

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 7th December 2022

Ward: Abbey

Application No.: 220856/REG3

Address: Former Family Centre North Street, Reading

Proposal: Development of 37 new affordable dwellings including vehicular, cycle and pedestrian access, parking and hard and soft landscaping as an amended scheme to the extant scheme for 41 dwellings under planning permission 191659

Applicant: Reading Borough Council

Target Decision Date: 14/09/2022

Extension of Time Date: 23/12/2022

RECOMMENDATION

Delegate to the Assistant Director of Planning Development and Public Protection Services to i) **GRANT** full planning permission, subject to the satisfactory completion of a legal agreement in the form of a Unilateral Undertaking or ii) Refuse full planning permission if the undertaking is not completed by 23rd December 2022 (unless officers on behalf of the Assistant Director of Planning Development and Public Protection Services agree to a later date for completion of the legal agreement)

The Unilateral Undertaking to include the following Heads of Terms:

- Secure all units as affordable housing at social rented levels
- £15,000 car club contribution
- £3,500 contribution towards a Traffic Regulation Order (section 278 agreement) for highway works to alter the parking restrictions on Weldale Street to provide an on-street car club space
- Adoption of new footway to North Street (Section 38 agreement)
- Carbon Off-setting Contribution (reduced level)
- Construction phase Employment and Skills Plan (ESP) (contribution as per SPD levels or developer to undertake)
- Permission 191659 shall not be continued

Conditions:

1. In accordance with the approved Plans
2. In accordance with approved materials
3. In accordance with approved details Construction Management Plan
4. Pre-occupation implementation of SuDs Strategy
5. In accordance with approved Contaminated Land 2: remediation scheme
6. Pre-occupation submission of Contaminated Land 5: verification report of completed works
7. In accordance with approved details of a Construction Environmental Management Plan
8. In accordance with approved details of a habitat enhancement scheme
9. In accordance with approved details of hard and soft landscaping
10. In accordance with approved details of security strategy
11. In accordance with approved details of design stage (SAP) sustainability report
12. In accordance with approved details of photovoltaic details
13. Pre-occupation verification of as an as built SAP sustainability report
14. Pre-occupation provision of approved glazing and ventilation specifications
15. In accordance with approved details of bin store details (pest control)
16. Pre-occupation provision of vehicle parking space

17. Pre-occupation provision of access to vehicle parking space
18. In accordance with approved details of cycle parking spaces
19. In accordance with approved details of electric vehicle charging point
20. Pre-occupation notification - no access to parking permits
21. Pre-occupation notification of addresses - no access to parking permits
22. Pre-occupation provision and retention of lifts
23. Control of construction hours (0800-1800 Mon-Fri, 0900-1300 Sat & not on Sundays or Bank Holidays)
24. No burning of waste on site
25. No fixing or installing of miscellaneous items to the external faces or roof of any building without the prior approval from the LPA
26. Submission and approval by the LPA of an external lighting scheme

Informatives:

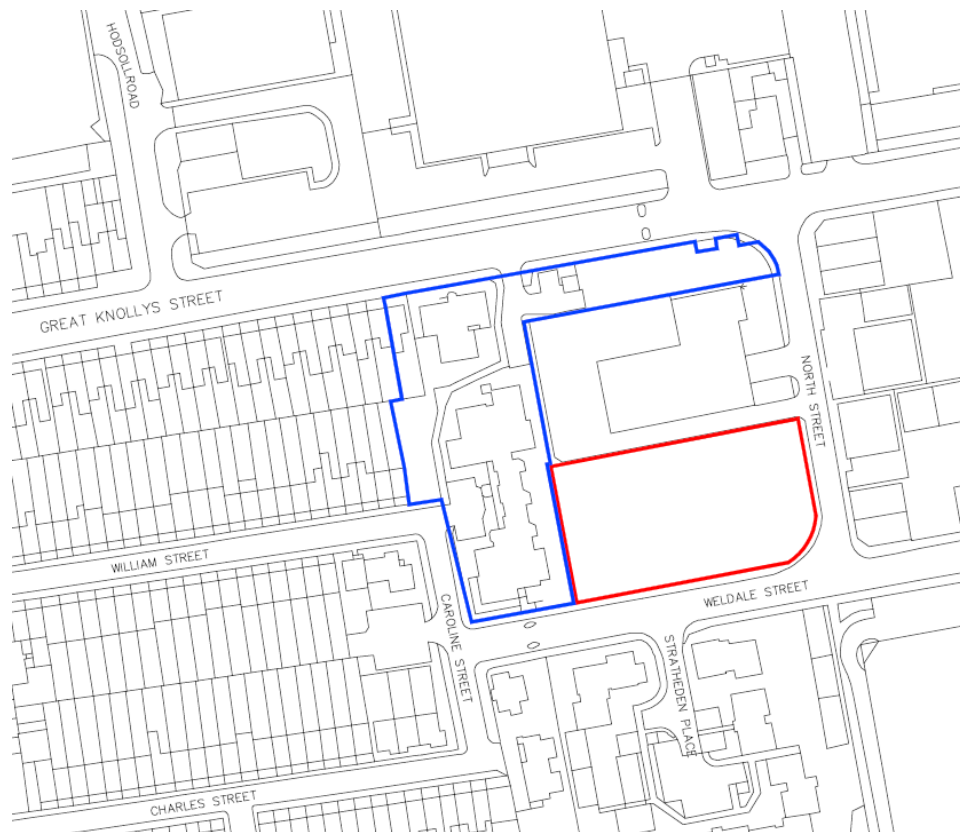
1. Positive and proactive requirement
2. S.106 applies
3. CIL
4. Terms and conditions
5. Pre-commencement conditions
6. Works affecting the Highway
7. Fee for conditions discharge
8. Building Regulations - noise between residential units
9. No parking permits

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application site is rectangular and extends to 0.23 hectares. The scheme approved under application 191659 is currently under construction on the site. The site sits on the North-West corner of the T-junction of Weldale Street with North Street and falls gently from South to North. To the South of the site is Stratheden Place, a residential cul-de-sac of flats and houses. To the South-East is the once Iceland/Wickes site, which has planning permission for residential redevelopment of 427 units, which is under construction. To the West is Burford Court, owned by RBC, a three-storey housing association scheme, which being set down into its site appears much lower when seen from Weldale Street. To the North of the site is an ambulance station. On the opposite side of North Street to the East are industrial units (Nos. 12-14 and 16).
- 1.2 The site is allocated for residential purposes (indicative guideline range of 15-22 dwellings) under Policy CR14b of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- 1.3 The application site was the chosen 'surrogate site' for affordable housing in relation to the, now completed, development at Thames Quarter on Kings Meadow Road (Planning permissions ref. 162166FUL and 190809FUL). In short, as the Thames Quarter development does not provide any on-site affordable housing this North Street site was secured by the section 106 legal agreement for Thames Quarter to provide a surrogate site for 'between 25 and 56 dwellings'. The site was transferred to Reading Borough Council's ownership to bring forward as affordable housing units. Planning Applications Committee approved planning application 191659 for residential development for 41 affordable housing units in March 2020.
- 1.4 Application 191659 originally allowed 41 dwellings as affordable housing units and this number of units was included in the description of works. Changing the number of units (from 41 to 37) as described in the current proposal cannot procedurally be undertaken through a s.73 application as the description of works needs to

match the original (in accordance with Case Law referred to as the *Finney case*, which held that subsequent altered proposals cannot use the s.73 route where the effect would be to alter the description). A clause is proposed within the Recommendation above for the previous permission to cease and the application under consideration here be taken forward if approved.

- 1.5 This application is reported to the Planning Applications Committee because it is a major category application and the Applicant is Reading Borough Council.



Location Plan (red line area)

2. PROPOSALS

- 2.1 The site was granted full planning permission on 17th September 2020 for 41 dwellings as affordable housing units including vehicular, cycle and pedestrian access, parking and hard and soft landscaping under planning permission 191659. The previous report is to be found at Appendix 1. This permission has been implemented and construction is underway.
- 2.2 This application before you proposes a reduction in the number of units from 41 to 37 affordable dwellings due to the omission of a storey from the building on North Street, which would result in the loss of 4 units. The omission of this storey would allow for design changes so additional solar panels and air source heat pumps can be provided.
- 2.3 The proposals also propose various design changes to the plans as approved under planning permission 191659. The changes proposed involve lowering the floor level of the rear of Block A (the T block fronting Weldale Street) of the approved

development to the same level as those of approved Block B, which would allow ramped access to the development from North Street and provision of accessible units on two sides of the courtyard without the need for a series of terraces/ramps taking up valuable amenity space.

- 2.4 Minor internal alterations are also proposed to the layout of both blocks to provide for fire separation and increased plant areas which also results in some minor external alterations to the proposed elevations, and alterations to the position of windows, balconies and doors.
- 2.5 The revised development would provide 17 x 1-bedroom units, 19 x 2-bedroom units and 1 x 3-bedroom units all as affordable housing units at social rented levels.



Proposed visual - corner of North Street and Weldale Street

3. PLANNING HISTORY

141626/REG3	A new temporary school of modular construction, single storey and flat roofed. New fencing and gates to site perimeter. New hardstanding for car and cycle parking, and pupil hard play.	GRANTED 7/1/2015
181652/REG3	Outline - erection of a 2.5, 3.5 and 4.5 storey building comprising 47 apartments (including 30 per cent affordable housing) in a mix of one, two and three-bedroom units. Landscaping, cycle and car parking with associated works (all matters reserved except layout and means of access).	GRANTED 12/3/2019
181653/REG3	Outline - erection of a 2.5, 3.5 and 4.5 storey building comprising 47 apartments for affordable housing in a mix of one, two and three-bedroom	GRANTED 12/3/2019

	units. Landscaping, cycle & car parking with associated works (all matters reserved except layout and means of access).	
191659/REG3	Two buildings of four and five storeys providing 41 dwellings as affordable housing units including vehicular, cycle and pedestrian access, parking and hard and soft landscaping	GRANTED 17/9/2020
201703/APC	Application for approval of details reserved by condition 4 (Method Statement), 7 (contamination assessment), 8 (contamination remediation) and 16 (Arboricultural Report) of application 191659	SPLIT DECISION 19/3/2021
210593/APC	Application for approval of details reserved by conditions: 8 (Contamination remediation), 12 (habitat enhancement), 13 (landscaping), 14 (boundary treatment), 16 (arboricultural method statement & tree protection), 22 (bin storage), 24 (cycle storage) and 27 (electric vehicle charging) of planning permission ref. 191659	PENDING CONSIDERATION
210153/APC	Application for approval of details reserved by condition 3 (materials), 5 (SuDS), 11 (CEMP), 12 (habitat enhancement scheme), 13 (landscaping scheme), 14 (boundary treatments), 18 (emission rate improvement), 20 (photovoltaic panels), 22 (bin store), 24 (cycle parking) and 27 (electric vehicle charging) of planning permission ref. 191659	SPLIT DECISION 19/3/2021
210275/VAR	Two buildings of four and five storeys providing 41 dwellings as affordable housing units including vehicular, cycle and pedestrian access, parking and hard and soft landscaping without complying with condition 2 (approved plans) of planning permission ref. 191659 for changes to floor levels, reconfiguration of internal and external areas and alterations to elevations	WITHDRAWN. SUPERSEDED BY CURRENT APPLICATION

4. CONSULTATIONS

RBC Housing

- 4.1 This proposal has been prepared in conjunction with the Council's Housing Team who are supportive of the scheme.

RBC Environmental Protection

- 4.2 No objection, subject to conditions to as secured and discharged in relation to the original planning permission.

RBC Transport Strategy

- 4.3 No objection, the proposed vehicle parking, cycle parking and bin store arrangements are acceptable.

A Unilateral Undertaking will be required to secure:

- A financial contribution of £15,000 towards provision of a car club
- A financial contribution of £3,500 towards a Traffic Regulation Order (Section 278 agreement) to alter the on-street parking restrictions on Weldale Street to provide an on-street car club parking space
- Section 38 agreement for adoption of proposed footway as part of the public highway on North Street

RBC Planning Natural Environment (Trees)

- 4.4 No objection, subject to conditions to secure the revised Arboricultural Method Statement and Landscaping proposals.

RBC Ecological Consultant

- 4.5 No objection, subject to conditions to secure:

- Submission and approval by the LPA of a habitat enhancement scheme
- Submission and approval by the LPA of an external lighting scheme

Berkshire Archaeology

- 4.6 No objection.

Thames Valley Police (Crime Prevention Design Advisor)

- 4.7 No comments received.

Public Consultation

- 4.8 The following neighbouring occupiers were notified of the application by letter - Burford Court Caroline Street (all flats), Units A1, A2 & A3 Great Knollys Street, Units 16, 1A and 12-14 North Street, Reading Ambulance Station North Street, 9a & 24 North Street, Unit C1 Reading Small Business Centre Weldale Street, Flats 1-6 Caroline Street and no.s 1-6 & 38-45 Stratheden Place.

- 4.9 Two site notices were also displayed on North Street and Weldale Street.

- 4.10 No neighbour letters of representation have been received.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 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) - among them the

'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.

- 5.2 Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

5.3 Reading 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
EN9: PROVISION OF OPEN SPACE
EN10: ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE
EN12: BIODIVERSITY AND THE GREEN NETWORK
EN14: TREES, HEDGES AND WOODLAND
EN15: AIR QUALITY
EN16: POLLUTION AND WATER RESOURCES
EN18: FLOODING AND DRAINAGE
H1: PROVISION OF HOUSING
H2: DENSITY AND MIX
H3: AFFORDABLE HOUSING
H5: STANDARDS FOR NEW HOUSING
H10: PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL OUTDOOR SPACE
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
CR1: DEFINITION OF CENTRAL READING
CR2: DESIGN IN CENTRAL READING
CR3: PUBLIC REALM IN CENTRAL READING
CR6: LIVING IN CENTRAL READING
CR14: OTHER SITES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL READING
CR14B: FORMER READING FAMILY CENTRE, NORTH STREET

5.4 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

Affordable Housing (2021)
S106 Planning Obligations (2015)
Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Employment Skills and Training (2013)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

5.5 Other relevant documentation

Reading Borough Council Tree Strategy (2021)
Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (2021)

6. APPRAISAL

The main issues raised by this planning application are as follows:

1. Principle of development
2. Sustainability and energy
3. Change to affordable housing numbers and mix
4. Design impacts of the changes

-

1. Principle of development

- 6.1 There is an extant planning permission for residential housing on the site ref: 191659. This has established the principle for the development of the land for residential purposes. This permission has been implemented and is under construction. This permission is therefore a significant material consideration to the assessment of the current application before you.
- 6.2 Since planning permission 191659 was approved (and implemented) the applicant has reviewed the sustainability credentials of the scheme. The scheme originally permitted included the provision of a gas-powered central heating system. Under the current climate emergency, where other options than the burning of fossil fuels should be utilised, a gas heating system is no longer considered appropriate. Indeed, the Government has announced that there will be a ban on installing gas boilers in new homes from 2025. Given this situation, the applicant has decided to future-proof the development and the scheme now includes air source heat pumps (ASHPs) and an increase in the level of solar panels proposed.
- 6.3 It was established during construction of the approved scheme that the additional weight required for the air source heat pumps could not be accommodated within the original design and structural solution of the approved scheme, with the design for gas central heating being much lighter.
- 6.4 To accommodate the additional weight of the air source heat pumps the application proposes to omit one storey from building B (fronting North Street) of the approved (under construction) scheme. Furthermore, additional solar panels are proposed across the site.
- 6.5 The consequence of omitting this one storey from the scheme is the loss of four units, resulting in 37 affordable housing units instead of the previously approved 41 units.
- 6.6 Given the above, officers advise that the principle of the proposal for residential development remains acceptable and in accordance with policies CC6, H1 and CR14B. The further implications of the proposed changes are now considered within the rest of this report.

2. Sustainability and energy

- 6.7 As set out in the attached report, the scheme as originally proposed was considered to comply with the Council's adopted policies and standards for sustainability/energy and was already designed to be built with a strong 'fabric first' approach to building insulation and included some photovoltaic panels as part of the scheme. With the move to prohibit gas boilers, the Housing team have been reviewing this scheme in order to minimise energy use even further. In this case, with the project already designed to a certain construction standard and under construction it has been found that the loading levels required for the heavy ASHPs

(to be inserted in each flat) and also additional photovoltaic panels made it necessary to remove a storey leading to a reduced number of flats being provided.

- 6.8 ASHPs would be provided in lieu of combi boilers in each of the flats and would provide each with domestic hot water and heating. The increased number of photovoltaic (PV) panels will supply the majority of electricity to each flat and also provide the electricity to run the ASHPs themselves. As a consequence, the Housing team advises that there will be significant financial advantages for the occupiers themselves with low energy bills.
- 6.9 Given that the scheme was already under construction this energy review is considered by your officers to be logical and timely and officers welcomed the improvements to energy performance and further welcome the provision of two separate approaches to sustainable (non fossil-fuel) on-site energy generation: ASHPs and PV. Officers advise that this is positive and moreover, will consequently reduce the carbon offset calculation required under the section 106 agreement. Officers therefore advise that the improved sustainability/energy gains should weigh heavily in the overall planning balance.
- 6.10 In conclusion on this matter, it is considered that the proposal demonstrates a very strong commitment to sustainability and continues to accord with Policies H5, CC2, CC3, CC4 and the SPD.

3. Changes to affordable housing numbers and mix

- 6.11 Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) requires that for developments of 10 or more dwellings 30% of the units are provided as affordable housing. The proposal would result in a reduction in affordable housing units from 41 to 37 to facilitate the inclusion of air source heat pumps and additional solar panels but the development remains proposed as 100% affordable housing at a social rented level. This higher than policy requirement level is justified as part of meeting the obligation as the 'surrogate site' for the development at Thames Quarter (refs. 162166/FUL and 190807/FUL) and the obligation for redeveloping the application site itself.
- 6.12 In terms of unit mix, Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) seeks residential developments within the town centre area to incorporate a maximum of 40% of 1-bedroom units and a minimum of 5% of 3-bedroom units. Concerns were originally raised by officers with one of the 4 units to be lost being the only 3 bed unit proposed in the original scheme. Further to discussions between officers and the applicant, new plans were submitted showing the retention of 1 x 3 bed unit within the development. Whilst the proposed mix does not strictly adhere to the requirements of Policy CR6, with only 1 x 3 bed unit proposed, this was previously found to be acceptable for application 191659.
- 6.13 Therefore, whilst it is regretted that the number of affordable units are reduced from what was previously approved for this site, the development remains 100% affordable and will continue to meet the requirements as a surrogate site. The mix remains as approved for the previous application.

4. Design impacts of the changes

- 6.14 The layout and footprint of the proposals is the same as that permitted under 191659. The primary difference in design terms between the consented (and implemented) scheme is the omission of the 4th storey to block B facing North

Street, fenestration changes and additional solar panels. The proposed lowering of the ground floor level to Block A would result in an enhancement to the pleasantness of the rear courtyard area and would allow the previously proposed terraces and ramps required to access the courtyard to be removed providing level access and improving the usability of this space. The minor external alterations to position of windows, doors and balconies are not considered to be materially different to those permitted under the original planning permission. Following the reduction in height of Block B (facing North Street), the proposals are still considered reflective of the wider area and the height of this building also reflects the height of Block A (Weldale Street frontage block). The increase in the number of solar panels will be noticeable, but not considered to be so incongruous so as to result in any material adverse harm either to the development itself or the wider character of the area.

- 6.15 In summary, it is considered that the revised scheme would continue to respond positively to its surroundings and would be in accordance with policies CR2, CR3 and CC7.

Other matters

Impacts of the changes on the amenity of existing and proposed occupiers

- 6.16 Given the nature of the proposed changes, with no increase in the footprint or height of the buildings over and above that already approved, no overbearing effects are considered to arise compared with that already consented. Similarly, given the position of windows combined with separation distances to the nearest residential neighbours, no material loss of privacy is considered to arise over and above that which has already been approved. All proposed units would continue to comply with nationally prescribed space standards, and all would be served by suitable levels of outlook and daylighting. The proposals are considered to accord with Policies H5, H10, EN16, CR6 and CC8.

Parking

- 6.17 The proposed site plan retains a total of 9 parking spaces located on the eastern boundary of the site will all spaces facing directly out onto North Street. Whilst this does not meet the parking standard provision requirements, this is the same as that considered acceptable under 191659 and remains acceptable. Commitments towards a car club and the consequent Traffic Regulation Order for an on-street car club space would be carried forward. Some conditions require updating (see below).

Trees and landscaping, ecology

- 6.18 An Arboricultural Method Statement, Tree Protection Details and Landscaping details have been submitted with the application to satisfy conditions of the original planning permission. RBC Natural Environment Officers have confirmed that the submitted details are acceptable and therefore both conditions will be updated to require the development to be carried out in accordance with the submitted details.
- 6.19 There remains a query in respect of the drainage layout plan, which is not consistent with that shown on the services plan. The applicant has been asked to

clarify what has actually been installed and this will be provided as part of an update report.

- 6.20 The Council's Ecologist has confirmed that whilst the details are largely acceptable in respect of ecological enhancement details submitted, the information needs to be updated to specify number and types of bat boxes. The applicant has been asked to provide this information, and this will be provided as part of an update report.

Conditions

- 6.21 Since the approval of permission 191659, the applicant has discharged a number of the planning conditions, these include landscaping, transport, materials, construction matters, etc. The update report will provide a fuller explanation of the progress made and the implications for the decision on this application, were permission to be forthcoming.

Employment and Skills Training

- 6.22 In accordance with the Employment Skills and Training SPD a construction phase employment skills and training plan was secured as part of the legal agreement for permission 191659. REDA (formerly Reading UK CIC) has confirmed that a plan for this site was agreed. However, it has subsequently been confirmed that it was not a usual ESP, that funding from Homes England for delivery of employment of young people has been provided and as such outputs for local labour and apprenticeships were agreed. This will therefore need to be checked and updated as part of the legal agreement for this application. Any further clarifications available will be provided in the update report, as necessary.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- 6.23 All new building housing development is liable for the community infrastructure levy (CIL). The chargeable floorspace of the development is 3190 square metres which equates to a levy of £498, 405. However, social housing provision is eligible for relief from the levy and therefore in practice the levy due is likely to be £0.

Equalities Impact

- 6.24 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 the 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 this revised development

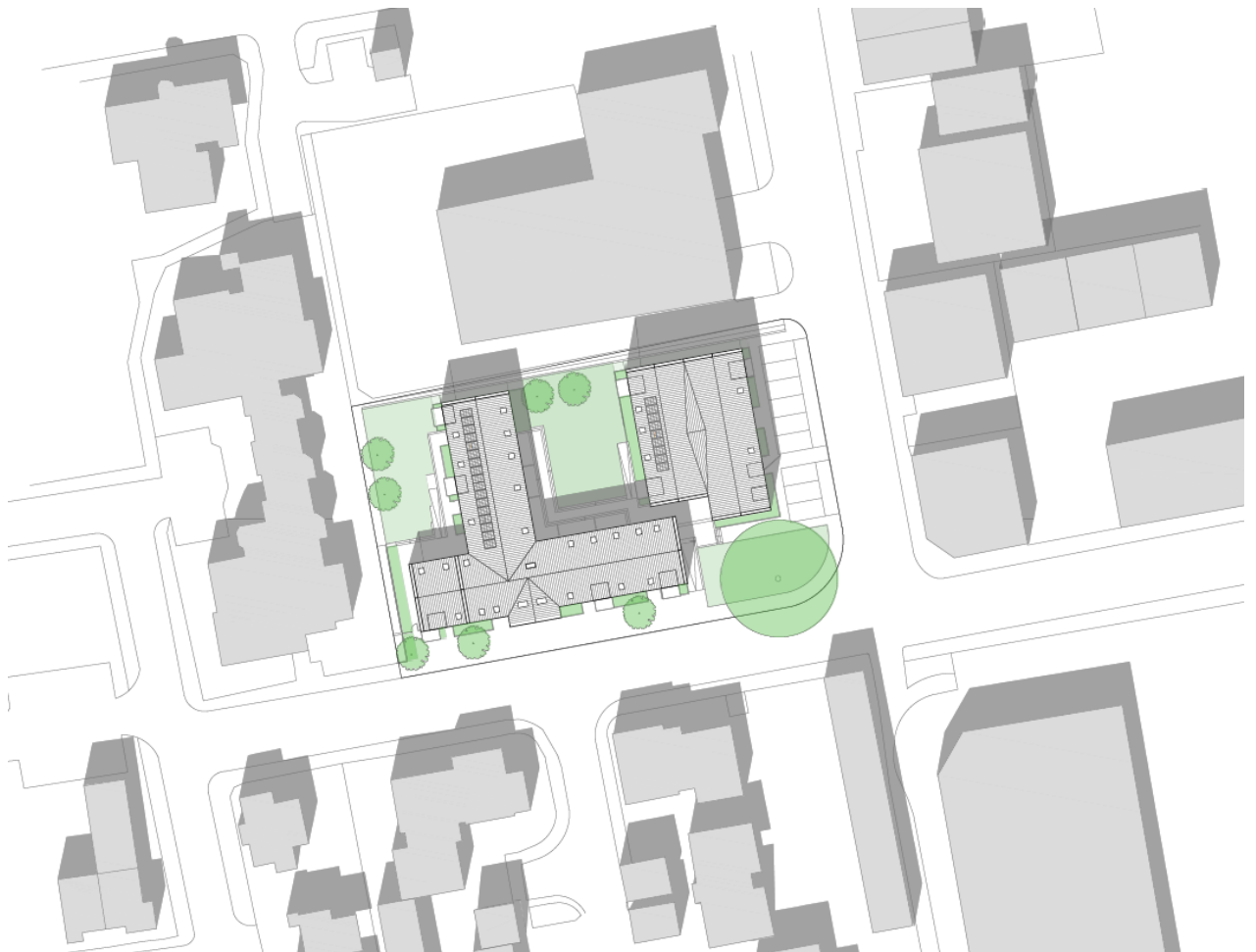
7. Conclusion

- 7.1 This application has been carefully considered in the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan and the previously approved application 191659.
- 7.2 The proposals would result in a reduction of affordable housing units as previously approved, which is a disbenefit of the scheme. However, this needs to be balanced against the opportunity to increase sustainability/energy benefits afforded by developing on-site non fossil-fuel energy generation. The additional benefits

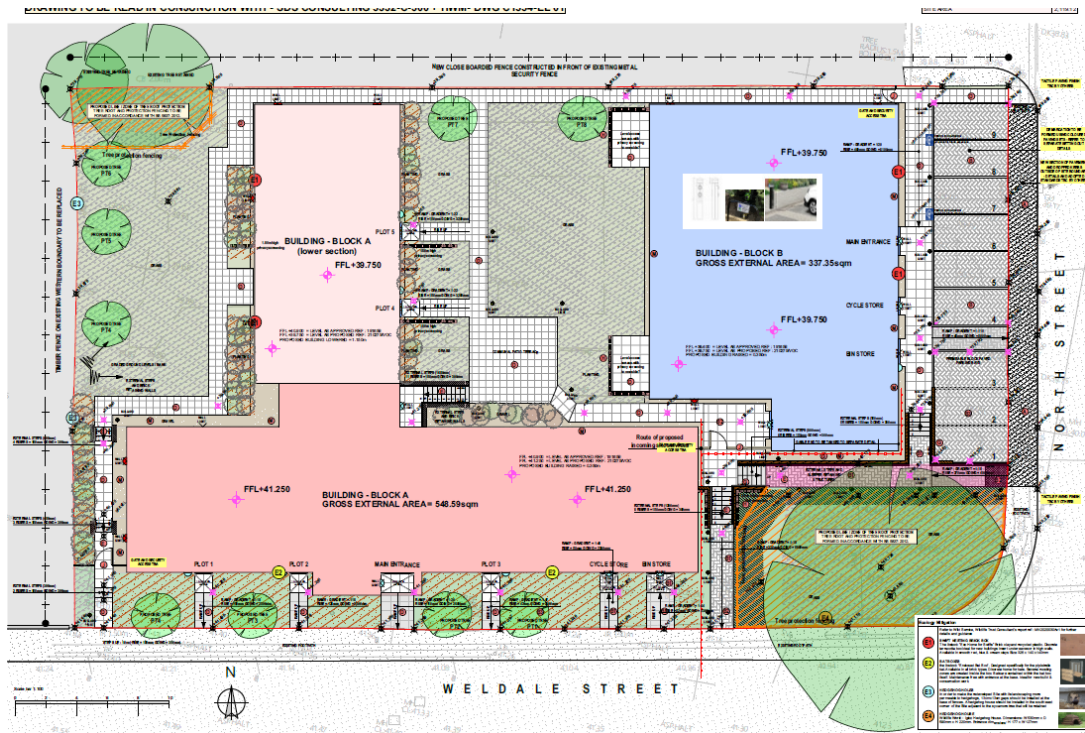
would result in a development close to achieving passive/benign energy demands as well as having the potential to deliver significant savings for residents in terms of heating bills, of significance to the occupiers who are likely to be on low incomes. Overall, officers consider that the advantages to these occupiers and the future energy demand of the Council's social housing stock should be given particular emphasis.

- 7.3 It is considered that the benefits of increased sustainability energy generation and wider societal benefits would in this instance, outweigh the loss (non-provision) of four dwelling units. As such, the recommendation is to grant full planning permission subject to the conditions and legal agreement heads of terms set out in the Recommendation box at the top of this report.

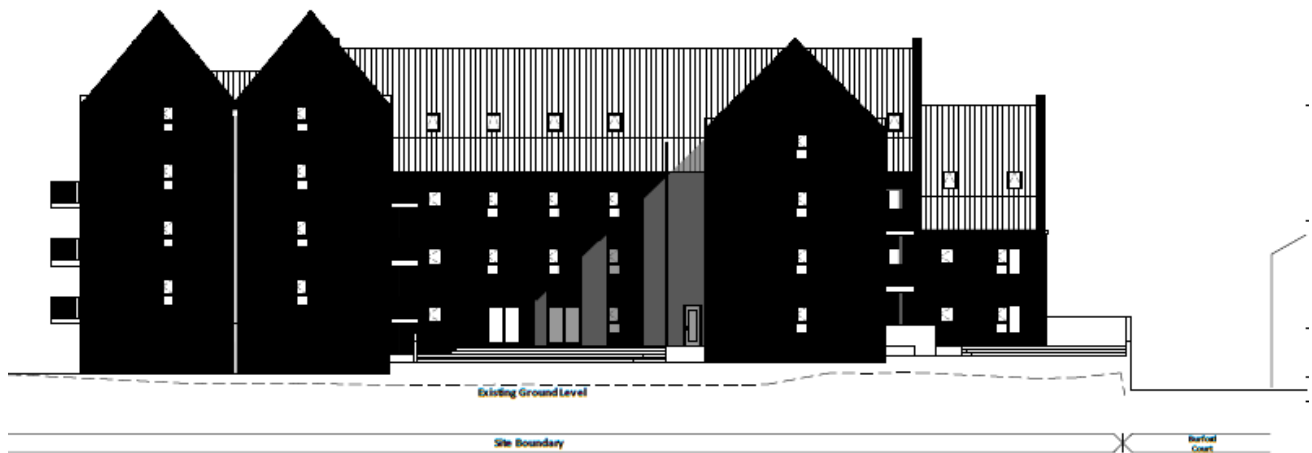
Case Officer: Ethne Humphreys



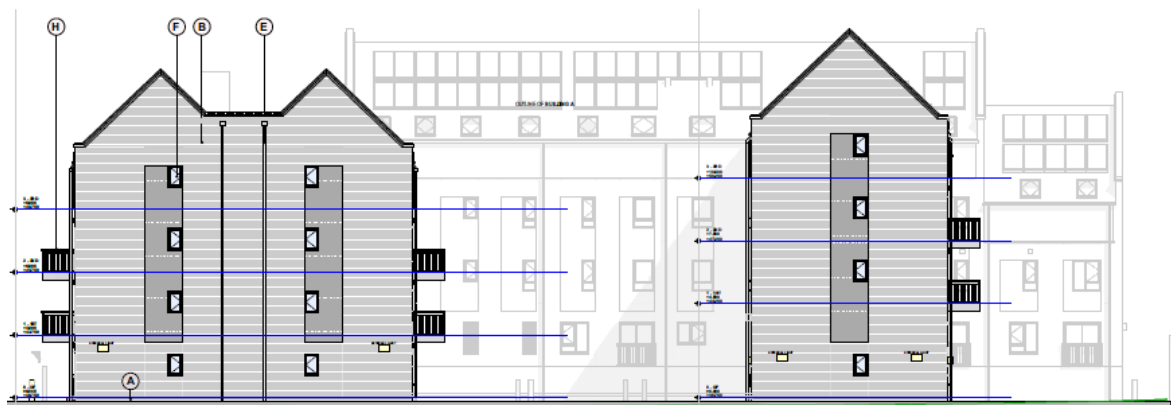
Proposed site plan - Approved



Proposed site plan - Proposed



Proposed north elevation and section - Approved



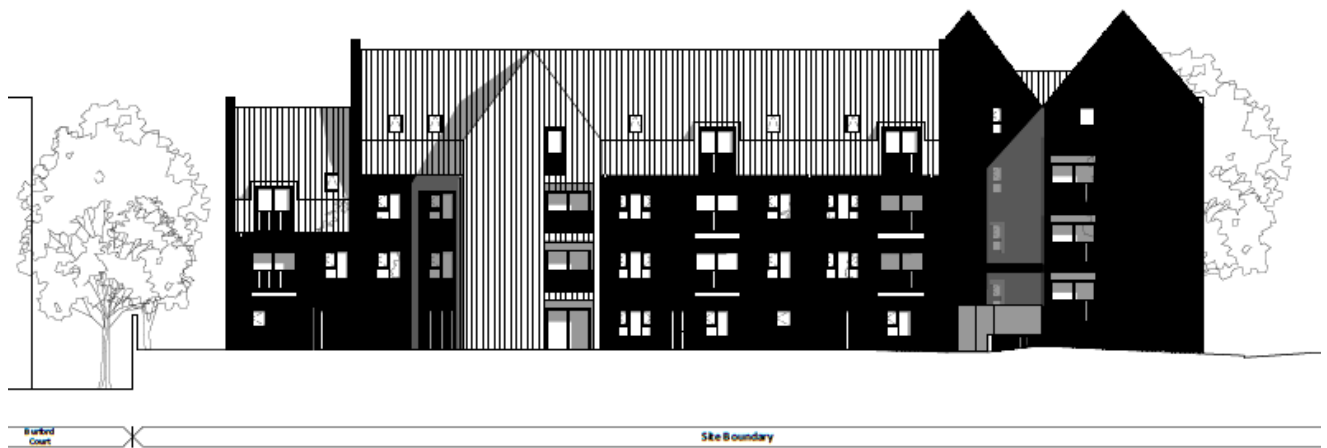
Proposed north elevation - Proposed



Proposed east elevation and section - Approved



Proposed east elevation - Proposed



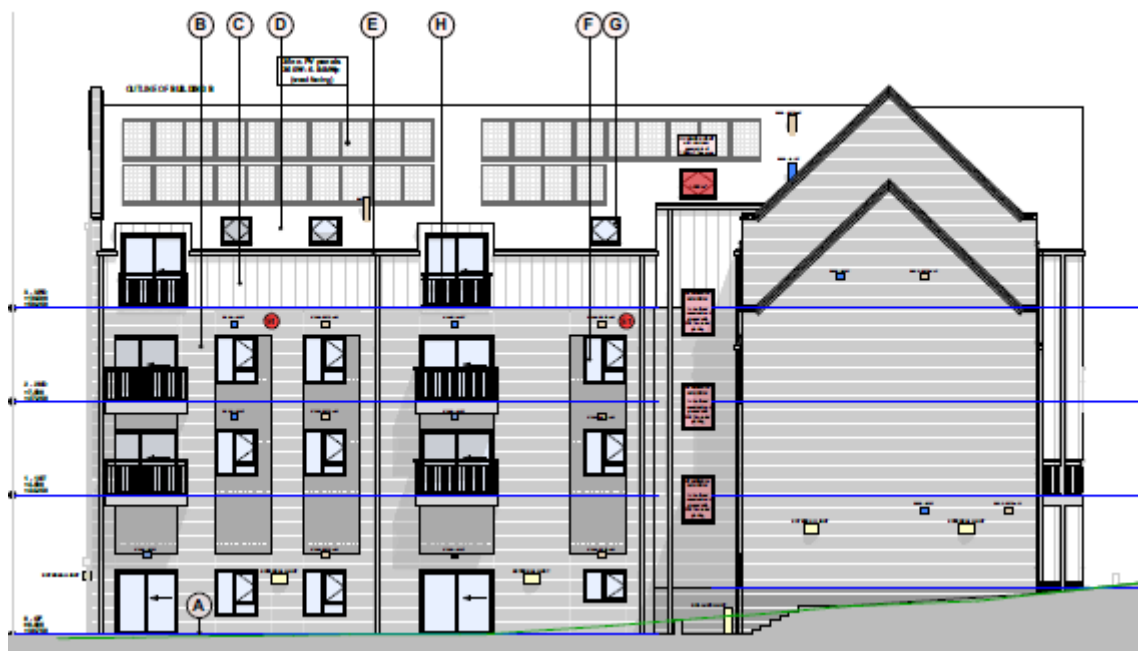
Proposed south elevation and section - Approved



Proposed south elevation - Proposed



Proposed west elevation - Approved



Proposed west elevation - Proposed

APPENDIX 1 - planning report for previous scheme