

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Abbey ward

App Ref: PL/25/1791 Full planning permission

Address: WALFORD HALL, CAREY STREET, READING, RG1 7JS

Proposal: Conversion of the Former RNIB building (Walford Hall) for use as a Children's Nursery and associated external alterations, landscaping and highway works.

Applicant: Mr Wesley Mahoney

Received date: 12/12/2025

Target Decision date: 12/06/2026 (agreed extension of time)

Case Officer: Marcelina Rejwarska

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

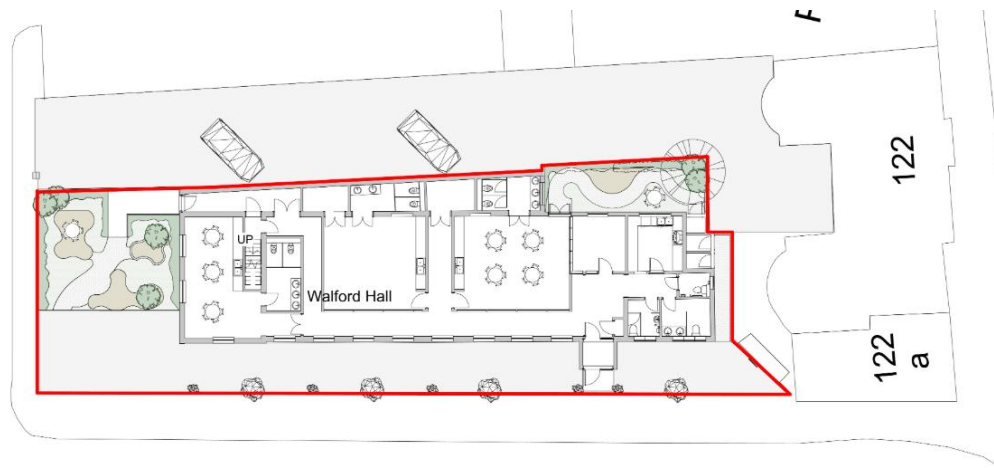
The application site comprises a detached commercial property on Carey Street, near the junction with Castle Hill. The building is owned and was previously used by Berkshire County Blind Society which has since relocated. The property is located in the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area, and is, by its relatively modern appearance, somewhat of an outlier in the street scene. The site is also within the Air Quality Management Area due to its proximity to major highway routes (Castle Hill, Oxford Road, IDR) and is located on contaminated land. The surrounding area is predominately residential, with some commercial uses on Castle Hill backing onto Anstey Street.



Image taken by case officer in April 2026

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Planning permission is sought for the conversion of the property to a private children's nursery including associated external alterations to the property (new porch), landscaping to allow the creation of outdoor play areas, and minor highway works. The nursery is proposed to be limited to 30 children and the proposed hours of use are 7.30am to 6pm (closed on weekends).



Proposed Block Plan

2.1. Information submitted:

1148-02-01-Proposed Block Plan-P2
 1148-02-01-Existing Block Plan-P1
 1148-02-02-Proposed Site Location plan-P2
 1148-02-02-Existing Site Location plan-P1
 1148-03-10-Existing GA Plan - Ground Floor-P1-Survey Overlay
 1148-03-10-Existing GA Plan - Ground Floor-P1
 1148-03-10-Existing GA Plan - Ground Floor-P1-Survey Overlay
 1148-03-11-Existing GA Plan - First Floor-P1
 1148-03-11-Existing GA Plan - First Floor-P1-Survey Overlay
 1148-03-11-Proposed GA Plan - First Floor-P2
 1148-05-10-Existing Elevations - Sheet 1-P1
 1148-05-10-Proposed Elevations - Sheet 1-P2
 1148-05-11-Existing Elevations - Sheet 2-P1
 1148-05-11-Proposed Elevations - Sheet 2-P2
 1148-05-12-Existing Elevations - Sheet 3-P1
 Received 12 December 2026

1148-03-10-Proposed GA Plan - Ground Floor-P3
 R01 - Transport Statement - corea2 -CS - 2026-02-06
 R02 Travel Plan - CS - 2026-02-03
 Received 9 February 2026

26-16179 - Walford Hall, Carey Street, Reading, RG1 7JS - Air Quality Assessment
 Received 7 April 2026

Supporting letter from Berkshire Vision
 Received 9 April 2026

Planning Statement (revised)
 Received 7 May 2026

Design and Access Statement (revised)
 Received 3 June 2026

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- PL/07/0543 - Demolition of existing garage. Application permitted.

- PL/07/0542 - Demolition of existing garage and erection of a replacement. Application permitted.
- PL/99/1562 - Demolition of rear extension and rebuilding of two storey rear extension. Application permitted.
- PL/97/0975 - Extension and refurbishment of main hall to improve entrance, toilets and kitchen. Demolition of existing extension and construction of two storey unit to provide secure garage for mini bus and additional staff offices. Application permitted.
- PL/91/0247 - Erection of an extension to provide training workspace for blind people. Application permitted.

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted:

- RBC Transport Development Control – No objections subject to recommended conditions.
- RBC Environmental Protection – Air quality assessment is acceptable. The submitted land screening survey is insufficient; a contaminated land assessment is required. Noise mitigation plan also required.
- RBC Conservation Officer – No objections, clarification and amendment of minor errors in the submission requested.
- CAAC – No comments received.

Site notices were erected on Carey Street, Anstey Road and Castle Hill in the public interest. No letters of representation were received.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

National Planning Practice Guidance (2014 as amended)

Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance 2008

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

CC5: WASTE MINIMISATION AND STORAGE

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

EN3: ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS

EN6: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN A HISTORIC CONTEXT

EN15: AIR QUALITY

EN16: POLLUTION AND WATER RESOURCES

TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS

TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

OU1: NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Supplementary Planning Documents

Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

Other documents

Russell Street/Castle Hill/Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal (2020)

Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-2025

Local Plan Update

The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) turned five years old on Tuesday 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up to date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A submission draft was submitted to the Secretary of State on 9th May 2025 and is currently at examination.

Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become “out of date” when they are five years old. It is a matter of planning judgement rather than legal fact whether a plan or policies within it are out-of-date. This will depend on whether they have been overtaken by things that have happened since the plan was adopted, either on the ground or through changes in national policy, for example.

Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to this application listed above is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remain very similar in the draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the appraisal below and are not considered to be ‘out of date’.

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore, in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

6. APPRAISAL

6.1. Land use principles

Paragraph 100 of the NPPF (2024) states *“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. They should: a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter early years, schools and post-16 facilities through the preparation of plans and decisions on application...”* Policy OU1 of the Reading Local Plan states *“Proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable...New community facilities should be located where there is a choice of means of travel (including walking and cycling), and in existing centres where possible.”*

The Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-2025 states *“Local authorities across England have a duty of sufficiency to make sure there are enough childcare places for families in their area. Parental demand for 0–2-year-old places has increased following the expansion of funded childcare for many working families, additionally eligible parents will be able to increase their entitlement from 15 to 30 hours a week, term time from September 2025. The DfE has set local authority expansion targets and the supply of childcare in Reading has increased, however further growth is required to ensure growing demand is met.”*

The proposal comprises a change of use from a community and training centre (Sui Generis) to a day nursery (Class E(f)). Although the uses fall in different use classes, both can be described as community uses in the context of Policy OU1. As such, there is no loss of community use. The proposed change of use aligns with Paragraph 100 of the NPPF as it provides much needed early years provision. The use is identified as infrastructure needed to support sustainable growth within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan in the Reading Local Plan, and the emerging Local Plan Partial Update (2024) contains the updated figures which demonstrate that the need still exists for additional education infrastructure. Therefore, the proposal is acceptable in principle, as it provides much needed early years places for the Borough. A condition is recommended to restrict the use to Class E(f) only to prevent the change of use under permitted development provisions within Class E to ensure that the premises remains in community use.

6.2. Design and heritage implications

Policy EN3 requires development to conserve and enhance the special interest, character and architecture of conservation area by making a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness. Policy EN6 similarly requires development to contribute to the historic character of areas characterised by heritage assets. Policy CC7 sets out the requirements for high quality design.

The proposal includes minimal external alterations, comprised of new outdoor play areas at the rear and side of the site, and a new porch constructed in matching materials. These will have a neutral impact on the character of the conservation area and nearby heritage assets. The development is considered acceptable in this context.

6.3. Residential amenity

Policy CC8 requires development to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties in terms of noise and disturbance, among other factors.

The main concern raised by the proposal is the potential for noise and disturbance associated with the use of the outdoor play areas during the daytime due to the site's proximity to residential properties on Carey Street and Anstey Street. Based on the number of children proposed, the proximity to busy roads (Castle Hill) and other non-residential uses on Castle Hill backing onto Anstey Street, it is not anticipated that the levels would be so harmful as to warrant refusal, however, a condition is recommended to secure a noise management plan prior to commencement of works.

There are no other concerns identified and the proposal is considered acceptable in this respect.

6.4. Air quality and land contamination

Policies EN15 and EN16 require development which introduces sensitive users into areas including contaminated land or the Air Quality Management Area to be protected from detrimental impacts through mitigation. Where mitigation is not possible, applications should be refused.

The application site is located both in the Air Quality Management Area and on contaminated land. The submitted air quality statement demonstrates that there will be no significant adverse impacts on the future users of the nursery, nor the surrounding area due to travel to and from the site, and this is considered acceptable.

The submitted site screening report contains insufficient information in relation to the contaminated land and the impact that the construction of the outdoor play areas may have on the users and the surrounding area. However, the Environmental Protection Officer has confirmed that securing such detail via condition would be acceptable in this case. As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in this respect.

6.5. Transport and refuse

Policy TR3 requires development which results in generation of additional trips on the transport network to have consideration to the effect on safety, congestion and the environment. Policy TR5 requires development to provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport.

The nursery is proposed to have a capacity of 30 children. The nursery will have flexible drop off and collection times with drop off between 7:30am and 9:30pm and collection between 4:00pm and 6:00pm.

The site is located on the east side of Carey Street approx. 50 metres south of its junction with the A4155 Castle Hill. Carey Street is one way running from Castle Hill to Baker Street. The majority of Carey Street is restricted to permit holders only, apart from two lengths of on street parking, totalling 45 metres in length, adjacent to the Walford Hall, where parking is permitted for 2 hours no return for 2 hours between 8:00am and 8:00pm, seven days a week.

The site is located within the Zone 2, the primary core area but on the periphery of the central core area which lies at the heart of Reading Borough, with good access to public transport connections. In accordance with the adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD, a day nursery would be required to provide parking provision of 1 space per 2 FTE staff and 1 drop-off space per 10 pupils based on flexible pick up and drop off times.

The nursery will have 12-15 employees but with no more than 8 staff on site at any one time. The site has two existing parking areas which will remain as part of the proposals. The first consists of two spaces adjacent to the northern façade of the building perpendicular to the Carey Street, and the second consists of three spaces adjacent to the western façade of the building, parallel to Carey Street, which are separated from the footway by a pedestrian barrier. This parking arrangement has been in place and operational for a number of years, indicating an established pattern of use at the site.

It is proposed the two southern spaces will be used for parent drop off and pick up, while the three spaces parallel to Carey Street, will be used for staff parking. To ensure the proposed parking provision is fully utilised by staff and parents, a condition is recommended to secure a Parking Management Plan prior to first use of the nursery.

The proposed change of use will result in an increase in vehicle trips during both peak periods and a slight uplift across a typical day. However, these increases are not considered material, equating to approximately 10 additional trips in the AM peak and 6 in the PM peak. A proportion of these trips are also likely to comprise linked journeys associated with employment travel, thereby reducing their overall impact on the highway network.

With regard to cycle parking, the relevant standards require the provision of one cycle space per two members of staff (full-time equivalent). It is proposed that four cycle parking spaces will be provided to the rear of the building, in accordance with these standards. In addition, provision should be made for a dedicated buggy store, which would support and encourage sustainable modes of travel, particularly walking, for drop-off and pick-up trips. These details are recommended to be secured by condition.

Overall, the proposal is considered acceptable in transport terms.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposal has been assessed against national and locally adopted planning policies and is considered in accordance with those policies.



8. RECOMMENDATION

GRANT FULL PLANNING PERMISSION

Recommended conditions:

1. Time limit (standard)
2. Approved plans
3. Materials to match
4. Capacity restricted to 30 children at any one time
5. Use restricted to Class E(f)
6. Noise management plan to be submitted
7. Contaminated land assessment to be submitted
8. Remediation plan to be submitted
9. Remediation implementation and verification
10. Parking management plan to be submitted
11. Cycle and buggy parking details to be submitted