



12th May 2026

Reference: Use of 79 Silver Street, Reading, RG1 2SU

Dear Sir/Madam,

We write on behalf of Homes for Students, the management company responsible for managing 79 Silver Street, Reading and the building owner, Silver Street 79 LLP. We wish to bring to your attention an urgent issue affecting the property ahead of the upcoming 2026/27 academic year and to seek your consideration regarding a temporary variation in the permitted use of the building.

About Homes for Students

Homes for Students is one of the UK's leading providers of purpose-built student and residential accommodation, managing over 40,000 beds. We manage a diverse portfolio of high-quality properties across the country, serving the needs of students, young professionals, and key workers. Since the opening of 79 Silver Street in 2020, we have successfully managed the property in line with the highest standards of safety, service, and community engagement.

Current Occupancy and Demand

The property has been experiencing weak demand for the last few academic years, which has resulted in numerous void periods. Despite our continued efforts and proactive marketing strategies, demand for the 2026/27 academic year is exceptionally weak. Current occupancy stands at just 26%, with only a few weeks remaining in the letting cycle. This is of major concern to all stakeholders, as it is now highly likely that a significant number of rooms will remain vacant for the entirety of the academic year.

This pattern is not unique to 79 Silver Street. National data confirms that the UK PBSA sector is experiencing a structural downturn in demand: the StuRents Occupancy Update (October 2025) reported national PBSA occupancy at 85.4%—down 5.4 percentage points year-on-year and well below the 95–98% range typically budgeted for in the sector. Indicators for the 2026/27 cycle suggest that this softening is continuing. The factors driving this are well documented: declining international postgraduate numbers, affordability pressures on UK students, and an over-supply of new beds in a number of university cities.

For 79 Silver Street specifically, we have pursued an extensive programme of mitigation measures over successive letting cycles, all of which have failed to close the void gap. These have included:

- Sustained marketing investment across digital, agency, and student-platform channels (StudentCrowd, Amber, Casita, uhomes, University Living, Meraki Student and others);
- Engagement with the University of Reading and other local higher education institutions in pursuit of nomination agreements;
- Rental incentives, including discounted rates, fee waivers and flexible tenancy lengths;



- Marketing of summer-let and short-stay options to bridge void periods between academic years; and
- Continued investment in the building's amenity offer (gym, cinema/games room, lounge, study spaces) to maintain its competitiveness in the local market.

Despite this, demand has continued to soften. We have therefore concluded that further marketing or pricing measures alone are unlikely to resolve the position for the 2026/27 cycle.

The Case for Mixed Occupancy

These voids are problematic not only for us but also for the local authority and the wider community. Empty rooms provide no value to anyone; yet, they represent a missed opportunity to address local housing needs, especially as the property offers high-quality, self-contained, purpose-built accommodation. We believe there would be considerable benefit in making a proportion of these units available to key workers, whose presence would help meet pressing local demand while easing pressure on traditional housing stock.

We wish to emphasise that the requested variation does not represent a reduction in the supply of student accommodation in Reading. 79 Silver Street will continue to operate, first and foremost, as a purpose-built student residence. Our priority is, and will remain throughout the three-year period, to let every available unit to full-time students. The proposed variation in respect of 15 units is intended only as a fallback—to be drawn upon if, and only to the extent that, we are unable to fill those units with students through our usual marketing and letting activity each academic year. In a year in which student demand is sufficient to fill all 61 units, the variation would simply not be exercised.

On a net basis, the application therefore protects rather than diminishes housing supply in Reading. The status quo—voids of the scale currently experienced—results in no housing being delivered for anyone. Under the proposed variation, the building would continue to maximise student occupancy, with key worker tenancies engaged only as a backstop to ensure that the building's capacity is not wasted at a time of acute local housing pressure.

Key Worker Accommodation

Key workers are individuals whose professions are considered vital to the functioning and well-being of society, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, emergency services, and social care. These roles often include doctors, nurses, paramedics, teachers, police officers, and other essential public service staff. Given the close proximity of 79 Silver Street to the local hospital, the property presents an ideal opportunity to address key worker accommodation needs. Making 15 high-quality, self-contained units available for hospital staff and other essential workers would not only help alleviate local housing pressures but also ensure that key workers have access to secure, convenient housing options, supporting both their well-being and the broader community.

For the avoidance of doubt as to the eligible occupant group, we propose that "key worker" for the purposes of any variation be defined in line with the definition adopted in Appendix 1 of the Reading



Borough Council Allocations Scheme (2024), comprising public sector employees and persons delivering a public sector duty. In practice this would include NHS clinical and clinical-support staff (with priority given to Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust personnel given the proximity of the hospital), teaching staff in state-funded schools and further education colleges, social workers, and uniformed emergency services personnel. This definition is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, which expressly recognises “essential local workers” as a category of housing need.

Planning Policy Context

We believe this application sits comfortably within the established planning policy framework, both at the national level and within Reading specifically.

At the national level, the National Planning Policy Framework defines affordable housing as housing for those whose needs are not met by the market, expressly including housing for “essential local workers.” The application is therefore aligned with the NPPF’s recognition of key worker housing as a legitimate and important component of housing need.

At the local level, the Reading Borough Local Plan (Partial Update) Submission, May 2025, sets as one of its core strategic objectives the strengthening of Reading as “the hub for the Thames Valley, providing an accessible focus for the development of employment, housing, services and facilities, meeting the needs of residents, workers, visitors, those who study in Reading Borough, and the wider area.” The proposed variation directly supports that objective by enabling a single asset to meet the needs of two of those identified groups (students and workers) on a flexible basis responsive to demand.

Reading Borough Council’s own actions provide further support for the principle of this application. The Council has, through its key worker housing initiatives—including the 15-unit Arthur Hill development at Norwood Road and Kings Road—publicly recognised the difficulty that key workers in Reading face in accessing affordable housing, and the importance of retaining essential workers in the borough. The Reading Borough Council Allocations Scheme (2024) and the Council’s dedicated key worker housing page on its website provide both a clear definition of the eligible group and a clear policy basis for facilitating their accommodation. The application therefore aligns 79 Silver Street with a housing priority that the Council has itself identified as urgent.

Experience in Managing Mixed-Occupancy Buildings

Homes for Students brings significant expertise in managing mixed-occupancy buildings. For example, at 33 Parkside and The Residence in Coventry—both managed on behalf of the same client—dual-class occupancy has been operated successfully for several years. In these buildings, we have demonstrated robust management practices and an ability to foster harmonious communities comprising both students and non-students.

More broadly, the difficulties currently being experienced at 79 Silver Street are reflective of a wider sector trend. Numerous PBSA schemes across the country—in cities including Sheffield, Leeds,



Nottingham, Coventry and others—have been grappling with falling student demand against a backdrop of new supply delivery, and operators and local authorities alike are increasingly engaged in discussions about flexible occupancy models as a pragmatic response. The Coventry precedent, where the same client and management team have successfully operated dual-class occupancy for several years, demonstrates that with the right management framework in place, such arrangements can deliver substantial benefits to the local community without compromising the residential amenity or operational integrity of the building.

Management Framework at 79 Silver Street

To address any concerns regarding the day-to-day operation of a mixed-occupancy arrangement, we wish to outline the management framework that would apply at 79 Silver Street. The property is operated to the established management plan already in place at 33 Parkside and The Residence in Coventry, and would continue to be managed to the Unipol ANUK Code of Standards for Larger Developments for Student Accommodation—the recognised industry benchmark covering health and safety, maintenance, and the relationships between managers and tenants. The site benefits from a dedicated on-site property manager Monday to Friday during office hours, supported by customer services, maintenance and cleaning staff, with a 24/7 remote security and helpdesk providing out-of-hours cover. CCTV is installed throughout the building with 24/7 recording and on-site monitoring, and fob-based access control with keypad over-ride governs entry to all communal areas and individual units. These arrangements provide robust 24/7 oversight of the building regardless of occupant profile.

Day-to-Day Operational Controls

In terms of the practical interface between the two occupant groups, both students and key workers would be required to sign tenancy agreements that bind them to the same code of conduct, with escalating enforcement (deposit deductions, written and final warnings, and ultimately termination of the tenancy) for any breach. Critically, the existing planning-related restrictions would be carried forward in full: the car-free policy, expressly incorporated into every tenancy agreement and treated as a breach of planning conditions if contravened, would apply equally to key worker tenants, who would also be prohibited from bringing vehicles to the site. Communal areas would remain subject to the existing night-time curfew and all residents would receive the customised Resident Handbook covering fire safety, good neighbourliness and respect for the surrounding community at sign-up. Weekly inspections of communal areas, regular meetings with local residents and resident's associations, and a staggered, managed move-in process would continue as at present. We are satisfied that these arrangements, which already operate successfully in our mixed-occupancy schemes elsewhere, would ensure that the introduction of 15 key worker tenancies has no adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers or on the wider community.

We confirm that no physical alterations to the building are proposed or required in connection with this application. The layout, unit configuration, internal and external appearance, refuse and cycle storage, communal facilities, and the existing (zero) parking provision would all remain unchanged.



The variation is concerned solely with the permitted occupancy class of 15 of the 61 units, not with the fabric, scale, or appearance of the building.

Transport and Parking

We recognise that key worker tenants, particularly NHS staff working shift patterns, may have different transport needs from students, and we wish to address this openly. The starting point is that 79 Silver Street was permitted on the basis of a zero on-site parking provision; that physical constraint applies to all occupants regardless of category, and would not change under the proposed variation. The site is, however, genuinely well-located for non-car travel by NHS staff: Royal Berkshire Hospital is approximately 1.4 miles away and served by direct bus routes from stops within a short walk of the building, Reading station is within walking distance, and the site sits on a primary bus corridor.

To ensure prospective key worker tenants understand the position before signing a tenancy, we would provide each prospective tenant with an NHS Transport Information Pack at the point of enquiry. This pack would set out public transport routes and approximate journey times to Royal Berkshire Hospital and other principal NHS sites in Reading, the location and indicative cost of off-site paid parking facilities in the surrounding area, and a clear statement that on-site parking is not available at the property. The pack would supplement (not replace) the existing Student Travel Plan, which would continue to apply across the building. The car-free clause in the tenancy agreement would apply equally and identically to all occupants regardless of category, with the same enforcement consequences for any breach.

Proposed Planning Conditions and Monitoring

To give the Council comfort regarding the operation of the variation, and to provide a clear and enforceable mechanism for oversight, we would be content for the temporary three-year change of consent to be made subject to appropriate planning conditions. We would suggest the following framework, which we believe would address the principal areas of legitimate planning interest:

- Cap on key worker units: that the number of units occupied by key workers shall not at any time exceed 15 of the 61 total units;
- Defined eligibility: that “key worker” be defined in accordance with the Reading Borough Council Allocations Scheme (2024), with priority given to Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust personnel;
- Student-first letting: that the 15 units may only be offered to key workers after marketing as student accommodation has been undertaken and the units remain unlet for the relevant academic year;
- Carry-forward of existing controls: that the existing car-free policy and all other planning-related restrictions attaching to the original consent continue to apply, in full, to all occupants regardless of category;
- Transport: that the existing car-free policy and Student Travel Plan be carried forward in full to all occupants, supplemented by the provision of an NHS Transport Information Pack to



prospective key worker tenants setting out public transport routes to Royal Berkshire Hospital and other principal NHS sites and the location of off-site paid parking facilities;

- Annual reporting: that an annual occupancy report be submitted to the Council, evidencing the split between student and key worker tenancies, the marketing activity undertaken, and confirmation of compliance with the 15-unit cap; and
- Time limit and reversion: that the variation expire automatically three years from the date of grant, with the property thereafter reverting in full to its existing permitted use unless a further application is made and granted.

We consider that such a conditions framework would provide the Council with a robust ongoing oversight mechanism, while giving the operator the flexibility needed to address the current demand position and protect the property's ongoing viability for its primary student-accommodation purpose.

Our Application

We are therefore submitting this formal application for the Council's support in granting a temporary three-year change of consent in respect of 15 of the 61 units at 79 Silver Street. We remain confident in our ability to fill the remaining 46 units with students, and the 15 units subject to the requested variation would be made available to key workers. This targeted, time-limited variation would help to address the current voids, support the local economy, and provide much-needed accommodation for essential workers—all while upholding the high standards of management and safety for which Homes for Students is known. At the end of the three-year period, the property would revert in full to its existing permitted use. It is our hope that, over the course of this three-year period, the student market will recover sufficiently to allow all 61 units to be safely and fully occupied by full-time students without any voids.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and to provide any additional information you may require.

Thank you for your consideration.

Homes for Students and Silver Street 79 LLP