

PLANNING STATEMENT

**DETAILED PLANNING APPLICATION
FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF EXISTING
STARTERS HUT WITH PRO SHOP**

**LAND AT SONNING GOLF CLUB,
DUFFIELD ROAD, SONNING, READING,
RG4 6GJ**

Prepared by:

**Douglas Bond BA Hons MRTPI
Woolf Bond Planning Ltd**

On behalf of: Sonning Golf Club Ltd

WBP REF: DB/8340

June 2025



Woolf Bond Planning
Chartered Town Planning Consultants

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY	1
2. THE SITE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA	3
3. THE PROPOSAL	6
4. SITE PLANNING HISTORY	9
5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT	11
6. EMERGING LOCAL PLAN	15
7. MAIN ISSUES	17
8. PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION	24

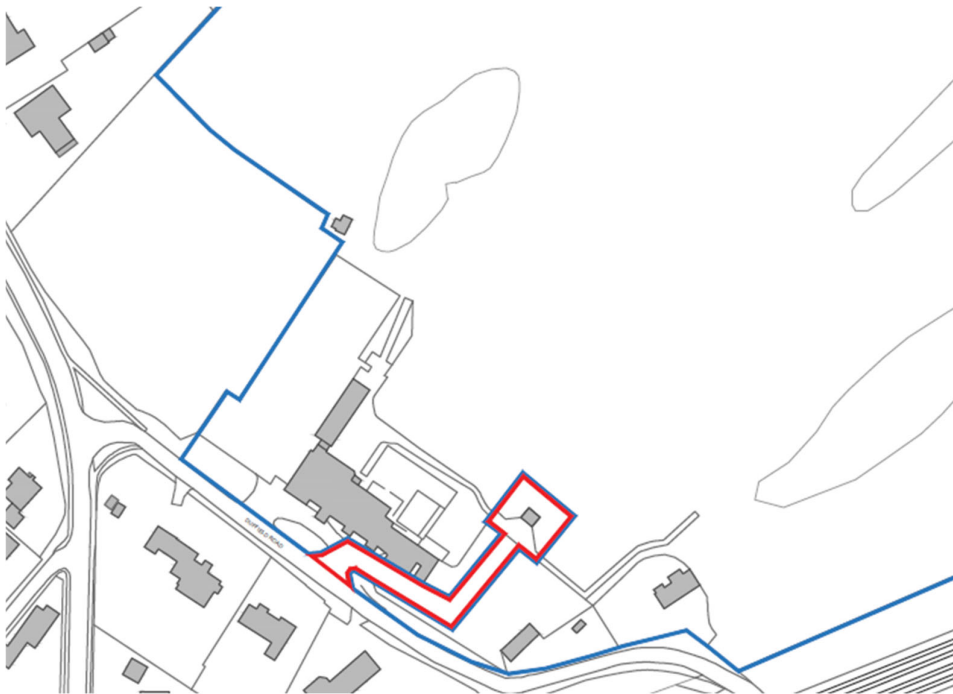
1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

- 1.1. This Statement has been prepared in support of a detailed planning application for land at Sonning Golf Club, Duffield Road, Sonning, Reading, RG4 6GJ. The detailed application proposes the replacement of the existing starters hut at the golf club and its replacement with the new pro shop. This application follows on from the Council's approval on 30th November 2023 of the outline planning application for the erection of up to 50 dwellings with reconfiguration of the club house and car parking in application 223458. Whilst the reconfiguration works to the existing clubhouse in application 223458 had envisaged the retention of the pro shop on the ground floor of the club house, as the approach to delivering the scheme has evolved (to reflect the specific needs of the club), it has been decided to provide a pro shop as a free-standing facility. Consequently this planning application has been prepared to achieve the provision of the new pro shop to serve the members of the Golf Club.
- 1.2. As indicated above, the site of the proposed pro shop is located where the current starters hut is place. The starters hut provides a location for golfers to await their tee off time for the 1st hole. This application has been prepared to facilitate the replacement of the starters hut with the new pro shop which will consequently enable a refined reconfiguration of the existing club house to accommodate the uses as approved through application 223458. As the starters hut was located outside of the application site boundary in the approved scheme 223458, a new application has therefore been submitted.
- 1.3. The other elements of the reconfiguration of the clubhouse will be delivered through a future reserved matters application consistent with the approach initially established in application 223458, including the phased delivery approved through application 242641 approved 20th November 2024. The original permission for the reconfiguration of the club house and associated works alongside the erection of 50 dwellings has been further refined through application 250553, approved 25th April 2025.
- 1.4. This Statement sets out the characteristics of the site and surrounding area, provides information on the planning history for the site, and sets out an analysis of the proposal against the relevant planning policy context.

- 1.5. The application is accompanied by a number of additional supporting reports including a Design and Access Statement, an Ecological Assessment (including Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)) and a CIL information form. The full list of supporting documents is set out in the covering letter accompanying this planning application.
- 1.6. This Planning Statement concludes that the proposal represents an appropriate scheme to enhance the facilities at the Golf Club alongside the wider proposals for improvements at the club.
- 1.7. Whilst located within designated countryside, that “countryside” represents a “man made” golf practice ground of limited landscape quality. The provision of the new pro shop represents an enhancement of the facilities at the Golf Course and enables refinements to the reconfiguration of the club house already approved. As indicated, the further works at the club house will be detailed in a subsequent reserved matters application, for phase 1 of the approved redevelopment (LPA ref 223458 (as amended by 242641 and 250533)).
- 1.8. The Planning Statement considers the merits of the proposal, and relevant national and Local Planning Policy, and in this context, concludes that planning permission should be granted without delay.

2. THE SITE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1. The site is located adjoining the settlement of Sonning, east of Reading, as shown on the extract from the Site Location Plan below and extends to 0.06ha. It is located to the north-west of the existing club house and as noted is the current location of the starters hut for the course. As indicated above, the starters hut is where golfers currently wait for the first tee to be vacant prior to their commencement of their round of golf.
- 2.2. Whilst the starters huts provide a waiting area during inclement weather, this replicates that available within the existing club house which as the location plan indicates, lies approximately 30m to the south-west. Given the short distance of the starters hut from the club house, golfers waiting to tee off for the first hole in their round can wait in the existing club house.
- 2.3. As indicated on the extract of the location plan, the starters hut lies immediately to the north of the western car park at the course.



Extract from the Site Location Plan

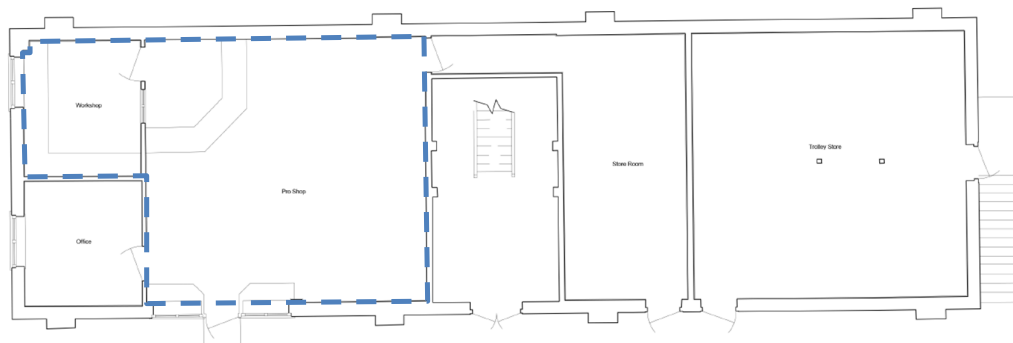
-
- 2.4. The Golf Course itself has the residential properties along Pound Lane so the south-west with further dwellings to the north-west along Bath Road. The Golf Club and associated course lies to the east of the site.
- 2.5. As noted, the principle of reconfiguration of the facilities at Sonning Golf Club, especially those in the Club House was confirmed in the earlier application, which remains extant. The Club House and adjoining car park will be reconfigured as part of the extent permission (223458 as refined through the approved phasing in application 242641 and the refined description of development in application 250533).
- 2.6. The now agreed works to the existing club house includes provision of the simulator facilities alongside new practice nets. Whilst the reconfiguration of the club house was to include a refurbished pro shop (through internal alterations to the building), the Golf Club now seeks to provide this in a separate building to replace the current starters hut. The proposal therefore entails a relocation of the existing pro shop to an alternative location on the course, albeit still readily accessible to the car park and the club house.
- 2.7. In terms of land use designations, the application site is not subject to any constraints; it is not designated for any landscape value; it is not identified as a strategic or local gap between settlements; it does not fall within the Green Belt, or in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now known as National Landscapes); there are no local landscape designations applicable to the site (existing or proposed in the Submitted Draft Local Plan) . It does not therefore fall to be considered as a 'valued landscape' within the definitions as set out in paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework, instead it forms part of the currently managed landscape associated with its use as a Golf Club.
- 2.8. The site is not located near any Conservation Areas or Listed Buildings. It is not identified as falling within any Historic Parks and Gardens designation, nor having any archaeological potential. It does not fall within either Flood Zone 2 or 3.
- 2.9. The site is not identified as having any nature conservation designations; it is not a local nature reserve, local wildlife site or site of special scientific interest.
- 2.10. As the proposed relates to the relocation of the current ancillary retail facility as part of the existing operation of the golf club, it contributes towards the enhancement of the wider recreational use of the site. The use of part of the existing site for an

enhancement of the current services available to members of the Club, it is appropriate for this location, especially as it also enables the approved reconfiguration of the club house to proceed, with greater flexibility to accommodate the improvements envisaged.

- 2.11. Overall, the use of the Golf Club for a refined and improved service for members is consistent with the wider recreation activities of the site, and acknowledges the limited constraints to the site.

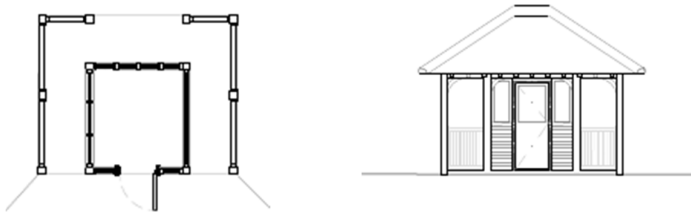
3. THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1. The detailed application as outline entails the replacement of the current starters hut adjacent to the eastern car park with a new pro-shop, which is being relocated from the current club house. The current club house includes a pro shop (which is ancillary to the wider recreational use of the site (as a members Golf Club) which operates primarily from the ground floor of the existing club house. As indicated, through application 223458 (including amendments approved in applications 242641 and 250533), permission was granted for the reconfiguration of the existing club house. To fully achieve the requirements of the club; especially to enable provision of the golf simulators in the club house), it is proposed that the pro shop is relocated to a free-standing building on the course, where the current starters hut is located.
- 3.2. The floor plan of existing clubhouse's west wing indicated that the current pro shop is located on the ground floor, and provided covered approximately 52.5m² as illustrated on the annotated plan below (including the workshop). Excluding the workshop, the existing pro shop covers around 43m².

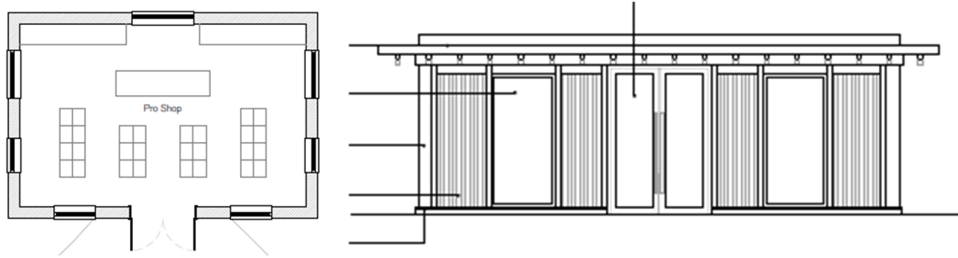


Extract of ground floor plan of existing clubhouse submitted with application 223458 (drawing ref MA/SGC/OPA/10). The current pro shop is shown edged by blue dashed line).

- 3.3. The floor plan and elevations of the proposed pro shop are shown below, alongside those details for the current starters hut.



Existing starters hut (floorplan and front elevation)



Proposed Pro shop (floorplan and front elevation)

- 3.4. The proposal is for the erection of a new pro shop (43m² GIA) to replace the current starters hut. The proposed pro shop would be around 3.3m in height. As indicated on the plans submitted, the starters hut includes an internal area of 4m² (2m x 2m) enclosed on three sides with an open sided covered area which extends around 1m from the central space. The starters hut (including open sided canopies) therefore covers around 12m² (4m x 3m). The current starters hut is approximately 3.7m in height.
- 3.5. The floor area of the proposed new pro shop is therefore the same as that within the existing club house, albeit it is larger than the 12m² extended area (including canopy) of the starters hut (4m x 3m). Nevertheless as indicated above, the height of the proposed pro shop is less than the existing starters hut.
- 3.6. Consistent with the existing operation of the pro shop, it is there to serve the members of the club and is ancillary/complimentary to the wider functionality of the Golf Club.
- 3.7. As the current location of the pro shop will be lost through the reconfiguration of the club house, it is appropriate that this is replaced in order that members can still purchase the equipment necessary to support their game (i.e. balls, footwear & clothing and clubs). It will also provide the location for the professional who provides training and advice to existing members to improve their playing abilities.

- 3.8. Since the pro shop already operates as an ancillary activity to the wider use of the site as a members Golf Club, this remains the intention for its operation. As already approved, the existing club house will be reconfigured to include the approved simulators and other enhancements.
- 3.9. Further details of the scheme are set out in the technical reports submitted in support of this planning application, including the Design and Access Statement. A summary of the matters that have influenced the proposal is set out below. However, the full suite of supporting technical reports should be referred to in the consideration of the application.
- 3.10. In terms of the placement of the proposed built form on the site, this has been predicated by the arrangement of existing buildings on the site and how this will evolve through the implementation of the consented schemes on the site. The replacement of the existing starters hut with the pro shop ensures that the existing focus of the main buildings remains at around the clubhouses thereby minimising any wider impacts. The suitability of the location is reinforced due to the relationship between the pro shop and other structures in this part of the club, especially the maintenance of the vista through the proposed building (given the placement of the entrance doors and rear window in line with the existing gateway in the wall enclosing the car park).
- 3.11. Further information on the parameters for the design of the scheme is provided in the Design and Access Statement that accompanies this application.

4. SITE PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1. A review of the Council's website indicates that since 1998, several applications have been submitted on the application site. These are summarised in the table below:

Site Planning History

App. No.	Proposal	Decision
F/2010/2583	Proposed refurbishment and extension to club house to include new pro shop and balcony, new starters hut, new garden wall and associated external works, new 4 bay members practice range.	Approved 17 th February 2011
F/2011/1654	Proposed erection of new entrance gates/ boundary fence and hedge plus formation of new kitchen store	Approved 12 th October 2011
F/2014/0744	Proposed erection of new entrance gates/ boundary fence and hedge plus formation of new kitchen store (part retrospective). (Amendment to planning consent F/2011/1654)	Approved 30 th May 2014
223458	Outline planning permission for the proposed erection of up to 50 no. dwellings with public open space and revised access off Duffield Road, plus associated modifications to Sonning Golf Club including reconfiguration of golf club car parking areas and relocation of the 18th green, addition of a practice putting green, new driving nets, new short game chipping area and conversion of the west wing of the existing clubhouse to accommodate a new golf simulator practice facility, including removal of external staircase and changes to fenestration. (All matters reserved except for access).	Approved 30 th November 2023
242641	Application for non-material amendment to planning consent 223458 to amend planning conditions 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18,	Approved 20 th November 2024

App. No.	Proposal	Decision
	19, 20, 22, 23, 24 and 26 to enable phased delivery of proposal, with revisions to the site access and reconfiguration of the car parking delivered in advance of the dwellings	
200533	Amend description of development in scheme 223458 to <i>“Outline planning permission for the proposed erection of up to 50 no. dwellings with public open space and revised access off Duffield Road, plus associated modifications to Sonning Golf Club including reconfiguration of golf club car parking areas and conversion of the west wing of the existing clubhouse to accommodate a new golf simulator practice facility, including removal of external staircase and changes to fenestration. (All matters reserved except for access. As shown on plan PL 002 dated March 2025”</i>	Approved 25 th April 2025

- 4.2. The starters hut to be replaced in this application was originally approved in scheme F/2010/2583, as indicated in the above table. The residential development on the site in tandem with the reconfiguration of the club housing approved in application 223458 necessitates this current proposal as the current area of the building used as the pro-shop will no longer be available. This scheme has therefore been prepared to enable the relocation of the pro shop so that the wider redevelopment and improvements for the Golf Club can proceed as permitted.

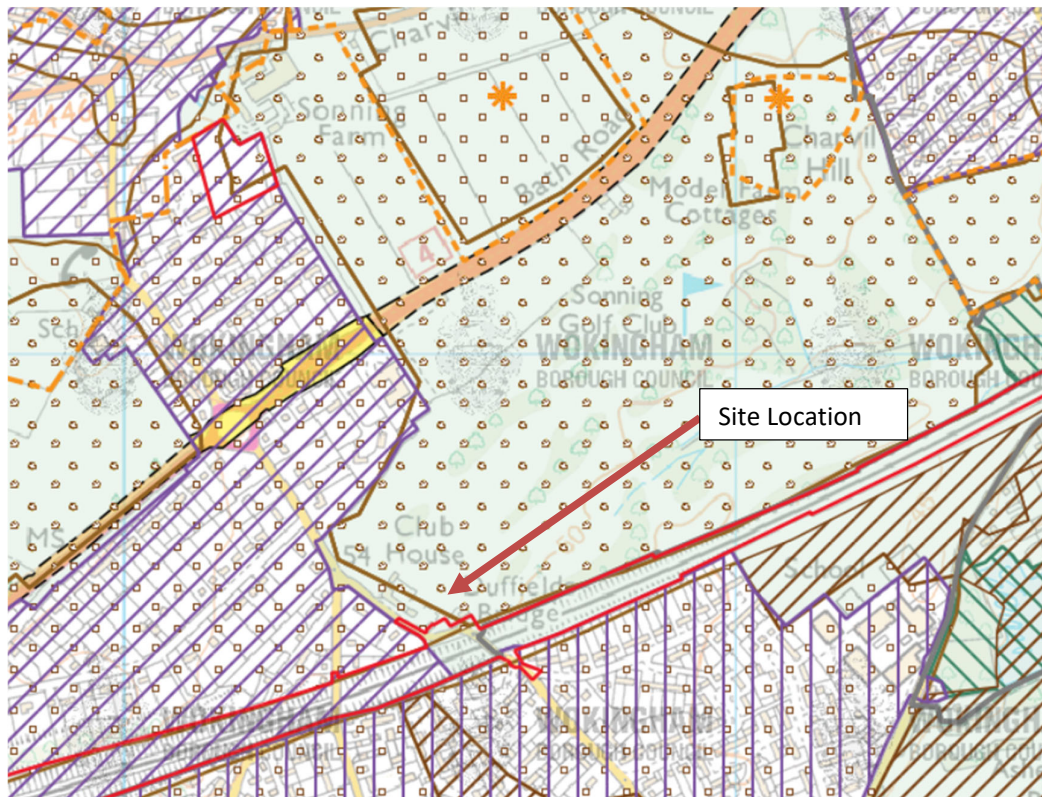
5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Development Plan Policy

5.1. For the purposes of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the relevant development plan against which the application proposal will be determined, comprises:

- Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (CS) (January 2010);
- Wokingham Borough Managing Delivery Local Plan (MDD) (February 2014)

5.2. As shown on the Wokingham Borough Proposals Map, the application site is located on the edge of Sonning. It is undesignated countryside.



Extract from the Wokingham Borough Proposals Map

5.3. The key development plan policies against which the application should be considered are set out in the Table below:

Relevant Wokingham Borough Development Plan policies for the application

	Subject
CS	
CP1	Sustainable development
CP2	Inclusive communities
CP3	General principles for development
CP4	Infrastructure
CP6	Managing travel demand
CP7	Biodiversity
CP9	Scale and location of development
CP11	Proposals outside development limits
MDD	
CC01	Presumption in favour of sustainable development
CC03	Green Infrastructure, trees and landscaping
CC07	Parking
CC09	Flooding
CC10	Drainage
TB21	Landscape and character
TB23	Biodiversity and development

- 5.4. In considering the relevance and weight of the development plan policies for the determination of the applications (NPPF, paragraph 11), it is necessary to assess their consistency as required by paragraph 232. However, for the reasons detailed, the application is consistent with the Development Plan alongside the NPPF and therefore reflecting paragraph 11 of the NPPF, the scheme should be approved at the earliest opportunity.

National Planning Policy

- 5.5. The National Planning Policy Framework is also a relevant material consideration in assessing the application. The NPPF is underpinned by a presumption in favour of sustainable development, with three overarching, but interlinked objectives.

Paragraph 8 is relevant to the application as the proposal would help to deliver each of the strands of sustainable development:

- a) **An economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth...**
- b) **A social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, but ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations;**
- c) **An environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land...**

5.6. The proposal will help to deliver each of these objectives, thereby responding to the requirement in paragraph 10 of the NPPF that development is pursued in a positive way, reflecting the presumption in favour of sustainable development which sits at the heart of the Framework.

5.7. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Where an application accords with up to date policies of the Development Plan, paragraph 11c indicates schemes should be approved.

5.8. Alternatively, paragraph 11 (d) notes that where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, planning permission should be granted unless:

- i. **The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas of assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or**
- ii. **Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.**

5.9. As set out in paragraph 61, the NPPF is clear that the Government's objective is to boost significantly the supply of homes, and in doing so, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed. Whilst this application does not directly relate to the provision of housing, for the reasons explained it enables the relocation of the existing pro-shop serving the Golf Club members and therefore enables the reconfiguration of the Club House as permitted in application 223458 (as amended).

-
- 5.10. Part of the wider reconfiguration of the Club House and Golf Club site permitted in application 223458 is the provision of up to 50 dwellings on part of the site. Therefore, whilst the application does not directly relate to housing, it does assist in maintain operations at the Golf Club, including it continued role in providing recreational opportunities to residents and therefore the Council's accepted housing land supply shortfall indicates that the policies of the Local Plan are out-of-date¹.
- 5.11. Notwithstanding the wider role of the scheme in facilitating the permitted improvements to the Golf Club, the application also accords with the specific goals in the NPPF concerning the promotion of healthy communities as detailed in chapter 8. This includes the provision and enhancement of recreational facilities as advocated by paragraphs 98, 103 and 104. The replacement of the existing starter's hut with the pro shop does not impact upon the wider operation of the Golf Club since as indicated there are other opportunities for players to wait before commencing their round of golf, including in the club house.
- 5.12. The provision of the new pro shop will enable the wider refurbishment and improvement to the Club House permitted in application 223458 (as amended).
- 5.13. The application has been submitted as a separate scheme since the new pro shop is outside of the approved boundary for the redevelopment and refurbishment as approved.
- 5.14. As a scheme related to the enhancement of an existing recreational facility within the borough, its location in the countryside (land outside of a defined settlement) is accepted under Policy CP11. This is because it enables the provision of an improvement to the existing Golf Club thereby both contributing and promoting recreation in the countryside consistent with criterion 1 of the policy. The wider acceptability of the scheme is covered in section 7 of this statement.

¹ The Council's Housing Land Supply Assessment published January 2025 indicates that for the period April 2024 to March 2029, the provision is a maximum of 1.7 years.

6. EMERGING LOCAL PLAN

Development Plan Policy

- 6.1. The part of the development plan that contains the Council's strategic planning policies which set the Borough's housing requirement – the Core Strategy – was adopted in January 2010. This was of course over 15 years ago, so is considered significantly beyond the five-year threshold beyond which those policies required to be reviewed (NPPF paragraph 34). The Local Authority has commenced work on a review of its development plan through the preparation of a new Local Plan, which will provide a strategic planning policy framework for development in the Borough until 2040. The timetable within the current Local Development Scheme (September 2024) for the preparation of the emerging Update of Wokingham Borough Local Plan is detailed in the Table below.

Stage	Date completed / anticipated
Issues and options consultation	August 2016
Spatial options consultation	November 2018
Draft Plan consultation	February 2020
Revised Growth Strategy consultation	November 2021
Proposed Submission Plan Publication	September 2024
Submission	December 2024 – January 2025
Examination hearings (stage 1)	April 2025*
Examination hearings (stage 2)	September 2025*
Inspector's post hearing letter	November 2025*
Modifications consultation	January 2026*
Inspectors report of examination	April 2026*
Adoption	May 2026*

Timetable for Local Plan Update from Wokingham Borough's Local Development Scheme (September 2024)

- 6.2. As indicated above, the Council consulted on a Draft Submission Local Plan from 30th September until 13th November 2024 consistent with the timeline envisaged in the LDS. The Plan was submitted for Examination on 28th February 2025, which was a month later than the window indicated in the LDS. Although the LDS envisaged that the stage

1 hearings for the examination were expected to commence in April, these have yet to be scheduled. The Inspectors examining the Local Plan posed some initial questions to the Council² regarding the submitted plan on 17th April for which a response was supplied on 28th May. However the Inspector's views on the Council's response to the initial questions are awaited. The subsequent timing of the Examination of the Local Plan Update therefore remains uncertain as this planning statement is being drafted.

- 6.3. Whilst the Inspectors views regarding the approach of the Submitted Local Plan are awaited, and consequently limited weight can be attributed to its policies³, a recreational scheme in the countryside as proposed in this application also accords with the thrust of the document. This is because criterion "i" in clause 2 of draft policy SS5 allows for development associated with outdoor sports, recreation and leisure in such areas. Again further details in support of the application are outlined in section 7 of this statement.

² Examination document reference ID1 detailing a range of queries on the Council's housing trajectory, including sources of supply and the expected timeline

³ See NPPF paragraph 49

7. MAIN ISSUES

Context for considering the application proposal

- 7.1. Prior to considering the various individual issues, it is important to establish an overall context for considering the proposals. There are two alternative routes to a decision.

1. Section 38(6)

- 7.2. Firstly, applications should be considered in accordance with the development plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise, in accordance with section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 7.3. The application scheme lies outside the currently defined built-up area of Sonning in designated countryside. As indicated, the approach of the existing Development Plan (especially Core Strategy policy CP11) together with the Submitted Local Plan Update (Draft Policy SS5) are supportive of development associated with recreation in the countryside. Therefore, subject to wider technical matters which the application accords with, the scheme is acceptable and consistent with the approach of the Development Plan. Therefore, the application can readily be determined consistent with section 38 (6) in accordance with the development plan.
- 7.4. It therefore does not matter whether paragraph 11d of the NPPF and the tilted balance is engaged.
- 7.5. However, given that the scheme can facilitate the implementation of the extant permission in application 223458 for the erection of 50 dwellings together with the improvements/reconfiguration to the Club House the Council's accepted housing land supply shortfall also engages the tilted balance within paragraph 11d of the NPPF.
- 7.6. Whilst the engagement of the tilted balance is noted, the scheme enables the enhancement of an established recreational facility which is supported by the approach of the NPPF, especially paragraphs 98, 103 and 104. The enhancement of the established recreational facility of Sonning Golf Club accords with these paragraphs given it supports the wider provision of the improved leisure offering which supports

the health and well-being of residents and their ability to participate in sport. Therefore, the scheme is a conflict with Development Plan policy is identified, the acceptability of the proposal with the wider encouragement in the NPPF for improving recreational opportunities is an important facet of the proposal. The NPPF's support for recreation as part of healthy lifestyles are so compelling that they outweigh any harm by reason of conflict with the dated development plan policies, even in an unweighted balancing exercise. Importantly, the weight to be afforded to these conflicts with the dated development plan policies is limited by virtue of their out-of-date status.

- 7.7. Notwithstanding this, however, in the event the tilted (weighted) balance is applied (the third approach to a decision with a route to the presumption in favour of sustainable development), then the case for the application is further reinforced.

NPPF Paragraph 11d

- 7.8. The second approach to reaching a decision relates to the engagement of the tilted planning balance through the application of NPPF paragraph 11d – the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 11d states:

“Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development...

For decision-taking this means:

**c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date⁷, granting permission unless:**

i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole”.

- 7.9. This paragraph of the NPPF can be engaged for two separate, independent reasons, and these represent the second and third routes through to a decision. The first of these relates to the existence of a five-year housing land supply deficit. This is confirmed by the Council's assessment demonstrating a maximum of 1.7 years supply

for the period April 2024 to March 2029. Therefore, this application should be determined under NPPF paragraph 11d, especially as although not directly a housing scheme, it provides a route for delivering the redevelopment and improvements of the Golf Club and thereby enabling the provision of up to 50 dwellings permitted in application 223458.

Summary

- 7.10. To summarise, NPPF paragraph 11d is engaged as the most important policies for determining the application are found to be out of date. This is due to the accepted lack of a five year supply⁴. Whilst the application is not for housing itself, it facilitates the implementation of the improvements to the Golf Club; especially the relocation of the pro shop; which is integral to the provision of up to 50 dwellings on the wide Golf Club site.
- 7.11. This therefore confirms that the NPPF paragraph 11d “tilted balance” is engaged and provides a route through to a decision. Accordingly, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.
- 7.12. The tilted balance does not apply in certain circumstances where specific policies in the NPPF indicate development should be restricted, as set out in paragraph 11(d)(i) of the NPPF. Footnote 7 lists the restrictive policies which could disengage the tilted balance. None of these apply to the application site.
- 7.13. Therefore, any adverse impacts would need to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits that arise from these proposals when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole. If not, then the proposals would comprise sustainable development and planning permission should be granted.
- 7.14. As noted, the application scheme is not caught by any the footnote 7 restrictive policies.
- 7.15. Overall, therefore, this application needs to be considered in terms of the weighted balancing exercise in NPPF paragraph 11d.

⁴ The maximum of 1.7 years for the period April 2024 to March 2029

7.16. With this context in mind the main issues can be addressed in turn under a number of headings:

1. Development in the countryside;
2. Replacement golf facilities – relocated pro shop;
3. Impact on the character, appearance and function of the site and surrounding area;
4. Compliance with the development plan; and
5. Conclusions on main issues

1. Development in the countryside

7.17. The policy concerning development in the countryside (CP11) indicates that proposals are acceptable where they accord with a number of principles. Firstly, as the scheme at Sonning Golf Club demonstrates, it contributes towards recreation in the countryside (criterion 1). In this case, golf is a recognised leisure/recreational pursuit and therefore development associated with this activity in the countryside is in principle acceptable, subject to compliance with the other criteria.

7.18. The consented refurbishment of the Club House in application 223458 means that the pro shop cannot be retained in the current part of the club house, given it is to be refurbished to facility the wider improvements at the course, particularly for practice.

7.19. The existing starters hut is not suitable in terms of size to accommodate the same range of products as the existing pro shop, and therefore a new building is required. The redevelopment of the existing starters hut site on the course and its replacement with the new pro shop both ensures that the new facility is located close to the existing buildings on the course and thereby demonstrates that the proposal has focused the scheme close to the original buildings. It therefore demonstrates compliance with criterion 2 of the policy.

7.20. Therefore, the scheme is consistent with the broad approach and principles in policy CP11.

2. Replacement golf facilities – relocated pro shop

- 7.21. As indicated earlier in this statement, the pro shop for the course currently operates from the ground floor of the club house. Through the permission granted in application 223458, these are to be converted into other golf related activities, including for golfers to practice their game. This includes the approved indoor golf simulators which were part of the replacement for the driving range on the course.
- 7.22. The proposal enables the relocation of the pro shop within the wider facilities at the start of the course and contributes towards facilitating the implementation of permission 223458. This is therefore a further illustration of the consistency of the application with Core Strategy Policy CP11.

3. Impact on the character, appearance and function of the site and surrounding area

- 7.23. As to the impact on the countryside, the first point to note is that the site does not lie in an area of landscape/countryside which is designated as having any particularly great value according to footnote 7 of the NPPF (2024). In this context, the site lies beyond the Green Belt, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, AONBs, conservation area or nearby heritage assets.
- 7.24. Having regard to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area, whilst designated countryside it is in a totally man-made landscape that has been shaped and constructed solely for the benefit of golfers. It is not a natural landscape. The site itself is visually part of the course, either the manicured lawn around the starters hut or the hardstanding areas through the existing car parks which provide the pedestrian access to the site. The existing and proposed uses are clearly integrated as part of the wider form and operation of the Golf course. This means the site is well contained and has no undesirable impact on settlement patterns or the character and appearance of the wider landscape.
- 7.25. The site and location plan submitted with the application demonstrates the limited built form of the scheme and its relationship/proximity with the existing club house for the course.

- 7.26. The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (November 2019) confirms that the area within which the site sits forms part of J4: Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay. The Council's assessment indicates that the J4 character area is greatly influenced by the network of recreational spaces, including a golf course (Sonning)⁵. The Council's Landscape Assessment indicates that the wider objective is to increase the recreational value of the area which the application would support. The aggregation of the factors of value and susceptibility to change provide a landscape sensitivity of only medium. Accordingly, the site only has a moderate landscape value and should not be regarded as part of a valued landscape.
- 7.27. The importance of enhancing the recreational value of the site and its moderate landscape value indicates that the application scheme can be accommodated without any significant impact upon the surrounding countryside.
- 7.28. The absence therefore of any significant harm confirms that such a judgment must be set against the wider benefits of the proposal in improving the recreational offer on the site and its wider role in facilitating the implementation of application 223458 and its associated benefit arising from the 50 dwellings approved. significant need for new housing development and the benefit that these new dwellings would bring.
- 7.29. In conclusion, the proposal has an acceptable level of landscape and visual impact within the context of the titled planning balance and the wider benefits of proving enhance recreational offer on the site, consistent with the approach of policy CP11.
- 7.30. Whilst the application scheme is located on the edge of a built-up area and beyond land designated for its landscape quality, the scheme will not result in any significant landscape or visual effects as they are visually well contained. The redevelopment of part of the Golf Course, enhancing its recreational value is consistent with the approach of the Plan.
- 7.31. There would be no loss of important hedgerows and trees to form the access or develop the site. Accordingly, the proposals comply with Local Plan Policies CCO3(2(d)) and TB21 which require proposals to address the landscape character

⁵ Paragraph J4.5

assessment, retain or enhance the condition and character of features that contribute to the landscape and provide protection for trees and hedgerows.

4.Compliance with the development plan

- 7.32. CP3 – General Principles for Development. The individual and collective components of the application scheme accord with the principles and subject matter of the policy.
- 7.33. CP7, TB23 – Biodiversity. The ecological assessment ensures that the proposals will bring about an overall enhancement (net gain) in the biodiversity value of the site. In this regard the proposals more than meet the requirements of Policies CP7 and TB23 together with the more up-to-date approach to biodiversity matters in the NPPF.
- 7.34. CP11 - Proposals Outside Development Limits (including Countryside). As indicated, the enhanced of recreational facilities and its potential to support the wider reconfiguration and improvements approved at the Golf Course in application 223458 means that the scheme protects the separate identity of settlements and maintains the quality of the environment consistent with the objectives of Policy CP11. The replacement of the starters hut with the pro shop ensures that the development is focused around the core existing Golf Club buildings on the site which is reflective of the approach in the policy.

5.Conclusions on main issues

- 7.35. In conclusion, this section of the Statement has demonstrated that there are no significant planning matters that would cause material harm in the overall tilted planning balance. Moreover, the scheme would deliver recreational benefits alongside the related role of the scheme in facilitating the implementation of the reconfiguration of the existing Club House and erection of 50 dwellings approved in application 223458. Only minimal adverse landscape impacts arise to a site of limited intrinsic quality and character whilst the impact on the wider surrounding landscape is tempered by the contained nature of the proposed development area itself. The individual components of the application also accord with other requirements of the development plan.

8. PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

- 8.1. The commentary below assesses the merits and potential impacts of the application scheme in relation to the three sustainability tests set out at paragraph 8 of the NPPF. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF states that (amongst other things) the assessment of the sustainability roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent. In accordance with the guidance at paragraph 8 of the NPPF, a combined analysis in relation to the sustainability role is set out below.
- 8.2. The principal economic benefits are summarised below:
- 1) Creation of direct construction related jobs at a range of skill levels;
 - 2) Supporting a further 'spin-off' jobs in services and other businesses during the construction phase;
- 8.3. In accordance with the provisions at paragraph 88 of the NPPF, the economic benefits set out in this Statement should therefore be accorded **substantial weight** in the planning balance, especially as it supports the continued operation of a long established leisure facility in the countryside which respects the character of the area.
- 8.4. A key social benefit of the scheme, as part of its wider role in supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, is the retention and enhancement of the established recreational facility.
- 8.5. The social benefits of the scheme attract **significant weight** in the overall planning balance.
- 8.6. In terms of the environmental role, the appeal scheme is not located on land designated at a national or local level for its townscape, or ecological value. It makes good use of land on the edge of a defined settlement (Sonning).
- 8.7. Whilst the proposal will result in the loss of part of a greenfield site of limited intrinsic character and beauty, that is characterised by its natural containment as well as built up surroundings that create a physical and visual well contained parcel of land. The

ability of the scheme to retain the landscape containment and enhance other parts of the site ensures that the effect of the proposal on the landscape character on and beyond the site is limited. As a result, the degree of harm associated with the development within a countryside area, albeit at the edge of the settlement, is limited.

- 8.8. The proposal will also deliver a biodiversity net gain on the site.
- 8.9. As a result, the overall the character, appearance and function of the site, as a whole, in the wider area, through the sensitive layout will be enhanced.
- 8.10. Accordingly, it is evident from economic, social and environmental perspectives that the scheme delivers many benefits that clearly outweigh any adverse impacts in the NPPF paragraph 11d tilted balance.

Conclusions

- 8.11. Planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan, section 38(6). In this ordinary, unweighted planning balance, this Planning Statement has demonstrated that the harm that would arise from the development of the new prop shop would be minimal, and that the benefits arising from the scheme will outweigh the minor harm arising through the loss of a greenfield land of limited landscape value. The scheme accords with relevant policies such that planning permission should be granted in accordance with the development plan, when considered as a whole.
- 8.12. In the alternative, and in the light of the matters discussed in this Planning Statement, paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF is engaged due to the Council not being able to demonstrate a five-year supply. The presumption in favour of sustainable development therefore applies. Planning permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
- 8.13. This Planning Statement has considered the impacts that would arise from the delivery of the scheme on this site and demonstrated with the support of specialist technical reports that any impacts that would arise from the scheme can be addressed, and most certainly do not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits that would arise from the scheme. On this basis, the proposal delivers “sustainable development” within the terms of the NPPF, such that planning permission can be granted.