

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250543
Site Address:	Unit 4, Winnersh Fields, Gazelle Close, Winnersh, Wokingham, RG41 5QS
Expiry Date:	7 May 2025
Site Visit Date:	31 March 2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use of the building to an Islamic education, worship and community centre (Use Class F1 and F2).	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Overhead cables 15m buffer
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Major Development Location (Winnersh)
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone
Nuclear Consultation Zone
Landscape Character Assessment Area
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
JCEB Mineral Safeguarding Areas
Flood Zones 2 and 3
Flood Zone 3
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone Minor

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 CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP15 – Employment Development
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 CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB11 – Core Employment Areas TB17 – Local Centres and Neighbourhood and Village Shops TB21 – Landscape Character

	TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	M2 – Safeguarding Sand and Gravel Resources
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
030308	Outline application for the proposed erection of a building for B1 use with parking and ancillary works.	Approved 22/01/2004
050969	Proposed erection of five buildings 2 storey high, containing 7 units for B1(a) office use (3023 sq m total floorspace) with associated access and parking.	Withdrawn 15/03/2006
062628	Proposed erection of 7 units for office B1(a) use (3,023 metres squared in total).	Approved 15/09/2006

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY ELSEWHERE IN WINNERSH FIELDS

220113 (Application at unit 1, Winnersh Fields)	Full application for the proposed change of use from office (Use Class E(iii)) to tuition centre / education use (Use Class F1(a)).	Refused 14/04/2022 (Refused on highway grounds)
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CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No objection
WBC Drainage – No objection subject to condition
WBC Highways – Objection due to insufficient parking and highways information
WBC Health and Wellbeing – No comments received
WBC Community Safety – No comments received
WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received

External

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received
The Environment Agency – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Objection based on the following concerns:
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	• Access and traffic impact • Insufficient parking • Noise pollution • Building is not designed to be a community centre • Also noted that a number of comments in support are from individuals outside of the immediate area of Winnersh who may not be directly impacted by the proposal Officer comment: See ‘Highway Access and Parking Provision’ and ‘Neighbouring Amenity’ sections of the report. Whilst the building was not originally built for a community use, this does not necessarily prevent a change of use, subject to the proposal complying with relevant material considerations/ planning policy. Any individual has the right to comment on a planning application, no matter their location.
Ward Member(s)	<u>Comments from Cllr Bray:</u> • It is extremely difficult for faith communities to find suitable locations for their needs, including Christian denominations. As this location is not surrounded by residential properties and is accessible by public transport, both bus and train, it seems to me to be a reasonable place for an Islamic Centre. • Recognise people in the community have concerns over parking and ask the application is assessed in the same way as application 231077 for a nearby Gurdwara • Would want to ensure that traffic movements are manageable at the junction with Reading Road • Possibility of a wider community use is welcomed Officer comment: The above is noted and comments raised in relation to Highways matters will be discussed in the ‘Highway Access and Parking Provision’ section of the report <u>Comments from Cllr Jamthe:</u> • Concerns over site security • The site is on private property • Safety concern for public access • No dropping off space so will block the barrier to enter Winnersh Fields • Inadequate parking • Increase in noise and disturbance • Concern over safety of cyclists and pedestrians • Increase in traffic jams • Increased environmental concerns eg pollution

	• Not compatible with local character Officer comment: See ‘Design/ Character of the Area’, ‘Neighbouring Amenity’ and ‘Highway Access and Parking Provision’ section of the report. Concerns over site security (compatibility of private and public access) is not a reason to resist an application. The site being on private property is not a material planning consideration. <u>Comments from Cllr P. Jorgenson (Not a Ward Cllr):</u> • Supportive of an Islamic Centre but concerns over inadequate parking and improvements to the junction with Reading Road are required Officer comment: See ‘Highway Access and Parking Provision’ section of the report.
Neighbours	723 comments were received (excluding duplicates). Themes of comments have been summarised. <u>334 objections relating to the following matters:</u> <u>‘Need’ of the development</u> • No need for an Islamic centre • There are other Islamic centres nearby • Council should work with religious leaders and grant permission based on population ratio • Not many Muslim people are in the area Officer comment: The ‘need’ for the facility is discussed in the ‘Principle of development’ section of this report. Officers are required to assess all proposals that are presented to the Local Planning Authority. Permission is granted on the basis of planning policies only and not population ratios. <u>Parking/ Highways</u> • Insufficient parking • Pedestrian access to Winnersh Fields is limited • Additional traffic would worsen traffic on the A329 • Proposal can’t be accommodated by existing infrastructure such as public transport/ healthcare • Would be parking on pavement • Concern over safety of cyclists and pedestrians • Accidents more likely • Inappropriate disabled access and disabled parking • Improvements should be made to the junction with Reading Road • Dropping off outside the barrier to Winnersh Fields will block access

Officer comment: See 'Highway Access and Parking Provision' section of the report for discussion on Highway matters. In response to concerns over additional pressure on healthcare facilities, this is not considered relevant to this proposal as the application is for a change of use to a community facility as opposed to residential accommodation that could increase population numbers. In response to concerns over disabled access, there is ramp access to the main entrance to the ground floor of the building, and there is a lift between the ground and first floor.

Consultation

- Community not adequately consulted
- Building is already occupied by tenants

Officer comment: Although seen as best practice, applicants are not required to share their proposal with the community in advance of a submission, However, they are required to ensure that the correct notice is served upon submission of an application. The applicant signed certificate B within the application form confirming that they had served notice on all 'owners' (those with a freehold interest or leasehold interest (with 7 years left to run on the lease)). The Council consults all adjoining addresses in writing notifying them of the application. No site notice is required to be displayed as letters were sent to adjoining addresses (only one of these is required to be carried out for the Council to fulfil its duty under the Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015).

Flooding and Drainage

- Building is located in an area of flood risk which will put people at risk
- Concern over pressure on existing drainage system

Officer comment: See 'Flooding and Drainage' section of the report

Internal amenities

- Inadequate fire exits
- Inadequate toilet and washing facilities

Officer comment: Fire exits are a matter for Building Control to review rather than at the planning application stage. Number of toilet and washing facilities are not a material planning consideration.

Noise/ Impact on the area

- Lots of noise due to prayers at multiple times of the day
- Infringement of privacy

	• Will affect the character of the area (which is a residential area) • Would result in environmental impacts • Will affect the professional environment of nearby offices • Would make the area less enjoyable for visitors <i>Officer comment: See 'Design/ Character of the Area' and 'Neighbouring Amenity' sections of the report. The comment regarding the proposal would make the area less enjoyable for visitors is subjective, however the proposals acceptability in relation to material considerations that could affect the wider area will be assessed.</i> <u>Loss of employment/ office space</u> • Takes away the building for employment use and helping the economy • Applicant has not demonstrated that the unit has been marketed for the appropriate time period <i>Officer comment: See 'Principle of Development' section of the report.</i> <u>Relationship with other planning applications</u> • If approved, all religious communities would do the same which is not justified • Other applications in Winnersh Fields were refused • Future applications on other units in Winnersh Fields should be accepted, if this is <i>Officer comment: All applications are assessed on their own merits, against the relevant planning policy and any other material considerations.</i> <u>Consideration of the application</u> • Studying religion can be done online • Don't understand why the Council are considering the application • Proposed facilities should benefit the whole community and not just certain groups • Should be a centre used for other groups of the population e.g. elderly <i>Officer comment: Officers are required to assess and determine all proposals submitted to the Council. The Council cannot dictate what is submitted, or question the need or reasoning for why an application is submitted, or suggest alternatives. The proposed development still qualifies as a community facility.</i> <u>Other Matters</u> • Proposal requires management company approval
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	• Will affect property values and business investment • Private property – who is responsible for the road if public access is granted to Winnersh Fields? • Security of Winnersh Fields – the site is not appropriate for general public use as there is a barrier. • Private office park is not suitable for public use Officer Comment: These are not material planning considerations. Whilst the site is in private ownership and has a physical barrier, in planning terms this does not constitute a reason for refusal. The applicant would need to secure access to the site from the land owner but this is not a planning consideration. • Open space is needed for healthier lifestyles Officer comment: This is not relevant to this application. • Would be an increase in litter Officer comment: This application is for a change of use only. The existing bin store would continue to be used. • Installation of signs and changes to the building may not blend in with the surrounding area Officer comment: Should any advertisements be displayed on the building, these may require separate advertisement consent application. This proposal does not incorporate any external changes to the building. • Winnersh is a religious neutral community Officer comment: The above comment is subjective, and not relevant to the determination of the application. • Location is not suitable for a religious establishment • Allowing regular access to the site puts other businesses at risk • 2 religious places should not exist in close proximity to one another as it would be an inconvenience for the community and the police • Risk of interfaith tensions • There would be large gatherings without safeguards Officer comment: The report will assess as to the acceptability of the proposal in relation to relevant material planning considerations. Applications cannot be resisted due to perceived issues. • Fire brigade access won't be possible when the site is at full capacity Officer comment: There is no evidence before Officers to substantiate this claim. Fire safety would be considered at Building Control stage.
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	<u>389 comments in support on the following grounds:</u> • Urgently need a mosque to continue religious activities and community support • Relieves pressure on other mosques • Will foster inclusivity as it would be a hub for community engagement for all backgrounds • Will reduce parking burdens at other mosques • Will be a source of happiness for everyone • Will be a place for Muslim youth to learn about their faith • Will promote interfaith relationships and charity efforts • Will help those who have been in isolation • Would be a place of pride and belonging • People will use nearby park and ride • Rejecting the application would be inconsistent with the Council's commitment to social cohesion and equal access to community spaces <i>Officer comment: The above are all noted. Comments on the 'need' for the development will be discussed in the 'Principle of Development' section of the report. Parking matters are discussed in the Highway Access and Parking Provision section of this report.</i> One comment was received relating to a GDRP concern. Concern was raised over the listing of names and addresses on the public website which could cause community relations between two specific groups. This comment was received anonymously and so the individual could not be contacted to discuss this or to gather further information, as from that submitted, it is unclear what potential breach is being referred to. It should be noted that all respondent's names and addresses appear in their representation, and respondents are made aware of this when their comment is submitted. When submitting a comment on an application, the respondent has to agree to the following: <i>"Any comments made are not confidential and can be seen by anyone as they form part of the public record. The comments, unless offensive, discriminatory and/or racist, will appear on the Council's website within 24 hours and include the submitted name and address."</i>
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APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site relates to a detached two storey office building located in 'Winnersh Fields' accessed off Gazelle Close. There are 14 parking spaces associated with the building. Immediately surrounding the application building in Winnersh Fields are 4 other buildings containing offices. On Gazelle Close there are a number of retail units and the closest residential neighbours are those on Greenacres Avenue to the west.

Proposal:

Planning permission is sought for the change of use of the office building to an Islamic education, worship and community centre (Use Class F1 and F2). No external works to the building are proposed. The application has identified 14 car parking spaces within the red line to serve the proposed facility.

The applicant, Muslim Community Connect Wokingham, currently operate out of the existing Winnersh Community Centre, however, they are seeking to relocate in order to host regular events in a dedicated building.

The applicant states that generally, 70 would be the maximum number of attendees.

The summary of events run by Muslim Community Connect Wokingham are as follows:

Table 3.1 Summary of Events Run by MCC Wokingham

Time	Event	Attendees (maximum)
Friday (Peak Day for Regular Prayers)		
18:30 – 20:00	Kids' Activities	50-70
19:45 – 20:15	4 th Prayer	15-25
21:00 – 21:30	5 th Prayer	5-10
Ramadan (Peak Month for Late Evening Prayers)		
20:00 – 21:00 (Winter)	Ramadan Prayer	50-70
22:00 – 23:00 (Summer)	Ramadan Prayer	50-70
Weekend Community Events		
Late Morning (10:00 – 12:00)	Weekend School	50-70
Afternoon	Non-Regular Family Community Event	~50

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.

The site is located within settlement limits and as such the development should be acceptable providing that it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy. 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.

The principle of development is assessed under the NPPF, the Development Plan (Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Plan)

The Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP) also forms part of the Development Plan and the site is located within a Mineral Safeguarding Area. However, as the proposal is for a change of use only, an assessment is not considered necessary under the JMWP as no new built form is proposed that could sterile or affect scarce natural resources.

The other documents which form part of the Development Plan (as mentioned above) will be considered in assessing the principle of the change of use, alongside the NPPF.

Loss of Office Space:

Due to changes made in September 2020 to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 have resulted in the Use Class of the existing building changing from B1(a) to E(g).

Policy CP15 of the Core Strategy (in addition to Policy TB11 of the MDD Local Plan) states that any change of use from Class B1/B2/B8 should not lead to an overall net loss of Class B floorspace. The basis behind this is outlined in paragraph 4.70, which refers to an Employment Land Study (2006) which sets out that the supply of floor space for industry and warehousing needs to increase by 51,000m² to meet forecast Class B use growth in the Borough over the Development Plan period to 2026.

Upon consultation with the WBC Planning Policy team, it is concluded that based on latest monitoring, the modest loss of commercial floorspace is unlikely to lead to a net loss of B1 (now E(g)), B2 and B8 floorspace across the borough in light of recent permissions.

Policy CP15 does also include a qualitative element:

“Provision will be made for a range of sizes, types, quality and locations of premises and sites in order to meet incubator/start up, move on, expansion and investment accommodation needs and having regard to the needs of specific sectors of the business community.”

As supporting paragraph 4.70 states a *“good supply of a range of sizes, types and location of available sites and buildings is a pre-requisite to a thriving economy”*.

The site is currently in commercial use and its location in Winnersh outside a Core Employment Area offers an alternative site and size of employment land within the borough. The existing commercial use therefore contributes to the mix envisaged by CP15, though tempered by its location so close to the Winnersh Triangle Core Employment Area. As a general principle, were such alternative sites allowed to be lost unchecked, without appropriate justification, this would run contrary to the qualitative policy aim to ensure variety in provision across the borough.

Against that though, would need to be weighed the fact its currently vacant and that the proposed use could result in some jobs in the local area.

Marketing of the premises

To help assess the loss of the office space, Officers ask for evidence of genuine and sustained marketing efforts. Details would normally be expected to include information on how and where the site has been advertised; for how long and whether this has been on a continuous basis; the rates at which the site has been marketed; information to show these rates are representative of the market; and ideally details of all approaches received.

There is a comment within the Planning Statement that the site has been actively marketed for since September 2024 and previously marketed in March 2023. The marketing email contains slightly more information, and states that the instruction to market the site commenced on 16/03/2023, but it does not provide details of how the site was marketed and nor is it clear for how long that marketing was undertaken. It then appears that the marketing from September 2024 onwards was on a freehold rather than leasehold basis. Additional clarity from the applicant was sought but not received within the required timeframe.

As such, there is a shortfall in evidence to demonstrate full compliance with Policy CP15, however the information that has been submitted, along with the facts of the site (i.e. that it is not within a Core Employment Area) need to be considered in the balance when making a conclusion on the principle of the change of use of the building.

Principle of the proposed use:

Paragraph 98 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should “*plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments*”

Policy CP3(h) states that proposals will be acceptable where they contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities. The proposed use (place of worship, education and community centre) is considered to be a community facility, albeit would primarily be used by a subset of the community (Muslim community). However, the planning statement does state that an additional benefit of the proposal will be that the facility will have the potential to offer space for alternative community uses within the area.

Policy CP2 states that to ensure that “*new development contributes to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities (including the provision of community facilities) to meet long term needs, planning permission will be granted for proposals that address the requirements of:...*

(d) The specific identified needs of minority groups in the borough, including Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople and black and minority ethnic groups. Proposals for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople (including allocations in other Development Plan Documents) will demonstrate that:

- i) The site is located either within or close to the development limits of a settlement in policy CP9 in order to maximise the possibilities for social inclusion and sustainable patterns of living; and*

- ii) *The proposed site is not disproportionate to the scale of the existing settlement whether singly or cumulatively with any existing sites in the area”*

The applicant has considered that the above is relevant to this proposal. They consider it relevant due to the applicant having long searched for an appropriate site to meet its long term needs to ensure that a suitable place of worship for the Muslim community can be delivered within an accessible location between Reading and Wokingham.

Officers agree that Muslims are a minority group in the borough (and so consideration against policy CP2 does apply). The proposal will also see the provision of a community facility for this minority group and therefore complies with CP2(d) along with CP3(h).

Summary on the principle of the change of use

The proposal would see the loss of an office building. Despite a lack of marketing information, some information has been provided, and the Planning Policy team have confirmed that the loss of this office would not result in a significant loss of office space within the Borough overall. Furthermore, the site is not located within a Core Employment Area where changes of use could have greater implications and undermine the designation. There is also national and local policy to support the proposed use.

In pure use class terms, Officers do not consider the proposed use to be incompatible with the remaining offices in Winnersh Fields, however compatibility in other respects will need to be assessed. Whilst refused, application 220113 (at Unit 1 Winnersh Fields – see planning history) for the change of use from an office to tuition centre / education use (Use Class F1(a)) was not resisted on the loss of office space or incompatibility with the rest of Winnersh Fields. This case supports the notion that alternative uses in Winnersh Fields can/have been accepted in principle when assessed.

In this case, the proposal would see a community and educational use which is supported by local and national policy. As such, on balance, the principle of the change of use from offices (use class E(g)) to an Islamic education, worship and community centre (Use Class F1 and F2) is accepted. However, the proposal still must be assessed in relation to other material considerations.

Design/ Character of the Area:

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.

The proposal will not result in any external alterations to the building and so visually, the building will remain as existing and not have any significant impact on the street scene. It is noted that Winnersh Fields is an office estate, and so the proposed use would result in some change to the character of the immediate area in terms of the mix of uses within Winnersh Fields. However, Officers do not consider the proposed use, in conjunction with offices elsewhere in Winnersh Fields, to be incompatible in pure land use terms and would not be considered to be of detriment to the surrounding area, given activities would be concentrated in the building (as would be the case if the building were to continue in office use). It would bring members of the public to Winnersh Fields that are not attending in connection with employment, however their

general movements into and out of the building are comparable to the existing situation and character of the Winnersh Fields area. It is appreciated that higher numbers of movements may be occurring, and this will be assessed within the Highways section of the report. Activities at the proposed centre would be restricted to inside use only so as to not erode the surrounding professional/office environment and result in undue disturbance.

As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of policy CP3 owing to the proposal not resulting in any external alterations, and given the proposed activity is compatible with immediate surroundings.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that proposals should not result in detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life. Policy CC06 of the MDD states that Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed noise impacts to protect noise sensitive receptors (both existing and proposed) from noise impacts.

The immediate neighbouring buildings are in an office use. To the rear of the site is a building used by Stablecroft Care Services on Greenacres Lane. The closest residential properties are located approx. 100m to the rear of the site at Greenacres Avenue. The surrounding area is considered to be primarily commercial as opposed to residential.

The proposal will not result in any external alterations and therefore will not result in any overlooking or overbearing impacts or loss of light to neighbouring sites.

In terms of noise and disturbance, the application form states that the building in its proposed use would be open between the hours of 07:00 – 23:00 each day. This would be conditioned. The applicant has stated that the centre would primarily be busy during early morning and late evening.

The applicant has confirmed that there would be no music or amplified sound within the centre. The call of prayer is usually carried within the prayer hall at least 15 minutes before the prayer time and lasts less than 3 minutes, and this would not be amplified via any sort of sound equipment. It would be conditioned that no music or amplified sound be used within the building at any time. No objection was raised by the WBC Environmental Health team regarding noise pollution (or any other form of pollution) from the development on a regular day. However, it is acknowledged that temporary events and special occasions that can generate additional noise, especially if any live music is performed. The Council have a system for licensing of temporary events that falls outside of the planning process.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that:

- Improve the existing infrastructure network, including road, rail and public transport, enhance facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, including provision for those with reduced mobility, and other users;
- Provide appropriate vehicular parking, having regard to car ownership;

- Mitigate any adverse effects upon the local and strategic transport network that rise from the development proposed;
- Enhance road safety; and
- Do not cause highway problems or lead to traffic related environmental problems.

Policy CC07 of the Managing Development Delivery Local plan (MDDLDP) also states that planning permission will only be granted where the proposal demonstrates the following:

- How the proposed parking provision meets the standards set out in Appendix 2 of the MDDLDP
- That the new scheme retains an appropriate overall level of off-street parking.

The proposal has been assessed by WBC Highways.

A Transport Scoping Note (TSN) is submitted in support of this proposal, However, in view of the nature of a full planning application, the Highways expect to review a Transport Statement which shall include an assessment on traffic impacts and Parking Management Plan.

Site Sustainability

Sustainability assessment has been provided within the TSN, which is welcomed. As the site has good access to well-lit and paved pedestrian and cyclist network, and is benefitted from the regular bus services circa 400m walking distance and regular train services within 600m throughout the week, the site is acceptable in terms of access to sustainable modes of travel.

Traffic Impacts

The event details of proposed site are provided. However, those details have only been considered for parking demand, without assessing the traffic impacts induced from the proposal.

The application form has stated that the site will open from 7am to 11pm daily. The applicant has not provided details on staff numbers and shift patterns or clarified the details of general operations other than the scheduled events.

In section 3.2 of the TSN, the applicant suggests that the proposal will be the service relocation from Winnersh Community Centre, which is circa 3km from the proposed site. If the site intends to serve the same community, it is unreasonable to consider majority of trips as part of a local linked trip of current traffic needs and can be carried out through walking.

Access

WBC Highways have no objection to the retainment of existing access of the site. It is acknowledged that the site has a barrier.

Parking

The applicant proposes to utilise the 14 no. of existing allocated parking. The TSN has assessed the parking accumulation based on TRICS. As the site is a relocation

of existing service, the applicant is required to refer to the parking demand of current community services and adjust the parking demand after considering the traffic impacts.

Meanwhile, Ramadan prayer can end late at 9pm in winter and 11pm in summer, whereas the Sundays' bus services have ended before the events. The applicant is required to assess the parking demand of the proposal with reference to the current operations at Winnersh Community Centre.

The applicant also suggests that many attendees opt for online classes, which reduces the numbers of attendees on-site. Unless justification can be provided, the proposal shall be assessed based on the business lifespan and assess the maximum demand of parking based on the maximum design capacity of attendees.

With some of the spaces to be occupied by staff, the estimation of less than 20% site users will drive appear to be very optimistic and impractical.

As there are regular events for up to 70 attendees, the Highways concern about the potential displacement of parking onto public highways, Gazelle Close in particular, due to shortage of on-site parking.

A Parking Management Plan is required to ensure no disturbance to the neighbouring business units and public highways. Whenever applicable, mitigation measures such as funding of TRO shall be proposed.

Cycle Provisions

According to the WBC Parking Standards, one short-term cycle parking allocation will be required per 15 per period visitors and one long-term allocation will be required per 5 staff. This has to be indicated on the site plan.

Summary on Highway Matters

Overall, insufficient information has been submitted with the planning application to positively determine the highways and traffic implications of the proposed development.

The application is supported by a Transport Scoping Note which identifies the site is accessible by a range of transport modes, but some services are not available during the operating periods of the proposed use, adding to the parking demands that are insufficient to meet the needs of the proposed use. In the absence of surveys, details of general operations, forecast parking demands and a parking management plan, it is not possible to judge the cumulative residual effects of parking in the surrounding area can be effectively managed to preserve road safety and amenity.

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that *“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.”* Under this application, has not been possible to conclude that there would not be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or residual cumulative impacts on the road network. Accordingly, the proposal is justified to be refused on highway grounds in line with paragraph 116 of the NPPF.

The proposals are therefore considered to be Contrary to Core Strategy Policies CP3, CP6, Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07 and paragraphs 115 & 116 of the NPPF.

Waste Provision:

Policy CC04 states that All development, including conversions, alterations and extensions shall incorporate suitable waste management facilities, including on-site recycling.

The site as existing contains a bin store, these existing waste arrangements are set to continue and the bin store is included on the proposed plans. In the absence of contrary comments from the WBC Cleaner and Greener team, this is deemed acceptable.

Flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD states that All sources of flood risk, including historic flooding, must be taken into account at all stages and to the appropriate degree at all levels in the planning application process to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding. Development proposals in Flood Zones 2 or 3 must take into account the vulnerability of proposed development. Development must be guided to areas of lowest flood risk by applying the sequential approach taking into account flooding from all sources and shall ensure flood risk is not worsened for the application site and elsewhere, and ideally that betterment of existing conditions is achieved.

The application site is located within Flood Zone 3a which is the zone most susceptible to flooding. Development in flood zone 3 is therefore subject to the sequential test (aimed to guide development towards areas with less probability of flooding) and exception test, unless exempt. The exception test is carried out if the sequential test is satisfied and would have to demonstrate that the wider sustainability benefits to the community outweigh flood risk and that the development will be safe for its lifetime.

Annex 3 of the NPPF classifies buildings into vulnerability classification. The existing office use is classified as a 'less vulnerable' development. The proposal would result in a use that falls into a 'More vulnerable' category. As such, the vulnerability classification would be increasing. All development in flood zone 3 is subject to the sequential test, which aims to guide development to an area of lower flood risk. Should Table 2 of the PPG states that 'More vulnerable' development in flood zone 3a is subject to the exception test. However, paragraph 176 of the NPPF states:

Applications for some minor development and changes of use should also not be subject to the sequential test, nor the exception test set out below, but should still meet the requirements for site-specific flood risk assessments set out in footnote 63.

Footnote 62 of the NPPF clarifies that proposals for changes of use do not need to be subject to the sequential and exception test, unless the change of use relates to a caravan, camping or chalet site, or to a mobile home or park. This is not the case here. As such, the sequential and exception test are not required, however a site specific flood risk assessment is still required (for all proposals in flood zone 3).

The Council's Flood Risk and Drainage Officer has reviewed the proposal and the submitted flood risk assessment. The Environment Agency were also consulted but have provided no response. The WBC Officer noted that the FRA report identifies that

the site falls within an Environment Agency flood alert area and recommends in section 9.3 that a flood warning and evacuation plan be established to demonstrate how action will be taken to get people to safety following the evacuation route in section 8.7. Subject to a condition requiring a flood warning and evacuation plan being submitted to and approved by the Council, the WBC Flood Risk and Drainage Officer raised no objection to the proposal.

Given the proposal will not result in any built development or greater extent of impermeable land, there would not be any additional implications in terms of surface water drainage or connections to drainage systems. Concern was raised over the greater intensity of the use of the building putting additional pressure on the drainage system, however due to the nature of the proposal being a change of use, there was not sufficient justification to request further drainage details given that the internal facilities are remaining as is with no new drainage connections.

The Natural Environment (Trees, Landscaping and Ecology):

Policy CP7 states that sites designated as of importance for nature conservation at an international or national level will be conserved and enhanced and inappropriate development will be resisted. Policy TB23 states that development will only be granted that complies with policy CP7 and that they incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing. Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation and promote ecology permeability.

Policy CC03 states that development should protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features e) Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.

The site has limited vegetation but is identified as being within a red zone for Great Crest Newts. This is the zone which is a highly suitable habitat for Great Crested Newts. It is also located in a potential bat roosting area.

As the proposal is purely for the change of use of the building, the proposal will not result in any loss of landscaping or ecology. As such, it is also not proportional to require any additional landscaping or ecological enhancements given the proposal not resulting in any new built form or physical alterations. It would also not result in harm to protected species, such as Great Crested Newts, as no new physical development is being carried out. Furthermore, bats should not be adversely affected as the proposal does not result in any demolition or modification of the roof. No ecological appraisals are therefore required.

As the proposal is purely for a change of use, it is also exempt from providing 10% mandatory net gain on site on the grounds the proposal meets the 'de minimus' threshold.

Summary/ Planning Balance

The significant number of comments from third party respondents are noted (both in support and objection of the proposal). There are notable benefits of the scheme, namely the provision of a community facility. Whilst there were identified shortfalls in the level of information submitted to justify the loss of the existing office building, on

balance, this loss was still considered acceptable when balanced against local and national policies. The proposal was also found to not result in substantial harm in relation to a number of material considerations, subject to conditions. However, the level of information submitted in respect of Highways implications was unsatisfactory and Officers were not able to fully assess the implications on the existing highway. Given this could therefore result in adverse highway safety for the wider highway network, this is considered to outweigh the benefits of the proposal. A refusal on highway grounds is justified by paragraph 116 of the NNPF, as discussed earlier in this report.

The recommendation is therefore to refuse the application.

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, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. 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:

Refuse for the following reason:

1. *The applicant has failed to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in adverse highways and traffic implications. The application is supported by a Transport Scoping Note which identifies the site is accessible by a range of transport modes, but some services are not available during the operating periods of the proposed use, adding to the parking demands that are insufficient to meet the needs of the proposed use. In the absence of surveys, details of general operations, forecast parking demands and a parking management plan, it is not possible to judge the cumulative residual effects of parking in the surrounding area can be effectively managed to preserve road safety and amenity. The proposal is therefore considered to be Contrary to Core Strategy Policies CP3, CP6, Managing Development Delivery*

	<i>Local Plan policy CC07 and paragraphs 115 & 116 of the NPPF.</i>
Date:	22 April 2025
Earliest date for decision:	2 April 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	22/04/25