

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251984
Site Address:	Land south of Bridge Farm, Reading Road, Arborfield, Berkshire, RG2 9HT
Expiry Date:	20 March 2026
Site Visit Date:	4 September 2025
Proposal: Application for approval of Reserved Matters pursuant to Outline Planning Consent 223083 (as varied by 243190) for the erection of up to 11 no. commercial units to provide 6,986sqm GIA commercial / employment development predominantly within Class B8 and/or Class E (g) uses with supporting facilities within Class E uses comprising ancillary offices, trade counters and food/drink facilities with highway works and strategic landscaping. Details of appearance and landscaping to be considered.	

RELEVANT PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Countryside
Ancient Woodlands
Green Routes and Riverside Paths Consultation Zone
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Local Wildlife Site
Nuclear Consultation Zone – AWE 12km Zone
Public Open Space – Pound Copse
Tree Preservation Orders - TPO-0018-1968
Local Plan Update- Submitted Site 5AR024.
Public Right of Way - ARBO FP 22
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Thames Basin Heath SPA Mitigation Zone – 5km

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP15 – Employment Development
MDD Local Plan	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping

(MDD)	CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB12 – Employment Skills Plan TB20 – Service Arrangements and Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB26 – Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS8 – Meeting our employment needs SS15 – Securing infrastructure SS16 – Safeguarded routes SS17 – Transport improvements CE1 – Design principles for efficient buildings CE2 – Environmental standards for non-residential development CE4 – Supporting a circular economy CE5 – Embodies carbon CE7 – Low carbon and renewable energy generation CE8 – Protecting renewable energy generation C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C3 – Active travel C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging C6 – Technology and innovation in transport C8 – Utilities ER2 – Employment uses outside of Core Employment Areas ER3 – Supporting the rural economy ER4 – Employment and skills plans H13 – Retention of mobile home parks FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage 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 DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH5 – The historic environment HC5 – Environmental protection HC6 – Air pollution and air quality

	HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution HC9 – Contaminated land and water HC10 – Odor, fumes and dust
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Arborfield and Newland Village Design Statement Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
170433	Full application for the proposed extraction and processing of approximately 3.6 million tonnes of sand and gravel from a site of 190 ha, known as land, south west of bridge farm, together with erection of an aggregates processing plant, ready mix concrete plant and the provision of associated ancillary infrastructure and parking for HGV's and staff, with mixed restoration including importation of inert material to agriculture, lowland meadows, and wetlands. Proposed temporary diversion of public footpath 20 for the duration of operations.	Refused 23/08/2019
172209	Full application for the construction of a 2.3 km Arborfield Cross Relief Road (including shared use pathway) linking A327 Reading Road in the north and A327 Eversley Road in the south east. The proposal includes two new roundabout junctions link to the existing road network along the A327, a new staggered priority junction at Swallowfield Road and a new shared-use (non-motorised user) bridge where Arborfield Footpath 17 intersects the proposed relief road.	Approved 23/01/2018
181802	Application to vary the following conditions of planning consent 172209 - 2. Approved details. The planning permission is for the construction of a 2.3 Arborfield Cross Relief Road. The proposed minor material amendment seeks to enlarge the red line boundary to allow for a) amended staggered priority junction design at Swallowfield Road, and b) greater visibility at the southern roundabout junction with A327 Eversley Road. Proposed minor material amendment to the archway profile of green bridge at Arborfield footpath 17.	Approved 03/09/2019
223083	Outline application for the erection of up to 11No	Approved

	commercial units to provide 6,986sqm GIA commercial / employment development predominantly within Class B8 and/or Class E(g) uses with supporting facilities within Class E uses comprising ancillary offices, trade counters and food/drink facilities with highway works and strategic landscaping. Matters of Access, Siting and Scale to be considered only.	02/02/2024
243190	Application to vary condition 2 of Outline planning consent 223083 for the erection of up to 11 no. commercial units to provide 6,986sqm GIA commercial / employment development predominantly within Class B8 and/or Class E(g) uses with supporting facilities within Class E uses comprising ancillary offices, trade counters and food/drink facilities with highway works and strategic landscaping. Matters of Access, Siting and Scale to be considered only. Condition 2 refers to the approved details and the variation is to change the site layout.	Approved 05/08/2025
252702	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning approval 243190 dated 05.08.2025. Condition 11 relates to visibility splays.	Approved 10/12/2025
252705	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning approval 243190 dated 05.08.2025. Condition 19 relates to decentralised energy supply.	Approved 12/01/2026
252706	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning approval 243190 dated 05.08.2025. Condition 10 relates to highway construction details.	Approved 06/01/2026
252961	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent 223083 (as varied consent 243190) dated 02.02.2024. Condition 14 relates to travel plan.	Approved 22/01/2026
253080	Application for submission of details to comply with the following conditions of planning approval 243190 dated 05.08.2025. Condition 18a relates to protection of trees.	Approved 15/01/2026
253081	Application for submission of details to comply with the following conditions of planning approval 243190 dated 05.08.2025. Condition 7 relates to drainage- exceedance flow.	Approved 15/01/2026

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments received
WBC Drainage – No objection subject to condition(s)
WBC Highways – No objection subject to condition(s)
WBC Growth & Delivery (Planning Policy) – No comments received
WBC Economic Prosperity & Place (Community Infrastructure) – No comments received
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objections
WBC Public Rights Of Way – No comments received
WBC Ecology Newts – No objections
WBC Sustainability – No comments received
WBC Ecology – No comments received
WBC Waste Services – No comments received
WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received
WBC Green Infrastructure – No objections

External

Natural England – No objections
Southern Gas Networks – No objections
Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No objections
Forestry Commission – General tree protection advice
Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue – General fire safety advice
Active Travel England – No comments
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust – No comments received
Crime Prevention Design Advisor – See main body of report
Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council

Arborfield and Newland Parish Council have raised the following concerns:

- The argument regarding the economic benefits of the scheme is flawed due to the number of changes made to the scheme, namely the reduction in units from 11 and 7. ***(Officer comment: It is important to note that the reduction from 11 to 7 units has already been permitted by application 243190, insofar that the reduction did not affect the overall provision of floorspace originally permitted.)***
- Conflict with policy IRS1 (Preservation of Separation of Settlements)
- Conflict with policy IRS2 (Recognise, Respect and Preserve Identity and Rural Setting of Settlements.
- Conflict with policy IRS3 (Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment and Green Spaces)
- Conflict with Policy TC3 (Conditional Support for Businesses in the Countryside and Agriculture)

	- Conflict with Policy AD3 (High Quality Development with Generous Open Space, Properly Landscaped) - Conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development Principles) - Conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP3 (General Principles of Development) - Conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP6 (Managing Travel Demand) - Conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP7 (Biodiversity) - Conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP9 (Scale and location of development proposals) - Conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP10 (Improvements to strategic transport network) - Conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP11 (Proposals Outside of Development Limits) - Conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP15 (Core Employment Areas) Please see their full response on the Council website for further details.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	One representation received from local residents raising the following concerns: - Do not understand references to amenity land and what it means (<i>Officer comment: Amenity land is an area of open space that provides both visual and physical benefits for users of the industrial estate. For example, employees of the units may utilise the land during their breaks.</i>) - Proposed description is illegible.

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is located to the south of Bridge Farm Industrial Estate. The site is irregular in shape and measures approximately three hectares. To the north of the site lies Bridge Farm Estate which consists of several existing commercial buildings.

Primary access to the site is achieved by the access road linking an existing junction on Reading Road leading through the Bridge Farm Estates towards the northeast of the proposed development site.

The construction of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road (A327 Observer Way) runs parallel to the western boundary of the site and links to Reading Road.

The site is contained to the north and east by Pound Copse which is protected by a Tree Protection Order (TPO 18/1968), designated as ancient and semi-natural woodland and a Local Wildlife Site. This woodland is also designated as a public

open space.

There is an existing public right of way running alongside the eastern boundary of the site, this is identified as Footpath 22. This crosses Observer Way to the southwest.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks approval for the Reserved Matters associated with Outline Consent 223083, more recently varied by S.73 application 243190. The matters reserved for assessment under this application are appearance and landscaping; matters of access, siting and scale have all been deemed acceptable through the determination of applications 223083 and 243190.

For clarity, consent 223083 permitted outline consent for up to 11 no. commercial units to provide 6,986sqm GIA commercial / employment development predominantly within Class B8 and/or Class E (g) uses with supporting facilities within Class E uses comprising ancillary offices, trade counters and food/drink facilities with highway works and strategic landscaping.

S.73 application 243190 consented a reduction in the originally proposed units from 11 to 7, maintaining the overall approved floorspace. This consent also varied the footprint of the units, plus consequential changes to the parking layout and landscaping.

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 principle of the proposed development was considered acceptable as part of the determination of application 223083. Nothin herein contained within this submission is deemed to affect this conclusion, therefore no objections are raised on the principle of development.

Notwithstanding the principle of development, this application is subject to further assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the character of the area, street scene, neighbouring amenity as well as compliance with other local and national planning policies. These are addressed in turn below.

Character of the Area:

Policy Context

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).

Policy TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 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 National Design Guide section B1, paragraph 67 also states that the built form of well-designed places should relate well to:

- the site, its context and the opportunities they present;
- the proposed identity and character for the development in the wider place;

Policy IRS1 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan titled 'Preservation of separation of settlements' relates to development within countryside areas and seeks to preserve the character and appearance of the countryside.

Policy 1RS2 titled 'Recognise, Respect, and Preserve Identity and Rural Setting of Settlements' relates to new development being appropriately designed within a rural setting.

Policy IRS3 titled 'Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment and Green Spaces' relates to development proposals conserving and enhancing natural environments and green spaces.

Policy TC3 titled 'Conditional Support for Business in the Countryside and Agriculture' relates to new businesses or existing businesses being encouraged to reuse buildings that are vacant, derelict or unviable subject to scale, neighbour amenity, parking arrangements and no excessive encroachment. In addition, the best and most versatile agricultural land should be protected.

Assessment:

Prior to the assessment below, it is again important to note that the assessment is limited to the development's appearance and the associated landscaping for the site. Matters of siting, scale and access have already been approved as part of previous related consents. A reserved matters application does not revisit the principle, layout or access that has been agreed through previous permissions. The assessment below therefore focuses only on the detailed appearance of the buildings and the associated landscaping proposals.

Appearance:

To begin with, all seven units proposed are largely identical in terms of architectural form and material palette. Each unit would have a shallow gable roof form with solar panels installed on the top of the roof. Elevational materials would consist of a

mixture of:

- Narrow, horizontal dark grey cladding
- Narrow, vertical dark green cladding
- Thick, horizontal dark brown cladding
- Fenestration and service doors would be finished in dark grey
- The roof form finished in a light grey

The choice of a natural, darker colour palette for the units is welcomed, as this ensures the buildings recede visually into the landscape when viewed from the west against the woodland behind.

Whilst concerns have been raised by the WBC Landscape and Trees Officer about the lighter colour of the roof forms, its choice is strategic to ensure the energy efficiency of the buildings, insofar that lighter cladding colours are used on the roofs of the buildings as an institutional norm to mitigate solar/heat gain through the roof into the building. Given the associated sustainability benefits of the roof colour and its limited visual prominence in the wider locale, this choice is considered acceptable on balance.

The presence of solar panels on the roof form is also not considered to result in any adverse appearance concerns, namely due to their 'low-key' protrusions from the roof form and limited visual prominence when viewed from the public realm. It is however noted that final details/specifications for the solar panels have not been submitted with this application. The applicant has agreed to a condition, requiring these details to be submitted for approval post-permission, should the application be approved.

The scale and siting of the building is unchanged from previously approved permissions. Overall, the material palette choice for the buildings, and their overall appearance in the locale, would be acceptable.

Attention now turns to the boundary treatments. On a positive note, the proposed development utilises very little urbanising boundary treatments and instead relies primarily on existing green infrastructure, or the wealth of additional landscaping proposed as part of this application. The only departures from this strategy are the use of 2.4 metre tall paladin fencing for the service yards related to Units 6 and 7, plus 3 metre tall acoustic fencing on the western boundary between Units 3/5 and 6/7.

The paladin fencing proposed to enclose the service yards for Units 6 and 7 is typical of industrial developments. Whilst an urbanising feature in this Countryside location, the fencing would be well set back from the public realm to the east and to the west, aided by the densely vegetated eastern and western borders of the site, severely limiting most public viewpoints of its form/massing. As such, its inclusion does not raise any appearance concerns, particularly as it would not appear out of keeping with the industrial estate once completed.

With regards to the acoustic fencing along the western boundary, WBC Landscape and Trees have raised concerns regarding its height and close boarded form, namely due to its impact on views of the woodland to the immediate west, an issue raised at Outline stage. The applicant has now agreed to reduce the fencing to 3 metres,

originally proposed at 4 metres.

The fencing, whilst it does impact the visual permeability of the site, its impact on the appearance of the development would overall be negligible. The orientation of the units already assists with views of the western woodland, with the height of the fencing only limiting views of the understorey vegetation and tree trunks. Its inclusion is also pertinent to noise suppression as a result of noise emissions associated with the units, primarily due to the presence of dwellinghouses located approximately 60/65 metres further west. Overall, despite the minor harm to the visual permeability of the site, the noise suppression properties of the fencing are acknowledged and ultimately outweigh the limited harm to the wider landscape.

Turning to the general layout of the landscaping in particular the service yards and access road, both elements are well enclosed by large areas of amenity landscaping which adequately offsets their urbanising form, assisted by the development's offset from the public realm to the east.

Recognising Observer Way is a main arterial route into and out of Arborfield Strategic Development Location, any part of the development visible for that short duration approaching or leaving the A327/Reading Road roundabout would be read in context to the status and nature of this road and is not considered to result in significant long-term harm from a visual amenity perspective.

WBC Landscape and Trees have raised concerns with the location of the substation centrally on the site, namely due to the minor loss of strategic landscaping. The applicant has clarified that following consultation, the location chosen is the most functionally viable in terms of connections to the units on site. The minor loss of landscaping is negligible in the overall context of the site, and the remaining tree planting that would enclose the substation would sufficiently offset the urbanising form of the substation.

Overall, based on the above assessment, the appearance of the proposed development is considered acceptable.

Neighbouring Amenities:

The appearance of the development, and the associated landscaping, would have no additional impact on any adjacent or nearby land users. All other matters related to neighbouring amenities (overlooking, loss of light, overbearing, noise) were all assessed and considered acceptable at Outline stage.

Landscape and Trees:

Landscaping:

WBC Landscape and Trees have reviewed the overall hard and soft landscaping for the site and raise no objections to the provisions proposed.

A full landscape specification will need to be provided in order to comply with the Outline landscape condition (condition 17) and can be submitted separately through a Discharge of Conditions application.

Arboricultural Matters:

A revised Arboricultural Method Statement (V4) by BLADE Trees Ltd and dated December 2025 has been provided. This report outlines that the 15 metre buffer zone from the Ancient Woodland is maintained, and contains sufficient details regarding the protection of other vegetation adjacent to the site, plus further planting provision within the Ancient Woodland Buffer Zone as requested by WBC Landscape and Trees.

WBC Landscape and Trees welcome these revisions to the arboricultural information and as such, raise no objections to the proposals on arboricultural grounds.

Green Infrastructure/Public Right of Way:

Immediately east of the application site is a Public Right of Way (ARBO22) which continues parallel to the site via the Ancient Woodland but does overlap minorly to the south.

The proposed soft landscaping indicates a small break in the proposed tree line to accommodate the PROW route. Whilst WBC Green Infrastructure initially requested that the tree line remain uninterrupted from a landscape and ecological perspective, they acknowledge its necessity to ensure the PROW is not illegally blocked. WBC Public Rights of Way have raised no objections to this landscaping approach as it ensures the permeability of the route is unaffected.

Heritage:

Policy TB24 relates to Designated Heritage Assets including Conservation Areas. The policy sets out the Council will conserve and seek the enhancement of designated heritage assets in the Borough, requiring a demonstration that proposals would at least conserve and where possible enhance a Conservation Area.

Bridge Farm sits at the northern end of Observer Way adjacent to the Reading Road. The historic farmhouse and associated farm building to west and south of it are seen on the 1873 OSM map when this was New Farm. These remnants of a traditional farmstead are non-designated heritage assets.

The Reserved Matters details raise no further concerns on heritage grounds. The proposed appearance of the commercial units would have no discernible effect on the setting of the historic former farm buildings to the north.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

It is important to note that the original outline application was submitted prior to April 2024, meaning the development is exempt from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gains.

The biodiversity strategy for the development has been minorly altered since the Outline Consents. Compared to a 12.7% gain in habitats originally approved, the Reserved Matters submission indicates that a 21.91% increase in habitat units can be achieved, alongside the originally consented 100% increase in hedgerow units. WBC Ecology have not responded to this application, therefore it is assumed that no objections are raised to this revised strategy.

To avoid a net loss for habitat biodiversity, it will be crucial for enhancements to occur in the ancient woodland buffer and within the woodland on-site. At this stage, it has

not been established how these enhancements will be secured and maintained for a minimum period of 30 years. Such details were conditioned as part of the Outline Consent (condition 21), namely the submission of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP). This is yet to be discharged but subject to its approval, no further objections are raised on these grounds.

Drainage:

The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is defined as an area having a low probability of flooding. Whilst matters of drainage were considered acceptable at Outline stage, the strategy proposed has been varied due to changes in landscaping.

WBC Drainage have reviewed the revised drainage strategy report and whilst the Drainage Officer agrees that the strategy may likely be viable, the strategies are indicative and lack sufficient technical detail to be approved at this stage.

Whilst it is standard practice to secure these details prior to the determination of Reserved Matters applications, both WBC Drainage and the applicant have agreed that these details can be submitted post permission and prior to the commencement of the development.

Other matters:

As outlined above, the only matters reserved for assessment under this application are the appearance of the development and the associated landscaping. As such, the following constraints/topics are not relevant to these reserved matters, and were fully assessed and considered acceptable at Outline Stage:

- Highways matters (highway safety, parking provision, site layout)
- Ecological matters, including protected species.
- Air Quality
- Waste Storage
- Sustainability/energy performance
- Contamination

The submitted details do not conflict with the approved parameters or the requirements of the outline conditions.

Conclusion:

Overall, the appearance and associated landscaping for the development are both considered acceptable. Subject to conditions, this Reserved Matters 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 reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approval
Date:	17 March 2026
Earliest date for decision:	8 January 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	17 March 2026