

Response to the Thames Valley Park Data Centre Public Consultation

To: Thames Valley Data Centre Project Team

From: The Wokingham Energy Collective (WEC) Committee

Date: 17 July 2026

Subject: Consultation Response – Data Centre Proposal at Thames Valley Park

1. Overall position

Wokingham Energy Collective (WEC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the public consultation on the proposed data centre at Thames Valley Park.

We recognise that data centres are an increasingly important and widely discussed issue, bringing a range of environmental, social, and economic considerations.

At present, insufficient detail has been provided for us to take a formal position either in support of or in opposition to this proposal. Our response should be understood as neutral on the principle of development. However, if the project is to proceed, we believe it must meet a clear set of minimum standards to safeguard local residents, prevent energy waste, and minimise environmental impact. The points set out below reflect what we consider essential requirements for any responsible development of this kind. We ask the project team to work with local partners so that, if the scheme proceeds, it is designed and operated in a way that maximises environmental, energy-system and community benefits for Wokingham Borough and the surrounding area.

Our central request is simple: the project should be treated not only as a major electricity-consuming development, but also as an opportunity to demonstrate how digital infrastructure can contribute positively to a local energy transition, and how data centres could be constructed in a way that genuinely benefits local communities. WEC would welcome early engagement with the project team, Wokingham Borough Council, relevant network operators and other local stakeholders to explore the practical opportunities set out below.

2. Summary of our key asks

Theme	Requested commitment
Collaborative delivery	Establish an ongoing local energy and community benefit dialogue with WEC, Wokingham Borough Council and other relevant local partners.
Energy strategy and carbon impact	Provide a clear, transparent energy strategy covering the proposed fuel-cell use, future grid connection, transition away from fossil gas, carbon accounting and the role of offsets.
Grid flexibility	Design the facility to act as a flexible grid participant, including exploring batteries, demand-side response and operational flexibility that can reduce stress on the local electricity network.
Waste heat reuse	Move from general exploration to a funded feasibility and delivery pathway for capturing and reusing waste heat through nearby heat users and potential future heat-network infrastructure.

Water and cooling	Maintain low-water cooling as a core design principle and publish enough information for the community to understand water demand and local heat impacts during setup and operation.
Community benefit	Develop a tangible, locally governed community benefit package that is additional to planning requirements and focused on local need, energy affordability, fuel poverty, climate resilience, skills and community energy.
Transparency and reporting	Publish clear information, milestones and annual reporting so local people can see what has been promised, what has been delivered and what remains under development.

3. Collaboration: turning consultation into a partnership

We welcome the fact that the project team has opened a public consultation at an early stage. To build trust and improve outcomes, consultation should now move into a more structured partnership approach. This would allow local concerns and opportunities to be considered while key design and delivery decisions are still capable of being shaped.

We ask the project team to commit to:

- a follow-up meeting with WEC and relevant local stakeholders to discuss the energy, heat and community benefit opportunities in detail;
- a named project contact for ongoing dialogue on energy, community benefit and local sustainability matters;
- a transparent action log setting out which local suggestions are being taken forward, which are not, and why;
- an approach based on co-design where there are realistic opportunities for local partners to help shape solutions.

This would make the consultation more than a short-term statutory exercise. It would create a practical route for the project to become a better neighbour and a more useful part of the local energy system.

4. Energy, carbon and grid flexibility

The proposed data centre will be a major electricity user. We therefore consider the energy strategy to be central to the acceptability and long-term value of the scheme. The consultation material refers to the use of on-site fuel cells while additional grid capacity is brought forward. We ask for further clarity on how this approach will be managed over time and how the development will avoid locking in fossil-fuel dependence.

4.1 Energy strategy and carbon transparency

The project team should publish a clear energy and carbon strategy before planning submission. At minimum this should explain:

- the expected electricity demand profile during commissioning, early operation and full operation;
- the proposed role of fuel cells, including expected fuel source, operational hours, emissions assumptions and transition pathway;
- the conditions under which the project will increase use of grid electricity as capacity becomes available;
- the opportunities for on-site and local renewable energy generation, and which of these are taken forward or rejected (and why);
- the hierarchy for reducing carbon impact: demand reduction first, low-carbon supply second, transparent residual offsetting last;

- the potential for recovered waste heat to power emerging carbon capture and removal technologies ahead of relying on offsetting;
- how any residual offsetting proposals will be verified, additional, permanent and locally meaningful where possible.

4.2 Grid flexibility

The project should not be designed as a passive load on an already constrained electricity system. Data centres can increasingly be designed to support the grid through flexible operation, batteries, smart controls and demand-side response. This should be treated as a core opportunity for the Thames Valley Park scheme, not a secondary consideration.

We ask the project team to explore and report on:

- whether on-site battery storage could reduce peak import demand and provide local or national flexibility services;
- whether certain computational workloads can be scheduled or shifted to periods when renewable generation is plentiful or when the grid is less constrained;
- how the site could participate in demand-side response, balancing or ancillary service markets where technically and commercially feasible;
- how flexibility could help reduce the need for network reinforcement or avoid exacerbating local constraints;
- whether connection arrangements can be designed to reward genuine flexibility rather than simply increasing fixed peak demand.

WEC would welcome the opportunity to work with the project team to identify local flexibility options and to connect the project with wider community and local authority discussions on smart local energy systems.

5. Waste heat reuse and heat-network opportunity

We strongly welcome the project team's acknowledgement that heat generated by the data centre could be reused. However, the current wording should be strengthened from a general intention to "assess opportunities" into a clear feasibility, design and delivery commitment.

Waste heat should be treated as a valuable local energy resource. The project should be designed so that heat recovery remains technically and commercially deliverable, including if the most viable heat off-take route emerges after the initial planning application. This is particularly important because data centre design decisions made now could determine whether waste heat is usable later.

We ask the project team to commit to:

- undertaking a funded waste heat feasibility study before planning determination, covering heat quantity, quality, temperature, temporal profile, recovery infrastructure and potential heat customers;
- designing the facility to be "heat-network ready", including space, access, pipe routes and technical interfaces for future connection;
- working with Wokingham Borough Council, Reading Borough Council and relevant heat-network stakeholders to understand whether the site could contribute to a wider heat network over time;
- reviewing nearby anchor heat demands, including leisure, commercial, public-sector and residential opportunities;
- publishing the conclusions of the heat-reuse feasibility work in plain English, including what would be needed to move from feasibility to delivery.

We would particularly encourage consideration of nearby heat users and the potential relationship with existing or emerging heat network planning in the wider Reading/Wokingham area. If a direct connection to a large heat network is not immediately viable, the project should still explore phased options such as serving local anchor loads first, while preserving the ability to connect into a larger network later.

6. Community benefit: beyond mitigation and towards lasting local value

The current draft response rightly asks for “concrete opportunities for local benefit”. We suggest strengthening this substantially. A development of this scale should provide a clear, tangible and locally governed community benefit package. This should not be presented as a substitute for good design, planning mitigation, environmental compliance or business rates. It should be additional: a positive contribution to the communities affected by the development and to the wider local energy transition.

Local benefit should be transparent, needs-led, proportionate, additional, governed well, and developed through early engagement with affected communities.

6.1 What the community benefit package should do

We ask the project team to work with WEC and local partners to develop a community benefit package that could include:

- **A local community energy and climate fund:** annual funding for locally determined projects that reduce energy bills, tackle fuel poverty, support retrofit, improve community buildings, enable rooftop solar, or build climate resilience.
- **Support for community energy capacity:** funding, technical advice or partnership support to help WEC and other local groups develop investable community energy projects.
- **Skills and employment pathways:** local training, apprenticeships, school and college engagement, and pathways into digital infrastructure, electrical engineering, heat networks, data, energy management and retrofit.
- **Local energy innovation:** support for smart local energy projects, flexibility pilots, building-level demand reduction, or community energy advice.
- **Transparent governance:** a simple local governance arrangement involving community representatives, relevant councils and local organisations, with published criteria and annual reporting.
- **A Community Action Plan approach:** a short, locally owned plan setting out priorities, eligible uses, decision-making arrangements and how benefits will be monitored over time.

6.2 Principles for the community benefit arrangement

We suggest the project team adopts the following principles:

- **Additional:** community benefit should be additional to planning mitigation, legal obligations and standard corporate social responsibility activity.
- **Local and needs-led:** funding should prioritise host and affected communities, while enabling wider strategic benefits where there is clear local support.
- **Long-term:** benefits should continue through the operational life of the facility, not only during construction.
- **Transparent:** headline terms, governance arrangements, annual funding and delivery outcomes should be published.
- **Flexible:** the package should be able to respond to changing local needs and opportunities over time.
- **Collaborative:** local communities should help shape priorities rather than simply receive a pre-designed offer.

A credible community benefit package would give the project a stronger local social licence and help ensure that the local area benefits directly from hosting nationally important digital infrastructure.

7. Transparency and public communication

The consultation process should provide clear and accessible information that allows residents to understand both the benefits and the impacts of the proposed development. We ask the project team to improve transparency in the following areas:

- energy demand, power sources and carbon impact;

- fuel-cell operation and pathway to lower-carbon energy supply;
- grid connection, grid flexibility and expected timing of any changes;
- waste heat recovery potential and delivery milestones;
- water demand during setup and operation;
- construction impacts and local employment opportunities;
- community benefit commitments, governance and reporting.

Communication should be plain English, locally specific, and updated at key milestones. It would be helpful for the project team to publish an annual local benefits and sustainability statement if the scheme proceeds.

8. Conclusion and offer to work together

If this data centre project proceeds, WEC would like to see it developed as a genuinely collaborative project that contributes positively to Wokingham's energy transition, local resilience and community prosperity.

The project has the potential to do more than provide digital infrastructure. It could demonstrate how a major energy-consuming development can support grid flexibility, capture and reuse waste heat, reduce its carbon impact, and create locally governed community benefit. These outcomes will not happen automatically. They require early design choices, transparent commitments and meaningful partnership with local stakeholders.

WEC would welcome a meeting with the project team to discuss the proposals in this response and to explore how we can work together constructively as the scheme develops.

About the Wokingham Energy Collective: WEC is a Community Energy group set up to champion and deliver community-owned low-carbon energy technologies across Wokingham Borough. We are a member-led association, with membership open to all who share our objectives. Members' experience includes finance, local government, energy, academia and more – coming together on a voluntary basis for a cleaner, fairer and more resilient energy future for Wokingham Borough.