights moderately in favour of the scheme given the limited quantum of development.

The proposal would make efficient use of partially previously developed land through an integral conversion which prevents encroachment of building form into the countryside. The development can be carried out without detriment to the character of the area and accordingly reduce net trip generation. These in combination are moderate benefits in favour of the scheme.

The site is located within an unsustainable development location outside of settlement limits and would have a degree of impact on the undeveloped nature of the land west of Moor Green Barn. This is a moderate harm triggered by the development which is afforded moderate weight against the proposal.

The development would contribute to the Borough economically through council tax, however, given the loss of business rates the economic role is afforded neutral weight.

Conclusion:

Overall, having regard to the above considerations and the application of paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework, the identified harms would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal. The development is therefore recommended for approval, subject to appropriate planning conditions.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approval subject to conditions & the signing of a legal agreement
Date:	23 April 2026
Earliest date for decision:	12 January 2026

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

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

Screening Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

In the light of the “Sweetman Judgement” (People Over Wind and Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta, April 2018), the comments below comprise an Appropriate Assessment which includes advice on necessary avoidance and mitigation measures which is consistent with the advice provided to the Planning Inspectorate on such matters.

Summary of Response

WBC, in consultation with Natural England, has formed the view that any net increase in residential development between 400m and 5km straight-line distance from the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA) is likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of the SPA, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects. An Appropriate Assessment has been carried out which includes regard to mitigation requirements.

This site is located approximately **2.5 km** (measured from the access road to the application site) from the boundary of the SPA and therefore is likely to result in an adverse effect on the SPA, unless it is carried out together with appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures.

On commencement of the proposed development, a contribution (calculated on a per-bedroom basis) is to be paid to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) towards the cost of measures to avoid and mitigate against the effect upon the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, as set out in WBC’s Infrastructure Delivery Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The strategy is for relevant developments to make financial contributions towards the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) in perpetuity as an alternative recreational location to the SPA and financial contributions towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures.

In this instance, the proposed development would result in a net increase of **1 dwelling** within 5km of the SPA which results in a total SANG contribution of £2,049.59

The proposed development is required to make a contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) which is also calculated on a per bedroom basis. Taking account of the per bedroom contributions this results in a total SAMM contribution **of £810**

The total SPA related financial contribution for this proposal cannot be calculated at this stage. The applicant **must agree** to enter into a S106/s111 agreement to secure this contribution prior to occupation of each dwelling. Subject to the completion of the S106 agreement, the proposal would not lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA and would comply with SEP Saved Policy NRM6, policy CP8 of the Core Strategy, and the NPPF.

1. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) as amended

In accordance with The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) as amended, Regulation 63, a competent authority (in this case Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)), before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which—

- a. is likely to have a significant effect on a European site...(either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and
- b. is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site.

must make an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives.

A person applying for any such consent, permission or other authorisation must provide such information as WBC may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment or to enable it to determine whether an appropriate assessment is required.

WBC must for the purposes of the assessment consult Natural England (NE) and have regard to any representations made by that body. It must also, if it considers it appropriate, take the opinion of the general public, and if it does so, it must take such steps for that purpose as it considers appropriate. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment, and subject to Regulation 64 (Considerations of overriding public interest), WBC may agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site.

In considering whether a plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of the site, WBC must have regard to the manner in which it is proposed to be carried out or to any conditions or restrictions subject to which it proposes that the consent, permission or other authorisation should be given.

2. Stage 1 Screening for Likely Significant Effects

WBC accepts that this proposal is a 'plan or project' which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site. The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) is a European designated site which affects the borough, and WBC must ensure that development does not result in an adverse impact on the SPA. The potential adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA include recreational activities from inside the SPA and air pollution from inside and outside the SPA.

At this stage WBC cannot rule out 'likely significance effects' on the SPA (alone or in combination with other plans or projects) because the proposal could undermine the Conservation Objectives of these sites. This is because the proposal lies within **5 km** of the SPA and:

- represents a net increase in dwellings within 400m - 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) which will lead to an increase in local population and a potential increase in recreational activity on the SPA

As the 'likely significance effects' cannot be ruled out at this stage an Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken.

3. Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment

Based on the information proposed by the applicant, WBC must decide whether or not an adverse effect on site integrity (alone or in combination with other plans or projects) can be ruled out. Mitigation may be able to be provided so that the proposal is altered to avoid or reduce impacts.

The following policies and guidance set out WBC's approach to relevant avoidance and mitigation measures which have been agreed with Natural England. For the majority of housing developments this will comprise the provision of (or contribution towards) Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and a contribution towards the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project. The financial contributions towards SANG would be either through an obligation in a s106 agreement that requires WBC to allocate an appropriate amount of the development CIL receipt towards the provision of SANG, or through an obligation in an agreement under s111 of the Local Government Act, that requires the developer to make an appropriate financial contribution towards the provision of SANG (to be used in the event that the developer successfully seeks CIL relief). Developers will be required to secure an appropriate financial contribution to the SAMM project through an obligation in a s106 agreement.

For SDL development (and occasionally some other larger non SDL developments) within 5km of the SPA, SANG is required at a minimum of 8 ha per 1,000 new residents, constructed and delivered to Natural England's quality and quantity standards and a contribution towards pan SPA access management and monitoring (as advised by the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board). For SDL development (and occasionally some other larger non SDL developments) between 5 and 7km, the proposals will need to be individually assessed but it is likely that SANG will be required on site in line with Natural England's quality and quantity standards, although the exact requirement will be agreed having regard to evidence supplied.

a. Policies and Guidance

For this proposal the following guidance and policies apply:

- South East Plan (May 2009) Policy NRM6 (Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area)
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100528160926/http://www.gos.gov.uk/gose/planning/regionalPlanning/815640/>
- Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010) Policy CP8 (Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area) sets out the approach WBC will take in order to protect the TBH SPA <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Final%20adopted%20Core%20Strategy%20inc.%20cover.pdf>
- Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010) Policy CP7 (Biodiversity) sets out the approach WBC will take in order to protect national and international nature conservation sites <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Final%20adopted%20Core%20Strategy%20inc.%20cover.pdf>
- Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) Policy TB23 (Biodiversity and Development)
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Adopted%20MDD.pdf>
- Infrastructure Delivery and Contributions SPD (2011)
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Adopted%20Infrastructure%20De~nd%20Contributions%20SPD.pdf>

The project as proposed would not adversely impact on the integrity of the SPA if avoidance and mitigation measures are provided as stipulated by these policies and guidance.

b. SPA Avoidance and Mitigation Measures

i) The provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and its ongoing maintenance in perpetuity.

In accordance with the development plan, the proposed development will be required to provide alternative land to attract new residents away from the SPA. The term given to this alternative land is Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

As this development is not part of an SDL, the developer may make a payment contribution towards strategic SANGs in line with schedule below (most likely this will be at Rooks Nest Wood SANG although it is subject to SANGs capacity in the right location within Wokingham borough). An occupation restriction will be included in the Section 106 Agreement in order to ensure that the contribution has been made prior to occupation of the dwellings. This gives the certainty required to satisfy the Habitats Regulations in accordance with South East Plan Policy NRM6 (iii) and Core Strategy Policy CP8

The development will result in a net increase of **1 dwelling**. Depending on the dwelling mix, the level of SANG payments are set out as follows:

No. of bedrooms	SANG Contribution 5km	Aggregate SANG Contribution
1 bedroom	£1,567.98	£0
2 bedrooms	£2,049.59	£2,049.59
3 bedrooms	£2,690.93	£0
4 bedrooms	£3,546.86	£0

5 bedrooms	£4,240.62	£0
Total SANG Contribution		£2,049.59

ii. Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Contribution

The proposed development will also be required to make a contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM). This project funds strategic visitor access management measures on the SPA to mitigate the effects of new development on it.

From 1st April 2023 SAMM contributions have been updated across the 11 Local Authorities affected by the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Following engagement with Natural England, the Joint Strategic Partnership Board agreed this change is necessary to ensure sufficient income is raised to cover the costs of the SAMM project in perpetuity. Without this change the SAMM project would be at risk of being unable to deliver the objectives of the SAMM project, and therefore secure positive outcomes for the SPA

The level of contributions are calculated on a per bedroom basis. The application for this development is for **1 new dwelling**. Depending on the dwelling mix, the level of SAMM payments are calculated as follows:

No. of bedrooms	SAMM Contribution 5km	Aggregate SAMM Contribution
1 bedroom	£563.00	£0
2 bedrooms	£810.00	£810.00
3 bedrooms	£1,042.00	£0
4 bedrooms	£1,225.00	£0
5+ bedrooms	£1,400.00	£0
Total SAMM Contribution		£810.00

Prior to the permission being granted the applicant must enter into a Section 106 Agreement based upon the above measures.

4. Conclusion

An Appropriate Assessment has been carried out for this development in accordance with the Habitats Regulations 2017. Without any appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures the Appropriate Assessment concludes that the development is likely to have a significant effect upon the integrity of the SPA with the result that WBC would be required to refuse a planning application.

Provided that the applicant is prepared to make a financial contribution (see above) towards the costs of SPA avoidance and mitigation measures, the application will be in accordance with the SPA mitigation requirements as set out in the relevant policies above.

WBC is convinced, following consultation with Natural England, that the above measures will prevent an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA. Pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and Regulation 63(5) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) as amended, and permission may be granted.

If the applicant does not agree with the above mitigation and does not enter into a Section 106 Agreement to secure the measures, then the application must be refused using the following reason for refusal.

A S106 legal agreement has been secure and as such appropriate mitigation is now in place. The Appropriate Assessment concludes that the development is likely to have a significant effect upon the integrity of the SPA with the legal agreement securing appropriate mitigation. Given this WBC is now able to approve the planning application.

Date:

Signed:

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Minerals Safeguarding Area

Designated Countryside

Bat Roost Suitability Area

Flood Zone 1

Great Crested Newt Impact Zone

Thames Basin Heath 5km Zone