

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Emmer Green Ward

App Ref: PL/26/0679 Full planning permission

Address: Land to rear of 88 Knights Way, Reading, RG4 8LJ

Proposal: The erection of ancillary outbuilding to accommodate additional nursery spaces

Applicant: Mrs Rebecca Hartley

Received date: 21/05/2026

Target Decision date: 14/08/2026 EOT until 15/10/2026

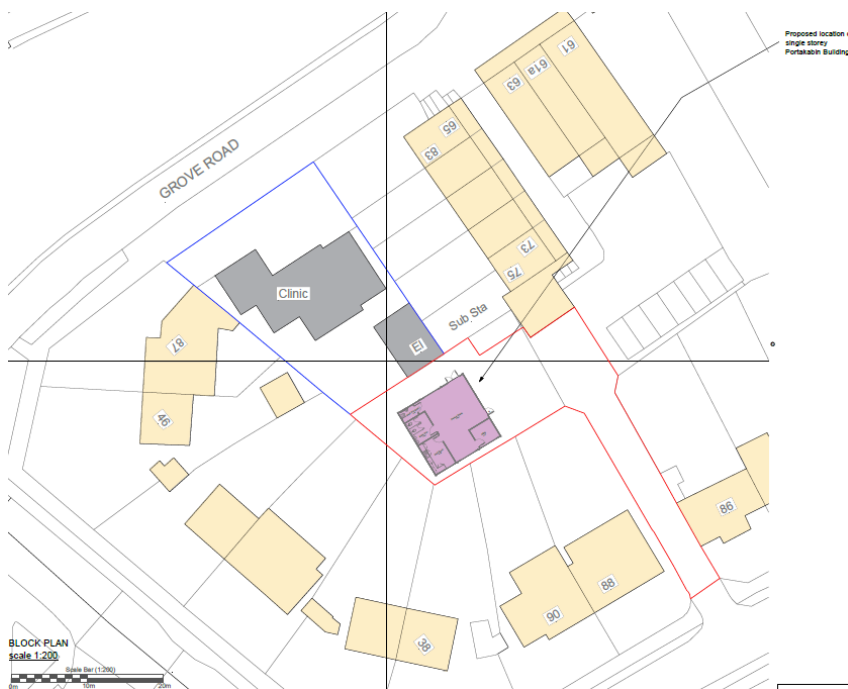
Case Officer: Catrin Davies

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is located to the rear of 88 Knights Way and south of Emmer Green Kindergarten. The application site lies within the existing nursery grounds and forms a vacant area of land adjacent to the nursery's existing operations. The site contains an area of hardstanding. Emmer Green Kindergarten caters for children 3 months to 5 years and is open all year round. The site is bounded on three sides by residential properties and is located in an open area bounded by the rear gardens of those residential buildings. An access serving the site, Grove Road flats and a service yard serving commercial properties fronting Grove Road forms the eastern edge of the site. Access to the existing nursery site is taken from Grove Road.

The applicant has confirmed that they own all land within the application red line boundary. However, officers note that Land Registry information reviewed during the assessment appears to indicate that land within the red line remains in the ownership of Reading Borough Council.

To the north of the site lies a TPO and there is also a Green Link to the north.



2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The application seeks planning permission for the erection of a single-storey ancillary outbuilding to provide additional accommodation associated with the existing Emmer Green Kindergarten.

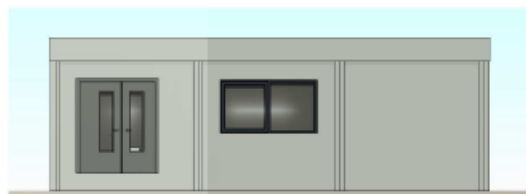
The proposed building would comprise a modular 'portacabin' structure with a gross floor area of approximately 94m². The building would measure approximately 10.17m in width, 9.83m in length and have a maximum height of 3.51m.

The submitted information states that the building would be used to provide additional nursery accommodation, increasing the overall capacity of the nursery from 80 children to 105 children, representing an increase of 25 childcare places. There would be no increase in staffing with the staff remaining at 30.

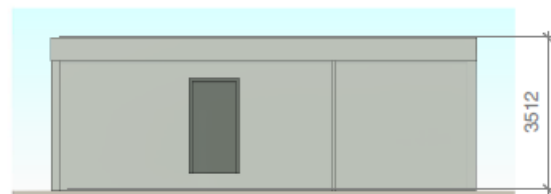
The applicant has advised that the additional accommodation would cater for children aged 3 months to 5 years. The existing nursery operates between 08:00 and 18:00 Monday to Friday and no changes to the proposed hours of operation are sought as part of this application.

The proposed modular building would be constructed using plastic-coated galvanised steel cladding with a prefabricated roof system.

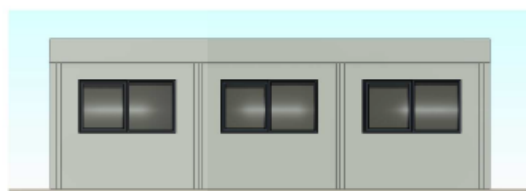
The proposal does not include any additional staffing provision and the applicant has advised that existing staff numbers are sufficient to accommodate the proposed increase in childcare places. The proposed building would operate as an extension to the existing nursery facility and would be accessed via the existing nursery site.



2 North Elevation
1 : 125



3 East Elevation
1 : 125



4 South Elevation
1 : 125

10172



5 West Elevation
1 : 125

Document and plans submitted:

Design access and sustainability statement received 21 May 2026

JIAF220239290PNM Rev A Proposed location and block plan received 19 June

HD/14133/02 proposed elevations received 21 May 2026

Noise Report received 21 May 2026

ITL210710 002A R Transport Statement received 21 May 2026
RBC Supporting Letter received 21 May 2026

In order to work pro-actively with the applicant concerns were raised and the applicant was offered the opportunity to submit additional information. These included the following:

NoiseAir Limited technical note dated 18th September 2026 Ref: P8869-L1-V1 received 21 Sept 2026

Noise management plan dated prepared by NoiseAir dated 18th September 2026 received 21 Sept 2026

Ecological Enhancement Report received 21 Sept 2026

Transport Statement i-Transport Ref: JN/EN/IC/ITL210710-001B dated 24 August 2026 received 21 Sept 2026

Officer note: There are discrepancies within the information submitted within the transport stating 25 additional children and the noise report stating 24. Officer asked for this to be clarified with the further submission however this was not done. As such for the avoidance of doubt the LPA have considered the increase to be 25 children as indicated.

Planning history:

PL/25/0883- Proposed children's nursery building (Use Class E(f)) ancillary outdoor space, shed and replacement fencing and gates to provide expanded facilities for the existing Emmer Green Kindergarten on Grove Road. Withdrawn

PL/21/0692 Two storey detached dwelling, following demolition of garage. Withdrawn.

3. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted:

RBC Highways (summary)

The Reading Borough Council Highway Authority object to the proposal on the basis that insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the additional nursery places would not result in increased parking demand. They consider that the surrounding area already experiences significant parking stress and that the proposal would further intensify parking pressures, adversely affecting highway safety and the operation of the local highway network. Discussed further below.

RBC Environmental Protection (summary)

Reading Borough Council Environmental Protection object to the proposal due to concerns regarding the noise and disturbance impacts arising from the intensification of the nursery use. They are not satisfied that the submitted information demonstrates that neighbouring residents would be adequately protected from noise impacts associated with increased nursery activity, particularly in relation to outdoor play areas and nearby residential gardens. Discussed further below.

RBC Planning Natural Environment (summary)

No objection subject to a condition securing additional landscaping. Discussed further below.

RBC Brighter Futures for Children (summary)

The Early Years and Childcare Team supports the proposed expansion of Emmer Green Kindergarten from 80 to 105 places, recognising the nursery's important role in meeting growing childcare demand in north Reading. The team notes that demand for early years provision continues to increase due to the

expansion of funded childcare entitlements, particularly for children aged 0-2, while recent nursery closures have reduced local capacity and parental choice. Emmer Green Kindergarten currently has a significant waiting list, with 62 children awaiting places and a further 17 existing families seeking additional sessions. The nursery's year-round provision makes an important contribution to local childcare sufficiency, and although the additional spaces are primarily for 3-4 year olds, the expansion would also help create capacity for younger children as older children progress through the setting. On this basis, the Early Years and Childcare Team considers that the proposal would make a positive contribution towards meeting childcare needs in this part of Reading and therefore supports the increase in registered capacity, subject to the necessary regulatory approvals.

Community Consultation Response (Caversham and District Residents' Association) (summary)

CADRA supports the principle of increasing nursery provision in north Reading and acknowledges the identified need for additional childcare places. However, concerns are raised regarding inconsistencies within the application documents, particularly in relation to the age group the additional places are intended to serve, the number of additional childcare places proposed, and staffing levels.

CADRA also questions the transport assumptions within the Transport Statement, including trip generation forecasts, the potential for increased car use if younger children are accommodated, localised congestion at drop-off and pick-up times, and the adequacy of cycle, scooter and buggy storage provision. CADRA therefore requests further clarification on these matters before the application is determined.

Public Consultation

Several site notices were displayed (one at the application site, one on Knights way and one on Grove road) as well as being advertised on the council website and four letters of support were received.

4. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

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'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Policy and Guidance
National Planning Policy Framework 2026
National Planning Practice Guidance 2014 onwards

National Planning Policy Framework 2026, with a particular focus on:

Chapter 3. Decision-making policies
Chapter 4. Achieving sustainable development
Chapter 5. Meeting the challenge of climate change
Chapter 12. Making efficient use of land
Chapter 14. Achieving well-designed places
Chapter 16. Promoting healthy communities
Chapter 19. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)
CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
CC4: Waste Minimisation and Storage
CC7: Design and the Public Realm
CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
CC9: Securing Infrastructure
EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment – not relevant?
EN14: Locally Important Heritage Assets – not relevant?
EN6: New Development in a Historic Context – not relevant?
EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
EN4: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands
EN17: Noise Generating Equipment
TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR4: Cycle Routes and Facilities
TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
OU1: New and Existing Community Facilities

SPG/SPD

Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

Other documents

Reading Borough Council (Brighter Futures for Children) – Accessibility Strategy (Education)

Local Plan Partial Update (May 2025)

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 consultation version of the draft update of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024.

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 these applications listed above is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remains very similar in the draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the determination of this planning application and are not considered to be ‘out of date’.

The Local Plan Partial Update was submitted to the Secretary of State on 9th May 2025. Submission marks the beginning of a process of public examination led by an independent Inspector. Due to the stage of examination, the draft Local Plan can be afforded limited weight.

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.

5. APPRAISAL

Principle of the development- Provision of childcare places

Policy OU1 states that proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site. Proposals for on-site intensification of important facilities, such as schools and healthcare uses, will be supported, subject to other policies in the plan. 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. A childcare facility is considered to fall under 'education and training facilities' (at all levels) as outlined within paragraph 4.7.2 of the RBLP.

There is a clearly demonstrated need for early years childcare provision within Reading. The Council's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment identifies that places for children aged 2 to 4 years are in highest demand, with demand exceeding available capacity across the Borough. Evidence from the Council's Early Years Sufficiency analysis (Spring 2025) confirms there is a need for additional childcare places. Collectively, this evidence demonstrates a clear need for additional childcare provision within the wider area and, in principle, the proposal aligns with Policy OU1.

However, while this need may be evident it does not necessarily justify the suitability of the use within this specific residential location. The discussion below therefore considers the extent to which the application site itself represents an appropriate and acceptable location for the proposed use.

Furthermore, Chapter 16 of the NPPF 2026 states that the objective of the policies in this chapter is to "promote the creation of healthy and inclusive places and support the provision of appropriate public services, by enabling development which can support this aim and seeking to retain, improve and deliver new facilities which are important for community wellbeing and minimising inequalities."

The extent to which the proposal achieves these objectives is considered in the assessment below.

Residential Amenity

Policy CC8 requires that "Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of:

- Privacy and overlooking;
- Access to sunlight and daylight;
- Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;
- Harm to outlook;
- Noise and disturbance;
- Artificial lighting;
- Vibration;
- Dust and fumes;
- Smell;
- Crime and safety; or
- Wind...."

Additionally, Policy EN16 states that "development will only be permitted where it would not be damaging to the environment and sensitive receptors through land, noise or light pollution."

Policy P3.1 of the NPPF 2026 requires development proposals to provide healthy, safe and inclusive places, whilst Policy P3.2 seeks to ensure that development provides a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

Noise and Disturbance

A Noise Impact Assessment (NoiseAir, July 2025) was submitted in support of the application. The assessment considers the potential impact of noise arising from the proposed expansion of the existing nursery, with particular regard to children's outdoor play activities and the effect upon surrounding residential properties.

Background noise monitoring was undertaken between 15 and 17 July 2025, with a representative daytime background noise level of 37 dB(A) identified. A 3D noise model was then used to compare the existing nursery operation against the proposed expansion.

The assessment predicts increases in noise levels at neighbouring residential receptors ranging from 0.5 dB(A) to 6.6 dB(A), with the greatest increase occurring at receptors to the south-east of the site. The assessment also identifies that noise from the nursery would exceed existing background sound levels by between 10 dB(A) and 19 dB(A) and would remain audible and readily identifiable at neighbouring residential properties.

The assessment further considers likely internal noise levels within nearby dwellings. Whilst most receptors are predicted to comply with the internal daytime noise recommendations contained within BS8233:2014, one receptor to the north-east is predicted to experience internal noise levels approximately 6 dB(A) above the recommended guideline value.

Whilst the report ultimately concludes that the impacts arising from the proposal would not be significant, officers have concerns regarding both the findings of the assessment and the level of information provided. In particular, the predicted increase of up to 6.6 dB(A) represents a noticeable increase in noise levels and the assessment acknowledges exceedances of both existing background sound levels and, in one instance, the BS8233 internal noise guideline values. Officers consider that the conclusions reached within the assessment rely heavily upon the fact that nursery noise already forms an established component of the local sound environment, rather than demonstrating that the proposed intensification of the use would not result in adverse impacts upon neighbouring residential amenity.

Officers also consider that the Noise Impact Assessment has not sufficiently considered neighbouring private gardens and the level of noise impact likely to be experienced within these areas. Private gardens form an important component of residential amenity and it is therefore necessary to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in unacceptable harm to the enjoyment of these spaces.

The assessment also places significant reliance upon noise impacts being managed through a Noise Management Plan. However, no Noise Management Plan was submitted as part of the original application and therefore officers were unable to assess the effectiveness of any proposed mitigation measures. As such, the conclusions reached within the assessment were considered speculative. In response to the concerns raised by officers, the applicant subsequently submitted a Technical Note and Noise Management Plan in support of the application.

The Technical Note does not adequately address the concerns previously identified and remains largely reliant upon the assertion that nursery noise already forms an established component of the local sound environment. However this in itself does not demonstrate that the proposed intensification of the use would not result in adverse impacts upon neighbouring residential amenity. Also the land in question does not currently form part of the nursery and the proposal would introduce nursery noise into a new parcel of land adjacent to properties which are currently less affected. Officers note that the proposal

would facilitate an increase of up to 25 additional children and therefore represents a significant intensification of the existing nursery operation rather than a minor increase in activity. The Technical Note fails to demonstrate that the additional children, associated staff activity and increased use of the outdoor areas – and the use of new areas of land - would not result in unacceptable noise levels at neighbouring residential properties. Furthermore, insufficient consideration has been given to the impact upon neighbouring private gardens. The proposed nursery would directly adjoin six residential garden boundaries and officers are not satisfied that sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the intensified use would not adversely affect the reasonable enjoyment of these outdoor spaces.

The Technical Note suggests that any noise impacts can be mitigated through management measures and references a Noise Management Plan that has now been submitted. However, officers consider the submitted Noise Management Plan to be inadequate and incapable of providing meaningful or enforceable controls over noise generation.

For example, the plan states that "External doors and windows serving nursery rooms will be managed to minimise unnecessary noise breakout." However, no detail is provided as to what is meant by "managed" or how this would be achieved in practice. This is unlikely to be possible in practice – especially during hot weather.

The plan also states that "Arrivals, collections, external play, mealtimes, sleep/rest periods, indoor activities and staff tasks will be scheduled and supervised to avoid unnecessary concentration of noise. Staff will minimise raised voices, prevent prolonged shouting or screaming where practicable, and avoid avoidable impacts from doors, gates, bins, toys, play equipment and vehicles." Officers consider these measures to be vague, subjective and heavily qualified. In particular, the phrase "where practicable" provides little certainty regarding how noise would actually be controlled in practice.

The plan further states that "Outdoor play shall be supervised at all times by nursery staff." Officers do not consider this to represent a meaningful noise mitigation measure, as children would be expected to be supervised irrespective of any planning controls. The plan provides no information regarding the number of children permitted outdoors at any one time, the frequency of outdoor play, or how outdoor activities would be managed to minimise impacts upon neighbouring occupiers.

Similarly, the plan states that "Larger group activities and more energetic play should be located away from the most noise-sensitive boundaries where practicable." Again, officers consider this measure to be vague and lacking sufficient detail to provide confidence that it would effectively mitigate impacts upon neighbouring occupiers.

Overall, the Noise Management Plan does not provide any meaningful or measurable controls capable of effectively limiting noise arising from the proposed intensification of the nursery. In particular, the plan contains no restrictions relating to the number of children using outdoor areas, the duration or frequency of outdoor play, or any other quantifiable measures that could reasonably be monitored and enforced through a planning condition. Given the vague and aspirational nature of the measures proposed, officers do not consider that the document could reasonably be secured through condition and consequently little weight can be attached to the proposed mitigation.

Notwithstanding the above concerns regarding the adequacy of both the Technical Note and Noise Management Plan, officers have carefully considered whether planning conditions could reasonably be imposed to mitigate the identified impacts. Whilst such controls may provide a degree of mitigation, concerns remain regarding their practicality, effectiveness and enforceability.

Furthermore, officers note that the concerns identified are not limited solely to outdoor activity. The submitted Noise Impact Assessment identifies exceedances of existing background sound levels and predicts internal noise levels above the recommended guideline values at one residential receptor. Consequently, insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the building itself would adequately contain noise generated by the intensified use.

Even if further information were submitted to demonstrate that the building could adequately contain internal noise, concerns would remain regarding the use of the outdoor play areas. Outdoor play forms an intrinsic and fundamental component of nursery provision and is an inherent characteristic of the proposed use. Unlike many commercial activities, the operation of a nursery must remain responsive to the welfare, development and day-to-day needs of children. Officers therefore consider that restrictions relating to the duration of outdoor play, the opening of windows, the timing of activities, or the number of children permitted outdoors at any one time would be difficult to monitor and enforce in practice and may not accurately reflect the operational requirements of the nursery.

The nursery's close relationship with surrounding residential properties and private gardens means that noise generated from outdoor play, children's activities, staff movements and daily drop-off and collection periods would be readily experienced by neighbouring occupiers. Whilst it is acknowledged that the nursery would not operate during evenings or weekends, this does not negate the impact arising from the prolonged and intensified daytime activity associated with the use.

Furthermore, modern working patterns have changed significantly in recent years, with home working, flexible working arrangements and shift patterns becoming increasingly common. Consequently, it cannot reasonably be assumed that neighbouring residents will be absent from their homes during nursery operating hours. As such, neighbouring occupiers are likely to experience noise and disturbance throughout the day at times when they would reasonably expect to enjoy both their homes and private gardens.

It is also important to note that the noise report reference 24 children, yet the transport statement references 25 as such there is an inconsistency regarding the number of children proposed. This raises further concern about the accuracy of the reports but given the report has failed to demonstrate 24 children would be acceptable then it is considered that 25 children would also be unacceptable. For the avoidance of doubt this discrepancy was discussed with the applicant, and it was requested this was amended in the additional information however this was not done.

Visual Amenity, Overbearing Impact and Outlook

The proposed nursery building would occupy a significant proportion of the application site and would be sited immediately adjacent to sections of the shared boundaries with neighbouring residential properties. The degree of change would be significant when viewed from those properties. Whilst the building would be single storey in scale, it would have a height of approximately 3.5 metres and extend along the neighbouring boundaries with little to no meaningful separation distance. Officers consider that the combination of the building's footprint, height, massing and proximity to neighbouring gardens, together with the absence of any established landscaping or effective screening, would result in a prominent and visually intrusive form of development. Given the height of the building, the impacts would not be adequately mitigated through typical domestic boundary treatments such as fencing or garden planting and, as such, the proposal would have an overbearing presence when viewed from adjoining residential properties.

The proposal would introduce a substantial built form into an area which is presently open in character and would materially alter the outlook currently enjoyed by neighbouring occupiers. Whilst it is acknowledged that the site is not of exceptional visual quality, it previously accommodated trees and vegetation which provided a softer appearance and filtered outlook. By contrast, the proposed building

would present a comparatively stark built form with limited landscaping provision to soften its appearance or mitigate its impact. Officers therefore consider that the proposal would result in a material and harmful change to the outlook and visual amenity enjoyed by neighbouring occupiers.

Furthermore, the proposed windows within the southern elevation would provide opportunities for overlooking towards the private gardens serving Nos. 38 and 90. These windows would be immediately adjacent the shared boundary and there would certainly be a perception of, as well as actual, overlooking. Officers are concerned that the number and siting of the windows, and when considered alongside the day-to-day operation of the nursery and the regular presence of staff and children in close proximity to neighbouring boundaries, would result in an unacceptable erosion of privacy to adjoining occupiers. The building is sited such that there would be no opportunity for soft landscaping along these boundaries to minimise the impacts.

Taking these factors together, it is considered that the proposal would result in unacceptable harm to neighbouring residential amenity by reason of its overbearing impact, loss of outlook, adverse effect on visual amenity and loss of privacy.

Highway Safety and Parking

Policy TR3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan states that, in determining proposals involving a new or altered access onto the transport network or the generation of additional trips, consideration will be given to the impact upon highway safety, congestion and the environment. Policy TR5 requires parking provision that is appropriate to the accessibility of the site and the nature of the proposed development. In addition, the NPPF 2026 seeks to ensure that development supports sustainable patterns of growth whilst providing safe, suitable and accessible transport choices.

The existing nursery is registered to accommodate up to 88 children and employs 30 staff. The site benefits from only three on-site parking spaces, with the majority of staff parking and all parent drop-off and collection activity relying upon on-street parking within the surrounding highway network. The proposal would increase the capacity of the nursery by a further 24-25 children and therefore represents a notable intensification of the existing use.

The application site is located within an area that already experiences significant parking demand arising from surrounding residential properties and nearby facilities, including Emmer Green Primary School, Emmer Green Surgery, local retail units and Highdown Secondary School. As such, parking pressures are already evident within the surrounding road network, particularly during peak periods.

In support of the application, the applicant has submitted a Transport Statement and travel survey data seeking to demonstrate that the proposal would result in only a limited increase in vehicle movements. However, officers are not satisfied that sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate the robustness of the travel survey data. In particular, insufficient information has been provided regarding the methodology used, survey return rates and the reliability of the assumptions relied upon.

Furthermore, whilst it is suggested that many nursery trips are linked to journeys associated with the nearby primary school, no substantive evidence has been provided to support this assertion. Consequently, officers attach limited weight to the conclusions reached within the submitted Transport Statement.

The applicant also submitted a parking survey intended to demonstrate that sufficient on-street parking capacity exists within 200m of the site to accommodate the additional parking demand generated by the proposal. However, concerns have been raised regarding the accuracy of this assessment. Whilst the applicant identifies 132 available parking spaces within the surrounding area, it is evident that this figure significantly overestimates actual parking capacity by assuming parking can occur on both sides of roads

where carriageway widths would not safely allow this. The evidence before officers indicates that the actual parking capacity of the surveyed area is considerably lower.

The applicant also asserts that the impact of the proposal would be reduced because a number of nursery users are likely to have siblings attending the nearby primary school and therefore many journeys would comprise linked trips rather than entirely new vehicle movements. However, no substantive evidence has been provided to demonstrate the extent to which this occurs or that the additional nursery places would be predominantly utilised by families already travelling to the area as such insufficient evidence has been provided to support this assumption and, as such, limited weight can be attached to this element of the applicant's case

Based on the available evidence, it is apparent that the surrounding highway network already experiences a high degree of parking stress. Survey results demonstrate periods during the day where parking demand approaches, and in some instances exceeds, available parking capacity. This is particularly evident during peak periods associated with school and nursery drop-off and collection times.

The proposal would increase the number of children attending the nursery and would therefore be likely to generate additional parking demand during these already constrained periods.

Officers consider it reasonable to expect that parents and carers would seek to park as close as possible to the nursery entrance during drop-off and collection periods. Consequently, the proposal is likely to increase pressure on the Grove Road service road and surrounding residential streets, resulting in additional vehicle movements, vehicles circulating in search of parking spaces, and opportunistic parking. Such activity has the potential to adversely impact highway safety, the free flow of traffic, access for emergency and service vehicles, and the amenities of surrounding occupiers.

The applicant has suggested that nursery staff would advise parents not to park inappropriately. Whilst this is noted, officers attach limited weight to this measure as nursery staff would have no formal authority to control or enforce parking behaviour on the public highway. As such, there is insufficient certainty that any resulting parking impacts could be adequately managed through operational measures.

Taking all of the above into account, officers are not satisfied that the applicant has demonstrated that the proposed intensification of the nursery can be accommodated without resulting in additional pressure on an already constrained highway network. The proposal would be likely to exacerbate existing parking stress and has the potential to adversely impact highway safety and the efficient operation of the surrounding road network. Accordingly, the proposal is considered contrary to Policies TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

This conclusion is supported by the objection of the Reading Borough Council Highway Authority, who consider that the applicant has failed to demonstrate that the proposed development would not have a detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network and that the parking provision is inadequate to accommodate the intensification of the use.

Design and Character

Policy CC7 seeks to preserve or enhance the character of an area in terms of layout, landscape, density, scale, height, massing, architectural detail and materials. Similarly, Policy DP3 of the NPPF 2026 requires development to respond positively to its context so that it integrates with and enhances its surroundings and creates visually attractive and distinctive development that maintains a strong sense of place.

The proposal comprises a single-storey modular nursery building located to the rear of the existing nursery premises. Whilst the building would not be readily visible from the wider public realm, the proposal would occupy a significant proportion of the plot and introduce a substantial area of built form into a previously more open part of the site. Although limited to a single storey, the building would have a height of approximately 3.5 metres and because of its footprint, scale and siting, would appear as a dominant feature within this part of the site. The proposed steel-clad structure is relatively stark in appearance and provides little visual interest in its own right. Whilst the design reflects the functional requirements of the use, it is considered to display a commercial and utilitarian character which sits uncomfortably within the predominantly residential surroundings and fails to integrate positively with the character of the area.

The site previously contained trees and vegetation which contributed positively to the appearance of the site and provided a softer visual setting. However, little meaningful landscaping has been proposed as part of the application. Whilst the Biodiversity Enhancement Plan indicates the planting of hedgerows along sections of the site boundaries, these measures are relatively modest and would do little to soften the appearance of the building or mitigate its prominence within the site. As such, officers are not satisfied that the proposed landscaping would adequately assimilate the development into its surroundings or compensate for the loss of the site's previously vegetated character.

Furthermore, officers have concerns that the nursery use is likely to result in additional visual clutter associated with play equipment, fencing, storage areas, shelters and other paraphernalia. Collectively, these elements would further urbanise this part of the site and add to the visual prominence of the development.

Taking these factors together, officers consider that the proposal would result in an overly dominant and visually intrusive form of development which would fail to respond positively to its context. The scale, appearance and extent of the proposed building, when combined with the absence of meaningful landscaping, would result in harm to the character and appearance of the site and its immediate surroundings. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CC7 and Policy DP3 of the NPPF 2026.

Trees and Landscaping

Policy EN14 seeks to protect trees, hedges and other vegetation of importance and requires new development to make provision for tree retention and planting to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of an area, provide biodiversity benefits and contribute towards climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Officers note that the application site previously contained trees, hedgerows and other vegetation, below is an aerial photo of the site:



On the site visit it was apparent that these trees have been removed and vegetation/greenery lost. The application has not demonstrated that the loss of these trees and vegetation has been appropriately mitigated through replacement tree planting or a comprehensive landscaping scheme which would be necessary due to the extent of the development proposed.

Whilst the submitted Biodiversity Enhancement Plan has been considered, the measures proposed are relatively limited in extent and predominantly comprise limited hedgerow planting along sections of the site boundary. Officers do not consider that these measures adequately compensate for the loss of existing vegetation. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to Policy EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

Biodiversity and Biodiversity Net Gain

Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan seeks to ensure that development protects biodiversity interests and secures biodiversity enhancements wherever possible. In addition, qualifying development is required to demonstrate a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Policy CC3.1(d) of the NPPF 2026 requires development proposals to include green infrastructure, whilst Policy DP3.2(c) requires proposals to incorporate and connect to a network of high-quality green infrastructure that strengthens habitats and biodiversity.

The application form states that the development is exempt from the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements on the basis that it constitutes de minimis development. However, officers do not agree that the proposal falls within this exemption.

The proposal includes the erection of a new nursery building measuring approximately 94 sq.m together with the provision of additional hardstanding in the form of pathways. Whilst it is acknowledged that areas of hardstanding were already present within the site, insufficient information has been provided to demonstrate that the extent of new built development and hard surfacing falls within the de minimis exemption. As such, officers are unable to conclude that the proposal is exempt from the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

It is acknowledged that amendments to the Biodiversity Net Gain regime came into effect on 6 August 2026, including the introduction of additional exemptions for certain smaller developments. However, it is understood that transitional arrangements apply and that planning applications submitted prior to 6 August 2026 remain subject to the Biodiversity Net Gain requirements that were in force at the time of submission. As such, the proposal is required to demonstrate compliance with the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain provisions.

Officers also note that several trees previously present within the site have been removed. It has not been demonstrated that the loss of these trees has been appropriately accounted for within any biodiversity assessment. Any Biodiversity Net Gain calculation would need to establish an appropriate baseline position and consider the biodiversity value of habitats and trees lost as part of the development in order to accurately assess the gains and losses arising from the proposal.

The applicant submitted an Ecological Enhancement Report however it does not include a completed biodiversity metric, Biodiversity Gain Plan or any other robust assessment demonstrating that the development would achieve the statutory minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. Consequently, the report does not provide sufficient information to demonstrate compliance with the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

In the absence of a Biodiversity Gain Plan, completed biodiversity metric or other robust evidence demonstrating compliance with the statutory requirements, officers are not satisfied that the proposal is exempt from the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain regime or that it would achieve the required 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. Accordingly, the proposal fails to demonstrate compliance with the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and weighs against the development in the planning balance.

Notwithstanding the above, officers have also considered the proposal against the wider biodiversity objectives of the development plan. Policy EN12 seeks to ensure that development protects biodiversity interests – no net loss - and secures biodiversity enhancements wherever possible. Policy CC3.1(d) of the NPPF 2026 requires development proposals to include green infrastructure, whilst Policy DP3.2(c) requires proposals to incorporate and connect to a network of high-quality green infrastructure that strengthens habitats and biodiversity.

Officers are not satisfied that the proposal has demonstrated that it would avoid a net loss of biodiversity. The development has resulted in the erection of a significant built form the provision of additional hardstanding and pathways, and the loss of trees from the site. Collectively, these works have reduced the extent of undeveloped land and opportunities for habitat provision within the application site.

The Ecological Enhancement Report proposes two ecological measures, officers do not consider that these represent meaningful biodiversity enhancements capable of offsetting the impacts arising from the development. The measures proposed are limited in scope and are largely confined to small-scale planting and bird boxes. Whilst such measures may provide some ecological value, they are considered token gestures in the context of the scale of development undertaken and do not adequately demonstrate how biodiversity losses would be compensated for or enhanced.

Furthermore, the report does not provide a robust assessment of biodiversity losses arising from the development, nor does it demonstrate how the proposed measures would deliver an overall ecological improvement when compared to the baseline position of the site. As such, limited weight can be afforded to the biodiversity benefits claimed within the report. Officers are not satisfied that it has been adequately demonstrated that the development avoids, mitigates or compensates for the biodiversity impacts arising from the proposal.

Given the extent of built form, hardstanding and habitat loss within the site, together with the limited and unquantified nature of the proposed ecological measures, officers are not satisfied that the proposal would avoid a net loss of biodiversity or secure meaningful biodiversity enhancements. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, Policy CC3.1(d) of the NPPF 2026 and Policy DP3.2(c), which seek to protect and enhance biodiversity and secure high-quality green infrastructure as part of well-designed development.

Sustainable Design and Construction

Policy CC2 requires development proposals to demonstrate how they have been designed and constructed to address climate change through the appropriate and efficient use of energy, water, materials and other natural resources, whilst taking account of environmental impacts.

Policies CC1-CC3 of the NPPF 2026 seek to ensure that development supports climate change mitigation and adaptation and contributes towards a sustainable and resilient future.

The application is not supported by any sustainability information and fails to demonstrate that the development would meet a BREEAM 'Very Good' standard or equivalent level of sustainability performance, as required by Policy CC3. As such, insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the development will be designed and constructed to address climate change, minimise environmental impacts and make efficient use of natural resources.

The proposal does not comply with Policies CC2 and CC3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

Planning Balance and Conclusion

Officers acknowledge that there is policy support for the provision and expansion of childcare facilities, also the letters of support for the proposal. Significant weight is afforded to the need for additional childcare places, particularly having regard to the identified shortage of provision within Reading, the support expressed by the Council's Early Years and Childcare Team, and the role the nursery plays in serving the local community. The proposal would therefore deliver a social benefit. However, the public benefit of additional nursery provision is not considered to outweigh the harm identified and as discussed in this report.

The existence of a need for childcare provision does not automatically render every site suitable for such a use. The planning system requires the benefits of a proposal to be weighed against any harm arising from it.

In this instance, officers have identified significant concerns regarding the impact of the development on neighbouring amenity, highways, design, trees the lack of a robust biodiversity strategy, the failure to demonstrate compliance with Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and the limited information provided in relation to sustainable design and climate change.

Taking all matters into account, whilst weight is afforded to the need for childcare provision and the social benefits arising from the proposal, officers consider that these benefits are significantly outweighed by the identified harm. The proposal has failed to demonstrate that the site is capable of accommodating a commercial nursery use of this scale without resulting in unacceptable impacts on residential amenity, character and appearance, biodiversity and the overall quality of the environment.

Accordingly, the planning balance weighs against the proposal and officers conclude that the development is unacceptable and contrary to the Development Plan when read as a whole. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

REASONS FOR REFUSAL

1. The proposed development, due to the nature and intensity of the use and close proximity to neighbouring properties, would result in unacceptable noise and disturbance harmful to the

amenity of neighbouring occupiers. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC8 and EN16 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Policy P3 of the NPPF 2026.

2. The proposed development, due to its siting, overall excessive height, bulk and massing and close proximity to neighbouring properties and private gardens to the rear of the site along Knights Way and Evesham Road, would result in an overbearing and visually intrusive form of development with consequent harm to the amenity of neighbouring properties. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Policy L2 of the NPPF 2026.
3. The proposed development, due to the combination of its scale, siting and the number and position of windows in close proximity to neighbouring dwellings and private gardens to the rear of the site along Knights Way and Evesham Road would result in overlooking and loss of privacy to these areas with consequent harm to the amenity of neighbouring properties. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Policy L2 of the NPPF 2026.
4. The proposed development would not provide sufficient on-site parking provision and would unacceptably intensify existing parking pressures with consequent harm to the safety of users of the transport network including pedestrians and cyclists. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Policies TR3, TR5 and TR6 of the NPPF 2026.
5. The proposed development, due to its siting, overall excessive height, bulk and massing combined with its stark design, would result in a dominant, visually intrusive and unsympathetic form of development that fails to respond positively to its surroundings. The loss of vegetation and tree planting combined with the absence of meaningful tree planting and soft landscaping would further exacerbate the visual dominance of the development. The proposed development would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area and would not create a visually attractive form of development. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Policy DP3 of the NPPF 2026.
6. The proposed development, due to the size and siting of the building relative to plot size, would result in a cramped form of development which fails to accommodate buildings and provision of tree planting and landscaping in a manner which enhances the character and appearance of the area. Furthermore, the proposed development fails to demonstrate that the loss of trees, hedgerows and vegetation previously present within the site has been adequately mitigated through replacement planting. As such, the proposed development would result in harm to visual amenity, air quality, biodiversity and environmental quality of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7, EN14 and EN15 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Policies CC3, DP3, N2 and N3 of the NPPF 2026.
7. The application has failed to demonstrate that the proposed development would comply with the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements. No Biodiversity Gain Plan, biodiversity metric or other robust evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that the proposed development would achieve the required minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. As such, it has not been demonstrated that the proposed development would comply with the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and Policy N2 of the NPPF 2026.
8. The application has failed to demonstrate that biodiversity impacts would be avoided, mitigated or compensated for, and that the proposed development would avoid a net loss of

9. biodiversity. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019, Policies CC3, DP3, N2 and N3 of the NPPF 2026.

The application has failed to demonstrate that the development has been designed and constructed to address climate change and minimise its environmental impacts including a failure to demonstrate that the development would meet BREEAM 'Very Good' standard. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC2 and CC3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Policies CC2, CC3 and DP3 of the NPPF 2026.