

Planning Statement

Proposed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Resource Base – St Paul’s Junior School, Oxford Road, Wokingham RG41 2YJ

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 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Resource Base at St Paul’s Junior School, Oxford 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 ASD can access high-quality, 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 accommodation, breakout space and a secure external learning environment designed specifically for ASD pupils. The building will be located on an area of underused space adjacent to the school’s nature garden and playing fields, forming a self-contained but well-integrated addition to the existing educational campus. The location has been selected following a formal options appraisal, with the preferred siting chosen for its strong access links, separation from residential boundaries and minimal impact on wider outdoor play areas.

The scheme has been designed to RIBA Stage 3 and is supported by a suite of technical documents including a Design and Access Statement, Transport Assessment, Arboricultural Assessment, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment, Noise Impact Assessment, Sustainability and Energy documentation, Drainage Strategy and a Ground Conditions 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) - as well as 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

St Paul’s Junior School is located on Oxford Road within a predominantly residential area of Wokingham, forming part of a shared education campus with Walter Infant School & Nursery.

The setting is suburban in character, with two-storey housing, mature tree cover and extensive school playing fields providing a well-established educational environment.

Access for vehicles and visitors is taken from the existing Oxford Road entrance and shared car park, with additional pedestrian and service access available from Murray Road. These routes provide safe and convenient circulation across the wider school site.

The school buildings are predominantly single-storey, including the original 1960s block and later modular additions. The surrounding outdoor environment includes hard play areas, formal and informal green spaces, a wildlife/nature garden and the school's heated outdoor swimming pool. Localised areas of poor drainage have been taken into account in identifying an appropriate development location.

3. Proposed Development

The proposal comprises a single-storey modular Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Resource Base providing specialist accommodation for up to 16 pupils. The building contains three teaching spaces, a calm/sensory room, hygiene and WC facilities, staff workspace, breakout space and associated support areas.

The new unit is positioned on an underused part of the school grounds adjacent to the nature garden and playing fields, away from residential boundaries and close to existing pedestrian circulation routes. The location reflects a five-option site appraisal undertaken through the DAS, with the preferred site offering the best balance of accessibility, safeguarding, operational integration and minimal impact on outdoor play space.

A secure, dedicated external learning and play area is provided, incorporating soft-surfaced and sensory zones with direct access from each classroom. The modular construction method minimises disruption during installation and ensures a robust, efficient and consistent building form aligned with WBC's wider SEND programme.

Vehicular access, parking and drop-off arrangements utilise the existing Oxford Road entrance and car park, with pupils accessing the unit via established pedestrian routes across the campus. No new vehicle access is required.

The development provides a purpose-designed, inclusive and self-contained facility that integrates effectively with the existing school environment while meeting the borough's identified need for enhanced ASD provision.

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 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Resource Base as part of Wokingham Borough Council's programme to expand local SEND provision. The development is located within an established primary school campus and makes use of an underused area of grass and informal space adjacent to the school's nature garden and swimming pool. 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 St Paul's and Walter Infant School campus. The layout provides three classrooms, a calm/sensory space, hygiene room, staff and office areas, and a secure, dedicated external learning area. The DAS confirms that siting avoids established play areas and makes effective use of gentle level changes around the nature garden, ensuring accessible routes 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 only one tree (T10 – a Category C weeping willow) requiring removal due to direct conflict with the footprint. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment confirms one minor RPA incursion (T1 at 8.9%), which is fully mitigated through a no-dig construction solution and protective fencing, with no proximity or shading issues arising. Replacement planting is proposed as part of the secure garden. Overall arboricultural impacts are low and fully mitigated.

5.4 Transport

Access is via the existing Oxford Road entrance, with on-site movements managed separately from the main school through two re-allocated drop-off bays at the front of the school. Staff parking demand is modest and can be accommodated through existing spare capacity and sustainable staff travel patterns identified in the TS. The surrounding pedestrian network, cycle links, bus services and proximity to Wokingham Station 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 with negligible groundwater flood risk and no on-site surface water features. The proposed drainage strategy restricts surface water discharge to 1 l/s, below greenfield runoff rates, with attenuation provided in a below-ground cellular tank sized for the 1 in 100 year + 40% climate change storm without flooding. Discharge is made to the existing Thames Water sewer, subject to consent. Exceedance routes are directed south-west across existing grassed areas away from buildings. The strategy complies with NPPF, LLFA requirements and the SuDS hierarchy where feasible.

5.6 Noise and Residential Amenity

A background noise survey undertaken at the nearest noise-sensitive receptor (2 Villiers Mead) identifies daytime and night-time background levels of 42 dB(A) and 30 dB(A) respectively. Plant noise limits are therefore set at or below these thresholds, ensuring a low impact under BS 4142. The nearest dwelling is approx. 35m from the proposed plant location, and predicted levels comply with BS 4142, BS 8233 and BB93 internal criteria with standard attenuation and an acoustic enclosure. External play areas remain comfortably below the IoA Schools Design Guide threshold of 55 dB LAeq,30min. There are no predicted unacceptable amenity impacts.

5.7 Ground Conditions / Land Contamination

A Desk Study identifies no significant contaminant sources either on-site or within the surrounding area. The land comprises historic school use over former agricultural ground, with no record of landfills, industrial uses or elevated risks. The preliminary risk classification is Low to Low/Moderate, and no further intrusive contamination investigation is required, subject to a watching brief during excavations. The ground conditions pose no constraint to development.

5.8 Ecology & Biodiversity

The site comprises mown grass and limited hard surfacing of low ecological value, with no designated ecological assets within or adjacent to the development footprint. The nature garden is retained outside the works area and protected through fencing. Proportional biodiversity enhancement is secured through soft landscaping within the secure play area. No significant ecological impacts arise.

5.9 Sustainability

The proposal incorporates air source heat pumps, a high-performance modular building fabric and a 10.12 kWp PV array, achieving a 40% reduction in regulated CO₂ emissions compared to Part L 2021. These measures substantially reduce operational energy use and align with Core Strategy sustainability policies (including CC04). The drainage strategy delivers a significant reduction in discharge rates, supporting climate resilience. Modular construction also reduces embodied carbon and minimises site 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 ASD 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 a small area of existing grassed informal space immediately south of the school's swimming pool, outside the marked playing fields and outside the formal PE curriculum 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 informal open space. The key reasons are:

- Demonstrated educational need: The scheme forms part of the Council's School Places Strategy 2025–2030 and addresses the urgent requirement to expand in-borough SEND provision through new ARPs.
- Supporting inclusion locally: The ARP enables SEND pupils to learn closer to home, reducing travel distances, improving inclusion within mainstream settings, and meeting the Council's SEND Vision that children should be supported within their local community wherever possible.
- High community benefit: Without in-borough ARP capacity, more children require costly and less sustainable out-of-borough placements. Delivering a local ARP therefore provides significant social, educational and economic value while improving outcomes for pupils and families.

These benefits constitute alternative provision with substantially greater community value than the low-intensity grassed open space currently present on the site.

Additional Material Considerations

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

- The affected land is not part of the marked PE pitches or curriculum playing field, but instead comprises a small parcel of informal grassed space adjacent to the nature garden and swimming pool. The school retains full playing field capacity to meet statutory curriculum requirements.
- No formal sports pitches are displaced, and the proposal does not impede any sports markings or scheduled PE areas.
- Dedicated external play and learning space is provided as part of the ARP, offering higher functional and inclusive value than the low-use space it replaces. The secure sensory garden and soft-surfaced areas enhance SEND pupils' access to outdoor learning and regulated play.
- Qualitative enhancements to surrounding soft and hard landscaping accompany the scheme, improving safety, accessibility and outdoor provision 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 informal 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

The proposal seeks full planning permission for a single-storey modular ASD Resource Base within the grounds of St Paul's Junior School. The development responds directly to Wokingham Borough Council's identified and pressing need to expand in-borough SEND provision through new Additionally Resourced Provisions. The DAS, Transport Statement, Drainage Strategy, Noise Impact Assessment and supporting technical reports collectively demonstrate that the scheme has been carefully designed to integrate into the established school campus while minimising and mitigating environmental effects.

The public benefits of the proposal are substantial. The development delivers essential specialist accommodation, enabling children with ASD to be educated locally, reducing long-distance travel, and supporting inclusion within a mainstream school community. The facility provides a calm and structured learning environment designed in line with WBC's ARP model and DfE guidance, ensuring that pupils' sensory, social and communication needs are met appropriately. These educational and social benefits attract significant weight in the planning balance.

Environmental and technical considerations have been thoroughly addressed. The scheme results in only a very minor loss of low-value grassed informal space, with no impact on marked playing fields or PE curriculum areas, and complies with NPPF paragraph 104(c) and Policy TB08. Arboricultural impacts are minimal; the development incorporates a compliant SuDS strategy restricting discharge to appropriate levels; ground conditions assessments identify low to low/moderate contamination risk; and the unit has been designed and located to minimise impact upon neighbouring amenity.

Sustainable design measures are embedded throughout, including high-performance modular construction, air source heat pumps and a 10.12 kWp PV array, achieving a 40% reduction in regulated carbon emissions relative to Part L 2021. These measures align with local sustainability policies and support the Council's climate objectives.

Taking all matters into account, the significant educational, social and community benefits demonstrably outweigh the limited and mitigated impacts identified. The proposal accords with the Development Plan when read as a whole, meets the tests of NPPF paragraph 104(c), and benefits from the great weight afforded to the expansion and enhancement of schools under NPPF paragraph 100.

The scheme therefore represents a sustainable form of development. Accordingly, planning permission should be granted.