



Thames Valley Park Data Centre

Planning Statement

Arup | On Behalf of FH Trustees
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1. Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared by Ove Arup & Partners (Arup) and has been commissioned by BCS Consultancy Ltd, on behalf of FH Trustees¹ (the Applicant). This report supports an outline planning application submitted to Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) in relation to the following Proposed Development, at **Microsoft Campus, Thames Valley Park, Reading, RG6 1WG** (the Site).

Outline planning application (all matters reserved except for Access) for demolition of existing buildings and the construction of a data centre (Use Class B8), fuel cells for energy generation, ancillary office space and associated plant, drainage, backup power generation, sub-station, car parking, landscaping, engineering works and formation of and alterations to access roads.

We are seeking outline planning permission for the construction of a 72MW IT data centre to provide a viable long-term future for the existing underused office campus, responding to falling demand for office space while supporting the area's business cluster and strengthening its economic future.

1.1 Environmental Impact Assessment

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken for the proposed development in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the 'EIA Regulations').

The Applicant elected to proceed directly to the preparation and submission of an Environmental Statement (ES) to accompany the planning application, without seeking a formal Screening Opinion from the Local Planning Authority. The EIA Regulations do not require either a Screening Opinion or Scoping Opinion to be obtained prior to the submission of an ES, and applicants may choose to undertake a voluntary EIA where they consider it appropriate to do so. The EIA has focused on those matters with the potential to give rise to likely significant environmental effects. Matters scoped out of the EIA are, where relevant, addressed through the other technical documents submitted with the planning application.

The ES has been prepared to support the planning application and identifies and assesses the likely significant environmental effects of the Proposed Development. It sets out appropriate mitigation measures where required and has been structured in accordance with the requirements of the EIA Regulations. The scope of the assessment has been informed by the nature, scale and characteristics of the Proposed Development and the environmental sensitivities of the Site and its surroundings.

1.2 Accompanying documents

This Planning Statement outlines the proposed development and sets it within the context of the applicable planning policy framework. It should be read alongside the submitted plans, drawings, and the full suite of technical reports that collectively address all relevant material planning considerations, as detailed below in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 1. Submitted Documents

Document Name	Prepared By
Application Form & Ownership certificates	Arup
CIL Additional Information Form	Arup
Design and Access Statement	Twelve Architects
Planning Statement	Arup

¹ FH Trustees and FH Trustees 2 as trustees of the Mapeley Beta HL Unit Trust

Document Name	Prepared By
Statement of Community Involvement	Alpaca Communications
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Great Crested Newt eDNA Surveys	Tyrens Hilson Moran
Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment	Tyrens Hilson Moran
Landscape and Visual Appraisal	Arup
Economic Benefits Statement	Arup
Desk Based Heritage Assessment	Prospect Archaeology
Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy	Arup
Arboricultural Impact Assessment	CBA Trees
Utilities Statement	Tyrens Hilson Moran
Phase II Site Investigation Report (Geotechnical & Contamination)	Onyx
External Lighting Strategy	Lumenata
Energy & Sustainability Statement	Tyrens Hilson Moran
Energy Strategy Report	Tyrens Hilson Moran
BREEAM Pre-Assessment Report	Tyrens Hilson Moran
Transport Assessment & Travel Plan	SK Transport Planning
Environmental Impact Assessment - Air Quality - Noise - Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas (Operational Energy Assessment / Embodied Carbon Assessment) - Water Resources - Waste	Tyrens Hilson Moran

Table 2. Drawings List

Drawing Description	Drawing Reference Number
Location Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-EX-0000-R2-02
Existing Site Block Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-EX-0001-R2-02
Existing Building Elevations	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-EX-0400-R2-02
Demolition Site Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-DM-0000-R2-02
Parameter Ground Floor Levels	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-PP-0001-R2-03
Parameter Building Heights Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-PP-0002-R2-03

Drawing Description	Drawing Reference Number
Parameter Development Zone	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-PP-0003-R2-03
Parameter Ground Floor Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-PP-0100-R2-03
Parameter First Floor Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-PP-0101-R2-03
Parameter Second Floor Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-PP-0102-R2-03
Parameter Roof Level Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-PP-0103-R2-03
Parameter Typical Sections	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-PP-0300-R2-02

Table 3. Illustrative Drawings List

Drawing Description	Drawing Reference Number
Illustrative Site Proposal Drawings	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-IP-0000-R2-03
Site Plans (33kV Substation)	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-IP-0001-R2-03
Site Plans (132kV Substation)	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-IP-0002-R2-03
Illustrative Ground Floor Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-IP-0100-R2-03
Illustrative First Floor Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-IP-0101-R2-03
Illustrative Second Floor Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-IP-0102-R2-03
Illustrative Roof Plan	259904-12A-AR-DR-PL-IP-0103-R2-03

1.3 Purpose and Structure

The purpose of this Planning Statement is to assess the Proposed Development against the development plan as well as other material considerations, including national planning policy, relevant published guidance and legislation. It provides an overview of the site and the relevant planning policy context. In particular, this document identifies and describes the key opportunities presented by the Proposed Development at the Thames Valley Park site.

The Statement is structured as follows:

1. Section 2 describes the application site, surrounding area, and provides a summary of the planning history;
2. Section 3 provides some context to data centres;
3. Section 4 provides a summary of the proposal;
4. Section 5 sets out the form of the Outline Application;
5. Section 6 sets out the consultation process which the Applicant has undertaken and which has informed the proposal submitted for pre-application discussion;
6. Section 7 provides an overview of planning policy relevant to the proposal;
7. Section 8 assesses the Proposed Development against the relevant planning policies and guidance set out in Section 7;
8. Section 9 provides a conclusion to the Statement.

This **Planning Statement** should be read in conjunction with the application drawings and other supporting documentation, as set out in Table 1-3 above.

2. Background

2.1 The Site

The site, located at Thames Valley Park, Thames Valley Park Drive, Sonning, Reading RG6 1RB, extends to approximately 5.4 hectares within the established Thames Valley Business Park. It occupies a strategic position on the eastern edge of Reading, benefiting from strong transport links via the A329(M), M4 corridor, and nearby rail connections. The surrounding context comprises commercial offices to the north-east and west, with the River Thames and Caversham Lakes situated further north. Immediately south of the site is the Great Western railway line, and beyond the railway is a residential area and the Reading substation. East of the site is an open, unvegetated area used for agricultural purposes (Sonning Meadows) and residential areas further afield.

Topographically, the site is generally level, but rising to an embankment at its southern edge. The southern and western boundaries of the site contain a high pressure gas main and its related exclusion zones. There are no public rights of way (PRoW) within or adjoining the site and access is obtained via the Thames Valley Park private estate road. The location is within an established employment area supporting the principle of redevelopment for economic purposes. The location of the site is shown in Figure 1.

No statutory or non-statutory ecological designations are located within the Site. The ecological desk study identified a number of designated sites and habitats within the wider study area, including Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Wildlife Sites, ancient woodland and priority habitats. Ecological value within and around the Site is principally associated with the perimeter woodland, mature trees, hedgerows and other landscaped habitats, together with the River Thames corridor and Thames Valley Park Nature Reserve. The Site is not located within a Conservation Area and there are no listed buildings within the Site. The closest Conservation Area is Sonning Conservation Area, located approximately 1.5 km north-east of the Site.

Figure 1. Site location



2.2 Existing Use

The Site currently contains three office buildings formerly occupied by Microsoft as part of their long-established presence at Thames Valley Park. Microsoft have already vacated two of the three buildings, and while they retain a lease on the remaining building until December 2027, they are not fully occupying it. Microsoft has confirmed that they do not intend to remain on the campus and will vacate entirely at the expiry of their lease in December 2027. The total existing office floorspace is 22,867 sq m.

We understand that Microsoft is currently under offer for alternative accommodation within the adjacent *Here* building (c. 73,500 sq ft). This represents a significant reduction from their historic occupation of approximately 246,200 sq ft across the three Campus buildings. Their move would see Microsoft occupying less than one-third of their previous footprint, reflecting a wider strategic shift towards smaller, more centralised office locations. Industry feedback suggests that this is driven by strong employee preference for city-centre offices over out-of-town business parks such as Thames Valley Park.

2.3 Existing Business Park Market Conditions

Thames Valley Park is a multi-ownership business park. Such ownership structures can hinder strategic investment, coordinated enhancement and long-term estate management. Consequently, business parks of this nature often age quickly and become less competitive relative to single-ownership estates, where investment decisions are streamlined and improvements can be delivered consistently.

These challenges are reflected in the wider office market performance in the Reading Fringe area. According to CoStar data, there is approximately 895,227 sq ft of office space currently vacant in the Reading Fringe. Vacancy levels have increased consistently since 2004 and now stand at 17.1%, materially above the long-term average of 12.74%. Market absorption is negative (-17,868 sq ft year-to-date), indicating that more space is becoming available than is being taken up by occupiers. On average, it now takes 59.4 months to let an office building in this market.

Given high construction costs, limited occupier demand for out-of-town office accommodation, weak rental growth, and elevated investor yield expectations, the development of new office space within business parks

has generally become unviable. These structural market conditions justify the need to consider alternative employment-generating uses on sites such as is now proposed.

2.4 Planning History

We understand that the primary planning history for the site comprises that set out in the table below.

Table 4. Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision
28578	(A) Outline Application for business park. Information age project, hotel and local centre; (B) Full application for country park associated roads and engineering operation all at North Earley comprising former power station and adjoining land. This application was for the Thames Valley Business Park.	22/11/88
R/1995/63132	Development comprising the erection of 3 buildings containing 25,895 sqm of business floorspace (B1) with estate roads and amenity space	March 1996

3. Data Centres

Data centres are at the core of cloud computing and comprise a network of remote servers hosted to store, manage and process data in place of local servers and personal computers. Organisations of every type, size, and industry are using the cloud, and data centres are a key component of a modern economy and society. They enable business and consumer technologies which have become a key part of our daily lives – helping us connect, communicate, discover, work and learn with increasing ease and efficiency. This has never been truer than throughout the COVID-19 pandemic when data centres have enabled us to learn, work and stay connected.

The strategic importance of data centre infrastructure provision is recognised in the UK Government’s policy paper ‘National Data Strategy’ stating “We are currently in the middle of a fourth industrial revolution. Technological innovation has transformed our lives, changing the way we live, work and play. At the same time, this innovation has brought with it an exponential growth in data: in its generation and use, and in the world’s increasing reliance upon it”.

The UK Government’s policy paper ‘UK Digital Strategy’ underpins the importance of data centres. One of the seven strands of the UK Digital Strategy is “Building world-class digital infrastructure for the UK” which states: “For businesses to thrive and grow, government needs to create the conditions and set the framework for investment in widespread and up-to-date infrastructure. Digital infrastructure is a critical component of this”.

Over recent years, a wide variety of service providers, including the Operator, have begun offering IT infrastructure services – now commonly known as ‘cloud computing’. At the core of cloud computing are Data Centres which comprise networks of remote servers hosted to store, manage, and process data in place of local servers and personal computers.

The proposed Data Centre will support the provision of cloud computing services. Cloud computing is the on-demand delivery of IT resources over the Internet with pay-as-you-go pricing. Instead of buying, owning, and maintaining physical data centres and servers, organisations can access technology services, such as computing power, storage, and databases, on an as-needed basis from a cloud providers such as the Operator of the proposed facilities.

Organisations of every type, size, and industry are using the cloud for a wide variety of use cases, such as data backup, disaster recovery, email, virtual desktops, software development and testing, big data analytics,

and customer-facing web applications. Cloud computing offers significant advantages to organisations over traditional in-house (on premises) data storage systems. The primary advantages are:

- Higher reliability and redundancy of systems;
- 24/7 monitoring and maintenance of storage by staff;
- Higher security and data protection;
- Flexibility & Lower Cost – ability to increase or decrease storage requirements at short notice in line with specific business needs; and
- Increased energy efficiency over on-premises data centres; attributable to the combination of a more energy efficient server population and much higher server utilisation.

Data centres are crucially important drivers to the growth of the digital and national economy. They are essential to realising national economic policy that seeks to put the UK at the forefront of data revolution and development of the data economy. The Government's Industrial Strategy identifies four "Grand Challenges" and one of these is to "put the UK at the forefront of the artificial intelligence revolution". Where there is a need to store and process data, then data centres are required, and the whole of the Industrial Strategy envisages a data-heavy economy.

Furthering this, a report by Intellect comments that 'Data should be regarded as one of the key utilities of the 21st century, along with energy and water. In the same way that governments prioritise the efficiency and security of their energy supply and distribution, they must recognise in data centres a key technology, resource and skill set that should be retained within national and economic borders. All high-tech manufacturing and knowledge economies are especially dependent upon ICT and on data centres in particular'.

Data Centres do not grow in isolation. A single data centre can provide the IT function for thousands of businesses. Data centres contribute to the growth across the wider economy. The digital services they provide improve efficiency and make customers more competitive, irrespective of their area of business. Data centres are key components of the wider cloud computing ecosystem and present an opportunity for the UK to capture the full economic value, efficiency gains and growth potential of the transition to cloud networks.

The growth of the digital economy depends heavily on the capacity to store, process and access data. The proposed development is intended to help meet this demand.

4. Proposed Development

This application seeks Outline planning permission for a data centre development comprising B8 Use Class floor space and ancillary supporting infrastructure. The Description of Development for which planning permission is sought is:

Outline planning application (all matters reserved except for Access) for demolition of existing buildings and the construction of a data centre (Use Class B8), fuel cells for energy generation, ancillary office space and associated plant, drainage, backup power generation, sub-station, car parking, landscaping, engineering works and formation of and alterations to access roads.

The works that form the Proposed Development comprise:

- data centre halls behind the office frontage comprising up to 37,000m² of total floorspace, excluding ancillary infrastructure i.e solid oxide fuel cells and back-up generators;
- A substation and compound
- An administrative/office at the front;
- Electrical equipment and generators;

- Double-stacked solid oxide fuel cells at the east and west of the main building;
- Two access points to the Thames Valley Park estate road – one main access point at the north-west corner, and one emergency access point further east;
- Internal access roads circulating the main buildings, and maintenance access road;
- A security lodge at the main site entrance;
- A car parking area, positioned at the front of the office/admin building; and
- Landscaping and engineering works.

4.1 Strategic Need for Additional Digital Infrastructure

The UK Government has identified digital infrastructure as a fundamental driver of economic growth and national resilience, recently designating data centres as Critical National Infrastructure (CNI). This designation recognises the essential role data centres play in supporting the operation of modern society, placing them alongside other nationally important infrastructure sectors such as energy, water and transport.

Data centres provide the secure facilities required to house the servers, storage systems and networking equipment that underpin digital services relied upon by businesses, public services and individuals. They support a wide range of activities including cloud computing, online banking, healthcare systems, telecommunications, streaming services and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. As demand for these services continues to grow, there is a corresponding need for additional data centre capacity to ensure the UK's digital infrastructure remains resilient, secure and capable of supporting future economic development.

The Proposed Development would contribute to meeting this growing demand by increasing the availability of strategically located digital infrastructure within the Thames Valley, one of the UK's most established technology clusters outside London. The proposal would strengthen the area's nationally significant digital ecosystem and support businesses already operating within the region, helping to maintain the Thames Valley's competitiveness as a centre for innovation and technology-led growth.

4.2 Economic Benefits

The Proposed Development would deliver substantial economic benefits at both the local and regional level. Construction of the facility is expected to support up to 245 jobs, while operation of the completed data centre would create at least 40-65 full-time positions. Industry estimates indicate that each data centre role can support a further 1.4 to 2.5 jobs within the wider economy through indirect and induced employment effects.

In addition, the development would represent an investment of more than £200 million during the construction phase, generating significant economic activity and supporting local supply chains. Once operational, the development would also generate business rates revenue that could contribute towards the funding of local services and infrastructure.

The proposal would further strengthen Wokingham's attractiveness as a business location, supporting sectors including technology, telecommunications, life sciences and healthcare. The presence of major international businesses within the area demonstrates the wider appeal of the Thames Valley as a location for investment, and the provision of additional digital infrastructure would help reinforce this position.

4.3 Key Design Drivers

Other key elements of the proposed scheme are as follows:

- The maximum building height will be approximately 30.5 metres, incorporating rooftop plant areas, with internal data hall floor-to-floor heights of approximately 7.5 metres.
- Construction of four data hall buildings arranged centrally within the site, each comprising three storeys, alongside an administration building positioned at the northern frontage.

- The data centre will operate on a continuous 24-hour basis, reflecting the operational requirements of mission-critical digital infrastructure.

Figure 2 shows the anticipated layout of the Proposed Development.

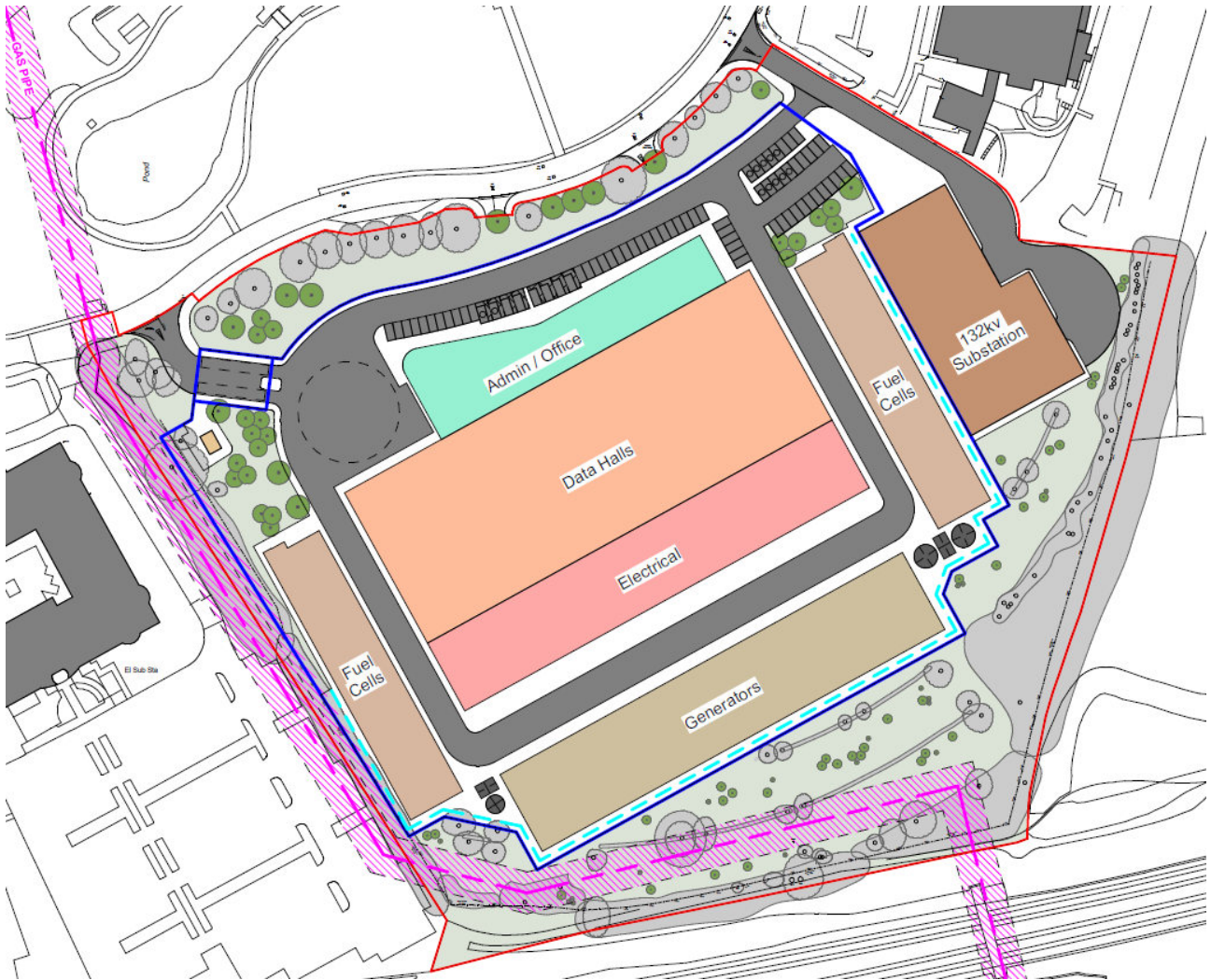


Figure 2. Site Layout

4.4 Servicing and Access

Key elements of the servicing and access strategy comprise:

- Provision of a primary access from the Thames Valley Park estate road at the north-west corner of the site, forming the main route into the development.
- Provision of a secondary emergency access point to the east of the site, supporting emergency and operational requirements.
- Provision of a central internal access road and circulation network designed to accommodate servicing, maintenance and emergency vehicles, including articulated lorries.
- Removal of estate road island feature adjacent to proposed main entrance.
- Provision of 72 car parking spaces (including 8 accessible spaces) located to the front of the administration building to support operational staff requirements.
- EV charging will be provided to 10% of spaces (7 spaces) from first occupation, with passive provision incorporated to all remaining spaces to support future expansion.

4.5 Security

Key elements of the site securing strategy comprises:

- Creation of a secure perimeter boundary incorporating appropriate stand-off distances and a combination of fencing and landscape treatment to balance security requirements with visual integration.

4.6 Power

The proposed development comprises a 72MWIT data centre with solid oxide fuel cells generating up to 42.5 MW of electricity per year on the site.

The fuel cell installation forms part of a phased energy solution required to facilitate initial occupation and operation of the facility prior to the delivery of permanent utility infrastructure. The Applicant continues to engage with utility providers regarding both 33kV and 132kV grid connection options.

The solid oxide fuel cells are intended as a primary energy source until 2037 or before, should other lower-carbon grid electricity supplies become available where national infrastructure allows. The operational strategy will be reviewed following implementation of a permanent grid connection, and details of the future role, retention, replacement or decommissioning of the solid oxide fuel cells will be confirmed through the application process. The submitted Tyrens Hilson Moran authored Energy Strategy sets out the full detail of this approach.

The Energy Strategy sets out the following phases and options:

- **Phase 1 (2028–2037).** The administration building is supplied with 1.8MW from the existing grid connection. The remainder of the site is powered by the fuel cells, which provide 42.5MW and enable the initial data halls to be brought into operation. This phase allows the facility to come into operation on programme, years before a grid connection of sufficient capacity could be delivered.
- **Phase 2 (from 2037).** A permanent grid connection is introduced. In Phase 2 either a 60 MW or 110 MW grid connection becomes available, and the site either retains fuel cells and adds electrical capacity, or fully transitions to the electrical grid. Two Phase 2 grid connection outcomes, and a biomethane variant, have been assessed over a 60 year project lifecycle.
 - **Phase 2 Option A** - Retaining the fuel cells on natural gas which produces the highest lifecycle emissions.
 - **Phase 2 Option B** - Removing the gas fuel cells and meeting demand from the grid. This scenario has the potential to cut lifecycle emissions by 75% and is the applicant's preferred solution.
 - **Phase 2 Option C** - Retaining the fuel cells on natural gas and offsetting their emissions by purchasing certified biomethane through gas sleeving (injecting biomethane into the national grid at the point of production).

4.7 Heat Network Opportunities

The ultimate delivery of heat network integration depends on infrastructure and commitments outside the applicant's control. The applicant therefore commits to safeguard the necessary plant space and pipework provision so that the connection can be realised as soon as the wider network comes forward.

Two possibilities for heat networks in proximity to the site have been investigated:

- Micro-level heat network providing the nearby business park, paired with the liquid cooled data cabinet loop
- Macro-level heat network which would have a much wider reach into the town of Reading, paired with the air-cooled data cabinet loop.

The submitted Energy Strategy report sets out the feasibility work in more detail.

4.8 Water

There will be no substantive operational water consumption associated with the data centre or fuel cells. Water will be required during the installation of the cooling systems associated with the fuel cells and IT equipment (construction phase). Top-ups of these sealed systems may be required over the operational lifetime of the Proposed Development; however, these are expected to be minimal.

4.9 Landscaping and Biodiversity

Retention and enhancement of existing tree cover along the site frontage, alongside additional landscaping to reinforce the established green character of Thames Valley Park and soften the appearance of the development.

5. Form of the Application

The application is submitted in outline, with all matters reserved except access. Outline planning permission is sought by reference to Parameter Plans. These establish the parameters within which the detailed design may subsequently come forward. Future reserved matters applications would be required to comply with the approved Parameter Plans.

It is proposed that the maximum quantum of floor space proposed with the application is fixed via planning condition with reference to the proposed parameter plans.

The Design and Access Statement sets out the key principles in the approach to design at this site. It does not set a specific design code to which a future reserved matters application must comply. An illustrative scheme also accompanies the outline planning application. It represents one way, but not the only way, in which the Proposed Development could come forward within the Development Parameters.

Key Parameter Plans	Key Parameter Details
Development Zone	-Data Centre Development Area -Substation Development Area -Retained Enhanced Landscape Zone -Location of Retaining Wall -Safeguarded High Pressure Gas Main Zone -Fixed Building Frontage Alignment -Security Fence Alignment
Ground Floor Levels	-Setting a proposed Main Data Centre Site Level of +42.50m AOD -Setting a Substation Level of +45m AOD
Building Heights – Set from Ground Floor Levels	Admin/Office Block - >22.5m Data Halls - >30.5m Electrical Zone - >22.5m Fuel Cells - >16.5m Back-Up Generators - > 17m Back-Up Generator Flues - > 30.5m Ancillary Plant and Tanks - >10m Pressure Reducing Station - >3m Security Lodge - >3m Substation - >7.5m

Other key parameters:

- >37,000m² of total floorspace, excluding ancillary infrastructure i.e solid oxide fuel cells and back-up generators
- Provision of 72 car parking spaces (including 8 accessible spaces) located to the front of the administration building to support operational staff requirements.
- EV charging will be provided to 10% of spaces (7 spaces) from first occupation, with passive provision incorporated to all remaining spaces to support future expansion.

6. Pre-Application Consultation

A Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) was entered into between the Applicant and Wokingham Borough Council to facilitate a structured programme of pre-application engagement for the development.

The PPA set out a programme of engagement to seek advice on an outline planning application. The pre-application process was structured into three stages (Pre-App 1, Pre-App 2 and Pre-App 3), each comprising the submission of information, technical and officer meetings, and subsequently written responses from the Local Planning Authority.

An initial stage of engagement was undertaken to establish the key planning considerations, including the principle of development, land use, design, and visual impact. This was followed by iterative stages of engagement focusing on technical matters such as ecology, landscaping, sustainability, transport and environmental effects, alongside ongoing design development.

The process provided an opportunity for ongoing dialogue between the Applicant and the Council, enabling key issues to be identified and addressed as the proposals evolved.

Table 5 below sets out a summary of the feedback received through the pre-application process and how the proposed development has responded to that feedback.

Table 5. Pre-Application Engagement

Topic	LPA Feedback	Summary of Design Response
Pre-Application 1: February-March 2026		
Principle of development	Development broadly acceptable in principle within Core Employment Area and Major Development Location, subject to detailed matters being addressed.	Continued to progress proposals on basis of B8 data centre use, supported by planning case and alignment with employment land policies.
Land use / fuel cells	Clarification requested regarding classification of fuel cells (ancillary vs sui generis) and need for justification and precedents.	Approach developed on basis of fuel cells operating as ancillary to the data centre, with supporting planning rationale to be provided.
Design and layout	Need for high-quality design responding to business park context, including frontage treatment and overall architectural approach.	Design evolved to maintain strong frontage presence (admin building), and to develop a contemporary “hi-tech” architectural approach rather than standard warehouse form.
Scale and massing	Limited concern at this stage regarding scale and appearance, but further work required to demonstrate appropriateness.	Two- and three-storey options tested to understand massing, with continued refinement through subsequent stages.

Topic	LPA Feedback	Summary of Design Response
Landscape and visual impact	LVIA approach considered a good starting point but requires further work, including wider study area, broader receptors, and methodology.	LVIA scope and methodology to be expanded, with further testing, visualisations and refinement of landscape-led design.
Site levels / earthworks	Need to carefully consider extent and visual impact of level changes, retaining structures and any bunding.	Ongoing design work to minimise visual impact of level changes and explore mitigation through landscaping and design.
Security and boundary treatment	Security required but boundary treatments (e.g. fencing) must be carefully designed to avoid negative visual impacts.	Security strategy to be integrated into design development, avoiding overly industrial or visually intrusive solutions.
Energy and sustainability	Need for clear explanation of energy strategy (fuel cells, grid supply) and wider sustainability approach, including public-facing narrative.	Energy strategy further developed, including clearer articulation of role of fuel cells and potential efficiency measures (e.g. heat reuse). Further detailed in the comprehensive Sustainability Strategy.
Employment and economics	Recognition of economic benefits but relatively low operational employment; need to address policy requirements (e.g. skills plan).	Economic case strengthened, including articulation of wider benefits and preparation for Employment and Skills Plan at delivery stage.
Drainage and flood risk	No objection in principle, but detailed drainage strategy required, including SuDS, runoff rates and capacity.	Commitment to develop a full drainage strategy incorporating SuDS and detailed modelling in line with policy requirements.
EIA / further technical work	Further technical work required to inform the planning application (including environmental assessment).	EIA and technical assessments progressed to inform subsequent design and application submission.
Pre-Application 2: May-June 2026		
Landscape, visual impact and design	Revised design responded positively to earlier feedback. LVIA methodology broadly supported, subject to an additional viewpoint and further visualisations. The Council welcomed the revised frontage, architectural approach, building articulation and reduced encroachment towards woodland. No fundamental landscape or design concerns were identified.	Design evolved to reduce the building footprint, increase separation from woodland and establish a strong public-facing frontage. Additional viewpoints and AVR visualisations were prepared to support the LVA and assess the visual effects of the development.
Transport and access	Emerging transport assessment and travel plan approach broadly supported. Evidence indicated the proposed data centre was likely to generate significantly fewer vehicle movements than the lawful office use. Further evidence was requested regarding staffing levels, parking provision, servicing arrangements and operational assumptions.	Transport evidence was refined to demonstrate reduced trip generation compared with the existing office use. Access arrangements, servicing strategy, parking provision and sustainable travel measures continued to be developed to support the application as it reflects feedback.
Ecology, biodiversity and green infrastructure	Revised layout welcomed for reducing impacts on priority woodland and ecological features. No in-principle ecological constraints identified. Further work required regarding BNG, ecological connectivity, habitat compensation, lighting, tree retention and green infrastructure integration.	Feedback on level of detail and methodology to be included in technical reports.
Pre-Application 3: July-August 2026		
Highways and transport	Highway Authority maintained that the proposal was capable of being supported from a transport perspective. Further clarification requested regarding the ancillary office function, parking provision, trip generation assumptions, servicing requirements and opportunities to enhance sustainable travel.	Transport strategy further refined, including clarification of ancillary office accommodation, parking demand assumptions, servicing arrangements and sustainable transport measures to support the planning application.
Ecology and biodiversity	Ecologist welcomed the revised layout, increased separation from priority habitat, proposed bird-strike mitigation measures, retention of low lighting levels and delivery of BNG. Further	Additional consideration of operational noise impacts and ecological mitigation measures was undertaken to inform the application submission.

Topic	LPA Feedback	Summary of Design Response
	work requested regarding potential operational noise impacts on adjacent woodland, birds and bats, together with the siting of biodiversity enhancements and the ecological role of the proposed SuDS basin.	
Sustainability and energy	The Council commissioned specialist sustainability and energy advice to review the emerging energy strategy and wider sustainability approach. The Council and its specialist energy adviser welcomed the overall direction of the sustainability strategy, including the consideration of fuel cells, heat network opportunities, embodied carbon reduction and wider sustainability measures. However, further evidence was requested in relation to operational energy demand, PUE and application of the energy hierarchy, climate resilience, waste heat recovery, embodied carbon, circular economy measures and a Whole Life Carbon Assessment. The Council also encouraged the applicant to have regard to the emerging climate change and energy policies within the Local Plan Update.	The Energy Strategy and Sustainability Statement were further developed to articulate the energy strategy, role of fuel cells, carbon reduction measures and wider sustainability credentials of the scheme.

7. Planning Policy Context

The Proposed Development has considered both national and local planning policies and guidance. This section provides a concise overview of the key planning policy documents, followed by a summary of how the proposal aligns with the relevant policy requirements.

7.1 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The Framework was comprehensively revised and republished in August 2026, replacing the previous version published in December 2024.

The 2026 NPPF introduces a new structure, separating plan-making policies from national decision-making policies, and places sustainable development at the heart of the planning system. The purpose of the planning system remains to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. It is supported by three overarching and interdependent objectives: an economic objective, a social objective and an environmental objective.

The revised NPPF places strong emphasis on delivering economic growth, housing and infrastructure, while supporting climate resilience and environmental enhancement. Notable changes which are relevant to the Proposed Development include:

- Stronger policy support for economic growth and investment through Chapter 7, including specific recognition of data-driven and high-technology industries, data centres and associated infrastructure (Policy E1: Providing the conditions for long-term economic growth).
- Enhanced support for renewable and low-carbon energy, electricity network infrastructure, heat networks and water infrastructure (Chapter 10: Securing clean energy and water).

- Greater emphasis on delivering development in sustainable locations supported by appropriate infrastructure and sustainable transport connections (Chapters 4: Achieving sustainable development and Chapter 15: Promoting sustainable transport).
- Continued support for making effective use of previously developed land and optimising development opportunities within settlements (Chapter 12: Making effective use of land).
- Increased focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity recovery and nature-based solutions (Chapter 5: Meeting the challenge of climate change and Chapter 19: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment).

The 2026 NPPF also provides explicit support for data centres and related digital infrastructure. Chapter 7: Building a Strong, Effective Economy recognises the importance of knowledge and data-driven industries and requires plans to make provision for data centres, associated generating capacity and electricity network infrastructure. The NPPF also recognises the role of data centres in supporting economic growth, innovation and investment, whilst acknowledging the importance of locations with suitable infrastructure capacity, including electricity and grid connections. Data centres are further recognised as essential infrastructure for the purposes of flood risk policy and as a potential source of recoverable heat within low-carbon energy systems.

The application has been prepared having regard to the relevant national decision-making policies within the 2026 NPPF, with particular consideration given to policies relating to sustainable development, economic growth, communications infrastructure, energy and water infrastructure, climate resilience and environmental protection.

7.2 Local Development Plan

The current statutory Development Plan for Wokingham Borough Council includes:

- Core Strategy (2010)
- Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014)
- Central & Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals & Waste Plan (2023)

Wokingham Borough Council is preparing a new Local Plan Update (LPU), which will set out the planning framework for the borough up to 2040. Once adopted, it will replace the existing Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

The LPU will establish a clear vision, objectives, and spatial strategy to guide future development and growth. It will address the need for additional housing alongside planning for employment opportunities, schools, transport infrastructure, green spaces, retail provision, and community facilities. The *Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040: Proposed Submission Plan* was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by an independent Planning Inspector in February 2025. Two independent Inspectors have been appointed and examination hearing sessions now concluded. The Inspectors have published their post hearing letter on required modifications to the plan.

7.2.1 Wokingham Borough Core Strategy

The Wokingham Borough Core Strategy was adopted on 29 January 2010 and forms part of the statutory Development Plan. Section 38(6) of the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004* (as amended) requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Core strategy sets out the vision for how the borough will develop in the period to 2026 and how the council aims to protect and enhance the quality of life in the borough. It also sets out key policies which guide the delivery of sustainable development across the Borough.

The Core Strategy, as part of the statutory Development Plan, provides the framework for decision-making on planning applications and must be given full weight unless material considerations suggest otherwise.

Policies relevant to the proposed development under the Core Strategy are listed below.

7.2.2 Site designations

The following designations apply to the site under the Local Plan

- **Adopted Local Plans**
 - Core Employment Location – Thames Valley Park Core Employment Area (Policy CP15):
 - Major Development Location: Earley (Policy CP9):
- **Minerals and Waste Local Plan**
 - Mineral Safeguarding Area: (Sharp Sand and Gravel, and Soft Sand).
- **Safety Hazard Areas**
 - Consultation Zone for a Major Nuclear Site:
 - Major Accident Hazard Pipeline:
- **Hydrology & Drainage**
 - Environment Agency Surface Water Flood Zones:
 - The site is **not** within the Thames flood zone.
- **Ecology & Environment**
 - Bat Roost Habitat Suitability Model: Bat survey required for planning applications that involve roof modification or demolition.
 - Potentially Contaminated Land Consultation Zone:
- **Aerodrome Safeguarding**
 - Heathrow Consultation Zone SU7474: All works exceeding 150 metres (492.1 feet)
- **Trees & Landscape**
 - Landscape Character Assessment 2019: Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes
 - **Tree Protection Orders**: Four TPOs are located to the east of the site, outside the proposed development footprint.
- **Heritage & Conservation**
 - Archaeological Site lies immediately east, outside the proposed development footprint.
- **Strategic Transport Network Improvements** are designated for the southern part of the site.

There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within or adjoining the site boundaries.

Under the proposed Local Plan Update, the site remains within a Core Employment Area (Policy ER1) and Core Settlement Area.

7.2.3 Neighbourhood Plan

Neighbourhood development plans are optional plans prepared by local communities through parish or town councils. Once made, they form part of the statutory development plan and are used in the determination of planning applications.

The Site lies within the Parish of Sonning. Sonning Neighbourhood Development Plan was formally submitted to Wokingham Borough Council in November 2025 and examined during 2026. The Examiner concluded that, subject to a number of recommended modifications, the Plan meets the basic conditions and

other legal requirements. At the time of writing, the Plan is awaiting referendum and therefore attracts weight as an advanced-stage emerging neighbourhood plan.

Of particular relevance to the Proposed Development is Policy SNP/ENV1 (Local Gaps), which identifies a Local Gap between Sonning and Thames Valley Park. The purpose of the policy is to maintain the separation between the settlements, prevent visual coalescence and protect their distinctive character and setting. The designated Local Gap includes the woodland and open land to the east of the Application Site. The implications of this policy for the Proposed Development are considered in the relevant technical assessments and planning balance set out within this Planning Statement.

8. Planning Assessment

This section provides an assessment of the Proposed Development against the relevant planning policies and guidance set out in Section 5. The following matters are considered in turn:

- Principle of development
- Design and appearance
- Visual impact
- Socio-economic benefits
- Landscaping
- Transport and Parking
- Energy and Sustainability
- Biodiversity and Ecology
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Drainage and Flood Risk
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Planning obligations

8.1 Principle of Development

8.1.1 Use Class

The proposed data centre falls within Use Class B8 (Storage or Distribution) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended), as its primary function relates to the storage, processing and distribution of digital data. This approach is consistent with that adopted by a number of local planning authorities in relation to comparable schemes.

The proposed energy generation infrastructure is considered to be ancillary to the primary data centre use, insofar as it is necessary to support its operation.

8.1.2 National Policy

The 2026 NPPF sets out the Government's policies for plan-making and decision-making and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development through the management of land in the long-term

public interest. Sustainable development is supported through three interdependent objectives: economic, social and environmental.

The NPPF adopts a strongly positive approach to sustainable growth. Policy S3 establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development and confirms that development proposals which accord with both an up-to-date development plan and the national decision-making policies of the NPPF should be approved without delay. Within settlements, development proposals should be approved unless any adverse effects would substantially outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF as a whole.

Of particular relevance to this project, Policy E1 requires development plans to support the needs of a modern economy and specifically recognises the importance of knowledge and data-driven industries. The policy requires provision to be made for clusters, networks and sites associated with high-technology industries, including data centres, campus facilities, associated generating capacity and electricity network infrastructure required to support their operation and growth.

Policy E2 further confirms that substantial weight should be given to the economic benefits of proposals that allow businesses to invest, expand and adapt. The policy recognises the importance of locations where infrastructure capacity, including electricity network infrastructure and grid connections, facilitates development and specifically identifies opportunities to co-locate large-scale generators and users of power such as data centres.

The NPPF places significant emphasis on climate resilience and sustainable development. Policy CC2 (mitigation of climate change) encourages development to contribute to climate change mitigation through the efficient use of resources, low-carbon energy and opportunities to co-locate energy generation and demand. The policy also supports opportunities to draw energy from decentralised networks and to maximise efficiencies between energy generators and users.

The NPPF further promotes the effective use of land. Policy L2 (Making effective use of land) requires substantial weight to be given to the benefits of making better use of vacant and underutilised land and buildings, while Policy L3 (achieving appropriate densities) seeks to ensure that development makes efficient use of land having regard to infrastructure availability, local circumstances and the need to secure well-designed places.

Taken together, the NPPF provides clear and substantial support for development that delivers advanced digital infrastructure, supports business investment and productivity, strengthens the UK's data-driven economy, and provides the energy and utility infrastructure necessary to enable future growth. The proposed Thames Valley Data Centre aligns closely with these objectives through the delivery of nationally important digital infrastructure, associated energy infrastructure, substantial economic investment and employment opportunities, and a strategically located campus capable of supporting continued growth in the digital economy.

The Government's wider economic strategy reinforces this position. A Ministerial Statement published in July 2024 confirmed that data centres are considered critical infrastructure, stating:

“Alongside building more houses, we also need to build more of the infrastructure that underpins modern life... We will therefore change policy to make it easier to build growth-supporting infrastructure such as laboratories, gigafactories, data centres...”

This national recognition highlights the importance of proposals such as the Thames Valley Data Centre in delivering infrastructure that supports innovation, competitiveness, and resilience.

Data centres underpin the UK's digital economy, supporting sectors such as finance, healthcare, government, and commerce by hosting essential data and applications. They contribute to productivity, attract investment, and create skilled employment opportunities. The proposed development will deliver a campus-scale facility, enabling operational efficiencies and clustering benefits consistent with the NPPF's emphasis on supporting networks of high-technology industries.

8.1.3 Existing Local Policy

The application site is located within the Thames Valley Park business park, identified as falling within a Core Employment Area in the adopted Local Plan.

Policy CP15 (Employment Development) identifies Thames Valley Park as a Core Employment Area, safeguarded for uses that contribute to economic growth. It states that development for business (Use Class E(g)), industry (B2), or warehousing (B8) will be permitted, including expansion or intensification of existing employment uses. The proposed data centre falls within Use Class B8 and therefore complies with CP15 by maintaining the site's employment function and supporting high-value sectors. The Economic Benefit Statement highlights the site's role in enabling advanced technology, supporting the knowledge economy, and creating skilled employment opportunities. This approach aligns with CP15's objective to sustain and grow Wokingham's economic base.

Policy CP9 (Scale and Location of Development Proposals) confirms that the site lies within a Major Development Location (Earley), where significant development is acceptable within settlement limits. The scale and nature of the proposal reflect the area's established infrastructure and accessibility, consistent with CP9's requirement that development be proportionate to local facilities and services. The data centre's strategic location within Thames Valley Park ensures connectivity to existing utilities and transport networks, supporting sustainable growth.

8.1.4 Proposed Local Policy

The emerging Local Plan Update continues to identify Thames Valley Park as within a Core Employment Area, reflecting its importance as one of the Borough's principal employment locations. The Site therefore occupies a location where the emerging strategy seeks to retain, modernise and optimise employment uses in support of economic growth and business investment.

Policy ER1 (Core Employment Areas) supports proposals for business, industrial and storage and distribution uses within designated Core Employment Areas. The policy specifically supports the renewal, modernisation, expansion and intensification of employment uses, provided development is appropriate to the character of the area and does not give rise to unacceptable impacts on surrounding uses.

The proposed development is fully consistent with these objectives. It would redevelop an established employment site to provide a modern form of employment-generating development that responds to the evolving needs of the digital economy whilst maintaining the employment function of the Site. The proposal has been designed to respond to the character of Thames Valley Park and is accompanied by a suite of technical assessments which demonstrate that potential impacts relating to traffic, noise, air quality, ecology, landscape and visual amenity can be appropriately managed and mitigated.

The proposal also aligns with the broader economic objectives of the emerging LPU, which seek to support business growth, investment and the provision of infrastructure required to support a modern economy. Data centres are increasingly recognised as critical infrastructure underpinning digital services, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and wider economic activity. The redevelopment of the Site will therefore contribute towards the continued competitiveness of Thames Valley Park as a strategic employment location and support the Borough's role within the Thames Valley's technology and innovation economy.

Overall, the proposed development is consistent with both the adopted and emerging development plan, maintaining the Site's employment function whilst supporting investment, economic growth and the delivery of nationally important digital infrastructure.

8.2 Design

The proposed development has evolved through an iterative design process informed by ongoing engagement with WBC and other stakeholders. The resulting masterplan, prepared by Twelve Architects, comprises four three-storey data halls, an administration building, fuel cell compounds, electrical infrastructure, generators and associated operational facilities arranged within a cohesive campus layout. The administration building is positioned along the northern frontage of the site, maintaining the established crescent building line that characterises Thames Valley Park, whilst the data halls and supporting

infrastructure are located to the rear of the site. A central access route provides access to the generators, electrical compounds and fuel cell areas, creating a clear and efficient operational arrangement.

The layout has been refined in response to consultee feedback and technical assessment undertaken throughout the pre-application process. In particular, the siting of the buildings has been adjusted to reduce impacts on nearby tree root protection areas and to avoid direct conflict with protected trees, whilst retaining the established frontage character of the business park. Existing trees along the site frontage are retained and the development has been arranged to minimise impacts on the woodland edge. The massing strategy places the tallest elements within the centre of the site, with the administration building providing a transition between the surrounding office environment and the operational data centre infrastructure beyond.

The architectural approach responds directly to the character of Thames Valley Park and seeks to reflect the articulated form of the existing office campus. The buildings incorporate a clear hierarchy of massing through set-back ground floors, prominent middle sections and recessed upper levels, reflecting the established composition of neighbouring buildings. Rooftop mechanical plant is contained within screened enclosures, reducing its visual prominence whilst maintaining operational requirements. The Design and Access Statement establishes a design framework for the reserved matters stage, including the use of contemporary high-tech façade treatments such as fins and louvres to integrate ventilation requirements, provide visual articulation and ensure a cohesive architectural appearance across the development.

8.2.1 Policy Alignment

The design approach aligns with the expectations of the adopted development plan:

- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks development that contributes positively to the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development. The redevelopment of a previously developed employment site for strategically important digital infrastructure represents an efficient use of land within an established business location. The retention of existing landscape features, integration of on-site energy infrastructure and consideration of sustainable design principles throughout the masterplanning process support the wider sustainability objectives of the policy.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development)** requires development to be of a high quality design that responds positively to local character, creates attractive places and protects the amenities of surrounding users. The proposed masterplan responds directly to the established character of Thames Valley Park by maintaining the crescent frontage arrangement, locating the administration building along the northern frontage and concentrating operational infrastructure within the interior of the site. The articulated building form, screened roof plant, integrated security measures and landscaped approach ensure that the development is appropriate to its context whilst delivering the operational requirements of a modern data centre.
- **MDD Policy CC03 (Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping)** seeks to protect existing green infrastructure assets, retain important trees where possible and secure high quality landscape design. The layout has evolved through the pre-application process to reduce impacts on existing trees and root protection areas, whilst retaining the established frontage trees and woodland edge. The proposal incorporates a strengthened landscape structure around the site perimeter and provides opportunities for further planting and biodiversity enhancements through the detailed design stage.
- **MDD Policy CC04 (Sustainable Design and Construction)** promotes sustainable design measures, efficient use of resources and reductions in carbon emissions. The compact development footprint, integrated energy strategy and consolidation of plant and servicing infrastructure support these objectives. The use of on-site fuel cell infrastructure, together with the incorporation of building services within screened rooftop enclosures, demonstrates how operational requirements have been integrated into the design from the outset. Further detail regarding compliance with relevant sustainability standards and performance requirements will be provided at the detailed design stage.

The emerging Local Plan Update places increased emphasis on the efficient use of employment land, design quality, climate resilience and the delivery of infrastructure required to support a modern economy. Whilst carrying limited weight at this stage, the proposal aligns with what is currently included in the draft plan update:

- **Policy ER1 (Core Employment Areas)** seeks to support the retention, renewal and modernisation of established employment locations, recognising the need for employment areas to evolve in response to changing market demands and economic needs. The application site forms part of the Thames Valley Park employment area and the proposed redevelopment will deliver a modern form of employment-generating development that responds to the growing demand for digital infrastructure. The proposal represents the continued productive use of an underutilised established employment site and will support the borough's role within the wider knowledge, technology and digital economy.
- **Policy CE1 (Design Principles for Efficient Buildings)** promotes building forms that make efficient use of land, incorporate sustainable design principles and integrate energy infrastructure within development proposals. The proposed layout consolidates data halls, administration facilities and supporting infrastructure within a compact and coherent masterplan, enabling efficient site utilisation whilst maintaining landscape buffers and operational requirements. Energy infrastructure, including fuel cells, substations and rooftop plant, has been integrated within the overall design approach rather than appearing as separate or disconnected elements. The screening of rooftop plant and incorporation of servicing requirements within the architectural composition further supports the objective of delivering efficient and well-designed buildings.
- **Policy NE5 (Landscape and Design)** requires development to demonstrate high-quality design, respond positively to local character, integrate landscape considerations from the outset and ensure that scale and massing are appropriate to the surrounding context. The proposal has evolved through an iterative process of design refinement informed by feedback from the Local Planning Authority and technical consultees. This has included adjustments to the building footprint to reduce impacts on existing trees, retention of the established crescent frontage pattern, and reinforcement of the site's landscape framework. The arrangement of the administration building along the northern frontage, the set-back positioning of the data halls, the articulated massing strategy and the retention and enhancement of existing landscape features collectively ensure that the development responds positively to the character of Thames Valley Park whilst accommodating its operational requirements.

8.3 Visual Impact

The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA), prepared by Arup, assesses the likely effects of the proposed development on landscape character and visual amenity during construction, operation and the long term. The analysis establishes that the site is located within an established business park characterised by substantial commercial buildings, surface parking and mature landscape planting. The site benefits from a strong degree of enclosure provided by existing woodland belts, tree cover and the wider landscape structure of Thames Valley Park. The Great Western Main Line provides physical and visual separation from residential areas to the south, whilst woodland alongside the River Thames and Caversham Lakes limits views from the north.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis demonstrates that visibility of the proposed development is generally limited by existing buildings, mature vegetation and landform. While theoretical visibility extends beyond the site boundary in some locations, field surveys confirm that many views are heavily filtered or screened by woodland, riparian vegetation, surrounding commercial development and the railway corridor. The proposed development would typically be perceived within the context of the existing built form of Thames Valley Park and the wider urban influence of Reading rather than as an isolated feature in the wider landscape.

The LVA concludes that there would be no important effects on landscape character during construction, operation or at Year 15 following establishment of mitigation planting. Landscape effects are assessed as minor adverse, negligible adverse or no change across all landscape receptors. The assessment also concludes that there would be no significant adverse effects on the River Thames Valued Landscape, the Thames Valley Major Landscape Feature, the proposed Sonning-Earley Local Gap, Bulmershe Park Site of Urban Landscape Value, or other locally valued landscapes within the study area. Whilst mitigation planting and landscape enhancements would reduce effects for many receptors over time, this conclusion does not rely on screening of longer-distance views from the Thames corridor, where the upper parts of the Proposed Development would remain visible above the existing tree line.

Visual effects during construction would be temporary and primarily associated with demolition activities, construction compounds, plant and cranes. Important visual effects during construction are limited to visitors to the Thames Valley Park Nature Reserve and people working within Thames Valley Park, reflecting the close-range nature of views from within the business park. During operation, important visual effects are confined to a limited number of receptors in close proximity to the site, including users of the Thames Path, river users and visitors to the Thames Valley Park Nature Reserve, where the upper parts of the building would be visible above portions of the existing tree line. Elsewhere, effects are assessed as minor adverse, negligible adverse or no change due to the filtering effect of existing vegetation, surrounding built form and landform. Mitigation planting and the proposed Green Ring landscape strategy would improve integration over time, reducing effects for many receptors by Year 15 and reinforcing the established landscape framework of Thames Valley Park.

8.3.1 Policy Alignment

- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks to ensure that development protects and enhances environmental quality whilst supporting sustainable growth. The LVA demonstrates that effects on landscape character are not important and that visual effects are largely confined to a limited number of receptors within the immediate vicinity of the site. The proposal retains and reinforces the landscape framework of Thames Valley Park, allowing the redevelopment of a previously developed site without giving rise to unacceptable effects on the wider landscape resource.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development)** requires development to respond positively to local character, integrate landscaping and contribute to a high-quality environment. The proposal has been developed through an iterative design process that retains key landscape features, strengthens boundary planting, introduces a perimeter Green Ring and concentrates the tallest elements within the centre of the site. The LVA confirms that the development would be viewed within the context of the existing business park rather than as a prominent standalone feature in the wider landscape.
- **MDD Policy CC03 (Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping)** seeks to protect and enhance green infrastructure assets and ensure landscaping is integrated into development proposals. The landscape strategy retains existing boundary vegetation where practicable, reinforces woodland planting, strengthens ecological connectivity and introduces substantial new planting that will improve integration of the development within the wider landscape over time.
- **MDD Policy TB21 (Landscape Character)** requires development to conserve and enhance landscape character and be informed by the Borough's Landscape Character Assessment. The LVA concludes that all landscape effects are not important, reflecting the site's location within an established commercial environment and the strong containment provided by existing vegetation and surrounding development. Landscape effects on surrounding character areas, including the River Thames corridor and Sonning-Earley Local Gap, are assessed as negligible or minor adverse
- **MDD Policy TB22 (Sites of Urban Landscape Value)** seeks to protect the character and amenity of designated urban landscapes. The LVA concludes that Bulmershe Park SULV would experience no change during operation, with only negligible adverse construction effects associated with temporary crane visibility. The proposal would therefore preserve the character, function and recreational value of this designated landscape.

The emerging Local Plan Update places increased emphasis on landscape-led design, protection of valued landscapes and the integration of development within its surroundings. The proposal aligns with these emerging policy objectives as follows:

- **Policy NE5 (Landscape and Design)** requires development to demonstrate high-quality design that responds positively to landscape character, landscape features and visual context. The proposal has evolved through an iterative design process informed by technical assessment and consultation feedback. Retained woodland belts, reinforced boundary planting and the Green Ring landscape strategy help integrate the development into the established landscape structure of Thames Valley Park and minimise effects on surrounding receptors.

- **Policy NE6 (Valued Landscapes)** seeks to conserve and enhance the Borough's valued landscapes. The River Thames Valued Landscape forms part of the assessment baseline. The LVA concludes that there would be no important landscape effects on this designation and that visual effects are limited to a short section of the Thames corridor where upper parts of the development would be visible above intervening vegetation. The development does not alter the physical characteristics of the valued landscape and the effects are localised within the context of an existing commercial business park.

Overall, the LVA demonstrates that the proposed development can be accommodated within its landscape and visual context without giving rise to important effects on landscape character, designated landscapes, valued landscapes or strategic views. Whilst important visual effects are identified for a limited number of receptors in close proximity to the Site, these effects are localised, arise within the context of the existing Thames Valley Park business park and do not undermine the wider landscape strategy or function of surrounding landscape designations. The proposed Green Ring and associated mitigation planting will further assist the integration of the development into its surroundings over time.

8.4 Economic Benefits

Detailed information on the economic benefits of the proposal can be found in the Economic Benefits Statement prepared by Arup. The report found that the proposed data centre would deliver a significant economic boost, beginning with a major programme of private investment and construction activity. Over a four-year build period, the project is expected to generate between £165.7m and £208.4m in construction expenditure, supporting approximately 195–245 FTE jobs locally and 260–325 FTE jobs across the South East, with associated GVA contributions of £48.8m–£51.3m in Wokingham and £61.4m–£64.6m regionally. These impacts reflect the capital-intensive, specialist nature of data-centre construction and include jobs supported through supply chains and induced spending.

Once operational, the development would support a highly skilled workforce, generating approximately 40–65 gross direct on-site jobs associated with the operation and maintenance of the data centre. The Economic Benefits Statement also estimates that the development could support 50–85 net additional jobs across the South East once wider supply-chain and expenditure effects are taken into account. The scheme would function as strategic digital infrastructure that enables innovation and growth in high-value sectors such as information and communication, professional services, finance, life sciences and AI-driven industries across Berkshire and the wider South East economy.

8.4.1 Policy Alignment

We consider the proposal aligns with the adopted Core Strategy and MDD, which support high-quality, sustainable development within Core Employment Areas and encourage modern economic uses that deliver productivity and long-term economic value. The development replaces an increasingly under-occupied office campus with a high-value digital-infrastructure use that secures major inward investment, sustained productivity uplift and stable fiscal returns. This directly supports policies on sustainable economic growth (CP1), good design and efficient land use (CP3), and the intensification of strategic employment locations (CP15).

The scheme is equally consistent with the emerging Local Plan Update, which places strong emphasis on digital infrastructure, modern employment, climate-resilient development, and the strengthening of the borough's technology-led economy. The data centre reflects LPU objectives to optimise Core Employment Areas (ER1), support high-value sectors, and deliver energy-efficient, future-facing employment floorspace in line with policies such as CE1 (efficient buildings) and NE5 (landscape and design). By securing long-term economic competitiveness and enabling growth in data-dependent industries, the development directly supports the spatial strategy for sustainable, innovation-driven economic growth set out for Wokingham to 2040.

8.5 Landscaping

A Landscape Strategy (Set out within the Design and Access Statement) has been developed to respond to the established character of Thames Valley Park and to integrate the proposed development within its wider setting. The existing landscape structure has informed the evolution of the masterplan. The strategy seeks to

retain and reinforce existing perimeter vegetation where possible, including mature trees, woodland edge planting and hedgerows, whilst integrating the proposed development within the established landscape character of the business park. Particular emphasis has been placed on maintaining and strengthening the site's perimeter planting to provide visual screening, support habitat connectivity and soften views of the proposed development from surrounding areas.

The Site contains a notable level change across its southern and eastern boundaries, with the landscape strategy exploring opportunities to address these changes through a combination of landform, planting and structural landscape measures. The design process considered a range of approaches to managing site levels and integrating the development into the surrounding landscape. Common principles emerging from this work include the retention of existing trees, reinforcement of perimeter woodland planting, creation of a stronger landscape buffer around the Site and the use of structural planting to reduce the visual prominence of built form and associated infrastructure.

The landscape strategy also seeks to deliver wider environmental benefits through the enhancement of habitat connectivity and integration of biodiversity measures within the landscape framework. Existing vegetation and planting areas will be retained and enhanced where possible, whilst opportunities for additional native planting, woodland reinforcement and habitat creation will be incorporated through the detailed design process. Collectively, these measures will strengthen the landscape character of the site and assist in integrating the development within the wider setting.

8.5.1 Policy Alignment

The proposals align with national and local planning policy relating to landscape, green infrastructure and design quality as set out below.

- The **NPPF** requires development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment and recognises the importance of good design and the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure. The proposed development retains and strengthens the established landscape framework of Thames Valley Park, incorporates additional planting and biodiversity enhancements, and has been designed to integrate built form within its landscape setting.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks to protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment whilst supporting sustainable growth. The landscape strategy reinforces existing landscape assets, strengthens ecological connectivity and contributes positively to the environmental quality of the Site.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development)** requires development to respond positively to local character and provide high-quality landscaping. The proposal has been informed by the established character of Thames Valley Park, retaining a strong landscape setting and incorporating a robust framework of trees, hedgerows and structural planting that reflects the wider business park environment.
- **MDD Policy CC03 (Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping)** seeks to protect, extend and enhance green infrastructure assets and ensure that landscaping forms an integral part of the design process. The proposed development retains key landscape features where possible and reinforces perimeter woodland, hedgerows and tree planting to strengthen the Site's contribution to the wider green infrastructure network.
- **MDD Policy CC04 (Sustainable Design and Construction)** encourages development to incorporate sustainable design measures and deliver wider environmental benefits. The landscape strategy has been developed alongside ecological and drainage considerations, supporting biodiversity enhancement, sustainable land management and long-term landscape resilience.

The emerging Local Plan Update places greater emphasis on landscape-led design, biodiversity enhancement and multifunctional green infrastructure.

- **Policy NE1 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)** seeks to protect and enhance ecological networks and improve biodiversity. The proposed landscape framework strengthens habitat connectivity through the retention and reinforcement of perimeter planting and woodland edge habitats.

- **Policy NE5 (Landscape and Design)** requires development to demonstrate high-quality design that responds positively to landscape character and local context. The proposal incorporates a landscape-led approach that has informed the layout, massing and relationship of development to retained trees and existing vegetation.
- **Policy NE6 (Valued Landscapes)** seeks to conserve and enhance the qualities of important landscapes and their settings. The landscape strategy ensures that the development remains integrated within the established character of Thames Valley Park through the retention of key landscape features, reinforcement of visual screening and enhancement of the wider landscape framework.

Overall, the landscape strategy responds directly to the existing character of the Site and its surroundings, retaining and enhancing key landscape features whilst integrating the proposed development into the established business park setting. The proposal therefore accords with national, adopted and emerging planning policy relating to landscape, green infrastructure and design quality.

8.6 Transport and Parking

A Transport Assessment and Framework Travel Plan has been prepared by SK Transport Planning Ltd to assess the accessibility of the Site, the suitability of the proposed access arrangements and the likely transport effects of the development. The assessment has been informed by pre-application engagement with Wokingham Borough Council, including discussions with the Council's Highways Officer. The Transport Assessment concludes that the Site is highly accessible by a range of transport modes and that the proposed development can be accommodated without adverse effects on the local highway network.

The Site occupies a sustainable location within Thames Valley Park, an established employment destination benefitting from excellent transport connectivity. Existing pedestrian routes connect the Site to the wider Thames Valley Park campus, the Thames Path, local amenities and surrounding residential areas. Dedicated cycle routes pass through Thames Valley Park and connect to Reading town centre and surrounding communities. The Site also benefits from a dedicated weekday shuttle bus service linking Thames Valley Park with Reading town centre and Reading railway station, with the nearest bus stop located immediately adjacent to the Site. Reading railway station is approximately 3.5km from the Site and provides frequent local, regional and national rail services.

The proposed development will utilise and enhance existing access arrangements. The main vehicular access will be taken from the existing western access point onto the Thames Valley Park estate road, with a secondary access provided for emergency and substation access. The internal layout has been designed to safely accommodate operational, servicing, maintenance, emergency and occasional abnormal load vehicles associated with the data centre. Vehicle tracking demonstrates that all required vehicle movements can be accommodated safely within the Site. Pedestrian and cycle access will be retained via the existing frontage, linking directly to the wider network of routes throughout Thames Valley Park.

Given the specialist nature of data centre operations, the Transport Assessment demonstrates that the proposed development will generate substantially fewer vehicle movements than the existing lawful office use. The assessment compares the proposed 37,000 sqm data centre against the existing 22,867 sqm office campus. The assessment concludes that the proposed development would result in a reduction of approximately 253 vehicle trips during the AM peak hour, 209 vehicle trips during the PM peak hour and approximately 1,708 fewer vehicle movements over a typical weekday. As a result, the development will not have a material impact on the operation or capacity of the local highway network.

The Transport Assessment also confirms that the proposed parking provision is appropriate to the operational requirements of the development. While the data centre falls within Use Class B8, only approximately 1,400sqm of floorspace comprises ancillary office accommodation. Evidence from comparable data centre developments, staffing assessments and industry-standard benchmarks demonstrates that a provision of 72 car parking spaces is suitable and proportionate. The proposed development will also provide 36 cycle parking spaces, comprising 20 secure long-stay spaces and 16 visitor spaces, together with electric vehicle charging infrastructure and associated facilities to support sustainable travel choices.

A Framework Travel Plan accompanies the application and sets out measures to encourage travel by walking, cycling and public transport, reduce reliance on the private car and support sustainable travel behaviour amongst staff and visitors. The Travel Plan will be monitored and updated following occupation of the development.

8.6.1 Policy Alignment

The proposed development accords with the transport objectives of national and local planning policy.

- The **NPPF** requires development proposals to adopt a vision-led approach to transport, prioritise sustainable modes of travel, provide safe and suitable access for all users and ensure that any impacts on the transport network can be satisfactorily mitigated. The Transport Assessment demonstrates that the Site is sustainably located, benefits from excellent accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, and will generate substantially fewer vehicle movements than the existing lawful use.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks to promote sustainable development and reduce the need to travel. The redevelopment of an existing employment site that benefits from established transport infrastructure and opportunities for sustainable travel is consistent with these objectives.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP6 (Travel Demand)** supports development that encourages travel by sustainable modes and provides appropriate levels of parking whilst avoiding unacceptable impacts on the highway network. The proposal incorporates a Framework Travel Plan, cycle parking, electric vehicle charging and a parking provision proportionate to the operational requirements of the data centre. The Transport Assessment confirms that vehicle trips will be significantly lower than the existing office use.

8.7 Energy and Sustainability

An Energy and Sustainability Statement, Energy Strategy, BREEAM Pre-Assessment and supporting Environmental Statement chapters have been prepared by Tyrens Hilson Moran to assess the sustainability performance of the Proposed Development. Together, these documents demonstrate how sustainability considerations have informed the evolution of the scheme and how the development responds to relevant national and local planning policy relating to carbon reduction, energy efficiency, climate resilience, resource efficiency and sustainable design. The accompanying Energy and Sustainability Statement provides a detailed review of the relevant policy framework and the Proposed Development's response to those policy requirements.

Grid Connection

At commencement, the site will receive 1.8 MW of grid power, which will serve the administration building. Additional grid capacity is not currently available, with the network operator's current backstop date for a 60 MW connection being 2037, although discussions are ongoing to secure an earlier connection date and potentially increase capacity to 110 MW. As a result, the site's long-term power requirements and on-site generation strategy remain under review pending the outcome of negotiations with the network operator.

Energy Demand and Efficiency

The Proposed Development has been designed in accordance with the energy hierarchy, seeking first to reduce energy demand, then maximise energy efficiency before considering energy supply requirements. The administration building will be designed as an all-electric building incorporating a high-performance building envelope, heat pump technology, mechanical ventilation with heat recovery, LED lighting and intelligent controls. Building fabric and services performance targets have been developed to exceed minimum Building Regulations requirements and support efficient long-term operation.

At full build-out, the Proposed Development is expected to support an IT load of approximately 72 MW and a total peak electrical demand of approximately 110 MW. This equates to a peak-design Power Usage Effectiveness (PUE) of approximately 1.5, which is considered good to very good for a facility of this nature. To minimise energy consumption and optimise operational performance, the cooling strategy incorporates intelligent two-stage cooling through air-cooled chillers with free-cooling capability, rejecting heat through a

combination of air and liquid secondary cooling loops. This approach reduces water consumption whilst improving overall energy efficiency.

Power Generation

Given the current constraints on grid capacity, the Energy Strategy proposes a phased approach to energy supply. Whilst the administration building will be supplied from the existing electricity network connection, the data halls will initially be supported by on-site solid oxide fuel cells until additional grid capacity becomes available.

The Energy Strategy explains that solid oxide fuel cells have been selected in preference to conventional gas turbine generation. Unlike gas turbines, which generate electricity through combustion, fuel cells generate electricity electrochemically. As a result, they produce no nitrogen oxides (NOx) or particulate matter emissions, require significantly lower volumes of water, and generate lower operational noise levels. The technology also benefits from a modular design and fuel flexibility, allowing future adaptation as energy systems and fuel sources evolve.

The submitted Energy Strategy compares the operational performance and carbon implications of alternative power generation technologies and concludes that solid oxide fuel cells represent the most suitable interim solution in the context of current grid constraints. The strategy recognises that technological advancements in energy infrastructure and generation technologies are likely before installation and provides flexibility to incorporate future improvements where appropriate.

The Applicant's preferred long-term outcome remains the progressive replacement of on-site generation with grid-supplied electricity as additional network capacity becomes available. The strategy therefore provides a pathway towards increased reliance on grid electricity over time, with the eventual removal of on-site fuel cells anticipated once sufficient capacity has been secured.

Heat Recovery Opportunities

The Energy Strategy also identifies opportunities to recover waste heat from the Proposed Development for use beyond the site boundary, enabling local carbon emissions associated with conventional gas-fired heating systems to be offset. Whilst the delivery of any off-site heat network infrastructure remains outside the Applicant's control, the proposals safeguard appropriate plant space and infrastructure corridors to facilitate future connection to local or strategic heat networks should viable opportunities come forward. This approach ensures that the Proposed Development does not prejudice future district heating opportunities and supports broader decarbonisation objectives.

BREEAM

BREEAM Pre-Assessment has been undertaken for the Proposed Development against the BREEAM Data Centres 2010 scheme. The assessment demonstrates that the Proposed Development is expected to achieve a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating, with a predicted score of 74.09%, exceeding the minimum score required for certification. The assessment reflects the incorporation of sustainability measures across the design, including energy efficiency, water conservation, sustainable transport, responsible material selection, ecological enhancement and pollution reduction measures. The assessment also confirms that all mandatory credits associated with an 'Excellent' rating are currently being targeted. The current assessment provides a clear pathway to achieving BREEAM Excellent and will continue to be reviewed as the detailed design progresses towards formal certification.

Policy Alignment

The proposal aligns with national and local planning policy relating to sustainable development, energy efficiency, climate change mitigation and environmental performance as set out below and detailed further within the accompanying Energy and Sustainability Statement.

- **The NPPF** supports the transition to a low carbon future, encourages renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure, and seeks to minimise greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable design and construction. The Proposed Development incorporates a phased energy strategy that responds to current grid constraints, prioritises energy efficiency through high-performance building fabric and cooling

systems, and provides a pathway towards increased reliance on grid electricity as additional capacity becomes available.

- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks to deliver sustainable forms of development that minimise resource consumption, support renewable and low-carbon energy generation, address climate change and promote environmental quality. The Proposed Development incorporates energy-efficient design measures, low-carbon technologies, future heat recovery opportunities and a commitment to achieving a BREEAM Excellent rating, supporting the delivery of sustainable development.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development)** requires development to be designed to a high standard and respond appropriately to environmental considerations. Sustainability considerations have informed the design of the Proposed Development from the outset, including the integration of energy-efficient building services, climate resilience measures and opportunities for future decarbonisation.
- **MDD Policy CC04 (Sustainable Design and Construction)** requires major non-residential development to achieve high standards of sustainable design and construction and demonstrate compliance with recognised environmental performance standards. A BREEAM Pre-Assessment demonstrates that the Proposed Development is targeting a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating, with sustainability measures embedded throughout the design.
- **MDD Policy CC05 (Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks)** encourages opportunities to incorporate renewable and low-carbon energy technologies and support decentralised energy infrastructure. The Energy Strategy adopts a phased approach to power provision, incorporating solid oxide fuel cells as an interim energy solution and safeguarding opportunities for future heat recovery and district heating connections.

The emerging Local Plan Update places increased emphasis on climate change mitigation, carbon reduction, energy efficiency and sustainable construction.

- **Policy CE1 (Responding to Climate Change)** seeks to ensure that development mitigates and adapts to the effects of climate change. The Proposed Development incorporates measures to reduce operational energy demand, support future decarbonisation and enhance resilience to future climate conditions.
- **Policy CE2 (Sustainable Design and Construction)** promotes high standards of environmental performance, energy efficiency and resource efficiency. The Proposed Development incorporates a high-performance administration building, efficient cooling systems and a comprehensive sustainability strategy that exceeds minimum regulatory requirements.
- **Policy CE4 (Low Carbon and Renewable Energy)** supports the delivery of low-carbon energy infrastructure and encourages developments to maximise opportunities for carbon reduction. The Energy Strategy has been designed to minimise operational carbon emissions within the constraints of the existing electricity network and provides a clear pathway towards increased use of grid-supplied electricity as capacity becomes available.
- **Policy CE6 (Water Efficiency and Environmental Performance)** and **Policy CE7 (Infrastructure and Resource Efficiency)** seek to ensure that development minimises environmental impacts and makes efficient use of resources. The Proposed Development incorporates efficient cooling technologies, minimises water consumption through closed-loop systems and safeguards opportunities for future heat recovery and wider resource efficiency measures.

Overall, the Proposed Development incorporates a comprehensive sustainability strategy that responds positively to current energy infrastructure constraints whilst supporting long-term decarbonisation objectives. Through a combination of energy-efficient design, low-carbon technologies, future heat recovery opportunities and a commitment to BREEAM Excellent, the proposals accord with national, adopted and emerging planning policy relating to energy, sustainability and climate change.

8.8 Biodiversity and Ecology

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment and Great Crested Newt (GCN) eDNA Survey have been undertaken by Hilson Moran to establish the ecological baseline of the Site and inform the development proposals. The reports note that the main existing ecological features are concentrated around the site perimeter and comprise mixed woodland, mature trees, native hedgerows, scrub and areas of modified grassland. The perimeter woodland is the most ecologically valuable habitat on the Site, providing habitat and connectivity for birds, bats and other wildlife.

The Site is not subject to any statutory ecological designation and contains no irreplaceable habitats. The nearest statutory and non-statutory ecological designations are located within the wider surrounding area, including Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Wildlife Sites and areas of ancient woodland. Priority habitat inventories identify deciduous woodland within and adjacent to the Site, reflecting the established woodland belts that form part of the wider Thames Valley Park green infrastructure network.

Ecological surveys confirm that the existing buildings have negligible potential to support roosting bats owing to their modern construction, regular historical occupation and lack of suitable roosting features. In contrast, trees within the perimeter woodland contain features that may provide opportunistic bat roosting opportunities and form part of a wider commuting and foraging corridor connected to the surrounding green infrastructure network. The perimeter woodland, mature trees and hedgerows also provide habitat suitable for breeding, wintering and migratory birds, with a range of bird species recorded during the site surveys and evidence of active nests observed. The ecological surveys also considered the potential presence of amphibians. Whilst the nearest pond approximately 25m north of the Site was assessed as having excellent habitat suitability for great crested newts, eDNA surveys undertaken on five ponds within 500m of the Site returned negative results. The surveys therefore conclude that GCN are likely absent and unlikely to represent a constraint to the Proposed Development. The Site is assessed as having negligible suitability for reptiles, water voles, otters and hazel dormice [REDACTED]

A BNG Assessment has also been undertaken using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. The Site has a baseline biodiversity value of 14.45 area habitat units and 2.69 hedgerow units. The proposed development has been designed to retain the most valuable ecological features on the Site, including perimeter woodland, retained mature trees and sections of existing hedgerow. The landscape strategy includes woodland enhancement, species-rich hedgerow enhancement, extensive tree planting, open mosaic habitat creation and habitat management measures to strengthen ecological connectivity and biodiversity value. On the basis of the 132kV substation layout, the proposals would deliver 16.07 area habitat units, representing a net gain of 1.62 habitat units (+11.21%), exceeding the statutory requirement to achieve a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. The scheme would also deliver 3.11 hedgerow units, representing a net gain of 0.41 hedgerow units (+15.29%). These gains would be achieved through the creation of approximately 0.698ha of open mosaic habitat, the planting of 90 native trees, the creation of 0.42ha of mixed native scrub, the creation of 0.31km of species-rich native hedgerow, and the enhancement of approximately 0.156km of retained native hedgerow to species-rich native hedgerow. Accordingly, the proposed development would deliver measurable biodiversity enhancements across the Site whilst comfortably exceeding the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement.

8.8.1 Policy Alignment

The **NPPF** states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by protecting and enhancing valued habitats, minimising impacts on biodiversity, strengthening ecological networks and securing measurable net gains for biodiversity. The ecological assessment demonstrates that the Site is predominantly previously developed land of generally low ecological value, with the most valuable ecological features comprising perimeter woodland, mature trees and associated habitats. These features have informed the design process and are retained where possible. Appropriate mitigation, habitat enhancement and Biodiversity Net Gain measures will be secured as part of the development, ensuring compliance with the biodiversity objectives of the NPPF.

The proposals align with the adopted development plan as follows:

- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks development that protects and enhances the natural environment whilst supporting sustainable growth. The proposals retain the Site's highest value habitats, including woodland, mature trees and hedgerows, whilst incorporating new habitat creation, biodiversity enhancements and long-term ecological management measures that will improve the overall environmental performance of the Site.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP7 (Biodiversity)** requires development to protect biodiversity and contribute positively to the Borough's ecological resource. The ecological assessments and feedback received during the pre-application process have informed the evolution of the masterplan, helping to avoid and minimise impacts on the most valuable habitats whilst identifying opportunities for habitat enhancement, woodland reinforcement, species-rich hedgerow enhancement, biodiversity management and BNG. The proposals will retain approximately 0.55ha of woodland and incorporate extensive habitat enhancement measures that contribute positively to local ecological networks.
- **MDD Policy CC03 (Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping)** seeks the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure assets, trees and landscape features. The proposed development retains key woodland belts, mature trees and hedgerows where possible and incorporates a landscape strategy that reinforces the site's existing green infrastructure network.
- **MDD Policy TB23 (Biodiversity and Development Management)** requires development proposals to avoid adverse impacts on biodiversity and ecological networks and to provide suitable mitigation where required. The PEA confirms that the Site is largely developed in character, with the principal ecological value arising from perimeter habitats. Appropriate mitigation measures, ecological protection measures and biodiversity enhancements have been identified to ensure compliance with this policy.

The emerging Local Plan Update places increased emphasis on biodiversity enhancement, ecological resilience and the protection of ecological networks. The proposal aligns with these emerging policy objectives.

- **Policy NE1 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)** requires development to protect and enhance biodiversity, strengthen ecological networks and deliver measurable biodiversity improvements. The proposed development has been informed by detailed ecological survey work and has been designed to retain and enhance the most valuable ecological features on the Site. The preferred 33kV option would deliver a biodiversity net gain of approximately 17.12% for area habitats, exceeding the statutory 10% requirement, whilst additional measures will be secured to address hedgerow biodiversity requirements through the Biodiversity Gain Plan process.
- **Policy NE5 (Landscape and Design)** promotes landscape-led development that integrates biodiversity considerations from the outset. Ecological considerations have informed both the layout and landscape strategy, including the retention of perimeter woodland, protection of important trees and the integration of biodiversity enhancements within the wider landscape framework.

Overall, the ecological assessment demonstrates that the Site is capable of accommodating the proposed development whilst retaining its most valuable ecological features, providing biodiversity enhancements and delivering Biodiversity Net Gain in accordance with adopted and emerging planning policy

8.9 Heritage

A Desk-Based Heritage Assessment (DBA) has been undertaken by Prospect Archaeology to assess the potential effects of the proposed development on designated and non-designated heritage assets, including both built heritage and buried archaeological remains.

The assessment identifies four designated heritage assets within 1km of the Site comprising Bulmershe Manor (Grade II*), the Gates and Piers to Bulmershe Manor (Grade II), London Road Bridge (Grade II) and the Barns at Holme Park Farm (Grade II). In addition, one Building of Traditional Local Character (South Lodge) is located within the study area. The assessment concludes that none of these assets share significant intervisibility with the Site and that the Site does not contribute to their significance or setting. The Site also falls outside any Significant Views with Heritage Interest identified within the Reading Borough Local Plan.

The archaeological baseline demonstrates that the wider area is of historic interest, with evidence of prehistoric, Iron Age and Romano-British activity recorded across the Thames Valley corridor. Previous archaeological investigations undertaken across the Site during the 1980s included evaluations, excavations and watching briefs associated with the development of Thames Valley Park. These investigations identified evidence of Middle Iron Age to Romano-British activity, principally in the form of a ditched enclosure, associated field systems, pits, postholes and cremation burials. Evidence of earlier prehistoric activity was represented largely by residual artefacts rather than surviving archaeological features.

The Site has subsequently been extensively developed as part of the existing office campus. The DBA notes that the previous archaeological investigations were supplemented by topsoil stripping and archaeological monitoring, which did not identify significant additional remains beyond those already excavated and recorded. Whilst there remain limited areas that may not have been subject to the same degree of disturbance, these are confined principally to parts of the southern perimeter and the south-eastern corner of the Site. On balance, the assessment concludes that it is unlikely that significant unknown or unrecorded archaeological remains survive within the Site.

The DBA therefore concludes that the proposed development will not result in direct or indirect effects on designated heritage assets and that the potential for significant archaeological remains to survive within the Site is low. No further archaeological work is recommended.

8.9.1 Policy Alignment

The proposals align with national and local planning policy relating to the historic environment as set out below.

- The **NPPF** requires planning decisions to conserve and enhance the historic environment, having regard to the significance of heritage assets and any contribution made by their setting. The DBA concludes that no designated heritage assets will be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed development and that the Site does not contribute to the significance of nearby listed buildings or other heritage assets. The proposal therefore accords with the NPPF objective of conserving heritage significance whilst supporting sustainable development. The application is supported by a DBA which has reviewed historic environment records, previous archaeological investigations, cartographic evidence and heritage designations to establish a robust evidence base.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks to protect and enhance the Borough's environmental assets, including its historic environment. The assessment confirms that the proposed development can be accommodated without harm to the significance, setting or appreciation of heritage assets within the surrounding area.
- **MDD Policy TB24 (Designated Heritage Assets)** requires development to conserve and, where possible, enhance designated heritage assets and their settings. The DBA concludes that there will be no direct or indirect effects on nearby listed buildings and that no mitigation is required in respect of built heritage.
- **MDD Policy TB25 (Archaeology)** requires appropriate assessment where archaeological remains may be present and seeks the preservation of significant archaeology where necessary. Extensive archaeological investigations have previously been undertaken across the Site, including evaluation, excavation and watching briefs. These works have substantially informed the understanding of the archaeological resource and support the conclusion that significant unknown archaeological remains are unlikely to survive.
- **MDD Policy TB26 (Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character)** seeks to protect Buildings of Traditional Local Character and their settings. The assessment confirms that South Lodge, the nearest identified asset of this type, has no intervisibility with the Site and that its significance and setting will not be affected by the proposed development.

The emerging Local Plan Update similarly seeks to conserve the Borough's historic environment whilst supporting appropriate growth and regeneration.

- **Policy NE5 (Landscape and Design)** requires development to respond positively to its context, including historical and cultural considerations. The redevelopment of an existing office campus within Thames Valley Park does not affect designated heritage assets, historic views or archaeological resources of known significance and therefore accords with the wider objectives of the policy.

Overall, the DBA demonstrates that the proposed development will not result in harm to designated or non-designated heritage assets and is consistent with the objectives of national, adopted and emerging planning policy relating to the historic environment.

8.10 Air Quality

The likely effects of the Proposed Development on air quality have been assessed within Chapter 6 of the Environmental Statement, prepared by Hilson Moran. The assessment considered the potential effects arising during both the construction and operational phases of the development, including construction dust, construction traffic emissions, and emissions associated with the operation of the proposed fuel cells and back-up generators. Operational traffic emissions were scoped out of detailed assessment as the development is predicted to result in a reduction in vehicle movements compared with the existing use of the site.

The assessment undertaken using recognised industry guidance and air quality modelling methodologies. Existing air quality conditions were assessed using monitoring data from Wokingham Borough Council, Reading Borough Council and Defra background concentration datasets. These demonstrate that pollutant concentrations in the vicinity of the Site are currently below the relevant Air Quality Strategy objectives and that no Air Quality Management Areas are located within the immediate vicinity of the Proposed Development.

During construction, the assessment considers the potential for temporary effects associated with dust generation and construction traffic. Appropriate mitigation measures will be secured through the implementation of construction environmental management measures to control dust emissions and minimise impacts on nearby receptors.

During operation, detailed air dispersion modelling has been undertaken to assess emissions from the proposed fuel cells and back-up generators. The operational energy strategy incorporates measures to minimise emissions, including provision for selective catalytic reduction systems on the back-up generators and the design of emission stacks to promote effective dispersion away from sensitive receptors.

8.10.1 Policy Alignment

The proposals align with national and local planning policy relating to air quality and environmental protection as set out below.

- The **NPPF** requires planning decisions to sustain and contribute towards compliance with relevant air quality objectives, take account of the effects of air pollution on health and the natural environment, and ensure that development is appropriate for its location. Chapter 6 of the ES demonstrates that the Proposed Development would not give rise to significant adverse air quality effects. Existing air quality in the vicinity of the Site is compliant with relevant air quality objectives and operational traffic emissions have been scoped out of detailed assessment as the development would generate fewer vehicle movements than the existing lawful use of the Site. The assessment also identifies appropriate mitigation measures to manage potential construction and operational impacts.

The emerging Local Plan Update similarly seeks to protect residents and the environment from the effects of air pollution whilst supporting sustainable development.

- **Policy HC6 (Air Pollution and Air Quality)** requires development proposals to avoid unacceptable impacts on air quality and demonstrate that potential effects have been appropriately assessed and mitigated. Chapter 6 provides a detailed assessment of construction dust, construction traffic emissions and emissions associated with the proposed fuel cells and back-up generators. The assessment identifies appropriate mitigation measures, including provision for selective catalytic reduction on back-up generators and design measures to promote effective dispersion of emissions.

Overall, the Environmental Statement demonstrates that the Proposed Development would not result in significant adverse air quality effects and is consistent with the objectives of national, adopted and emerging planning policy relating to air quality and environmental protection.

8.11 Noise

A Noise Impact Assessment has been prepared by Hilson Moran to assess the potential effects of the proposed development on nearby noise-sensitive receptors. The nearest residential properties are located to the south and east of the Site, separated from the proposed development by existing infrastructure, commercial development and landscape features.

A baseline noise survey was undertaken to establish the prevailing acoustic environment. The survey identified that the existing noise climate is already influenced by a range of established noise sources, most notably railway movements associated with the Elizabeth Line and National Rail services, together with activity generated by surrounding commercial uses within Thames Valley Park. As a result, the Site is located within an existing developed environment rather than a quiet rural setting.

At this stage of the design process being undertaken as part of an outline planning application, detailed plant selection remains flexible. Rather than assessing specific items of equipment, the Noise Impact Assessment establishes operational noise limits that future plant and equipment will be required to achieve. These limits have been derived having regard to accepted assessment methodologies and the existing background noise environment. The assessment confirms that the proposed development can be designed to operate within these limits through a combination of embedded and detailed mitigation measures.

The assessment identifies a range of measures capable of controlling operational noise, including the selection of low-noise plant, careful positioning and orientation of equipment, acoustic enclosures and screening, attenuated ventilation systems, vibration isolation measures and roof-level screening. The building massing, landscape framework and separation distances to nearby residential receptors provide additional attenuation and help contain operational noise within the Site.

Whilst emergency power systems and periodic testing regimes may generate occasional short-term noise events, these can be effectively managed through appropriate operational controls and testing procedures. Overall, the assessment concludes that operational noise from the development can be controlled such that significant adverse effects on neighbouring residential amenity are avoided.

8.11.1 Policy Alignment

The proposals align with national and local planning policy relating to noise, environmental quality and the protection of residential amenity as set out below:

- The **NPPF** requires planning decisions to avoid significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life arising from noise, whilst ensuring that existing businesses and infrastructure are not placed under unreasonable restrictions. The Noise Impact Assessment demonstrates that operational plant can be designed to operate within appropriate limits at nearby residential receptors, so that unacceptable impacts on amenity do not arise.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks to ensure that development protects environmental quality and contributes positively to the quality of life of existing and future communities. The proposed development incorporates design measures and operational controls that minimise noise impacts whilst supporting the continued economic function of Thames Valley Park as a strategic employment location.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development)** requires development to protect the amenities of neighbouring occupiers and ensure that adverse environmental impacts are appropriately mitigated. The Noise Impact Assessment establishes operational plant noise limits based on the prevailing baseline environment and identifies mitigation measures capable of protecting nearby residential receptors and ensuring compliance with accepted assessment standards.
- **MDD Policy CC04 (Sustainable Design and Construction)** seeks to ensure that development avoids or mitigates environmental impacts arising from its construction and operation. Noise attenuation measures

have been incorporated into the design approach from the outset, including acoustic screening, attenuation, equipment selection and vibration isolation, ensuring that environmental effects are minimised.

The emerging Local Plan Update similarly places emphasis on the protection of environmental quality and residential amenity, namely:

- **Policy NE5 (Landscape and Design)** requires development to be designed in a manner that safeguards the amenity of existing and future occupiers. The proposed development has been configured so that plant and infrastructure can be appropriately screened and acoustically controlled, whilst benefiting from the existing separation distances, landscape structure and established commercial context of the broader business park.

Overall, the Noise Impact Assessment demonstrates that the proposed development can be designed and operated without giving rise to unacceptable impacts on nearby noise-sensitive receptors and is consistent with the objectives of national, adopted and emerging planning policy.

8.12 Drainage and Flood Risk

A Drainage and Flooding Technical Note has been prepared to assess existing flood risk conditions and to establish an appropriate drainage strategy for the proposed development. The assessment confirms that the Site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore at very low risk of fluvial flooding, with a probability of flooding from rivers of less than 0.1% in any given year. Whilst areas associated with the River Thames corridor to the north are located within Flood Zones 2 and 3, these areas do not extend into the Site. No flood defences influence flood risk at the Site.

The principal source of flood risk identified is surface water (pluvial) flooding. Existing mapping indicates localised areas of surface water ponding within parts of the current office campus, particularly adjacent to the existing buildings. However, the assessment concludes that these flood pathways are influenced by the current building arrangement, which acts as an obstruction to overland flow routes. As the existing buildings will be demolished and replaced as part of the proposed development, the new drainage strategy provides an opportunity to address these existing constraints and reduce surface water flood risk on the Site.

A moderate groundwater flood risk has also been identified. The proposed development has therefore been designed having regard to site levels, drainage infrastructure and operational resilience requirements. A comprehensive drainage strategy is proposed, utilising existing discharge points to the local sewerage network whilst incorporating attenuation and sustainable drainage measures to control runoff rates and volumes.

The drainage strategy includes a range of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) that will be considered through future design stages. These include green roofs, rainwater harvesting, infiltration features, swales, filter drains, bio-retention areas, tree pits, permeable paving and underground attenuation storage. In particular, underground geo-cellular storage is identified as a suitable and effective attenuation solution given the operational and site constraints associated with the development.

The proposed drainage strategy has also been developed to address the specific operational requirements of a data centre. Measures include glycol containment systems, fire effluent retention infrastructure, diesel and AdBlue containment measures, oil interceptors and controlled drainage arrangements. Glycol sampling chambers and shut-off valves are proposed to prevent contaminated water entering the wider drainage network in the event of a leak, whilst fire effluent will be collected and retained on site before being removed for appropriate treatment and disposal. Industrial wastewater generated by the cooling systems will be monitored prior to discharge and managed in accordance with the requirements of Thames Water and any necessary trade effluent consents.

The assessment concludes that the Site is suitable for the proposed development from a flood risk and drainage perspective. The proposed drainage strategy will replicate existing discharge arrangements whilst incorporating additional attenuation, water quality protection measures and operational safeguards, resulting in an overall reduction in existing surface water flood risk.

8.12.1 Policy Alignment

The proposals align with national and local planning policy relating to flood risk, drainage and sustainable water management, as set out below.

- The **NPPF** seeks to direct development to areas at lowest risk of flooding and requires development to be safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere. The Site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore situated within the area of lowest fluvial flood risk. The proposed drainage strategy incorporates attenuation, controlled discharge and sustainable drainage measures to ensure that flood risk is appropriately managed and not increased elsewhere. The NPPF also promotes the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) within major development proposals. A site-specific SuDS appraisal has been undertaken which identifies a range of suitable measures that can be incorporated into the detailed design, including green roofs, rainwater harvesting, swales, filter drains, bio-retention features, tree pits, permeable paving and underground attenuation storage.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development)** seeks to ensure that development responds to environmental constraints, supports climate resilience and protects environmental resources. The proposed drainage strategy addresses existing flood risk constraints whilst incorporating sustainable water management measures and operational resilience features that are appropriate to the nature of the development.
- **Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development)** requires development to be supported by appropriate infrastructure and to avoid adverse environmental impacts. The proposed drainage strategy provides a comprehensive approach to managing flood risk, surface water drainage, wastewater and operational containment requirements whilst utilising existing drainage connections where appropriate.
- **MDD Policy CC02 (Sustainable Drainage Systems and Flood Prevention)** seeks to ensure that developments incorporate suitable flood prevention and drainage measures and do not increase flood risk elsewhere. The proposed development incorporates attenuation storage, controlled discharge arrangements and a range of potential SuDS features which will manage runoff rates and volumes whilst reducing existing pluvial flood risk within the Site.
- **MDD Policy CC04 (Sustainable Design and Construction)** encourages developments to incorporate sustainable water management measures and reduce pressure on existing infrastructure. The proposal includes opportunities for rainwater harvesting, green infrastructure and sustainable drainage measures as part of an integrated site-wide drainage strategy.

The emerging Local Plan Update places greater emphasis on climate resilience, integrated water management and sustainable drainage, as below:

- **Policy NE4 (Flood Risk and Sustainable Drainage)** requires development to be safe from flooding for its lifetime, avoid increasing flood risk elsewhere and incorporate sustainable drainage measures wherever practicable. The proposed development is located within Flood Zone 1 and incorporates a drainage strategy specifically designed to manage surface water runoff, groundwater considerations and operational risks associated with the data centre use.
- **Policy NE5 (Landscape and Design)** promotes the integration of drainage and green infrastructure as part of the wider design approach. The proposed drainage strategy includes opportunities for landscape-led SuDS features, including swales, bio-retention areas and tree pits, helping to integrate drainage infrastructure within the overall landscape framework of the Site.

Overall, the drainage and flood risk assessment demonstrates that the proposed development is appropriately located within an area of low flood risk and can be delivered with a robust drainage strategy that manages flood risk, protects water quality and accords with national, adopted and emerging planning policy.

8.13 Environment Impact Assessment

A proportionate and targeted Environmental Impact Assessment has been undertaken to accompany the outline planning application for the Proposed Development. Whilst the proposal has not been formally

determined to constitute EIA development under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended), a voluntary EIA has been prepared as a precautionary measure to ensure that potential environmental effects have been robustly identified, assessed and addressed through the design process. The findings are presented within the Environmental Statement.

The scope of the EIA was informed through consultation with Wokingham Borough Council and focuses on those environmental topics with the potential to be materially affected by the Proposed Development. The assessment considers the likely significant effects arising during demolition, construction and operation and includes detailed assessments of air quality; noise and vibration; greenhouse gas emissions and climate change resilience; water resources; and waste. The ES also considers cumulative effects arising from the interaction of these topics and from other committed or reasonably foreseeable developments in the surrounding area.

The EIA has informed the evolution of the Proposed Development and identifies measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate potential environmental effects. These measures include construction management controls, sustainable drainage measures, operational design parameters, climate resilience measures and sustainable resource management practices. The proposed mitigation is embedded within the assessment and forms part of the overall development strategy.

The ES concludes that, subject to the implementation of embedded and proposed mitigation measures, the Proposed Development would not result in significant adverse effects in relation to air quality, noise and vibration, water resources, or waste and materials. A minor beneficial effect is identified in relation to the foul sewer network due to reduced foul water volumes compared with the existing office use. The principal significant effects identified by the EIA relate to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change resilience, reflecting the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the Proposed Development and the challenges posed by future heatwave and drought conditions. The cumulative assessment identifies no additional significant effects beyond these greenhouse gas and climate-resilience effects.

8.14 Planning Obligations

The 2026 NPPF recognises that planning conditions and obligations may be required to make development acceptable in planning terms. Planning obligations must satisfy the statutory tests set out in Regulation 122(a) of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended), which must be:

- Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- Directly related to the development; and
- Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

The Local Plan supports the use of planning obligations to secure infrastructure and mitigate the impacts of development. In addition to planning obligations, WBC approved its Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule on 19 February 2015. The Charging Schedule sets a CIL rate of £0 per square metre for ‘All Other Development Types’ borough-wide, which is relevant to data centre proposals.

9. Conclusions and Planning Balance

Outline planning permission is sought for the following Proposed Development:

“Outline planning application (all matters reserved except for Access) for demolition of existing buildings and the construction of a data centre (Use Class B8), fuel cells for energy generation, ancillary office space and associated plant, drainage, backup power generation, sub-station, car parking, landscaping, engineering works and formation of and alterations to access roads.”

The Site comprises approximately 5.4 hectares of previously developed land within Thames Valley Park, an established Core Employment Area and Major Development Location. The proposal will redevelop a former office campus to provide strategically important digital infrastructure, whilst retaining the employment

function of the Site and supporting the continued evolution of Thames Valley Park as a key employment location.

As set out throughout this Planning Statement, the principle of development is strongly supported by national and local planning policy. The Site is specifically identified for employment uses within the adopted Development Plan and continues to be safeguarded as a Core Employment Area within the emerging Local Plan Update. The proposal is also consistent with the revised NPPF (August 2026), which explicitly recognises the importance of data centres and other digital infrastructure in supporting economic growth and productivity.

The proposed development aligns with the strategic objectives of the Development Plan, including:

- Core Strategy Policy CP1 – promoting sustainable development and economic growth;
- Core Strategy Policy CP3 – requiring high quality development that responds positively to its surroundings;
- Core Strategy Policy CP9 – supporting appropriate development within Major Development Locations;
- Core Strategy Policy CP15 – safeguarding and supporting employment uses within Core Employment Areas;
- MDD Policies CC02, CC03 and CC04 – supporting sustainable drainage, landscape enhancement and sustainable design principles.

The proposal also aligns with the emerging Local Plan Update, particularly:

- Policy ER1 (Core Employment Areas) – supporting the renewal, modernisation and intensification of employment uses within Thames Valley Park;
- Policy CE1 (Design Principles for Efficient Buildings) – promoting efficient and well-integrated employment development;
- Policies NE1, NE4 and NE5 – supporting biodiversity enhancement, sustainable drainage and high-quality landscape-led design.

The application is supported by a comprehensive suite of technical assessments, including an Environmental Statement, which demonstrate that the Site is capable of accommodating the proposed development without giving rise to unacceptable impacts. The assessments confirm that environmental effects can be appropriately mitigated and that the development responds positively to matters relating to design, ecology, heritage, flood risk, drainage, transport, noise and visual amenity.

The application is supported by a sustainability pathway which demonstrates that, whilst the Proposed Development requires an interim energy solution in advance of wider electricity network reinforcement, there is a clear and deliverable route towards long-term decarbonisation. The assessment shows that the development is capable of transitioning to a full grid connection as capacity becomes available, enabling it to benefit from the continued decarbonisation of the national electricity network and substantially reducing operational carbon emissions over its lifetime. The proposal also safeguards opportunities for future heat network integration and waste heat recovery, creating the potential for wider carbon reduction benefits beyond the Site itself. Whilst the operational energy demands associated with a data centre are acknowledged, the submitted evidence demonstrates that the applicant has adopted a proactive and future-focused approach to carbon reduction which is proportionate to the nature of the development and consistent with national and local climate objectives.

Overall, the proposal represents a sustainable form of development that will deliver nationally significant digital infrastructure, support the growth of the digital economy and make efficient use of a previously developed employment site. It is therefore considered to accord with the Development Plan when read as a whole and should be approved without delay, subject to appropriate planning conditions and obligations.