

TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

MR & MRS FRANCIS

PLANNING STATEMENT

**GOLDBLOCKS DAY NURSERY
77 & 77A SCHOOL ROAD
TILEHURST
READING
RG31 5AT**

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Application by Goldilocks Day Nursery for the following:

'Use of 77 and 77A School Road for 90 children as part of a pre-school day nursery'

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1 INTRODUCTION

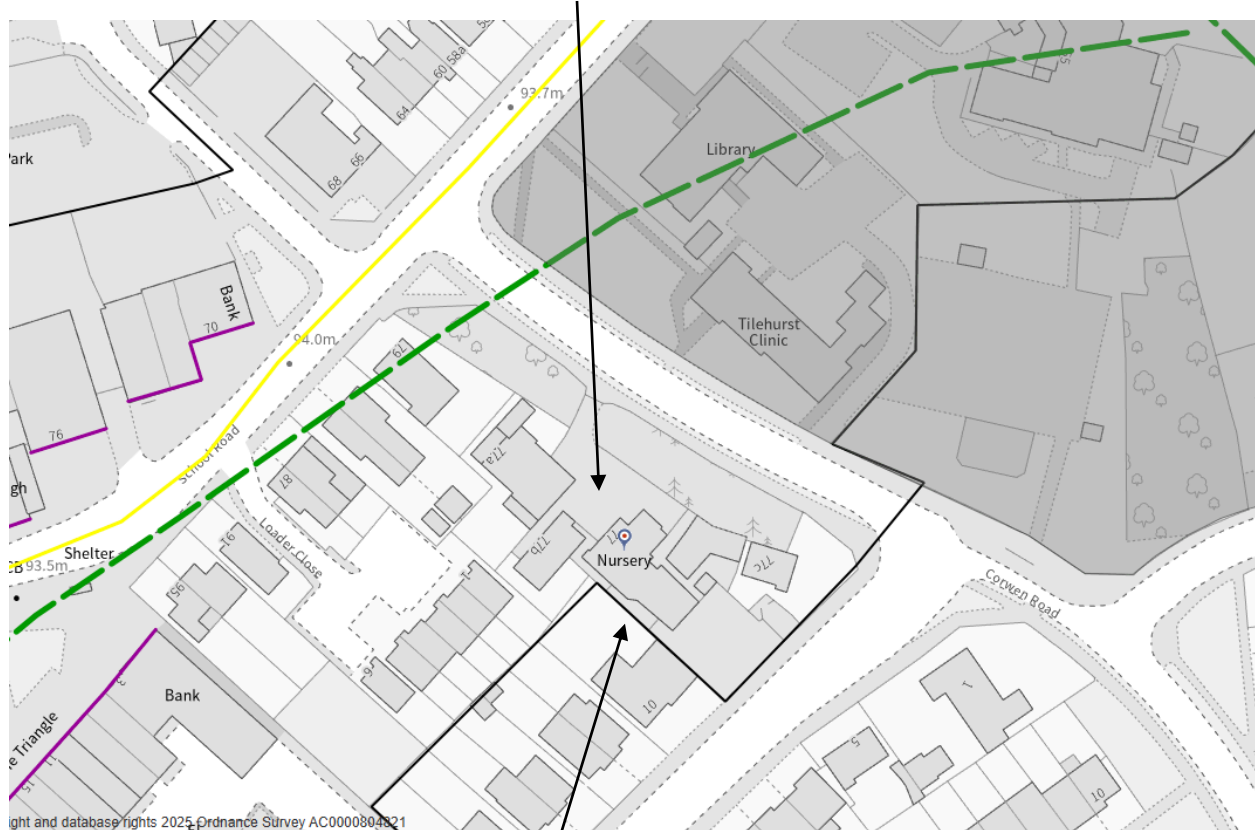
- 1.1 This planning statement is submitted on behalf of Mr & Mrs Francis and relates to the two existing nursery buildings (Nos.77 and 77A School Road). The reason for submitting the application is to regularise an existing use at 77A and to establish a combined pupil limit across both buildings for 90 children. At the current time, No.77 has permission as a day nursery under 92/0207/FD whilst 77A has permission for use for purposes ancillary to the day nursery as a childrens activity centre, after school club and residential flat (98/0547/FD).
- 1.2 No.77A has been fully operating as part of the nursery for over 25 years. The first floor flat was initially installed but has not been in use for in excess of 8 years. The nursery currently has 108 children on its roll split between the two buildings with No.77A currently operating with the greater number of children. They are seeking to regularise an overall capacity at 90 children to attend Monday to Friday.
- 1.3 The remainder of this statement firstly describes the site and surrounding area before examining in closer detail the history of the site and the local area. National and Local planning policy is examined in more detail in Chapter 4 whilst Chapter 5 of the statement deals with the case for the planning application proposal. The conclusion in Chapter 6 will be that the application should be supported and granted permission.
- 1.4 The application is accompanied by a Travel Plan and Transport Statement both produced by highway consultancy, Motion.

2 THE SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1 The site is located within the urban area of Tilehurst as identified on the Local Plan Proposals Map. The application site comprises of two large detached buildings which have historically been in use as part of a childrens day nursery (Goldilocks). No.77 was originally granted permission in 1990 for use as a nursery being granted in May 1992 under ref.92/0207. In respect to the second building (77A), permission was granted in 1998 for a change of use from residential to a use comprising of childrens activity centre, after school play club and a first floor residential flat with the premises conditioned to be for purposes ancillary to the main use at No.77.
- 2.2 Following conversion in the late 1990s, the premises were immediately used solely as part of the day nursery. Whilst the first floor flat was initially installed, it was vacated over 8 years ago with the space now being used as part of the main nursery use.
- 2.3 No.77B previously formed part of the nursery but is now in residential use.
- 2.4 Parking/drop off for the nursery is located adjacent to the main entrance in Walnut Way. The surrounding area comprises of a diverse array of uses with the immediate vicinity being characterised by various community and institutional uses including a clinic, library and Park Lane Primary School. The application site falls within the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre which is deliberately drawn to include facilities such as schools and community centres (see paragraph 4.6.6 of the Local Plan and Local Plan Proposals Map extract below).
- 2.5 The application site is located in a highly sustainable area with shops and transport opportunities in very close proximity. The existing non-car modes of transport are set out within the Transport Statement produced by highway consultants, Motion.

Local Plan proposals Map extract

Application site



District Centre boundary

3 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 The most relevant planning applications relating to the nursery are set out below:

77 School Road

90/0671/FD - Conversion of existing house and extension to provide day nursery.

Approved 01.11.1990.

92/0207/FD - Increase in the number of children at day nursery from 30 to 60.

Erection of ancillary toilets to new classroom, and car park enlargement. Approved 05.05.1992.

77A School Road

98/0547/FD - Proposed conversion of existing bungalow into a childrens activity centre and after school play club with residential flat. Approved 21.10.1998.

Condition 2 restricts its use to purposes ancillary to the main nursery.

4 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 4.1 Relevant planning policy guidance is contained within Government guidance (National Planning Policy Framework 2024) and the development plan which comprises of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

i) National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

- 4.2 Paragraph 7 of the NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Paragraph 8 states that in achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These are an economic objective, a social objective and an environmental objective. Paragraph 10 states that *'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development** (paragraph 11).*
- 4.3 Paragraph 100 states that it is important that a sufficient choice of early years school places are available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. To this end, LPA's are required to take a *'...proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education'*. LPA's should therefore undertake the following:
- a) *give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and*
 - b) *work with school promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.*
- 4.4 Paragraph 116 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

ii) Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

- 4.5 Policy H7 (protecting the existing housing stock) seeks to resist the loss of residential accommodation unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- 4.6 Policy RL1 (network and hierarchy of centres) identified the application site as being within the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre which is the second highest category of centre with only Reading town centre (regional centre) being of a higher category. The policy states that the centres should be maintained and enhanced. Supporting paragraph 4.6.6 states as follows:

‘The boundaries of all centres on the Proposals Map have been deliberately drawn to include a wider area than simply the shopping parades, incorporating facilities such as schools and community centres where possible. Such an approach emphasises the importance of a diverse range of facilities’.

- 4.7 Policy OU1 (new and existing community facilities) states that proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site. Proposals for on-site intensification of important facilities, such as schools and healthcare uses, will be supported, subject to other policies in the plan. New community facilities should be located where there is a choice of means of travel (including walking and cycling), and in existing centres where possible. Supporting paragraph 4.7.4 states as follows:

‘Given the dense, built up nature of Reading and the lack of appropriate new sites, it is inevitable that some of the Borough’s community facility needs will have to be met through intensification of the use of existing sites’.

5 THE PLANNING APPLICATION

- 5.1 The application seeks to regularise the use of No.77A and to agree with the Council an overall combined upper limit for both existing buildings which together comprise of Nos.77 and 77A. The upper limit sought is for 90 children on the premises at any one time to be split between the two buildings as desired by the nursery operator.
- 5.2 The Council will be aware that since both buildings were granted their respective permissions in 1992 and 1998, the Government has published the National Planning Policy Framework with a number of updated versions, the most recent being in December 2024. Paragraph 100 of the NPPF requires LPA's to give 'great weight' to the need to create, expand or alter schools through decisions on applications. Whilst the two buildings have been successfully operating together for over 25 years, the proposal to crystallize child numbers at a maximum of 90 will remove the current uncertainty as well as formalising an existing historical situation.
- 5.3 In view of the earlier decisions and the conditions attached to No.77A, this chapter addresses the following considerations:
- The case for an overall limit of 90 children at the nursery;
 - Highways and transportation;
 - Loss of the residential flat under planning permission 98/0547/FD
 - Summary and conclusions.
- i) The case for an overall limit of 90 children at the nursery
- 5.4 The nursery has operated throughout the past 27 years from both buildings (Nos.77 and 77A) with a role of circa 108 children between both buildings at any one time although the capacity being sought through this proposal is for a figure of 90 children. This has operated without any known problems or issues to the amenity of the area in terms of operational times (07.30-18.00, Monday to Friday) including noise and parking drop-off/pick-up. It is a vital part of the local community allowing local parents to work a conventional day. The 2019 Ofsted Inspection rated its overall effectiveness as 'Good'.

- 5.5 The nursery provides an important source of local employment providing up to 35 jobs in an accessible and sustainable location. Employment is also provided for cleaners, cooks etc as support staff/jobs.
- 5.6 Currently, the nursery operates 5 days per week and is closed on weekends and public holidays.
- 5.7 Over the 27 year period which the nursery has operated through both buildings there is no evidence that any complaints about noise or disturbance have been made to the Local Authority. The requested 90 children upper limit would therefore in reality represent little change to the level of activity and the overall extent of any perceived noise or levels of disturbance as this has been ongoing since 1998. The only logical conclusion that can be reached is that the proposed maximum 90 child limit would not affect the amenity of adjoining properties or the area in general.
- 5.8 The site is located within the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre which is purposefully drawn to include schools and other community uses considered vital to their overall function. The principle of both buildings being used entirely as a nursery for 90 children is consistent with the overall designation and its intentions. LP Policy OU1 also supports on-site intensification, in particular schools. In conclusion, local and national policies support the formalisation of an upper limit of 90 children on the nursery spread between the two existing buildings and there is no conflict with the Development Plan as a result.

ii) Highways and transportation

- 5.9 The nursery is located within a location that relates well to sustainable modes of transport. There are several bus stops within a 100m walk from the nursery entrance and there are currently no on-street parking restrictions immediately outside the site. Current drop-off/pick-up times are between 07.30-9.30 and 16.00-18.00 hours. The car park is for the sole use of parents dropping off their children with staff not having any use of this area and being encouraged to use sustainable modes of travel. The nursery provides a total of 12 spaces for parents.
- 5.10 The Transport Statement includes a car parking survey of the car park and this has demonstrated that it has operated such that no more than 50% of the available

spaces are occupied at any time. The adjacent Tilehurst Triangle car park survey also indicates spare capacity. Finally, the survey for occupancy along Walnut Way and Corwen Road demonstrates that parking spaces have remained available during drop off/pick up times.

- 5.11 The statement has also demonstrated that the nursery is accessible by a variety of modes of transport including public transport, foot and cycling. There is already a secure cycle parking area to the rear of the nursery which is available for staff and parents.
- 5.12 As part of this application, the nursery are promoting a Travel Plan which encourages a modal shift and car sharing for staff. It is clear that the current nursery roll of 108 children has not resulted in any known implications for the transport network in the local area. Taking into account all of these points, it is highly unlikely that the proposals, which are to formalise a role of 90 children, would lead to a material impact on local transport networks and there is therefore no conflict with either the NPPF or the development plan.

iii) Loss of the residential flat under planning permission 98/0547/FD

- 5.13 Planning permission 98/0547/FD comprised of ground floor play and eating areas, a first floor play area and a two bedroom flat adjacent to the first floor play area. Following approval in 1998, the flat was initially installed and occupied and this continued until circa 2017 when it was vacated by the tenant. Throughout the last 8 years it has been in use as part of the main nursery use accommodating children throughout the day between the hours of 07.30am to 18.00pm Monday to Friday in an identical manner to No.77.
- 5.14 Condition No.2 of the planning permission stated as follows:

'The premises shall be used for purposes ancillary to the main Nursery use at 77 School Road and shall not be separately let or disposed of.

Reason: As it is considered that the site is inappropriate for a further independent use in addition to the main use on the site, which would be detrimental to the amenities of the area.'

- 5.15 The reason for imposing the condition was clearly to prevent the building being used independently from No.77 for various reasons. The use has always been connected to No.77, and it has never been used independently with the only change being the re-use of the area nominated to be a residential flat as part of the nursery school and the remaining space as conventional classrooms.
- 5.16 In terms of the loss of the residential flat, this is considered to be justified on a number of grounds including child welfare and security grounds (i.e. it would not be appropriate for a residential use inside a pre-school nursery) and residential amenity grounds (i.e. noise from the nursery and shared use of external space). Residential re-use of the flat would have the potential to put the day-to-day operations of the nursery in jeopardy. There are no reasons why a flat would be required on security grounds as the site is secure when it is not open. The fact that there has not been an operational flat in the building for in excess of 8 years would not put existing residents to any inconvenience through having to vacate the property should this application be supported.
- 5.17 LP Policy H7 resists the loss of residential accommodation unless there are 'exceptional circumstances'. The reality of the situation is that the flat has not been in use for over 8 years and is now an integral part of the nursery, invaluable to its ongoing success locally and in the community. As stated above, there are serious concerns about providing a flat inside a pre-school nursery on child welfare grounds and security. These grounds are considered to amount to the 'exceptional circumstances' sought under Policy H7 and there is not considered to be any conflict with its intent as a result.

iv) Summary and conclusions

- 5.18 Economic Objective: The proposals seek to formalise a pupil roll of 90 pre-school children at the site ensuring that existing parents can maintain the continuity of the existing service which has been on offer for 27 years. This is important as it enables local people to continue to work thereby benefiting the local and national economy. The nursery also provides vital local employment for the immediate area.
- 5.19 Social Objective: The proposal to formalise a 90 pupil roll is an important social benefit to the local area.

- 5.20 Environmental Objective: The proposal provides for a Travel Plan to encourage modal shift and car sharing for pupils and parents, which is an important sustainable benefit.
- 5.21 Having regard to the above economic, social and environmental objectives, the proposal represents a sustainable form of development. The nursery has already been lawfully operating for the past 27 years with a roll of 108 children. The nursery seeks a lower figure of 90 children which is clear would not materially impact the amenity of residents or highway safety. The nursery is not aware of any complaints over the past 27 years for the 108 roll that has been operating. The proposal has the support of both the NPPF and the adopted Local Plan.

6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 In conclusion, the proposal to use 77 and 77A for up to 90 children as a pre-school day nursery should be supported for the following reasons:

- i) The use has operated at the level of a 108 child roll for 27 years without any known problems and is now seeking a lower figure of 90 children. The site is located within a District Centre where schools are broadly welcomed. The proposal contributes strongly to the social, economic and environmental objectives to planning.
- ii) The Transport Statement has demonstrated considerable spare capacity for parents during drop-off/pick up times within the nursery car park, neighbouring roads and public car parks. The statement also demonstrates that the premises are accessible through numerous non-car modes. As part of this application, the nursery are promoting a Travel Plan to encourage a modal shift and car sharing.
- iii) The permission at No.77A was implemented in accordance with the approved plans but the flat has not been in use for at least 8 years since the previous tenant vacated the property. It is clear that incorporating a flat within a nursery is prejudicial to both uses. The flat, which is not restricted, raises serious child welfare and security issues whilst the noise/disturbance generated by the nursery would materially impact on the future amenities of occupants. These matters are considered to amount to the 'exceptional circumstances' required under LP Policy H7 in terms of the loss of residential accommodation.