

Planning Department – Development Management
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

02 March 2026

Sent electronically

Our ref: JS/SB/9182

Planning application for a (retrospective) change of use from residential (C3) to a mixed use (sui generis) residential and childcare nursery for 15 FTE childcare spaces and erection of 2 no. log cabins for this purpose at 80 Whitley Wood Road, Reading, RG2 8JE

Dear Sir / Madam,

This Planning Letter Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client and applicant, Mrs Donna Defazio, to support a retrospective planning application for the change of use of her home to a mixed-use including provision of a childcare nursery for up to 15 children.

Background

This application is submitted pursuant to pre-application advice (LPA Ref: PL/25/1362) dated 8th January 2026, prepared by planning officer Chukwudi Onwudinanti, which was for "erection of a single storey cabin in rear garden and part retrospective change of use of site to sui generis mixed use of childcare and C3 dwelling for up to 25 children."

The applicant is the owner/occupier of 80 Whitley Wood Road, and in September 2024 opened up a new childcare business, known as 'Sweet Pea Childminding', on the property which initially accommodated up to 8 children. Demand for pre-school childcare is high, and so the applicant expanded and employed staff to accommodate up to 15 children.

During the course of the first year of operating (2024-25), the applicant was approached by the Council's Early Years Team with an offer of grant funding to expand the setting to accommodate up to 25 children, as the demand for childcare places in Whitley Ward is particularly high, and there is a notable lack of provision.

The applicant was informed during the application process for expansion, that the existing level of use at the site also required planning permission. This application seeks to regularise the existing level of use, prior to a future application for the proposed expansion.

Planning History

The planned expansion prompted the preparation and submission of a householder planning application (LPA Ref: PL/25/0590) in April 2025 for "modular cabin measuring 9.5m x m (28.5sqm) in rear garden." At the time of submission, the application was only aware that the proposed cabin required planning permission, and was not advised that the use of the cabin for the nursery business was a planning matter.

In September 2025 the applicant was advised to withdraw the application, due to an application for the change of use being required, and was instead advised to submit a pre-application enquiry. The application was formally withdrawn on 26th September 2025.

Pre-application enquiry

The pre-application enquiry was submitted in October 2025, and response received dated 8th January 2026. The advice included requiring additional information as follows;

- Notification that the existing use does not have planning permission, and to apply for a retrospective change of use.
- Requesting noise management information.
- Details relating to the proposed car and cycle parking provision, and the enlarged site access.
- Details relating to bin storage and collection point.
- Tree protection information will be required.
- Service routes and foundation details.
- Soft landscaping improvements.
- Design of the proposed cabins was deemed acceptable.

Proposed Development

In response to the pre-application advice, and upon our instruction, we have reviewed the existing position in respect of the site and both existing and proposed development.

We are submitting the necessary planning applications in two stages as follows;

1. Retrospective application for the 2 cabins closest to the house and change of use to sui generis (C3 and childcare setting) for up to 15 children. For this application we intend to red line most of the property boundary, but exclude/blue line the cabin at the rearmost of the garden for future consideration. [This application]
2. Subsequent application seeking to expand the setting through the addition of the final cabin, for childcare provision for up to 25 children.

I sought to confirm our approach with you by emails dated 19th and 26th January 2026 with no response.

This application represents Stage 1 as set out above and is for the mixed use in place at the site at present. Supporting reports have been prepared in respect of noise, highways and trees, and these are submitted

alongside an updated drawings set. The proposed (retrospective) development is comprised of the following;

- Drawings prepared by Adapt Architecture Ltd.
 - Location Plan & Block Plan – drawing no. 80WWR-P-01B
 - Proposed Plans & Elevations (Cabins) - drawing no. 80WWR-P-02B
 - Proposed Plans & Elevations (Bike Shed) - drawing no. 80WWR-P-03B
- Drawing prepared by Motion;
 - Proposed Access and Parking Arrangement - 2512041-01A
- Noise Impact Assessment including proposed Noise Mitigation Strategy, prepared by ES Acoustics
- Transport Statement, prepared by Motion
- Travel Plan, prepared by Motion
- Tree Survey, Tree Protection Plan, AIA and AMS, prepared by GHA Trees

Planning Policy

As set out in Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the starting point for assessing any application is the development plan, which in Reading Borough comprises;

- Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

The Local Plan reached its fifth anniversary on 5th November 2024. A draft Local Plan Partial Update was submitted for Examination on 9th May 2025.

A key relevant local policy OU1 – New and Existing Community Facilities – is one which was identified for update. This Statement therefore considers the draft submission wording and the NPPF as more up-to-date material considerations than the extant (outdated) policy.

Additionally, there is a relevant SPD;

- Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

Of relevance as an important material consideration is the NPPF (2024) and consultation version NPPF (2025), as well as the PPGs.

The 2024 NPPF at para. 100 provides specific support for early years* provision;

“It is important that a sufficient choice of early years, school and post-16 places are available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:
a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter early years, schools and post-16 facilities through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and

b) work with early years, school and post-16 promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted."

* Where early years is defined in the Glossary as ***the provision of childcare (including education) for a young child, meaning a child from birth to the September after the child turns 5.***

In the context of this application, the planning department should be taking a 'proactive, positive and collaborative approach' to meeting the requirement for a sufficient choice of early years places. This includes giving 'great weight to the need to create, expand or alter early years facilities through decisions on applications.' It is therefore clear that the Council must adopt a positive approach to the consideration of this application, and the provision of early years places must be given great weight in the planning balance.

This approach is re-iterated in the consultation draft NPPF (2025) at Policy HC1: Planning for Healthy Communities, which in section 2 states;

"They [authorities] should attach considerable importance to providing for sufficient education facilities (including early years, school and post-16 provision), health care provision and other essential community facilities and public service infrastructure over the plan period, in a way that aligns with the needs of the local population." [our emphasis]

In this context, and as per the pre-application advice, needs-based evidence is also a relevant material consideration in this case;

- Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-2025 (Brighter Futures, March 2025)

Details which the applicant has received from the Council's own Early Years Team requesting that she expand her setting is also of key relevance to this application, and is appended to this letter statement (Appendix 1). Whilst this application is for the existing level of provision, i.e. 15 children, the letter is a material consideration which demonstrates the importance of this childcare setting to the Council in continuing to meet its needs to provide funded childcare places across the Borough.

Assessment of Proposed Development

The assessment of the application against relevant policies is set out in the same order and headings as in the pre-application letter for ease of cross-reference.

Principle of use and location

The site is located within an established residential area, with many family homes in the vicinity. The plot itself is substantial, and spacious in its relationship with its neighbours. The proposed use as a mixed use for childcare in a residential area isn't unique and is in fact fairly commonplace across the Borough¹. Being within the community it is in the right location to provide a service which caters for the needs of the community, for families who require childcare for young children to enable them to work.

Local Plan Policy OU1 is supportive for proposals which seek to provide new, extended or improved community facilities, and states that they should be located where there is a choice of means of travel (including walking and cycling) and in existing centres where possible.

The site is well located within the established settlement, within the community it serves. It has connected pedestrian footways, providing routes in all directions, as well as the opportunity to cycle. There are regular bus services into Central Reading via the nos. 5 Emerald and 9 Buzz bus routes a short walk away. These options all provide suitable sustainable modes of transport to and from the site, either as service users, or as employees.

As set out in the accompanying technical reports, both the noise level arising from the proposed level of childcare provision of up to 15 FTE children, and the associated parking provision, are acceptable in respect of the residential setting and neighbouring properties. As such it is an appropriate use for the location.

Residential amenity

The Noise Assessment carried out for the site established a baseline noise level for the residential use of the site, using a timeframe spanning a weekend when no additional children were at the site for childcare. The assessment at section 4 compared the ambient level of noise to measurements of noise generated from similar childcare settings and found that the predicted noise emissions are expected to result in a maximum change in ambient noise profile of 3.5dB at the closest noise sensitive receivers. The increase would fall within the 'slight' impact category of IEMA effect descriptors.

Section 5 of the noise report considers the impact of the additional traffic generation which would come about as a result of the proposed change of use. In line with the findings of the transport statement, additional vehicle movements are minimal, and their arrival and departure from site staggered, such that the additional movements will not give rise to a notable level of increased noise.

¹ Bright Horizons Abbeymore Day Nursery, 161 Wokingham Rd, Reading RG6 1LP
Pine Rivers Kindergarten & Day Nursery, 5 Western Elms Ave, Reading RG30 2AL
The Wigwam Day Nursery, 22 Fatherson Rd, Reading RG1 4PL
Berkeley Gardens Day Nursery, 72 Berkeley Ave, Reading RG1 6HY
Bees Knees Day Nursery & Pre-School, 97 Connaught Rd, Reading RG30 2UE

It is also a material consideration that the site has been operating at its current level of activity since September 2024 (18 months), and no complaints have been received by the Council's environmental health team in relation to noise or vehicle movements.

Overall, the technical reports support the proposal and demonstrate that they do not give rise to any undue negative impact upon neighbouring properties, and are therefore in accordance with Local Plan Policy CC8 Safeguarding Amenity.

Character and design impact on trees

It is noted that the pre-application response confirms that the design of the new cabins are acceptable.

An arboriculturist has been appointed to undertake a tree survey and assess the impact of the siting of the cabins on the existing RPA's. The cabins have been sited on concrete slab bases, no digging has occurred which could disturb the tree roots. Furthermore, no notable pruning was required to the trees to accommodate the development.

The tree report confirms that the impact on the existing trees is acceptable, and thus the proposal accords with the requirements of Policies CC7 Design and the Public Realm and EN14 Trees, Hedges and Woodland.

Transport matters

The drawings, Transport Statement and Travel Plan have been prepared to respond to the detailed points raised in the pre-application advice in respect of the proposed car and cycle parking, access widening and bin storage.

The proposed site plan shows how 6 parking spaces can be accommodated on the driveway, and this is the number of spaces required for the proposed change of use. The tandem arrangement will work well, with the spaces closest to the house being for staff, who will arrive before the children, and the front spaces being used for parent/carer drop off.

The access drawing plan shows how a minor widening of the dropped kerb to the north will accommodate the additional turning space required to access the driveway parking, whilst minimising the loss of the verge (calculated to be $2.7 \times 1.5\text{m} = 4.05\text{sqm}$) and retaining the existing position of the lamppost to the south.

Cycle parking is available for both staff and parent/carers/children within the rear garden of the property.

Given the home address of some of the existing childcare users, it is known that many will walk to the setting. Furthermore, the site is well located to serve the community, with a range of options of sustainable modes of travel available. Overall, it has been demonstrated that the proposals meet the requirements in respect of highways safety, traffic generation, car and cycle parking, and waste and

recycling provision in accordance with Policies TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging), as well as the Parking SPD.

Benefits of the Application Scheme

In addition to the clear benefit of providing much needed Early Years childcare spaces for local families, the nursery use will have positive economic benefits through direct employment at the site (the current level of operating requires a rota of 6 staff – 1 full time, and 5 part-time to care for the children), and indirectly within the supply chain (catering, play and educational materials, cleaning and refuse services, etc.). Furthermore, the setting plays a facilitative role in enabling parents of young children to return to work, thus having a positive effect on the wider economy.

Summary and Conclusion

The application proposed is submitted retrospectively, for the change of use to a mixed use residential and early years childcare setting for up to 15 FTE children. The use will be accommodated within 2 cabins sited within the rear garden which are already in situ, and detailed on the accompanying plans.

The pre-application advice requested further detail in respect of noise impact, trees, highways and parking. These have all been addressed in detail through the accompanying technical reports, which all confirm that the proposals are in accordance with relevant standards and do not give rise to any unacceptable impacts on neighbouring amenity.

In addition, material considerations including the needs-based evidence, the funding letter from the Council's Early Years Team, and the support in the NPPF for the provision of a choice of childcare settings as a key community facility, all give great weight to this application being considered favourably.

This application has been submitted pursuant to a positive and collaborative pre-application process, and in accordance with relevant development plan policies and para. 11dii of the NPPF, such that it is considered to be sustainable development which should be approved without delay.

I look forward to receiving confirmation of validation, and communication from you regarding the application in due course.

Should you need anything further, please contact me on the details below.

Yours faithfully,

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