

1323_TH/IM
8 May 2026



Planning Department
Wokingham Borough Council
Civic Offices
Shute End,
Wokingham
RG40 1BN

By Email Only

Dear Sir/Madam

THE COURTYARD, THE TOWN HALL, MARKET PLACE WOKINGHAM, RG40 1AS

On behalf of The Honesty Group, we are pleased to submit a full planning and listed building consent application for the installation of 2 x 14kW ceiling-cassette type heat-pump air conditioning systems on the roof and associated works to provide adequate heating and cooling to the customer area at The Courtyard, The Town Hall, Wokingham, RG40 1AS (herein referred to as the 'application site').

This application has been submitted online via the Planning Portal system and has been allocated the reference number PP-14844363. Payment of the full planning application fee of £400.00 (including £91.00 planning portal service charge) will be made by the applicant.

The following documents have been submitted alongside this letter in line with Wokingham Borough Council validation requirements:

- Location Plan; ref: 1323-WW-B1-00-A-0010--PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT
- Existing Site Plan ref: 1323-WW-B1-00-A-0001--EXISTING SITE LAYOUT
- Proposed Site Plan ref: 1323-WW-B1-00-A-0000--SITE LOCATION PLAN
- Proposed Elevations Ref: 1323-WW-B1-00-A-0202--PROPOSED ELEVATIONS 1
- Existing Elevations Ref: 1323-WW-B1-00-A-0200--EXISTING ELEVATIONS 1
- Community Infrastructure Levy

Site and Surroundings

The application site comprises part of The Courtyard within Wokingham Town Hall, located centrally within Wokingham town centre. The Town Hall is a prominent civic building situated on the Market Place and forms an important focal point within the towns historic core.

The courtyard forms part of the Town Hall building which was built in 1860. The courtyard sitting at the south end of the building was originally constructed as an open exercise yard, until a glazed roof was added in the 1970's so that the space could be used as a covered market. The market space evolved into a commercial let in 2005 when 'The Courtyard' restaurant was opened and has remained a dining establishment since.

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The Town Hall is a multi-functional building accommodating a range of uses, including commercial occupiers such as Piccolo Arco and Timpson. It also provides office space for the local authority and delivers wider community benefits, including the use of the hall for civic and community functions.

By nature of how the space has evolved it has limited thermal properties, and we understand that the previous occupiers have struggled to maintain comfort for their customers.

Wokingham Town Hall is a Grade II listed building, and therefore a designated heritage asset of national importance whose conservation attracts statutory protection. In accordance with section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, considerable importance and weight must be given to the preservation of its special architectural and historic interest.

The proposal is located on the roof of The Courtyard, an enclosed area to the rear of the principal frontage, defined by built form on all sides and exhibiting a limited visual relationship with the wider streetscape. This part of the building has historically accommodated ancillary and commercial uses and continues to function as an active component of the Town Hall complex.

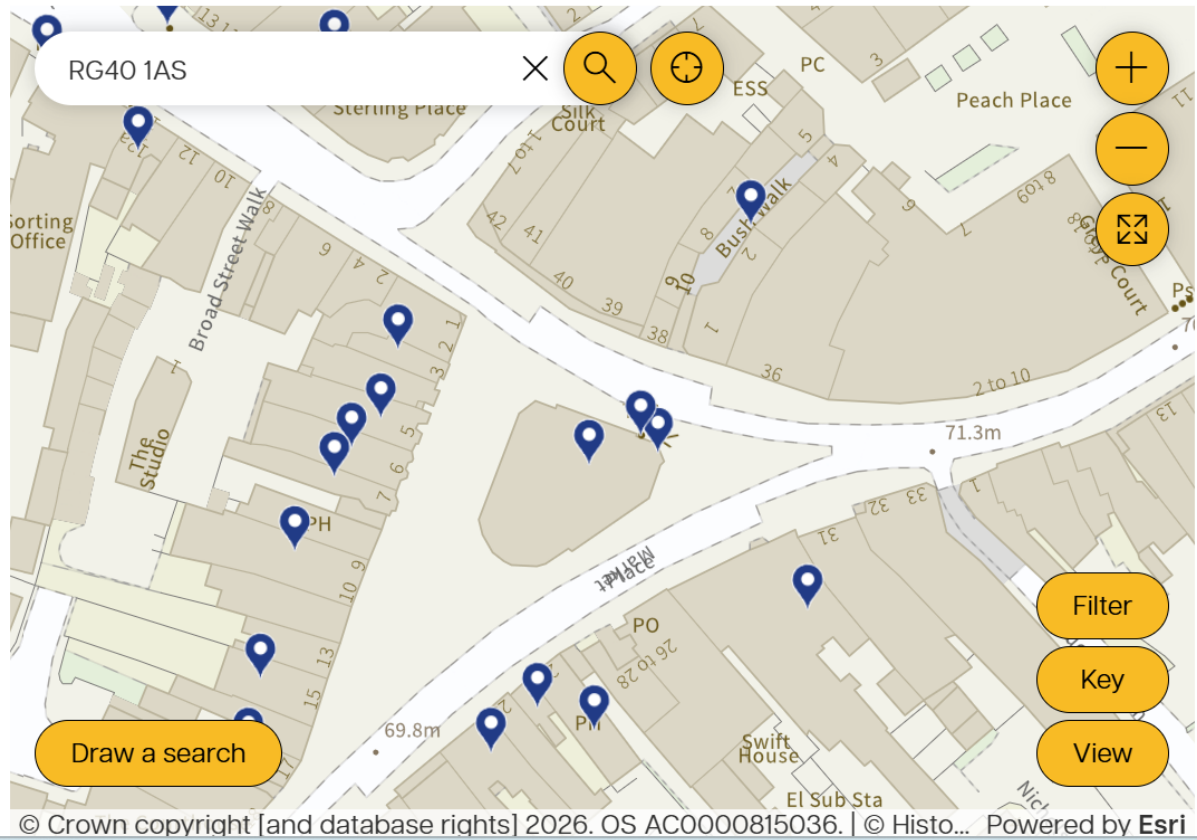
In this context, the installation of modern heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment presents inherent constraints, arising from both the building's heritage status and the limited availability of space for external plant. These factors necessitate a carefully considered and sensitive approach to the siting and design of new equipment.

That significance is not limited to the principal elevations or architectural detailing of the main building, but extends to its setting, spatial form, and historic functional relationships. The courtyard forms an integral part of this context. It contributes to the understanding of the building's historic use and operation, reinforces its spatial hierarchy and enclosure, and plays a role in how the asset is experienced within the town centre.

While it may be of lesser architectural elaboration than the primary façades, the courtyard is nonetheless a component of the asset's overall significance and cannot be treated as incidental. Any assessment which seeks to diminish its contribution risks failing to properly understand the heritage asset as a whole.

Accordingly, the courtyard must be recognised as contributing to the significance of the listed building, and this contribution must be taken into account in any assessment of potential harm or change affecting the application site.

The surrounding area is characterised by a diverse mix of town centre uses, including retail, food and beverage and commercial functions. The site therefore sits within an established mixed-use environment with active frontages and a high level of pedestrian activity. The immediate context is urban in nature, with buildings generally arranged in close proximity and a strong sense of enclosure typical of historic town centres.



The site benefits from a highly sustainable location, with excellent accessibility to local services, facilities and public transport. Wokingham railway station is located within walking distance, and the surrounding street network provides strong pedestrian connectivity throughout the town centre.

In amenity terms, the application site is situated within a busy heart of the town centre environment where a degree of activity, noise and movement is characteristic of the area. The enclosed nature of the courtyard also serves to contain activity within the site, limiting wider impacts on the surrounding area.

Overall, the application site represents a previously developed and well-contained attractive building within a highly sustainable town centre location. Its position within an established mixed-use environment presents opportunities for continued active use, whilst its enclosed form allows the installation of the HVAC to be accommodated without giving rise to wider visual or amenity impacts.

Planning History

The relevant planning history for the site is as follows:

Reference	Proposal	Decision
LB/2000/2531	Proposed installation of a new lift, accessible toilets, and entrance lobby doors.	Approved – 29 January 2001
LB/2006/8542	Listed building consent for internal alterations to the building.	Approved – 15 January 2007
25/05094/ADRC	Application for approval of details pursuant to Conditions 03 (Samples of materials) and 12 (Renewable technology) of planning permission 22/07513/VCDN.	Approved – 21 March 2025
25/05283/ADRC	Application for approval of details pursuant to Condition 13 (Biodiversity enhancement) of planning permission 22/07513/VCDN.	Approved – 7 April 2025

Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises the installation of two air source heat pumps at roof level of The Courtyard at Wokingham Town Hall. The works are required to provide effective heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) to parts of the building, including private dining areas which currently lack adequate environmental control. This is essential to the proper functioning of the existing restaurant use, addressing overheating and ensuring suitable conditions for customers and staff, thereby supporting the continued viable use of the building.

Furthermore, the provision of an appropriate internal environment is directly linked to the operational performance of the business and its ability to retain employment on site. Ensuring suitable thermal comfort and air quality is necessary not only for customer experience but also for staff welfare and retention, thereby underpinning the ongoing economic contribution of the premises within the town centre.

Existing and Proposed system

The existing system comprises a high-level supply and extract arrangement which provides basic ventilation but does not constitute a comprehensive environmental control system. While a heater battery is installed to temper incoming air, its capacity is limited and it does not provide effective space heating. The current heating provision, including low pressure hot water radiators and an over-door convector heater, is estimated to deliver approximately 11kW of output, which falls significantly short of the anticipated requirement of around 27kW for the space.

The system also lacks any form of active cooling, relying instead on extract fans which are insufficient to regulate internal temperatures, particularly in a space subject to solar gain and intensive use. In addition, airflow inefficiencies further reduce the overall effectiveness of the system. As a result, the existing arrangement is unable to maintain stable and comfortable internal conditions throughout the year. This has had a demonstrable impact on the operation of the premises, with previous tenants identifying overheating and inadequate ventilation as contributory factors to business failure. While re-commissioning may improve ventilation performance, it would not address the fundamental limitations of the system.

The proposed works comprise the installation of the HVAC system to provide effective heating and cooling to the customer areas of the building to deliver a combined capacity of over 27kW, the calculated requirements of the building.

The proposed system represents a balanced and efficient solution, addressing the existing deficiencies and enabling the building to operate effectively for its intended use. In this regard, the proposals accord with the adopted Wokingham Borough Local Plan, particularly Core Strategy Policies CP1 (Sustainable Development) and CP3 (General Principles for Development), by promoting an efficient use of resources and ensuring that the building can function appropriately without adverse impacts.

The proposals also support the continued vitality and viability of Wokingham town centre, consistent with Policies CP13 and CP14, by enabling the ongoing operation of an established restaurant use. The provision of modern HVAC infrastructure is essential to maintaining appropriate environmental conditions and supporting the building's continued active use.

At the national level, the proposals align with the National Planning Policy Framework, particularly paragraphs 157 and 163, which support the transition to a low-carbon future and the deployment of renewable and low-carbon energy technologies. The integration of air source heat pump technology represents a proportionate and effective measure to improve the building's environmental performance and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In policy terms, the proposals are also consistent with the emerging Wokingham Borough Local Plan and align with the emerging Wokingham Local Plan Update, particularly Policy CE1 (Design Principles for Efficient Buildings) and Policy CE6 (Reducing Energy Consumption in Existing Buildings). These policies support the integration of energy-efficient building services and the sensitive upgrading of existing buildings to improve environmental performance.

Furthermore, Wokingham Borough Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. The proposed installation directly supports these objectives by reducing reliance on carbon-intensive systems and enabling a more sustainable and resilient operation of the building.

Location

The HVAC system has been carefully sited at roof level of The Courtyard to minimise its visual impact on the wider townscape. This element of the building is well contained within the overall built form, providing a high degree of natural screening and limiting visibility from the public realm. As such, the proposals will preserve the character and appearance of the site, with no material increase in visual presence arising from the replacement of existing plant.

Alternative locations, including ground-level and more prominent elevations, have been considered and discounted due to their greater potential to result in visual harm and spatial intrusion. The selected roof-level location therefore represents the least intrusive and most appropriate solution, balancing operational requirements with design and heritage considerations.

In policy terms, the proposals are consistent with the adopted Wokingham Borough Local Plan, particularly Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development) and Policy TB24 (Designated Heritage Assets). The discreet siting of the equipment ensures that the

development avoids adverse impacts on visual amenity and results in no harm to the significance of the listed building or its setting.

Amenity

In amenity terms, the site is located within a busy town centre environment where background noise and activity are already well established. The proposed units will operate at levels that do not give rise to unacceptable impacts on neighbouring occupiers, with their enclosed and contained location assisting in reducing and limiting any potential noise effects.

As such, the proposals accord with the adopted Wokingham Borough Local Plan, particularly Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development), which requires that development safeguards the amenity of surrounding uses and does not result in unacceptable impacts.

At the national level, the National Planning Policy Framework requires development to achieve a high standard of design, protect amenity, and support sustainable growth. In particular, paragraph 135(f) requires a high standard of amenity for existing and future users, while paragraph 191 seeks to ensure that development does not give rise to unacceptable noise impacts. The proposed development satisfies these requirements through its contained location, limited visibility, and controlled operational characteristics

In addition, the proposals align with the emerging Wokingham Local Plan Update, particularly Policy DH2 (Safeguarding Amenity) and Policy HC8 (Noise Pollution), which seek to ensure that development does not result in unacceptable impacts on surrounding receptors, including through noise.

Overall, the proposed works represent a well-considered and policy-compliant intervention, delivering necessary operational improvements while preserving heritage significance, safeguarding amenity, and enhancing environmental performance. The proposals therefore demonstrate full accordance with the development plan and national policy, with no conflict identified in planning terms.

Heritage Considerations

Wokingham Town Hall is a Grade II listed building, located within the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area. In accordance with sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, considerable importance and weight must be given to the conservation of the building, its setting, and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The proposed works are limited in scale and comprise the installation of two modern, energy-efficient plant units on the roof. The siting of these units has been subject to careful consideration, with the selected location representing the least visually and physically intrusive option. By positioning the units at roof level within The Courtyard, the proposals deliberately avoids the principal elevations, key architectural features, and important public views of the building and the street scene.

This approach also minimises intervention to the historic fabric, avoiding disturbance to the building's brickwork and removing the need for ground-level service areas or invasive fixing methods, such as extensive drilling, which could otherwise result in harm.

Due to its discreet and contained position within the built form, the development will not affect the building's architectural expression, roofscape, or wider townscape presence, nor will it alter the way in which it is experienced within the public realm. The proposals therefore preserve the significance of the listed building and its setting and preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The scheme accords with the Wokingham Borough Local Plan, particularly Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development) and Policy TB24 (Designated Heritage Assets), and is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, particularly Section 16, which requires great weight to be given to the conservation of heritage assets.

In addition, the proposals align with the emerging Wokingham Local Plan Update, particularly Policy DH5 (The Historic Environment) and Policy DH1 (Place Making and Quality Design), which seek to ensure that development conserves heritage significance and is appropriately designed and sited.

Overall, the proposals result in no harm to designated heritage assets and represent a proportionate and sensitively designed intervention, supporting the continued viable use of the building.

Conclusions

The proposed installation of the HVAC system represents a necessary proportionate development to support the ongoing effective operation of The Courtyard. The installation of the modern, energy-efficient plant is essential to the proper functioning of the restaurant use, addressing current issues of substantial thermal gain and ensuring suitable conditions for occupiers and users.

The proposal has been carefully designed and sited, with the selected location representing the least intrusive option. As a result, the development preserves the character and appearance of the building and its surroundings, safeguards neighbouring amenity, and results in little or no harm to the significance of the Grade II listed building or Conservation Area.

The scheme is also fully compliant with Local and National Policy with regards to the Wokingham Local Plan (Adopted in 2010) and the emerging Wokingham Local Plan, whilst also respecting the National Planning Policy Framework. The scheme delivers clear environmental and operational benefits, supporting the buildings ongoing use and energy performance.

Accordingly, the proposal gives no rise to conflict with policy and is considered to be acceptable in planning terms and should be supported.

I trust that the information submitted is sufficient to enable the Council to determine this application. However, please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely,

Tomaz Heap
Town Planner
BSc(Hons) MA,
West Waddy Archadia (WWA)

cc: The Honesty Group (By email only)

Encs.