

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT

Site Address: Public Service Plaza, Civic Centre Road, Havant, PO9 2AX
Proposal: Proposed change of use of amenity space associated with the Public Service Plaza to outside play area for children attending Growing Places Nursery. Associated erection of a boundary fence with 1No pedestrian gate and 1No double gate to allow grass cutting.
Application Type: Full Planning Permission
Application No: APP/25/00335
Applicant: Community Childcare Centres
Expiry Date: 11 September 2025
Case Officer: Denise Sheath
Ward: St Faiths

Recommendation: **GRANT PERMISSION**

1 Site Description

- 1.1 The Public Service Plaza is a 3-storey building located on the western side of Civic Centre Road. The building is the main offices for Havant Borough Council. There are carparks located to the north and south boundaries.

2 Planning History

APP/10/00001 - Extension of the existing Civic HQ, to provide a new public reception area from which services to the public can be provided (including a cafe); internal refurbishment; enhancement of the existing landscape setting; amendments to the existing car and cycle parking provisions; and provision of temporary accommodation (portacabin). – Approved 05 July 2010

3 Proposal

Proposed change of use of amenity space associated with the Public Service Plaza to outside play area for children attending Growing Places Nursery. Associated erection of a boundary fence with 1No pedestrian gate and 1No double gate to allow grass cutting.

4 Policy Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework
Havant Borough Council Borough Design Guide SPD December 2011
Havant Borough Council Parking SPD July 2016

Havant Borough Local Plan (Core Strategy) March 2011

CS16 (High Quality Design)
CS1 (Health and Wellbeing)
DM8 (Conservation, Protection and Enhancement of Existing Natural Features)

Havant Borough Local Plan (Allocations) July 2014

AL1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development)

Listed Building Grade: Not applicable.
Conservation Area: Not applicable.

5 Statutory and Non Statutory Consultations

Council's Arborist:

Norse has arranged for the removal of four Ash trees that were identified as requiring removal on health and safety grounds within the Growing Places App. It is important to note that this work was necessary irrespective of the App's identification and would have needed to be carried out regardless for H&S.

In relation to the proposed tree works outlined in the Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS), further consultation is required with Craig from the Estates team. Specifically, discussions will need to take place regarding the schedule of proposed tree works and clarification on who will be responsible for carrying them out. While I will not be involved in the practical delivery of these works, it is essential that Craig, as the land manager, gives formal consent before any operations can proceed (to include correspondence with Sonja as the Norse contract manager).

Regarding the proposed Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) itself, I have no objections from an arboricultural perspective. However, should permission be granted for the works, I would request that the following planning condition be included please:

The development hereby permitted shall only be carried out in accordance with the Arboricultural Impact Appraisal and Preliminary Arboricultural Method Statement (Reference ArbTec for Growing Places August 2025) and British Standard BS5837: 2012 (Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations).

Reason: To ensure the continuity of amenity value afforded by the trees in question and in accordance with policies CS16 and DM8 of the Havant Borough Core Strategy (2011) and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Ecology – Initial Response:

Thank you for consulting me on this application. The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Assessment and Roost Assessment (Arbtech, July 2025) and a Biodiversity Net Gain Exemption Statement (Arbtech, July 2025).

The application site comprises an area of grassland situated to the rear of the Public Service Plaza. For the past two years this area has been included within a purposeful 'relaxed mowing' programme of grassland management as part of a wider initiative to enhance biodiversity at the site. The grassland within the application has proven to be a moderately species-rich example of neutral grassland. Alongside various grass, sedge and herbaceous species the site supports at least four native orchid species. Surveys carried out by the Council in 2024 and 2025 have identified both Pyramidal Orchid and Common Spotted Orchid within the application site. I agree that the grassland does not meet the definition of Priority Habitat.

The proposed development will effectively result in the functional loss of the grassland due to the need for regular mowing, as well as footfall/trampling. On the matter of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the application includes an exemption statement. This concludes that the habitat loss associated with the proposal would meet the de minimis exemption, affecting less than 25m² of habitat. I am content to agree that this is the case in this instance: the proposed development is clearly of significant benefit to the nursery, allowing access to a valuable outdoor space for children and

staff. I would however be resistant to any future proposal for any permanent surfacing within the fence that results in a permanent loss of grassland habitat.

Given the biodiversity value of the grassland, and its inclusion in the Council's strategy for biodiversity enhancement at the Plaza site, the Council should make available a similarly-sized area elsewhere on site for inclusion in the enhancement programme.

Overall, I am content with the submitted information.

Officer Comment: *the availability of a similar-sized area for inclusion in the Council's enhancement programme, is outside of the scope for determining the application.*

Ecology – Final Response:

Thank you for consulting me on this application. Following on from our discussion this morning, I can confirm that the proposed hedging is not necessary in order to meet biodiversity obligations. On the matter of mandatory BNG, the inclusion of new hedging within the existing grassland would very likely require a recalculation of habitat impacts, required before planning permission could be granted. The current proposal has been agreed as being exempt from BNG due to the minimal area of grassland habitat affected. The installation of new hedging – whilst obviously a good idea in general – would necessitate the removal of an area of grassland that would tip the proposal over the de minimis BNG threshold (replacing neutral grassland with planted hedging). The hedging, situated adjacent to the proposed security fencing, would be of some biodiversity benefit but its value would be limited by its location alongside the proposed play area. For example, bird species would be unlikely to nest within a hedge in such a location.

The use of climbing plants on the new fencing would potentially be of biodiversity benefit, mostly for pollinating insects. I have no particular preference in terms of species, although native climbers such as Traveller's Joy *Clematis vitalba* and Hops *Humulus lupulus* would be welcome.

The most valuable measure for biodiversity here would be to avoid over eager cutting of the grass within the play area. There is abundant scientific evidence to demonstrate the benefits of young children being exposed to biodiverse places, and therefore a relaxed attitude to grass height would be of benefit to children and wildlife.

Landscaping Team – Initial Response

From a landscape perspective we have the following comments in relation to this application:

- The creation of an outside space for the nursery is a great idea and will allow children to get fresh air and play outside.
- I have some concerns with the public nature of the service plaza amenity and the potential safe guarding issues with young children, this is exacerbated by the lack of natural surveillance and visual permeability of the proposed fence style.
- The proposed anti-climb fence is considered to alter the open green character of amenity space, however this is only at a micro level and would be deemed acceptable.
- A possible solution to both soften the impact of the fence, mitigate the visual permeability and also add biodiversity improvements would be to plant a UK native hedgerow around the perimeter (where appropriate) and/or include self supporting

climbers (clematis, Jasminum, Ionicera etc.)

Landscaping Team – Final Response following the removal of the hedging from the application.

The hedge was to act as screening to block the view of the rather large fencing which in my opinion is detrimental to the character of the open space of the plaza (rather than a BNG intervention). Furthermore, the hedge would act as a physical barrier to separate the publicly accessible walkway around the plaza and the play space as I have safeguarding concerns with how publicly accessible the play area will be.

I do not agree with the principal of leaving the grass to be unmown in the play area will be a valuable BNG asset as the nature of its use (children running around and playing) will cause vegetation damage, soil compaction, impact on invertebrates, habitat homogenization.

Officer Response:

The Council's Ecologist has confirmed that the planting of hedging along the inside perimeter of the fence would necessitate the removal of an area of grassland that would take the proposal over the agreed de minimis BNG threshold. Furthermore, the Ecologist has advised that a hedge in this location would offer limited biodiversity value. The Landscape Team previously commented that the planting of climbers along the fencing would be acceptable. Accordingly, the proposed climbers are considered an appropriate response to the issue. A condition is recommended to secure the planting and ongoing maintenance of the climbers.

Property Services – No comments Received

Norse – No comments Received

6 Community Involvement

This application was publicised in accordance with the Council's Code of Practice for Publicity of Planning Applications approved at minute 207/6/92 (as amended), as a result of which the following publicity was undertaken:

Number of neighbour notification letters sent: 79

Number of site notices: 1

Statutory advertisement: Not applicable.

Number of representations received: 0

7 Planning Considerations

7.1 Having regard to the relevant policies of the development plan it is considered that the main issues arising from this application are:

- (i) Principle of development
- (ii) Appropriateness of design and impact on the character of the area
- (iii) Impact upon residential amenity
- (iv) Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

(i) Principle of development

- 7.2 The application site is situated within an urban area where further development is considered acceptable subject to the usual development control criteria.

(ii) Appropriateness of design and impact on the character of the area

- 7.3 The proposal is for the change of use of amenity space associated with the Public Service Plaza to an outside play area for children attending Growing Places Nursery located within the Plaza Building. The proposal would include the erection of a boundary fence with 1No pedestrian gate and 1No double gate (to allow grass cutting). The proposed outside play area would be located adjacent to the north west of the plaza building. The proposed fencing would be GuardSAFE Vmesh Security Fencing, this would have a height of approximately 1.8m from ground level.
- 7.4 The applicant has confirmed that climber plants will be planted along the new fencing. This would help mitigate the visual impact of the proposed fencing. This would be conditioned if permission is granted.
- 7.5 The proposed change of use, together with the associated development, is considered appropriate in the context of the site and its locality. The scheme would provide a desirable facility for the nursery and is therefore regarded as acceptable, meeting the requirements of Policy CS1 of the HBLP (Core Strategy). Furthermore, it is considered that the proposal would not result in any adverse impact on the visual amenity of the surrounding area, in accordance with Policy CS16 of the Core Strategy.

(iii) Impact upon residential amenity

- 7.6 Due to separation distances, it is considered that the proposal will not appear overbearing or lead to overlooking and would have limited and acceptable impact on the properties and premises within the locality meeting the requirements of Policy CS16 of the HBLP (Core Strategy). It is noted no letters of objection were received with respect to the scheme.

(iv) Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

- 7.7 The application site comprises an area of grassland located to the rear of the Public Service Plaza. The proposed development would effectively result in the functional loss of this grassland due to the need for regular mowing and increased footfall/trampling.
- 7.8 In relation to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the application includes an exemption statement which concludes that the habitat loss associated with the proposal falls within the *de minimis* exemption, affecting less than 25m² of habitat. The Council's Ecologist was consulted during the application process and has confirmed that the proposal meets this exemption.

- 7.9 To enhance biodiversity, the use of climbing plants on the new fencing was suggested, primarily to benefit pollinating insects. The applicant has confirmed that climbing plants will be planted along the fencing. A condition will be attached to any approval requiring these plants to be installed within one month of the decision and retained thereafter.

8 **Conclusion**

- 8.1 The change of use and associated development would be a desirable addition to the nursery and would have a limited and acceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area and residential amenity and is exempt from BNG and is therefore considered to be appropriate and recommended for approval.

9 **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Development Manager be authorised to **GRANT PERMISSION** for application APP/25/00335 subject to the following conditions

- 1 The development must be begun not later than three years beginning with the date of this permission.
Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 2 The external materials used shall be as indicated on the submitted forms and hereby approved plans, or shall match, in type, colour and texture, those of the existing building so far as practicable.
Reason: In the interests of the amenities of the area and having due regard to policy CS16 of the Havant Borough Local Plan (Core Strategy) 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 3 The development hereby permitted shall only be carried out in accordance with the Arboricultural Impact Appraisal and Preliminary Arboricultural Method Statement (Reference ArbTec for Growing Places August 2025) and British Standard BS5837: 2012 (Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations).
Reason: To ensure the continuity of amenity value afforded by the trees in question and in accordance with policies CS16 and DM8 of the Havant Borough Core Strategy (2011) and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 4 The climbing plants detailed in the email dated 10 November 2025 shall be planted within one month of the erection of the fencing. The plants shall be planted along all elevations of the fencing and retained thereafter. Any planting that is removed, uprooted, destroyed, dies, or becomes severely damaged or seriously diseased shall be replaced within one month with plants of a similar size and species to those originally required, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: To protect visual amenity and in accordance with Policy CS16 of the Havant Borough Local Plan (Core Strategy) 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 5 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Root Assessment – Received 27 August 2025

Arboricultural Method Statement - Received 06 August 2025

Arboricultural Impact Assessment Plan – Drawing No. Arbtech AIA 01 – Received 06 August 2025

Tree Protection Plan – Drawing No. Arbtech TPP 01 - Received 06 August 2025

Arboricultural Survey - Received 01 August 2025

Location Plan – Received 27 August 2025

Fence Layout Plan – Received 27 August 2025

Security Fencing Product Specification – 27 August 2025

Proposed Fencing Style – Received 27 August 2025

Climber Plants – Email Received 10 November 2025

Reason: - To ensure provision of a satisfactory development.

Informative:

Informative 1:

In accordance with paragraphs 39-51 of the NPPF Havant Borough Council (HBC) takes a positive and proactive approach and works with applicants/agents on development proposals in a manner focused on solutions by:

1. Offering a pre-application advice service, and
2. Updating you of any issues that may arise in the processing of your application and where possible suggesting solutions, and,

In this instance:

Your application was acceptable following receipt of additional information, and no further assistance was required.