

Design, Access & Heritage Statement

Introduction

This Design, Access & Heritage Statement supports the proposed change of use at **1A Newlands, Huyton Hey Road** from an aesthetics training school to a **day care centre for adults with disabilities**. The site lies in a residential area within the **Victoria Road Conservation Area** and the building itself, known as “Newland,” is a mid-19th century **Grade II listed Victorian villa**historicengland.org.uk. No construction work is proposed; the project will **reuse the existing building fabric** as-is, with only minor reversible adaptations (such as portable ramps) to improve accessibility. The absence of physical alterations ensures that the **building’s character and appearance remain intact**, in line with its listed status and conservation area setting.

Figure 1: Exterior of “Newlands,” a mid-19th century Grade II listed villa at 1A Newlands, Huyton Hey Road

Newlands is a two-storey Victorian villa constructed in red brick with stone dressings and ornate classical details, including projecting bays with curved angles, sash windows with decorative pediments, and a bracketed cornicehistoricengland.org.uk. *The property sits at the junction of Huyton Hey Road and Victoria Road, marked by cast-iron gates and brick gateposts bearing the address “1A Newlands.” Its historic architectural character contributes significantly to the Victorian-era streetscape of the conservation area.*

Site Context and Heritage Overview

1A Newlands is part of a substantial Victorian villa **built circa mid-19th century**. The Historic England listing describes “Newland” as a **brick villa with stone base and plaster dressings, 2 storeys and 4 bays**, with projecting end bays featuring **recessed curved angles and open pediments**. Original architectural features include **sash windows** (some tripartite on the ground floor), decorative window surrounds with **friezes and pediments**, and a prominent **bracketed eaves cornice**. The main elevations facing Huyton Hey Rd and Victoria Rd are highly intact, showcasing the elegant proportions and detailing characteristic of the period. Internally, the building retains elements of its historic layout and ornamentation (such as **ornate plaster coving, a grand staircase, and marble fireplaces**), which have been preserved through successive uses.

The property occupies a generous plot with landscaped grounds. The **front forecourt** has been adapted to provide on-site parking for approx. **10+ vehicles**, secured by

electric gates at the entrance. The surrounding area (Victoria Road Conservation Area) is known for its collection of Victorian residences and mature trees, which lend a historic and leafy character. Within this context, Newlands is a **positive contributor to the conservation area’s special character**, being one of the grand Victorian villas that the designation seeks to protect. Notably, a recent Conservation Area Appraisal (2015) identified the area’s architectural value and led to updated management plans, underscoring the importance of preserving buildings like Newlands.

The building has a history of **adaptive re-use**. It has previously served as a **solicitor’s office**, later as a **school**, and most recently as **training and office space**. These uses have ensured the structure’s upkeep and viability over time. The proposed day care centre use continues this tradition of occupation with care and minimal intervention, aligning with national heritage guidance that **putting historic buildings to viable uses consistent with their conservation is desirable for sustaining their significance**. Indeed, Knowsley’s own policy states that the Council will *“take positive action to secure the retention, repair, maintenance and continued use of Listed Buildings”*. This proposal directly supports that goal by giving Newlands a sustainable new purpose.

Proposed Use and Internal Layout

The day care centre will cater to **up to 35 young adults (18–35) with physical and/or learning disabilities**, supported by approximately **10–12 staff** on site. Operating hours are **08:30 to 17:00, Monday to Friday** (with no evening or weekend hours). All activities will occur **indoors**, utilizing the building’s spacious rooms which are well-suited to conversion into program spaces. The internal layout (across basement, ground, and upper floors) will be organized to provide a variety of therapeutic and recreational environments for users, including:

- **Therapy Room & Sensory Room:** Quiet spaces equipped with sensory equipment and comfortable furnishings to support users’ mental well-being and therapeutic needs.
- **Gym & Exercise Area:** A room fitted with light exercise and physiotherapy equipment, allowing supervised physical activity and rehabilitation exercises.
- **“Snug” & Chill-Out Lounge:** Small cozy rooms with soft seating, dimmable lighting and calming décor, where users can relax in a low-stimulation setting if they feel overwhelmed.
- **Games & Gaming Rooms:** Areas with interactive games, consoles, and computers to encourage social interaction, cognitive stimulation, and fun in a controlled setting.
- **Cinema Room:** A multimedia room for group movie sessions or educational presentations, fostering a communal experience in a safe environment.

- **Arts and Crafts Space:** A creative studio area with tables and storage for art materials, facilitating crafts, music, and other creative therapies.
- **Dining Room & Kitchenette:** A communal dining area (likely on the ground floor) where users and staff can have meals and snacks. The space will be arranged to be wheelchair-accessible, and any required kitchen facilities will be adapted for use by people with varying abilities (e.g. low-level counters if needed).
- **WC Facilities:** Multiple **washrooms on ground and upper floors**, including at least one fully **accessible disabled toilet** on the ground level. These provide for the personal care needs of users.
- **Staff Office and Meeting Room:** An office for administrative work and private consultations with families or care professionals, ensuring efficient operation and safeguarding (for confidential record-keeping, etc.).
- **Storage Rooms:** Areas for secure storage of medical supplies, equipment (e.g. hoists, wheelchairs), and users' personal items.

No partitions or structural modifications are needed to achieve this layout – the existing rooms are generously sized and can accommodate the above functions with interior redecoration and furnishing only. **Fire safety provisions** are already up-to-date: the building is equipped with a fire alarm panel, emergency lighting, and fire doors throughout, meeting modern standards. These existing safety features will remain in place for the proposed use, and will be supplemented with any additional staff training or evacuation plans specific to our user group.

Crucially, the proposed internal arrangements have been designed with **flexibility** and **inclusion** in mind. Spaces can be adjusted to individual needs – for example, if a user requires a quiet break, the snug or sensory room is available at any time. Likewise, group activities can be scaled up or down depending on users' comfort levels. By utilizing the inherent spaciousness and variety of rooms in this Victorian villa, the design avoids an institutional feel and instead offers a **homely yet stimulating environment** that can cater to a wide spectrum of disabilities.

Inclusive Design and Accessibility

Inclusive design principles are at the forefront of this proposal, ensuring that **all users – regardless of mobility or cognitive ability – can access and benefit from the facility**. Key measures include:

- **Physical Accessibility:** The building's main entrance will be made wheelchair-accessible via **portable modular ramps** that can be placed over the few existing steps. These ramps provide a smooth approach for wheelchair users while being **reversible interventions** that do not alter the historic fabric. Inside, the wide hallways and doorways (characteristic of a grand 19th-century villa) allow for

wheelchair circulation; any narrow thresholds will be fitted with small ramps if needed. A ground-floor disabled WC is already in place. Activity rooms on the ground floor will be prioritized for users with limited mobility, so that those unable to use stairs can still participate in core activities. If feasible, the team will employ additional solutions such as **stair lifts** or elevator alternatives in the future (subject to listed building consent) to improve access to upper floors.

- **Sensory and Cognitive Accessibility:** The interior décor will be thoughtfully designed to accommodate individuals with autism, sensory processing disorders, and other cognitive disabilities. This includes using **muted, calming colour schemes** in quiet zones, providing adjustable lighting (dimmable lights, blackout curtains in the sensory/cinema room), and managing acoustics to reduce echoes (adding rugs, acoustic panels where appropriate, without permanently affixing them to historic surfaces). Clear signage with easy-read symbols will be used throughout the centre to help users navigate – these signages will be **temporary and removable**, respecting the historic interiors. Consistency in room layout and storage will help users build routine and confidence in using the space independently.
- **Secure & Safe Environment (Safeguarding):** Given the vulnerability of the user group, building security and safeguarding measures are essential design considerations. A **fob-access system** is in place controlling entry and exit points – only staff and authorized visitors hold fobs, preventing users from wandering out unsupervised and preventing unauthorized entry. Additionally, an existing **CCTV system** covers key indoor and outdoor areas (excluding private areas like WCs) to assist in monitoring and ensure user safety at all times. These systems were sensitively installed during previous uses and will remain operational. All exterior doors can be locked or alarmed to ensure that if a user attempts to leave unnoticed, staff are immediately alerted (this is critical for users with limited road safety awareness). The large, gated parking court allows **vehicles to drop off/pick up users within the secure site**, away from the public road – this controlled environment is much safer for embarking/disembarking, especially for those with mobility challenges, and it minimizes disturbance to traffic on Huyton Hey Road.
- **Active Design for Well-being:** The variety of rooms (sensory, gym, gaming, arts, etc.) is itself an inclusive design strategy to address different aspects of health. The **sensory room and snug** cater to mental well-being by offering stress-relief and personal space. The **gym and outdoor garden/patio** (at the rear) encourage physical activity and time in fresh air, which are beneficial for both physical and mental health. Daily programs will balance active sessions (exercise, interactive games) with quiet sessions (arts, relaxation) to suit individual care plans. This

aligns with the concept of providing “**healthy and safe**” **community spaces** that enable all participants to pursue healthier lifestyles and social interaction.

- **Staff Support and Supervision:** From a design perspective, sightlines and supervision have been considered. Rooms frequently used by users will be located such that staff can easily circulate and observe. For instance, the lounge and dining areas on the ground floor will be near staff offices, and doors can be left open for passive supervision. High-risk areas (like the kitchen or storage for art tools) will have controlled access. The environment is thus designed to **minimize risks of accidents or unsupervised situations** while still allowing users a sense of independence and freedom of movement.

Overall, the proposed use introduces **no physical barriers** that would impede disabled access; on the contrary, it proactively removes barriers (with ramps, modified facilities, and assistive technology) to create a **welcoming, inclusive space**. This approach is in harmony with **Policy CS19 of the Knowsley Core Strategy**, which requires new development to provide **safe, secure and convenient routes and access for all users, including the less mobile and elderly**. By re-purposing an existing building in this way, we demonstrate that historic environments can be made accessible and functional for modern social needs without compromising their integrity.

Impact on Heritage Significance

One of the core objectives of this project is to **preserve the heritage significance** of the Grade II listed building and its conservation area setting. The design and operational plan have been developed to ensure that the character-defining features of “Newlands” are *unharm*ed and indeed highlighted by the continued use. Key considerations and justifications in this regard include:

- **No Structural Alterations:** There will be **no demolition, extensions, or structural changes** internally or externally. All historic fabric – from the brick facades and slate roof to interior staircases, mouldings, and doors – will remain as existing. The listed building’s *special architectural interest* lies in its external appearance and period features, all of which are retained and respected. By confining interventions to **light-touch, reversible adaptations** (ramps, temporary signage, furniture), the proposal ensures the building’s physical authenticity is maintained. Even elements like the portable ramp will be removed outside operating hours, if necessary, to leave the frontage unaltered in appearance.
- **Preservation of Setting:** The external setting – including the front garden and gated forecourt, as well as the rear landscaped garden – will remain unchanged, preserving the building’s visual contribution to the streetscape. There are **no new fixtures** such as external lift shafts, additional lighting columns, or signage

boards proposed that could visually clutter the historic frontage. If any identification sign for the day centre is needed, it will be modest in scale (e.g. a small plaque by the door) and designed in consultation with the conservation officer to complement the building's aesthetics. The existing wrought-iron perimeter fence, gateposts, and other site features will simply continue in use, with regular maintenance. By avoiding any external alterations, the scheme aligns with the conservation area policy presumption "*in favour of the preservation of buildings or structures that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of a Conservation Area*" The character of Victoria Road Conservation Area will thus be preserved, and arguably enhanced by ensuring this prominent villa is occupied and cared for.

- **Interiors and Reversibility:** Internally, the building's plan will be utilized as-is. Historic room layouts will not be subdivided or gutted. Any equipment or décor introduced (such as therapy fixtures, projectors in the cinema room, etc.) will be installed in non-invasive ways. For example, sensory room fittings can be free-standing or fixed with minimal penetrations; gym equipment is free-standing; even heavy items like hoists can be mobile or use tension-fit systems to avoid damage to ceilings. Fire safety upgrades (fire doors, etc.) have already been completed sympathetically during prior uses – no further alterations are needed. The net effect is that, should the use ever cease in the future, the building could be easily returned to a residential or other use with *no loss of historic fabric*. This satisfies the NPPF requirement that **alterations to heritage assets should be "no more than necessary"** and that significance should be understood and safeguarded in any changes. In this case, the "change" is largely one of use and furnishings, not of fabric.
- **Conservation Benefits of Continued Use:** Importantly, keeping the building in active use will itself benefit its conservation. Vacant or under-utilized listed buildings often face deterioration; by contrast, our proposal ensures the property will be heated, cleaned, and maintained daily. Regular occupation will help spot maintenance issues early (leaks, faults, etc.) and justify ongoing investment in upkeep. The Council's heritage policy highlights the "*desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation*". The day care centre provides such a viable use, generating income (through service contracts or fees) that can be partly reinvested in the building's maintenance. In essence, the historic asset's long-term survival is strengthened by this scheme, as it marries the building's ample space and character with a community function that can appreciate and take care of that space. The alternative – leaving it to a potentially unsuitable use or no use – could risk neglect.

- **No Adverse Impact on Fabric from Use:** The nature of the day care activities is generally low impact on the building fabric. Unlike an industrial or intensive commercial use, a day centre's activities (arts and crafts, office work by staff, leisure activities by users) are relatively gentle. Wear and tear on floors and surfaces will be mitigated by protective measures (e.g. using rugs or mats in high-traffic areas, which also protect original floor finishes). Housekeeping protocols will ensure that any spills (paint, etc. from art activities) are promptly cleaned with appropriate materials to avoid damage. Heavy equipment is limited; even the small gym will have only light apparatus appropriate for disabled users (e.g. therapy balls, accessible exercise machines), so structural loading is not a concern. Noise levels will be contained within normal ranges – music or films in the cinema room will use moderate volume, respecting both the building (no vibration damage) and neighbors. Thus, the use is compatible with the building's age and fabric, not causing any harm that might arise from excessive noise, moisture, or physical strain.
- **Respecting Historical Layout in Function:** We have also endeavored to assign uses to rooms in a way that respects their character. For instance, the most ornate ground-floor room (with large windows and fireplace) will serve as a calm lounge or meeting space, avoiding clutter and allowing its features to be appreciated. More utilitarian spaces (perhaps previous service areas or secondary rooms) are chosen for storage or messy activities, to minimize the risk of damage to highly decorated rooms. This thoughtful planning reflects an understanding of the building's hierarchy of spaces and ensures that new functions do not conflict with the historic ambiance of significant rooms. Where appropriate, historic features will be incorporated into the daily life of the centre – e.g. the grand central hallway can serve as an **“interaction hub”** where users' art is displayed on temporary easels, celebrating the building's heritage as part of the centre's identity.

In summary, the proposal **preserves the listed building's significance in full** and complies with all relevant heritage criteria. By doing “nothing” physically to the structure and “something good” functionally (finding it a sustainable use), we adhere to both the **local policy CS20: Managing the Borough's Historic Environment** and national guidance in NPPF Chapter 16. The special architectural and historic interest of Newlands will not only remain unharmed but will be **kept alive** through appropriate use. The overall character of the conservation area is maintained, as the outward appearance of the site is unchanged (aside from the everyday presence of users and staff).

Notably, **no harm has been identified** in heritage terms; accordingly, there is no need to engage in harm mitigation or balancing exercises under NPPF paragraphs 202–204

(for less than substantial harm), since we assert a neutral or positive impact. Even so, were one to consider any minute impacts (say, the visual presence of a portable ramp during the day), these are far outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme (discussed later) – a stance fully supported by NPPF policy which allows harm only where justified by public benefit [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). Here we have *public benefit with no harm*, the ideal scenario for heritage-led regeneration.

Inclusive Design & Heritage – Balancing Act

It is worth highlighting how this project exemplifies a **balance between inclusive design and heritage conservation**. Sometimes, making historic buildings accessible can introduce tensions (ramps, lifts, etc. can conflict with fabric), but in this case we have found solutions that respect both aims:

- The **portable ramp** strategy avoids any permanent alteration to the entrance steps, thus protecting the original entrance design while still providing wheelchair access when needed. This approach aligns with Historic England’s guidance of “reversibility” in adaptations to listed buildings.
- **Internal circulation:** rather than widen doorways or corridors (which would harm fabric), we are working within the generous proportions already there and managing the use of floors to accommodate those who cannot reach upper levels. This demonstrates flexibility in programming instead of forcing physical changes.
- Installing a **lift** was considered but ruled out at this stage due to the significant intervention it would require in a historic layout; instead, functions are arranged so that lack of lift does not exclude anyone from key services (e.g. essential therapy and personal care facilities are all at ground level). This is consistent with inclusive design guidance which encourages *pragmatic solutions in historic contexts* – doing the most to include people without undue harm to heritage when full physical adaptation is impractical.
- **Safety systems** like the fob access and CCTV have been integrated in an unobtrusive way (e.g. small cameras at eaves, electronic locks in existing door frames) during past uses. We will utilize these existing installations to avoid new visual intrusions. This demonstrates how modern requirements (security) can be met without defacing historic character.

Through such measures, the project intends to be a **case study in how an old building can serve modern inclusive needs**. Both the fabric and the users benefit: the former is maintained and appreciated, the latter enjoy a rich environment that might be far more inspiring than a purpose-built modern facility. This co-benefit is a strong theme in current conservation philosophy – that reusing heritage buildings for community

purposes can create unique places which foster pride and well-being, something a generic new build might not achieve.

Conclusion (Design & Heritage)

The design approach for 1A Newlands demonstrates **sensitivity to heritage, commitment to inclusivity, and a practical plan for a safe, nurturing environment**. In summary:

- The **historic character** of the Grade II listed building is *fully preserved*: no structural changes and only sympathetic, reversible adaptations are proposed. The building's appearance and key architectural features will remain as today.
- The scheme provides a **high level of accessibility** (ramps, accessible WC, managed use of spaces) and safety (secure entry, supervised environment) in line with best practices for inclusive design, thereby opening this heritage asset to users who traditionally might have been excluded from such environments.
- The **design is fit for purpose** as a day care centre, with a variety of internal spaces repurposed to support therapy, recreation, and social activities – all while retaining the building's integrity.
- The proposal aligns with **local design and conservation policies** (Knowsley Core Strategy Policies CS19 and CS20) by achieving design quality, accessibility for all, and respectful integration with the historic environment. It also supports the NPPF's objectives for healthy, inclusive communities and the proactive conservation of heritage assets.
- By ensuring an active and beneficial use, the project offers a **sustainable future for "Newlands"**. The public benefits – notably improved services for disabled young adults and their families – go hand in hand with the conservation of the building, showcasing that heritage and social objectives can be mutually reinforcing.

In conclusion, the Design, Access & Heritage considerations have been thoroughly addressed to guarantee that this change of use will **enhance community value** while **honouring the past**. We respectfully submit that the proposal merits support as a thoughtful, well-justified adaptation of a listed building, delivering inclusive design excellence without compromise to heritage.