

Reading Borough Council – Planning Department

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13 May 2026

Our Ref: 35486d

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: An Application for Full Planning Permission at River Academy School, 7 Richfield Avenue, Reading RG1 8EQ.

This cover letter has been prepared on behalf of our client, Department for Education c/o Bowmer + Kirkland Ltd (“the Applicant”) in support of a full planning application to Reading Borough Council (“the LPA”). Bowmer + Kirkland Ltd are the Department for Education’s appointed contractor to deliver the replacement of the car parking surfacing and installation of fencing, and gates at the River Academy, 7 Richfield Avenue, Reading RG1 8EQ (“the Site”).

The full description of development is as follows:

“The remediation, and replacement of the hard surfacing of the existing car park, and installation of fencing, and gates”.

In support of this application, please find enclosed the following documents:

- Application Form;
- Planning Statement by Nexus Planning (enclosed within this Cover Letter);
- The following drawings:
 - Site Location Plan – ref. FS0949-ALA-XX-DR-L-0058 Rev P04;
 - Existing Site Plan – ref. FS0949-ALA-XX-ZZ-DR-L-0061 Rev P02;
 - Proposed Site Plan – ref. FS0949-ALA-XX-ZZ-DR-L-0063 Rev P01;
 - Car Park Remediation Site Clearance Layout – ref. FS0949-HEX-XX-XX-DR-C-9460 Rev P03;
 - Car Park Remediation External Works and Details – ref. FS0949-HEX-XX-XX-DR-C-9450 Rev P04;
 - Car Park Additional Works Plan – ref. FS0949-ALA-XX-ZZ-DR-L-0057 Rev P06;
 - Additional Gate Plan – ref. FS0949-ALA-XX-ZZ-DR-L-0062 Rev P04;
 - Fencing Elevations – ref. FS0949-ALA-XX-ZZ-DR-L-0059 Rev P05;
 - DL 2.4 x 6.5 Twinwire Gate for Automation – ref. 4210-1;

- A Photograph of the Kissing Gate;
- Highways Technical Note prepared by HEXA (enclosed within this Cover Letter);
- Tree Technical Note by Ares (enclosed within this Cover Letter);
- Flood Risk Assessment, Drainage, and Contamination Technical Note by Ashfield Solutions Group (enclosed within this Cover Letter).

Site Context

Planning permission is sought for amendments to the car parking area for River Academy School, which is a three storey secondary school and sixth form for 1,500 pupils, which was granted planning permission in July 2022, ref. 212061. The wider site was completed and occupied in September 2024. The site is located north of Richfield Avenue, immediately adjacent to an external, artificial playing pitch and open fields, beyond an unsurfaced track. These fields are used to host the annual Reading Festival. The wider site has a site area of approximately 5.8ha, and the application site has a site area of approximately 1.5ha. The wider site, and application site are identified within **Figure 1** below. The site is accessed via Richfield Avenue to the south of the site.



Figure 1 – Site Location Plan

The recently redeveloped Rivermead Leisure Centre is to the east of the site and the Caversham Bridge Garden Centre, is also in proximity, to the southeast of the site. The north and northeast of the site comprises of several open fields, these fields are utilised for camping during the Reading Festival. The River Thames runs some 120 metres to the north of the site, beyond which, some 200m further north of the site, is the southern edge of Caversham, along The Warren, with a mix of dwelling houses, open spaces and recreational areas.

The site is not considered to fall within the setting of any heritage assets, due to distance, lack of intervisibility, lack of association and the barrier provided by the River Thames. The Caversham Conservation Area, Caversham Court Gardens (Grade II registered park) and several Grade II and a single Grade II* (St Peters Church) are situated approximately 350 metres to the northeast of the site, and around 450 metres to the proposed new school buildings. Further listed buildings, at Grade II are Isomer and Chiltern Court, which are approximately 350 m and 450 metres from the site respectively, and 450 and 550 m from the proposed new school buildings.

The Environmental Agency interactive flood map identifies the majority of the site, as being located within Flood Zone 2, land and property in Flood Zone 2 have a medium probability of flooding. The car parking area, which is the subject of this planning application, is located within Flood Zone 2, and Flood Zone 3. Land and property in Flood Zone 3 have a high probability of flooding.

The car parking area features 82 car parking spaces, including six disabled spaces, as indicated by **Figure 2** below, and is located to the south of River Academy School. A pedestrian access point is located to the east of the car parking area, and the vehicular entrance is located to the west of the car parking area. The car parking area is bordered by soft landscaping, including trees, as per the approved planning application for the wider site.

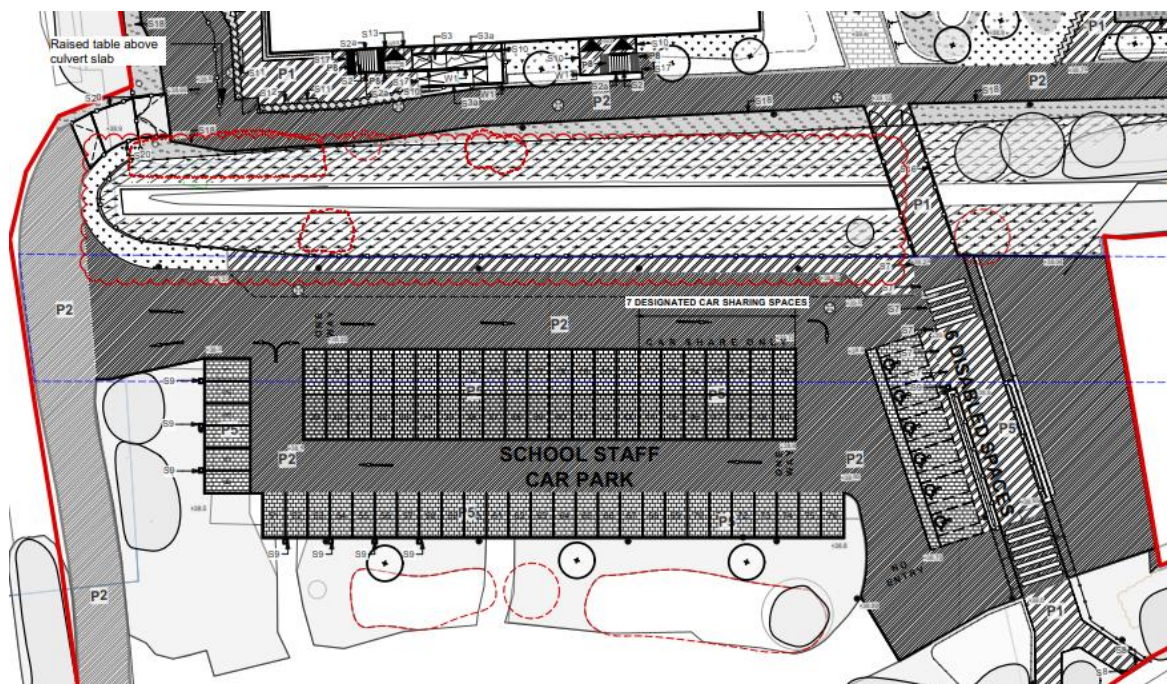


Figure 2 – Approved, and Implemented Car Parking Layout

Planning History

Planning permission was granted on 20 July 2022 under planning application for the demolition of the existing driving range structures and the development of a new three-storey, 8-form entry secondary school (Years 11–16), including a SEND unit and a 300-place sixth form, resulting in a total school capacity of 1,500 pupils, ref. 212061. The approved development also included the creation of a new vehicular access from Richfield Avenue, a new parking area (which is the subject of this planning application), cycle parking, landscaped areas, external play areas, a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), and sporting pitches.

Following the grant of planning permission, all relevant Conditions were duly discharged. Advertisement consent was granted on the 21 October 2024, for the installation of external signage in relation to the School, 241141. A non-material amendment application was approved in July 2024, for amendments to the approved plans to make changes to window, and door layouts, and configuration, removal of structural columns, provide additional plant equipment, amend the design of the external stair, and proposed cladding, ref. 240806.

Development Proposal

The car park forms part of the wider development of the site to provide a secondary school, which was granted planning permission in July 2022, ref. 212061. The original planning permission has been implemented, the school is now constructed, and operational.

During the operation of the site, it has become apparent that the existing car park surfacing does not provide a suitable long-term solution. Accordingly, this application seeks permission for remediation works to the car park, including the replacement of the existing surfacing (permeable concrete) with a permeable/porous surface. The proposed surfacing is designed to accommodate vehicles of up to 44 tonnes, allowing vehicles to manoeuvre and remain stationary without causing deflection or subsidence. The proposed surfacing will provide a durable and functional solution appropriate to the operational requirements of the site. There is no change in the number of car parking spaces, or the layout of the car park.

For full details of the remediation work, please refer to the following drawings by Ares:

- Car Park Remediation Site Clearance Layout – ref. FS0949-HEX-XX-XX-DR-C-9460 Rev P03; and
- Car Park Remediation External Works and Details – ref. FS0949-HEX-XX-XX-DR-C-9450 Rev P04.

The development also includes the installation of fencing and gates around the car parking area. These measures are required to manage access and improve site security, ensuring the safe and controlled use of the parking facilities in connection with the school. For full details of the fencing, and gates, please refer to the Fencing Elevations by Ares, ref. FS0949-ALA-XX-ZZ-DR-L-0059 Rev P05.

Vehicular access to the car park will continue to be taken from the existing access road located along the western boundary of the site.

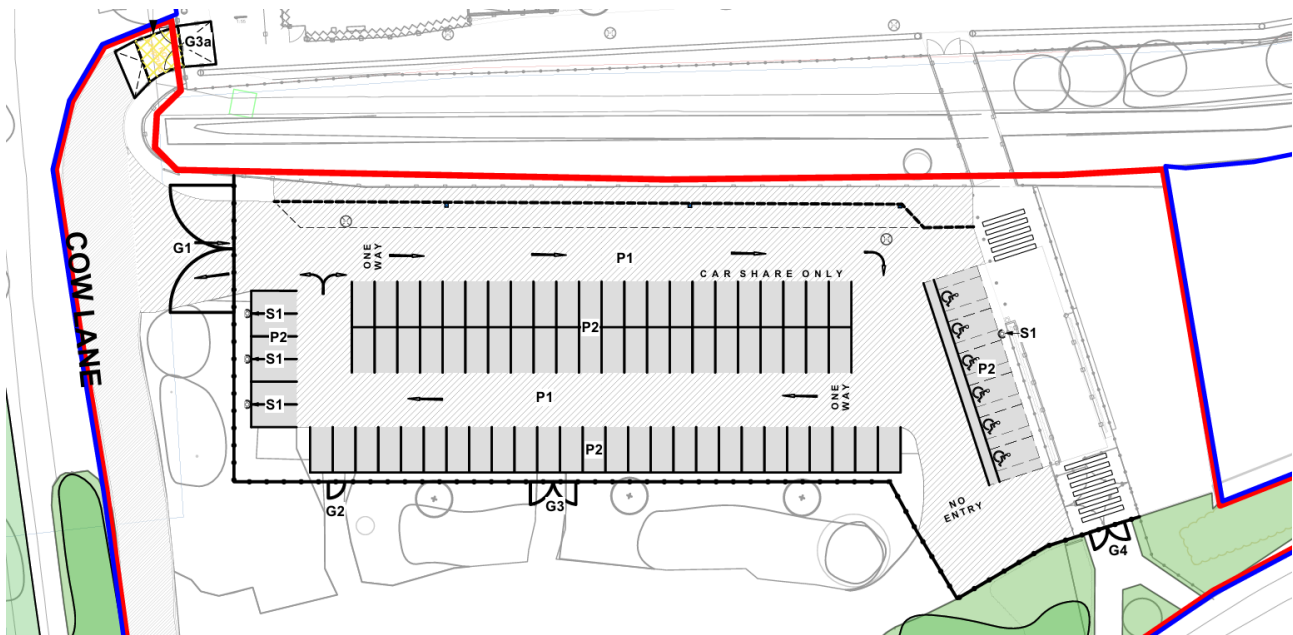


Figure 3 – Proposed Car Parking, Fencing, and Gates

In addition to the above, the existing manually operated vehicular swing gate and the automated height barrier located at the vehicular entrance from Richfield Avenue will be removed and replaced with an Automatic Double Leaf Vehicular Gate (Gate G9), and a Timber Kissing Pedestrian Gate (Gate G10), as shown on the Additional Gate Plan by Ares, ref. FS0949-ALA-XX-ZZ-DR-L-0062 Rev P04.

Planning Policy Context

The adopted The Local Development Plan for Reading Borough Council comprises the following:

- Reading Borough Local Plan (2019); and
- Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste (2023).

In addition to the adopted development plan, the proposals have been considered against relevant national planning guidance, including the National Planning Policy Framework (2024), which sets out the Government's overarching approach to achieving sustainable development.

A number of supplementary documents and other material considerations are also relevant to the assessment of this application, including the Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document (2011), which provides guidance on parking provision, layout, and design.

The proposed development has been designed having regard to the above policy framework and is considered to accord with the relevant policies and guidance, as demonstrated in the sections that follow.

Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

The proposed development comprises the replacement of the existing car park surfacing with a permeable/porous surface, together with the installation, and replacement of fencing and access gates. These works represent a form of refurbishment and improvement to existing infrastructure within an established and lawfully implemented school site. The principle of development was established through the application ref. 212061, and therefore, the principle of development is considered acceptable.

Design

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) in the Local Plan (2019) requires all development to be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area, taking account of layout, landscape, scale, materials, and safety considerations.

The proposed resurfacing works will not materially alter the layout or visual appearance of the approved car park and will remain consistent with the established character of the site and its surroundings. The proposed materials are appropriate for the functional nature of the car park and are in keeping with its existing use; therefore, there will be no perceived material change.

The installation of fencing and gates is limited in extent and is intended to manage access and improve site security. The fencing is 2.4m in height, and has been designed to reflect the design, and height of the fencing approved under application ref. 212061. This proposal will contribute to the creation of a safe and secure environment, ensuring that the operation of the site does not give rise to crime, disorder, or fear of crime, in line with the objectives of Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) in the Local Plan (2019).

Highway Safety and Accessibility

Policy TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters) in the Local Plan (2019) seeks to ensure that development proposals do not compromise the safe and efficient operation of the Classified Highway Network or encourage inappropriate use of the network for short local trips. The proposals do not involve the creation of a new site access or any material intensification of the existing access arrangements. Vehicular access to the car park will continue to be taken from the established access road located to the west of the site, connecting to Richfield Avenue. The number of parking spaces remains unchanged, and the proposals do not give rise to additional vehicle movements beyond those already associated with the lawful operation of the school.

HEXA, who were the transport consultants for the extant planning permission, ref. 212061, have reviewed the proposals which are the subject of this planning application, and as set out within **Figure 4** below, confirm that the proposals have **no impact on the operation or safety of the local highway.**

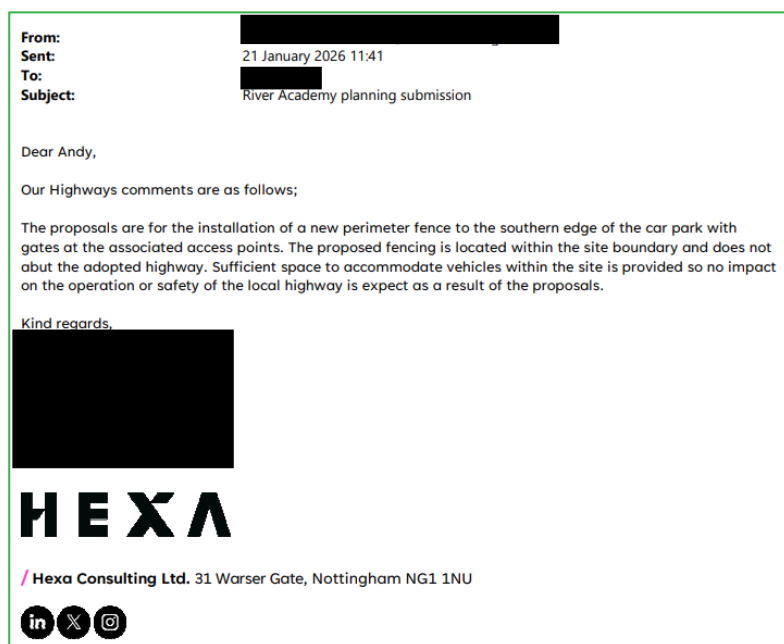


Figure 4 – Email from HEXA (21 January 2026)

As such, the development will not adversely affect highway safety, the free flow of traffic, or the safe operation of the Classified Highway Network. The proposals are therefore considered to comply with Policy TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters) in the Local Plan (2019).

Flood Risk and Drainage

The use of permeable surfacing promotes more sustainable surface water management and represents an efficient and appropriate use of materials in accordance with Policy CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change) in the Local Plan (2019). The proposals do not involve any increase in the developed footprint of the site, instead the proposals simply seek to replace the permeable surfacing of the car park.

As set out in **Figure 5** below, Ashfield Solutions Group have undertaken a review of the drainage strategy approved under application ref. 212061, and the proposed remediation works, and confirmed that **the proposed resurfacing works do not introduce any floor related risks to the scheme**, complying with Policy CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change) in the Local Plan (2019).



Figure 5 – Email from Ashfield Solutions Group (26 November 2025)

Tree Impacts

The car park remediation works, and installation of fencing, and gates is located within close proximity to the soft landscaping installed as part of the planning application ref. 212061. Ares Landscape Architects have undertaken a review of the proposals, and as set out in **Figure 6** below, **the proposals have no impact on the previously approved soft landscape proposals, with no additional works impacting on existing trees**, complying with Policy En14 (Trees, Hedges, and Woodland) in the Local Plan (2019).

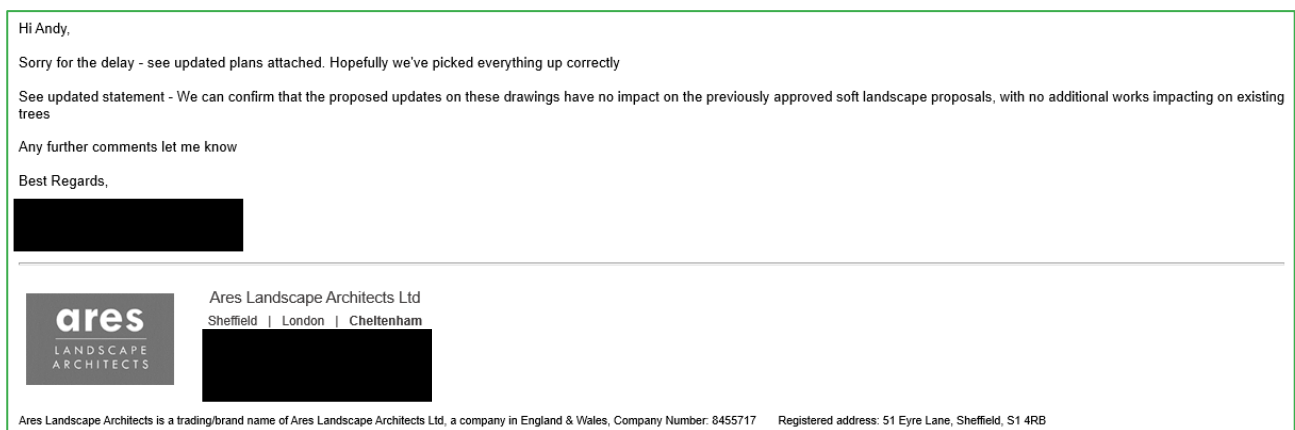


Figure 6 – Email from Ares (26 January 2026)

Contamination

The wider development site lies on the site of a historic landfill, which had the potential to have caused contaminated land, and the proposal for the school had the potential to introduce new pollutant linkages between contaminated land, and sensitive receptors at the site. A Contaminated Land Assessment, and Remediation Plan were submitted in support of the planning application ref. 212061, which provided an indication of the likely risks, and whether further remediation works would be required. These works have now been completed at the wider site.

As set out in **Figure 5** above, Ashfields Solutions Group have undertaken a review of the proposals, and confirmed that **as the hard surfacing continues to be maintained across the car park, there is no material change to the contamination risk profile, nor any increased exposure risk to human health, or controlled water....we can confirm that the proposed resurfacing works do not introduce any additional contamination risks to the scheme.** Therefore, the proposals comply with Policy EN16 (Pollution, and Water Resources) in the Local Plan (2019).

Conclusion

The application fee of £2,676 plus the £91 Planning Portal service charge has been paid via the Planning Portal. I trust that the information submitted in support of this application is sufficient for the determination of the application and I look forward to receiving confirmation that the application has been validated in due course. If in the meantime you have any queries or require any further information, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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