

30 April 2025



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT
Ward	ABBEY
Planning Application Reference:	PL/25/0291
Site Address:	Oxford Road Community School, Oxford Road, Reading, RG1 7PJ
Proposed Development	Proposed upgrades to playground equipment, suitable for children with Special Educational Needs.
Applicant	Reading Borough Council
Report author	Gary Miles
Deadline:	30 th April 2025
Recommendations	Grant planning permission, subject to conditions as follows
Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>TL1 – Time Limit – Three Years</i>2. <i>AP1 – Approved Plans</i>3. <i>M3 – Materials As specified</i>
Informatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>IF7 – Complaints about Construction</i>2. <i>I1 – Positive and Proactive</i>

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The proposal is to upgrade the existing playground so that it is suitable for children with Special Educational Needs. The existing equipment will be removed, and new SEND-appropriate equipment will be installed. The playground equipment is designed to have a positive impact on the children's health and wellbeing. The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its effect on the character of the area and the effect on neighbouring amenity.
- 1.2. The proposal is recommended for approval subject to the conditions as outlined above.

2. Introduction and site description

- 2.1. The proposed upgrade to the external play equipment at Oxford Road Community School will provide a purpose-built facility suitably for SEND.
- 2.2. The Oxford Road Community School is located within the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road conservation area. The primary school is a Grade II Listed, two storey Victorian building originally opened in 1881 and still retains many of its original features and character. The school sits on a small plot and currently has a purpose-built play area.

- 2.3. The application is required to be determined by Planning Applications Committee as Reading Borough Council is the applicant.
- 2.4. The new SEND play equipment is to replace the existing play equipment in the same area as the existing play equipment, located in the existing playground area to the rear of the school as highlighted in red on the submitted Location Plan.

Site visit photographs 6th June 2024



Existing play area looking north-west



Existing play area looking south-west

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. Full planning permission is sought to upgrade the existing playground within the quad area, suitable for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The existing equipment will be removed, and new SEND appropriate equipment will be installed.
- 3.1. The play equipment will include the following: Adventure Trail, Sunken Trampoline, Climbing Wall, Zig Zag Twister and Talking Flowers and will be purpose built and robustly constructed.
- 3.2. The Adventure Trail will stand at a height of 2.4m and the Climbing Wall will stand at 2.5m tall maximum height.
- 3.3. The nearest items of play equipment are to be positioned 6.5m from an adjacent residential boundary.
- 3.4. The ground finish will be constructed from rubber safety surfacing in colour Blue.
- 3.5. The proposal also incorporates a minimum 119Nr drilled drainage holes filled with shingle, to aid drainage.
- 3.6. Plans received:
 Drawing No: PP-13801473v1-Location Plan, dated Feb 25
 Drawing no: 2046/2024/P-01-Location Plan, dated Feb 25
 Drawing no: 2046/2024/P-02-Block Plan, dated Feb 25
 Drawing no: 2046/2024/P-03-Ground Plan, dated Feb 25
 Drawing no: 2046/2024/P-04-Elevations, dated Feb 25
 Drawing no: 2046/2024/P-05-Existing View, dated Feb 25
 Drawing no: 2046/2024/P-06-3D_View, dated Feb 25
 Received by the Local Planning Authority on 24th February 2025

3.7. Other documents received:

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Form
Design & Access Statement, dated Feb 25
Received by the Local Planning Authority on 24th February 2025

4. Relevant Planning History

PL/24/0463 – Pre-Application Advice - June 2024

5. Consultations

5.1 Internal Consultations

Conservation Officer

Due to the application site being located within a conservation area and adjacent to a listed building, the Conservation officer was consulted:

The Conservation officer reviewed the proposal and concluded the proposed primary school play equipment would not pose any harm to the setting of the listed building or the conservation area.

5.2 External Consultations

The planning notice was attached to nearby street furniture on 13rd March 2025 and left in place for a minimum of 21 days for the duration of the public consultation period.

No letters of representation have been received.

6. Legal context

6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

6.2 The NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

6.3 Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC7 (Design and the Public Realm)

CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity)

EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network)

EN1 (Protection & Enhancement of the Historic Environment)

EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas)

Local Plan Update

- 6.4 The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) turned five years old on Tuesday 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up to date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A consultation version of the draft updated version of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024.
- 6.5 Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become “out of date” when they are five years old. Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to this application and listed above is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remains very similar in the draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the determination of this planning application and are not considered to be ‘out of date’.

7. Appraisal

i) Character and appearance

The Oxford Road Community School is Grade II Listed. An existing play area exists to the rear of the building. The proposed play area suitable for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is considered to be acceptable as the new play area will replace the existing play area and cover the same floor space. The proposed play equipment by virtue of its nature, subservient scale, materials and colour choice is not considered detrimental to the character or the appearance of the Grade II Listed building or conservation area and is therefore considered acceptable in accordance with Policies EN1 and EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the NPPF 2024.

- 7.2 The proposal is considered compliant with policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

ii) Residential Amenity

- 7.3 Policy CC8 states that a development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties. The following points have been considered as part of this application:

- Visual dominance
- Noise and disturbance

- 7.2.1 **Visual dominance:** The proposed upgraded play equipment will be located behind the school and the neighbouring properties which back on to the school site from Stanley Grove. The maximum height of the tallest items of play equipment will be 2.5m – the same as the existing play equipment and the existing ground level is to remain the same. In terms of visual amenity, officers are content that the proposed upgraded SEND play equipment would not be overbearing or harmful to the nearby residential properties or the wider area. The play equipment replaces existing play equipment in the same location, whilst there are residential properties abutting the northerly boundary and in close proximity to the playground area, any noise from the play area will be during the school day, at break times, dinner times and the after school club. In terms of noise and disturbance officers considered the proposal is acceptable.

iii) Biodiversity & the Green Network

- 7.3 Policy EN12 states the key elements of the green network will be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced. On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. The proposals are subject to Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain provisions.
- 7.4 No trees or planting are to be removed as part of the proposal. Threshold for mandatory BNG is any development greater than 25sqm - the proposal covers an area less than 25 square metres, the area is made up of hard standing and space is limited to include any planting -officers confirm there is no loss of biodiversity and do not consider an increase of biodiversity is required for this proposal due to its small scale and existing site layout.

iv) Conservation

- 7.5 The application site is within the curtilage of the Grade II Listed school building and is located within a conservation area.

8. Equality implications

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2 The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that there is no indication or evidence that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this application.

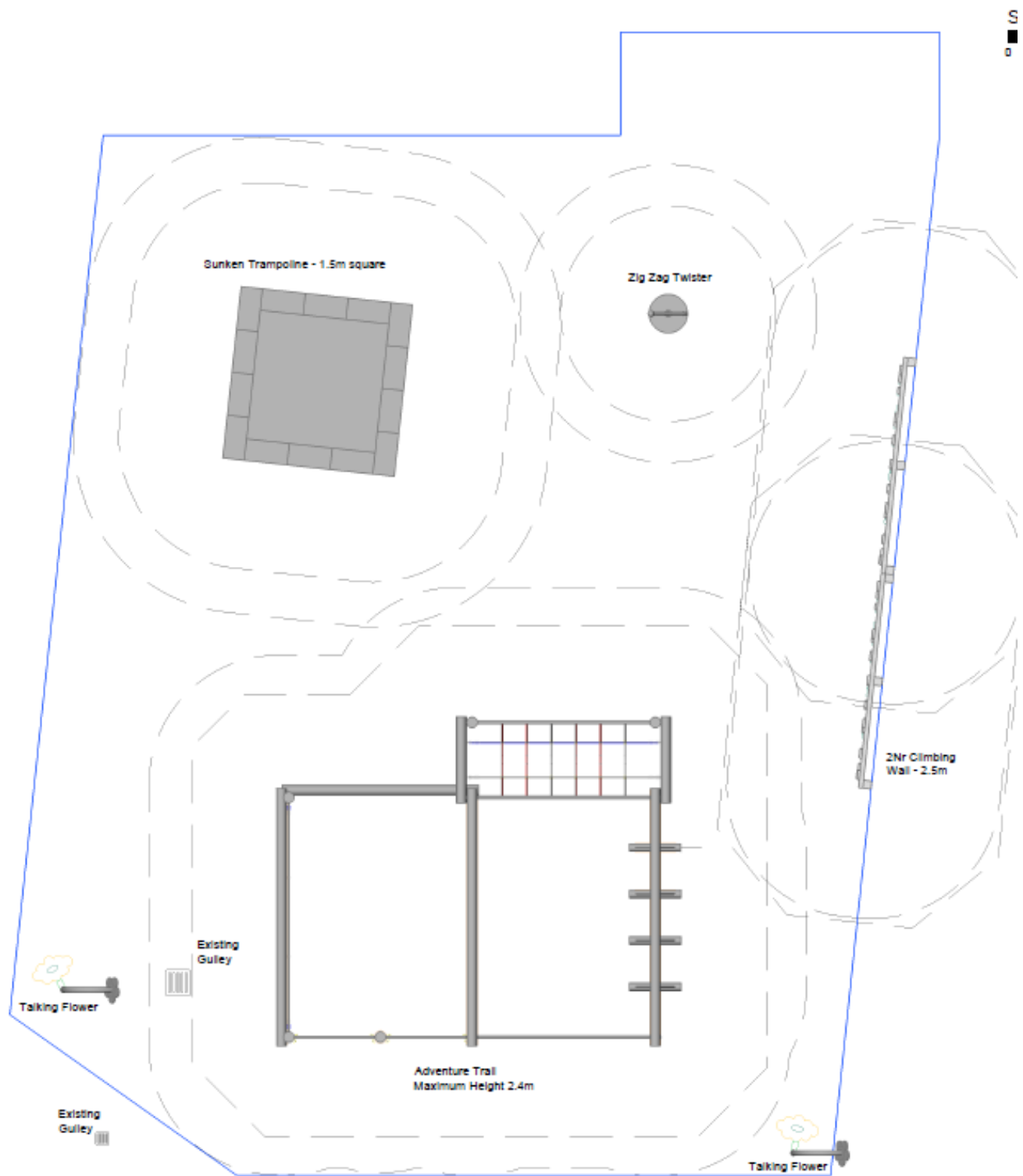
9. Conclusion & planning balance

- 9.1 As with all applications for planning permission considered by the Local Planning Authority, the application is required to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

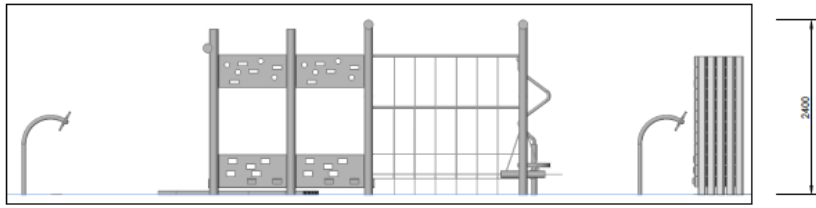
Block Plan



Ground Plan (Proposed)



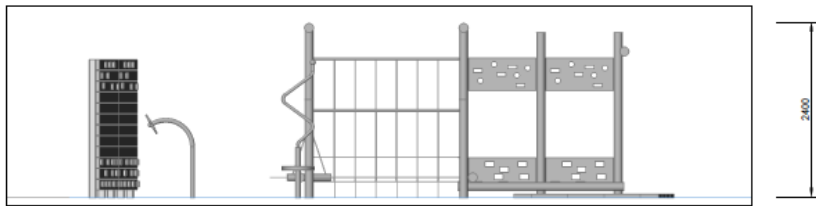
Elevations (Proposed)



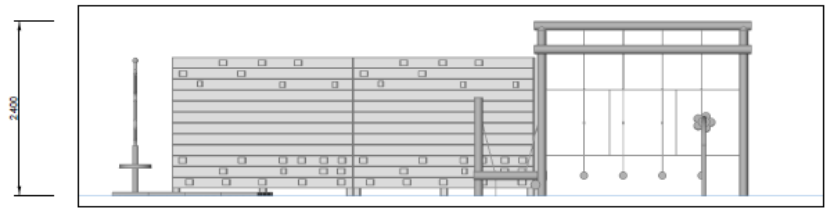
Front Elevation - South



Right Side Elevation - East



Rear Elevation - North



Left Side Elevation - West

Existing Views



3D Views (Proposed)

