

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	252236
Site Address:	515 Reading Road, Winnersh, RG41 5HL
Expiry Date:	13 November 2025
Site Visit Date:	N/A
Proposal: Application for a certificate of lawfulness to demonstrate that no development is occurring in the change of use from dwelling to children's home.	

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
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

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The existing site comprises a detached chalet bungalow located within an established residential area, with a hardstanding parking area to the front and a private garden to the rear. An extant planning permission (ref: 250222) for the enlargement of the property, allowing for six bedrooms, has been implemented.

Proposed development:

The application is a resubmission of a similar proposal which was recently refused in July 2025 under planning ref: 251112 for the following reason:

The proposed use of the existing dwelling as a residential care home for up to 4 children constitutes development requiring planning permission as it would result in a material change of use from Use Class C3 to C2. The description provided in the Planning Statement falls squarely within a C2 Use Class. The use as described would not form a single household and therefore would be a C2 Use Class. This conclusion is supported by case law. 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

The Certificate now seeks to establish that no development is occurring in the change of use from dwelling to children's home and includes additional supporting information, comprising a legal opinion, revisions to the staff rota, and further clarifications within the Planning Statement.

The proposed use is as a children's home for up to four children, between the ages of 11-17, with learning difficulties and autism to live at the property, looked after by carers.

It is proposed to have at any one time a maximum of 5 staff at any one time who will cover for the 24 hours, including a manager between 09:00 – 17:00. Staff will operate on a rota pattern changeover time would be 7.00am, 2.30pm and 9.30pm with one carer carrying out a night shift from 9.30pm to 7am.

Development Proposal and Contextual Information:

The site relates to an existing 6-bedroom dwellinghouse which is in Class C3 use.

No external changes are required to the property.

According to the submitted planning statement, whilst the duration of the stay for children will vary as this will depend on the needs of the individual child, it is anticipated that the property would be the long-term home for the children with a minimum stay of one year. The property would be the children's primary living accommodation for the duration of their stay.

Assessment:

The Planning Statement acknowledges that the proposed use falls within Use Class C2 and, as such, a change of use from Class C3 would not benefit from permitted development rights. It is well established that a care home facility is typically classified as a C2 use, as defined in the Use Class Order. This classification is supported by relevant case law, judicial precedents, and longstanding interpretations provided by previous circulars

The supporting Planning Statement refers that the house will be a residential Children's Home for up to 4 looked-after children and up to 5 staff throughout a 24

hour period. With the care package outlined, this falls squarely within a C2 use – The Use Class Order states *‘Use for the provision of residential accommodation and care to people in need of care (other than a use within class C3 (dwelling houses)’*. Development Control Practice (DCP) also confirms that *‘Children’s homes fall within Use Class C2 Residential Institutions.’*

In this case, the children would be unrelated, and it is stated that in some cases, the children could stay for a duration as short as one year at the home. Accordingly, they would be unable to form a household by themselves. The Planning Statement argues that there would be surrogate parents, however, a lack of information accompanies this, and it is unclear how this would work in relation to the 24/7 carers who would operate on a shift basis with staff coming in and going out to support the children’s needs. Due to the lack of information provided within the application, the LPA maintain the view that the surrogate parents would be the carers. The care home would not operate a single household based on these facts.

Whilst the applicant acknowledges the proposal represents a change of use, it is still relevant to consider the cases below as these aid in setting out the materiality of the change of use.

The Development Control Practice also highlights the same conclusion based on case law known as *Devon District Council v First Secretary of State and Southern Childcare [2003]*:

‘A children’s home may fall within Use Class C3 (Dwellinghouses) where the total number of residents does not exceed six and the carers and the cared-for live as a single household. This provision has given rise to debate, particularly where carers do not live at the premises, but operate on a shift basis. The key case used is North Devon District Council v First Secretary of State and Southern Childcare [2003] involving the use of a house to provide residential care for two children. In this case it was held that the concept of what constituted a ‘household’ meant more than simply the number of people. It was necessary to assess whether they could truly be regarded as a household and carers who did not live there all the time meant that the use fell within Class C2’.

A further case in Rochdale is referred to in DCP came to the same conclusion as the Devon judgement referred to above. It highlighted that children between 10 – 18 could not reasonably be regarded as being capable of living together as a single household. It was also observed that although there were carers present 24/7, they did not form part of a household because they did not live there and operated in a shift pattern. The following summary is provided by DCP:

‘In Rochdale 3/8/2016 DCS No 400-012-452 the conversion of a dwelling in to a young persons’ care home was found constitute a material change of use requiring planning permission. The appellant argued that the development would fall within class C3(b), which covers uses involving up to six people living together as a single household and receiving care. He explained that the property would be occupied by no more than four young people aged ten to 18 in a domestic environment where they could receive education and therapeutic care as necessary. There would be two to three care staff on a 24-hour shift cycle, with a

10am daily changeover. In support of its refusal to refuse a lawful development certificate (LDC), the council referred to North Devon, where the court held that staff who provided 24-hour care but were not resident could not be regarded as living together in a household. In the case before her, the inspector noted that although adult carers would be present at all times, they would not be living permanently at the property as part of the household. She also remarked that a group of young people containing individuals as young as ten could not reasonably be regarded as being capable of living together as a single household. She concluded, as a matter of fact and degree, that the proposed development would not involve persons living together as a household and therefore would not fall within class C3. In considering whether the change of use was material, the inspector decided that the level of daily activity at the site would be more intensive and constant than might reasonably be expected to be generated by even a large dwellinghouse. The overall character of the use would differ materially from that of a dwellinghouse and the council's decision to refuse an LDC was well founded, she decided.'

A further case in Leeds is identified in DCP that a care home would not fall within a C3 use:

'A claim that a children's care home would fall within the definition of a dwellinghouse was rejected in Leeds 3/3/2014 DCS No 400-003-340 because of the nature of staff supervision. The appellant stated that the property had been used as a dwellinghouse within Class C3. The property would accommodate up to three children and two members of staff would live in and be responsible for domestic chores, cleaning and preparing meals. Staff would sleep in the property for three consecutive nights and be replaced by two other members of staff. The appellant asserted that the use would fall within Class C3(c) which allowed a group of up to six people living together as a single household since no care would be provided to the children other than meeting their everyday needs. An inspector found that the proposals would be closer to being a household than was the case in North Devon where children were under the supervision of a team of six or seven people operating eight-hour shifts. But the use would still involve carers operating a shift system thereby falling outside Class C3(c). Class C3(b) allowed a household of up to six people, with some receiving care such as those with learning disabilities. But the appellant did not propose to house children in need of this type of care. Moreover, it would be used as a place for living and working with the staff being paid to look after the children. It was judged likely to generate more activity and traffic movements which would mean that it would involve a material change of use from a dwellinghouse to a residential care home falling within Class C2.'

The clear starting point is that a care home facility would normally be classed as a C2 use in accordance with the description in the Use Class Order, the case law and judgements cited above. Facilities providing care can fall within a C3 use where they form a single householder and do not exceed the House in Multiple Occupation threshold, but for the reasons stated above, the proposed use would not be operating as a single household.

The applicant also proposes that even if the proposal were a C2 use, planning permission would not be required if the change of use would not be a “material change” of use.

Case law surrounding further decisions and judgements provides greater clarity as to whether a material change of use has occurred or not.

An Inspector’s decision (APP/K5600/X/16/3146855 and APP/K5600/W/16/3146856) set out the application of principles regarding whether a material change of use had occurred, based on the judgment (R (oao) The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea v (1) SSCLG (2) David Reis (3) Gianna Tong [2016] EWHC 1785 (Admin)). The appeal decision stated that the following factors (inter alia) should also be taken into account when determining whether a material change would occur:

- The extent to which an existing use fulfils a proper planning purpose is relevant in deciding whether a change from that use would amount to a material change of use. Thus, the need for a land use, such as housing or a type of housing in a particular area is a planning purpose which relates to the character of the use of land;
- Whether the loss of an existing use would have a significant planning consequence(s), even where there would be no amenity or environmental impact, is relevant to an assessment of whether a change from that use would represent a material change of use;

The difference in use class C3 and C2 fulfils a proper planning purpose, in particular by calculating and addressing housing land supply requirements, the types of housing required and for whom. This is a key function of the planning system set out in section 5 of the NPPF. Therefore, the change between C2 and C3 is not inconsequential for strategic planning and housing delivery. It highlights that there is a crucial and legitimate planning purpose for a separate C2 and C3 Use Class and the different uses would materially affect the character of the use of land.

Whether the use is subject to different policies is also an indicator of whether a change of use has occurred. Policy TB09 refers specifically to care homes, and this is not applicable to C3 dwellings. C2 accommodation is also calculated differently for housing land supply purposes and impacts the borough’s housing stock. The loss of a C3 dwelling is also contrary to Core Strategy Policy CP3. An appeal decision (ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3341373) in the borough to replace two houses with a commercial development was dismissed based on the loss of dwellings – the loss of a residential dwelling results in a material impact.

Applying for different C Use Classes would also cause a decision maker to give weight to that particular use based on the need for it. For example, a lack of care home bed spaces may give rise to a decision maker giving greater weight to such a use than a C3 dwellinghouse. The applicant’s legal opinion does not engage with this policy distinction or with the wider planning purpose behind maintaining separate use classes. Instead, it focuses narrowly on operational comparability and the absence of material environmental effects.

Referring back to the appeal decision and judgment above, it is clear that there is a material difference in character between the existing C3 dwelling and the C2 Care Home use proposed. It is important to note that one of the principles highlighted states that “even where there would be no amenity or environmental impact, [this] is relevant to an assessment of whether a change from that use would represent a material change of use”. Therefore, even if there are no additional environmental impacts as a result of the proposal, a material change of use can occur.

It is further highlighted in the *Sage v Secretary of State for Housing, Local Government and Communities* [2021] Judgment, that treating environmental impacts as a crucial issue when determining whether a change of use would occur is not consistent with established law. The judgment states:

‘a material change of use can be made without any adverse environmental impact at all. Treating environmental impact as the seemingly crucial issue for the judgment as to whether a material change of use has occurred, or a purpose is reasonably incidental is not consistent with clearly established law. The crucial test is whether there has been change in the character of the use. Environmental impact can be relevant as evidence that a material change has occurred, because a use of the new character may be capable of yielding environmental impacts or have done so already. The Guidance [PPG] as written is apt to mislead as to what the real question is, and as to the true but limited relevance of environmental impact.’

Accordingly, the correct legal approach is to focus on whether the character and planning purpose of the use would change, with environmental and amenity effects treated as supporting evidence rather than the determinative test.

The applicant’s Planning Statement asserts that the proposed children’s home would operate in a similar way to a family house and includes a daily movement pattern table to show that staff and visitor movements would not be very different from an ordinary household.

While it is reasonable to look at how daily activities compare, the Council does not consider that the information provided is detailed enough to prove there would be no change in use. The table describes general activities such as school runs, shopping trips, and visits, but it does not show how many staff vehicles would be arriving and leaving at each shift change, what forms of transport staff would use, or how long these movements would overlap during handovers. These details matter, because what distinguishes a care home from a private dwelling is not just how many trips happen overall, but the pattern and timing of those trips.

Staff changeovers at around 7:00 am, 2:30 pm, and 9:30 pm could lead to several vehicles arriving and leaving within a short period. If two staff members were to be replaced at the same time, that could involve up to 4 cars manoeuvring and parking at and around the site at every shift change, 7 days a week. There would also be visits from various professionals from time to time, including some meetings, which would have the potential for multiple vehicle movement and parking, which is quite different from the more spread-out comings and goings typical of a family household.

The supporting legal opinion argues that because the property is in a sustainable location, it would be “reasonable to expect some carers to arrive and leave on foot or by cycle, and not by car”. Sustainability of location may reduce overall trip generation, but it does not alter the character of movements generated by a rota-based, staff-intensive use subject to statutory oversight. The Council is entitled to assume how staff and visiting professionals will travel if the applicant does not provide a travel plan or evidence to show otherwise. In the absence of robust evidence, it is reasonable to anticipate that a significant proportion of staff and visitors would travel by private car, particularly for early morning or late evening shift changes, and during winter months when reduced daylight and colder conditions may further discourage walking or cycling.

The way the home would be run also supports the view that it would not operate like a normal dwelling. The proposal involves shift-based care staff, regular professional visits, and ongoing oversight under an Ofsted registration. These features mean the property would operate to a managed routine rather than the independent, self-contained lifestyle expected of a family home. Even if the total number of vehicle movements or noise levels is not excessive, the fact that the building would be run as a staffed care facility, with organised shifts and professional oversight, makes it different in character from a domestic house.

Three appeal decisions outside the borough are cited in the legal opinion to suggest that small-scale children’s homes can operate similarly to large family dwellings. However, the specific circumstances of those cases are not fully known, and the established court judgments discussed in this officer report clarify when a material change of use arises.

In any event, none of the cited appeals related to homes providing for individuals with learning disabilities and autism, as proposed in the current application. The staffing levels in this case indicate a significantly different operational profile. A recent Inspector’s Decision (APP/Z4718/X/23/3335778, October 2024) found that, while such a use shares some features with a C3 dwellinghouse, the character of the use could be materially different, particularly where provision for emotional and behavioural disorders is involved. The Inspector noted that the residents’ behaviour has the potential to affect neighbouring properties and the overall character of the site use, and concluded that based on the evidence provided, the proposal would amount to a material change of use for which planning permission is required.

In summary, the proposed development would result in a material change of use. In this case, the different use classes fulfil a proper planning purpose and there are different policy and strategic implications between the existing use and the one proposed. There would be a material change in the character of the site and the way it functions. Planning permission is therefore required for this change of use.

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:	Refuse. Planning Permission Required
Date:	12 November 2025
Earliest date for decision:	15 October 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>MC</i>
Date:	13.11.2025