

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	252779
Site Address:	Dolphin School, Waltham Road, Hurst, Wokingham, RG10 0FR
Expiry Date:	16 January 2026
Site Visit Date:	30 July 2025 (for previous application at the site)
Proposal: Full application for the proposed retention of 4no floodlights, 6no amenity lights and artificial turf playing surface, associated with existing multi-use games area (MUGA) (retrospective)	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP7 – Biodiversity 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 CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB25 – Archaeology
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	M2 – Safeguarding sand and gravel resources
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design

	C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH5 – The historic environment HC4 – Open spaces, sports, recreation and play facilities HC5 – Environmental protection HC7 – Light pollution
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
251430	Full application for the retention of 4no. flood light columns with LED luminaires, and replacement of the existing facility surface, associated with the existing multi-use games area (retrospective).	Withdrawn 21/08/25

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No objection
WBC Enforcement – No comments received
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection
WBC Built Heritage Officer – No objection
WBC Ecology Newts – No comments received
WBC Ecology – No objection subject to condition

External

None consulted

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council: <i>“St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council has no adverse comments to application 252779 and trusts that WBC will incorporate appropriate conditions that the times in the application are adhered to.”</i>
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site relates to Dolphin School, an extended, private school for children aged between 3 and 13. North-east of the main school building is Hinton House, a Grade II* Listed Building.

Proposal:

Retrospective planning permission is sought for the retention of 4no floodlights, 6no amenity lights and artificial turf playing surface, associated with existing multi-use games area (MUGA).

The MUGA was installed pre-2000, as can be seen on ariel images of the site. As such, this application just focuses on the regularisation of the flood lights and re-surfacing that have taken place since and have been installed since 2022, according to the submitted application form.

The floodlights are proposed to be switched on when there is insufficient natural light and are only proposed to operate between 08:00-20:30 on weekdays, and 09:00-17:00 on weekends.

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.

a) Adopted development plan

The adopted development plan comprises of the Core Strategy (2010), Managing Development Delivery Plan (2014) and the Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (2023).

i) Core Strategy

The site is situated within the designated countryside of settlement limits defined in policy CP9 of the Core Strategy. As such, the site is located within the Wokingham Countryside and policy CP11 of the Core Strategy applies, as this governs development outside of settlement limits in the countryside. The policy states:

In order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:

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.

Attention has to turn to whether the proposal meets any of the above criteria, noting that 3-7 are not applicable in this case as no built form is proposed.

In terms of criteria 1, relating to the proposal supporting a diverse and sustainable rural enterprises, the proposal does not directly relate to a rural enterprise or promote recreation in, or enjoyment of, the countryside. Rather, it relates to supporting the functions of a school, albeit the sporting activities associated with the use of the proposed development could be partially viewed as recreation with and enjoyment of the countryside.

Regarding exception 2, it is noted that expansion should not be excessive from the original building. An 'original building' is as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally. This definition is taken from the NPPF. The school was constructed in 1970 and since then has been expanded. As such, there has already been development away from the original built form, as can be seen on historic mapping. However, as the development is within confines of the school grounds, the expansion away from the original built form is not considered to be detrimental to the wider countryside.

Overall, however, the proposal fails to comply with exceptions for development. Attention therefore has to turn to whether the proposal conflicts with the overall aims of CP11. As whilst a development may not meet the specified exceptions outlined in CP11, this does not automatically mean that the development will undermine the intent of the policy.

The overarching aims of policy CP11 are to prevent settlement coalescence and to maintain the quality of the environment. Due to the relatively modest scale of the development and significant distances from nearby settlements, the development would not result in settlement coalescence. In terms of maintaining the quality of the environment, a multi-dimensional assessment is required and interlinks with other material considerations that will be discussed in this report. Within the report's conclusion, it will judge as to whether the scheme maintains the quality of the environment.

ii) Minerals

The site is located within a designated Minerals Safeguarding Area and as such the Joint Minerals and Waste Plan is relevant to this proposal. Policy M2 seeks to protect mineral resources against unnecessary sterilisation by non-minerals development. For this purpose, a 3ha threshold is reflected in the supporting text to Policy M2 – which states at paragraph 6.40: “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.”

The site relates to a plot area of less than 3 ha and so is below this size threshold and therefore it is not considered commercially viable or suitable for prior extraction and removal and is therefore not a barrier for the principle of this development.

b) NPPF

Paragraph 100 of the NPPF focuses on development relating to school premises. It states that:

Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:

a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter early years, schools and post-16 facilities through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications;

This proposal results in the retention of an alteration of school premises, and so the above paragraph is considered to apply. The MUGA and flood lighting will continue to provide sports facilities for pupils. As per para 100, great weight will be given to the principle of this development when assessed against the NPPF.

c) Local Plan update

The Local Plan Update (LPU), the plan which will supersede the adopted Core Strategy and MDD local plans, is at Regulation 22 stage as it has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. As per paragraph 49 of the NPPF:

Local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:

a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);

b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and

c) the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)

As a whole, the LPU is still given limited weight, despite its advance stage of preparation. This is owing to unresolved objections to a great number of the policies contained within it. However, those policies highlighted in yellow in the policy table earlier in this report are those that have received less objection and therefore individually are considered to hold moderate weight in the determination of this application. All the others hold limited weight. The policies that hold moderate weight will feed into/ be considered in their relevant sections in this report, where applicable.

d) Summary on principle of development

The proposal does not comply with any of the exceptions for development in the countryside. However, attention will need to turn as to whether the proposal conflicts or complies with the overarching aims of policy CP11, despite not complying with the exceptions. This will be discussed later in the report and returned to in the conclusion. Notwithstanding this, the NPPF states to give great weight to planning applications relating to school development, which this is, and will be considered in the overall planning balance.

Design/ Character of the Area

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development should be an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design.

Policy CC03 of the MDD seeks to protect and retain existing trees and hedges.

The MUGA with associated light columns are located within the school grounds which has perimeter boundary treatment. As such, their visibility in the general street scene is minimised and screened by existing mature vegetation and trees.

The nature of the development means its design is one of practical appearance which is acceptable with the lighting columns being functional and of a proportionate scale. It is positive that the re-surfacing turf that has been laid is green which will more closely blend in with the vegetation surrounding the site.

Upon consultation with the WBC Trees and Landscaping officer, it is considered that the retention of the floodlights would also not have adverse impact on existing landscape features such as trees. As the lights are not on all the time their temporary usage (e.g, not on all day or night) will not have an adverse impact of the character and appearance of the site.

Built Heritage

Policy TB24 of the MDD states that the Borough Council will conserve and seek the enhancement of designated heritage assets in the Borough and their settings

The MUGA lies some 60 metres north-west of the grade II* listed building of Hinton House, with school buildings situated between, including the newly built Heather Borough Pavilion.

Due to the distance between the development and Hinton House, it is not considered that the development would adversely affect the setting of Hinton House, nor create any meaningful visual harmful impact from the light emitted from the flood lighting when in operation. The WBC Built Heritage officer raised no objection to the application.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states development should not result in detrimental impacts to the amenities of adjoining land users. This is echoed by policy DH2 of the LPU.

The closest residential property to the site is Hinton House, the Grade II* Listed Building located around 60m from the application site.

The built form above ground level only relates to the perimeter fencing around the MUGA and the light columns. Due to their slim composition, distance away from the neighbouring property and the intervening vegetation, these do not result in harm to this neighbour through as a result of the structures themselves.

No other neighbours are considered to be adversely affected due to their substantial distance from the application site.

Light pollution

Policy HC7 of the LPU states that proposals for outdoor lighting should be accompanied by a lighting appraisal. Outdoor lighting should be sensitively designed to protect neighbours and wildlife.

WBC Environmental Protection were consulted on this application and advised that floodlights and amenity lights have been designed to comply with ILP obtrusive light guidance and NGB standards. The Overspill report indicates minimal light spill beyond the MUGA footprint and therefore should not result in a substantial level of harm to surrounding neighbours in terms of light pollution. A planning condition will therefore be attached to secure lighting hours and operation and maintenance in accordance with submitted technical lighting specifications.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Policy CC07 of the MDD and C5 of the LPU states that development should provide for sufficient parking and policy CP6 of the Core Strategy states that development should not lead to highway problems.

As the development is for the regularisation of the floodlights and re-surfacing of the MUGA only, this will not result in a change in highway movements.

Ecology:

In line with national legislation and Wokingham Core Strategy Policy CP7 (Biodiversity), any development with potential impacts on species of principal importance must incorporate appropriate mitigation or compensation measures.

The Bat Roost Habitat Suitability Model identifies the treeline to the south-west of the application site and the southern edge of the MUGA as having potential to support bat roosting and foraging/commuting activity. Bats are a European Protected Species and a national conservation priority.

The proposal has been reviewed by the WBC Ecologist. The Design and Access Statement by Notts Sport Ltd confirms that four floodlights and six amenity lights will be time-controlled, operating between 08:00–20:30 on weekdays and 09:00–17:00. Lighting specifications confirm that lights are directed towards the interior of the MUGA. Overfill lighting plans show lux levels of up to 50 lux within 5m of the MUGA, reducing to approximately 5 lux at 20m. Bat activity typically occurs between April and September, beginning around 15 minutes after sunset (approximately

19:30–20:30 in April). With lighting switched off by 20:30, significant adverse effects on bats are unlikely.

When MUGA lighting is off, overspill lighting levels fall below 5 lux immediately south of the site and are predominantly 1 lux or less within 5–20m to the north, east and south. Although measurements were not taken to the south-west, existing hedgerow screening is expected to provide similar light attenuation. Brown Long-Eared and Pipistrelle bat roosts have been recorded within 580m of the site, and these species may use the south-west treeline as a commuting and foraging corridor. Brown Long-Eared bats are sensitive to light levels above 3 lux, and Pipistrelles above 5 lux. Given predicted lighting levels of predominantly under 1 lux when lights are off, the proposed development is not expected to adversely affect bats, provided lighting controls are adhered to. A planning condition will therefore be attached to secure lighting hours and operation and maintenance in accordance with the submitted technical lighting specifications as appropriate mitigation to prevent adverse impacts to bats.

Planning Balance/ Conclusion:

As discussed within the assessment, the proposal does not comply with any of the exceptions for development in the countryside as outlined in policy CP11. Nevertheless, it needed to be assessed as to whether the proposal conflicts or complies with the overarching aims of CP11; more specifically that which seeks to maintain the quality of the environment. The proposal sees limited built form and would not result in adverse light pollution to the detriment of neighbours and protected species. As such, the proposal is not considered to conflict with the aims of policy CP11 and so in this instance is acceptable in principle. This, combined with the proposal's limited harms and NPPF's direction to give great weight to planning applications relating to school development, results in a positive recommendation to grant planning permission.

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.

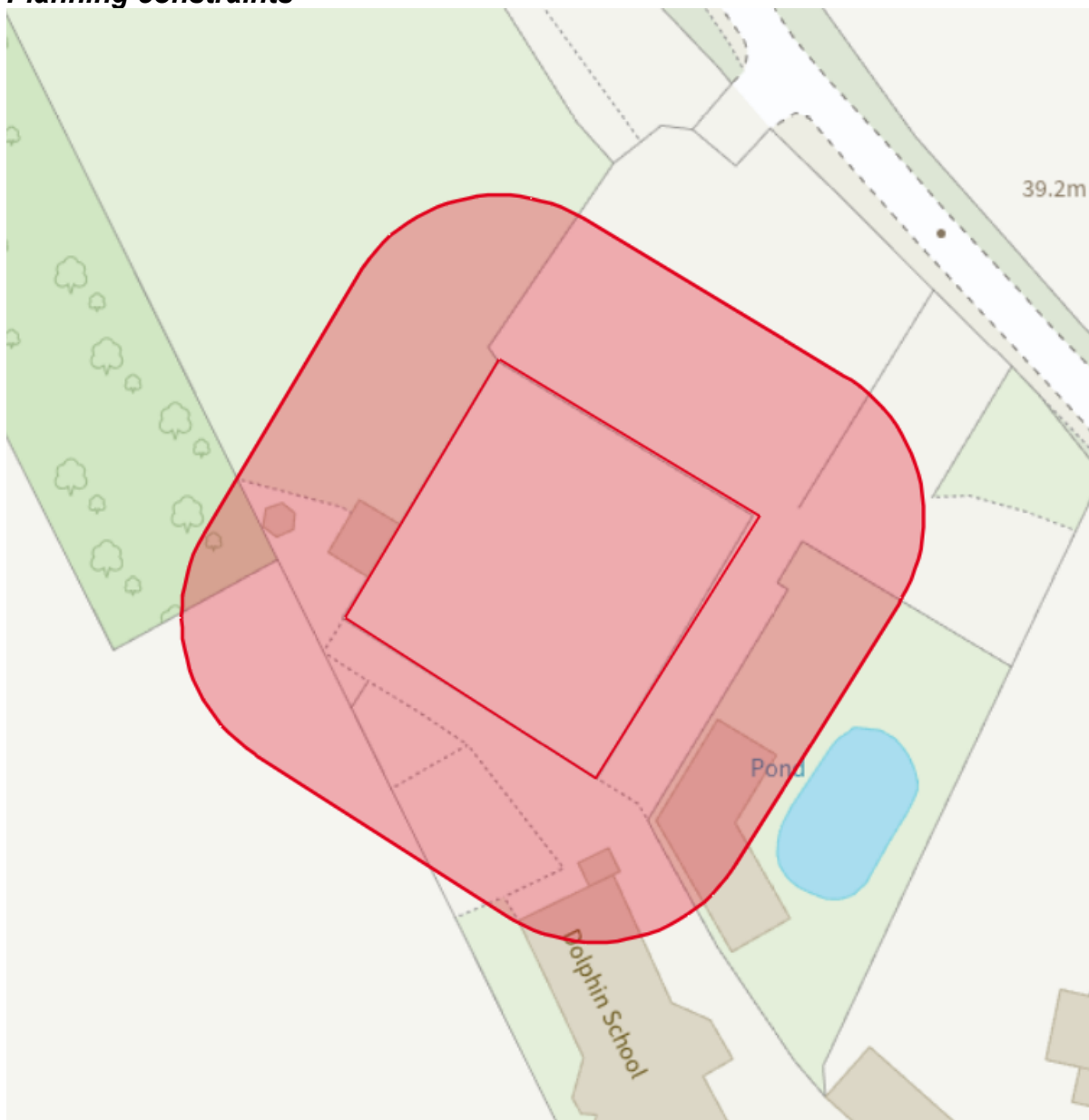
The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy 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:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approve subject to the following conditions: 1. Approved Plans 2. Hours and specification of lighting operation
Date:	06 January 2026
Earliest date for decision:	11 December 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	06/01/26

Planning constraints



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No legend

Affordable Housing Thresholds | Total count: 1

#	NAME
1	Outside Development Locations

Scale and Location of Development Proposals | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	NAME
1	Countryside	Countryside

Mineral Safeguarding Areas | Total count: 2

#	Type	SubType
1	Soft Sand	Construction sand: Palaeogene: Thanet Sand Formation, Lambeth Group, Harwich Formation, London Clay Formation

2	Soft Sand	Construction sand: Palaeogene: Thanet Sand Formation, Lambeth Group, Harwich Formation, London Clay Formation
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Major Nuclear Sites Consultation Zone | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	PLANNING_NOTE
1	Consultation Zone - Major Nuclear Site	AWE: Special Case Zone	ONR also requests to be consulted on planning applications, irrespective of distance from nuclear special cases. Developments that either introduce a new hazard or change the existing external hazards at nuclear sites.

Aerodrome Safeguarding: Heathrow Consultation Zone | Total count: 1

#	Height Band	Wind Turbine
1	All works exceeding 150 metres (492.1 feet)	YES

EA Groundwater Zones | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	Groundwater Consultation Zones	Groundwater Consultation Zone 3	Environment Agency (only if application in contaminated land) – see separate sheet: consult the Environment Agency

Bat Roost Habitat Suitability | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	Bat survey required for planning applications that involve roof modification or demolition.	WR560	Ecology Officer, Infrastructure Team

Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zones | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone	Red	For Householder applications check HH Land Use NatureSpace for all other types of development

Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zones - Householder | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone - Householder Applications	Red	This Amber/Red Zone is within 50m of a pond. Consult NatureSpace for Householder applications

Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zones - Minor | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone	Red	Consult NatureSpace for any minor development that intersects a red or amber zone in this layer

SSSI Impact Risk Zones | Total count: 1

#	IRZURL
1	https://irz.geodata.org.uk/IRZ/step2.html?irzcode=0301000500050-es=&location=476719,1000000&polygons=1000000%20(IRZ%20polygon%20centre)

Landscape Character Assessment 2019 | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	Name
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1	Landscape Character Assessment 2019	Stanlake Farmed Sand and Clay Lowla
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Listed Buildings Consultation Zone | Total count: 1

#	LIST_ENTRY	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	1117407	HINTON HOUSE	Conservation Architect and Building Control

Wards | Total count: 1

#	Name of area	Closest Approximate Distance
1	Twyford, Ruscombe & Hurst Ward	0 m

Parishes | Total count: 1

#	Name of area	Closest Approximate Distance
1	St. Nicholas, Hurst CP	0 m