

Memo

To: Catrin Davies, Planning

From: Amy Daly, Assistant Natural Environment Officer, Planning

CC:

Date: 14th May 2026

Re: Consultation on an Application

Planning Application Ref: PL/26/0277

Application Type: Full planning permission

Address: Garden of 80 Whitley Wood Road, Reading, RG2 8JE

Proposal: Change of use of rear garden of No.80 from residential (C3) to a mixed use (sui generis) residential and childcare nursery with the erection of two outbuildings used to accommodate 15 FTE childcare spaces (Retrospective)

I had previously given pre-application advice for this site/proposal on 4th November 2025, which the plans only demonstrated one outbuilding to the very rear of the garden – application reference: PL/25/1362. This proposal now includes three outbuildings, so a significant increase in the development demonstrated at the pre-application stage. I concluded the following in said advice:

To conclude a future application will need to be supported by an AIA, and an associated Tree Protection Plan, should the cabins' location be within the RPA of the adjacent trees. Service routes and foundation types also need to be demonstrated. Existing vs proposed landscape principles should also be shown on a plan, so we are clear on any changes to the landscaping and improvements to the soft landscaping are expected.

The application is retrospective and despite my pre-application advice, the outbuildings were constructed prior to a tree survey/Arboricultural Impact Assessment being submitted and planning permission granted.

I note a retrospective tree survey has been submitted, in the form of a letter, 24th February 2026, by GHA Trees. It states that 'As this plan shows, new structure 2 sits within the RPA of T2 and beneath the crown of T2. Structure 3 sits within the RPA of G4 and beneath the crown of G4. None of the other trees shown are affected' and then goes on to say 'Whilst the structures are within the RPAs of T2 and G4, I am content that no harm will have occurred to these trees. Firstly, it is clear that soil levels have not been raised or lowered within the RPAs (see photo below) when installing the new structures.

Secondly, the buildings were installed using above ground slabs and you supplied photos to evidence this fact. I am unclear why the tree survey/AIA wasn't undertaken prior to construction when my pre-application advice included this, which would have given us an opportunity to comment. As this is a retrospective application, any construction activity that would have had an impact to tree health would have already occurred which is disappointing.

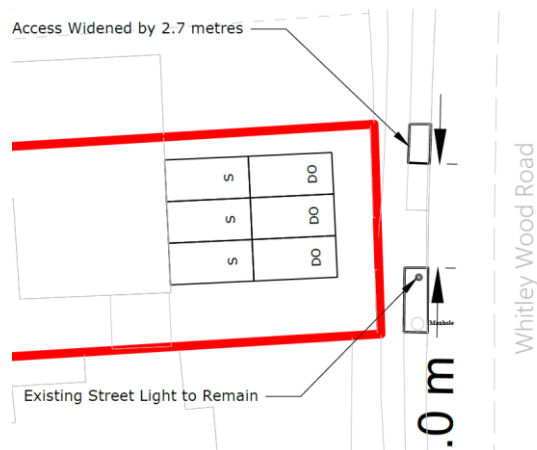
If this information was provided to us prior to construction, we would have had no objections to the development in principle due to the quality of trees and limited impact. That being said, I note a slab has been used for the base of the outbuildings which would have been advised against, and we would have encouraged the use of ground screws. The use of a slab will have led to a level of soil compaction and won't allow water and air movement into the soil in the way that ground screws would have. I note there is no mention of impermeable liners being used for the concrete slab, so concrete leaching into the soil, which is toxic to trees, will likely occur. As this is in situ, I have no further comment to add, but this is disappointing.

Whilst the RPAs are plotted, there is no evidence of stem diameters and thus I am unclear on how accurate the RPAs are and how these have been calculated.

With reference to the Proposed Access and Parking Arrangement, 12th February 2026, Drawing No. 2512041-01, Rev A, and the Block Plan, 24th April 2025, Drawing No. 80WWR-p-02B, Rev B, I note the vegetation on the frontage has not been surveyed/plotted - the changes to the landscaping on the frontage are not clear. I encourage that efforts to retain the existing vegetation are made, with my comments below in mind.



Google Streeview 2025 – showing frontage landscaping



Access and Parking Plan – no vegetation or Council owned grass verge clearly shown/labelled

I note from your site visit photographs, the rear garden has artificial grass laid down. The use of artificial grass is not advised for a number of reasons including: environment issues of microplastics from the turf, used turf going to landfill, and turf potentially being too hot, i.e. could be unsafe for children, in hot weather. It will also need regular cleaning so comes with continuing water use. On the whole, it is not a sustainable material and given the use of the site and that young children will be using the rear garden, it is advised it is removed. The artificial grass appears to be laid across almost the entire rear garden, and if this had formed part of the application, we would have objected to it. Artificial grass has no benefit for wildlife and will have led to a loss of biodiversity within the site. It is also harmful to tree health when laid within RPAs of retained trees.



Site Visit Photographs – clear artificial grass

As per my pre-application advice, where there is increased hard landscaping and a loss of soft landscaping, mitigation replanted is expected and certainly promoted in this circumstance. The rear garden now has very limited soft landscaping and wildlife value. Therefore, it is strongly encouraged that the remaining existing vegetation is retained and new planting is included.

To conclude, this is a disappointing application, but I have no objections – the application would have been acceptable on tree grounds, but tree information should have been demonstrated prior to construction. The use of artificial grass should be reconsidered for the reasons above. Given the extensive rear garden now has very limited soft landscaping, it is encouraged that the remaining soft landscaping is retained, both on the frontage and rear garden, and new planting would be beneficial to the wildlife and biodiversity of the site, in an attempt to mitigate the impact of the increased development in the rear garden.