



N FAMILY CLUB - READING
3-5 CRAVEN ROAD, RG1 5LE

GARDEN POD DESIGN

March 2026

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1. INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

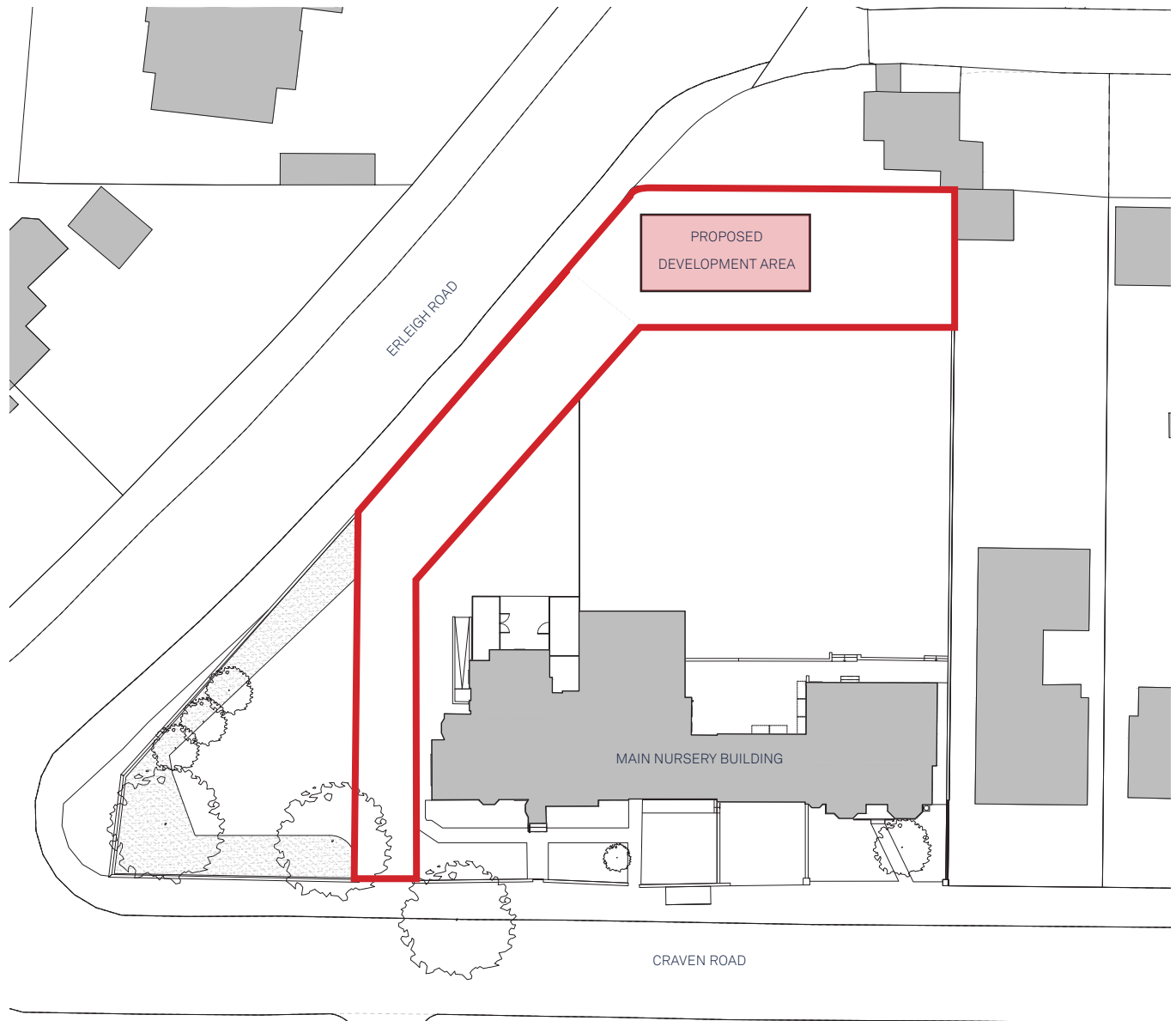
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Introduction

This application seeks planning permission for the installation of a high-quality external 'pod' classroom at N Family Club, 3-5 Craven Road. Following the successful commencement of nursery operations in late 2023, the setting has experienced significant demand, operating at over 90% capacity. These proposals represent a direct response to this local need, providing 32 additional much-needed childcare places within an established and successful early-years framework.

The pod is proposed at the rear of the existing garden in an undeveloped area of the site. The existing playspace meets the western boundary of the pod site and these proposals will incorporate the currently under-utilised space into the garden area whilst creating additional education spaces.

The modest structure meets the increased operational demand through careful positioning and refined articulation. The resulting scheme minimises visual impact, causing no harm to the locally listed building (no. 3).



EXISTING SITE PLAN, NOT TO SCALE

2. SPATIAL ARRANGEMENTS

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Design Development - Plan Form Options

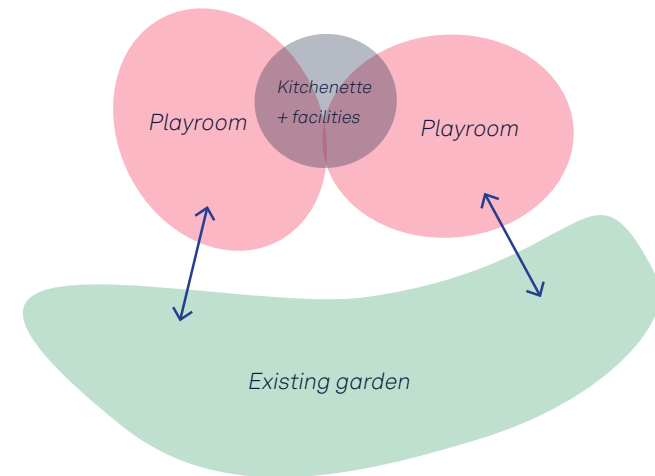
To make the most of the available space, and maximise the opportunity to increase childcare places, the design proposals have been centred around a provision for 32 additional preschool places.

Studies were undertaken to review options for split rooms (2 x 16 space playrooms), vs. a single 32 space playroom. It was agreed that the smaller playroom areas were preferable operationally as larger rooms can be more difficult to manage.

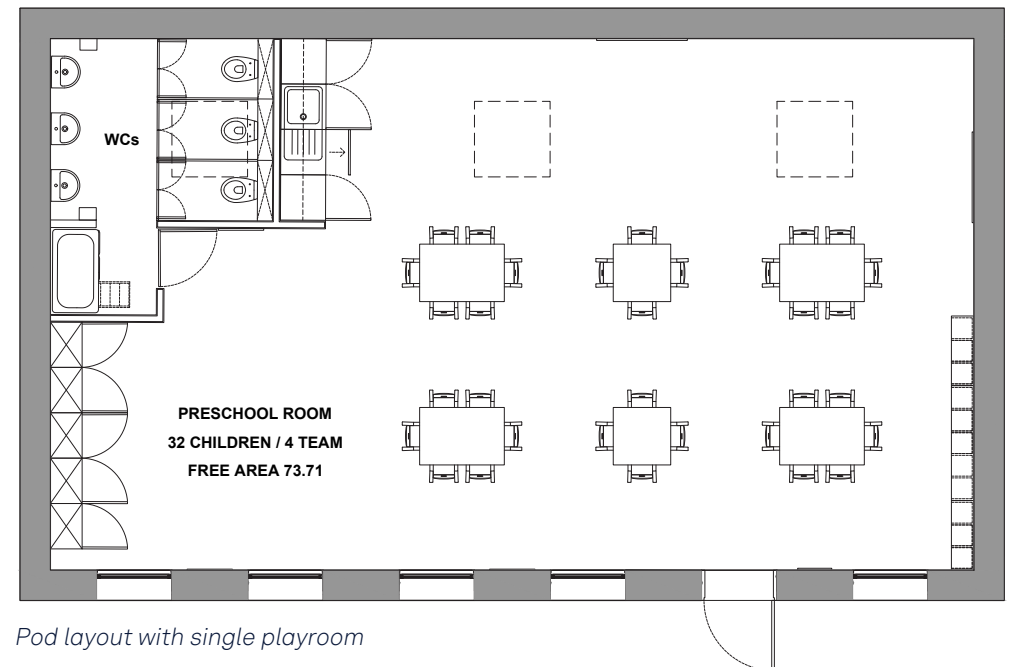
Further to this, the smaller rooms offer increased flexibility over age groups (the space could be used by toddler aged children, or babies, depending on demand).

The pod is proposed at the rear of the site to maintain the existing garden space. The views to the sides of the and rear of the space are limited, hence windows are proposed on the front elevation facing into the playspace only.

Additional rooflights are proposed to provide further natural light and ventilation opportunities.



Spatial diagram



Pod layout with single playroom

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Design Development - Plan Form Options

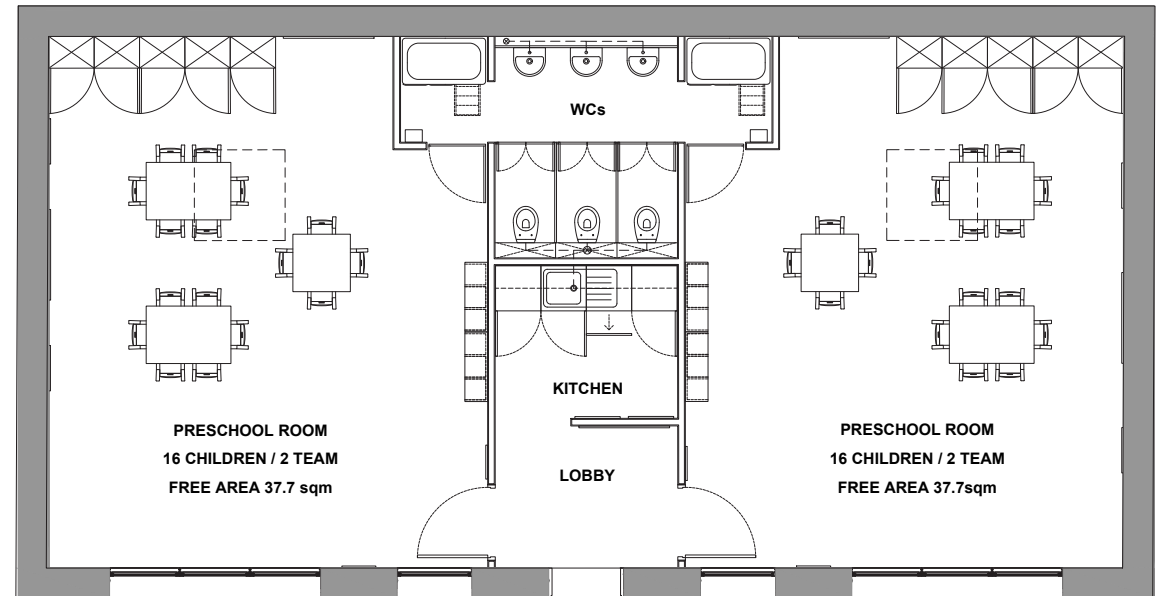
To simplify the servicing, the toilet and kitchenette areas are centred in a single zone. This minimises the need for multiple drainage connection points, and allows for a more rational, efficient servicing arrangement.

The initial proposal included a lobby area as a 'landing zone' for drop off and pick up. This was, however, removed in order to keep the floor plan as efficient as possible, ensuring the playrooms could fit in a compact footprint and minimise development impact in terms of scale and massing.

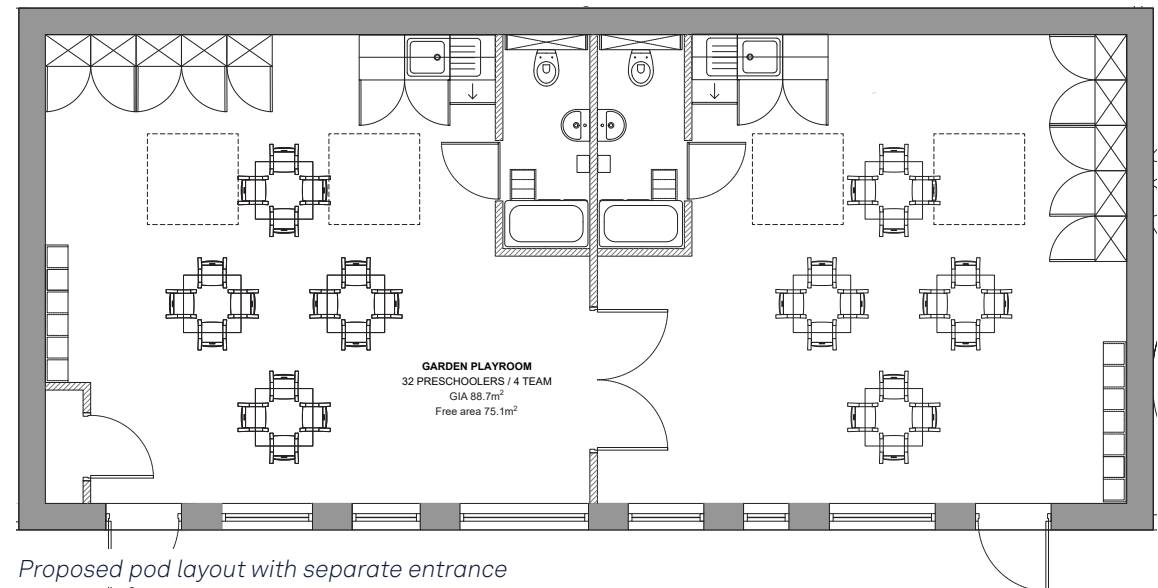
The operational preference was also to allow for 'free-flow' access to the playspace directly from the playrooms, which was achieved by providing external doors directly into each room.

A separate kitchenette and WC zone is provided for each room to allow for full flexibility (with both acoustic and physical separation between each side, a requisite if the rooms are to be used by different age groups).

The space can, however, still operate as a single playroom through the provision of interconnecting doors, which could be fixed open if the team wanted to use the pod as a larger provision.



Pod layout with lobby area



Proposed pod layout with separate entrance

4. ELEVATION DESIGN & MATERIALS

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Design Precedents - Look & Feel

The garden pod presents an opportunity to introduce high quality design and enhance the rear of the site. The natural material palette will help the 'pod' building embed with in its surroundings and not detract from locally listed building (no. 3).

The material approach has been carefully considered in the design. The intention is to use natural timber to provide a soft, lightweight aesthetic which complements the surrounding gardens and the existing extension at the rear of the nursery building, providing cohesion across the site.

In conjunction with this, the aim is to create a sense of unity across the site through the proposed window openings. Studies centred around larger, vertical openings to echo the double door arrangement of the existing extension.

A number of precedents were reviewed, with a focus on timber structures. Key features were openings designed for children (looking at shapes and positioning to create opportunity for learning and interaction), and simple yet effective solutions for timber detailing to provide a high quality, attractive finish. The overall design approach and finishes also reflect a recently approved 'pod' at our Hackney Downs site, which sits in the rear garden of the Grade II Listed main nursery building.



Ecospace Classroom, Ecospace



Ecospace Classroom, Ecospace



Harmeny Learning Hub, Studio SJM Architects



Harmeny Learning Hub, Studio SJM Architects

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Design Precedents - Material Finishes & Detailing



Lunawood Case Study, Russwood



Larch house, Penton Architects



House Cladding Exterior, Anon



Thermowood Redwood Case Study, Premier Forest

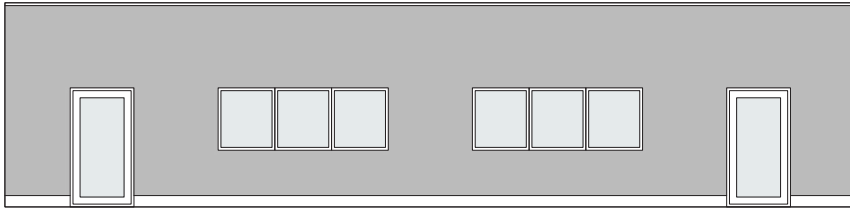


OrganoWood Self-Build (Siberian Larch), Millworks

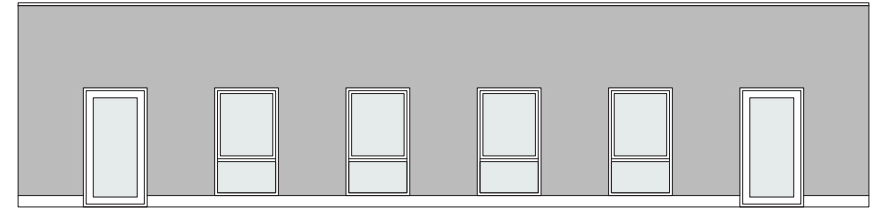


Old School House (Sweet Chesnut), Bindloss Dawes

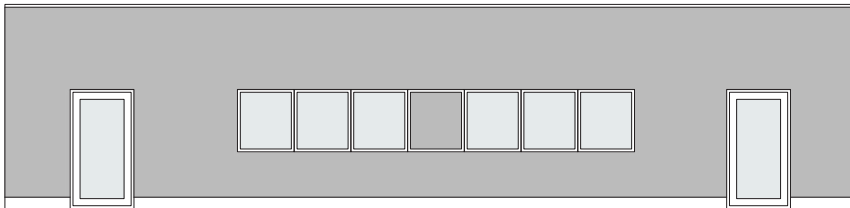
Rectangular windows, mirrored design



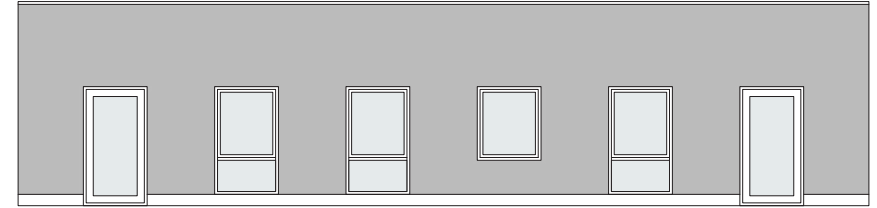
Vertical windows, increased regular rhythm



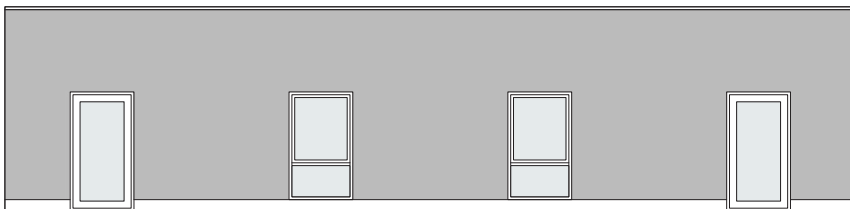
Ribbon windows, mirrored design



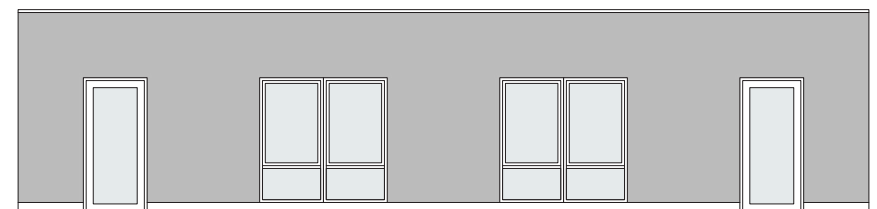
Vertical windows, irregular rhythm



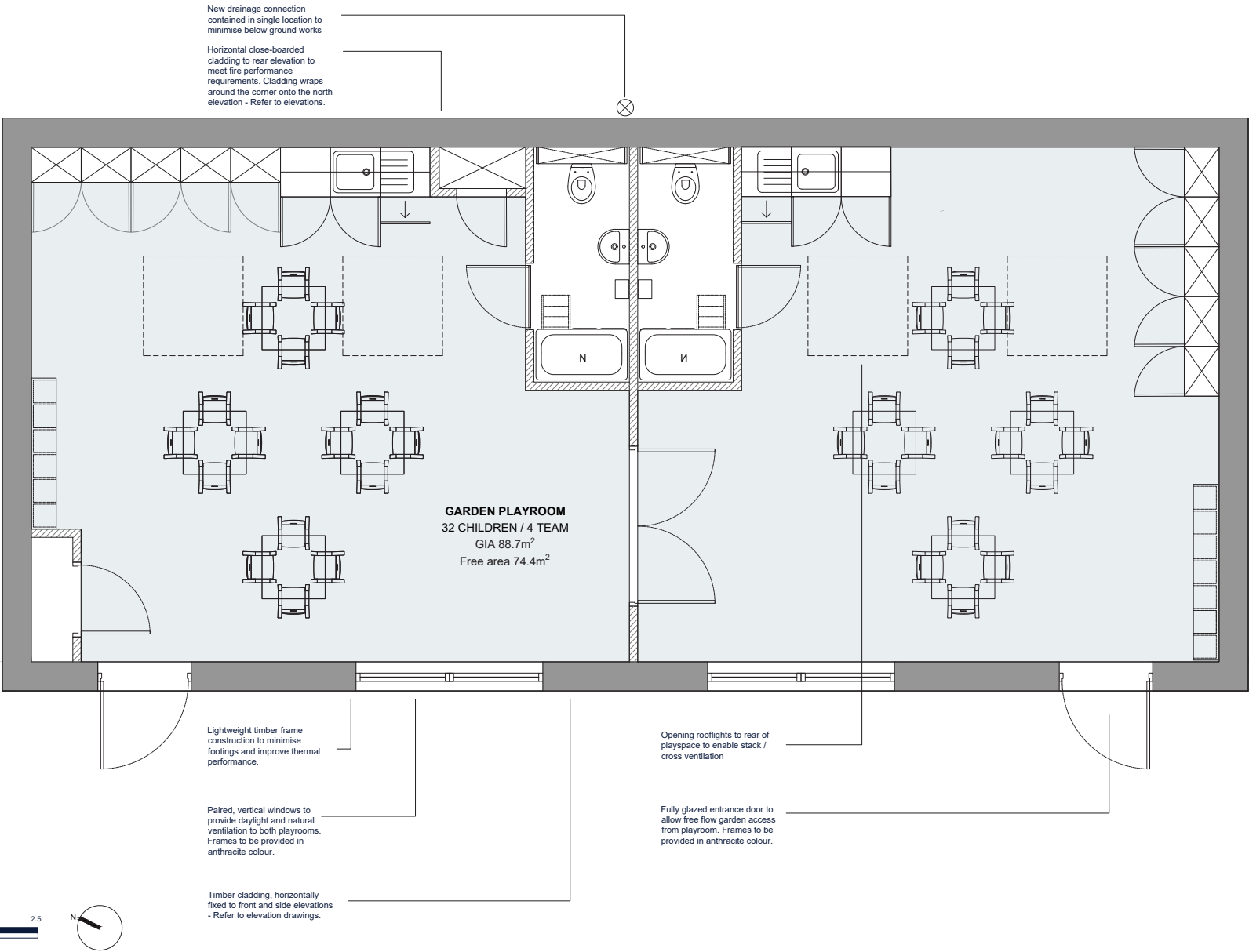
Vertical windows, regular rhythm



Paired vertical windows, mirrored design

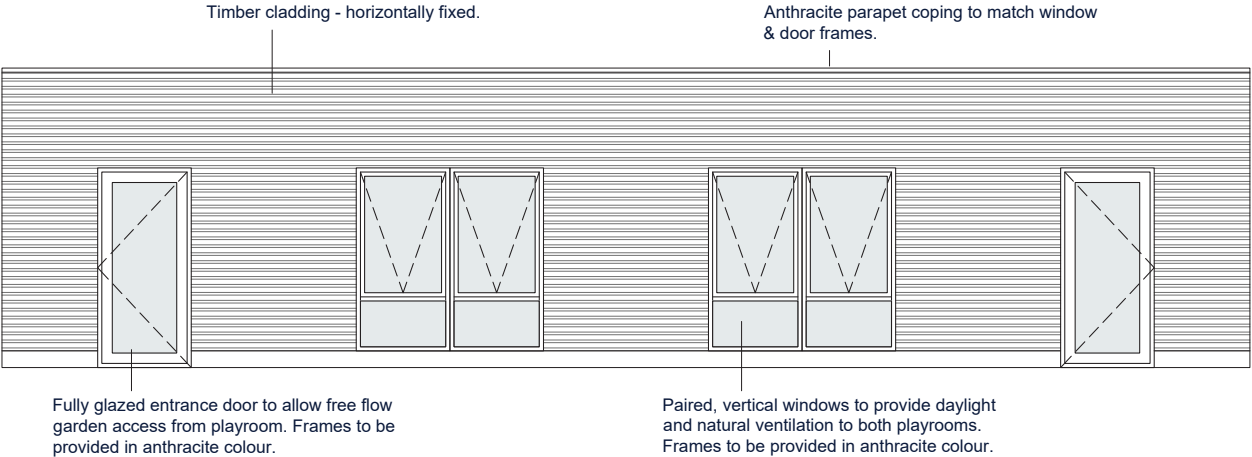
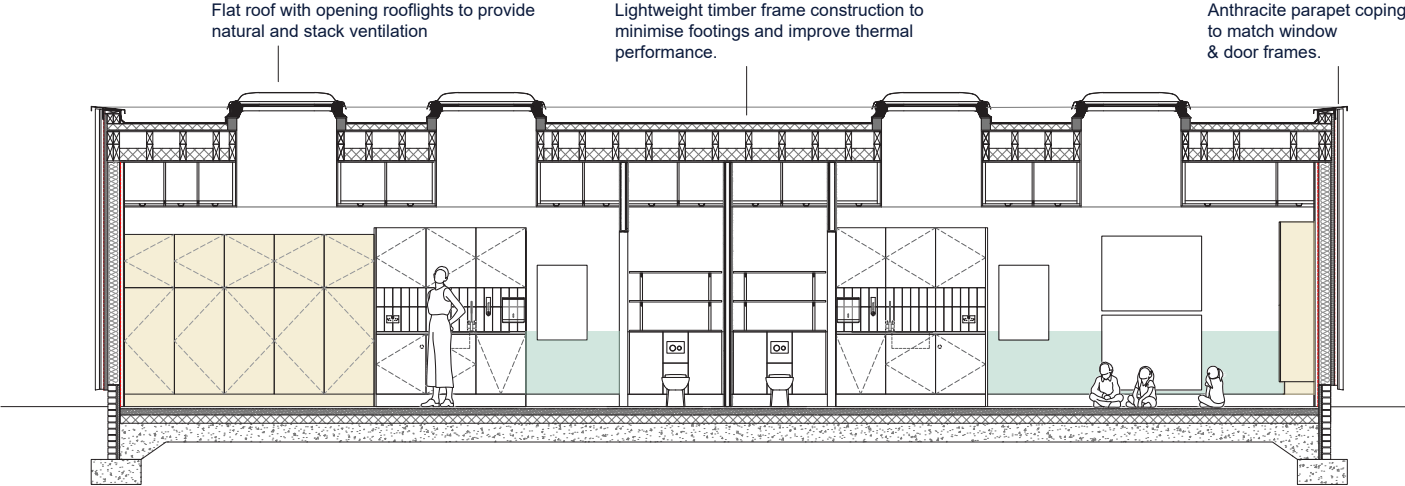


5. DESIGN PROPOSALS



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Design Proposal - Section / Elevation



7. ENERGY STATEMENT

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Energy Statement

As a certified B-Corp, N Family Club recognises its responsibility to improve environmental performance and de-carbonise operations, while also supporting its customers and supply chain to generate efficiencies.

In line with this, these proposals seek to achieve a high standard of environmental sustainability using the 'Be Lean, Be Clean, Be Green, Be Seen' framework.

The garden pod has been designed in line with AD Part L guidance. A high performance building envelope and servicing strategy is proposed to ensure energy efficiency and reduce energy demand.

The envelope will be insulated to achieve, and where possible exceed, the u-values and air permeability requirements as set out in Table 4.1 of AD Part L2. This will ensure thermal efficiency, reducing heat losses and gains through the envelope, and minimising the need for mechanical heating / cooling.

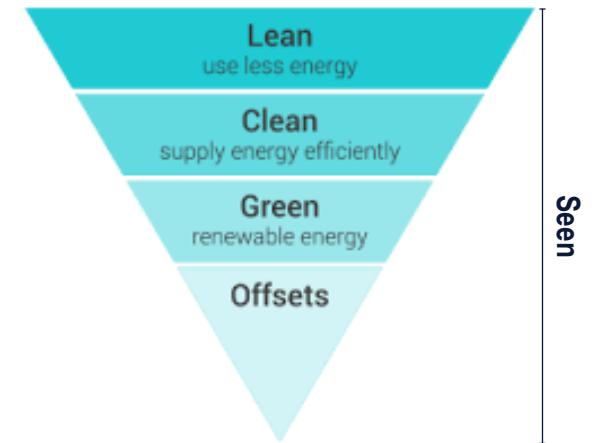
The pod will be serviced using an energy efficient heat recovery system to filter the air and control internal temperatures. Natural cooling and ventilation is encouraged through the provision of openable windows and rooflights, which enable a stack effect to move air through the space without the need for mechanical ventilation.

Power to N Family Club Reading is supplied by Ecotricity, the UK's greenest energy company. The nursery is completely gas and oil free, using energy efficient electrical air handling units for heating, cooling and ventilation. 100% of the electricity supplied by Ecotricity is produced by green sources, including renewable wind and solar power.

The performance of the nursery as a whole is carefully monitored to ensure energy is being used effectively. VRF units across the site are centrally controlled, offering high level management of the system to ensure units are not accidentally left on, or used inappropriately.

Meters are installed on the power and water supplies, in line with Building Regulations requirements, to allow usage to be carefully tracked. Sensors are fitted within the rooms to measure environmental conditions, with alarm triggers to alert if actions are required to ensure occupant comfort, and encourage behaviours to reduce energy wastage.

Aside from the building and servicing design, the nursery is committed to further reducing the carbon footprint of its operations through other measures such as encouraging sustainable travel, and educating the team, families, and children on environmental awareness.



The 'Be Lean, Be Clean, Be Green, Be Seen' hierarchy



Environmental education is part of N's curriculum



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