

30 April 2025



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT
Ward	Thames
Planning Application Reference:	PL/25/0342
Site Address:	Thameside Primary School, Harley Road, Caversham, RG4 8DB
Proposed Development	Proposed upgrades to (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) SEND play equipment and new 3m security fencing to enclose the proposed play area within the existing site boundary, following demolition of existing play equipment.
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. TL1 – Time Limit – Three Years2. AP1 – Approved Plans3. M3 – Materials (As Specified)4. L1 – Landscaping Small Scale (to be Approved)5. L3 – Boundary Treatment (to be Approved)6. L7 – Arboricultural Method Statement (to be Approved)
Informatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. IF7 – Complaints about Construction2. I1 – Positive and Proactive

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The proposal is to upgrade the existing playground to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) play equipment and new 3m security fencing to enclose the play area within the existing site boundary, following demolition and removal of existing play equipment. 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 Thameside Primary School will provide a purpose-built facility suitably for SEND.
- 2.2. The application is required to be determined by Planning Applications Committee as Reading Borough Council is the applicant.

- 2.3. The new SEND play equipment is to replace the existing play equipment located adjacent to the playing fields and existing playground area to the rear of the school as highlighted in red on the submitted Location Plan.
- 2.4. Thameside Primary School is located within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) an area subject to a Local Air Quality Action Plan to help improve air quality.
- 2.5. Thameside Primary School is located with Flood Zone 2 and has a medium probability of flooding from the nearby river Thames located 150 meters away.
- 2.6. Thameside Primary School dates to approximately 1910 and is located in a residential area.
- 2.7. The school is accessed from Harley Road and abuts Elliots Way and Cardinal Close, the school is bounded by a 3m high fence along the boundary with Elliots Way, including emergency access gates onto Elliots Way which are otherwise always locked and no formal day to day access is allowed.

Site visit photographs 6th June 2024



Existing play area - looking south-easterly



Existing play area - looking south-westerly

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. Full planning permission is sought to upgrade the existing playground equipment with suitable SEND equipment for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The new equipment will be installed following demolition of existing play equipment.
- 3.2. The proposal includes removal of hard and soft landscaping and existing play equipment, installation of new SEND play equipment and new 3m tall security fence with a single pedestrian access gate from the wider school playground into the SEND playground.
- 3.3. The play equipment will include the following: In-ground trampoline, Birds nest swing, Rock 'n' bowl, Wobbly plank, Supernova, Long traverse & Balance beam, Pick up sticks.
- 3.4. The SEND play area will cover an area of approximately 32m by 10m, largely on the same footprint as the existing play area.
- 3.5. The ground finish will be constructed from rubber safety surfacing in a blue colour.
- 3.6. Plans received:

Drawing No: 2061-2024-SK-06 Rev B-Site Location Plan, dated Jan 25

Drawing no: 2061-2024-SK-07 Rev A-Proposed Block Plan, dated Jan 25

Drawing no: 2061-2024-SK-08 Rev A-Existing & Demolition Plan, dated Jan 25

Drawing no: 2061-2024-SK-09 Rev A-Proposed Plan, dated Jan 25

Drawing no: 2061-2024-SK-10 Rev A-Existing Elevation 01 Cardinal Close, dated Jan 25
Drawing no: 2061-2024-SK-11 Rev A-Proposed Elevation 01 Cardinal Close
Drawing no: 2061-2024-SK-12 Rev B-Existing Elevations 02 Elliots Way
Drawing no: 2061-2024-SK-13 Rev A-Proposed Elevation 02 Elliots Way, dated Jan 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
Biodiversity Desktop Assessment, dated March 25
Flood Risk Assessment (Stantec) dated Jan 25
BS5837:2012 Tree Survey Ref: PB/5837-25/01.09 (Tree Surveys) dated Feb 25
Arboricultural Impact Assessment Ref: PB/AIA-25/01.09 (Tree Surveys) 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

Natural Environment Officer

5.2 As the proposal includes work to the ground in close proximity of trees, the Natural Environment officer was consulted:

“Generally, not acceptable’. So, in order for this to be acceptable, evidence is needed to show that RPA’s are going to be respected. Also, within accordance with the BS5837 2012, ‘New permanent hard surfacing should not exceed 20% of any existing unsurfaced ground within the RPA’. With reference to Table 1 within the AIA, it shows that the construction of Wetpour surfacing will encroach on 21.5% of T2’s RPA as well as 33.6% of T6’s RPA. With reference to the existing plans and Table 1 of the AIA, there appears to be soft landscaping within these RPA’s, which are proposed to be replaced with hard landscaped surfaces, but it is difficult to assess the surface type percentage change. The impact of this may be mitigated with an AMS, but this is generally not acceptable.

According to the Design and Access statement, ‘the 3m high fence proposed to surround the site for safety reasons will encroach onto the RPAs of T2, T3 and T5. Approximately 7no. fence post footings with associated foundations will be required to be located within the RPA of trees T2-5. Additionally, 1 no. Play equipment structure (bird’s nest swing) will require 4 no. Post footings, 2 of which are to be located on the boundary of the assumed RPA of T2, T3 & T5, and 2 of which only within the boundary of the RPA of T5’. The footings are not plotted on the TPP within the AIA, so it is inconclusive to where they lay in the designs and RPA. The BS5837 2012 recommends that ‘To avoid damage to tree roots, existing ground levels should be retained within the RPA. Intrusion into soil (other than for piling) within the RPA is generally not acceptable, and topsoil within it should be retained in situ. However, limited manual excavation within the RPA might be acceptable.’ If roots are over 25mm in the areas in which the post footings are found, there needs to be an alternative plan for where the footings can be placed to minimise harm, as severing roots over 25mm isn’t acceptable.

The AIA also states ‘There is no requirement for crown pruning to facilitate the development works, so it is assumed there is enough clearance between the tree

canopy and the ground, that the fence can be installed without coming into contact with tree branches. This should be checked in the final AMS.

In conclusion, L1 would be applicable here as there is going to a reduced number of trees and soft landscaping, with an increased amount of hard landscaping.

A pre-commencement scheme of hard and soft landscaping should be submitted (note that L1 currently states 'pre-occupation'). As a tree in an AQMA, on Council land, is being removed, replanting should be implemented in a suitable area. In addition, some other soft landscape features would be beneficial here, hence the need for a landscape plan. L3 also applies, a plan indicating the positions, design, materials and type of boundary treatment to be erected needs including as new fencing is being proposed and submitted plans lack clarity. Condition L7 is also applicable in relation to protecting retained trees with an AMS, and in accordance with EN14 of Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and adopted Tree Strategy”.

5.3 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).
- 6.2 In this regard, 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 (amended February 2025)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC7 (Design and the Public Realm)

CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity)

EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network)

EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands)

EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems)

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

- 7.1. The main considerations relevant to the determination of this application are:

- i. Character and appearance
- ii. Residential Amenity
- iii. Biodiversity
- iv. Tree and Hedges
- v. Flooding

i) Character and Appearance

- 7.2 Officers consider the proposal to upgrade the existing playground equipment, for children with Special Educational Needs and associated safe surfacing will not harm the existing school or outdoor area, not harmful to nearby residential properties in terms of character and appearance and as a result will be suitable, officers conclude that this development is good and provides a good use of the land.
- 7.3 The proposal is considered compliant with policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

ii) Residential Amenity

- 7.4 Policy CC7 states that all development must be of high design and quality that enhances the character and appearance of the area. 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
- 7.5 The proposed upgraded SEND play equipment and basketball hoop and climbing wall area will be in the same area as the existing play equipment. The area is located to the east of the main school and abuts the side elevation of a residential property located at 22 Elliotts Way. The proposed play area will be set down and be subservient to the wider outdoor playground area. The existing 3m fence is to remain in place and would screen the proposals to a degree. The residential property sides on to the proposed

play area and has no habitable rooms directly overlooking the play area. In terms of visual amenity, officers are content that the proposed upgraded SEND play equipment is not considered overbearing or harmful to the nearby residential properties or the wider area which already exists. In terms of noise and disturbance – the upgraded playground will only be accessible and usable during the hours of school and mostly during break times, dinner times and the odd after school club. Officers do not consider noise disturbance to be an issue as the play area has been in-situ for many years previous.

The proposal is considered compliant with policies CC7 and CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

iii) Biodiversity & the Green Network

- 7.6 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.
- 7.7 Officers have checked the submitted Biodiversity calculations and confirm there is no net loss of biodiversity and therefore the proposal complies with policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

iv) Trees, Hedges and Woodland

- 7.8 Policy EN14 states that Individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended. New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site.
- 7.9 The Natural Environment officer has highlighted a number of points in their advice which will require addressing. Further discussions have concluded that these matters can be addressed using appropriately worded conditions.
- *A condition is required to secure additional soft landscaping to assist in integrating the new development into its surroundings.*
 - A condition securing submission of a plan indicating the positions, design, materials and type of boundary treatment to be erected is required as new fencing is being proposed and submitted plans lack clarity.
 - A condition is required to secure submission of an Arboricultural Method Statement to BS5837:2012 to ensure that the works are designed and carried out in a way which protects existing trees, and in accordance with EN14 of Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and adopted Tree Strategy.

Subject to these conditions, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of policy EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019, subject to the points outlined above which will be secured by pre commencement conditions.

v) Flooding

- 7.10 Policy EN18 states it is the responsibility of those planning development to fully assess flood risk, propose measures to mitigate it and demonstrate that any residual risks can be safely managed. Flood resistance and resilience measures should not be used to justify development in inappropriate locations.

7.11 The 'Gos Brook' is located approximately 120m south from the site, flowing eastwards between Christchurch Meadows and the Lower Caversham residential area. The Brook provides land drainage for the surrounding meadows and discharges into the main channel of the River Thames further to the east, close to Caversham Lock. Though the site is entirely located within Flood Zone 2 according to flood mapping, the proposed play area development is a '*Water-compatible development*' and would be acceptable in this zone. Furthermore, an assessment of extracted modelled maximum flood levels shows the location of the proposed play area, in the south-east corner of the school site, is outside the present day 1 in 1000 annual probability (AP) floodplain and likely located in Flood Zone 1. The proposals constitute a 'minor development' in relation to flood risk. A Sequential Test is not required for 'minor' developments and an Exception Test is not applicable. The flood risk is considered to be acceptable for the proposed use in accordance with Policy EN18 and national planning policy.

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.

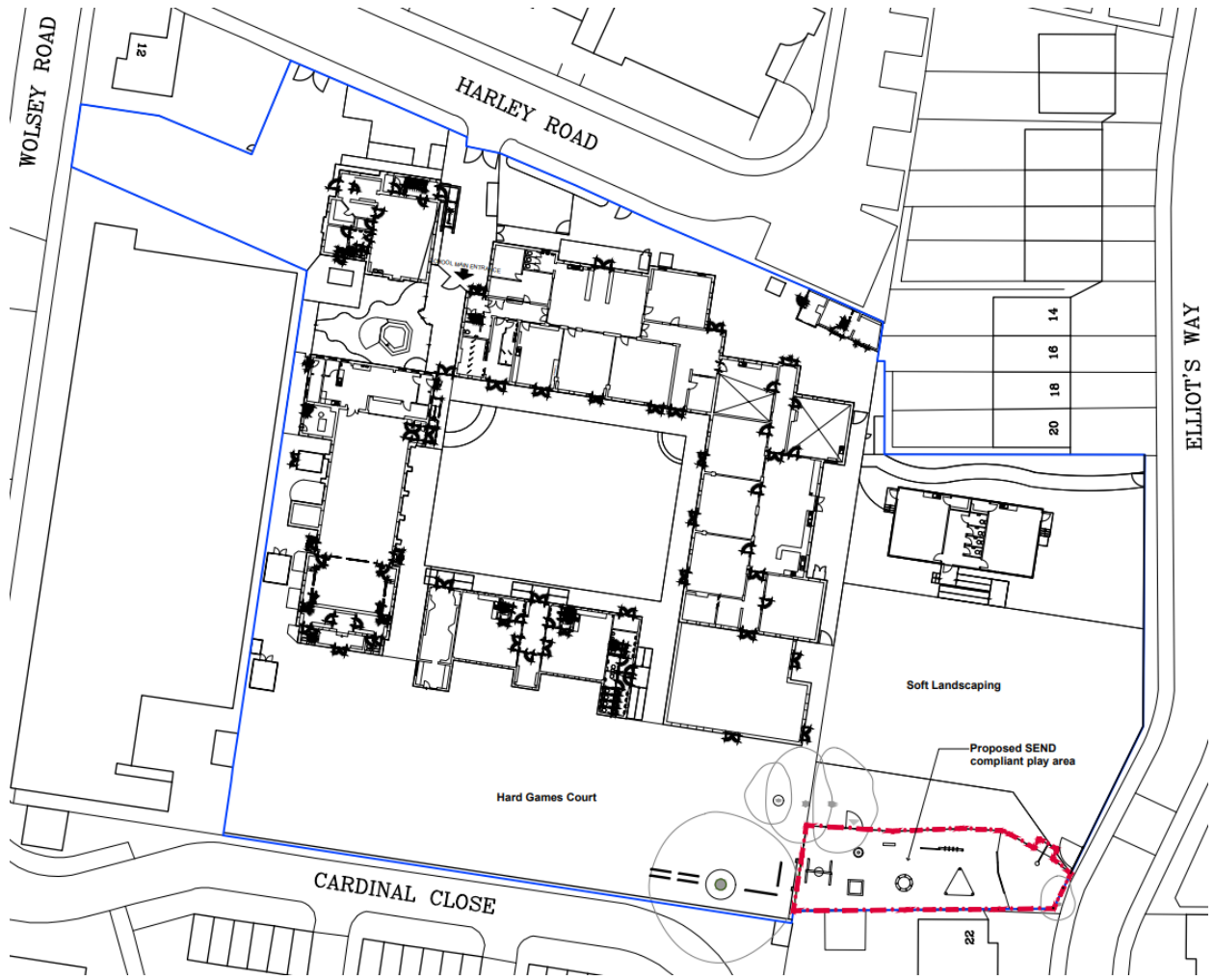
9.2 The proposal to upgrade the existing playground equipment, suitable for children with Special Educational Needs and associated safe surfacing is a benefit in terms of meeting educational and social needs and is not considered detrimental to the existing School, existing outdoor open space, nearby residential amenity or the wider area. The proposal is considered compliant with policies within the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Plans

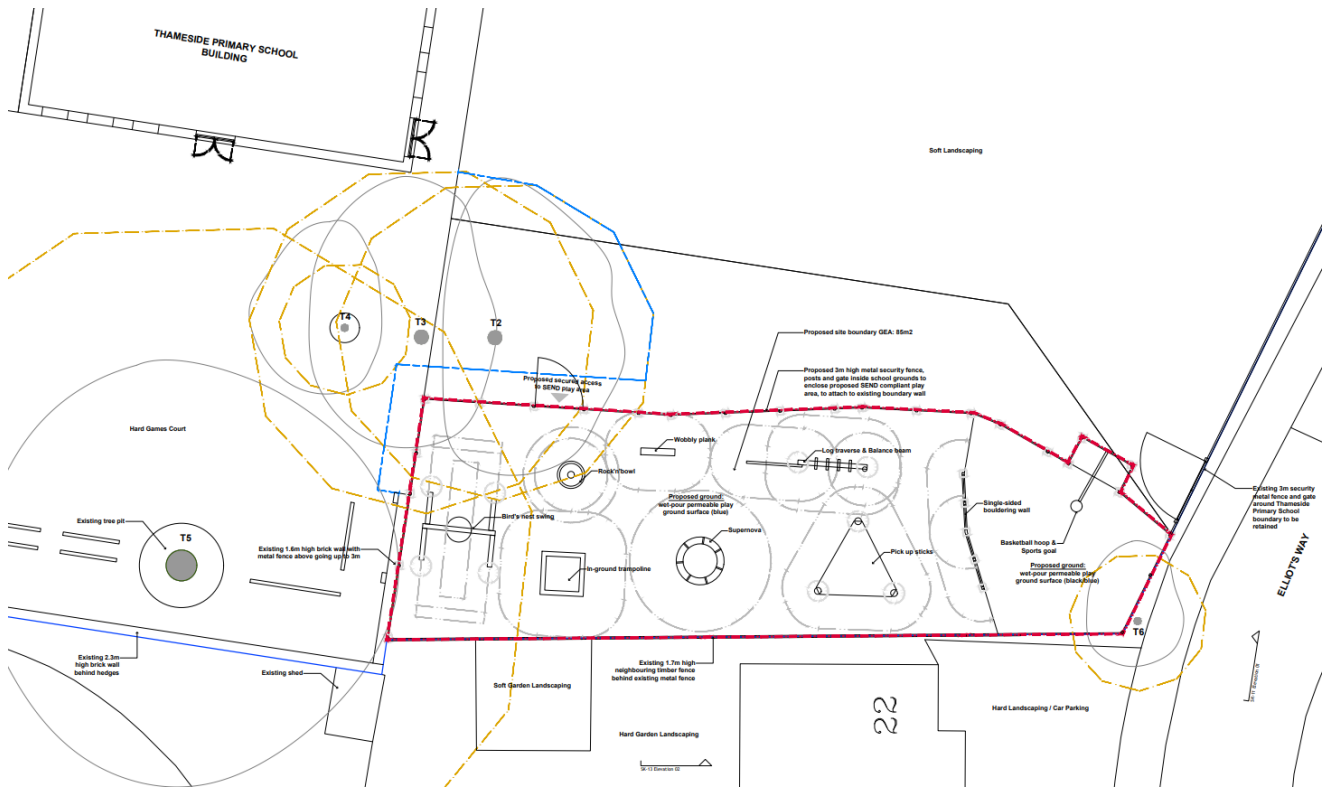
Location Plan



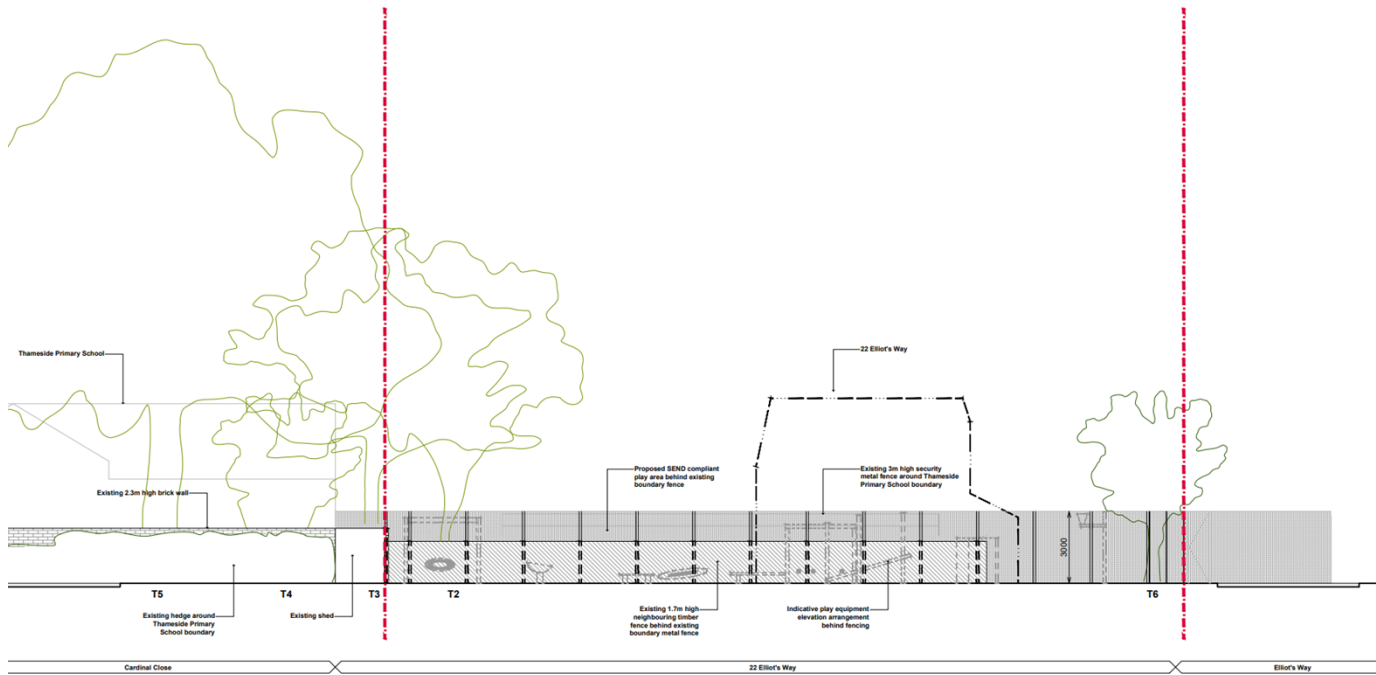
Block Plan



Floor Plan (Proposed)



Proposed Elevation 01



Proposed Elevation 02

