

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	260002
Site Address:	515 Reading Road, Winnersh, Wokingham, RG41 5HL
Expiry Date:	27 February 2026
Site Visit Date:	10 April 2025 – See PA 250222
Proposal: Full application for change of use from C3 Dwellinghouse to C2 Children's Home.	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking TB05 – Housing Mix TB09 – Residential Accommodation for Vulnerable Groups
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS3 – Development within or adjacent to major and modest settlements C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution

Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List
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PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
252236	Application for a certificate of lawfulness to demonstrate that no development is occurring in the change of use from dwelling to children's home.	Refused: November 2025
251112	Application for a lawful development certificate for proposed use as home for a maximum of 4 children under the ward of the Local Authority.	Refused: July 2025
250222	Householder application for the proposed raising of the roof, the erection of a single storey side extension and single storey rear extension, plus the conversion of the loft into habitable accommodation, facilitated by the erection of a rear dormer, including the erection of one roof light and changes to fenestration, following the demolition of the existing conservatory, chimney and outbuilding.	Approved: April 2025
042038	Proposed single storey rear extension to dwelling to form conservatory and porch extension.	Approved: April 2004
031284	Proposed rear dormer extension to dwelling to form rooms in roof space.	Approved: August 2003

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments received.
WBC Highways – Further information requested.
WBC Health and Wellbeing – No comments received.
WBC CIL – No comments received.

External

None consulted.

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	<u>Winnersh Parish Council:</u> Objects to the application on the grounds of inadequate staffing ratios, safety concerns, potential disturbance to neighbouring properties, and the overall suitability of the location for a children's home.
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	• The Committee supports the provision of housing for children in principle but has significant concerns regarding the appropriateness of the proposed placement. • It is considered that the proposed staffing levels and ratios are insufficient for the age and needs of the children, and that children's homes must be properly managed with adequately trained staff. • Concerns are raised that increased staff numbers would result in additional parking demand, as well as noise and disturbance to nearby residents. • The Committee highlights safety concerns due to the property's location on a main road, particularly in relation to the risk of children leaving the premises unsupervised. • Reference is made to previous experiences with the children's home at Welby Crescent, which the Committee considers relevant to the assessment of this application.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	<u>10 Turnstone Close:</u> • The proposed annex would result in overlooking of the objector's living accommodation. • Noise levels would increase due to staff shift changes • and frequent professional visits associated with 24-hour operation, exceeding typical residential activity. • The proposal could give rise to light pollution from night-time activity or potential security lighting. <u>513 Reading Road:</u> • Objection to the change of use of the property to a children's home. • Concerns regarding reduced privacy arising from alterations already undertaken at the property. • Potential for increased traffic and disturbance at all hours, with doubts that the existing on-site parking provision would be sufficient for staff and visitors. • Concerns that the applicant has not followed the correct planning process, including undertaking works prior to obtaining the necessary permissions. • Questioning whether there is a demonstrated need for the facility within the borough and whether the children would be better supported in their current placements.

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site relates to a one and a half, detached property located in an established residential area. The surrounding area is characterised by detached, semi-detached and terrace properties that are vary in design and appearance

Proposal:

Planning permission is sought for the change of use of the property from a C3 dwellinghouse (Use Class C3(a)) to a children's care home (Use Class C2). The proposed care home would accommodate up to four children between the ages of 11 and 17. The children would be supervised by two members of staff on site at any one time, operating on 12-hour shifts, with one member of staff sleeping overnight. During shift changeovers at 7:00am, 2:30pm and 9:30pm, there may be a brief overlap period when up to three staff members are present at the property.

No external alterations to the property are proposed.

This application follows on from a recently refused certificate of lawfulness for this change of use under planning ref 252236. The application was refused for the following reason:

The proposed use of dwelling as a children's care home as described constitutes development requiring planning permission as it would result in material change of use from Use Class C3 to C2. The description provided in the supporting Planning Statement falls within a C2 Use Class. The use as described would not form a single householder and therefore would be a C2 Use Class. The proposed use would result in a material change to the character of the use of the site. C2 and C3 uses draw upon different planning policies; strategic assessments and can attract different material weight: they are materially different uses with different material planning consequences. The certificate is therefore recommended for refusal.

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Principle of C2 use

With regard to the proposed C2 use, paragraph 96 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, are safe and accessible, and enable and support healthy lifestyles. Paragraph 63 of the NPPF makes reference for

authorities to establish the housing need for different groups; one group is looked after children.

Policy CP9 sets out that development proposals located within development limits will be acceptable in principle, having regard to the service provisions associated with the major, modest and limited categories. The site is located within a major development location, and the proposed C2 use would accommodate up to four children with two staff members on site at any one time. No increase in the number of habitable rooms is proposed, and the scale of occupation would be commensurate with that of a large family dwelling. As such, the scale of the development would respond to the existing level of facilities as set out in policy CP9, therefore the proposal would be acceptable in principle.

Policy CP2 states that to ensure that new development contributes to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities (including the provision of community facilities) to meet long term needs, planning permission will be granted for proposals that address the requirements of:

- b) Children, young people and families, including the co-ordination of services to meet their needs;

Policy TB09 of the MDD Local Plan supports the need for proposals which provide accommodation for people's needs over a lifetime. It states that "Applications for small group homes for vulnerable adults, children and young adults leaving care will be considered on a site-by site basis. The Council will have regard to the specific requirements of these groups, including the location of the development including vulnerable adults, children and young adults leaving care".

The proposed development would make a positive contribution towards meeting the identified need for accommodation for looked-after children and young people, as recognised by the National Planning Policy Framework and supported by Policies CP2, CP9 and TB09 of the Development Plan.

Loss of family housing (C3(a) use)

The proposed change of use to Class C2 would result in the loss of a single residential dwelling, thus conflicting with part i) of the CP3 of the Core Strategy which states that planning permission will be granted on schemes that 'do not lead to a net loss in dwellings and other residential accommodation or land'. In light of the boroughs 5YHLS position (as of March 2025) at 2.5 years, the loss of the property as family housing is regrettable. The NPPF, in section 5, also places great focus on boosting the supply of homes (including family homes).

However, the proposed scheme provides great social benefit and an essential community facility for supporting vulnerable children with specialist needs within the Borough instead of children being placed in care far from home, thus helping ensure essential care is delivered. Furthermore, the original dwelling would not be physically altered in a way which would prevent its conversion back into a single dwelling at a point in the future when the intended C2 uses is no longer required. In any case, the primary nature of the proposed use would be quasi-residential and as such it is

considered appropriate due to the existing residential form in the directly local area.

Overall, both national and local policy support the provision of accommodation for vulnerable individuals, including children, as well as family housing. On balance, the principle of the proposed change of use is considered acceptable and outweighs the loss of a single residential dwelling. In any case, the proposal would remain a form of residential accommodation and would not involve alterations that would prevent the property from being returned to C3 use in the future.

Character of the Area:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission should be granted if development is 'of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area.

The proposed change of use would not involve any external alterations to the appearance of the building, therefore there would be very little if any visual changes to the site. The existing property would remain unchanged and part of the street scene.

There would be a slight change in the way the property is used, however as described above, the proposal would continue to be used for residential purposes, and both internal and external areas would be used in the same way as a family dwelling. The proposal would therefore accord with the NPPF, policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy and the principles contained within the Borough Design Guide.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy aims to protect neighbouring amenity. Policy CC06 states that noise impact of the development must be assessed.

The proposed change of use would not involve any changes to the external appearance of the existing property, which already has first floor windows serving habitable rooms (bedrooms), and views from these windows would not be different to the existing situation and existing bedrooms would continue to function as such. Therefore, it is not considered there would be any detrimental impact upon neighbouring residential amenities by way of loss of light, overlooking or overbearing.

Concerns have been raised by the occupiers of 10 Turnstone Close that the existing outbuilding within the rear garden would result in overlooking of their amenity space. It should be noted that the impact of the outbuilding on neighbouring amenities was previously considered under the recently approved scheme (ref. 251840), which included the conversion of the outbuilding to form a single-storey residential annex. In any event, the outbuilding is single storey in height, and the existing boundary fencing is of sufficient height to screen any views from the ground-floor windows.

Concerns have also been raised in respect of potential light pollution arising from night-time activity or the use of security lighting. In this regard, it is noted that the proposed use would operate in a manner broadly to its current use as a residential dwelling, with no material increase in night-time activity anticipated. Furthermore, no

external security lighting is proposed as part of this application. As such, the proposal is not considered to give rise to unacceptable levels of light spill or light pollution that would adversely affect the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.

Noise and disturbance

In terms of noise and disturbance, the level of occupation would be comparable to the existing C3(a) use, and the external amenity areas would continue to be used in the same manner. Staff changeover times would occur at 7:00am, 2:30pm and 9:30pm, with the first two broadly aligning with typical movements associated with a residential property, such as commuting to work and school runs. Furthermore, this noise and disruption would only occur for a short period of time. As such, there is no evidence to conclude that the proposal would result in undue noise and disturbance to the surrounding area above and beyond if the property were to remain in a C3 use with children residing there.

In the event that noise and disturbance did arise from individuals living in the care, or if they had any behavioural or emotional needs, this would be the responsibility of staff/ the company to control long with other appropriate bodies. Professional carers, trained in managing emotional and behavioural needs, will provide 24-hour care and support. As discussed, in planning terms, there is no evidence to conclude that the level of noise and disturbance would be greater than what could occur as a result of general residential use.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Traffic Impact

The Highways Officer notes that the site is located in close proximity to sustainable transport options, including on-road cycle lanes and bus stops adjacent to the site. The 'Bearwood Path' bus stops provide access to services operating at an average frequency of approximately four buses per hour in each direction. The encouragement of public transport use and car sharing is welcomed.

The submitted information indicates that the proposed use would not generate additional vehicle movements during peak hours on the wider highway network. Staff changeover times would be staggered, occurring at 7:00am, 2:30pm and 9:30pm, with the first two broadly aligning with typical movements associated with a residential property. However, there would undoubtedly be additional comings and goings from staff and the children residing at the property. Given the scale of the development, the resulting traffic impact is not considered to be significant and is therefore acceptable in highway terms.

Access and Car Parking

In accordance with WBC Parking Standards, the development is required to provide one parking space per full-time equivalent staff member and one visitor space for every 3 residents. For the proposals, this equates to a minimum of 4 parking spaces for the 3 staff on site at any one time, and 1 space for visitors for the 4 children.

The proposals state 5 car parking spaces are to be provided in the existing driveway. In addition to 3 spaces for staff and a 'house vehicle' (a vehicle kept at the property for transporting residents) leaving one space for visitors.

The Council's Highways Officer has reviewed the application and considers that the provision of five off-street parking spaces would be sufficient to serve a dwelling of this size and its proposed use, in accordance with the Council's adopted Parking Standards.

Regarding access, the existing access is provided via Reading Road (A329) and is to be retained via the existing dropped kerbs. The proposed access arrangements are acceptable.

The Highways Officer advises that, given the proposed intensification of use and the site's access onto an A-road, adequate visibility splays must be retained for vehicles exiting the property. Any existing obstructions within the visibility splays, including hedging, should be removed or appropriately managed to ensure clear sightlines are maintained. Details of the required visibility splays should be demonstrated on a suitably scaled plan. As requested by the Highways Officer, a Swept Path Analysis together with a General Arrangement and Visibility Splays plan was submitted to the Local Planning Authority on 02/02/2026. This information has since been reviewed by the Highways Officer and is considered acceptable. Appropriate planning conditions will be attached to any permission granted to secure compliance with the approved details.

Cycle Parking

The cycle provision in the WBC standards state that 1 LT (*long term*) space shall be provided per 5 members of staff. The cycle parking facilities shall utilise the total number of staff associated with the site.

Drawing '1403 15 a' shows direct access to the rear garden. It would be acceptable to locate the cycle storage facilities in the rear garden. A plan shall be provided clearly showing the location of the cycle storage facilities. As it is expected that staff will travel by sustainable means, cycle storage details are justified – a suitable condition will be attached to any approval.

Waste Provision:

Policy CC04 of the MDD states that all development, including conversions, alterations and extensions shall incorporate suitable waste management facilities, including on-site recycling.

As the proposal would not be dissimilar in terms of intensity to a family dwelling, no additional waste facilities or provision above the existing are considered to be required. Waste provision would remain located at the front of the property.

Other matters:

Concerns have been raised on the grounds that the proposed staffing levels and

ratios are insufficient for the age and needs of the children, and that children's homes must be properly managed with adequately trained staff.

The proposed staffing arrangement of two members of staff on site at any one time to supervise up to four children aged 11–17, with a sleeping-in carer overnight and a short overlap during shift changes, reflects a typical and established model for small-scale children's homes. The suitability of staffing levels would be subject to Ofsted registration, approval and ongoing monitoring, with a requirement for review should the needs of the children change. As such, while the concerns raised are acknowledged, staffing ratios and operational management are controlled through separate legislation and licensing regimes.

Separately, a planning condition would be required to limit the use of the care home as being for a children's care home and no other purpose with the C2 use class. This is to accord with the development that has been applied for and another purpose for the care home may warrant a different assessment against the material considerations discussed in this report.

Planning Balance/ Conclusion

The proposed change of use from C3 Dwellinghouse to C2 Children's Home is considered, on balance, acceptable in principle, as discussed.

It would have minimal impact on the surrounding area due to no external alterations being proposed and the scale of the care home being comparable to that of a large family that could reside in the home. Whilst there are shortcomings of the scheme in terms of the loss of a family home in light of the Council's 5YHLS position, and the level of parking on site being sub-standard, both of these matters, individually and cumulatively are not considered robust enough (based on the evidence presented to Officers) to warrant refusal of the application in this instance. This is in light of the policy support for care homes at national and local level and given the substandard parking situation would continue with the property as a C3(a) dwelling.

The recommendation, on balance, is therefore to grant planning permission, subject to conditions

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):

When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010):

In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons

with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approval
Date:	6 February 2026
Earliest date for decision:	28 January 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>MC</i>
Date:	24.02.2026