

DELEGATED PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Whitley

App Ref: 231841/FUL

Address: Whitley Wood Fire Station, 270 Whitley Wood Road, Reading, RG2 8FS

Proposals: Demolition of the existing training centre and portacabin office on the site and its replacement with a new training building, relocation of existing fuel and LPG tanks, together with associated development.

Case Officer: Nathalie Weekes

Date received (valid from): 24 January 2024

Extended Target Decision date: 15 May 2024

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The proposal, submitted on behalf of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, is Whitley Wood Fire Station, a specialist training facility and community asset located within Whitley Ward. The site is located on the eastern side of Basingstoke Road and at the junction of Whitley Wood Road and Vernon Crescent. There is an existing car park within the site. Whitley Wood fire station comprises a number of buildings including an existing training building at the rear of the site, storage buildings with access onto Whitley Wood road for their specialist vehicles and fire engines, the fire station, a fire house structure at the front of the site for training, fuel and LPG tanks and a temporary porta cabin with offices that was situated on an area previously used for parking. The existing training building and porta cabin offices are proposed to be demolished to be replaced with a larger training building. The northern boundary is lined with trees and hedgerows. The south and western boundaries are marked by low-level hedgerows and mesh security fencing. To the north and the east of the site are residential dwellings comprising of two storey semi-detached and terraced properties. Thames Valley Police Roads department and Highways England depot are located to the southwest and west respectively. The site is in close proximity to the M4 motorway and the A33 Basingstoke Road.

The site is not listed or located within a conservation area and is in close proximity to an area designated as an Air Quality Management Area and in a flood zone 1.

Site visit date: 7 February 2024

Site visit photos:

Existing building with neighbouring houses to the rear, fire house and training area on site





Temporary building to be demolished



Nearest residential housing to the rear of the site



2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposal comprises the demolition of the existing training centre and porta cabin office within the Whitley Wood fire station and training centre site, which provides a service for Berkshire and South Oxfordshire. A larger two storey replacement modular training and office building is proposed to provide a more updated functional building to replace the existing facilities. The proposed building will accommodate offices, meeting rooms and a training facility to store and maintain RBFRS equipment, provide shower and decontamination facilities and provide views over the rest of the site to observe training activities. The proposed location, scale and design of the replacement building has been designed to make the best use of the site, set next to the fire house and training area.

No intensification of use of the site is proposed, the current and proposed number of staff remain as 17 full time employees and the works are not intended to result in any additional staff or visitors to the site. The Site is already in use as a Fire Station, and as a specialist training facility and the proposal consists of the redevelopment and modernisation of the site, resulting in lower running costs. The current facilities and offices on the site are in a poor state of repair and no longer meet the requirements of the fire service. The proposed training building will be located along the northern boundary of the site in a similar location to the existing building although it will be slightly re-oriented.

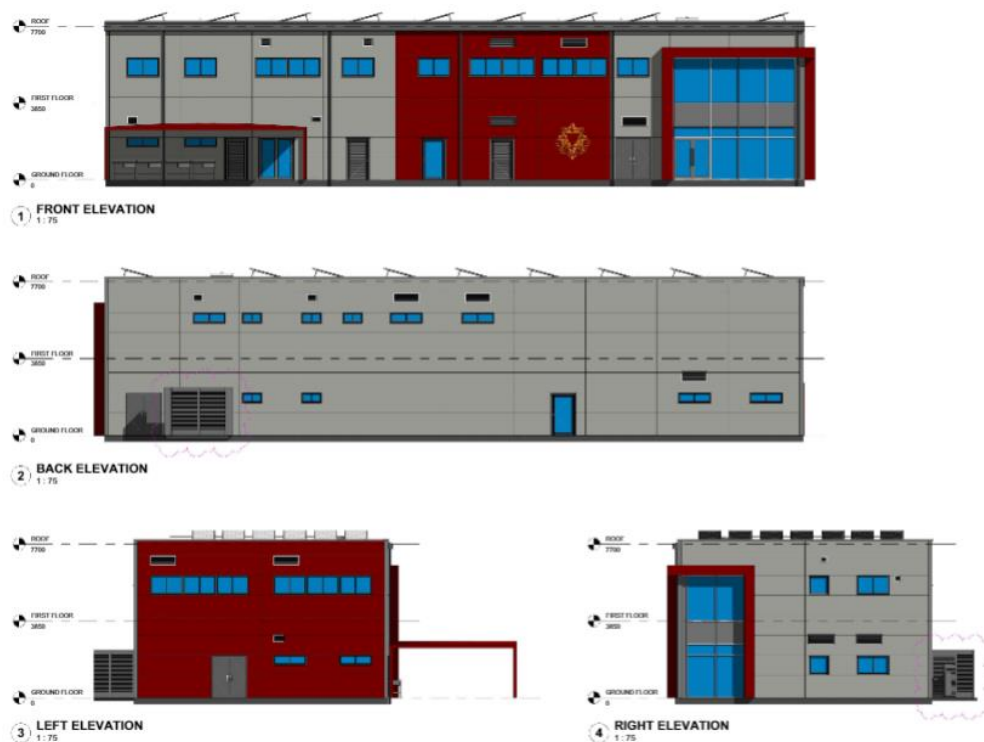
Solar panels are proposed on the roof, on the north-west corner of the site. Proposed works also include the relocation of existing fuel and LPG tanks together with associated development. The area in which the porta cabin is located would be returned to car parking spaces. The development results in a revised parking layout.

It will result in an increase of 6 parking spaces, an additional 2 EV charging points and 10 cycle parking spaces.

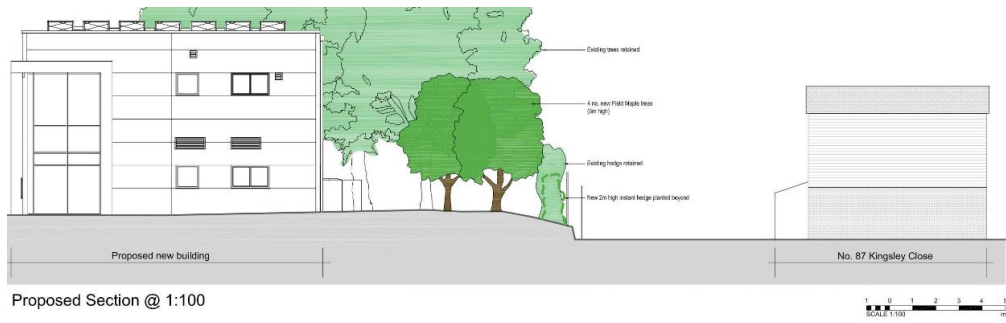
The LPG tank is proposed to be reduced in size and relocated with fuel tanks.

The proposed development results in the loss of a number of trees on site, a replacement landscaping scheme is proposed to mitigate the loss of any biodiversity on site.

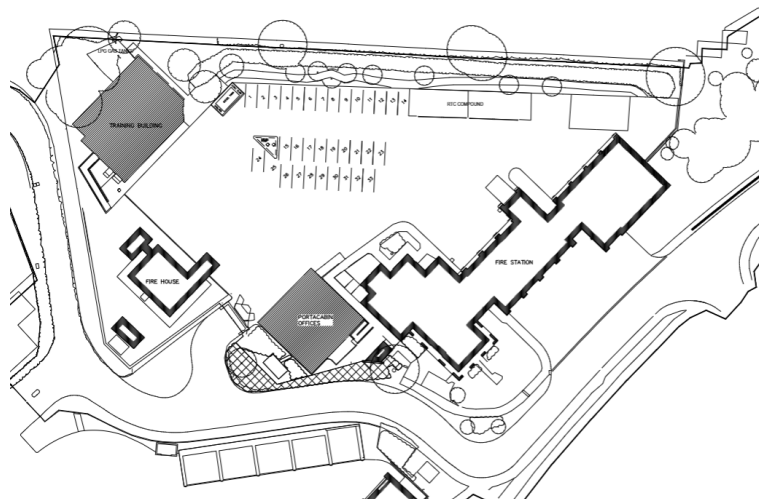
Proposed replacement building



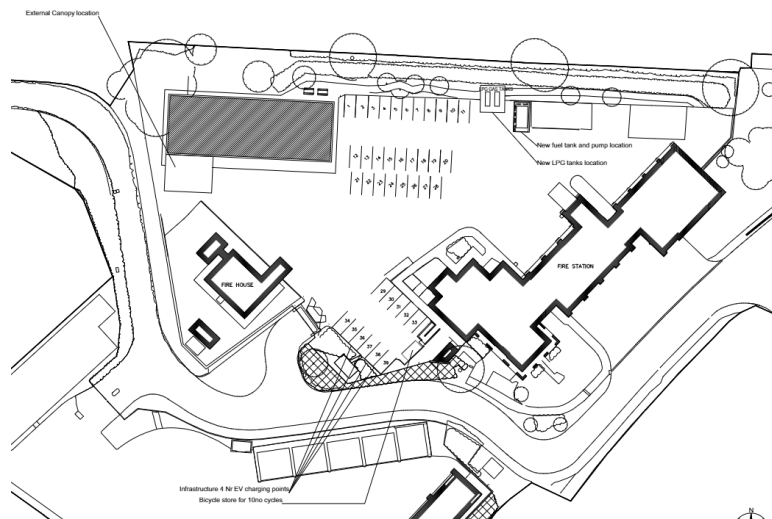
5019750 RDG XX XX SE B 0900 Rev B Proposed site section to show relationship with houses to the rear



Existing Site plan



Proposed Site Plan



Plans considered

Application letter, Ridge, 11 December 2023

5019750 RDG XX ST PL B 0100 Location plan

5019750 RDG XX ST PL B 0011 Proposed site plan

5019750 RDG XX ST PL B 0009 Existing site plan

36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0003 Roof plan

~~36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0002 Rev C Proposed elevations~~

~~36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0001 Rev F Ground and first floor plans~~

500 Rev A Soft landscaping proposals

1.0 Technical briefing note, flood risk assessment, ridge, 04/12/2023
~~230712-R001 Acoustic assessment, ACA acoustics, 7 December 2023~~
W5464_rep_Whitley Wood Fire Station_01-12-23 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, December 2023, Windrushecolgy.com, 1 December 2023
CIL
As received 08/01/2024

JSL4925_750 Tree Survey Schedule, 20/07/2023
JSL 4925 701 Tree removal & Protection plan
~~JSL4925 500 Rev A Soft Landscape proposals~~
BREEAM Pre assessment report, Ridge, 12 June 2023
As received 24/01/2024

~~JSL4925 770 Tree survey report and arboricultural impact assessment, RPS, 4 August 2023~~
As received 25/01/2024

Planning statement, Ridge, December 2023
As received 29/01/2024

Material sample specifications
As received 7/02/2024

~~JSL4925 500 Rev C Soft Landscape proposals~~
~~36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0002 Rev G Proposed elevations~~
~~36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0001 Rev F Ground and first floor plans~~
5019750 RDG XX XX SE B 0900 Rev B Proposed site section
36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0007 Rev C Window schedule
36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0006 Rev A External Door Schedule
0901 Rev A Proposed LPG And Diesel Tank Section
Whitley Wood Training Centre Explanation for Design Rationale, Ridge
As received 11/03/2024

Tree Canopy Calculator cover assessment
Canopy Calculator
JSL4925 500 Rev D Soft Landscape proposals
As received 12/03/2024

~~230712-R001A Acoustic assessment, ACA acoustics, 13 March 2024~~
As received 14/03/2024

36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0002 Rev H Proposed elevations
36087-PML-ZZ-DR-A-0001 Rev J Ground and first floor plans
As received 19/03/2024

BNG Calculation
As received 26/03/2024

JSL4925_771 Arboricultural Method statement 02 April 2024
Email from the agent detailing additional tree planting, an instant hedgerow along the northern boundary of the site
As received 08/04/2024

230712-R001B Acoustic assessment, ACA acoustics, 19 March 2024
Email to explain the noise assessment criteria,

As received 13/05/2024

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY (since redevelopment as a fire station)

90/00992/RG Fire station and garage with drill yard and fire/smoke house GRANTED 10/1991.
91/00934/REG3 Erection of a Training Centre for Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. OBSEN - 9.01.92.
92/00749/REG3 Erection of three storey training block for fire station. OBSEN - 5.11.92
02/00132/FUL Installation of modular office accommodation to the west of the main fire station building. Permitted 09/04/2002.
04/01014/FUL Extension of warehouse facility and conversion to operational vehicle bay, plus new link between buildings. Permitted 01/010/2004
06-00843/FUL Metal container in the yard of the station for BA Training. Permitted 21/09/2006
07/00357/FUL Metal storage container for general storage. Permitted 21/05/2007

4. CONSULTATIONS

Site notices were displayed around the site on 25 January 2024 for the required consultation period. The following addresses were consulted by letter.

101 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
80 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
82 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
84 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
86 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
98 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
83 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
97 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
96 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX
106 Kingsley Close, Reading, RG2 8TX

No letters of representation have been received.

Internal consultation

RBC Transport

There are no objections to the proposed development subject to condition for a pre - commencement Construction Method Statement, parking spaces to be provided as specified and 2 active and 2 further EV charging points to be provided and cycle storage for 10 cycle spaces to be provided next to the new parking area and highways informative.

There is not intensification of use of the site and no proposed alterations to the access onto the highway network. Fire appliances will exit the site from the appliance bays onto Whitley Wood Road. All vehicles return, and all other vehicles exit via the rear gate from Toro Way. The proposal will result a net increase of 6 parking spaces and total of 39 parking spaces. Additional parking has been created by the demolition of a temporary porta cabin on site.

The proposed cycle store should be equipped with Sheffield type stands where the cycle can be secured easily and quickly. The Sheffield type stands should be spaced 1000mm apart as per the recommended cycle parking layout within the adopted Parking Standards and Design

SPD. We therefore require detailed plans confirming that the cycle parking provision meets the Council's specifications.

RBC Environmental Protection

There are no objections to the proposal subject to conditions regarding noise generating equipment or noise from commercial activities and an informative regarding noise and vermin during demolition and construction phases.

Applications which include noise generating plant or commercial activities when there are nearby noise sensitive receptors should be accompanied by an acoustic assessment carried out in accordance with BS4142:2014+A1:2019 methodology.

The noise assessment submitted is considered acceptable. The noise source specific noise level (plant noise level) should be at least 10dBA below the existing background level as measured at the nearest noise sensitive receptor and the rating level should not exceed the background level (as measured in accordance with BS4142:2014 A 2019). This is to prevent cumulative impact from addition of plant over time which could result in background creeping up to levels which might cause adverse health impact, which is more likely in a densely occupied town such as Reading. Levels of -10dB ensure that the background level is not increased and nuisance is unlikely.

Complaints about noise and dust caused by construction and demolition works are commonly received, particularly working outside reasonable hours and about smoke from bonfires associated with the burning of waste and vermin ingress on site of minor developments. An informative is recommended to help prevent complaints.

RBC Natural Environment

It is a shame that tree works were commenced on site before a decision was issued. However additional arboricultural information was provided in respect of the trees removed. Although 8 trees have been removed, 12 new trees will be planted. There are no objections, subject to conditions for tree protection measures for the remaining trees and a soft landscaping scheme to be provided to comply with EN14.

RBC Ecology

There are no objections from the RBC ecology subject to a condition for there to be sufficient new tree planting that results in a net gain of biodiversity which will improve the canopy provision on site.

The application is supported by an ecology report (Windrush Ecology, December 2023). The buildings on site and a number of trees were assessed as unsuitable for use by roosting bats, and no evidence of bats was observed during the survey. As such, the risk of the proposals directly adversely affecting bats is likely to be minimal.

The report concludes that the proposals are unlikely to adversely affect priority habitats or protected species subject to the implementation of mitigation measures within the report.

These measures, which include tree removal/vegetation clearance undertaken outside the bird nesting season (March to August inclusive), measures to protect foraging badgers and hedgehogs during construction, and restricted lighting would be sufficient to ensure that the

risk of the works affecting protected species remains minimal. The recommendations should be secured through a planning condition once the issue below has been addressed.

A habitat enrichment condition is proposed to protect and enhance the habitat particularly for birds and bats and to limit any additional lighting without approval from the Local Authority to protect the local wildlife from light pollution. Additional information was requested regarding the proposed tree canopy on site. Information provided was not considered to meet current BNG criteria, however the application was submitted before the introduction of mandatory BNG requirements and in this instance the proposal is considered to comply with policy EN12.

Thames Water

Thames Water provided comments on waste, sewage treatment, disposal of surface water and water, advising that public sewers are close to the proposed development and providing an informative regarding water pressure.

Communications with the agent

Additional information and amended plans were provided by the agent to address case officer concerns regarding the design of the rear elevation of the original designs and their impact on neighbouring residents and the impact of noise. The amount of windows were reduced from the rear elevation, with the remaining sizes reduced and raised to reduce any impact of overlooking to the rear but to allow light into the rooms. Additional arboricultural information was provided due to the requirement to remove 8 trees on site. The agent agreed to have a pre-commencement CMS condition.

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework 2023

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

CC3: ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

CC5: WASTE MINIMISATION AND STORAGE

CC6: ACCESSIBILITY AND THE INTENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

EN12: BIODIVERSITY AND THE GREEN NETWORK
EN14: TREES, HEDGES AND WOODLAND
EN15: AIR QUALITY
EN16: POLLUTION AND WATER RESOURCES
EN17: NOISE GENERATING EQUIPMENT
EN18: FLOODING AND DRAINAGE
EM1: PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT
EM2: LOCATION OF NEW EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT
TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS
TR4: CYCLE ROUTES AND FACILITIES
TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING
OU1: NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES
OU2: HAZARDOUS INSTALLATIONS

SPG/SPD

Employment Skills and Training (2013)
Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

APPRAISAL

Design, Character and Appearance

Policy CC7 states that ‘all development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located’ particularly in terms of design, scale, character, adaptability and diversity.

The proposal is for a replacement training centre for Whitley Wood fire service station which was opened in 1992. The site is constrained by the size of the site and triangular shape of the site, and the services and facilities it needs to provide. A modular functional building, rectangular in shape is proposed which although is different in design to other existing brick buildings and a temporary porta cabin on the site, it is similar in appearance to other logistical buildings at nearby Thames Valley Police department and Highways depots. The site is located on land between the M4 and residential housing estates, providing good transport links to access areas within Berkshire and South Oxfordshire on land located near to the Basingstoke Road, A33 and M4. The location is logistically placed to provide essential fire, police and highways services. The building has been designed to provide the optimum use for the requirements of a new modern training facility to incorporate storage area for specialist equipment, kit and drying rooms, decontamination areas, providing training and meeting areas, with offices, laundry, kitchen, WC facilities and a control room. The building will be larger in size and scale which is required in order to provide essential services for the wider community. The scale is considered appropriate for the location in which it is situated.

The site is surrounded by residential properties (on the northern and eastern side) and office building and warehouses on the west and southern western side. Whilst properties to the north of site present some level of uniformity in terms of the character of buildings, properties on the southern part vary in size, design and style. Given the location of the new building and the nature of the site and its immediate surrounding area, the proposal is not considered to adversely impact on the character of the area. A significant amount of the building has been built on the site of the existing building and although the building is taller in height than the existing building, it has been moved as far away from the site boundary as possible. Proposed material samples have been provided and the colours proposed are to match the RBFRS brand, constructed of 100mm firestop and cladded in Tata steel grey RAL 90076 and red RAL 3000, with the grey facing neighbouring residential accommodation to the

rear of the site. There is no objection to the relocation of the LPG and fuel tanks on the site. The proposal is considered to comply with CC7.

Residential amenity

Policy CC8 states that ‘development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of:

- Privacy and overlooking;
- Access to sunlight and daylight;
- Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;
- Harm to outlook;
- Noise and disturbance;
- Artificial lighting.

Policy EN17 states, ‘Where noise generating equipment is proposed, the noise source specific⁶¹ level (plant noise level) should be at least 10dBA below the existing background level as measured at the nearest noise sensitive receptor.’

Privacy and overlooking

The proposal would be within 20m of the rear elevations of the neighbouring properties. However, the only windows at first floor level facing to the rear would be non-opening, obscure glazed high level windows to allow light into the training rooms whilst ensuring that overlooking and loss of privacy is minimised. Given the position of the building, fenestration pattern and distance to the neighbours, it is considered that in this instance there would be no harm from overlooking or loss of privacy.

Access to daylight and sunlight

Given the set off from the boundary, the distance to the rear elevations of the neighbouring properties and the additional planting along the rear boundary, it is not considered that the proposal would result in significant harm to the neighbour’s living conditions through a loss of daylight or sunlight, overbearing presence or a sense of enclosure.

Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development and harm to outlook

The site is bordered to the north by two storey residential dwelling houses. The proposed new training building is a large building measuring approximately 7.7m in height, 35m in length and 12.5m in depth. The proposed two storey training building would be located on the northern side of the site with a back to back distance of approximately 18m. Operational constraints required the building to be positioned in its proposed location on the site, to align with other buildings on site housing specialist vehicles, the main fire station and fire house, to ensure that the building would be fit for purpose. The size and scale of development enables all resources to be stored in the same building, to allow sufficient space for training exercises in front of the building whilst providing a view of the training manoeuvres being undertaken on site and in the fire house to improve the training provision. The height of the building allows for the required 2.7m floor to ceiling heights for the proposed use. Furthermore, the rear of the site boundary shall be landscaped to reduce the visual impact of the building on neighbours at the rear with an instant hedge proposed and additional tree planting and vegetation. A cross section has been provided to show the development in relation to neighbouring houses.

Noise and disturbance

The use of the site is considered to remain unchanged. Any plant proposed for the replacement training building is required to meet acceptable noise levels in order to protect the amenity of neighbouring residents. A noise report in accordance with BS standards has been submitted to demonstrate that the development and proposed plant will not result in a detrimental impact to neighbouring properties, with mitigation measures proposed. A condition is recommended to ensure that predicted specific sound level (LAeq,TR) (with reference to BS:4142) as measured at a point 1 metre external to the nearest noise-sensitive facade shall be at least 10dB below the pre-existing background sound level, LA90,T when all plant/equipment (or any part of it) is in operation. A noise assessment condition is also required to be submitted to demonstrate how any noise from plant, or machinery will be mitigated, to comply with CC8 and EN17.

Artificial lighting

A condition is recommended for no additional lighting to be installed without the prior written permission of the local planning authority to limit the impact of any artificial lighting.

Summary

The replacement training building would be larger and in closer proximity to the neighbouring properties than the existing building. Despite this, it is not considered that the impact on neighbours would be significant due to the mitigation measures proposed. Although the impact on neighbouring properties would not be significant, a low level of harm would be present, and so must be weighed in the planning balance.

Trees and Biodiversity

Policy EN12 states that ‘development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible.’

Policy EN14 states that ‘New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site.’

The site is located in Whitley ward, which (with ref to Tree Strategy canopy cover measurements) is only at 12% - given that the aim is to achieve a 12% canopy cover in each ward by 2030, the retention and planting of trees, to ensure a net gain is more important here to avoid the current canopy cover falling below the target percentage. Whilst outside the AQMA, the site sits close to it hence ensuring a net gain in greening to aid air pollution mitigation is also arguable.

Due to the actions of proactive landscapers at the site, the trees proposed to be felled had already been removed. Following discussions with the RBC Natural Environment and Ecology teams the proposal was considered acceptable subject to conditions. An Arboricultural and tree protection plan have been submitted to show that replacement planting is proposed. 8 trees have been removed and plans show 12 new trees to be planted, resulting in a net gain, compliant with Policy EN14.

Conditions are recommended for further details to be provided for the proposed landscaping scheme, for a habitat enhancement scheme with bat and bird habitat provision and for no new lighting to be proposed unless further details are provided to protect local wildlife, in order to comply with EN12.

Transport

Policy TR3 states, 'In determining proposals involving a new or altered access onto the transport network, improvement works to the transport network, the creation of new transport infrastructure or the generation of additional trips on the transport network, consideration will be given to the effect on safety, congestion and the environment'

Policy TR5 states, 'Development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport.'

The proposal would result in a total of 39 parking spaces, which is a net increase of 6, and proposes addition of two active EV charging points, together with infrastructure for a further 2 EV charging points, alongside 10 cycle parking spaces to be provided and located adjacent to the new parking area. Access to the site remains the same, with additional provision for EV cars. It is not intended that the proposals will result in an intensification of the existing use on site, and the proposal is considered to comply with TR3 and TR5.

Sustainability

Policy CC2 states, 'Proposals for new development, including the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing building stock, will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change.' And that 'All minor non-residential developments or conversions to residential are required to meet the most up-to-date BREEAM 'Very Good' standard as a minimum.'

A pre assessment BREEAM report has been submitted that confirms that the proposal is predicted to reach a BREEAM - VERY GOOD standard with a score of 59.58%. A condition is proposed to demonstrate that this has been achieved within 6 months of occupation of the replacement training building. The new building is proposed to be more energy efficient with solar panels proposed. A 6 month period is proposed for the final BREEAM report to be submitted is to allow sufficient time for staff to move to the new building, for the porta cabin to be demolished and the parking and EV provision to be completed.

Accessibility

The planning statement confirms that the building will be accessible for disabled access and will meet Part M building regulations.

Other matters

Thames Water

An informative has been added to highlight feedback from Thames Water regarding the provision of water pressure at the development site.

CIL

The Council introduced the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on 1st April 2015. CIL is a way of securing financial contributions towards infrastructure from new development, and partially replaces the Section 106 planning obligation regime. It is a set charge per sq m of floorspace for different uses, and, unlike Section 106, it is non-negotiable. It applies to developments which result in at least one dwelling; where the space has not been in lawful use for 6 months within the last 3 years or 100 sq m of new floorspace. For this approved

development the CIL status is CHARGEABLE. If chargeable you will be sent a CIL Liability Notice with the calculated amount soon. CIL becomes payable on commencement of the development or by instalments.

For more information go to:

https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/CIL_Advice_to_Applicants.pdf

Conclusion

The replacement fire service training and development building will provide significant social and community provision and benefits through the expansion of the training facilities. The proposed is acceptable with regards transport and access, and the design of the building would be in keeping with the site and an appropriate addition to the area. Conditions for replacement planting and landscaping on site to ensure there is no net loss of biodiversity on site have been secured. As a matter of planning balance, there is some resultant harm on residential housing to the rear along Kingsley Close, although this is not considered to be significant due to the proposed planting, proposed fenestration details and the position of the building would reduce impact of the proposal on neighbouring properties. The social and economic benefits to Berkshire and South Oxfordshire fire service provision would be significant as the proposal would enhance the important use on site, particularly in fire safety and prevention, future training provision and strengthen the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service resources in the area. There is an urgent need for replacement buildings on this site due to the condition of the existing facilities and to ensure the future viability of the site. On consideration of the weight of materials considerations and planning balance, the proposal is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Grant

Subject to the following conditions:

Time limit

Plans

CMS - Pre commencement

Materials

AMS

Landscaping

Habitat

Parking as specified

Cycle parking to be approved

Vehicle charging

Noise

Noise mitigation

Lighting

Obscure glazing

BREEAM

Informatives

Highways

Terms

Building control

Construction

Thames Water

P&P