

Planning Statement

Proposed Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Resource Base – Keep Hatch Primary School, Ashridge Road, Wokingham RG40 1PG

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)

Prepared by: WBC Development Team

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1. Introduction

This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a full planning application by Wokingham Borough Council for the development of a new Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Resource Base at Keep Hatch Primary School, Ashridge Road, Wokingham. The proposal forms part of the Council's wider strategic programme to expand specialist Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision across the borough, ensuring that pupils with SEMH needs can access targeted support within inclusive mainstream settings.

The proposed development comprises a single-storey, modular building providing three teaching spaces, a calm/sensory room, hygiene facilities, staff areas and a secure outdoor learning environment. The building is to be located on an area of underused hardstanding within the existing school site, avoiding established play space and green areas while maintaining strong physical and operational integration with the school.

The scheme has been designed to RIBA Stage 3 and is supported by a comprehensive suite of technical documentation, including a Design and Access Statement, Transport Assessment, Arboricultural Report, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment, Noise Impact Assessment, and Flood Risk appraisal.

The purpose of this Planning Statement is to assess the proposed development against the statutory Development Plan for Wokingham Borough - comprising the Core Strategy (2010) and the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan (2014) - and other material considerations including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024 as amended 2025). It demonstrates that the development complies with the relevant policy requirements relating to educational need, design quality, accessibility, sustainability, transport, flood risk, biodiversity, landscape, amenity and open space protection.

2. Site and Context

Keep Hatch Primary School is located within a predominantly residential part of Wokingham, positioned between Ashridge Road to the north and Hughes Road / Budes Gardens to the south. The surrounding neighbourhood is suburban in character, comprising mainly two-storey residential dwellings with established tree cover and good pedestrian permeability.

The school campus has evolved incrementally since the 1970s, with successive extensions and alterations contributing to its current layout. Mature trees along the northern boundary provide an effective visual buffer to adjacent residential properties and form part of the school's established landscape setting.

Vehicular and pedestrian access to the main school entrance is taken from Ashridge Road, leading directly to the reception area and car park. Additional pedestrian routes from Budes Gardens and adjacent education use at Foundry College provide further permeability across the southern part of the site.

The proposed SEMH Resource Base is located on an underused hard-surfaced area within the school grounds, well-screened from neighbouring dwellings and close to existing circulation routes and facilities. Its siting avoids established play areas and green spaces while maintaining operational integration with the wider school.

3. Proposed Development

The proposal comprises a single-storey modular Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Resource Base for 15 pupils within the Keep Hatch Primary School site. The building provides three teaching spaces, a calm/sensory room, hygiene facilities, staff areas, storage and a secure outdoor learning environment.

The unit is positioned on an underused area of existing tarmac, avoiding established play space and green areas while remaining well-screened from neighbouring properties and adjacent to Foundry College.

Access for pupils, staff and visitors is via the existing main entrance on Ashridge Road, with pick-up and drop-off using the established school car park. No new vehicle access points are required.

The landscape design provides a secure garden, soft-play areas, a small trim trail, and necessary level changes through ramps and steps. One hawthorn tree requires removal, with a mature birch retained and replacement planting incorporated.

Sustainability measures include air source heat pumps, roof-mounted photovoltaics, and robust modular materials suited to an SEMH setting. Noise, drainage, BNG and access requirements are addressed through the submitted technical reports. Modular delivery minimises disruption and enables a short onsite construction period.

4. Planning Policy

The statutory Development Plan for Wokingham Borough comprises the Core Strategy (2010) and the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan (2014). The proposed SEMH Resource Base has been assessed against the relevant policies of both documents.

Core Strategy (2010):

- CP1 – Sustainable Development: Ensures high-quality, accessible, low-impact development.
- CP2 – Inclusive Communities: Supports provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs within mainstream settings.
- CP3 – General Principles for Development: Secures appropriate design, layout and relationship with surrounding uses.
- CP6 – Managing Travel Demand: Encourages safe, efficient access arrangements.
- CP7 – Biodiversity: Protects ecological features and supports enhancement where appropriate.

MDD Local Plan (2014):

- CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC03 – Green Infrastructure
- CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC06 – Noise
- CC07 – Parking
- CC09 – Development and Flood Risk
- CC10 – Sustainable Drainage
- TB08 – Open Space
- TB23 – Biodiversity and Development

The proposal's compliance with each relevant policy is demonstrated in the subsequent assessment section.

5. Key Planning Issues

5.1 Principle of Development

The proposal delivers a new Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Resource Base as part of Wokingham Borough Council's programme to expand local SEND provision. The development is located within an established primary school site and makes use of an underused hard-surfaced area, avoiding any loss of playing fields or designated open space. The DAS confirms the facility provides specialist spaces consistent with recognised guidance and WBC's ARP model. The principle of development is therefore fully supported by policies promoting inclusive education and sustainable use of existing school sites.

5.2 Design and Layout

The single-storey modular building is positioned to integrate with existing school circulation, using a simple rectilinear form and materials consistent with the wider campus. The layout provides three teaching rooms, calm/sensory space and staff facilities, with direct access to a secure external area. The DAS confirms that siting avoids established play areas and responds to level changes through ramps and steps, ensuring accessible movement throughout. The scale, appearance and arrangement of the building are appropriate to its context and accord with Core Strategy and MDD design policies.

5.3 Landscape and Trees

The scheme retains all significant trees adjacent to the site, with the removal of only one hawthorn (T2) required to accommodate the footprint; no incursions into Root Protection Areas occur under the approved layout. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment confirms no proximity or shading issues and that impacts are low and fully mitigated through protective fencing, no-dig construction where required, and replacement planting of new trees. The proposed secure garden includes soft-play areas, planting and modest hard surfacing, consistent with the DAS.

5.4 Transport

Access is via the existing Ashridge Road entrance, with pick-up and drop-off accommodated through Budges Road and the school car park. The unit generates an estimated seven vehicle movements in both morning and afternoon peaks, staggered outside the main school and Foundry College times, avoiding cumulative peak impacts. Spare on-site staff parking capacity was recorded on site. The surrounding pedestrian network, cycle routes, and bus services provide good sustainable transport options. The TS concludes the development will not result in a severe impact on the highway network.

5.5 Flood Risk and Drainage

The site lies within Flood Zone 1 (very low fluvial risk), with negligible groundwater flood risk and no onsite surface water features. The proposed development reduces peak surface-water discharge to a restricted 3.5 l/s, significantly below the existing 1-year runoff rate of 7.2 l/s. Connection is proposed to the existing Thames Water surface water sewer in Ashridge Road, subject to consent. Attenuation is provided via a below-ground cellular tank sized for the 1 in 100 year + 40% climate change storm without flooding. Exceedance flows follow existing overland pathways away from buildings as shown in the overland flow plan. Overall, the drainage solution is compliant with NPPF, LLFA guidance, and the SuDS hierarchy where feasible.

5.6 Noise and Residential Amenity

A background noise survey undertaken at Budes Gardens establishes daytime and night-time background levels of 46 dB(A) and 32 dB(A) respectively. Plant noise limits are therefore set at or below these values, ensuring a low impact under BS 4142. The nearest residential property is approx. 40m from the proposed plant location, and modelling confirms compliance with BS 4142, BS 8233 and BB93 internal noise criteria with standard attenuation measures. Noise to external play areas also remains below the IoA Schools Design Guide threshold of 55 dB LAeq,30min.

There are no predicted unacceptable amenity impacts for neighbouring residents or the school.

5.7 Ground Conditions / Land Contamination

A Desk Study and Preliminary Risk Assessment identifies no significant contaminant sources either onsite or within the surrounding 500m. The site comprises historic school hardstanding with no evidence of industrial uses, tanks, or landfills. The preliminary risk classification is Low to Low/Moderate, with no need for further intrusive contamination investigation, subject to a watching brief during excavations.

Overall, the ground conditions present no constraint to development.

5.8 Ecology & Biodiversity

The site comprises existing hardstanding with low ecological value, and no designated ecological receptors are located nearby other than standard suburban tree cover. The

development therefore results in no significant ecological impact, with proportional mitigation secured via landscaping.

5.9 Sustainability

The proposal incorporates air source heat pumps, rooftop photovoltaics, and a high-performance modular building fabric. These measures reduce operational energy demand and are consistent with Core Strategy sustainability policies (CC04).

Surface-water discharge rates are significantly reduced relative to the existing site, delivering climate-resilient drainage performance in line with NPPF and LLFA standards. The modular construction method also minimises embodied carbon and reduces onsite disruption.

6. Open Space and NPPF 104

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) Policy TB08 requires that proposals which could result in the loss of open space, sports or recreational land demonstrate consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The previous NPPF paragraph 74 is now found at paragraph 104 of the December 2024 NPPF (as amended February 2025). It states:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields and formal play spaces, should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has clearly shown the space to be surplus to requirements; or*
- b) the loss is replaced by equivalent or better provision in a suitable location; or*
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

The proposed single-storey modular SEND Resource Base responds directly to the identified rise in local SEND demand and forms part of Wokingham Borough Council's borough-wide programme to expand Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs). The scheme would utilise part of the existing tarmacked informal play area. As such, it is necessary to demonstrate compliance with both Policy TB08 and NPPF paragraph 104.

Compliance with NPPF Paragraph 104 – Criterion (c)

In this case, the proposal directly satisfies criterion (c), as the educational, social and community benefits clearly outweigh any minor loss of open space. The key reasons are:

- Demonstrated educational need: The scheme forms part of the Council's *School Places Strategy 2025–2030*, approved by the Executive on 20 November 2025, and addresses the urgent requirement to expand in-borough SEND provision.
- Supporting inclusion locally: The ARP enables SEND pupils to learn closer to home, reducing travel distances, supporting inclusion within a mainstream environment, and reflecting the Council's SEND Vision that pupils should be supported in their local community wherever possible.
- High community benefit: Without in-borough ARP capacity, more pupils would require expensive and less sustainable out-of-borough placements. The proposal therefore delivers strong social and economic value to the local community while improving education outcomes.

These benefits constitute alternative provision with substantially greater community value than the existing low-intensity open space.

Additional Material Considerations

Beyond satisfying NPPF 104(c), several considerations demonstrate that the impact on open space is limited, proportionate, and acceptable:

- The site comprises existing hard-surfaced informal play area, not part of the marked PE pitches or curriculum-designated playing field.
- The school retains sufficient playing field capacity to meet statutory curriculum requirements; no formal sports pitches are displaced.
- The SEND Resource Base includes dedicated external play and learning space for small-group SEND use, providing greater functional value than the small area of hardstanding lost.
- Opportunities exist for qualitative enhancements to surrounding hard and soft landscaping, improving accessibility and delivering a more inclusive outdoor environment for SEND pupils.
- NPPF paragraph 100 requires that “*great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools*”. This is a directly relevant and powerful material consideration in favour of the proposal.

Policy Compliance Conclusion

Taking all factors into account, the development's substantial educational, social and community benefits clearly outweigh the very minor loss of low-value open space. The proposal therefore:

- meets NPPF paragraph 104(c);
- fully complies with Policy TB08; and
- attracts significant positive weight under NPPF paragraph 100 (great weight to school expansion).

The proposal is therefore acceptable in open space terms.

7. Conclusion

This Planning Statement demonstrates that the proposed single-storey SEND Resource Base at Keep Hatch Primary School fully accords with the relevant national and local planning policy framework. The development responds directly to Wokingham Borough Council's identified and urgent need to expand in-borough SEND capacity, forming part of the Council's approved programme to deliver new Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) across the borough. The proposal will enable pupils with SEMH needs to be educated closer to home within an inclusive mainstream environment, providing clear educational, social and community benefits.

The scheme is of an appropriate scale and design for its setting, integrates sensitively into the existing school campus, and provides high-quality internal and external learning space tailored to SEND requirements. Technical assessments submitted with the application confirm that the development can be delivered without causing unacceptable impacts.

In terms of open space, the proposal complies with NPPF paragraph 104(c) and Local Plan Policy TB08. The small area affected comprises existing hardstanding or field edge of low functional value, while the educational and community benefits of improved in-borough SEND provision clearly outweigh this minor loss. Paragraph 100 of the NPPF requires that *great weight* be given to the need to expand and improve schools, providing substantial policy support.

Overall, the proposal is a well-designed, sustainable and policy-compliant enhancement to an established school site. It will deliver significant education and community benefit with no adverse environmental, amenity or technical impacts.