

## COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES  
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL  
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021

**Ward:** Whitley

**App No.:** 201619/FUL and 201620/LBC

**Address:** Reading International Business Park, A33

**Proposal:** Upgrade of existing office building comprising the construction of a new entrance, reconfiguration of the car parking and basement level employee ancillary facilities (provision of new gym and end of journey facilities) and improvements to the hard and soft landscaping (including provision of meeting pods), consolidated waste management area, external alterations to 'The Dot' and internal works to the Listed Little Lea Cottage and the recolouring of the existing terracotta tiles under Permitted Development Rights

**Applicant:** Tristan Capital Partners

**Deadline:** 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**201619/FUL**

**GRANT** Planning Permission subject to conditions and informatives.

#### **CONDITIONS TO INCLUDE:**

- 1) TL1 - 3 yrs
- 2) AP1 - Approved Plans
- 3) M3 - Materials to be as detailed in application
- 4) L4A - Landscape implementation and replacement of trees
- 5) CS1 - Hours of Construction
- 6) CS2 - Construction Method Statement to be submitted and approved (including dust control)
- 7) Construction Environmental Management Plan
- 8) C4 - No Bonfires
- 9) BREEAM
- 10) DC1 - Vehicle Parking as specified
- 11) DC5 - Cycle Parking as specified
- 12) Lighting Strategy implemented as approved
- 13) An emergency plan by the developers/construction companies should be put in place such that should there be a radiation emergency during the construction phase they have procedures in place to protect the staff. All such plans should be reviewed on at least an annual basis and be available upon request by the planning authority.
- 14) An emergency plan should be put in place for all the commercial units by the management agency to cover the overall approach in advance of any units being accommodated and /or within one month of occupancy by those using the units. All such plans should be reviewed on at least an annual basis and be available upon request by the planning authority.
- 15) Employment & Skills Plan

**INFORMATIVES TO INCLUDE:**

- 1) IF5 - Terms and Conditions
- 2) IF6 - Building Regulations
- 3) IF2 - Pre-Commencement Conditions
- 4) I11 - CIL
- 5) IF3 - Highways
- 6) I29 - Access Construction
- 7) IF7 - Complaints about Construction
- 8) IF1 - Positive & Proactive.
- 9) AWE- All the sites should have a working landline in order to ensure the means of notification of a radiation emergency is available to all.

**201620/LBC**

**GRANT Listed Building Consent** subject to conditions and informatives.

**CONDITIONS TO INCLUDE:**

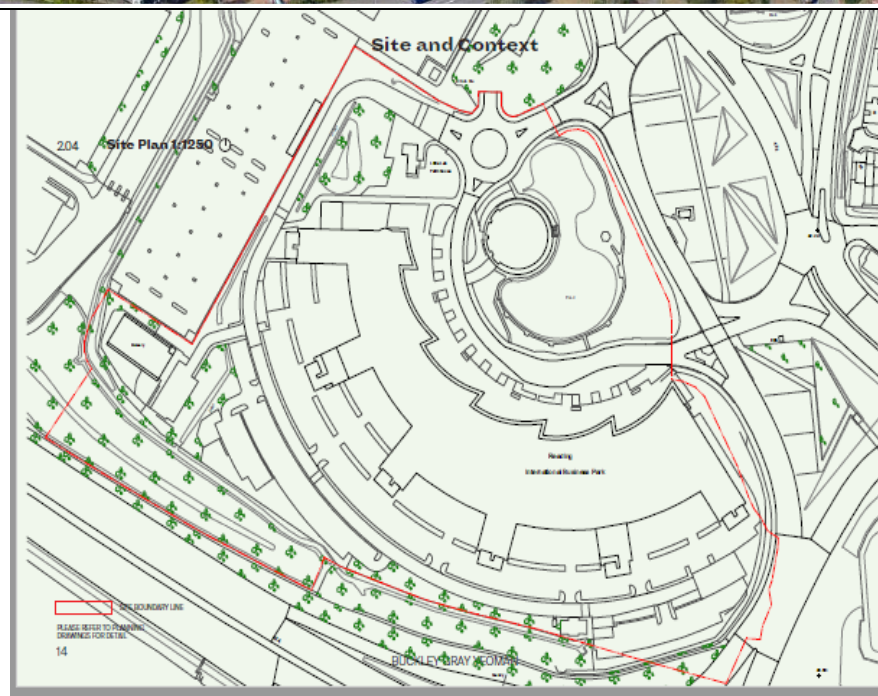
- 1) LBC - standard conditions
- 2) AP1 - Approved Plans
- 3) Materials and workmanship to be as detailed in application

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This application involves the site and buildings at the 'Reading International Business Park. The site includes a six wing office building, a Grade II listed cottage "Little Lea Cottage", a central, circular 'pod' building surrounded by a small lake. The site also contains a large open car park to the rear, and a child care centre.
- 1.2 The office building has approx. 34,650sqm of commercial and ancillary floorspace in the form of 6 inter-connected office 'Spurs'. The 'Links' between the Spurs provide further office floor space along with a number of associated uses at ground floor level comprising the main reception, cafes and shared meeting rooms. Across the front of the building is a full height atrium known as The Street. In the basement is a small on-site gymnasium. Within the grounds are three free-standing buildings: The Dot which has been historically used as the main canteen for the office workers and which is set within an attractive landscaped area that includes a lake, a Grade II listed Farmhouse which is currently vacant but was most recently used for office storage and the Busy Bees Nursery which is independently run and provides day care for the Business Park and other employers in the immediate area.
- 1.3 The building was originally let to MCI Worldcom (which subsequently became Verizon) but their use of the building has declined and a number of other companies have moved in but together these only occupy half of the available floorspace.
- 1.4 The lawful use of the entire site is Class E (as of 1st September 2020, subject to the outcome of the recent legal challenge to the changes to

the Use Classes Order), and formerly comprised a Class B1 office building with ancillary uses.

Aerial view



Location Plan



View from the Dot (south)

## **2. PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The applicant has explained that despite the site's prominent location, vacancy rates have increased in recent years and currently stand at around c. 16,900sqm of vacant space. This is due to a number of factors, but primarily due to the space not having been modernised so that it is no longer viewed in the market as providing 'Category A' space. In addition, there is a lack of good quality amenity space so the Park is unable to compete with the higher quality office accommodation provided elsewhere in Reading, in particular, at nearby Green Park.
- 2.2 The proposal therefore is to make a number of improvements to generate more commercial interest in the property and to bring the no 20 year old building up to date. The point is made that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic there is a growing shift towards employee wellness and the proposals seek to ensure that the commercial floorspace and the ancillary uses (gym, cycle and shower facilities, F&B offer etc), are all of the highest quality and suitable for a post-COVID working environment. The applicant therefore also intends to secure a BREEAM Excellent rating for the refurbished areas and has also recently been in conversation with the International WELL Building Institute to ascertain what is required to achieve 'Well' accreditation, with a Gold or possibly even Platinum rating to be sought.
- 2.3 Much of the work required is internal or decorative so does not require planning permission. This includes changing the colour of the terracotta tiles on the external walls by staining them to a dark grey colour, which is permitted development. Other changes involve the reconfiguration and modernisation of the office and ancillary spaces, a move to a displacement ventilation system which is the healthiest form of ventilation possible, a move away from fossil fuels (gas) to heat pump technology as well as improvements to the efficiency of all plant to enhance the environmental performance of the building. A number of transport initiatives to encourage a modal shift towards more sustainable transport choices will also be implemented.
- 2.4 The changes to the building that require planning permission can be summarised as follows:
- Construction of new entrance to the Main Building;



- Construction of Pagoda style structure to rear terrace;
- Amendments to the basement level, including provision of a larger gym and improved end of trip facilities;
- Reconfiguration of car parking spaces (no change in numbers) at grade level;
- Internal works to the Listed Farmhouse;
- External works to the Dot;
- Improved hard and soft landscaping proposals.

2.5 The applicant explains that the existing main entrance to the building is understated so visitors struggle to identify where the main entrance to the building is. Therefore, a new entrance is to be positioned centrally along the main facade. The design comprises a 2-storey semi-circular arch constructed in either steel or timber, and glass to allow transparency into the building. To the rear of the main building, a 'pagoda' structure will be installed on the terrace to enable outdoor seating accessible to those using the new food and beverage zone.



Proposed new entrance

- 2.6 It is proposed to create a brand new, high end gym which will only be available to occupiers of RIBP. The existing inadequate cycle facilities within the under-croft car park will be re-sited adjacent to the gym in a new secure storage area and new end of trip facilities for those employees who choose to cycle to work to be provided. The proposal includes secure cycle parking facilities for up to 174 bikes at basement level with additional covered visitor cycle parking provision to the front of the building.
- 2.7 To facilitate the basement facilities some existing parking bays will be lost. However, the applicant explains that the site's location outside of Reading town centre means it does need to accommodate those coming to work or visiting the site who are dependent on a private vehicle. This is especially the case in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the reluctance of some to commute via public transport, or in

shared vehicles. They note that “Whilst this may be considered to be a short-term issue, we cannot pre-determine what the after-effects of the pandemic will be and how long they will last. As a consequence, the future parking strategy for the site needs to be flexible and capable of adapting to change. Parking is key to the future letting strategy”.

- 2.8 The original outline planning permission (ref: 97/0595/OA) allowed for 1,260 spaces, but this was reduced to 1,199 spaces at the Reserved Matters stage (ref: 99/0010/RM). The existing car parking arrangement provides spaces at surface level with staff parking to the rear of the building, with visitor parking to the front. The proposed development seeks to reconfigure the existing car parking spaces, with the applicant promoting an increase in electric vehicle charging points, blue badge spaces and car share bays. The total number of car parking spaces proposed under this Planning Application does not exceed the 1,199 spaces approved previously.
- 2.9 However, a separate planning application has been submitted (see details listed below in Planning History). This seeks permission for an additional 69 parking spaces in a decked car park to the south of the site. This will be considered at a future meeting of this committee.
- 2.10 The alterations proposed to the Listed Farmhouse include repair work, the upgrade of the WCs and to make better use of the usable floorspace on the first floor. The works are described as comprising the “removal and reinstatement of the existing ‘modern’ fixtures and fittings. The only other structural alterations to the building involve some changes to the existing door openings and the introduction of a lightweight partition to improve the usability of the first floor and improve the circulation. All proposed works will be undertaken to conservation standards and can be considered ‘reversible’ in heritage terms”.



Little Lea Farmhouse

- 2.11 The Dot is proposed to be re-purposed and sub-divided into both offices and a multifunction space that can serve as a yoga or pilates studio, a town hall space for tenants or just as a multi-purpose ‘community’ room. The physical works to the structure of the building that require planning permission include the installation of a new glass roof on top of the existing rooflight and the installation of timber cladding to parts of the exterior of the building to help the building blend more easily into the surrounding landscape.



The Dot

- 2.12 Finally, the application proposes changes to the hard and soft landscaping throughout the site. To the front of the site, it is proposed to landscape the section of the access road that has been made redundant following the previous introduction of the one-way system. This area will be reclaimed and will provide additional tree planting and a revised service bay. Further tree planting is proposed along the boundary of the site, adjacent to the A33. As part of the wider landscape proposals, a number of innovative initiatives are proposed including an employee allotment, the potential introduction of outdoor meeting pods and walking and running routes. At the front of the main building the existing expanse of hard paving will be softened and broken up by introducing raised planters to create a 'rain garden' comprising flowering plants, shrubs and small trees. It is proposed to relocate the existing bus stop to a new location at the front of the main building to assist in the legibility and avoid blocking views of the new entrance feature.
- 2.13 Submitted plans and documentation received 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020 are as follows:
- Cover Letter (inc. Planning Considerations) (prepared by Carter Jonas);
  - Design and Access Statement (prepared by Buckley Gray Yeoman (BGY));
  - Planning Application Drawings (prepared by BGY)
  - 1172\_OS Site Plan;
  - 1172\_ES-B1 Basement Existing Site Plan (Car Park);
  - 1172\_EX-00 Ground Floor Existing Plan;
  - 1172\_EX-01 First Floor Existing Plan;
  - 1172\_EX-02 Second Floor Existing Plan;
  - 1172\_EX-03 Third Floor Existing Plan;
  - 1172\_PS-B1 Basement Proposed Site Plan (Car Park);

- 1172\_GA-00 Ground Floor Proposed Plan;
- 1172\_GA-01 First Floor Proposed Plan;
- 1172\_GA-02 Second Floor Proposed Plan;
- 1172\_GA-03 Third Floor Proposed Plan;
- 1172\_EE-00 Main Building Existing North Elevations;
- 1172\_EE-01 Main Building Existing South Elevation (D, E & F links);
- 1172\_EE-02 Main Building Existing South Elevation (B & C links);
- 1172\_EE-03 Main Building Existing East Elevation (D, E & F links);
- 1172\_EE-04 Main Building Existing East Elevation (A, B & C links);
- 1172\_EE-05 Main Building Existing West Elevation (D, E & F links);
- 1172\_EE-06 Main Building Existing West Elevation (A, B & C links);
- 1172\_GA-L0 Entrance Lobby Ground Floor Proposed Plan;
- 1172\_GA-L1 Entrance Lobby First Floor Proposed Plan;
- 1172\_GA-LB Basement End of Travel Layout Proposed Plan;
- 1172\_ES-00 Existing Section AA;
- 1172\_GS-00 Proposed Section AA;
- 1172\_EE-D0 The Dot Existing Elevations;
- 1172\_EX-D0 The Dot Existing Ground Floor Plan;
- 1172\_GA-D0 The Dot Proposed Ground Floor Plan;
- 1172\_GE-07 The Dot Proposed Elevations;
- 1172\_EE-F0 Farm House Existing Elevations;
- 1172\_EX-F0 Farm House Existing Plans;
- 1172\_ALT-F0 Farm House Alteration Plans; and
- 1172\_GA-F0 Farm House Proposed Plans.
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal prepared by Greengage;
- Bat Emergence Survey Report prepared by Greengage;
- Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment prepared by Greengage;
- Energy and Sustainability Statement prepared by MTT;
- Heritage Statement prepared by Bidwells;
- External Lighting Plan and Statement prepared by Foundry;
- Waste Management Plan prepared by Velocity Transport Planning;
- Delivery and Servicing Plan prepared by Velocity Transport Planning;
- Travel Plan prepared by Velocity Transport Planning;
- Transport Technical Note prepared by Velocity Transport Planning.

2.3 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): the applicant has completed a CIL liability form with the submission and this confirms that no additional floorspace is proposed.



### 3 PLANNING HISTORY

**970250** Development for unrestricted B1 use including 10,000 sq ft of managed small easy-in, easy-out units, associated leisure use, creche, retention of B2 use in established depot, 75 service parking spaces & 1275 parking spaces, servicing, landscaping.

**980971/REM** for the above.

**990017/VAR** to above to allow for use as ancillary office space rather than as a creche as the permission stipulates.

**990885/VAR** to above to Implementation of Consent 97/00595/OUT without complying with condition 24, which requires that at least 10,000 sq feet of the B1 use is to be constructed and used as small managed business units.

**201279/PREAPP** - Pre-application advice for the scheme submitted.

**201621/OUT** - A decked car park (net gain of 61 spaces) to the rear of the site and associated amendments to the parking layout at grade

### 4 CONSULTATIONS

#### Statutory

##### Environment Agency

No comments have been received. Officers can advise that while the application site is large enough to be a Major application the proposed works make no change to use or floor area so normally in these situations there would not be an objection in terms of flood risk.

#### Non-statutory

##### AWE Off Site Emergency Planning Group

At the time of writing this report no comments had been received. However, when commenting on the application for B8 uses at the neighbouring site (application ref: 192054) it was noted that the application site is within the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone of AWE (B) site and inside the area where urgent protective actions are necessary - in this case urgent sheltering. The recommendation was that due to the impact on responding agencies and the potential impact on the occupants of the proposed development, it is recommended that the Planning Authority request that conditions are added to the application to require an emergency plan by the developers/construction companies should be put in place such that should there be a radiation emergency during the construction phase and on completion of the works to protect staff and visitors.

##### Berkshire Archaeology

Prior to construction of the exiting development at this site, in 1994, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken which found significant archaeological material. A scheme of archaeological excavation was

planned but there is no record confirming this work was ever undertaken.

The proposed development will not impact any area of land which has not already been significantly impacted by past development, and therefore Berkshire Archaeology has no concerns regarding impact on as yet unknown heritage assets.

### **Ecology**

The ecological surveys submitted with this application have been undertaken to an appropriate standard and conclude that the proposals are unlikely to affect protected species or priority habitats. As such, subject to a condition being used to require the submission of a construction environmental management plan (CEMP: Biodiversity) there are no objections to this application on ecology grounds.

### **Environmental Protection & Nuisance (EP&N)**

Construction and demolition phases - Some concerns about potential noise, dust associated with the proposed development and possible adverse impact on nearby residents (and businesses). Recommended conditions are for a Construction Method Statement to be submitted; Hours of construction to be managed, no burning on site.

### **RBC (former) Heritage Consultant**

Little Lea Cottage (formerly listed as Little Lea Farmhouse under Whitley) is Grade II Listed. Early 17<sup>th</sup> Century, two storeys, ground floor stucco with buttresses. Timber-framed with brick nogging (stucco to south). Gable to left. Three ranges of leaded three light casements (early C19 on 1st floor to right). Projecting lean-to porch off-centre left. Tiled roof with external chimney to right hand gable end. Interior has inglenook fireplace to ground floor, west room.

As noted in Historic England's The Setting of Heritage Assets (HE, 2017):

*The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to visual considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places.*

The current setting already consists of modern development and traffic routes. The proposed changes to the existing building and landscape will therefore have a neutral impact on setting of Little Lea.

In terms of the Listed Building consent application the proposed works are confined to the interior of the historic cottage. A heritage Statement has been produced by an experienced conservation firm

and is a well produced document and analyses the significance of the host building and the proposed works.

The Significance Assessment within the statement, identifies the relative heritage value of the identified heritage assets, including contribution made by their setting. This approach to significance assessment is required in order to satisfy the provisions of Sections 16 and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) where the impact of development on a heritage asset is being considered (Paragraphs 193-197).

The report includes a thorough analysis of the buildings condition and area of importance. Little Lea Farmhouse was refurbished as part of the 1999 application to construct Reading International Business Park. Initially intended to be used as a creche, a new building was constructed at the south-west of the site for a creche instead. The building has not been used for a number of years.

As part of the current refurbishment of the Reading International Business Park site, a new, sustainable use is being sought of Little Lea Farmhouse. The intention is to find a use which supports the wider uses of the Business Park site, requires minimal alterations to the listed building and ensures the ongoing conservation of the listed building.

The current proposed works are to upgrade the internal toilets. It is also proposed to create a French drain around the perimeter of the listed building to reduce damp problems by allowing water to drain away from the base of the structure. This is a pragmatic and accepted approach in historic building terms, that will help safeguard the building's historic fabric from rising damp, whilst ensuring its long-term conservation.

#### **Natural Environment (tree officer)**

As at pre-application stage, the landscape principles described within the DAS are all positive and will extend and enhance the current level of soft landscape. I have no objections to these, the details of which will need to be secured via condition (L2).

However, some clarification on tree loss would be helpful. The DAS refers to only one section of trees to be lost, adjacent to The Dot, approx. 5m long. However, this is not mentioned in the AIA, hence clarification is required.

The Tree Survey/AIA states that: 148 individual trees and five tree groups/hedges were identified within the scope of this report. The Category mix includes 10 Category B and 142 Category C specimens/groups/hedges. It confirms that one individual tree (T152 - young Ash) and some B category trees (no number given) within W89 and G153 will need to be removed for the rear car park deck. It

confirms that 26 new trees will be planted, providing a net gain. However, as the number of trees within W89 & G153 are not stated, we have no demonstration of this net gain and this should be provided. I am not clear if these stated losses need to be considered under this application or 201621/OUT for the decked car park. However, clarification on any loss (as stated) around The Dot should be clarified.

As indicated in the AIA, trees on site will need protection during works hence an Arb Method Statement will need to be secured via condition (L7).

*Officer note - An update with additional information will be provided.*

**Reading (UK) CIC**

No objections to the proposal.

**Sustainability**

**Officer note:** The agent has submitted information and clarified that as part of the proposed works they intend to Improve the overall sustainability of the site, secure a reduction in energy loss, introduce heat pump technology, provide electric vehicle charging points and seek both WELL accreditation and a BREEAM Excellent rating. They also intend to Introduce a package of improvements to greatly enhance sustainable transport/accessibility to site and promote travel by non-car modes (including by way of a consolidated cycle parking facility, increased cycle parking provision including folding bikes/enlarged cycles/EV cycles, EV charging, car share bays, dedicated travel plan network, future proofed cycle docking station to promote access to the town centre/Green Park station, funding commitments to the Greenwave Bus, bus stop improvements, and provision of better travel information).

Comments from our consultee are still awaited but it is not expected that there will be objections to the approach taken as explained above.

**Thames Water**

No objections - information provided.

**RBC Transport Strategy**

The following are the initial comments from Transport:

**Parking:** - The site is located within Zone 3, Secondary Core Area, of the Council's adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD. In accordance with the adopted SPD, the development would be required to provide a parking provision of 1 space per 50sqm for office use. The level of parking currently available on site (and not proposed to change with this application) equates to 1 space per 30sqm. While this level of parking exceeds the current standards it

would not be reasonable to object to the level of parking remaining the same.

EV charging points are proposed to be provided. 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 any developments of at least 10 spaces must provide an active charging point (1 space for every 10 spaces). The Transport Statement advises that 9 Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points are to be provided (5% of total) and this is to be welcomed as the parking levels are not changing. Had additional parking been proposed to be policy compliant 10% of parking spaces would need to have EV charging points.

Cycling facilities: There is currently no formal visitor cycle parking provided at the front of the RIBP. All cycle parking is contained at basement level and provides cycle parking for staff only. There is direct access from the under-croft to the front entrance to the building via stairs. Cycle parking is provided in the form of 2 x cages and 2 x unsecure zones of Sheffield stands and provides space for a total capacity of 64 bicycles. The applicant is proposing to improve this by providing secure, cycle parking facilities for up to 174 bikes at basement level with additional covered visitor cycle parking provision to the front of the building for visitors. The secure basement level cycle parking will provide facilities for a range of different bikes including foldable, three wheel and electric bikes.

A Travel Plan has been submitted including appropriate references to the primary aim of the TP (to minimise single occupancy car travel being made by staff or visitors travelling to and from the development) and to the appointment of a Travel Plan Coordinator to be responsible for leading the implementation, monitoring and review of the Travel Plan. However, as the site occupiers are not yet known, a condition is required to require further details of the travel plan to be submitted.

Acceptable subject to conditions.

**Wokingham Borough Council**

No objection.

**Public consultation**

The following addresses were consulted; a site notice was displayed and details of the applications were publicised in the local paper. No comments were received:

Imperium, Imperial Way, Reading, RG2 0TD  
Verizon,



Leapfrog Day Nursery,  
Generale Bank  
Tesco Distribution Centre,  
Logic Modelling,  
Unit 2, Proctor End North,  
CyberSource Ltd,

## **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) (2019) which states at Paragraph 11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development”. The relevant sections of the NPPF are:

### **National Policy**

Section 2 - Achieving Sustainable Development

Section 6 - Building a Strong Competitive Economy

Section 9 - Promoting Sustainable Transport

Section 12 - Achieving Well-Designed Places

Section 14 - Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change

Section 15 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Section 16 - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

- 5.2 The Development Plan is the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019) (RBLP). The relevant policies are:
- CC1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development
  - CC2 Sustainable design and construction
  - CC3 Adaptation to climate change
  - CC5 Waste minimisation and storage
  - CC7 Design and the public realm
  - EM2 Location of new employment development
  - EN1 Protection and enhancement of the historic environment
  - EN4 Locally important heritage assets
  - EN6 New development in a historic context
  - EN12 Biodiversity and the green network
  - EN14 Trees, hedges and woodlands
  - 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

### **Supplementary Planning Documents**

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD 2019

Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD 2011

Employment, Skills and Training (April 2013)

## 6 APPRAISAL

The main matters to be considered are:

- Principle of Development
- Design and appearance
- Effect on Listed Building
- Transport
- Landscaping
- Other Matters
  - Sustainability
  - Employment & Skills
  - Equalities impact

### Principle of Development

- 6.1 The NPPF states (para. 10) that “at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development” and at para. 11 that for decision-taking this means: “approving development proposals that accord with an up -to-date development plan without delay; ....”. The overarching objectives are economic, social and environmental. The proposal would contribute towards helping to “build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth...”.
- 6.2 In addition, Chapter 6 states that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity.
- 6.3 It is clear from the information provided by the applicant that the purpose of the proposed works is to provide support for this existing employment site. Policy EM2 confirms that the site continues to be a good location for continued employment use as it is well served by the existing highway network and served by buses running to and from MereOak Park & Ride and the MRT. It also lies close to the residential area of Whitley to the east, a part of the Borough with high levels of deprivation in terms of employment and skills. The principle of the proposed development is acceptable.

### Design and appearance

- 6.4 The proposal seeks to renovate, and ‘re-brand’ the existing building to attract a range of tenants and improve the overall offer of the building. The building was constructed circa 2000 and completed in 2001. The building is a large and highly visible building viewed at the gateway to the south of Reading from the M4 and A33. The view of the building includes large areas of hung terracotta, and aluminium style cladding to the rear and sides, and circular projecting features of glazing, and hung terracotta to the front. Overall, the building is a good example of a modern office building which has lasted well in terms of weathering of the materials generally. The proposed development would seek to re-paint (using a staining technique) the

terracotta tiles to a black/darker colour. The images below show a before and after view.



Existing appearance



Proposed appearance

- 6.5 Officers have carefully considered the planning regulations and while on the scale of this building the proposed change in colour would be a significant change to the appearance of the building under the terms of Class C of the General Permitted Development Order the painting of an external wall does not require planning permission. Officer's initial thoughts when presented with the change at pre-app was not very receptive but when looking at the comparison photographs above it is clearly a subjective choice as to which image is better. The new colour choice is different but not harmful.
- 6.6 In terms of the other changes around the site it is considered that the new defined main entrance would be the most noticeable change and is acceptable. The design and materials are in keeping with the main building. The proposed changes to the Dot and the other changes described above (in the Proposals section) are also acceptable. The changes to the Listed Farmhouse and landscaping are discussed below.

- 6.7 Officers can confirm that the proposal meets the requirements of Policy CC7 in terms of its design and impact on the public realm. Conditions are recommended to request details of the proposed materials to be approved.

#### **Effect on Listed Building**

- 6.8 In terms of the Grade II listed 'Little Lea Cottage' the development would seek to bring it into a new use and retain its original appearance. A Listed Building consent application has been submitted for these works and a heritage statement provided.
- 6.9 It is clear from the Statement how the setting of Little Lea Cottage (formerly called Little Lea Farmhouse) has greatly changed over time, and what was once within a wider agricultural landscape has now been lost as a result of development around the site, combined with the loss of associated farm buildings, and the presence of the M4 within the wider landscape.
- 6.10 In this context the proposed alteration to the main building and campus will have a neutral impact on the setting of the listed building and the proposed works to the listed building itself have been found (see Conservation & Urban Design Officer comments above) to be acceptable. The proposed scheme would therefore, accord with policies CC7, EN1 and EN6 and Listed Building consent can be granted.

#### **Transport**

- 6.11 Paragraph 109 of the NPPF (2019) states that development should only be refused on highways grounds *"if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe."* The proposed alterations do not increase the floor space and while the intention is to get the building better occupied it is unlikely to exceed the occupation levels expected when the building was originally developed. Therefore, RBC Transport Strategy has confirmed that the proposal would not result in an increase in traffic movements compared to the extant use as offices.
- 6.12 The Reading Borough Local Plan, including policies TR1, TR3, TR4, and TR5 seek to ensure the Council's transport objectives are achieved. Policy TR1 also states: *"Planning permission will not be granted for major development proposals unless there is a commitment to implement measures to promote and improve sustainable transport facilities, such as through provision to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport; and through agreed travel plans, safe routes to local facilities and services, including schools and parks, and similar measures"*. Policy TR5 states: *"Development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport."* The policy is also supported by the Council's SPD "Revised parking standards and design" (2011).

- 6.13 The relocated and improved parking spaces, EV points and the improved cycle parking and associated facilities are a positive aspect of the proposal. The applicant has also provided details of a revised Travel Plan for the future users of the building.
- 6.14 Based on the above and no adverse comments from RBC Transport Strategy, officers advise that the scheme would be acceptable in transport terms (subject to a number of conditions as set out in the Recommendation above) and would therefore accord with requirements of policies TR1-TR5.

#### **Landscaping and Ecology**

- 6.15 Policy CC7 requires developments to be assessed to ensure, amongst other things, that they *“Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, ... and appropriate materials and landscaping.”*
- 6.16 Policy E14: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands states that *“...trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance. The quality of waterside vegetation will be maintained or enhanced. New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, ... to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change.”* The allocation SR4e requires a “landscaped buffer to the watercourses around the site, with development set back at least 10m from the top of the bank of the river wherever possible”
- 6.17 With reference to the comments provided from the Natural Environment officer (see above section) there are no objections raised to these proposals although additional information has been requested and will be provided in an update report to confirm full compliance with relevant policies.

#### **Other Matters**

##### **Sustainability:**

- 6.18 As one of the local authorities which declared a ‘climate emergency’, the aim is to eliminate carbon dioxide emissions in Reading by 2030. In this context there are several policies within the local plan which are relevant to new development.
- 6.19 Local Plan Policy CC2 requires new development to reduce the consumption of resources and materials and includes that *“All major non-residential developments ..... meet the most up-to-date BREEAM ‘Excellent’ standards, where possible”* and that *“Both residential and*



*non-residential development should include recycling greywater and rainwater harvesting where systems are energy and cost effective.”*

- 6.20 Policy CC5 requires minimisation of waste during construction and the life of the development.
- 6.21 The submitted Energy and Sustainability Statement explains that In order to evaluate the overall sustainability and measures included to mitigate the development’s environmental impact, BREEAM Refurbishment and Fit Out 2014 assessments are being undertaken for the main office areas and the Dot with formal certification sought. The assessment is currently at the Design Stage and this demonstrates that ‘Excellent’ ratings are achievable in each assessment, with a potential overall Credit score of 75.89% for the main office and 75.12% for the Dot, both significantly above the BREEAM threshold for ‘Excellent’.
- 6.22 Officers are satisfied that the refurbishment will allow the building to perform in an improved way to meet current sustainability policy expectations.

#### **Drainage & Flood Risk:**

- 6.23 Policy EN18 requires all major developments to incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) with runoff rates aiming to reflect greenfield conditions or be no worse than existing. The SUDS officer confirmed that although this is a major planning application by virtue of the application site size the nature of the proposed works are such that a full SUDS submission is not required.

#### **Employment Skills & Training**

- 6.24 Para 6.1.15 of the RBLP states that *“South Reading represents the largest concentration of deprivation in the Borough, with many neighbourhoods within the 20% most deprived areas in England<sup>114</sup>. There are particular issues with regard to skills and qualifications.”* The proposal has the aim to increase the use of the site by potential employers which would benefit directly employed jobs and indirect jobs as well created through the construction phase and servicing. The proposal would therefore enable the delivery of work opportunities for local people. Reading UK CIC supports the proposal.
- 6.25 In accordance with Policy CC9 the applicant has agreed to work with Reading UK to design an Employment, Skills and Training - construction and end user plan. Reading UK CIC has confirmed that the applicant has contacted them and has a clear understanding of the requirements for both types of plan and are considering a framework for each. The proposal provides the opportunity for good quality permanent work in south Reading. An appropriate condition is recommended.

### **Equalities Impact**

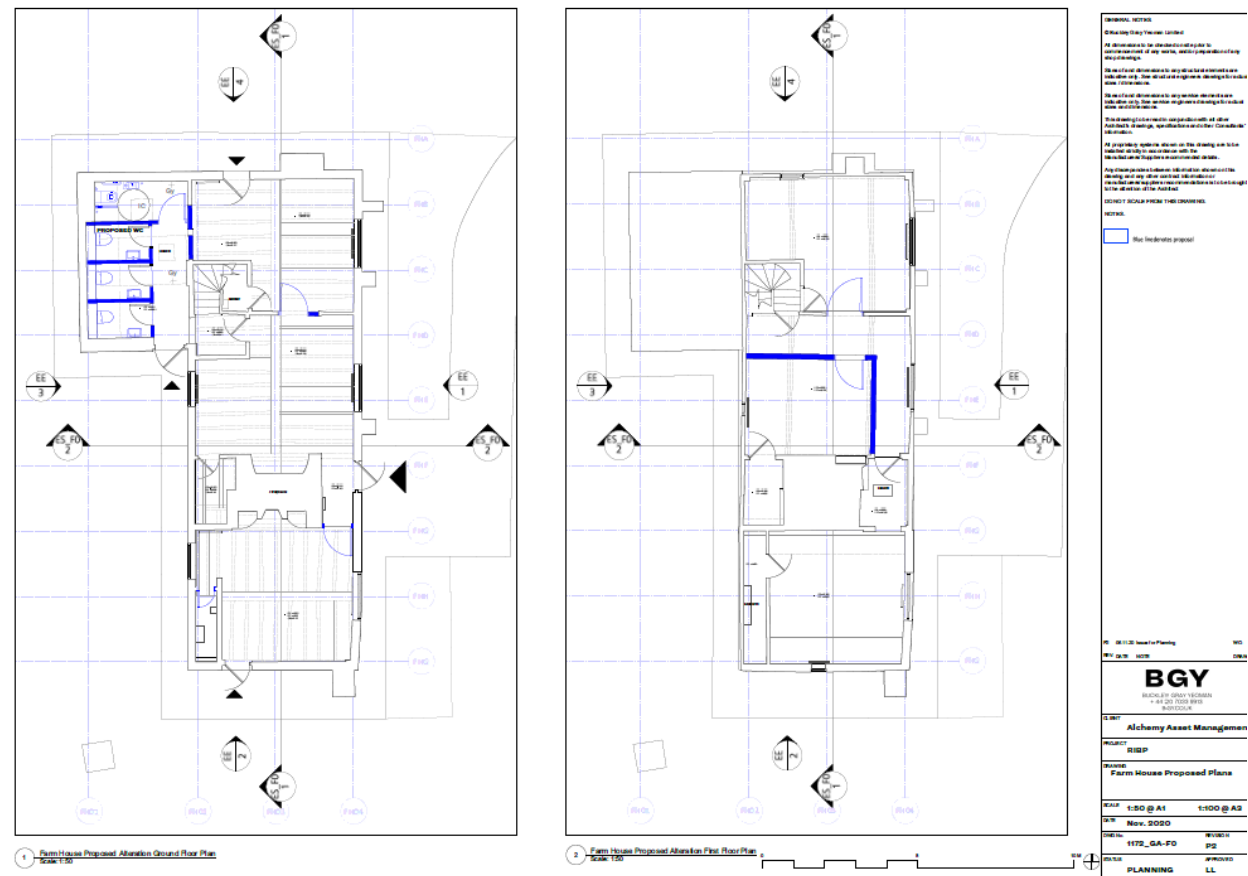
- 6.26 In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the 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 CONCLUSION**

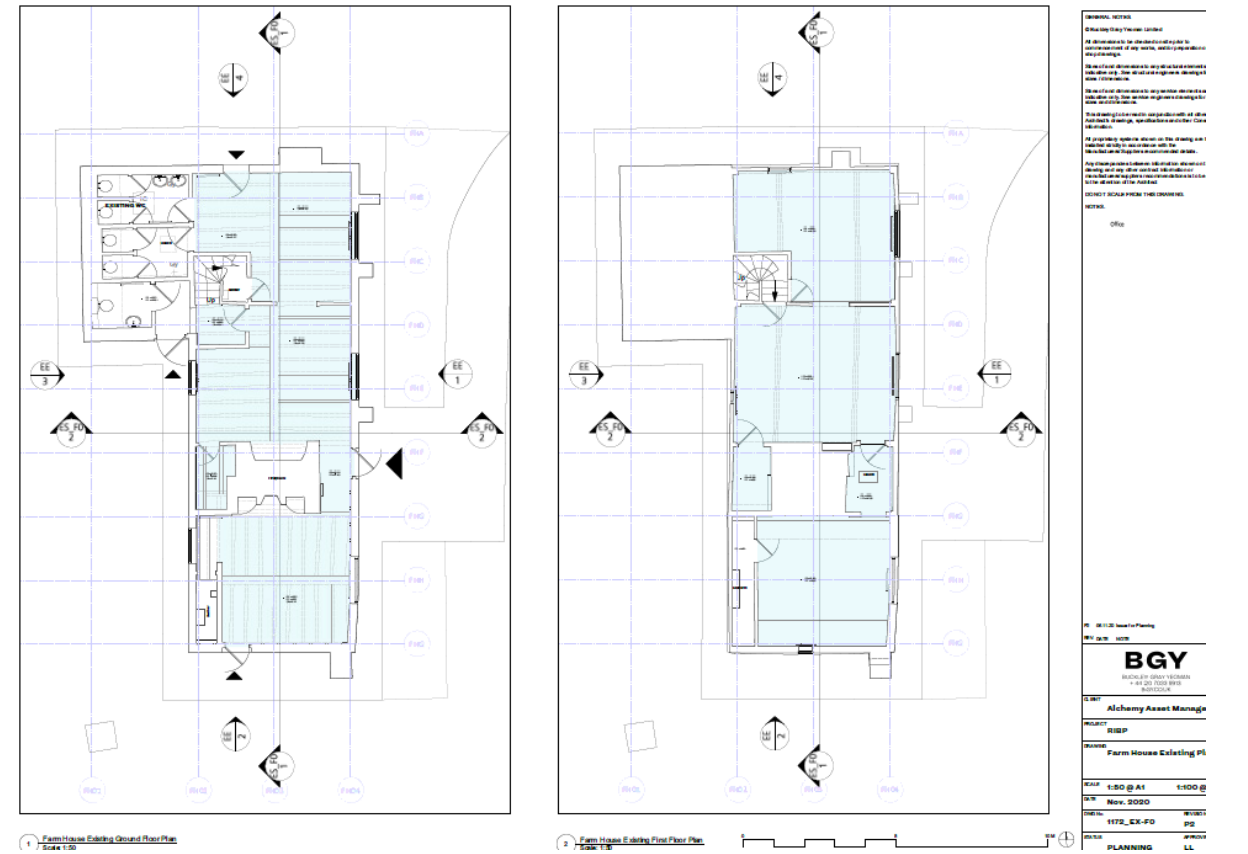
- 7.1 This proposal has been carefully considered in the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and previous planning history. By improving and investing in an existing employment site in this location it would accord with national and local policy in terms of meeting economic objectives by providing jobs in South Reading in an accessible location.
- 7.2 Officers have worked positively and proactively with the applicant on this scheme and overall officers consider this to be a supportable scheme. It is therefore, recommended for approval subject to conditions.

Case Officer: Ethne Humphreys

Works to Farmhouse

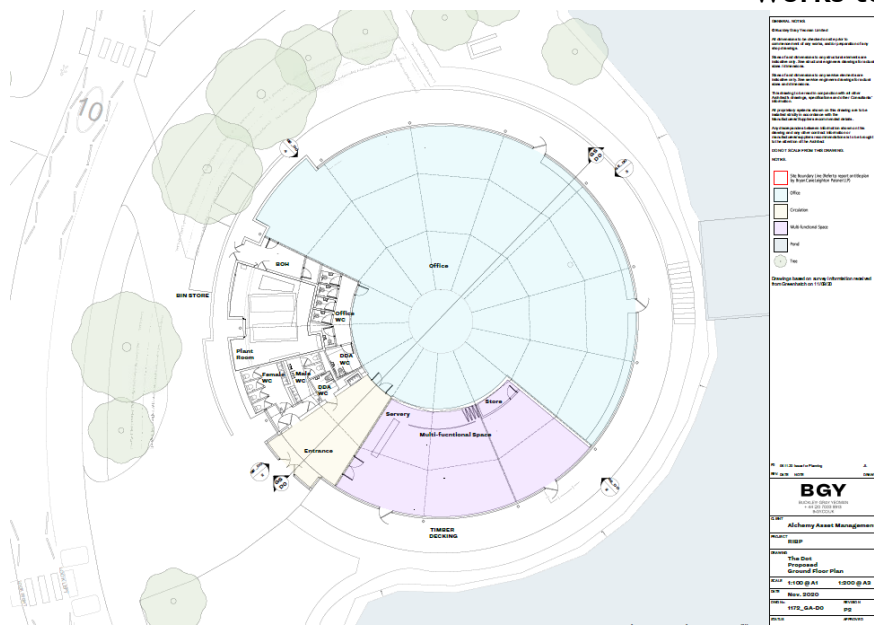


Proposed Plans



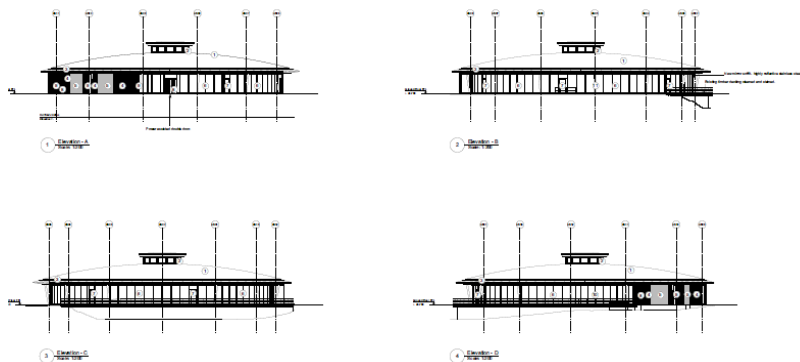
Existing Plans

Works to DOT



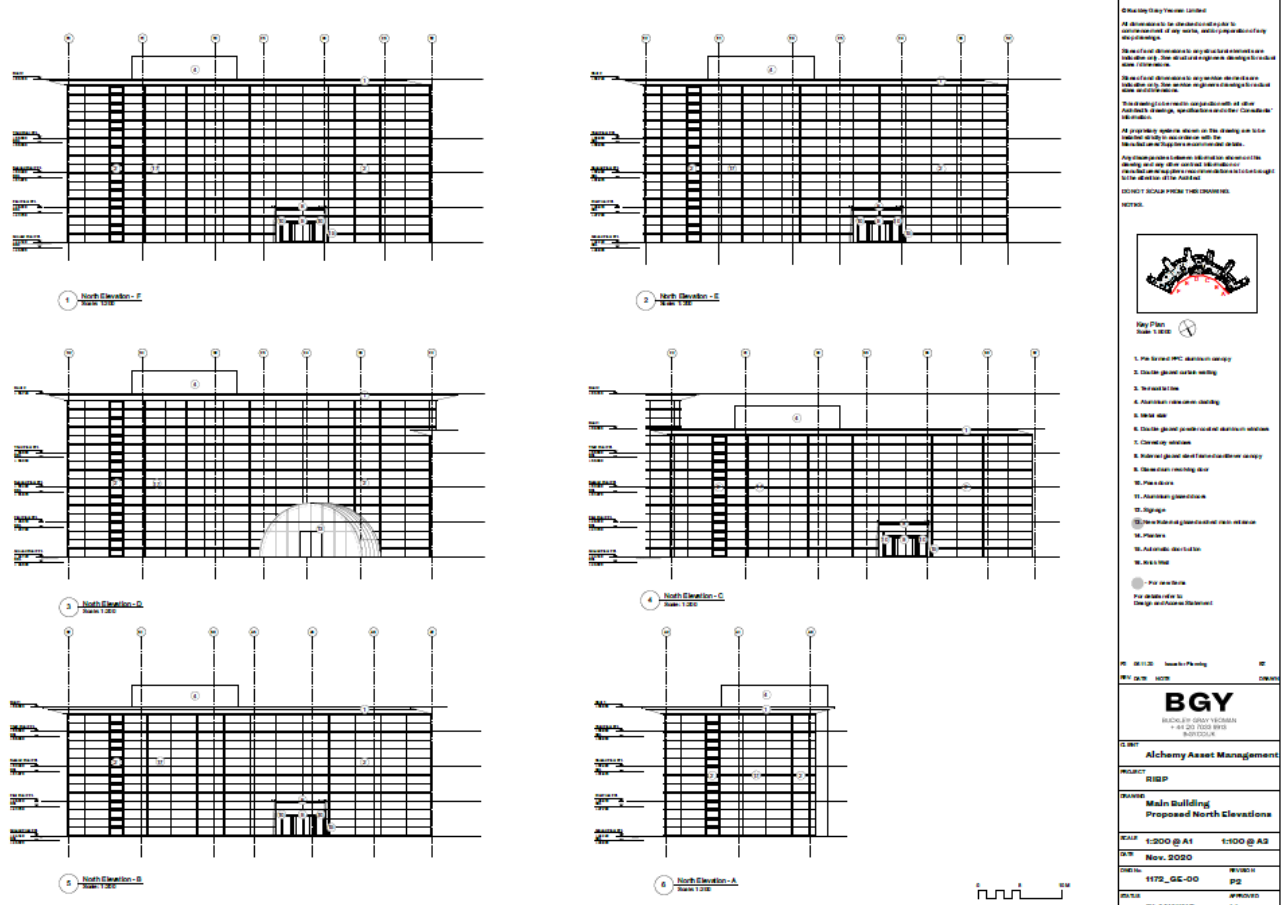
Proposed plan

Proposed Elevations

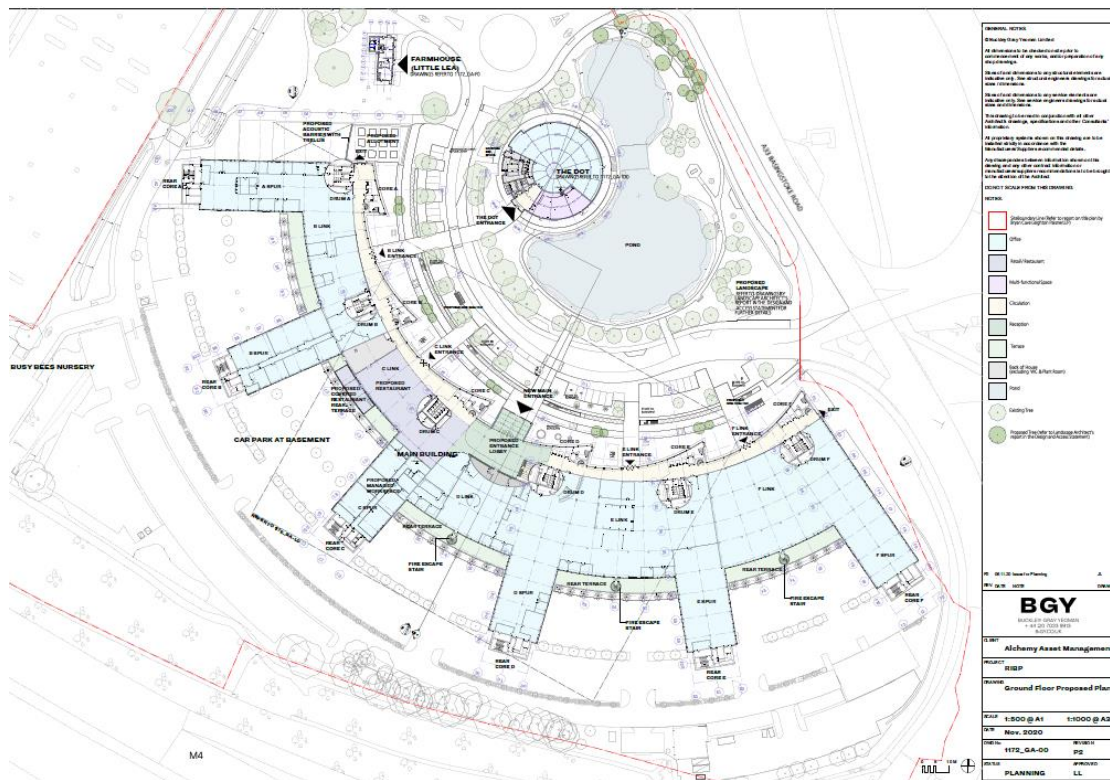


Image

Main Building



North elevations



Site Plan