

Planning Statement

Prepared on behalf of: Ellies Place Ltd

Site Address: 94 Hartsbourne Road, Reading, RG6 5SJ

Proposal: Change of use from C3 Residential Dwellinghouse to C2 Residential Institution (Children's Residential Care Home) — Residential Children's Home

Application Type: Full Planning Permission

Local Planning Authority: Wokingham Borough Council

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1.0 Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared by Inhaus Planning on behalf of Ellies Place Ltd in support of a Full Planning Permission application for the change of use of the dwelling at 94 Hartsbourne Road, Reading, RG6 5SJ from its current C3 residential dwellinghouse use to a C2 Residential Institution, specifically a children's residential care home accommodating up to four young people aged 5 to 18 years with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

The application site falls within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough Council. The proposed use would represent a sensitive, low-impact change of use that is consistent in character with the surrounding residential environment. The home will operate as a small, family-style household, with no external alterations proposed and no material change to the outward appearance of the property. The application is accompanied by a suite of ten supporting documents addressing care management, community engagement, transport, security, noise, missing person protocols, need, and sustainability.

This statement sets out the planning context for the proposal, assesses it against relevant national and local planning policies, and demonstrates that Full Planning Permission should be granted. The applicant is committed to operating the home in full compliance with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and will seek Ofsted registration prior to the admission of any young person.

2.0 Site and Context

The application site comprises a four-bedroom dwelling located at 94 Hartsbourne Road, Reading, RG6 5SJ, within the administrative boundary of Wokingham Borough Council. The property is situated within an established residential neighbourhood characterised by semi-detached and detached family dwellings of largely post-war construction. The surrounding area is predominantly residential in character, with local amenities, schools, parks, and public transport connections within reasonable proximity.

The property benefits from off-street parking provision for three vehicles to the front, together with a ground floor office and sleep-in facility to support 24-hour staffing arrangements, and cycle storage accommodating three bicycles. No external alterations are proposed as part of this application, and the outward appearance of the building will remain entirely consistent with the domestic character of the surrounding street scene.

It is noted that the property appears on the HMO licensing register maintained by the relevant authority. It is the applicant's clear position, however, that this is a licensing matter governed by the Housing Act 2004, and not a planning matter. The absence of any planning permission on the planning register for a change of use away from C3, combined with the absence of an Article 4 Direction removing permitted development rights for the C3-to-C4 change of use in this location, confirms that no such change of use ever took place in planning terms. The use of a small dwelling as an HMO with fewer than seven occupants falls within Use Class C3(a) or is treated as permitted development under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended), and does not of itself constitute a material change of use requiring planning permission unless an Article 4 Direction is in force. No such Direction

applies to this property. Accordingly, the lawful use of the application site for planning purposes is C3, and this application is correctly framed as an application for change of use from C3 to C2.

It is noted as a precautionary observation that, even in the unlikely event that the Local Planning Authority were to take a different view as to the existing use class, the material planning considerations applicable to a change of use from C4 to C2 are substantively identical to those applicable to a change from C3 to C2. The proposal is fully justifiable on its planning merits in either scenario.

3.0 Proposed Use and Operational Details

The proposal seeks Full Planning Permission for the change of use of 94 Hartsbourne Road from its existing C3 residential dwellinghouse use to a C2 Residential Institution. Use Class C2 encompasses residential institutions including care homes and is the appropriate classification for a children's residential care home of this nature. The property will accommodate up to four young people aged 5 to 18 years who present with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and who are in the care of a local authority.

The home will operate on a 24-hour basis, 365 days per year, in line with the requirements of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015. A Registered Manager, Deputy Manager, and a team of Residential Support Workers will be employed, operating on a rolling shift pattern to ensure continuous care and supervision. A minimum staffing ratio of 1:1 will be maintained at all times. A ground floor office and sleep-in room will support overnight staffing arrangements without the need for additional staff vehicles to arrive and depart during unsociable hours.

The operational model of the home is fundamentally domestic in character. Young people will attend school during term time, participate in community activities, and engage in the routines of daily life. The home will not operate as a commercial enterprise visible from the street; there will be no signage, no additional external lighting, no deliveries at unsociable hours, and no material increase in vehicular movements compared to a typical occupied family dwelling. The proposal is, in operational terms, indistinguishable from a conventional family home.

No external alterations are proposed. The property will retain its existing appearance, garden, and parking arrangements. The only substantive change from a planning perspective is the introduction of a regulated residential care use in place of general residential occupation, accompanied by a professional staffing and management structure that, if anything, reduces the likelihood of nuisance and disturbance associated with unmanaged residential uses.

4.0 Care Provision and Safeguarding

Ellies Place Ltd is committed to delivering high-quality residential care for children and young people with SEMH needs. The home will be registered and regulated by Ofsted under the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015, which impose detailed and comprehensive requirements upon providers in relation to staffing, safeguarding, behaviour management, physical environment, record keeping, and quality assurance. Compliance with these regulations is a legal prerequisite for operation and provides robust protection for both residents and the wider community.

The Children Act 1989 and associated guidance place a statutory duty upon local authorities to secure appropriate placements for looked-after children within their area or as close to their home community as possible. The home at 94 Hartsbourne Road will provide a small, community-integrated placement that meets this statutory duty. A comprehensive Care Management Plan has been submitted alongside this application, setting out in detail the ethos, staffing model, care delivery approach, safeguarding framework, behaviour management strategy, training arrangements, and quality assurance mechanisms.

5.0 Parking and Traffic Considerations

The property benefits from off-street parking for three vehicles, which is consistent with or exceeds the provision associated with a typical family dwelling in this location. The proposed use will generate no greater vehicular activity than the existing residential use. The young people resident at the home will not be of driving age and will not bring vehicles. Staff will travel to and from the property at shift change times, which are distributed across the day and night and do not give rise to peak-hour traffic concentrations.

The existing sleep-in arrangement means that one member of staff will remain on the premises overnight without the need for vehicle movements during night-time hours. Occasional professional visitors such as social workers, therapists, or Ofsted inspectors will attend the property from time to time, but the frequency of such visits is low and well within the capacity of the available parking and the highway network in the vicinity.

6.0 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023) is a material consideration of significant weight in the determination of this application.

Paragraph 62 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should support the development of an appropriate mix of housing and the provision of community facilities. Children's residential care homes serve a documented and acute community need and fall squarely within the category of community facility that paragraph 62 is designed to support.

Paragraph 92 of the NPPF confirms that planning decisions should promote the development of accessible community facilities. Children's residential care homes constitute essential community infrastructure, accommodating vulnerable young people who require regulated, therapeutic residential care. The Local Planning Authority is invited to give substantial weight to this community benefit in assessing the application.

Paragraph 119 of the NPPF directs that planning decisions should promote an effective use of land. The conversion of a four-bedroom dwelling to a four-bed children's home represents an efficient and appropriate use of an existing residential property that avoids greenfield development and makes productive use of the existing built resource.

Paragraph 130 of the NPPF requires that developments be sympathetic to local character and history. The proposed use involves no external alterations and will retain the domestic character and appearance of the property in its entirety, indistinguishable in outward appearance from any other occupied family dwelling on Hartsbourne Road.

Reference is also made to the Written Ministerial Statement of May 2023, in which the Government explicitly confirmed its support for the provision of small, community-integrated children's homes as part of the national strategy for improving the sufficiency and quality of provision for looked-after children. The Ministerial Statement recognised that children's homes of this type should be considered positively by local planning authorities, and that the material planning considerations associated with small-scale children's homes are typically comparable to those of a conventional family dwelling. This application falls directly within the category of provision that the Ministerial Statement was intended to support.

7.0 Local Policy Context

The application must be assessed against the policies of the Wokingham Borough Local Plan. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Wokingham Borough Local Plan seeks to protect and enhance the residential character of established housing areas and to resist development that would be harmful to the amenity of neighbouring occupiers or the character of the area. The applicant submits that the proposed children's home is wholly consistent with this objective. The use is residential in character, domestic in scale, and involves no external

alterations. It will not give rise to noise, disturbance, or activity that is materially different from the impacts associated with a conventional family dwelling.

Wokingham Borough Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities under the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017 are relevant material considerations. The Council is under a statutory duty to promote the welfare of looked-after children and to secure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of children in its care. The proposed home at 94 Hartsbourne Road would directly assist the Council in fulfilling this duty by providing a high-quality, locally-based placement for up to four children with SEMH needs.

There is no specific policy within the Wokingham Borough Local Plan that precludes the use of residential property for children's residential care purposes, nor is there any adopted supplementary planning guidance that would restrict such proposals in the absence of exceptional harm. The proposal therefore falls to be assessed on its planning merits under the general principles of the NPPF and the development plan taken as a whole.

8.0 Conclusion

This Planning Statement has demonstrated that the proposed change of use of 94 Hartsbourne Road, Reading, RG6 5SJ from C3 residential dwellinghouse to a C2 children's residential care home for up to four young people with SEMH needs is acceptable in planning terms and should be approved by Wokingham Borough Council.

The lawful use of the property is C3, notwithstanding its appearance on the HMO licensing register, as no Article 4 Direction is in force in this location and no planning permission for a change of use to C4 has ever been granted or sought. The proposal is therefore correctly framed as a C3 to C2 change of use and should be assessed accordingly.

The proposal is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, including paragraphs 62, 92, 119, and 130, and with the objectives of the Written Ministerial Statement of May 2023. It meets an acute and documented national and local need for small, community-integrated children's residential care placements. No external alterations are proposed and the outward appearance of the property will be unchanged. The home will be operated by Ellies Place Ltd in full compliance with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and will be registered and inspected by Ofsted. Inhaus Planning respectfully requests that the Local Planning Authority grant Full Planning Permission without delay.