



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 October 2025

by **E Worley BA (Hons) Dip EP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/25/3365613

The Heights Primary School, 129 Upper Woodcote Road, Reading RG4 7LB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by the Headteacher, on behalf of The Heights Primary School against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/23/1023.
 - The development proposed is the use of existing 2FE primary school for up to 420 pupils.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the use of existing 2FE primary school for up to 420 pupils at The Heights Primary School, 129 Upper Woodcote Road, Reading RG4 7LB in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref PL/23/1023, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal upon educational choice within the North Reading Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises an existing primary school, known as The Heights Primary School (THPS). It is located in a residential area, adjoining Mapledurham Playing Fields. The proposal seeks an increase in the pupil admission number (PAN) at the school from 350 to 420, an increase of 70 additional pupils in total, which represents an uplift in class sizes from 25 to 30. The proposal does not include any physical changes to the school building, as it was designed and constructed to accommodate 420 pupils, or the catchment area.
4. The Council's main concern is that, given the surplus of primary school places in the North Reading area, the proposed increase in PAN at THPS would have a negative effect on pupil numbers in other schools within the area. It is suggested that this would further threaten the financial sustainability and viability of schools which are undersubscribed, posing a significant risk to their continued operation, which would in turn adversely affect educational choice within North Reading.
5. In relation to new and existing community facilities, Policy OU1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 (RBLP) indicates that proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site. Among other things, Policy OU1 supports proposals for on-site intensification of important facilities, such as schools, subject

to other policies in the plan. My attention is not drawn to a specific policy requirement to justify the need for such development.

6. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out that it is important that a sufficient choice of early years, school and post-16 places are available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. It is clear that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. In addition, they should give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter early years, schools and post-16 facilities through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications.
7. The appeal submissions indicate that THPS was set up in 2014 to meet the urgent need for primary school places in the North Reading area, as existing schools at that time were at capacity, in a location where there was a geographical void of primary schools. The evidence before me indicates that there is now a significant surplus of school places in North Reading overall, with sufficient capacity available to meet projected needs for primary school places in the area. However, there is a disparity in the availability of school places within North Reading, with primary schools in the north west Caversham area, in which THPS is located, being at or close to capacity, while others elsewhere have a surplus of spaces.
8. I am mindful of concerns that the proposal would exacerbate the existing significant oversupply of primary school places in North Reading generally. There may also be potential financial implications of falling pupil numbers at schools that are currently undersubscribed, despite separate controls that may be available outside the planning regime to manage low pupil numbers at schools. However, within north west Caversham, Caversham Primary School, Emmer Green Primary School, THPS and The Hill Primary School, were oversubscribed for reception year admissions for 2023/24 and 2024/25. While this is not representative of North Reading as a whole, it clearly indicates a demand for school places within the north west Caversham area, in particular THPS. The proposal would therefore provide increased opportunity for those parents who wish to, to secure a place for their children at THPS, a school which the appeal submissions indicate is a popular, outstanding school, with a high degree of accessibility within catchment by foot or cycling, and would in that regard increase choice.
9. Consequently, even if an increase in PAN at THPS did have adverse effects on the long-term viability of undersubscribed schools, which could diminish educational choice in North Reading, the proposal would enable parents within the THPS catchment, who are currently not able to do so, to secure their preferred first choice of school. Thus, at best the effects would therefore be neutral having regard to the aims of the Framework to widen choice in education.
10. For the foregoing reasons, I conclude that the proposal would not have an adverse effect upon educational choice within the North Reading Area and would not conflict with the aims of Policy OU1 of the RBLP.

Other Matters

11. The Council's second refusal reason relates to the lack of a legal agreement pursuant to Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure the highway works required as part of the proposal. The works include the relocation of the existing crossing point close to the junction of the drive with Upper

Woodcote Road, and extension of the footway. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that it would be unreasonable to use a Grampian condition, which prohibits development authorised by the planning permission until a specified action has been taken, where there are no prospects at all of the action being performed within the time-limit imposed by the condition. Given the scale of the works, notwithstanding the site ownership, there is no clear evidence that there would not be a reasonable prospect of funding being available to enable the highway works to be carried out within the necessary timeframe.

12. In addition, the Council contends that exceptional circumstances as required by the PPG have not been demonstrated, or clear evidence provided, that the delivery of the development would otherwise be at serious risk, so as to justify a negatively worded condition. However, given that a condition, in this case, would not require a planning obligation or other agreement to be entered into, this advice is not relevant to the appeal proposal.
13. The Council has not objected to the proposed increase in PAN on highway safety grounds as it would lead to only a modest increase in vehicular trips, which are likely to be at different times due to breakfast and after school clubs. Based on the evidence before me, I have no reason to reach a different conclusion.
14. While the proposed increase in pupil numbers is likely to give rise to an increase in noise generated at the school, the Council's Environmental Protection officer is satisfied that, subject to the provision of an acoustic fence to the rear of 28 and 29 Hewett Avenue, noise levels within the rear garden areas would be within acceptable WHO levels to avoid significant impacts upon health. In the absence of any clear evidence to the contrary, I am satisfied that the proposal would not give rise to significant effects in terms of noise & disturbance because of the increase in pupils. As such, the proposal would not interfere with the occupiers of the neighbouring properties right to peaceful enjoyment of their possessions.
15. Interested parties have raised concerns regarding matters including, but not limited to, the effect of the development on living conditions of the occupiers of the adjoining residential properties through light emission, overlooking and loss of privacy, antisocial behaviour, effects upon wildlife, the existing drainage system and the operation of the adjacent facilities. However, there is no compelling evidence that the proposed increase in pupil capacity at the school would give rise to any detrimental effects in these regards.
16. Whether the school is operating in accordance with conditions attached to the planning permission granted by the Council for the school, including the Delivery and Servicing Plan and Car Park Management Plan, is a matter for the parties to resolve outside of the appeal process. While I note concerns regarding the timing of the submission of the planning application, I have determined the appeal based on the planning merits of the scheme.
17. My attention is drawn to the provisions of the legal agreement pursuant to Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in relation to the earlier permissions granted for the construction of the school. As the appeal before me relates only to an increase in pupil numbers, it is unclear as to how the appeal proposals would affect the provisions of the earlier agreement.

Conditions

18. In addition to the standard timescale condition, I have imposed a condition specifying the relevant plans to provide certainty. A condition to restrict the number of pupils to a maximum of 420 is necessary, having regard to the capacity of the existing infrastructure.
19. In the interests of highway safety and to encourage sustainable travel, conditions are necessary to secure the highway mitigation works, cycle and scooter parking, compliance with the approved Delivery and Servicing Plan and Car Park Management Plan and an annual review of the Travel Plan. The Council's Travel Plan review condition included a detailed list of requirements of what it would like to see submitted. As this is not necessary to make the condition precise or enforceable I have not included it, and the parties can agree what is necessary to satisfy the condition considering the situation and guidance applicable at the time approval is sought. A condition is necessary to require the implementation of the acoustic fence, prior to the increase in PAN, in the interests of the living conditions of the occupiers of the neighbouring properties.

Conclusion

20. The proposal would not conflict with the development plan, read as a whole, and there are no material considerations which indicate that the decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Consequently, and having regard to all other matters raised, including the provisions of the Framework, the appeal should be allowed.

E Worley

INSPECTOR

Schedule of conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing nos: Location Plan, Proposed site plan dwg no. 135-100 P1, Proposed Sections/Elevations dwg no. 135-200 P1 and Proposed Footway Extension dwg no. ref. 5920-001 P01.
- 3) The maximum number of pupils on the school roll shall not exceed 420.
- 4) Prior to the increase in pupil numbers hereby approved, the highway works including the proposed footway extension shown on drawing 5920-001-P01 (Robert West, 1 November 2023) shall be implemented in full and shall be retained as such thereafter in perpetuity.
- 5) Prior to the increase in pupil numbers hereby approved, the proposed cycle/scooter parking provision shall be provided in accordance with the details shown on drawing number FS0280-TFC-V2-00-DR-L-1001 Rev P03 - PROPOSED CYCLE/SCOOTER

PROVISION. The facilities shall be kept available for such purposes for the lifetime of the development.

- 6) Prior to the increase in pupil numbers hereby approved, the acoustic fence to the western boundary of the school as shown on drawings 135-100 P1 and 135-200 P1 (Unfold Architecture and Design, 16 February 2024) shall be implemented in full and retained thereafter in perpetuity.
- 7) Servicing and deliveries to the school shall not take place other than in accordance with the approved Delivery and Servicing Plan (Robert West, November 2023, ref: 5920/001/003).
- 8) The staff car park shall not be used other than in accordance with the approved staff Car Park Management Plan (Robert West, November 2023, ref: 5920/001/004).
- 9) A Travel Plan Review Report shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority on the first anniversary of this permission, and thereafter annually for 5 years.

******* end of conditions *******