

10 March 2026

Our Ref: TS.LPC.6331

Development Management
Wokingham Borough Council
PO Box 157
Shute End, Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 1BN



Dear Sir/Madam

Eastheath House, Eastheath Avenue, Wokingham, RG4A 2PR
“Change of Use from B1/Class E (office), B2 & B8 to Class E(d) Indoor Sport”
Planning Application Submission

On behalf of my client, Apacor Ltd, I wish to make a planning application submission for the above proposal. In order for the application to be registered I am pleased to enclose the following:

- Completed Application Form
- The relevant fee of £588
- Completed CIL Form
- Wokingham Town Centre Sequential Test
- Employment/ Marketing Statement
- Package of Application Drawings comprising:
 - Existing Floor Plans
 - Proposed Floor Plans
 - Existing Site Plan
 - Proposed Site Plan
 - Site Location Plan

This proposal relates to part of the Eastheath House site, which is part of a large commercial unit located on Eastheath Avenue. This locality is part of the Molly Millars Industrial Area core employment area. The site is presently empty, and has been in this situation since January 2023 despite full attempts to find a suitable reuse of the premises.

The proposal is to re-configure the building internally to create an indoor sports facility comprising 3 padel courts (2 x doubles courts and 1 x singles court), with associated reception, changing and toilet/washing facilities. The works can all take place internally without any alterations being required to the external appearance of the building. The unit benefits from its own separate vehicular & pedestrian access point, and within an immediately adjacent service yard area there is provision for 12 car parking spaces (including 1 disabled bay) and covered cycle storage facilities.

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Relevant Planning History

The site has relatively limited planning history available to view via the Council's online records. However, application ref: *F/1999/69086* (Proposed formation of additional B8 storage area in form of mezzanine floor) which was approved in 1999 contains existing floor plans of the site which demonstrate the site has a mixed B1/Class E (Office), B2 & B8 function/use. This remains the site's existing lawful use.

It's also material to note that within the Molly Millars Industrial Area other units have been granted consent for changes of use to leisure/indoor fitness uses.

Planning Policy Context

From my evaluation of the Development Plan framework the relevant planning policy context for the consideration of this proposal is set out in the following key documents.

Core Strategy (CS)

The Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy adopted January 2010, and represents the Council's primary strategic planning document. The relevant policies affecting the site are as follows:

- CP1 – Sustainable Development
- CP9 – Scale and location of development proposals
- CP13 – Town centres and shopping
- CP14 – Growth and Renaissance of Wokingham Town Centre
- CP15 – Employment Development

Managing Development Delivery (MDD)

The Managing Development Delivery local plan builds on the strategy set out in the Core Strategy and was adopted in February 2014, and the relevant policies are:

- CC01 – Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- CC02 – Development Limits
- CC07 – Parking
- TB11 – Core Employment Areas
- TB16 – Development for Town Centre Uses

Key Planning Issues

To aid your evaluation of this scheme I will now offer the following commentary on the key planning issues raised.

Principle of Development

Town Centre Impact

It is acknowledged that the nature of use proposed falls within the definition of main town centre uses as set out in the NPPF. The thrust of the guidance in the NPPF, and Policy TB16 is that there should be a hierarchal approach to such uses whereby town centre locations should first be considered, and thereafter following a Sequential Test evaluation, if no town centre sites are readily available and suitable, out of centre sites can be considered.

Accordingly, to comply with the above Policy requirements a rigorous Sequential Test has been undertaken of any vacant commercial units within the Wokingham Town Centre, including any available commercial units/sites on the edge of the Town Centre boundary. This Sequential Test is included as part of the application submission documents.

The Sequential Test demonstrates that given the low vacancy rate of units within the Town Centre it is clearly in a very healthy position in respect of its economic well-being and the services and facilities it provides for the Wokingham community. Only 15 vacant commercial units were identified across the whole town centre boundary area and none of these were more suitable for the proposed Padel Courts use than the application site.

The Sequential Test has therefore been complied with. Furthermore, due to the sporting nature of the proposed use it will not detract in any way from the vitality and viability of the predominately retail, leisure and restaurant characteristics of Wokingham Town Centre. The proposed development is therefore in accordance with policy TB16.

Core Employment Area

Given the location of the site within the core employment area it is also necessary to examine compliance with Policy CP15 which states;

“Any proposed changes of use from B1, B2 & B8 (within the core employment areas) should not lead to an overall net loss of floorspace in B Use within the borough. Provision will be made for a range of sizes, types, quality and locations of premises and sites in order to meet incubator/start up, move on, expansion and investment accommodation needs and having regard to the needs of specific sectors of the business community.”

This criterion will be fully complied with. The proposed development will essentially comprise a modest, discrete activity whereby the use will be undertaken internally within the existing building with no discernible impact on any of the surrounding

commercial uses. As demonstrated in the Transport Section below all aspects of Transport are fully dealt with, such that there will be no impedance of the access arrangements to nearby commercial premises. Furthermore, given that the works are purely internal the building will retain its appearance as a commercial unit. The temporary nature of the proposal will also allow for the site to return to commercial (employment) use in the future.

A material factor within this proposal is that the subject building has now been empty since January 2023, and despite the rigorous marketing which has taken place since August 2022 (as evidenced by the Economic Statement prepared by Hicks Baker), no new industrial operator has come forward.

The Padel Court proposal will clearly service a growing demand, and accordingly reusing an underused part of a building represents a beneficial sustainable pattern of development in comparison to the construction of a new building.

The building in its current state is providing no benefit in respect of employment. In comparison the proposed use will create employment for the equivalent of 6 full time employees, which is a significant economic benefit.

It is an important material consideration that no alternative provision has been made elsewhere in the Local Development Framework for the proposed Padel Courts use. This should be weighed heavily in the Planning Balance, and provides further strong justification for approving the beneficial sporting use of a vacant industrial unit.

This proposal therefore complies fully with the relevant criteria of Policy CP15 and will result in the beneficial reuse of an under used building within a core employment area.

Transport

With regard to accessibility to all modes of transport, this is good. Wokingham Railway Station at a distance of only 1km is a short walk of approximately 15 minute walk and equally Wokingham's town centre is a similar c.1km walk (15 minutes) from the site. The Molly Millars Close bus stops are located 300m from the site (less than 5 minutes' walk). The proposal will also provide for on site cycle parking provision for customers who wish to cycle.

Turning to car parking within the site curtilage will be provision for 12 car parking spaces (including 1 disabled bay) and covered cycle storage facilities. A booking system will be utilised and the intention is that the 3 courts, 2 accommodating up to 4 players and one accommodating 2 players, will be open daily from 07:00 to 23:00. Sessions will either last 60 minutes, 90 minutes or 120 minutes. Full capacity will therefore be 10 people when all the courts are in full use. Theoretically this will create a demand for 10 car parking spaces (if all users arrived individually by car) leaving the surplus parking for the staff members.

It should be stressed though that all users are unlikely to arrive in individual cars, with car sharing likely, and furthermore given the good accessibility of the site users will have suitable access to alternative modes of transport in comparison to the private

car. Accordingly, the 12 car parking spaces which will be provided specifically for the proposed use is more than ample, and will ensure that the usage will be entirely self-contained within the site from a Transport perspective.

Other Material Considerations

As part of the overall Planning Balance I do feel it's important to give due consideration to the health and well-being aspects of this proposal.

Padel Tennis is a racquet sport which is played on an enclosed court. The rules are the similar to tennis, played with the same (similar) balls, although serving is under-arm and the walls (like squash) are used as part of the game. Padel is suitable for all ages and caters to all levels of play. With limited racquet skills players can quickly engage in dynamic and fun rallies, utilising the court's surroundings. Padel is almost always played in doubles (on a full-sized court), which makes it very social and therefore ideal for the entire family.

The sport can be played by a wide range of age groups and ability levels, requires limited prior experience, and is quick to learn. This positions padel as a mass-participation sport with appeal beyond traditional racket-sport users, enabling strong and consistent demand across multiple customer segments rather than reliance on a narrow or specialist audience.

Although the origins of the sport have mainly been in Hispanic countries it's now spreading rapidly across Europe and the UK. There are currently circa 300 courts in the UK, with the closest current facilities in Bracknell and Reading, including recently installed Padel courts at 'PadelStars Bracknell' and 'Padel4all'. Given the close relationship between Padel and Tennis the Lawn Tennis Association became the national governing body for Padel in 2020 and recently adopted a 5 year plan (2024 – 2029) to grow Padel by making it more accessible, welcoming, enjoyable and inspiring.

This proposal will therefore provide a sports facility which will enhance the health and well-being of all participants, which is a significant material benefit. Achieving “Sustainable Development” is the key thrust of the Planning System and Paragraph 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out Three key strands to Sustainable Development, with “Social Objective” being one of these. Paragraph 8 emphasises a key element of the Social Objective is, “to support healthy communities”.

Thereafter Paragraph 96 of the NPPF states;

Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive places, which - enable and support healthy lives - for example through the provision of safe and accessible sports facilities.

Paragraph 103 further reinforces the importance of sport and physical activity where it states.

Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities.

In addition, Policy CP2 ('inclusive communities') of the Core Strategy states, *"planning permission will be granted for proposals that address the requirements of the population, particularly in terms of...health and wellbeing"*

The definition of "community facilities" includes "play and leisure" such as this scheme and the supporting text to Policy CP2 at paragraph 2.51 makes clear that the provision of sports and recreation facilities is an important objective of the Council.

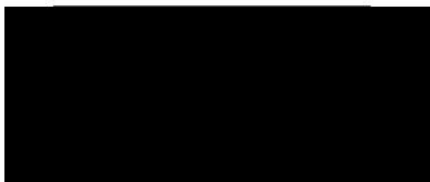
The salient points arising from the above guidance is that healthy communities are a key element of Sustainable Development. To facilitate healthy communities, it's most important that provision is made for high quality accessible sports facilities, which this scheme provides for.

Conclusion

This Support Planning Statement demonstrates that this scheme is wholly compliant with the adopted Development Plan Policy framework, and furthermore the temporary use of this vacant / under-used commercial floorspace in the sporting manner proposed will positively contribute to the important national Policy objective of supporting support healthy lives whilst also providing jobs and offering employment benefits.

Should you require any further assistance during the determination stage of the application please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely



Tom Sadler
Director
LPC (Trull) Ltd