

JPPC ref: 8534
Portal ref:

Planning Service
Wokingham Borough Council

SUBMITTED VIA PLANNING PORTAL

18 June 2024

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: Proposed alteration to existing field access and track
AT: Warren Crest Farm, Finchampstead

This letter supports an application for planning permission for the formation of a new access to serve the farm buildings at Warren Crest Farm, Finchampstead.

The bulk of the access track is considered capable of construction through agricultural permitted development rights with prior notification. However, those rights do not allow for works within 25m of the classified road meaning a planning application is required for the part of the track and access works that meet the highway. This application to cover the entire development to allow the proposal to be considered comprehensively.

The proposed development is to contribute to the safe and efficient running of Warren Crest Farm and to improve the environment, particularly for users of the public right of way along Wick Hill Lane. We hope therefore planning permission can be granted in a timely manner.

Site and proposal

Warren Crest Farm is a long-established agricultural holding of around 70 acres set to the edge of Finchampstead. The farm mainly consists of grass with areas of woodland. The extent of the farm area is shown on the plan provided as **Attachment 1**.

The site is not washed over by the Green Belt or by any other specific policy designation (such as a National Landscape or a Conservation Area). None of the buildings on the site are listed. The site is not identified on Wokingham Borough Council's interactive GIS Map as being within an area where there is high archaeological potential.

The closest area of Ancient Woodland to the site lies more than 100 metres to the east. None of the trees on the site are shown on the Council's interactive GIS Map as being subject to a Tree Preservation Order.

The John Phillips Planning Consultancy

Partners:

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The application site is in Flood Zone 1, the area of lowest risk, on the Environment Agency's online Flood Map for Planning.



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This submission relates to the improvement to the existing farm access to the southern boundary of the farm along with an access track, upgrading the informal way across the fields, to connect the southern entrance with the farmyard.

Currently the farm buildings are principally accessed from Wick Hill Lane which passes to the north of the farm. The narrow lane is a restricted byway that branches from the B3430 serving Warren Crest Farm along with several homes. The arrangement is not ideal as it requires agricultural traffic to pass along the narrow residential lane and navigate a tight junction with the busy B-road. It also necessitates large vehicles using the restricted byway creating a potential risk to walkers and riders using the route.

It is proposed to upgrade the existing access to the south of the farm to create a better access route. There is an existing field gate at the junction of Wick Hill Lane and Jubilee Road which is to be upgraded and realigned to provide a safe access point for farm traffic. It is also proposed to provide a surfaced track following the existing unsurfaced route between the southern gate and farm making use of existing gateways (i.e. no new openings are needed in field hedges). The track is to be surfaced in compacted stone which will be suitable for farm traffic while maintaining the rural character.

Principle of development

This application proposes the formation of a farm track with associated access to support an existing agricultural enterprise and improve the environment for users of the public right of way along which the current farm access passes.

Policy CP11 of the Wokingham Core Strategy confirms support for development proposals which contribute to rural enterprises and contribute to enjoyment of the countryside. Paragraph 88 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supports the development of agricultural businesses. The proposed development to serve an agricultural need and will enhance peoples' enjoyment of the countryside encouraged by local and national planning policy.

Agricultural need

Warren Crest Farm is a working farm with a need for safe and reliable access to allow efficient operation.

The proposed access is to ease access for large farm machinery and HGVs upon which the farm is reliant. Although the existing access is longstanding it is not well suited to modern machinery and associated vehicles that have outgrown the lane, particularly in view of its function as a public right of way. The shortcomings of the access are a constraint on the farm business as it cannot be reliably serviced by all vehicles.

The proposed access resolves difficulties with the existing access. Although a low-key agricultural track the route will be passable by all traffic necessary to serve the farmyard avoiding pinch points in the existing lane and, critically, removing potential for conflict with walkers, riders using the public byway. Safe and convenient access for essential farm traffic is clearly a development that contributes to the rural enterprise; thus it is supported by Core Strategy policy CP11.

Although not the main reason for its installation the proposed access track offers a further benefit in providing surfaced access to the farm's southern fields. This will be of assistance when undertaking essential operations on the land in winter. Currently the way across the grass fields can become damaged when traversed by large vehicles in wet conditions.

Amenity impacts

Impact on neighbours

The application site is well removed from all residential properties and so should not impact on any neighbours. The closest dwelling is The Old Police House at the corner of Jubilee Road. Considered in the context of traffic already passing along Jubilee Road the proposed relocation of the farm access should not have a discernible impact on amenity.

The works at ground level will not cause any overshadowing, loss of light, or cause overbearing impacts that might impact on a neighbour.

Landscape impact

The track is to be surfaced in crushed stone, compacted to a smooth surface. It will be an agricultural specification, suited to carrying farm machinery, with a width of 3 metres. The use of local stone will allow the track to blend with the surroundings; it will not appear at all out of place in the working farm landscape.

The works set at and below ground level will not be readily visible in views across the site, including from the public rights of way. If seen the track will be entirely in keeping with its agricultural context and so not harmful to the character of the area.

The proposed access point is an improvement on an existing field gate; thus it will not be an additional opening in the hedge. The proposed planting is a continuation of the native hedge, and the access is to be closed with a gate characteristic of a field entrance maintaining the rural character as required by policy TB21 of the Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

Highway and public right of way impact

As noted in discussion of the agricultural need (above) the proposal should offer benefits in terms of safety.

The existing access between Wick Hill Lane and B3430 is not well suited to large vehicles. It requires a sharp turn for vehicles approaching from the east and, as a narrow lane, presents risk of conflict when a large vehicle meets another vehicle (large or small) entering or leaving the lane.

Wick Hill Lane is also a restricted byway. The designation means vehicles are not permitted along the lane, save those properties with specific access rights, including Warren Crest Farm. The proposal which should remove the largest vehicles from the lane is desirable as it improves the safety and enjoyment of users of the public right of way.

The proposed access point allows farm traffic to join the road (Jubilee Road) directly without need to travel along another public right of way. The proposed access point has good visibility as shown on the submitted site plan and affords space for vehicles to wait out of the carriageway should this be necessary.

Other impacts

The proposal should not give rise to any other impacts which would merit refusal of planning permission. The site is not in an area at risk of flooding, there should therefore

be no concerns in this regard. The stone track can be constructed to expected sustainable drainage standards, its position in a grass field means there is ample opportunity for this.

The track has been routed to avoid the most productive farmland. It follows the path of an existing unmade route across the field. Use of the worn route also means the land used is less productive and less likely to be ecologically diverse. The proposal does not materially reduce the amount of productive farmland, any minimal loss in productive area is offset by the farming efficiencies the track provides.

Use of the established route across the fields also limits ecological impacts. The path through existing gateways avoids need for removal of hedgerows while the well-worn path is less likely to host important habitats or species. Notwithstanding, this submission includes proposals to ensure a net gain in biodiversity.

The track is well removed from heritage assets meaning there is no risk of harm to important features. The proposed arrangement maintains all existing field boundaries meaning the division of farmland is maintained.

The development is not of a type that gives rise to risk from land contamination or exposes persons to risk from contamination.

Summary

The development would not result in undue harm to the landscape and is to the benefit of the rural economy and people's enjoyment of the countryside as supported under national and local policy.

The proposal complies with relevant development plan policies, including policies CP11 of the Wokingham Core Strategy. Therefore, in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development expressed at paragraph 11 of the NPPF we consider planning permission should be granted without delay.

We welcome your early acknowledgement of this application and trust the allocated Case Officer will contact us without delay should they require any clarification or need to discuss the proposals.

Yours faithfully,



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