

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251551
Site Address:	Hill Farm, Jouldings Lane, Farley Hill, Wokingham, RG7 1UR
Expiry Date:	3 September 2025
Site Visit Date:	2 September 2025
Proposal: Full application for change of use of part of building in Area B, part of a building in Area D, and yard Area A from agriculture to use as a firewood enterprise and the siting of four shipping containers ancillary to firewood business use (retrospective).	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirement CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP15 – Employment Development CP17 – Housing Delivery
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB01 – Development within the Green Belt TB02 – Development adjoining the Green Belt TB04 – Development in vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), Burghfield TB20 – Service Arrangements and Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM3 - Protection of Habitats and Species

Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM4 - Protection of Designated Landscape DM5 - Protection of the Countryside DM10 - Flood Risk DM12 - Sustainable Transport Movements DM15 - Site History
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS7 – Development in the vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishments SS8 – Meeting our employment needs SS16 – Safeguarded routes SS17 – Transport improvements CE2 – Environmental standards for non-residential development CE4 – Supporting a circular economy CE5 – Embodies carbon C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design ER2 – Employment uses outside of Core Employment Areas ER3 - Supporting the rural economy NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE3 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design NE6 – Valued landscapes DH2 – Safeguarding amenity HC5 – Environmental protection HC6 – Air pollution and air quality HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution HC10 – Odor, fumes and dust
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

PLANNING HISTORY – there is no planning history for this building except:

AG/2014/0963: Application for agricultural prior determination for the erection of a Hay Barn for storing feed: Prior Approval Not required 12 May 2014

The wider Hill farm site is a large established farm has an extensive planning history for agricultural buildings, an agricultural dwelling, certificates and a biogas anaerobic digestion power generation facility.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No objections

WBC Highways – No objections following submission of additional information

WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection

WBC CIL – No comments received

WBC Ecology Newts – No comments

WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

Woodland Trust – No comments received

Natural England – No objection

Berkshire Archaeology – No objection

Forestry Commission – No comments however policy and guidance is provided.

Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Comments due 13.8.2025 but none received.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

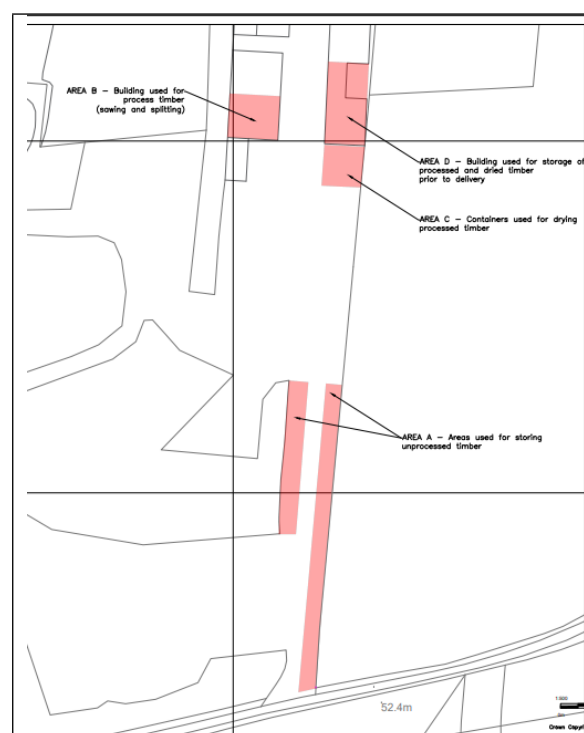
APPRAISAL

Site Description:

Hill Farm is an established farm within Farley Hill. The landowner and farmer currently farms 810ha part of which is at Hill Farm. The business also undertakes small amount of other agricultural contracting work such as hedge-cutting. 3 Other enterprises located at Hill Farm include an Anaerobic Digestion plant owned by Ecotricity.

Proposed Development:

This application proposes the material change of use of the change of use of buildings and yard area to be used as a firewood enterprise. The site comprises 4 areas:



- Area A – open area to the south of the main farmyard – used for storing unprocessed logs;
- Area B – southern half of building containing log sawing and splitting equipment;
- Area C – Containers used for the drying of firewood to ensure it meets the 'Ready to Burn' moisture status;
- Area D – southern end of building used for the storage of dried firewood prior to onward distribution.

Background:

The Planning Statement states that the applicant first started processing and selling logs at Hill Farm in 2006, when it became apparent that there could be a market for selling deadfall and felled trees on land under his control. When the firewood business started, it allowed the part-time employment of some staff during the winter, with logs being cut by chainsaw, the rounds being split using a small log splitter and air dried in barns at the farm.

As the majority of the wood processed by and sold by the applicant is from land not in the ownership of the applicant, the landowner sells the wood to the applicant on a £/m³ basis. The wood is collected by the applicant using tractors/telehandlers with log grab equipment and brought back to Hill Farm in HGVs for processing and onward sale. None of the wood processed by the business is associated with clear-felling, other than in specific circumstances such as larger areas of ash die-back

Since the establishment of the business the amount of firewood processed and sold by the applicant has increased significantly, with it now employing up to six farm workers on a part-time basis (when not doing agricultural works) throughout the winter months, collecting, processing and distributing firewood to customers in the wider area. These workers are the same which work for the applicant during the summer months; however, they are now no longer laid off during the winter months or on reduced hours. The applicant's business is now registered with the Government's 'ready to burn' scheme² which aims to reduce pollution from solid fuels.

In order to increase the amount of wood which can be processed the business recently invested in a Posch SpaltFix K-700 Vario¹ stationary automatic saw and splitter and has utilised existing buildings at the farm for the storage of equipment and firewood awaiting sale.

The increase in volume of wood to be split has meant that wood now needs sourced from land outside the control of the applicant. To this end the applicant now has agreements with two local forestry enterprises: Nick Horn Ltd and Powell Forestry Ltd. The applicant provides a useful market for these two companies due to his ability to process oversized timber. Unlike smaller firewood enterprises, the applicant's sawing and splitting machine has the ability to process 3m lengths of timber, bring with it much greater efficiencies of scale. The business now sources approximately 60% of wood from land under its control, with the balance being sourced from local forestry enterprises

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The site lies outside of any defined settlement limit and is therefore within the

countryside, as defined by policies CC02. Policy CP11 set a presumption against new development in the countryside unless it is appropriate to a rural location or supports the continuing rural enterprise.

Paragraph 88 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should amongst other things, enable (a) a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, new buildings. This continues to paragraph 89 which states:

“Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist”

CP11 states:

In order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:

- 1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and
- 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and
- 3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or
- 4) In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;
- 5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i) Bring about environmental improvements; or ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
- 6) Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;
- 7) Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

The material change of use of two building and associated land from agriculture to storage and distribution for firewood.

The relevant criteria of Policy CP11 which should be taken into consideration in this case are: 1) where the proposal “contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough”, 2) it would not “lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings” and 3) “It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case

of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement;”

The firewood business use proposed is separate business, not linked to the Hill Farm enterprise. However, the owner of the business is the landowner of Hill Far. The buildings and land are within the existing farm complex, and 40% of the timber processed is from the wider farmed land owned or rented by the applicant; thus the proposal is considered to contribute to diversification of the farm enterprise and supporting the existing business thus complying with criteria 1.

The proposed use would be within existing buildings and yard and there would therefore be no further expansion of built form away from the original buildings, however there would be the outdoor storage of firewood prior to its processing – the visual impact of this will be discussed further in the character and appearance section of this report.

Overall the proposal complies with CP11 and the aspirations of the NPPF in supporting the rural economy through the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas through the conversion of existing buildings.

Employment uses:

The Development Plan approach within CP15 for employment use is to provide for future employment needs in the borough through retaining the Core Employment Area’s and encouraging their continued intensification by supporting development for Class B and Class E(g) uses

Notwithstanding the provision of the adopted Development Plan, the current Employment Land Needs Review by Stantec establishes additional B2 and B8 floorspace continues to be needed within the Borough. This study outlines broad locations for new employment land, with two potential sites being identified within the brief that have been assessed as potentially suitable for employment uses in the council’s Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (2021).

The proposed development creates year-round employment opportunities for existing farm workers during the winter months when farm work is less busy.

Emerging Local Plan:

The Local Plan Update (LPU), the plan which will supersede the Core Strategy and MDD Local Plan, was published in October 2024 (Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Plan). It was subsequently submitted for examination on 28 February 2025.

The LPU sets out the development strategy and proposed site allocations to meet housing needs to 2040. Weight to be attributed to the emerging policy is informed by paragraph 49 of the NPPF 2024. This advises that weight can be applied according to the plan’s stage of preparation, the extent to which there are unresolved objections, and the degree of consistency with the NPPF.

Character of the Area:

Paragraph 187(b) of the NPPF requires that planning applications enhance the natural and local environment by ‘recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.’

Policy CP11 supports development in the countryside only where it maintains the high quality of the rural environment. Policy CP1(1) similarly only supports development that maintains or enhances the high quality of the environment, with policy CP3 supporting development of an appropriate mass, layout, built form, height and character to the area CP3(a) and which makes a positive contribution to the sense of place contributes to the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings CP3(f).

The Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document provides further guidance for developers with general guidance that development should respond positively to its site and local context (G1) and respond positively to the local character of the area (G2).

No changes are proposed to the building subject of the change of use. The firewood business is in keeping with the character of the wider farm particularly as a number of commercial buildings and uses are already taking place from this yard area.

There is proposed storage on a yard area outside any building. This area is on lower land than the surrounding fields and is not visible in the wider context of the site however, to prevent any detrimental visual impact to the wider area.

Landscape and Trees:

Policy CC03 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan states that development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable. Policy TB21 also states that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues. Proposals should retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

The site is located in Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBCLA) – Area LS ‘Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’. Key characteristics include small undulating hills, an extensive woodland network, intricate small-scale landscape with small sinuous pastures enclosed by the woodland, a rural settlement pattern including closely spaced farmsteads and the hamlet at Farley Hill. and a network of footpaths, bridleways and quiet rural lanes and tracks.

The proposed development introduces outdoor storage and the siting of shipping containers, the re-use of the existing buildings is unlikely to have any detrimental impact on the wider area.

The area where the buildings are devoid of vegetation. The Trees and Landscape

Officer has requested the reinstatement of native hedgerows and hedgerow trees

Neighbouring Amenity:

The closest residential property is the farm dwelling, approximately 53m from the proposed development. The yard area is on lower ground within in the site away from the dwelling.

The application is submitted retrospectively and no neighbours have raised complaints regarding noise or other impacts from outside the Hill Farm site.

On the basis of the above, the proposed development is sited a sufficient distance from neighbouring occupiers that there would be no detrimental impact on neighbour amenity.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The development is proposed to use the existing access with vehicle routing to the main highway network. A swept path analysis has been provided for an HGV.

The Highways Officer has confirmed the details submitted are acceptable and that the proposal will not have a significant impact on the highway network.

Flooding and Drainage:

The site is located in Flood Zone 1 where there is low risk from surface water flooding according to the EA mapping. There will be no increase in impermeable area created by the proposal.

Ecology:

The proposal involves the change of use of an existing agricultural building with no external alterations, demolition works or hardstanding proposed. As such, there is no direct impact on habitats, vegetation, or ecological features on the site.

The proposal is unlikely to have any impacts on protected species such as bats or nesting birds.

Under the Environment Act 2021, most new development is required to deliver a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). As the development is retrospective, it falls within an exemption to BNG requirements.

Notwithstanding this, in line with Paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), opportunities to enhance biodiversity have been considered. The scheme is not considered to give rise to any unacceptable adverse impacts on habitats or species, and no further mitigation or enhancement is required in this instance.

Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area:

The application site is located within the 5km linear mitigation zone for the Special Protection Area of the Thames Basin Heaths and does not result in any residential net gain. As such, the need for an appropriate assessment is not required.

Conclusion:

The proposed development complies with the requirements of CP11, it reuses existing buildings in the countryside and supports an existing rural enterprise.

The identified need for B8 floorspace within the Borough is acknowledged and the development causes negligible harm to the countryside and surrounding landscape character. There would be no adverse impact on nearby residential properties or highway safety and has, whilst limited, a positive economic, social and environmental contribution in the form of job creation. The application is recommended for approval.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):

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

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010):

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

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	13 August 2025
Earliest date for decision:	6 August 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>MC</i>
Date:	03.09.2025

Affordable Housing Thresholds | Total count: 1

#	NAME
1	Outside Development Locations

Scale and Location of Development Proposals | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	NAME
1	Countryside	Countryside

Thames Basin Heath SPA Mitigation Zones | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME
1	Special Protection Area Linear Mitigation Zone	5km Linear Mitigation Zone

Major Nuclear Sites Consultation Zone | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	PLANNING_NOTE
1	Consultation Zone - Major Nuclear Site	AWE: 12km Zone	This is the 12km Zone. A circular zone of 12km radius around all nuclear sites, for certain types of significant development due to the potential for such developments to pose an external hazard to sites.

Aerodrome Safeguarding: Farnborough Consultation Zone | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT_WHEN
1	Aerodrome Safeguarding: Farnborough Consultation Zone	Consultation zone 3	All buildings, structures, etc. Exceeding 90m

Aerodrome Safeguarding: Heathrow Consultation Zone | Total count: 1

#	Height Band	Wind Turbine	Aviation
1	All works exceeding 150 metres (492.1 feet)	NO	YES

Aerodrome Safeguarding: Odiham Consultation Zone | Total count: 2

#	CRITERIA
1	Consultation required for any building structure or works exceeding 91.4m in height above ground level
2	Consultation required for developments that involve flying activities including gliding, micro-light aircraft and hang-gliding sites

Risk of Flooding from Surface Water | Total count: 3

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME
1	Environment Agency Surface Water Flood Zones	1 in 30 year risk extent
2	Environment Agency Surface Water Flood Zones	1 in 100 year risk extent
3	Environment Agency Surface Water Flood Zones	1 in 1000 year risk extent

Bat Roost Habitat Suitability | Total count: 6

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	Bat survey required for planning applications that involve roof modification or demolition.	NF1110	Ecology Officer, Green Infrastructure Team
2	Bat survey required for planning applications that involve roof modification or demolition.	NG1109	Ecology Officer, Green Infrastructure Team
3	Bat survey required for planning applications that involve roof modification or demolition.	NG1110	Ecology Officer, Green Infrastructure Team
4	Bat survey required for planning applications that involve roof modification or demolition.	NH1109	Ecology Officer, Green Infrastructure Team
5	Bat survey required for planning applications that involve roof	NH1110	Ecology Officer, Green

	modification or demolition.		Infrastructure Team
6	Bat survey required for planning applications that involve roof modification or demolition.	NH1111	Ecology Officer, Green Infrastructure Team

Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zones | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone	Amber	For Householder applications check HH Layer. Consult NatureSpace for all other types of development

Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zones - Minor | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME	CONSULT
1	Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone	Amber	Consult NatureSpace for any minor development that intersects a red or amber zone in this layer

SSSI Impact Risk Zones | Total count: 1

#	IRZURL
1	https://irz.geodata.org.uk/IRZ/step2.html?irzcode=0111242322201-es=11401&location=478367,157485%20(IRZ%20polygon%20centre)

Ancient Woodland Natural England Consultation Zone | Total count: 1

#	THEMNAME	F15M	F100M
1	Ancient Replanted Woodland	Ecology Officer for all applications including householder	Ecology Officer for all applications except householder

Landscape Character Assessment 2019 | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	Name
1	Landscape Character Assessment 2019	Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills

Archaeological Sites Consultation Zone | Total count: 1

#	FEATURE_TYPE	FEATURE_NAME
1	Archaeological Site	The Devils Highway Roman Road

Wards | Total count: 1

#	NAME	Closest Approximate Distance
1	Spencers Wood & Swallowfield Ward	0 m

Parishes | Total count: 1

#	NAME	Closest Approximate Distance
1	Swallowfield CP	0 m