



BVA Planning
Town Planning Consultancy

Planning Statement

Former BCBS building (Walford Hall), Carey Street, Reading,
RG1 7JS

Prepared on behalf of:

Chalkhouse Childcare Services Limited (CCSL)

December 2025

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application for the conversion of Walford Hall for use as a children's nursery and associated office and storage areas together with some minor alterations including a new entrance porch, car parking and new play area at **Walford Hall, Carey Street, Reading ("the site")**. This Statement has been prepared by BVA Planning Ltd. on behalf of the applicant Chalkhouse Childcare Services Limited (CCSL). The building was used up until recently by the Berkshire County Blind Society (BCBS) but was deemed surplus to requirements. CCSL have achieved consistent "GOOD" ofsted ratings and continuity of care for children since 2011.
- 1.2 Across the UK, there is a significant need for more nursery spaces, driven by increased government-funded hours for working parents and a long-standing issue of short supply.
- 1.3 The primary drivers of the need for more nursery spaces nationally are:
- **Government Entitlement Expansion:** The phased introduction of 30 hours of government-funded childcare for all children aged 9 months to school age by September 2025 has created a surge in demand.
 - **National Shortfall Projections:** The Department for Education (DfE) estimates that around 85,000 new places and 40,000 additional staff will be required across England to meet this demand.
 - **Workforce Challenges:** The sector faces a significant recruitment and retention crisis, which is a major barrier to providers expanding their capacity.
 - **"Childcare Deserts":** Many parents, especially those in rural or deprived areas, struggle to find available places at times and locations that suit their working hours, leading to "childcare deserts" in some areas.
 - **Sufficiency Concerns:** In a 2024 survey, only 34% of English councils reported sufficient childcare for parents working full-time, and only 6% reported

sufficient places for children with disabilities, a sharp decrease from the previous year.

1.4 Whilst common in many areas, specific issues related to Reading are highlighted in the most up-to-date Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024–25 as follows:

- New housing is happening much faster in Abbey and Thames wards than elsewhere.
- Those two wards have a lower number of registered childcare providers than expected, given that housing growth.
- As a result, maintaining sufficient early years and childcare places could become challenging particularly within Abbey and Thames ward.
- This is more likely to be strained further once the new 30 hours free provision come in to force in Sept. 2025.

1.5 The purpose of this Planning Statement is to examine the merits of the development proposal in the context of the relevant planning policies of the Statutory Development Plan and to consider other material considerations.

Format of Planning Statement

1.6 This statement is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** describes the site and surrounding area including relevant planning history;
- **Section 3** describes the proposed development in more detail;
- **Section 4** sets out the relevant national and local planning policy context pertaining to the site and the proposed scheme;
- **Section 5** appraises the proposed scheme against the relevant planning policies; and
- **Section 6** provides an overall summary and conclusions.

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- 1.7 This Planning Statement should be read in conjunction with the accompanying plans and technical reports prepared by other specialist consultants, submitted in support of the detailed planning application.

2.0 Site and Surroundings

- 2.1 The Site is located within the urban area of Reading, a short walk from the town centre via Castle Hill.
- 2.2 The building is of modern construction with little architectural merit and is largely single storey with a two-storey element to one side. There is a also provision for car parking and refuse storage/bicycle storage.
- 2.3 The immediate area is predominately residential in character with mainly terraced properties though this part of Carey Street also provides commercial and leisure facilities surrounding the Hall along with a public car park to the rear (Anstey Road).
- 2.5 There are no listed buildings within the immediate vicinity, but the site does lie within the Castle Hill CA. There is a historic wall of listed No. 122 Castle Hill, which is not within the curtilage anymore (according to historic map regression and the official listing description) to the western boundary of the site. This will be unaffected by the proposal.
- 2.6 The site is not within a flood plain or constrained by any other statutory designations.

3.0 Proposed Development

3.1 The application site is well suited for use as a Children's nursery give its former use by the BCBS and given its relationship to surrounding commercial/leisure and residential properties and looks to make effective use of an existing building

3.2 As outlined in section 1, and as shown in the DAS, the submitted detailed scheme shows how the building and immediate areas could be successfully converted for the Nursery. The proposed scheme is informed by:

- National and local planning policy and guidance;
- The need to ensure the interests of the local community through careful placing and orientation of the new windows/doors and associated landscape works;
- The need to deliver a scheme that is viable; and
- A scheme that caters for a wide range of Children and families.

3.3 The nursery would operate 5 days a week from 7.30am to 6pm. The total number of children will be between 40 to 50 and the staff total of 12-15 with 8 members only at one working on a rota basis of mornings and afternoons. The age group catered for will be from 0 to 5. Given the location of the building, it is envisaged the majority of the children will be from the local area who would walk to the site or travel by public transport. The others arriving by private vehicles would be accommodated in the drop-off zone during the morning and afternoon changeover periods. As such, there would be a staggered drop-off as not all the children will arrive/leave at the same time i.e. early morning or late afternoon.

Layout/Materials

3.4 The detailed material within the DAS submitted with this application shows how the building and surrounding environ could be repurposed including proposed parking area, play space and some landscape features. The site will be accessed via the entrance onto Carey Street as existing. A drop-off zone is proposed to the front of the building and families will also be able to use the public car park on Anstey Road.

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- 3.5 Having regard to the surrounding residential neighbours, it is proposed that the existing building would remain as is and no new external additions are planned save for the new entrance porch. The proposed play area is located to one side and would be fenced off and only used at certain times of the day. Further details can be found in the DAS.

Movement and Parking

- 3.6 The proposed scheme would be accessed off the existing entrance off Carey Street and allows for xxx parking spaces along with areas for bicycles and refuse storage. A drop-off zone is also proposed.

Landscaping, Open Space and biodiversity

- 3.7 The site is devoid of any vegetation and so some limited planting is proposed by way of planters given the restricted areas and need for a play area and parking/drpp-off zone.

Sustainability

- 3.8 The site is located with excellent access to already established public transport routes and pedestrian and cycle routes.
- 3.9 In respect of drainage, there are no plans to change the existing arrangement as it is considered adequate to cater for the new use.
- 3.10 Any materials used both internally and externally will offer high levels of fabric insulation and low air permeability to an overall standard that will meet current UK Building Regulations to ensure that the building provides long-term, low-cost proposal.

Delivery Timetable

- 3.11 It is envisaged that on receiving planning permission any pre-commencement conditions would be discharged within 2-3 months in order works on site could commence in mid 2026. We can confirm that there are no landownership or technical constraints that would prohibit the site being developed as envisaged above.

S106 Obligations/CIL and Conditions

- 3.12 The extent to which obligations including planning conditions are required will be a matter of detailed discussions with officers during the application process.

4.0 Planning Policy

- 4.1 This section outlines the key planning policy considerations relevant to the proposed development at both the local and national level.
- 4.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that local planning authorities should determine planning applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.3 At the national level, relevant policy and guidance is set out within the revised National Planning Policy Framework ("**NPPF**") published December 2024 and the associated Planning Practice Guidance ("**PPG**").
- 4.4 At the Local level, the site sits within the administrative boundary of Reading BC (RBC) and, therefore, Development Plan for the area is the RBC Local Plan (adopted 2019). A partial review is currently underway but we not believe any of the suggested changes would have a detrimental policy impact upon our proposal.

RBC Local Plan

- 4.5 The key local plan policies that help guide development in relation to this application are as follows:
- CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.
 - CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION.
 - CC6: ACCESSIBILITY AND THE INTENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT.
 - CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY.
 - EN1: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT.
 - EN3: ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS.
 - EN15: AIR QUALITY.
 - TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS.
 - TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING.
 - OU1: NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 4.6 The revised NPPF was published in December 2024. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied and is a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 4.7 Paragraph 7 of the NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, which at a very high level, means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 4.8 Paragraph 8 goes on to add that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These objectives are economic, social, and environmental.
- 4.9 Paragraph 10 of the NPPF makes it clear that a presumption in favour of sustainable development is at the heart of the Framework.
- 4.10 Paragraph 96 of the NPPF sets out that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which, among other criteria, promote social interaction; are safe and accessible; and enable and support healthy lifestyles.
- 4.11 Section 11 seeks to make effective use of land. Paragraph 124 states that planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions.
- 4.12 Section 12 of the Framework seeks to achieve well-designed places. Paragraph 131 begins by declaring that the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. It goes on to add that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

4.13 Paragraph 135 of the NPPF states that Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

4.14 Paragraph 139 states that permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, significant weight should be given where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design guidance etc.

4.15 Section 15 of the NPPF is about conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 187 states planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.

- 4.16 Paragraph 100 of the NPPF advises that 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.
- 4.17 Paragraph 101 states to ensure faster delivery of other public service infrastructure such as health, blue light, library, adult education, university and criminal justice facilities, local planning authorities should also work proactively and positively with promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to plan for required facilities and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted. Significant weight should be placed on the importance of new, expanded or upgraded infrastructure.

5.0 Scheme Justification

5.1 This section of the Statement provides justification for the proposed scheme.

Principle of Conversion to Children's Nursery

5.2 This application is made in the context of the Government's objective increasing educational facilities especially for young children as set out in the NPPF. As set out in Section 1, there is an unprecedented need for more nurseries given the Government's commitment to such spaces being made available and locally, Reading needs to be provided more especially within the urban area close to the town centre where significant new housing development is taking place.

5.3 The site lies adjacent to already established residential/commercial/leisure uses and is within easy reach of the town centre and key public transport and other pedestrian routes. The building lends itself to the proposed use given its former use by the BCBS. Its open plan nature will allow configuration to suit the nursery who provide care for a range of children ranging from 0 to 5 years of age. The building is purpose built to cater for gatherings and so bringing it back into use would be seen as beneficial to the area.

5.4 In our opinion, a sensitive conversion scheme is being proposed which can be delivered without any significant or demonstrable negative impact upon the surrounding neighbourhood and, thereby, accord in general with key sustainable policies of the adopted development plan and guidance within the NPPF.

Achieving Sustainable Development

5.6 In accordance with s.38 (6) of the 2004 Act, the application must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Local Plan constitutes a spatial strategy and policies designed to achieve sustainable development under the three objectives: economic, social and environmental. This is also set out in paragraph 8 of the NPPF, achieving sustainable development. In respect of this application the proposed scheme would deliver the following:

1. **Economic objective:** Provision of employment and supply of associated materials, goods, and services in the conversion of the building. The conversion of the building for nursery use would also bring employment opportunities for local people as there will be a need for staff to run the nursery, cleaners and other support staff.
2. **Social objective:** The scheme would deliver a new children's nursery so needed in this area and so provide a valuable community facility.
3. **Environmental objective:** Any necessary development brings about change. However, the changes proposed in the DAS are minimal and so would not have any detrimental affect upon the area.

5.7 Overall, the application is considered suitable for nursery use given it generally the guidance found in the NPPF.

Character, Appearance and Layout

- 5.8 The proposed external changes are minimal and mainly related to the new front entrance and laying out of the car park/drop-off zone and the outside children's play area. The DAS provides detailed information to show a sensitively designed scheme could knit into the area.
- 5.9 The proposed layout of the building and internal partitions will ensure privacy and amenity issues for both users of the nursery and those in the surrounding properties is not compromised.

Heritage

- 5.10 It is at the discretion of the Planning Authority to judge whether any harms outweigh any public benefit that arises from new housing in relation and paragraphs 215 and 216 of the NPPF or sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It is our conclusion that the conversion redundant building would not unduly harm the setting of any nearby listed buildings/walls nor the Castle Hill CA given the limited changes proposed. The level of harm is considered

less than substantial and does not result in a level of conflict with the relevant legislation that would prevent approval of the application.

Energy and Sustainability

- 5.11 This scheme as outlined in the DAS will use sustainable building products and water saving devices etc. within the converted building, where possible.

Noise and Amenity

- 5.12 As set in the previous sections, the former hall use was unrestricted. The Nursery will operate only 5 days a week (Mon-Fri) between the hours of 7.30am and 6pm. Given the location of the building, it is envisaged the majority of the children will be from the local area who would walk to the site or travel by public transport. The others arriving by private vehicles would be accommodated in the drop-off zone during the morning and afternoon changeover periods. As such, any noise will be limited and no discernible difference to the general background noise levels in this urban area. The use of the children's play area will be limited to short periods during the day. Overall, it is not considered that the amenity of surrounding residents/occupiers would be unduly affected by this proposal. In addition, the active use of this building will deter anti-social behaviour that has occurred since the building was closed.

Ecology/Biodiversity

- 5.13 The ecology of the site is limited given the footprint of the building and associated hardstanding. As such, there would be no negative impact upon any ecological features in or close to the site.

Transport, Accessibility and Parking

- 5.14 As part of the application, parking spaces are proposed along with storage for bicycles in accordance with current Council guidelines. The addition of drop-off zone will also help to limit any parking/waiting on nearby roads. Given that the nursery will operate on a staggered basis and many of the parents will arrive by public transport or on foot we do not believe there would any significant increase in vehicle movements at peak times of the day.

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- 5.15 In respect of refuse collection, the site will provide a facility with an easily reachable recycling facility that can be wheeled out to the pick-up point on Carey Street.
- 5.16 As such, the proposal is not expected to give rise to any unacceptable highway impacts that would warrant refusal of this application and, thereby, complies with the local transport policies and the guidance within the NPPF.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 5.17 The suite is located within Flood Zone 1 and thereby, would not give rise to an unacceptable flooding scenario. That said, the proposal looks to deal with foul water and surface water by connection to the existing drainage system.
- 5.18 As part of the scheme, it is proposed to use water efficient devices to reduce water usage.

Viability and Deliverability

- 5.19 The extent to which limitations, undertakings and other requirements arising from the proposal can be covered by planning conditions and/or legal obligations will require further consideration and will be the subject of separate discussions between the applicant and officers. As part of the application, the applicant has provided CIL information for consideration though it is our understanding that no CIL is payable for this type of development.

6.0 The Planning Balance

- 6.1 This chapter draws together the information set out in the preceding sections to provide a summary of the case for granting detailed planning permission on this site.
- 6.2 This detailed application is made in the context of the Government's push for more Nursery spaces across the UK which has resulted in an unprecedented demand for new spaces and staff. Simply put there is not enough provision in the system to cater for all needs especially in highly populated areas like Reading close to the town centre. This application (albeit in a small way) looks to cater for this growing need that is much needed in this location.
- 6.3 The proposed building lends itself to be used as a Children's nursery given its former use and layout and location. Minimal changes are proposed and those shown within the DAS will improve the appearance and function of the building including the provision of outdoor play space.
- 6.4 Care has been taken to ensure any noise impact is minimised and largely will only occur on break times throughout the normal working day and not at weekends as the facility will not be open. Also, this part of Carey Street is mixed with residential/commercial and leisure uses in the surrounding and adjacent properties. There is some parking/drop off zone to be provided on site, but it is envisaged many of the children and staff will come from the local area and either walk/cycle or travel on public transport.
- 6.5 The site does fall within the Castle Street CA, but give the wide variety of uses and minimal external works it is not considered to amount to significant harm, but we feel an improvement on the current site/building which needs to be maintained if it is to contribute to the area. The applicant is willing to continue to work with the Council to agree suitable planning conditions and/or s106 terms required to ensure the scheme is delivered as envisaged and with minimal impact upon its neighbours
- 6.6 In the light of our assessment above and summary table below, it is our view, that this application **can be approved without delay.**
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POLICY Ref:	Full Compliance (✓✓), Partial Compliance (x✓), non-compliance (xx)
CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.	✓✓
CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION.	✓✓
CC6: ACCESSIBILITY AND THE INTENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT.	✓✓
CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY.	✓✓
EN1: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT.	✓✓
EN3: ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS.	✓✓
EN15: AIR QUALITY.	✓✓
TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS.	✓✓
TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING.	✓✓
OU1: NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES.	✓✓