



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT LTD

PLANNING STATEMENT

IN RESPECT OF PROPOSALS

AT

EMMANUEL CHURCH CENTRE
SOUTH LAKE CRESCENT
WOODLEY
RG5 3QW

January 2025



Site: Emmanuel Church Centre, South Lake Crescent, Woodley, RG5 3QW
Client: Emmanuel Church Centre
Date: January 2025

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APPENDIX 1 – Pre-application advice with ref: 242382



SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Statement is submitted to Wokingham Borough Council (*“the Council”*) on behalf of the Emmanuel Church Centre (*“the Applicant”*) in support of a full planning application for the replacement of two existing portacabins for a single portacabin for charity use, alterations to car parking and landscaping and other associated works at Emmanuel Church Centre, South Lake Crescent, Woodley, RG5 3QW (*“the application site”*).
- 1.2 The submission of this application follows an enforcement enquiry with ref. RFS/2024/089106 and RFS/2024/089200 and subsequent pre-application enquiry with ref: 242382, which sought the Council’s view on the on a proposed amendment to the car parking provision and landscaping granted under planning application LPA ref: 191989, as well as seeking the Council’s advice regarding the replacement of the two existing portacabins on the site for a single portacabin for charity use. The submission of this application follows the pre-application advice received, dated 22 October 2024.
- 1.3 The pre-application response has been taken into consideration when developing the application proposals. The feedback from the Council confirmed their willingness to consider the permanent presence of the proposed portacabin in the proposed location. Consequently, the previously suggested 5-7 year temporary use is no longer applicable.
- 1.4 Two car parking design options were presented as part of the pre-application enquiry. The Applicant selected the option that reduces parking by four spaces compared to the previously approved planning application with LPA ref: 191989, while also minimising the potential impact on existing trees by avoiding further groundwork. This option retains 52 square meters of grassed verge, which will be planted to enhance biodiversity. Considering budgetary constraints, this option is deemed the most suitable for fulfilling the Applicant's needs.
- 1.5 It is considered that the proposed development is of significant merit, namely:
 - The proposal would enable the existing food charities operating from the site to continue operating for the benefit of the community;
 - The proposal preserves the character of the site and thus has no adverse effect on the character of the area;
 - The proposal protects the amenity of neighbouring properties;
 - The proposed new planting and changes to the landscaping will result in biodiversity enhancements and safety pedestrian circulation; and
 - The proposed changes to vehicular access and car parking facilities will enhance safety, space efficiency and accessibility.



- 1.6 This Statement continues in Section 2 where an assessment of the site and its surroundings is provided. Section 3 provides an overview of the site's planning history with Section 4 detailing the proposed scheme. Details of the application proposal are set out at Section 5, with an overview of planning policy provided at Section 6. A description of the key planning issues detailed at Section 7, with the conclusions set out at Section 8.



SECTION 2: SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1 Emmanuel Church Centre is located in St Luke's Crescent, within a residential area of Woodley, Reading some 0.7 miles (15-minute walk) south from Woodley Town Centre. Woodley is a town of some 26,000 people, located to the eastern edge of Reading. The site benefits with immediate connection to Junction 10 of the M4.
- 2.2 The site consists of a two-storey community/church building with associated parking area. Two portacabins are also present on the site.
- 2.3 The site fronts South Lake Crescent along its south, east, and west boundaries. The northern boundary, which adjoins residential development, is defined by a wooden fence and an area of dense, mature vegetation, ensuring a good level of privacy.
- 2.4 The surrounding area is primarily residential in character with the site being surrounded by residential uses.
- 2.5 The site is located within Flood Zone 1, in an area with a low probability of flood risk and suitable for residential development.
- 2.6 The site is not statutory or locally listed and the site is not located within a conservation area.
- 2.7 Emmanuel Church is located in south-east Woodley, in the close proximity of Drovers Way estate, which ranks high on the government's index of multiple deprivation. The church was built in the mid-1960s as a parish hall for St John's Church. It became 'Emmanuel Church' in 1991, when a group of 11 established the community. In 2012, the building was refurbished and an outdoor all-weather terrace and play surface were added. The current main building is not consecrated, which together with the large garden, makes a multi-functional space with great flexibility in usage and development. However, there are still space limitations to what the Church is able to do in favour of the community. The vicarage, which is used for meetings and hospitality, is located 1.8 miles from the church. This location is obviously not ideal for meeting people living close to the church.
- 2.8 The church has greatly contributed to forming social cohesion and offering support to the community in this part of Woodley, through various initiatives, among which: youth clubs, toddler groups, sewing group for retired people, money management courses, contemporary Christian worship and a new base for Woodley Foodbank. Many of these activities are contingent upon having larger and better facilities where they can take place.
- 2.9 Three foodbank charities currently operate on site, namely:

- Woodley Foodbank which serves the local area and helps fight food poverty;
- Lunch Bunch which provides packed lunches for children in need during school holidays; and
- Share which provides the community free access to fresh food.

2.10 The Woodley Foodbank currently has storage space on the main building whilst Lunch Bunch and Share currently have their storage facilities within portacabins located adjacent to the car park.

Site's Photographs



Fig 1. Aerial view of the application site



Fig 2. View of the front (south) elevation of Emmanuel Church Centre



Fig 3. View of the rear (north) elevation of the site



Fig 4. View of the site's car park



SECTION 3: PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 A review of the site's planning history has been undertaken using Wokingham's Council online database. The planning history of the site is set out below:

Application Ref	Proposal	Decision	Date of Decision
191989	Full planning application for proposed single storey side extension to existing church building following demolition of existing portacabin plus changes to fenestration, internal alterations and proposed installation of solar panels to existing building	Approved	04 Sep 2019
163552	Full planning application for the proposed erection of a two storey side and rear extensions plus a single storey side/rear extension to the existing building	Approved	03 Jul 2017
092104	Proposed addition of 2 portacabins to Emmanuel site for storage and meeting room (Part retrospective)	Approved	06 Oct 2009
052444	Application for temporary permission sought for 5 years for the erection of building for Sunday school & midweek meetings	Approved	18 Nov 2005
050648	Application for temporary permission for the installation of a portacabin for Sunday school and midweek meetings	Refused	12 Sep 2005
960579	Proposed Renewal of Permission 40961 For The Retention Of Mobile Unit	Approved	08 Nov 1996



- 3.2 The most recent application on site with LPA ref:191989 seeking '*Full planning application for proposed single storey side extension to existing church building following demolition of existing portacabin plus changes to fenestration, internal alterations and proposed installation of solar panels to existing building*' was granted planning permission on 26 September 2019.
- 3.3 This permission has now been implemented; however, the Council considers that the approved set of plans included landscaping works have not been fully fulfilled. Concerns were raised by the Council through enforcement enquiries with ref: RFS/2024/089106 and RFS/2024/089200. In this regard, officer's have highlighted the following:
- 1) Bollards in front entrance not built.
 - 2) Bike racks not built according to approved plans.
 - 3) Disabled/larger parking spaces not designated.
 - 4) Tarmac not extended to the front of car park, leading to narrower access road to parking and loss of parking spaces.
- 3.4 Accordingly, this application seeks to regularise any breach of planning control and also replace the existing portacabins on site for a single portacabin.



SECTION 4: THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 As previously detailed, this application seeks to regularise any breaches of planning in relation to the approved and implemented application LPA ref: 191989 which saw an enlarged entrance lobby, a new office and larger kitchen. The extension to the east comprises of two meeting rooms, Food bank space and storage. The main hall was enlarged towards the rear of the building for new storage space. On the first floor, a third meeting room was constructed. The proposal included additional parking capacity, foodbank loading and disabled parking space.
- 4.2 Regarding the changes to the approved landscaping and car parking, the Church proposes maintaining a single vehicular access/exit to the car park, which would result in the loss of the vehicular entrance facing St Luke's Crescent. This change is intended to improve safety for pedestrians, including children and members of the public, who use the main entrance on St. Luke's Crescent. The following associated works have therefore been omitted in the implementation of LPA ref: 191989:
- Removal of soft landscaping and its replacement with hardstanding on the southern side of the site; and
 - Installation of bollards.
- 4.3 The existing vehicular access on the site's southern boundary is proposed to be retained as an emergency access. A retractable (hinged) bollard is proposed to be installed on the concrete drive. Furthermore, the existing timber post and rail fence is proposed to be extended to the edge of the concreted access. These measures will ensure safe pedestrian access and allow an ambulance to park directly in front of the main church entrance in the event of an emergency.
- 4.4 The applicant proposes retaining the existing soft landscaping on the southern corner and the existing grassed area on the southwest corner of the site. These areas are also proposed for planting to enhance biodiversity.
- 4.5 The proposal would comprise 29 car parking spaces, representing a reduction of 4 car parking spaces when compared to what was approved under LPA ref: 191989. Notwithstanding, the reduction in hardstanding for car parking will result in approximately 52sqm of soft landscaping to enhance biodiversity on the site.
- 4.6 Overall, it is considered that the proposed changes to the approved scheme provide a more efficient and sustainable solution to the site's public realm.



Installation of Portacabins

- 4.7 As previously detailed, Lunch Bunch, Share and the Woodley Foodbank charities currently operate a community service from Emmanuel's Church.
- 4.8 Lunch Bunch is a charity that provides packed lunches for children in need during school holidays, whilst Share provides the community free access to fresh food. The Woodley Foodbank serves the local area and helps fight food poverty. Food parcels can be collected from Emmanuel Church on most weekday mornings. The Woodley Foodbank also has drop-off points at Waitrose, Asda, and other local locations. They accept tinned or dried food, financial donations, and plastic bags to use for parcels.
- 4.9 The Church has been asked to make some changes to the way it currently operates to streamline the services that these charities provide to the community.
- 4.10 Two portacabins are currently installed on the site which the proposal seeks to replace with a single larger, 40'x 12' portacabin. Details of the proposed portacabin are detailed within the submitted plan 'Prefabricated Cabin' with ref: 20-10.
- 4.11 When Woodley Foodbank first relocated to the Emmanuel site, it was intended to occupy a room in the new building extension. However, by the time the building project was completed, it had already outgrown the capacity of that room, so has been housed the existing portacabin since, and used the room in the main building for storage. The arrangements in this proposal would now see Woodley Foodbank consolidate their operations and storage space in a single place, the new portacabin proposed. Two further food charities, Lunch Bunch and Share, who currently occupy a second cabin on the site, would then move their functions to the room in the main building, and both the old cabins removed.
- 4.12 The Woodley Foodbank currently operates in the mornings, Monday to Friday. There are usually two volunteers on a shift at a time, who are welcome to make use of the main building for toilet and kitchen facilities while working in the cabin. Clients come to pick up food parcels, during the opening hours. The parcels are heavy, so most who come to the site drive, and make use of the carpark. There would only usually be one or two clients on site at a time. They don't stay for long periods of time, waiting only while a parcel is made up for them. Other clients do not visit the site at all, as their food parcels are delivered to them at home by the volunteers. Because this side of the distribution has accounted for most of the increase in the time it has been housed on the site, the vehicle traffic created by Woodley Foodbank has not noticeably risen but remained quiet and steady.



- 4.13 The other biggest user of the Emmanuel site is Share Woodley, which operates on Monday afternoons. It draws a team of around 15 volunteers and serves about 80 clients during a weekly session. Volunteers arrive early in the afternoon 1.30-2.00pm and leave around 5.30pm. Clients can come from 3.30-4.30pm. The majority of people walk or drive to the site, and most do not stay for the whole session – arrives and departures are both staggered. In terms of operations, the food is kept for a short time during the week in the second portacabin and then carried into the main building by volunteers on a Monday. Any remaining food waste is picked up by a local farm after the session. Moving the operations entirely into the building would facilitate a smoother operation. Therefore, the proposal would carry on the existing use and would not impact the vehicle use around the site.
- 4.14 Lunch Bunch operate only in school holidays, when a small team of volunteers use the main building once a week to make up packed lunches for local children in need. These are then delivered to clients off site. Therefore, the proposal would carry on the existing use, but move their storage area inside along with Share. It would not impact vehicle traffic.
- 4.15 Overall, the Church is seeking to rationalise the space available for these three charities and provide a long-term sustainable solution so that they can continue to operate on the site to serve the community.

SECTION 5: PLANNING POLICY

- 5.1 The Section of the Planning Statement sets out an overview of national and local planning policy relevant to the proposed development Including policies relevant to design and access matters.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.2 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was last updated in December 2024 and now constitutes guidance for local planning authorities and decision takers and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications (paragraph 2).
- 5.3 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (paragraph 7).
- 5.4 Paragraph 8 confirms that there are three overarching objectives to sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways.
- An economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
 - A social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural wellbeing; and
 - An environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making efficient use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 5.5 These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and application of policies in the framework; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. It is confirmed that the planning system should play an active role in guiding development to sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into



account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area (paragraph 9).

- 5.6 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 10). For decision takers this means, inter alia, approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay.
- 5.7 Local Planning Authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible (paragraph 39).
- 5.8 Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing (paragraph 48). Local Authorities may give weight to relevant policies and emerging plans according to the stage at which they are at and the extent of unresolved objections (paragraph 49).
- 5.9 Paragraph 96 confirms that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which, inter alia, promotes social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other. Paragraph 98 confirms that to provide social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs planning policies should plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments and take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being of all sections of the community.
- 5.10 Transport considerations must be integrated from the outset of plan-making and development proposals, employing a vision-led approach to create sustainable and desirable places. This involves early community engagement regarding transport, integrating movement patterns and infrastructure into scheme designs to contribute to high-quality places, assessing and mitigating development impacts on transport networks, leveraging existing and planned infrastructure and evolving technologies, promoting sustainable transport modes like walking, cycling, and public transport, and identifying and mitigating the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure while pursuing net environmental gains (paragraph 109).



- 5.11 Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the needs for homes and other uses, whilst safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions (paragraph 124).
- 5.12 The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps to make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is the effective engagement between applicants, communities, Local Planning Authorities and other interests throughout the process (paragraph 131).
- 5.13 Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development; are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping; are sympathetic to local character and history; establish or maintain a strong sense of place; and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users (paragraph 135).
- 5.14 Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals (paragraph 137) and permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions (paragraph 139).
- 5.15 Paragraph 200 states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that new development can be integrated effectively with existing businesses and community facilities (such as places of workshop). Existing businesses and facilities should not have unreasonable restrictions placed on them as a result of development permitted after they were established. Where the operation of an existing business or community facility could have a significant adverse effect on new development (including changes of use) in its vicinity, the applicant (or '*agent of change*') should be required to provide suitable mitigation before the development has been completed.

The Development Plan

- 5.16 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that all applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.17 In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Statutory Development Plan for the site is the Wokingham Borough



Local Development Framework which comprises of the Core Strategy (adopted January 2010) and the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted February 2014). The Wokingham Borough Council Design Guide SPD (July 2007) is also relevant.

- 5.18 Within the policy map, the site is located in an area within Woodley - Major Development Locations, within a Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone and within an SSSI Impact Risk Zone,

Wokingham Core Strategy Development Plan Document (January 2010)

- 5.19 Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development) seeks to ensure development within the borough enhance the overall sustainability of the area through minimising impact on the environment.
- 5.20 Policy CP2 (Inclusive Communities) states that all new proposals that contribute to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities (including the provision of community facilities) will be supported when they address the requirements of:
- An ageing population, particularly in terms of housing, health and wellbeing;
 - Children, young people and families, including the co-ordination of services to meet their needs;
 - People with special needs, including those with a physical, sensory or learning disability or problems accessing services; and
 - The specific identified needs of minority groups in the borough, including Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople and black and minority ethnic groups.
- 5.21 Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development) sets out the principles development proposals need to follow to ensure they are appropriate to the site and the surrounding area in terms of design, amenity, ecology, amongst others. Part h states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities. Part j specifies that proposals should not lead to a loss of community or recreational facilities/land or infrastructure unless suitable alternative provision is available.
- 5.22 Policy CP6 (Managing Travel Demand) confirms that planning permission will be granted for schemes that provide choices in the mode of transport available and which minimises the distance people need to travel, provides appropriate vehicular parking, enhance road safety and do not cause highway problems or lead to traffic related environmental problems, amongst others.
- 5.23 Policy CP9 (Scale and Location of Development Proposals) states that the scale of development proposals in Wokingham borough must reflect the existing or



proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility.

Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (February 2014)

- 5.24 Policy CC01 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development) confirms that when considering development proposals, the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF.
- 5.25 Policy CC03 (Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping) requires development proposals to provide new or protect and enhance existing green infrastructure including trees, hedges and other landscape features.
- 5.26 Policy CC06 (Noise) states that Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed noise impacts to protect noise sensitive receptors (both existing and proposed) from noise impacts in line with Appendix 1 of the MDD.
- 5.27 Policy CC07 (Parking) confirms that schemes need to provide or retain appropriate overall level of off-street parking in line with standards set out in Appendix 2 of the MDD.
- 5.28 Policy CC09 (Development and Flood Risk (from all sources)) mandates that new development be directed towards areas of minimal flood risk. This is achieved through the application of a sequential approach that considers all potential sources of flooding. The policy stipulates that development must not increase flood risk at the application site or in surrounding areas. Furthermore, it encourages development that improves existing flood risk conditions.
- 5.29 Policy CC10 (Sustainable Drainage) requires all proposed schemes to manage surface water arising from the proposed development -including considering climate change- in a sustainable manner.
- 5.30 Policy TB21 (Landscape Character) details that proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape. Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues
- 5.31 Policy TB23 (Biodiversity and Development) confirms that planning permission for development proposals will only be granted when they are

Wokingham Borough Design Guide SPD (June 2012)

- 5.32 Policy R23 (Alterations and Extensions) states that alterations and extensions to buildings should be well designed, respond positively to the original building,



contribute positively to the original building, contribute positively to the local character and relate well to neighbouring properties.



SECTION 6: PLANNING ISSUES

- 6.1 Having reviewed the relevant planning policy background and the characteristics of the site and surrounding area, and the proposed development, it is considered that the following issues are most relevant to the consideration of the application.
- a. Principle of the Development;
 - b. Highways, Parking and Access;
 - c. Design and Character of the Area;
 - d. Amenity;
 - e. Landscaping and Trees;
 - f. Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain; and
 - g. Flood Risk.

Principle of the Development

- 6.2 Within the NPPF there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It is confirmed that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (paragraph 7). Paragraph 8 confirms that there are three overarching objectives to sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.
- 6.3 Section 8 (Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities) of the NPPF requires Local Planning Authorities to plan positively for local community facilities and services, and to guard against the unnecessary loss of such services and facilities, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs and ensure that established facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community. (paragraph 98)
- 6.4 According to Policy CP2, planning permission will be granted for developments that contribute to sustainable and inclusive communities by providing necessary community facilities. This includes addressing the needs of children, young people, and families through coordinated service provision.
- 6.5 Policy CP3 states that development must be appropriate to the site and surrounding area in terms of design, amenity, ecology, amongst others. Part h states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities. Part j specifies that proposals should not lead to a loss of community or recreational facilities/land or infrastructure unless suitable alternative provision is available.
- 6.6 The acceptability of the principle of development was confirmed at pre-application stages.



- 6.7 The application seeks to rationalise the space available on the site and provide a long-term sustainable solution for the Woodley Foodbank, Lunch Bunch and Share charities to continue to operate from the site to serve the community.
- 6.8 The proposed application therefore directly meets this requirement of the NPPF and Policies CP2 and CP3, providing an important community resource.

Highways, Parking and Access

- 6.9 The Church seeks to rationalise the space available for the three charities currently operating on the site and provide a long-term, sustainable solution for their continued community service. Therefore, the proposal maintains the existing use and will not increase vehicle movements.
- 6.10 The application site is located within a residential area, with St. Luke's Crescent subject to a 30 mph speed limit.
- 6.11 The proposed development will utilise the existing vehicular access west of the site as the sole point of access and egress to the car park. The existing southern access will be closed to general vehicular traffic but retained for emergency vehicle access as required. This will improve pedestrian circulation and ensure safe pedestrian access to the Church.
- 6.12 A post-pre-application email inquiry to Officer Kieran Newmann confirmed the acceptability of retaining the southern vehicular access for emergency vehicles. Feedback from a WBC Highways officer stated *'Regarding the access, we can accept the access to the south to be treated as emergency access by placing removable bollards on the land in the middle of the concrete drive and extending the existing wooden rail to the concrete. As such, the access (instead of bollards) will be conditioned as a whole.'*
- 6.13 The proposed car parking layout will provide a total of 29 spaces, including three disabled parking spaces. While the pre-application stage indicated a preference for 31 spaces, that layout would have required groundworks potentially impacting the tree protection area of a tree. Therefore, to avoid any impact on existing trees, the existing car park hardstanding will be retained, and the grass verge will be planted with wildflowers to enhance biodiversity.
- 6.14 It is considered that sufficient car parking spaces are available on site, which would serve the local community using the Church facilities. Notably, the pre-application response was positive on the proposal stating *'On another note, the reduction and variations in vehicle parking spaces proposed are unlikely to have any adverse impacts as the site is located within a residential estate where access to the site is viable via walking, cycling and other forms of sustainable transport.'*



- 6.15 The pre-application response noted that the proposed parking spaces (4.8m x 2.4m) are smaller than the recommended 5m x 2.5m. This is due to site constraints. However, the Officer's report confirmed the proposed dimensions as acceptable. This was further confirmed via email with the case officer, who *stated 'The absolute minimum dimensions we can accept for existing sites with spatial constraints are: 4.8m x 2.4m with a 1.2m access zone in front and on both sides.'*
- 6.16 Details of operations of the different charities on the site are detailed in the proposal section of this report. It is considered that the proposed development by virtue of its scale and nature will not generate excessive vehicle movements and it is considered that South Lake Crescent is able to accommodate the volume of traffic generated without having a significant adverse impact on the free flow of traffic and highway safety using the existing access.
- 6.17 Based on the above, the application proposal is considered to be in line with Policies CP6 and CC07, and no highway impacts are anticipated.

Design and Character of the Area

- 6.18 The NPPF states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development indivisible from good planning and should contribute positively to making places better for people.
- 6.19 In this regard, the Officer's response confirms that although the proposed replacement portacabin is utilitarian in style, because it would be well set back from the roadside and its single storey form would not be visually dominant. The Officer's response further confirms that the proposed one-way access to the site is unlikely to have an adverse visual impact on the character of the area.
- 6.20 As a result of budgetary restrictions, the Applicant has chosen a prefabricated portacabin. The application proposal represents a budget-conscious, modular solution designed for rapid assembly and flexible use, enabling the charities operating on site to maximise their resources and begin serving their beneficiaries promptly. It is considered that the proposed replacement portacabin's design is adequate for the intended purpose and will maintain the character of the site and the surrounding area.
- 6.21 The overall form and materials of the proposal have been carefully considered as to maintain a pleasing relationship with the site. The proposed portacabin will be located in an unobtrusive location and will not have visual prominence on the site. The submitted plans demonstrate that the proposal complements the existing complex of buildings on site, thus retaining the character of the site and the wider area.

- 6.22 It has been discussed somewhere else within this report that the site lies surrounded by fencing, hedges and mature trees which generally conceal the car park area and portacabin building on site. As such, it is considered that the proposal would not have an effect on landscape character of the general area or negatively affect visual amenity.
- 6.23 Overall, it is considered that the proposed changes to the site will fit harmoniously with the existing building on site and protect the character of the site and surrounding area in line with policy requirements.

Amenity

- 6.24 The application proposal primarily seeks to regularise landscape matters and replace two existing portacabins with a single portacabin located broadly in the same area as one of the existing structures.
- 6.25 The proposed replacement portacabin will be located along the site's northern boundary, adjacent to the car park. This area benefits from mature, dense vegetation along its boundary with neighbouring residential dwellings, providing a good level of privacy between properties.
- 6.26 As the proposal is for a replacement, existing conditions will largely remain the same. Although the proposed replacement will be slightly larger in footprint than the existing portacabin, this increase will not have a detrimental impact on neighbouring properties. The replacement will not be taller than the existing portacabin and is of a similar design already present on site. Therefore, the proposal will not have a significantly negative effect on the site or surrounding area in terms of overlooking, overbearing impact, or loss of light.
- 6.27 Concerning noise, the existing activities on the site are low-traffic generators and will maintain their current operational patterns, as detailed elsewhere in this document. As such, no increase in site usage or vehicular movements is anticipated that would negatively affect residential amenity.
- 6.28 The proposed car parking amendments will not impact the established existing arrangements on site and, therefore, will not affect any surrounding residential property.
- 6.29 Overall, it is considered that the proposed scheme would have an acceptable impact upon the amenity of neighbouring adjoining properties and is therefore fully compliant with Policies CP3, CC06 and R23 of the Borough Design Guide SPD.
- 6.30 Significantly, the pre-application response raised no concerns regarding the amenity of neighbouring properties.

Landscaping and Trees

- 6.31 The proposal will retain all the existing trees and hedges on the site and no works are proposed that would impinge on any of the tree's root protection areas. The application is submitted with a proposed Soft Landscaping Plan with ref: 20-4 and Hard Landscaping Plan with ref: 20-05 which sets out the soft and hard landscaping strategy and confirms that no harm to the vegetation or mature trees will arise from the proposal.
- 6.32 Conversely, the proposed landscape strategy focuses on enhancing biodiversity with additional planting. Hard landscaping will not be extended or replaced; instead, improvements such as demarcating car parking areas will be implemented to enhance safety, space efficiency, and accessibility.
- 6.33 The main access to the site will be improved through the extension of the existing timber post and rail fence to the edge of the concreted access and the installation of a retractable (telescopic) bollard on the concrete drive to ensure the proposed area is only used by an emergency vehicle when required, ensuring pedestrian safety.
- 6.34 Based on the above, it is considered that the proposed soft and hard landscaping and planting will have significant benefits to visitors to the site and the wider area. As such, the application proposal will provide an enhanced level of landscaping and amenity space on the site align with the requirements of Policies CC03 and TB21.
- 6.35 The pre-application confirms that WBC Landscape and Trees identified no potential for further harm to vegetation on or adjacent to the site.

Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain

- 6.36 The proposal has been designed taking into consideration any ecological features to ensure that there are no adverse ecological impacts where possible. In this regard, no trees are proposed to be removed and new planting is proposed in aid to the creation of habitat for flora and fauna.
- 6.37 The site does not comprise any priority habitats with the site largely comprising of short grass and hardstanding. It is considered that the proposal will not adversely affect the natural/ecological value of the site and the wider area and conversely would provide additional planting benefitting the site and wider environment in line with Policy TB23.
- 6.38 Paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A of The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) requires all applicable developments to have a positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity.



- 6.39 The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 prescribe exemptions for categories of development to which biodiversity net gain does not apply. Regulation 4, De Minimis Exemption, confirms that the BNG condition does not apply when the following two conditions are met:
- the development must not impact on any onsite priority habitat; and
 - if there is an impact on other onsite habitat, that impact must be on less than 25 square metres (e.g. less than a 5m by 5m square) of onsite habitat with a biodiversity value greater than zero and on less than 5 metres of onsite linear habitat (such as a hedgerow)
- 6.40 The proposal seeks to replace two portacabins for a single portacabin located broadly in the same location as one of the existing portacabins with minor changes to the car parking layout and soft/hard landscaping. The replacement portacabin will replace the existing portacabin along the northern boundary of the site. The second portacabin which is proposed to be removed, is currently located over existing grass protection mats which are proposed to be retained.
- 6.41 Overall, the replacement portacabin will represent a reduction in 8 sqm of ground coverage. As such, the development will not impact on on-site priority habitats and impact less than 25 sqm of on-site habitat and 5 metres of on-site linear habitats such as hedgerows. Consequently, the proposal falls below the threshold (Please refer to supporting existing and proposed set of plans) and the development is exempt from BNG requirements.
- 6.42 It is considered that, overall, the proposal will have a positive impact on habitat inside of the red line boundary maintaining the grassed boundary south of the site which is also proposed to be sown with wildflower mix resulting in biodiversity enhancements in line with Policy TB23. Notably the pre-application response confirms that *'There are no anticipated ecological implications resulting from the proposed development'*.

Flood Risk

- 6.43 The site lies within Flood Zone 1, with a low probability of flooding from rivers and the sea. Accordingly, the proposed development is located in an appropriate location for a community use which is not at risk of flooding.
- 6.44 The application proposes to maintain the existing site layout with minor adjustments to soft and hard landscaping. Two existing portacabins will be replaced with a single, larger portacabin for charity use, providing storage space. Because the replacement portacabin is smaller than the two it replaces, the proposed changes will have a negligible positive impact on the site's permeable coverage, maintaining existing conditions. Consequently, there will be no increase in vulnerability post-development.

- 6.45 The existing site usage is “less vulnerable” as the site is in assembly/community use. Post development, the site will remain “less vulnerable” throughout as the proposal will not significantly alter existing ground conditions on site.
- 6.46 Taking the above into consideration, it is not considered that the application proposal gives rise to any flooding concerns and the proposal is fully in line with the requirements of Policy CC09 and CC10.



SECTION 7: CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 This Statement is submitted to Wokingham Borough Council in support of a full planning application for the replacement of two existing portacabins for a single portacabin for charity use, alterations to car parking and landscaping and other associated works at Emmanuel Church Centre, South Lake Crescent, Woodley, RG5 3QW
- 7.2 This Statement provides an overview of the site and its context and sets out the principles on which the development proposal has been based.
- 7.3 The applicant is of the view that the principle of development is acceptable, and the proposed layout makes efficient use of the land whilst providing an important community facility.
- 7.4 The proposal has been sensitively designed to fit in with the surrounding built form while providing additional community space that is clean, sustainable and will result in a streamlined service to the community. The proposed portacabin would fit seamlessly in with the existing streetscene and is located to protect the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.
- 7.5 It is considered that the proposed development is of significant merit, namely:
- The proposal would enable the existing food charities operating from the site to continue operating for the benefit of the community;
 - The proposal preserves the character of the site and thus has no adverse effect on the character of the area;
 - The proposal protects the amenity of neighbouring properties;
 - The proposed new planting and changes to the landscaping will result in biodiversity enhancements and safety pedestrian circulation; and
 - The proposed changes to vehicular access and car parking facilities will enhance safety, space efficiency and accessibility.
- 7.6 Given the above, it is considered that the proposal is in accordance with National Policy and the Development Plan and therefore, it is kindly requested that permission is granted.

APPENDIX 1

