

LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEED STATEMENT

Prepared on behalf of: Zeeshan Deen

Site address: 12 St Ronans Road, Reading, RG30 2QE

Application type: Full Planning Permission

Prepared by: Inhaus Planning, Suite Ra01, 195-197 Wood Street, London, E17 3NU

1.0 Introduction

This Local and National Need Statement has been prepared by Inhaus Planning on behalf of Zeeshan Deen in support of the application for Full Planning Permission for the change of use of 12 St Ronans Road, Reading, RG30 2QE to a residential children's home. It sets out the compelling national and local need for additional residential care placements for looked-after children and demonstrates the significant public benefit that the proposed development will deliver.

2.0 National Context and Policy Pressures

England faces an acute and worsening crisis in the provision of residential care for looked-after children. The most recent data published by the Department for Education confirms that there are in excess of 80,000 children in the care of local authorities in England, a figure that has increased substantially over the past decade. Demand for residential placements continues to significantly outpace the available supply of registered, good-quality homes.

The consequences of this imbalance are profound and well-documented. Local authorities are regularly required to place children at significant distances from their home areas, severing established relationships with family members, friends, schools and communities. Out-of-area placements deprive children of the community connections that are fundamental to healthy development, and impose substantial financial costs on the placing authorities. The shortage of provision also drives placement instability, as children are moved between settings when suitable local options become unavailable.

The Government's Written Ministerial Statement of May 2023 (HCWS795) acknowledged these pressures directly and set out a clear commitment to ensuring that the planning system supports rather than impedes the provision of new children's homes. The Statement is explicit that the planning system should not act as a barrier to providing homes for the most vulnerable children in society, and directs local planning authorities to give appropriate weight to the acute national need for additional residential placements.

3.0 Regional and Local Context

Reading Borough Council, in common with local authorities across the South East of England, faces significant challenges in sourcing sufficient, appropriate residential placements for looked-after children within its area. The pressure on placements in the South East reflects both the high level of need in urban authorities and the relative scarcity of registered residential provision across the region.

The provision of a new, high-quality children's home within the Reading Borough will contribute directly to the local sufficiency of provision, enabling children with connections to the Reading area to be placed close to their families, schools, communities and existing professional relationships. Proximity to the community is a significant factor in achieving positive placement outcomes and is actively promoted by Government policy and Ofsted's inspection framework.

4.0 Benefits of Small-Scale Provision

The proposed home, accommodating just 2 children, represents the model of provision most strongly supported by Government policy and the evidence base in children's social care. Small, community-integrated children's homes consistently outperform larger, more institutional settings in terms of outcomes for young people, particularly for children presenting with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD), Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties (SEMH) and Learning Disabilities (LD).

Small homes provide an environment that is genuinely domestic in character, allowing children to develop meaningful relationships with a consistent team of carers, to engage with the local community as ordinary members of the neighbourhood, and to benefit from the stability and predictability that supports healthy development. The proposed home embodies this model in full.

5.0 Alignment with National and Local Policy Objectives

The proposed development aligns directly with the objectives of the national children's social care reform programme, which has placed the expansion of small-scale, community-integrated residential provision at its centre. It is consistent with the objectives of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019, including Policy H6 (Accommodation for Vulnerable People), which supports the provision of residential care accommodation in appropriate residential locations.

The NPPF (December 2024) at paragraph 63 explicitly identifies looked-after children as a group whose housing needs must be assessed and reflected in planning policies, and requires decision-makers to have regard to the relevant local authority's Children's Social Care Sufficiency Strategy. The proposed development responds directly to the documented sufficiency need.

6.0 Conclusion

The proposed children's home at 12 St Ronans Road, Reading, RG30 2QE will make a significant and demonstrable contribution to addressing the acute national and local shortage of residential care placements for looked-after children. The public benefit of providing two additional residential places for children with complex needs in a high-quality, therapeutically informed, community-integrated setting is substantial. This benefit constitutes a powerful material consideration in support of the grant of planning permission and should be afforded considerable weight in the determination of this application.