

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 24 June 2020

Ward: Redlands

App No.: 200061/FUL

Address: The Abbey School, Kendrick Road, Reading

Proposal: Erection of a new dining hall with green roof over the existing courtyard, rooftop extension to the 6th Form block to provide a new common room, extension to the south-east to provide additional classroom space and a new study area for the 6th Form block, reconfiguration of hard landscaped area to remove 1 of 4 netball courts, move existing flood lighting, relocate existing 6th form parking and enhance the frontage of the 6th form building.

Applicant: The Abbey School

Determination Date: Originally 15/4/2020; EOT agreed until 30/6/2020

RECOMMENDATION:

To GRANT full planning permission subject to the following conditions:

Time limit - standard three years for implementation

In accordance with the approved Plans

Pre-commencement submission and approval of materials

Pre-commencement submission of landscaping (large scale) details to be approved

Pre-commencement submission of construction method statement to be approved (including noise and dust control)

Pre-commencement submission of employment, skills and training plan to be approved

Pre-commencement submission of SuDs Strategy to be approved

Pre-commencement biodiversity enhancement to be approved

Pre-occupation vehicle parking as specified

Pre-occupation electric vehicle charging points as specified

No plant equipment to be installed until noise report submitted and approved

BREEAM 'Very Good' to be achieved: Pre-Assessment Interim

BREEAM 'Very Good' to be achieved: Post-Construction Review

Travel Plan

Construction/Hours of Working

No Bonfires during construction

Informatives

Terms and Conditions

Building Regulations

Highways

Pre-Commencement Conditions

Tree Works Application

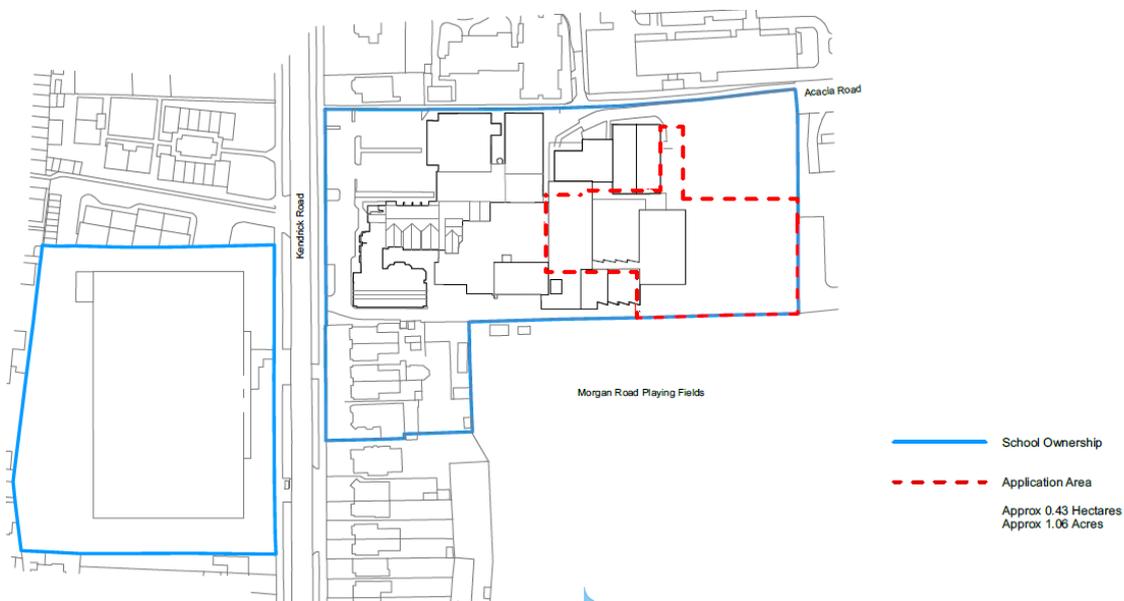
Complaints about Construction

Positive & Proactive

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application site comprises The Abbey School, located on the eastern side of Kendrick Road. The school comprises an original Victorian building core along Kendrick Road, with large modern extensions to the front and rear. The Abbey School is a private Girls' school for 3-18 year olds. The site is split between the Junior School on Christchurch Road and this, the Senior School site. There are 172 6th Form students, with 20 existing car parking spaces serving these students.
- 1.2 The site is located within the Kendrick Road Conservation Area and an Air Quality Management Area.
- 1.3 The proposal is being considered at Planning Applications Committee by virtue of it falling within the 'Major' applications category. The site in relation to the wider area is shown below.

Site Location Plan (not to scale)



Aerial View of Site



2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 Full planning permission is sought to provide a new dining hall by building a green roof over the existing courtyard, install a rooftop extension to the 6th Form block to provide a new common room, extend to the south-east to provide additional classroom space and a new study area for the 6th Form block, reconfiguration of hard landscaped area to remove 1 of 4 netball courts, move existing flood lighting, relocate existing 6th form parking and enhance the frontage of the 6th form building.
- 2.1 The number of pupils or staff is not proposed to be increased. The total gross internal floor area of the proposed scheme is approximately 3,100m².
- 2.2 It is proposed to remove 4 x Scots Pine trees, protected by a Tree Preservation Order, to facilitate the proposals.
- 2.3 Whilst the existing parking area is to be moved and reconfigured, the overall number of car parking spaces will not change.
- 2.4 10 x electricity charging points are proposed.
- 2.5 Drawings submitted:

- Drawing No: Site Location 181006-1100 P02
- Drawing No: A1 / 200 Existing Ground Floor Plan 181006- 1200 P01
- Drawing No: A1 / 200 Existing First Floor Plan 181006-1201 P01
- Drawing No: A1 / 200 Existing Second Floor Plan 181006-1202 P01
- Drawing No: A1 / 100 Proposed Ground Floor Plan 181006-1401 P03
- Drawing No: A1 / 100 Proposed First Floor Plan 181006-1402 P03
- Drawing No: A1 / 100 Proposed Second Floor Plan 181006-1403 P03
- Drawing No: A1 / 100 Proposed Roof Plan 181006-1404 P01
- Drawing No: A1 / 100 East Elevation - Proposed & Existing 181006-1500 P02
- Drawing No: A1 / 100 South Elevation - Proposed & Existing 181006-1501 P02
- Drawing No: A1 / 100 West Elevation - Proposed & Existing 181006-1502 P02
- Drawing No: A1 / 100 Section A - Proposed & Existing 181006-1503 P02
- Received 21/1/2010
- Drawing No: New Tree Planting Existing and Proposed 181006-1511
- Received 22/5/2020
- Drawing No: A1 / 200 Proposed Site Plan 181006-1400 P05
- Received 7/5/2020

Supporting information submitted:

- Outline Planting Schedule - Arrival and Car Park 3260
- New Planting Scheme Letter
- Additional Information/Justification Letter - Received 7/5/2020

- Planning, Heritage, Design and Access Statement prepared by KEW Planning, including landscape proposal prepared by The Landmark Practice;
- Transport Statement prepared by Motion;
- Travel Plan prepared by Motion;
- Environmental Noise Assessment prepared by Acoustic Consultants Limited;
- Interim Drainage Strategy prepared by Momentum Engineering;

All prepared by Eight Associates and received 21/1/2020:

- Arboricultural Survey Report and Tree Constraints Plan;
- Arboricultural Implication Assessment and Draft Tree Protection Plan;
- Energy Assessment and Sustainability Statement;
- BREEAM Pre-Assessment; and
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

2.5 The CIL requirement for schools is nil under the Council's adopted CIL Charging Schedule.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

Pre-application advice was sought on the site and discussions held under application 190924.

88/0044 Erection of two timber sheds for store/garage and workshop. Permitted

99/1181 Erection of a single storey extension to provide cloakroom for kitchen staff. Permitted

99/1869 Extension of existing laboratory block; new roof and external windows to existing laboratories plus new staff room. New area of parking to replace spaces lost to the laboratory extension. Permitted

01/0414 Alteration to existing building to create new dormer and 6sqm extension to provide new tuck shop. Permitted

06/01507/CON Removal of wing at the front of the school and the timber classroom. Permitted

06/01508/FUL Partial demolition of existing front section of the school. Permitted

12/01629/FUL Development of an all weather playing field with floodlights and fencing. Permitted

07/00318/FUL 6 floodlights to illuminate existing 6 tennis courts. Permitted

13/00288/FUL Erection of 30m length of 3m high weld mesh security fence and 1.5m high bund. Permitted

13-00316/APP CON Discharge of conditions 3 and 9 of planning 12/01629/FUL. Discharged

4. CONSULTATIONS

Internal

4.1 RBC Ecologist - No objection. Discussed below.

4.2 RBC Heritage Officer- No objection. Discussed below.

4.3 RBC Natural Environment Officer - Originally objected; further to additional information, objection withdrawn. Discussed below.

4.4 RBC Environmental Protection Officer - No objection subject to additional information. Discussed below

4.5 RBC Transport Officer - No objection. Discussed below

4.6 Sports England - No objection.

4.7 Reading UK CIC - No objection.

4.8 Reading CAAC- No comments received.

4.9 Thames Water - No objection.

Public consultation

4.10 Letters were sent to surrounding neighbouring properties and a site notice was put up. Notice placed in local paper. No letters of representation received.

5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

5.1 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) which states at Paragraph 11 “Plans and decisions should apply a 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. In this case the development plan consists of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

5.2 Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the LPA to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

5.3 Accordingly, the following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)
National Planning Policy Guidance (2014 onwards)

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019:

- CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
- CC4: Decentralised Energy
- CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
- CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
- CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- CC9: Securing Infrastructure
- EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
- EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
- EN6: New Development in a Historic Context
- EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
- EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
- EN15: Air Quality
- EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
- EN17: Noise Generating Equipment
- EN18: Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems
- TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
- TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
- TR4: Cycle Routes and Facilities
- TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
- OU1: New and Existing Community Facilities

Relevant Reading Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):

Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Planning Obligations Under Section 106 (2015)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)
Employment, Skills and Training (April 2013)
Tree Strategy (2010)
Draft Tree Strategy (currently out for consultation)
Draft Biodiversity Action Plan (currently out for consultation)
Draft Climate Change Strategy (currently out for consultation)

Other relevant documentation:

Kendrick Road Conservation Area Appraisal (2005)
Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England, 2016)
Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015a)
Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b)
Principles of Conservation (Historic England, 2008)
Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings (British Standards Publication BS 7913:2013, 2015)

6. APPRAISAL

The main issues to be considered are:

- Principle of Development
- Landscape/Trees
- Scale, Appearance, Design and Impact on Conservation Area
- Amenity for Nearby Occupiers
- Transport
- Ecology
- Sustainability
- Other Matters - Sustainability, SuDs, S106 Legal Agreement and CIL
- Equalities impact
- Overall Planning Balance and Conclusion

Principle of Development

- 6.1 As noted in the introduction, The Abbey School is a private school. Policy OU1 seeks to promote 'new, extended or improved community facilities, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site'. Whilst acknowledging the private school status, supporting text of the policy states at Para 4.7.3 that 'The range and quality of facilities serving Reading's communities should be improved'. In this respect the applicant has confirmed that the school offers the following community benefits:

Use of the swimming pool by:

Albatross Diving Club
Swimkidz
Swim England Synchro
Thames Valley Swim School
Abbey Swim School
Reading University water polo club
SuperCamps
Reading Boys school
British Rowing capsized testing
Reading University 3rd year film & drama student filming

Use of all-weather pitch by:

Berkshire Elite FC
Reading Lacrosse Club
Reading School
Reading University mixed hockey team
SuperCamps
Phoenix & Ranelagh Hockey club

Use of netball courts by:

Go Mammoth
Reading Social netball league

Use of classrooms by:

Reading Korean School
Hispanolandia Spanish School
Reading Prayer group

Use of other large spaces ie Richards Hall, Hardcastle and sports hall:

School of the Arts theatre school (Junior School)
Reading Tango Festival
St Andrews Scottish Dancing
Reading Swing Exchange
The Rock Project
linkai judo
BKMA Reading
Berkshire Maestros
Reading University mixed basketball team
Bollywood Dance Worldwide
My Dance Land
Madeleine Kelly ballet
Berkshire Chess
Parenthesis Choir TARA (Telagu Association of Reading and Around)
Reading Between the Lines
Starburst Foundation

- 6.2 Given the above, it is considered that the school does offer significant community benefits to the Borough, wherein the proposals would provide enhanced facilities to an existing school, and within the school curtilage. It is considered that this would broadly comply with Policy OU1 in this respect. This is also supported by Policy CC9, which identifies education as a particular aspect of infrastructure within the Borough in which the highest priority must be given in the planning process.
- 6.3 The proposals would result in the loss of 1 out of the current 4 netball/MUGA courts. Sport England has considered this application against the National Planning Policy Framework (particularly Para 97) and against its own playing fields policy which states:

'Sport England will oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or would prejudice the use of:

- *all or any part of a playing field, or*
- *land which has been used as a playing field and remains undeveloped, or*
- *land allocated for use as a playing field*

unless, in the judgement of Sport England, the development as a whole meets with one or more of five specific exceptions contained within Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and Guidance document'.

- 6.4 Sport England have commented that whilst the loss of a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) is regrettable, Sport England's role is to protect playing fields, which a MUGA is not. Furthermore, Sport England are satisfied that the proposed development meets Exception 3 of the playing fields policy, in that:

'The proposed development affects only land incapable of forming part of a playing pitch and does not:

- reduce the size of any playing pitch*
- result in the inability to use any playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins and run-off areas);*
- reduce the sporting capacity of the playing field to accommodate playing pitches or the capability to rotate or reposition playing pitches to maintain their quality;*
- result in the loss of other sporting provision or ancillary facilities on the site; or*
- prejudice the use of any remaining areas of playing field on the site.'*

- 6.5 It is noted that should the school require a 4th netball court, the hockey pitch on the opposite side of Kendrick Road could also facilitate this. Given the proposed remaining provision of a hockey pitch, 3 netball courts (one as a flexible netball/tennis court) swimming pool and sports hall, this is not considered to have an overtly negative impact on the sports provision available to students.
- 6.6 Given the above, is considered that the proposal to increase facilities for education would broadly comply with the principles of Policy OU1 and CC9.

Landscaping/Trees

- 6.7 Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) requires development to contribute positively to the area of Reading within which it is located, including by way of landscaping. Policy EN14 (Trees Hedges and Woodlands) states that individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal, and the Borough's vegetation cover will be extended with new development to make provision for tree planting within the application site, or off-site in appropriate situations.
- 6.8 Further to this, the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy is also out for consultation, which recognises the importance of tree cover and how the natural environment can make a significant contribution towards reducing Reading's carbon footprint. To help deliver important elements of Reading's climate emergency strategy is the Borough's adopted Tree Strategy and the Revised Sustainable Design and Construction SPD which states that "Development will not be permitted which would undermine current levels of tree cover as this is likely to be damaging to climate change adaptation strategies". Furthermore, draft Tree Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plans are also currently out of consultation.
- 6.9 Further to the above, the site sits within the Kendrick Road Conservation Area and the 4 Scots Pines trees proposed to be removed are further protected by Tree Preservation Order 3/20. In this respect the four mature Scots Pines are considered to have significant amenity value as a group being the only mature, coniferous trees visible within this area of the school grounds. Whilst the Appraisal for this Conservation Area does not specifically comment on the trees in question, it does

note the “area’s mature trees” and comments that “despite this being a relatively urban conservation area, trees are a special feature”.

6.10 The Council’s Natural Environment Team and Planning Officers originally raised an objection to the proposals. However, during the course of the application the applicant submitted additional justification for the loss of the trees and the following elements in mitigation are now proposed:

1. 4 no. Mature replacement Scots Pine trees (not saplings), in a location (along the same boundary as those to be removed) which will allow the trees to flourish and have a longer life span.
2. 6 no. Further additional trees to enhance the landscaping provision in this particular part of the site, seeking to reduce the carbon footprint and increase biodiversity.
3. Provision of additional landscaping throughout the campus to seek to meet RBC’s objectives to contribute to the provision of the landscaping throughout the Borough.
4. A planting aftercare plan to ensure that the measures agreed are maintained in accordance with the planning process.

6.11 Points 1 and 2 are indicated on the drawing excerpt below, indicating 10 trees (6 net gain):



- 6.12 Given the above, the key questions therefore, are whether the proposed trees would provide sufficient immediate impact to replace the amenity lost from the existing Scots Pines, and whether the principle of the loss of mature trees is acceptable. In this respect, it was considered reasonable to request that the applicant satisfactorily demonstrate that the school can, in practice, source and afford to pay for the trees they are proposing, should the potential removal of mature trees be agreed.
- 6.13 In response, the applicant has provided all the information that has been requested by officers; namely, availability of Scots Pines in a reasonable condition for the size specified, tree pit specifications for trees planted at the northern end of the car park, and confirmation that the school has the available funds to purchase the trees. These details have all been checked by the Council's Tree Officers, and, the proposed mitigation scheme, in itself, is considered acceptable.
- 6.14 The value of trees is graded by the British Standard 5837:20112 and these range from Grade A (the best, most healthy, valuable specimens) to Grade U (those that are the least healthy and valuable specimens). For the 4 Scots Pines proposed to be removed, are 3 x grade B considered to be of 'moderate quality and value' and 1 x grade C considered to be of 'low quality and value'. In this instance, it was the combined amenity value as a group that warranted the Group TPO, and it is noted by the Tree Officer that as individual specimens, the trees have various flaws, such as they are growing at right angles to each other which limits opportunity for each tree to grow further.
- 6.15 Whilst there remains strong concern from the Natural Environment Team with the principle of removing established mature trees, which is acknowledged, the Natural Environment Team consider it reasonable to remove the objection on the basis of the applicant providing replacement planting of 4 x mature (not saplings) Scots Pines (as direct mitigation for the 4 trees to be lost) in a similar location and in a better rooting environment, along with 6 x mature additional Scots Pines. In this respect, the additional trees do not necessarily need to be Scots Pines - indeed, species diversity would be beneficial for biodiversity, appearance and pest and disease resilience. As such, the species selection could be dealt with by way of suitably worded conditions.
- 6.16 The proposed Scots Pines along the boundary would provide direct evergreen visual mitigation and, furthermore, would also result in a better visual impact in long distant views from the south/south east (given the view of the existing trees is partly obscured by a 2m high fence). Furthermore, these trees would also provide direct evergreen visual mitigation.
- 6.17 The proposals would also allow for a suitable level of soft landscaping that does not currently exist on the site and this would assist in mitigating the increase in bulk of the extensions. Overall, the proposed new tree planting would result in a 150% increase in the number of trees on the site. This would also result in wider benefits beyond the site as not only would the appearance of the development be softened, but this opportunity for additional planting would enhance the appearance of the Kendrick Road Conservation Area, adding to the Conservation Area's mature trees as referenced in the Appraisal and increase tree canopy across the Borough which is welcomed.
- 6.18 The application also incorporates a green roof above the new dining hall. As well as providing an attractive feature, this is considered a welcome introduction of further greenery to the scheme, as well as offering other benefits through support

given to biodiversity, a reduction in rainwater run-off, better air quality and an increase in energy efficiency which is encouraged at local and national policy levels. Indeed, the Council welcomes measures to adapt to Climate Change, particularly in light of the Council's recent commitment to its Climate Change Emergency as referenced above and, furthermore, the Council's recently adopted Sustainable Design and Construction SPD considers a green roof to be a technique that can help with adaptation to climate change. Furthermore, the Council's draft Tree Strategy and draft Biodiversity Action Plan both promote additional green roofs, which are considered to play an important role in achieving sustainable development and afforded great weight in Para 131 of the NPPF which specifically promotes high levels of sustainability in decision making.

- 6.19 In summary, whilst the loss of the existing trees is acknowledged, the applicant has gone to great lengths to provide appropriate compensation. In this very specific instance, whilst acknowledging that the loss of these trees is not strictly in accordance with the development plan Policy EN12, officers consider this is outweighed by the very specific mitigation proposed including replacement mature tree planting (of the same species), further additional trees ensuring net gain and the wider landscaping proposals, which is considered to be a tangible planning benefit of the proposal, which is noted within the context of the overall planning balance, as detailed at the end of this report.
- 6.20 On balance, the proposals are considered in accordance with policies CC7, CC2 and EN1, EN3, EN6 and EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 as well as objectives 5 (Climate Adaptation) and 8 (The Role of New Developments) in the adopted Tree Strategy.

Scale, Appearance, Design and Impact on Conservation Area

- 6.21 The site lies within the Kendrick Road Conservation Area and as such there is a duty imposed by Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requiring decision makers to have special regards to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.
- 6.22 To reflect the above, Policy CC7 aims to preserve or enhance the character of the area in which a development is proposed in terms of layout, landscape, density, scale, height, massing, architectural detail and materials. Policy EN1 seeks to preserve or enhance the historic character and setting of heritage assets, Policy EN3 seeks that proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness and Policy EN6 seeks that new development will make a contribution to the historic character of the area by respecting and enhancing its architectural and visual qualities and considering how heritage considerations can influence the design of new development.
- 6.23 Paragraph 127 of the NPPF 2019 details that decisions should ensure that developments are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and are sympathetic to local character including the surrounding built environment
- 6.24 Paragraph 193 of the NPPF 2019 details that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

- 6.25 The Kendrick Road Conservation Area Appraisal notes that The Abbey School “boasts an attractive Victorian frontage to Kendrick Road and a large modern extension is an example of the successful integration of old and new. The extension has been successfully broken down into smaller units which are in sympathy with the scale and form of surrounding historic buildings while being unashamedly modern in concept and performance”.
- 6.26 Noting that the buildings behind the Victorian frontage (to the rear, east, of Kendrick Road) are all more modern, and as noted in the Appraisal, suitably designed modern extensions, in an appropriate location, are considered acceptable. It is the Kendrick Road elevation that comprises the remains of the original Victorian building and, in this instance, given that the proposed extensions would be confined to the modern buildings to the rear of the school, there would be no adverse effect on the historic front elevations.
- 6.27 Building heights within the school range between two and three storeys. As such, the proposed two storey building serving the dining hall (which would be below the height of the general teaching block and 6th form) and the three storey extension to the 6th form block, would be comparable with the massing of existing buildings, without appearing over dominant. Indeed, the 6th Form building would match the height of the general teaching block and, overall, the buildings would appear to complement each other in height. Furthermore, given the position of the proposed two storey building, infilling the courtyard area, this will not be readily visible from the wider public domain, and well-screened from internal and external views of the Conservation Area. The proposed extension to the 6th form and roof extension would be more readily visible, with a more direct view of this part of the school from Morgan Road to the south - which would be viewed across the extensive playing fields - and one of the University of Reading’s lecture/teaching blocks to the east. It is not considered that such views would be overtly disrupted over and above the current situation and when seen from all nearby vantage points the proposed scale and design, owing to a combination of height, the significant set back from the wider public realm and the high quality finished appearance envisaged (discussed further below), it is considered that the proposal has been satisfactorily designed so as to not result in any adverse harm to either views from the wider Conservation Area and is considered to acceptably respond to its context.
- 6.28 In terms of detailed design, the proposals would produce a very modern extension to the school, designed to be distinct, with no ‘competition’ between this new design element and the Victorian building. However, it would still incorporate brick to reflect the brick used on other school buildings, and brick is also a common material within the wider Conservation Area (residential houses). The tile-clad spandrel sections will also feature patterning taking inspiration from the local multi-coloured brickwork found in Reading, adding richness to the design, which is also considered to enhance the proposals.
- 6.29 The NPPF states that ‘Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development’ (Para 124) and that planning decisions should not ‘prevent or discourage appropriate innovation or change’ (Para 127). It is considered that securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations and that decisions should address the connections between people and places. In this instance, whilst acknowledging the difference in aesthetic appearance, it is considered that the proposals would not detract from the character of the main historic building, rather it would highlight and reflect the building’s function and value as an education facility. Indeed, the proposals are considered to represent an acceptable compromise in linking the new elements proposed to both the

modern additions to the school without in any way detracting from the historic site frontage.

- 6.30 The proposed roof garden is considered to be an attractive feature in itself, as well as offering other biodiversity benefits discussed further below. The proposed glazed balustrading (which is considered necessary for safety purposes), would be softened by planting which would help to minimise the visual impact. It is noted that given its position above the dining hall, which would also be largely obscured by the 6th Form, it would not be readily visible from the wider public realm.
- 6.31 It is considered that the proposals would represent an enhancement of the existing school buildings and no harm is considered to arise either to the historic school frontage of other nearby listed buildings in the area. The Council's Historic Buildings Consultant has raised no objection to the scheme either in respect of the impact on the historic element of the school, nearby listed buildings or the Conservation Area.
- 6.32 The success of the scheme will, to some extent, rely on the quality of materials and the finer details and finish proposed. To ensure suitable quality of materials it is considered reasonable and appropriate to secure further details of the proposed materials by way of a suitable worded pre-commencement condition. More specifically, the proposals would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets and, when weighed against the benefits of the proposal (as outlined elsewhere in this appraisal), the proposals are considered to be appropriate in this regard. With the condition secured in relation to materials, as set out previously, this is another safeguard in protecting the nearby heritage assets, by helping to ensure that the detailing of the design helps to tie with the more contemporary buildings in the surrounding area.
- 6.33 In overall terms, and together with the proposed landscaping being secured via condition (as discussed elsewhere), the proposals are considered appropriate in all design and heritage regards, in compliance with policies CC7, EN1, EN3 and EN6 and the design approach taken, is considered a planning benefit in the overall planning balance for the scheme.

Amenity for Nearby Occupiers

- 6.34 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) seeks to ensure development does not cause harm to the living environment of existing properties, in terms of loss of privacy, overlooking and visual dominance, amongst other things. Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) seeks to protect surrounding occupiers from the impact of pollution.
- 6.35 The proposals are set within the existing school site, to the rear, some significant distance (well in excess of 20m) from the nearest residential properties. As such, it is not considered that there would be any adverse effect on neighbouring properties in terms of loss of light, privacy or overbearing impact. Whilst the proposals are likely to be seen, no material loss of amenity is considered to occur.
- 6.36 The intention is not to increase in the number of pupils attending the school and the proposal would therefore be unlikely to result in any significant material harm to neighbouring occupiers in terms of noise or disturbance. Furthermore, Environmental Protection Officers have raised no concern in this respect.
- 6.37 The proposals do not introduce any new flood lighting. However, as it is proposed to move the existing flood lighting, this could change the impact that they have on nearby receptors. In this respect, Environmental Protection Officers consider that

a light-spread (lux) plan should be provided, confirming that the lux levels at the nearest receptors in each direction, will still be acceptable. The applicant has confirmed that they will be submitting a lux plan to demonstrate acceptability and details of which will be provided in the update report.

- 6.38 The school and all outdoor spaces are outside of the AQMA; so air quality levels to the school are considered to be acceptable. It is also noted that a travel plan is already in place and there would be no increase in staff or pupil numbers. Regarding cooking smells, a condition is recommended for details of any mechanical extraction to be submitted, in order to maintain neighbour amenity from food odours.
- 6.39 Conditions requiring the submission of a Construction Method Statement and restricting hours of construction work and prohibiting bonfires are also recommended to protect neighbouring amenity.
- 6.40 In overall terms the proposals are not considered to cause a significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing residential properties or wider users of the area. The proposals are therefore considered to comply with policies CC8 and EN17 in particular.

Transport

- 6.41 Policies TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway related matters), TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking related matters relating to development.
- 6.42 There are no changes proposed to the existing access and parking arrangements at the front of the school, with the proposals contained to the rear of the site. The 6th Form parking area located to the rear of the site currently provides 20 parking spaces. The application states that the existing chevron bay parking layout is cramped and makes turning difficult hence the proposals including the reconfiguration of the 6th form parking, resulting in the loss of 1 of the 4 netball courts. The relocated car park will still be accessed by the driveway to the south of the main buildings and will still be provided with 20 spaces, with no increase in parking spaces.
- 6.43 Policy CC6 (Accessibility and the Intensity of Development) says that scale and density of development will be related to its level of accessibility. The site is located within the town centre and therefore highly accessible by a range of transport options. The 20 parking spaces that would serve the development are existing and the proposals do not seek to increase this provision. These spaces are shared by 172 6th Form students. The proposals therefore are not considered to facilitate an intensification of vehicle movements to the site.
- 6.44 The Council's Local Transport Plan 3 Strategy 2011 - 2026 includes policies for investing in new infrastructure to improve connections throughout and beyond Reading which include a network of publicly available Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points to encourage and enable low carbon or low energy travel choices for private and public transport. Policy TR5 of the Local Plan also states that "*Within communal car parks for residential or non-residential developments of at least 10 spaces, 10% of spaces should provide an active charging point.*" In view of this, 10no. new electricity charging points are being provided to ensure that electric vehicles have sustainable means of fuelling, which is appropriate.

- 6.45 The existing cycle parking will remain in its existing location adjacent to the school minibus parking area to the south of the main school buildings. Given that the proposals do not result in an increase in staff or student numbers at the school, this is acceptable.
- 6.46 A vehicle access point exists to the North of the playing fields, via Acacia Road and Redlands Road to the East. Deliveries and other servicing activity will continue to take place via Acacia Road as per the existing arrangements, which is acceptable.
- 6.47 There is an existing travel plan in place of the 4 campuses, with a separate travel plan under this application specifically for the proposed extension. In view of the above, the proposals are considered to be acceptable in respect of transport matters subject to conditions in respect of a construction method statement, vehicle parking and electric vehicle charging points.

Ecology

- 6.48 Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) states that development proposals should retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity.
- 6.49 The Council's Ecology Consultant agrees with the findings of the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal that the building is unlikely to host bats with no habitats nearby likely to be affected. Indeed, the Ecologist considers that the four Scots Pines trees proposed to be removed are very unlikely to be suitable for use by roosting bats.
- 6.50 Further to the above, Policy EN12 seeks that development should provide for a net gain in biodiversity wherever possible. The existing site is limited due to the existing built form and use of the building. Notwithstanding, a number of ecological enhancements are proposed, including:
- Biodiverse green roof
 - At least 3 bird nesting boxes on site
 - At least 3 bat boxes on site
 - External lighting in line with BCT (Bat Conservation Trust) guidelines
 - Native or fruiting and flowering plant species
 - A stag beetle logger
 - Hedgehog corridors
- 6.51 These are welcomed as positive biodiversity enhancements and considered to be a tangible planning benefit of the proposal, which is noted within the context of the overall planning balance, as detailed at the end of this report. Full details will be secured by way of suitably worded conditions. The biodiversity enhancements shall thereafter be installed as approved, as supported by policy EN12 and the NPPF.

Sustainability and SuDS

- 6.52 Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) and CC3 (Adaption to Climate Change) seeks that proposals should incorporate measures which take account of climate change. Policy CC4 (Decentralised Energy) seeks that developments of over 1,000m² should consider the inclusion of combined heat and power plant (CHP) or other form of decentralised energy provision.
- 6.53 A number of sustainability measures have been highlighted in the Design and Access Statement which is welcomed. Notwithstanding, as a major application for

non-residential development, the proposals would be required to meet a BREEAM 'Excellent' standard where possible. A BREEAM Pre-Assessment has been undertaken and the proposed new build element of the development is to achieve a 'Very Good' rating. Whilst the site is currently considered to achieve a score of 58% within this rating, measures have been detailed to increase the score to 62.7%, within the 'Very Good' rating. Whilst acknowledging that this is short of the policy requirement, supporting Para 4.1.4 of the policy CC2 confirms that "some types of development, such as industrial uses, warehouses and schools might find it more difficult to meet these standards. In these cases, developments must demonstrate that the standard to be achieved is the highest possible for the development, and at a minimum meets the BREEAM 'Very Good Standard'. In light of this, and provided that the required pre- and post- BREEAM energy efficiency conditions are attached to achieve the anticipated level of compliance, Officers are satisfied that the requirements of the policy can be achieved.

- 6.54 The supporting information also includes a Sustainability Statement and Energy Statement. These reports follow the most recent policies and Sustainable Design and Construction SPD guidance applying the recognised energy hierarchy of 'be lean', 'be clean' and 'be green'. This has been achieved with the design of the building incorporating high standards of insulation to minimise energy use and using low carbon technologies.
- 6.55 In terms of decentralised energy, the applicant has set out that the use of Combined Heat and Power is not feasible as there is no thermal demand and the use of gas CHP is not considered to offer any carbon savings. However, the development seeks to reduce carbon emissions by utilising fabric energy efficiency measures ('be lean'), with other measures proposed to reduce overheating and the need for cooling ('be clean'). Furthermore, solar photovoltaic panels and an air source heat pump are proposed leading to a reduction of carbon emissions of 36.9% over Building Regulations Part L.
- 6.56 On balance, officers are satisfied that the proposals demonstrate a good standard of sustainability and adhering to reducing carbon off-setting which is considered to be a positive benefit of the scheme.
- 6.57 An interim drainage note in respect of SuDs has also been submitted as part of the application. This has been reviewed by the Local Flood Authority (RBC Transport) and it is considered that a detailed assessment should be provided to establish that the run off rate from the development will not exceed the existing. It is considered that this can be dealt with by way of a suitably worded condition.
- 6.58 The comments of Thames Water are noted and can be addressed by their suggested informative.

Other Matters

Employment, Skills and training Plan

- 6.59 As the scheme falls within the Major category it would be required to provide an Employment Skills and Training Plan for the 'Construction Phase', or equivalent financial contribution. In this instance the applicant has specified their intention to provide a site specific ESP. The exact form is, at the time of writing, under discussion with Reading UK CIC (who delivers ESPs on the behalf of the Borough Council). It is proposed, in this instance, for this to be dealt with by way of a suitably worded condition rather than secured through s106 legal agreement.

Accessibility

- 6.60 The proposed new 6th form entrance would provide step-free access into the

building, as well as lift access and emergency egress provided, with step-free exit to the ground floor. Accessible toilets will be provided on all floors and the car park has two disabled car parking spaces.

CIL

- 6.61 CIL would apply to the proposals, subject to the usual reliefs or exemptions set out in the CIL Regulations. In this respect, although the proposed scheme would be CIL liable development, because education facilities attract a zero CIL charge in the Borough there would be no CIL payable for this scheme.

Pre-commencement conditions

- 6.62 Pre-commencement conditions - In line with section 100ZA(5) of the Town and Country Planning Act (as amended) discussions are being undertaken with the applicant regarding pre-commencement conditions. At the time of writing a response is awaited from the applicant in terms of agreement to pre-commencement conditions. If appropriate, a response will be reported in an update report prior to committee.

Equalities Impact

- 6.63 When determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore, in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

7. Overall Planning Balance and Conclusion

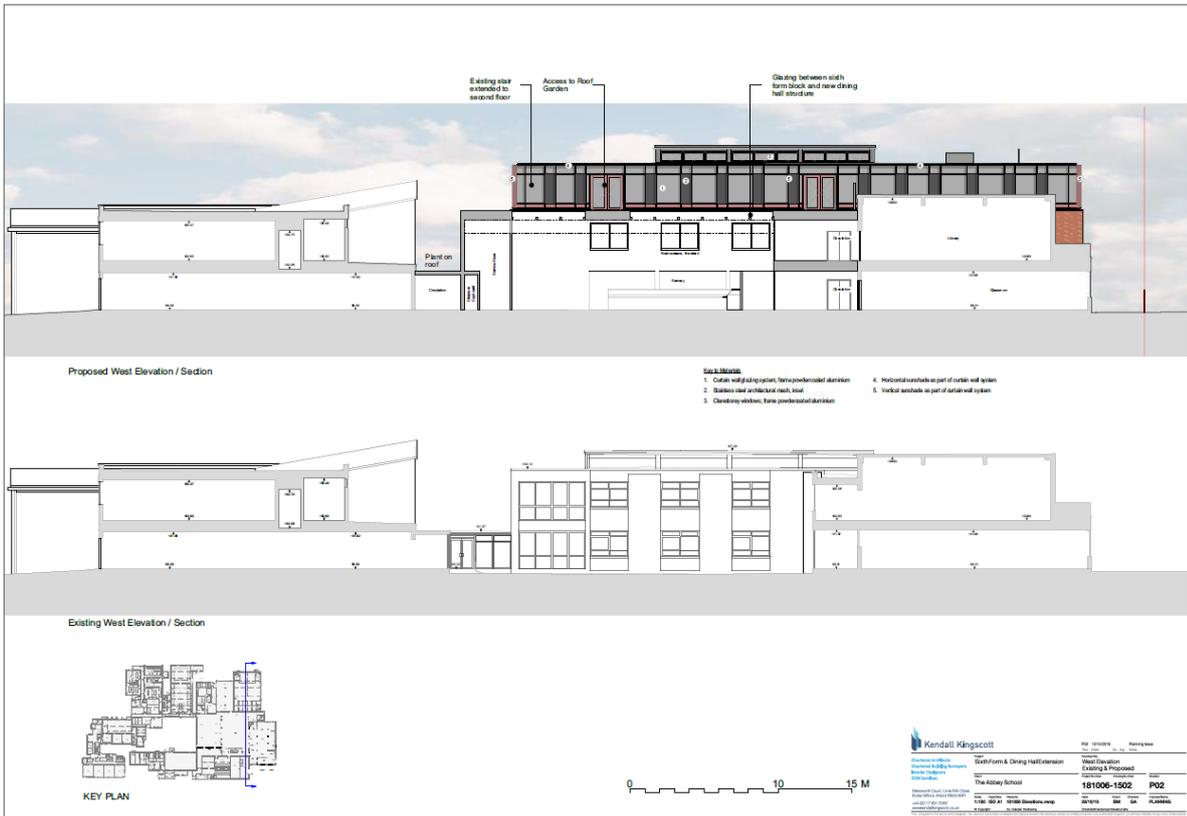
- 7.1 As detailed at the outset of the assessment, the application is required to be determined with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. From the assessment above the main issue is whether the loss of the four Scots Pines associated with the proposals is sufficiently outweighed by the benefits of the scheme.
- 7.2 The proposed development would provide better education facilities in terms of quality and quantity that would not only be of benefit to the existing school itself, but to some extent the wider community too. There are also wider sustainability benefits including a reduction in carbon emissions and thus supporting the Council's commitment to a Climate Change Emergency; the biodiversity enhancements where currently there are few, and the net gain of trees to help increase canopy cover across the Borough. Furthermore, the appearance and detailed design of the scheme is supported and subject to various conditions, would not result in significant adverse impact on nearby occupiers. As detailed in the above appraisal, these aspects of the scheme are considered to be tangible planning benefits.
- 7.3 Provision of a better quality of accommodation/additional space for those existing pupils is also likely to be essential in light of the current Covid 19 crisis and reinforces the value of, and increased need for, space. This would appear particularly pertinent with schools currently implementing strict social distancing measures to keep children and staff safe. The proposals offer an opportunity to provide a more adaptable use of space, as well as access to external environments, including the roof garden.
- 7.4 When applying an overall critical planning balance of all material considerations, the benefits of the proposals, including acceptable means of mitigation in this



East Elevation Existing and Proposed



South Elevation Existing and Proposed



West Elevation Existing and Proposed