

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	260401
Site Address:	Land to the south of 38 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40 2NN
Expiry Date:	29 May 2026
Site Visit Date:	18 March 2026
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 1 no. detached dwelling with associated parking, landscaping and drainage infrastructure.	

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 CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP13 – Town Centres and Shopping CP14 – Growth and Renaissance of Wokingham Town Centre CP17 – Housing Delivery
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB05 – Housing Mix TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB15 – Major Town, and Small Town/District Centre development TB16 – Development for Town Centre Uses TB21 – Landscape Character TB26 – Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM15 - Site History

(JMWP)	
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU) (N.B. the LPU is deemed to overall hold limited weight at this time).	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS3 – Development within or adjacent to major and modest settlements SS10 – Meeting our housing needs CE3 – Environmental standards for residential development C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C3 – Active travel C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging ER6 – Town, district and local centres and shopping parades ER7 – Strengthening the role of centres ER8 – Wokingham town centre H1 – Housing mix, density and standards FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Wokingham Town Centre SPD

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
192977	Prior approval submission for the demolition of former taxi office.	PA not required – 25/11/2019
CLE/2010/0188	Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the existing use or operation for the use of the premises as a taxi office.	Approved – 18/03/2010

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Property Services: No comments received
WBC Environmental Health: No comments received
WBC Drainage: No objection
WBC Highways: No objection
WBC Landscape and Trees: Request further information before determination
WBC CIL: Advice regarding CIL matters

WBC Ecology: No objection subject to conditions
WBC Cleaner and Greener: No comments received

External

Thames Water Utilities Ltd: No comment
South East Water: No comments received
Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks: No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Wokingham Town Council have raised concerns with safe access for construction vehicles during construction. Query whether there would be a construction plan that takes this into consideration.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	Two comments received (not including duplicates) objecting on the following grounds: - Noise and disturbance impact during construction. <i>Officer's Comment: While this could be a material planning consideration, the proposed works are not so significant as to warrant imposition of a Construction Method Statement condition. Any adverse noise/disturbance during the works could be reported to the Council's Environmental Health team.</i> - Access to Nos. 36 & 38 Finchampstead Road during construction may be restricted or required. <i>Officer's Comment: Boundary disputes are not a material planning consideration. This planning consent does not authorise the applicant to access or carry out any works on their neighbour's land or property without first obtaining their consent, or obviate the need for compliance with the requirements of the Party Wall etc Act 1996. An informative is recommended which reminds the applicant of these requirements.</i> - Inaccurate/unclear drawings. <i>Officer's Comment: Officers are satisfied that the submitted plans adequately show the proposed development. See 'Proposal' section of the report below.</i>

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site comprises a vacant, rectangular parcel of land approximately 140sqm in size located towards the southern edge of Wokingham Town Centre. The site was previously occupied by a taxi office building which has been demolished in recent years. The site is flanked by 2.5 storey buildings comprising residential flats, with an electricity sub-station located immediately adjacent to the site's frontage facing Finchampstead Road and it's rear (east facing) boundary adjoining a car park serving the Ascot House development.

The site is located in close proximity to the recent Elms Field and Carnival Pool developments which has introduced denser mixed use development to the south/west of the historic town centre. To the east lies predominantly two storey residential development.

Proposal:

This application proposes the erection of a detached, three storey four bedroom dwellinghouse with associated parking, landscaping and drainage. The proposed dwelling comprises a townhouse style with a pitched gable roof form at a total height of approximately 9.8m with the eaves sitting at 6.3m.

Two parking spaces are provided within the existing car park serving Ascot House to the north-east which is within the applicant's ownership. A small private external amenity space (approx. 21sqm) is proposed alongside a 7.6sqm first floor balcony to the master bedroom.

Principle of Development:

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Act requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the Local Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the Development Plan consists of the Core Strategy (CS) 2010 and Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan 2014. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) must also be considered as it constitutes guidance which the Local Planning Authority must pay regard to; however, it does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making. However, the NPPF is a material consideration in any determination and must be read alongside the Development Plan.

Development Plan

The spatial strategy for the borough is contained within the Core Strategy (CS). Policy CP9 'Scale and location of development proposals' of the Core Strategy relates to the scale and location of development proposals and seeks focus development proposals within those identified major or modest development locations.

CC02 of the MDD Local Plan sets out the development limits for each settlement as defined on the policies map. The site is located within a major development location and as such the principle of development should be acceptable subject to other material considerations.

Emerging 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 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.

The Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan

The Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (Joint Plan) was adopted by Wokingham Borough Council on 19 January 2023. The Joint Plan identifies site allocations and extensions to help provide a future supply of sand and gravel extraction. However, despite these allocations, there remains a shortfall of supply during the plan period. The policy response to address the shortfall is the identification of a 'Minerals Safeguarding Area' (MSA), where Policy M2 of the plan applies, and also an 'Area of Search' where Policy M4 applies. The application site is not located with the MSA and therefore the proposal would not result in impact to minerals.

National Planning Policy Framework:

The NPPF is a material consideration in the decision-making process. The NPPF outlines the Government's planning policy on a national level and highlights sustainable development as the centre of the decision-making process incorporating economic, social and environmental objectives. These three objectives seek to balance growth and local community needs against the protection of the natural, built and historic environment.

Paragraph 12 of the NPPF also states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making.

Housing Land Supply

To achieve sustainable development, the NPPF (February 2025) at paragraph 78 requires LPAs to identify a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than 5 years old. The latest published Five-Year Housing Land Supply Statement (at 31st March 2025) shows the Council is currently only able to demonstrate 2.5 years' worth of deliverable sites. Subsequently, those policies relating specifically to housing development identified above are currently considered

to be out of date. However, this does not mean that they have no weight.

Paragraph 11 states that where policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in the Framework that protect 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, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

Firstly, in considering i), it must be recognised that the proposed site is not located within any protected areas or assets of particular importance (as outlined above and within footnote 7 and paragraph 181 of the NPPF). In considering ii), Officers must assess as part of any forthcoming application whether there are any adverse impacts generated by the development that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF taken as a whole. This is referred to as the 'tilted balance', as harms and benefits are not weighed equally, but tilted according to paragraph 11(d)(ii).

An important underlying reason in the context of Wokingham Borough is the historic oversupply of housing against both the requirement set out in the Core Strategy local plan and the scale of local housing need as calculated by the previous standard method which remains a key contributing factor to the current lack of the required deliverable housing land supply, and this must be considered in the planning balance.

Having established the tilted balance is engaged, paragraph 11(d)(ii) requires the proposal to be considered against the policies of the NPPF taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed place and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination. These key policies, as outlined within footnote 9, will be referred to throughout this report where relevant, with the balance required by paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF given in the 'Planning Balance and Conclusion' section.

Locational Sustainability:

Policies CP1, CP4, CP6, CP9 and CP11 of the CS permit development where it is based on sustainable credentials in terms of access to local facilities and services and the promotion of sustainable transport.

Paragraph 110 of the NPPF, a key policy referred to in paragraph 11(d), states that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health. Paragraph 115 of the NPPF, another key policy referred to

in paragraph 11(d), states that in assessing development, it should be ensured that sustainable transport modes are prioritised, and safe & suitable access can be achieved for all users.

In this instance, the site is located within settlement limits within a major development location and is acceptable in terms of the principles stated in the Core Strategy. It also accords with the relevant policies in the MDD Local Plan. Future occupants would be within walking distance of the services and amenities in Wokingham Town Centre and the surrounding area. In terms of sustainable transport modes, the site is approx. 700m (10 minute walk) from Wokingham Train Station and has good access to the pedestrian and cycle network and buses. On this basis, there are no sustainability concerns with the proposal in terms of accessibility.

Design and Character of the Area:

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy requires developments to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high-quality design. R1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF, a key policy referred to in paragraph 11(d), requires that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping, and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. Paragraph 139, another key policy referred to paragraph 11(d), states that development that is not well designed should be refused.

The site's immediate surroundings are significantly varied comprising a range of residential and mixed-use developments reflective of its edge of town centre location. Mulberry House to the immediate south and Ascot House to the north-west are office to residential conversions ranging from 2-2.5 storey in height from ground level, while Nos. 36-38 Finchampstead Road to the immediate north comprises a relatively recent 2.5 storey (from ground level) development containing 2no. dwellings. A planning application for the proposed erection of a 1.5 storey upwards extension to enlarge Ascot House (ref 242066) has a Committee resolution for approval but is yet to be determined.

Siting and Scale

Policy CP5 of the Core Strategy and Policy TB05 of the MDD Local Plan require an appropriate dwelling density and R10 of the Borough Design Guide SPD seeks to ensure that development achieves an appropriate density in relation to local character.

Paragraph 129 of the NPPF, a key policy referred to in paragraph 11(d), states that development that makes efficient use of land should be supported, taking into account several factors including "(d) the desirability of maintaining an area's

prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens)”.

The proposed dwelling would be sited within an empty plot of land within the street scene, excluding the electricity substation at the front, providing a significant gap between the adjacent buildings. In contrast, the rhythm of gaps between buildings within the surroundings is tighter and more akin to a typical edge-of-town location.

Given the wide variety in scale of neighbouring developments, including the adjacent apartment buildings, the addition of 1no. detached family sized dwelling within the site’s location would have a negligible impact on the density of development within the immediate surroundings.

The proposed development would retain a separation distance of approximately 2.8m with Nos. 36-38 Finchampstead Road adjacent to the north and 1m with Mulberry House adjacent to the south (N.B. Mulberry House sits in very close proximity to the shared boundary). While the proposal would result in a significant change to the site’s relationship with both adjacent buildings, the proposal meets the recommended minimum of 1m for flank to boundary separation distances within the Borough Design Guide SPD, and for the reasons above the proposal would not be uncharacteristic in this respect.

The proposal would sit behind both adjacent buildings and respect the established building line within this section of Finchampstead Road, further mitigating the visual bulk of the scheme. In respect of its height, a 2.5 storey dwelling would not be out of character with the area, and the ridgeline would not sit in line with Nos. 36-38 to the north and set down from Mulberry House as demonstrated in the submitted Street Scene Elevations plan (see extract below):



Overall, for the reasons above it is considered that the proposal would provide a scale and form that would successfully integrate with the surrounding area and constitute an efficient use of vacant land within the site’s edge of town centre location.

Design

While the proposed dwelling’s townhouse form with its front facing gable would not particularly reflect the site’s immediate neighbours, it is in keeping with the overall style of the townhouses, flats and mixed-use buildings within the Elms Field development to the north-west. The appearance of the dwelling would therefore reflect the considerably varied local character and would not be out of keeping.

Notwithstanding, the proposed use of red brick with dark coloured frames and cladding is in keeping with the site’s immediate neighbours, particularly Mulberry House to the south. While the proposed fenestration is more contemporary in form, it

would create a balanced frontage and would not be out of keeping with similar examples within the surrounding area. The proposal would therefore not introduce an incongruous element to the street scene.

Overall, the proposed dwelling would preserve the mixed character and appearance of the area and would not introduce any adverse harm to the townscape. The proposal therefore reflects the aims of the NPPF, policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy and the Borough Design Guide SPD and is acceptable in this regard.

Dwelling Mix:

Paragraph 129 of the NPPF, a key policy referred to in paragraph 11(d), states that LPAs should support development that makes sufficient use of land, taking into account factors including: *“(a) the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it”*.

Policy CP5 of the Core Strategy requires an appropriate mix of dwelling types, tenures and sizes so that the housing needs of the community are met. Policy TB05 of the MDD Local Plan requires an appropriate housing mix which reflects a balance between the underlying character of the area and both the current and projected needs of households. The Council’s most up-to-date Local Housing Needs Assessment shows a continued priority need for 3 bed unit market housing, with 82.2% of all dwellings to be 3+ bedrooms.

The intent of Council’s policies is to provide a mix of accommodation to cater for the varied needs of the community and to ensure that it is provided where it is needed. It must take account of a variety of living arrangements including but not limited to families, extended families, couples, single parents, first homeowners, aged residents (including those looking to downsize) and those on low income. Provision of affordable housing is also paramount.

In this case, the proposal would create 1no. four bed dwelling which reflects the priority need for family sized dwellings within the borough and is in keeping with the varied housing mix within the site’s edge of town centre location. The proposal is therefore acceptable in this regard.

Housing Amenity:

Internal Amenity

Policy TB07 of the MDD Local Plan and R17 of the SPD require adequate internal space to ensure the layout and size achieves good internal amenity. R18 of the SPD requires sufficient sunlight and daylight to new properties, with dwellings afforded a reasonable dual outlook and southern aspect.

Based on the submitted plans, the proposed dwelling would have a gross internal area of approximately 131m², meeting the nationally described space standard for a 4 bed, 8 person, three storey dwelling (130m²). Each bedroom exceeds the national standard for a double (11.5m²) and an appropriate level of floorspace for living and

storage is proposed. The fenestration proposed on all elevations would ensure that suitable levels of daylight and sunlight are achieved within habitable rooms of the dwelling.

External Amenity

Policy TB08 of the MDD and R16 of the Borough Design Guide states that new housing must provide easy access to some form of amenity space. R16 of the SPD recommends a minimum depth of 11m for rear gardens and a 1m setback from the site boundary to allow access thereto. It should receive direct sunlight and be capable of accommodating play, clothes drying and storage.

The proposal comprises a rear patio area in addition to the first floor balcony, totalling circa. 27m² of private external amenity space for future residents. While this is fairly modest, it is not uncharacteristic within the site's location and future occupants would have easy access to public open space including Elms Field located approximately 190m (less than five minutes walk) to the north-west. On balance, it is considered that the proposed external space would provide a satisfactory living environment for future occupiers of the development.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Overlooking: The proposed dwelling would not have a traditional back-to-back relationship with any neighbouring properties to the rear (east), and the main outlook to the front and rear would have an oblique outlook of the neighbourhood rather than direct views into neighbouring private amenity space. All proposed fenestration on the side (flank) elevations at first floor level or above would serve non-habitable rooms or be fixed shut, preventing any potential direct overlooking into the adjacent flats.

While the proposed first floor balcony could give rise to a greater perception of overlooking due to its use as external amenity space, in this case it is limited in size and would not directly face the primary elevations or private garden areas of any neighbouring dwellings. Officers have considered whether a condition requiring privacy screening would be necessary. However, given the balcony's limited size, its orientation towards non-habitable accommodation and a car park, and the absence of any primary windows or private amenity space within its outlook, such a condition would not meet the tests of necessity or proportionality.

Loss of Light: A site visit confirmed that there are no side-facing windows on either adjacent building directly facing the application site. The site history for Nos. 36-238 Finchampstead Road adjacent confirms that the rear (east) elevation of this neighbour comprises secondary windows serving non-habitable rooms only, therefore there would be no adverse loss of light impact on this neighbour.

The proposed dwelling would sit approximately 1m. from the side (flank) elevation of Mulberry House adjacent to the south and encroach its rear building line. Measurements taken on the submitted plans indicate that the proposal would comply with the 45 degree test (horizontal) from the closest primary window to the rear under BRE guidance, providing a rule-of-thumb indication that the proposal would not result in an unacceptable loss of daylight to this window. The 45-degree test is not a policy

requirement but is a commonly applied tool used to inform planning judgement on daylight impacts. The proposal would therefore not result in the adverse overshadowing of primary windows and complies with the BRE Guidance and the Borough Design Guide in this respect.

Overbearing: While the dwelling would be positioned relatively close to side boundaries, its overall height, massing and domestic form are not excessive when viewed in the context of surrounding development, which includes buildings of greater scale and bulk. The proposal would not introduce an uncharacteristically tall or visually dominant form, nor would it present a continuous or oppressive built frontage when viewed from neighbouring properties.

Overall, any potential impact on neighbouring amenity in respect of overlooking, overshadowing, or overbearing impact would be sufficiently mitigated, preventing any adverse harm as a result of the development. The proposal complies with Core Strategy policy CP3 in this respect.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

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.

Core Strategy policy CP6 concerns issues relating to highway safety and access, stating that planning permission will be granted for schemes that, amongst other requirements, provide appropriate vehicular parking, enhance road safety and do not cause highway problems. Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD Local Plan set out the recommended minimum parking requirements for development proposals.

The proposal would utilise the existing vehicular access off Kendrick Close which serves the adjoining Ascot House development (within the applicant's ownership). Two parking spaces are allocated within the existing private parking area, which is proposed to be amended under application ref 242066. The Council's Highways Officer has raised no objection to this arrangement and concludes that there would negligible traffic impacts arising from the proposal.

In line with policy CC07 and the latest Building Regulations, acceptable provision of cycle parking facilities and an EV charging point are proposed to further encourage sustainable transport modes. Finchampstead Road is double yellow lined meaning that any construction traffic/deliveries would have to access the site to the rear. Given that this area falls within the applicant's ownership, and the relatively small scale of the development, a Construction Method Statement has not been requested in this instance. Given the limited scale of the development, any construction impacts would be short-term and typical of residential development within an urban area.

Overall, no adverse highway safety impacts have been identified and the proposal complies with the aforementioned policies.

Flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of flood risk from historic flooding and policy CC10 requires sustainable drainage methods and the minimisation of surface water flow. The site and access thereto is located within Flood Zone 1 and the proposal represents no additional fluvial flood risk or vulnerability. In principle, the proposal is therefore acceptable in terms of Policy CC09.

A SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage System) Report (Nimbus, June 2024) has been submitted in support of the application. The Council's Drainage & Flood Risk Officer has reviewed the proposal and raised no objection, noting that the proposed strategy including rainwater harvesting, permeable surfacing and below-ground attenuation with restricted discharge, is proportionate for the scale of development proposed. The proposal therefore complies with policy CC10.

Landscape and Trees:

Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan aims to protect green infrastructure networks, promote linkages between public open space and the countryside, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping. Policy TB21 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of the landscape character. R14 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires well-designed hard and soft landscaping that complements housing.

Finchampstead Road is a designated Green Route under policy CC03 and while the site's boundaries do not directly abut the highway, the proposed development would clearly be visible and impact upon the Green Route designation. A Arboricultural Impact Assessment (Lizard Landscape Design and Ecology, September 2024) has been submitted in support of the application which confirms that impact would be limited to the trimming of vegetation to the rear of the site, outside of the red line boundary, to facilitate the proposed development. The Council's Senior Landscape Officer has raised no objection to these works.

As noted by the Council's Senior Landscape Officer, there is very little space within the site's frontage to facilitate new planting due to the relationship with the adjoining electricity sub-station. Nonetheless, in accordance with policy CC03 landscaping should be incorporated into the design of the proposal. On this basis, the applicant has agreed to include a climber plant on the site's northern boundary which would help soften the building's flank façade and incorporate landscaping into the design.

Given the site's constraints and urban context, this is considered to be an acceptable compromise, and the proposal would achieve compliance with the aforementioned policies. Details of the proposed climber are secured by condition.

Ecology:

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF is clear that new development should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by minimising impact on and providing net gains for biodiversity and Paragraph 193 states that planning permission should be refused if significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated or compensated for. Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan requires the incorporation of

new biodiversity features, buffers between habitats and species of importance and integration with the wider green infrastructure network.

Protected and Priority Species:

The Council's Ecology Officer has reviewed the proposal and notes that the site overall is of relatively ecological value due to the presence of solely hardstanding and vacant, derelict land in poor condition. However, the site is in close proximity to potential suitable habitat roosting features previously identified by the Council, and the vegetation to the rear may offer limited ecological value.

The Ecology Officer subsequently concludes that there would be no impact on protected or priority species during and following the development, subject to any vegetation clearance being taken outside of the bird nesting season (March to August) and a sensitively designed external lighting scheme. These are secured via conditions. A separate biodiversity enhancements condition, to include at least 1no. integrate bat and bird box, has also been agreed with the applicant to ensure compliance with the NPPF and MDD Local Plan policy TB23.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

BNG is now mandatory for major and minor planning applications unless the proposed development meets the exception criteria set out in paragraph 17 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 and The Environment Act 2021 (Commencement No. 8 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024. The proposal does not meet the exception criteria and is subsequently required to demonstrate that there would a BNG of 10% or more following the development.

The statutory framework for BNG involves the discharge of the statutory biodiversity gain condition following the grant of planning permission and prior to commencement of the development. The relevant Planning Practice Guidance states that prior to the determination of an application the LPA must be confident that the statutory condition is capable of being discharged, however full detail does not need to be submitted to the LPA prior to determination.

A BNG metric has been submitted which concludes that the development would result in a 78.15% net habitat unit loss without proper mitigation/compensation. The habitat baseline has been agreed by the Ecology Officer. The applicant has indicated that the required unit creation will be achieved via the purchase of off-site habitat units, the Officer has raised no objection to this in principle. Full detail will be provided when discharging the statutory condition.

Taking into consideration the information submitted in support of this application, including the indicative proposals, the Ecology Officer has advised they are confident that the statutory condition is capable of being discharged and no further information is required prior to the determination of the application.

Subject to the submission of, and agreement to, the statutory biodiversity gain plan,

the LPA can be satisfied that the proposed development would comply with the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement.

Building Sustainability:

Policy CC04 of the MDD Local Plan and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD require sustainable design and conservation and R21 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that new development contribute to environmental sustainability and the mitigation of climate change.

It should be noted that the above policy (CC04) is out of date and written before the Council's declared Climate Emergency. For this reason, the Council produced a Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement (CCIPPS) (2022) which outlines what is expected of development proposals in light of the climate emergency. In relation to policy requirements outlined in CC04, it should be noted that the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 has now been withdrawn, and now applicants must meet the interim Future Homes Standard (as required by Building Regulations) of a minimum 31% reduction in emissions, in line with the CCIPPS.

As discussed in the 'Flooding and Drainage' section of the report, SuDS have been incorporated into the design of the proposal which would contribute to environmental sustainability and the mitigation of climate change. However, except for an EV charging point, no further environmental sustainability measures such as renewable energy generations have been proposed at this stage. To ensure that the development meets the interim Future Homes Standard a condition is recommended to ensure that no dwelling is occupied until compliance has been confirmed by an accredited assessor.

Planning Balance and Conclusion:

The starting point for decision making is the development plan. However, as set out in the Principle of Development section of this response, paragraph 11d(ii) of the NPPF is engaged and this also requires the proposal to be considered against the policies of the NPPF taken as a whole. The tilted balance does not however remove the primacy of the development plan.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out that achieving sustainable development means that development should satisfy three overarching objectives in relation to economic, social and environmental benefits.

Economically the proposed development would enable job creation during the construction period although this would be very limited and temporary in its extent given the scale of the scheme. The development would add an additional dwelling within settlement and in a sustainable location. There would also be contribution to the local economy with consumer spending on goods and services within the immediate and wider area, alongside some indirect benefit arising from the payment of Council tax and other spending. Notwithstanding, these benefits combined can reasonably be considered to fulfil a moderate positive economic role.

Regarding the **social** role the development would perform, the provision of an

additional family sized dwelling would not make a significant contribution to the Council's housing land supply position. However, the development would contribute towards an appropriate housing mix which reflects the varied needs of the community. Therefore, this is also given moderate positive weight in the planning balance.

Environmentally, the proposal would re-develop a vacant piece of land within a sustainable location with good access to all sustainable transport modes. No adverse impact on biodiversity has been identified and the proposal would be required to compensate for the loss of on-site habitat units and provide a 10% net gain of units through off-site enhancements. Furthermore, the proposal could reasonably be expected to demonstrate a degree of inherent sustainability through compliance with current local plan energy efficiency objectives and up to date Building Regulations standards. All these benefits combined can reasonably be considered to fulfil a positive environmental role, although this is afforded limited weight due to the scale of the proposal.

The proposal is acceptable in principle, with no adverse impact identified in relation to any material planning considerations including local character, neighbouring amenity, highway safety, drainage and environmental matters.

Overall, when applying weight to the economic, social and environmental benefits of the scheme, no adverse harm has been identified which would significantly and adversely outweigh the identified benefits as required by paragraph 11 of the NPPF. Therefore, the proposal is recommended for **approval** subject to conditions.

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

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

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	27 May 2026

Earliest date for decision:	30 March 2026
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	27/05/26

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

- *Major Development Location – Wokingham*
- *Retail Centre – Wokingham Town Centre*
- *Thames Basin Heath SPA Mitigation Zone – 7km Linear Mitigation Zone*
- *Green Route Enhancement Area*
- *Bat Roost Habitat Suitability Area*
- *Potentially Contaminated Land Consultation Zone*
- *Landscape Character Assessment Area – Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland*