

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 11th January 2023

Ward: Abbey

App No: 221446

Address: Soane Point, 3-10 Market Place, Reading, RG1 2EG

Proposal: External works to existing building, including partial replacement of the existing facades fronting Market Place and Abbey Square alongside other external works to the building, set back single-storey extension above part of block fronting Market Place, part two part three storey extensions above other blocks, and conversion and alterations to ground floor reception and car parking area, together the works will deliver 38 new homes and (internal and external) residential amenity areas with associated car parking

Applicant: Tene Living (Reading) Ltd

13 Week Target Decision Date: 26/12/2022 **Extension of Time Date:** 10/02/2023

RECOMMENDATION:

Delegate to the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services (ADPTPPS) to i) **GRANT** full planning permission, subject to the satisfactory completion of a s106 legal agreement or ii) Refuse full planning permission if the legal agreement is not completed by 10/02/2023 (unless officers on behalf of the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services agree to a later date for completion of the legal agreement)

The legal agreement is to include the following heads of terms:

1. Provision of 11 flats (29%) as on-site Affordable Housing in the following unit mix: 5 x one-bedroom flats, 5 x two-bedroom flats and 1 x three-bedroom flat. 6 of the units to be at Reading Affordable Rent Tenure and 5 of the units to be as shared ownership dwellings.
2. Affordable Housing Off-site Commuted Contribution equivalent to the remaining 1% of the proposed development to top up the affordable housing on site to 30%. Payable prior to first occupation of the 18th unit
3. Provision of a Construction Phase Employment Skills and Training contribution of £8, 632 towards local skill and labour training. Contribution to be paid prior to commencement of development.
4. Zero Carbon Offset as per Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019) to achieve a minimum of 35% improvement in regulated emissions over the Target Emissions Rate in the 2013 Building Regulations, plus a Section 106 contribution of £1,800 per remaining tonne towards carbon offsetting within the Borough (calculated as £60/tonne over a 30-year period). Payable prior to occupation of 28th unit.

5. All Contributions Index Linked from date of permission

Conditions to Include:

1. Time limit - standard three years for implementation
2. In accordance with the approved Plans
3. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of materials
4. Pre-Occupation implementation of vehicle parking
5. Pre-Commencement, submission and approval of cycle parking
6. Pre-Occupation submission and approval of details of bin storage (including pest control measures)
7. Pre-Occupation submission and approval of refuse management/collection details
8. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of Construction Management Plan (including measures for control of noise and dust)
9. Pre-Occupation submission and approval of an electric vehicle charging scheme
10. Pre-Occupation - notification to residents of no automatic access to parking permits
11. Pre-occupation implementation of proposed glazing, ventilation and other noise mitigation
12. Control of construction hours (0800-1800 Mon-Fri, 0900-1300 Sat & not on Sundays or Bank Holidays)
13. No burning of waste on site
14. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of a Sustainable Drainage Strategy
15. Pre-Occupation Implementation of the Sustainable Drainage Strategy
16. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of a scheme for Biodiversity Net Gain Plan
17. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of scheme of Ecological Enhancements
18. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of details of hard and soft landscaping
19. Pre-Occupation submission and approval of a Landscape Management Plan
20. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of a design stage SAP assessment
21. Pre-Occupation submission and approval of an as built SAP assessment
22. Pre-Occupation implementation of all lifts and retention thereafter
23. All development to take place outside of the bird-nesting season, unless it can be demonstrated that nesting birds are not present or if nesting birds are identified development to not proceed until all young have fledged the next or a suitable mitigation strategy has been submitted and approved
24. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of design of gates to Abbey Square
25. Dwelling mix to be as proposed only
26. Pre-Commencement submission and approval of security strategy
27. At least 5% of units to be wheelchair user adaptable units
28. Submission and approval of a scheme or archaeological investigation prior to any below ground excavation
29. Submission and approval of a contaminated land assessment prior to any below ground excavation
30. Submission and approval of a contaminated land remediation strategy prior to any below ground excavation
31. Implementation of contaminated land remediation strategy in accordance with approved timetable of works
32. Reporting of any unidentified contamination

33. All roof terraces are not to be used outside the hours of 0800 to 2300

1. INTRODUCTION

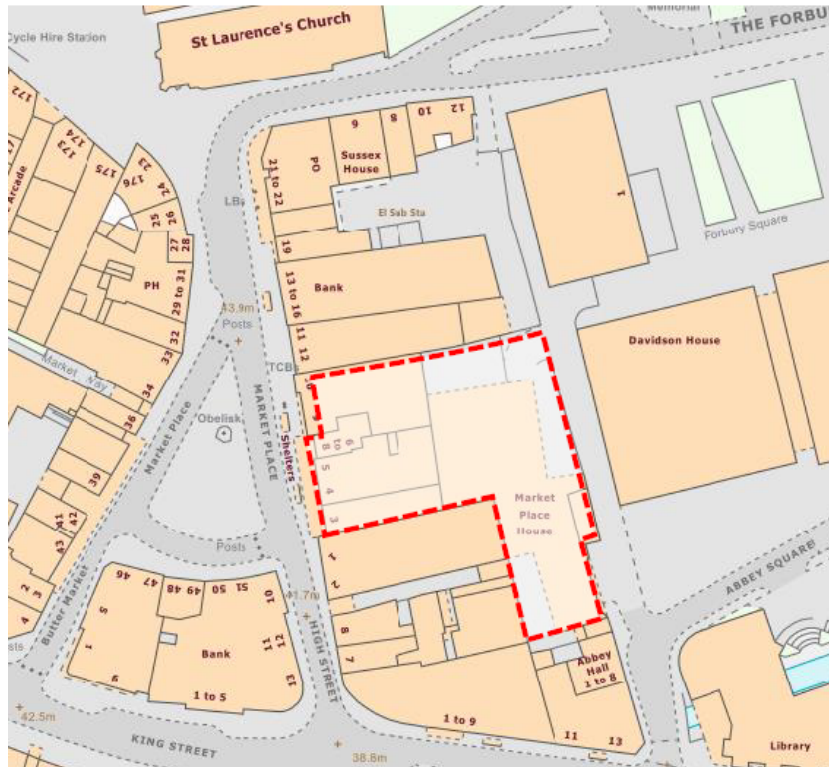
- 1.1 The application site comprises a predominantly five storey 1960s office building located on the east side of Market Place; the building also fronts on to Abbey Square to the rear. The building is access at ground floor level from Market Place and at basement level from Abbey Square to the rear.
- 1.2 The building is not listed but is located within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. There are a number of listed buildings within Market Place including the Grade II star listed The Simeon Monument within the centre of the Market Place square. The site is also located within the Abbey Quarter Area (a major area for heritage and cultural life within the Borough) as defined by Policy CR15 (The Reading Abbey Quarter) given the site's close proximity to the historic Reading Abbey site and within an identified area of Archaeological Potential (Policy EN2 - Areas of Archaeological Significance).
- 1.3 The site is located within the town centre and Central Core of the Reading Central Area as defined by Policy CR1 (Definition of Central Reading), within the designated Primary Shopping Area and Office Core Areas and the Market Place frontage of the site is a designated Active Frontage (Policy CR7 Primary Frontages in Central Reading).
- 1.4 The site is allocated for development under Policy CR14e (3-10 Market Place, Abbey Hall and Abbey Square). The policy states that development on the site will be for:

Retail and related uses on ground floor with residential and/or offices on upper floors, designed to enhance contribution of site to Conservation Area. Possible pedestrian link between Market Place and Forbury Square/Abbey Square. Rear servicing and preservation of historic building line and that development should:

- *Enhance the Conservation Area and the setting of adjacent listed buildings;*
- *Reflect the prevailing height of Market Place;*
- *Take account of the high potential for archaeological significance;*
- *Address noise impacts on residential use; and*
- *Address air quality impacts on residential use.*

(Site size: 0.29 ha / 46-70 dwellings plus ground floor town centre use)

- 1.5 The site is also located within an air quality management area (AQMA).
- 1.6 The Application is subject to determination by Planning Applications Committee because it is a 'major category' development proposal.



Site Location Plan

2. PROPOSAL

2.1 The application seeks full planning permission for external works to the existing building, including partial replacement of the existing facades fronting Market Place and Abbey Square alongside other external works to the building, set back single-storey extension above part of block fronting Market Place, part two part three storey extensions above other blocks, and conversion and alterations to ground floor reception and car parking area, together the works will deliver 38 new homes and (internal and external) residential amenity areas with associated car parking.

2.2 More specifically the proposals include:

- Retention of existing retail units at street level to Market Place;
- Comprehensive redesign and reconfiguration of external envelope of the building;
- Roof extensions to the building of between one and three storeys;
- Creation of easily-identifiable pedestrian entrances into the site from Market Place and Abbey Square;
- Conversion of ground floor car parking to residential amenity space and relocation of parking provision to basement level;
- Retention and re-landscaping of the existing central courtyard; and
- Creation of a network of connected landscaped roof terraces

2.3 The proposals seek to extend upon the prior approval consent ref. (210478) for conversion of the existing building from offices to 144 studio flats for which prior approval was given on appeal (ref. APP/E0345/W/21/3284108). The

appeal was granted following the Local Planning Authority’s decision to refuse the prior approval application due to concerns about noise impact of future occupiers of the flats from existing plant equipment associated with the ground floor supermarket use, as well as concerns about contaminants associated with the basement car park use. The Inspector accepted the revised contamination and commercial noise assessments submitted by the Appellant during the appeal process which reflected plant relocation work that they had undertaken on-site during the course of the appeal which reduced the external plant noise levels. These revised studies overcame the technical contamination and commercial noise concerns with the proposals and given the limited focus for issues for these types of applications, the reasons for refusal effectively fell away and The Inspector allowed the appeal.

2.4 The 38 additional flats which are proposed as part of this application would provide for a unit mix of:

	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom	Total
Market	11	14	2	27
Affordable	5	5	1	11
Total	16	19	3	38

Proposed Unit Mix

2.5 The Applicant sought pre-application advice from the Local Planning Authority in respect of the proposed development prior to submitting the planning application, including seeking input from the Reading Design Review Panel.

2.6 Submitted Plans and Documentation:

- Planning and Affordable Housing Statement, prepared by Savills;
- Design and Access Statement, prepared by TP Bennet Architects;
- Heritage Statement prepared by Stephen Levrant Heritage;
- Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment prepared by Stephen Levrant Heritage;
- Statement of Community Involvement prepared by MPC;
- Air Quality Assessment prepared by AQA Ltd;
- Transport Statement, prepared by TPS;
- Travel Plan, prepared by TPS;
- Flood Risk and Drainage Statement (including SUDs Proposals), prepared by Civilistix;
- Daylight and Sunlight Report, prepared by T16 Design;
- Noise Impact Assessment, prepared by Venta Acoustics Ltd;
- Energy Statement, prepared by T16 Design;
- Sustainability Statement, prepared by T16 Design
- Fire Statement prepared by BB7;
- Preliminary Roost Assessment, prepared by Arbtech; and

- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment, prepared by Arbtech
- Location Plan (Drawing Reference: 0430 P3);
- Existing Site Plan (Drawing Reference: 0610 P1);
- Existing Car Park Podium Floor (Drawing Reference: 0600 P1)
- Existing Basement Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0699 P1);
- Existing First Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0601 P1);
- Existing Second Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0602 P1);
- Existing Third Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0603 P1);
- Existing Fourth Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0604 P1);
- Existing Fifth Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0605 P1);
- Existing Sixth Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0606 P1);
- Existing Elevations Sheet 1 (Drawing Reference: 0620 P1);
- Existing Elevations Sheet 2 (Drawing Reference: 0621 P1);
- Existing Elevations Sheet 3 (Drawing Reference: 0622 P1);
- Existing Elevations Sheet 4 (Drawing Reference: 0623 P1);
- Existing Elevations Sheet 5 (Drawing Reference: 0624 P1);
- Existing Elevations Sheet 6 (Drawing Reference: 0625 P1);
- Existing and Proposed Block Plan (Drawing Reference: 0431 P2);
- Proposed Site Plan (Drawing Reference: 0410 P3);
- Proposed Basement Plan (Drawing Reference: 0499 P4);
- Proposed Ground Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0400 P2);
- Proposed First Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0401 P2);
- Proposed Second Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0402 P3);
- Proposed Third Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0403 P3);
- Proposed Fourth Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0404 P3);
- Proposed Fifth Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0405 P3);
- Proposed Sixth Floor Plan (Drawing Reference: 0406 P3);
- Proposed Roof Plan (Drawing Reference: 0407 P3);
- Proposed Elevations 1/6 (Drawing Reference: 0420 P3);
- Proposed North Elevations 2/6 (Drawing Reference: 0421 P3);
- Proposed North Elevations 3/6 (Drawing Reference: 0422 P3);
- Proposed East Elevations 4/6 (Drawing Reference: 0423 P3);
- Proposed East Elevations 5/6 (Drawing Reference: 0424 P3);
- Proposed West Elevations 6/6 (Drawing Reference: 0425 P3); and
- Proposed Elevation Detailing (Drawing Reference: 0426 P3).

Community Infrastructure levy (CIL)

- 2.7 In relation to the community infrastructure levy, the applicant has duly completed a CIL liability form with the submission. Based upon a proposed new build floor area of 3,453m² the proposals are projected to be subject to a levy of £539,496.72, albeit this figure is likely to decrease slightly in practice in the

event that the applicant applies for social housing relief for the affordable housing elements of the scheme.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 091332 - Replacement of access gates to the rear of the property from Abbey Square - Granted
- 3.2 101041 - Alterations between B1 and A1 class 1 use with associated changes to shop frontage - Granted
- 3.3 171756 - External alterations to the part of the building also known as Market Place House to include 1.1m high railings to enable use of the rear second floor roof area as outdoor amenity space - Granted
- 3.4 200918 - Internal and external refurbishment works to existing office building, including alterations to building frontage on Market Place and Abbey Square, roof extensions of between one and three storeys to existing building and five storey side extension to the north elevation to Abbey Square to provide a total 10, 921 sqm of new and refurbished B1 (a) office space with servicing from Abbey Square and retention of existing ground floor retail units on Market Place - Withdrawn
- 3.5 210478 - Change of use of part of the ground floor, part basement, and upper floors from office use Class B1(a) to C3, 144 studio apartments. Prior Notification under Class 0, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 - Prior Approval Refused - Allowed on Appeal
- 3.6 210880 - Change of use of building Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 100 dwellings. Prior notification under class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended) - Prior Approval Refused
- 3.7 211018 - Change of use of building Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 100 dwellings. Prior notification under class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended) - Prior Approval Refused
- 3.8 211261 - Change of use of building Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 93 dwellings. Prior notification under class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended) - Prior Approval Given
- 3.9 221766 - Application for non-material amendment to prior approval consent ref. 210478 (Change of use of part of the ground floor, part basement, and upper floors from office use Class B1(a) to C3, 144 studio apartments. Prior Notification under Class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country

Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended)) for alterations to internal layouts - Under Consideration

4. CONSULTATIONS

RBC Environmental Protection

- 4.1 No objection, subject to conditions to secure implementation of the submitted glazing and ventilation scheme, submission approval and implementation of details of bin store details including pest control measures and a construction method statement and to control hours of construction to standard working hours (0800 to 1800 hours Monday to Friday and 0800 to 1300 hours Saturdays only).

RBC Transport

- 4.2 No objection, subject to conditions to secure submission, approval and implementation of a construction method statement, details of cycle parking and refuse collection arrangements and a scheme of electric vehicle charging, provision of the proposed vehicle parking spaces and a condition to notify future occupants that they would not be automatically entitled to a parking permit.

RBC Planning Natural Environment Team (Trees)

- 4.3 No objection, subject to a condition to secure submission, approval and implementation of a detailed scheme of hard and soft landscaping and management details.

RBC Ecological Consultant

- 4.4 No objection, subject to conditions to secure submission, approval and implementation of a biodiversity net gain plan and scheme of ecological enhancements.

RBC Conservation and Urban Design Officer (CUDO)

- 4.5 No objection. There have been several pre-application meetings and the applicant sought detailed pre-application advice from officers. The proposals result in an overall enhancement to the setting of the Market Place within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area.

The negative details of the existing building, which are identified in the conservation area appraisal, have been taken into consideration with the new façade design. The new scheme is a positive addition to the Market square and is an enhancement of the existing setting around the square.

A condition is recommended to secure submission and approval of a detailed schedule and sample of all proposed external materials.

Berkshire Archaeology

4.6 No objection, given no below ground excavation is proposed.

Thames Water

4.7 No comments received.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

4.8 The proposed plans would meet the principles of means of escape in case of a fire.

Thames Valley Police Crime Prevention Design Adviser (CPDA)

4.9 No comments received.

Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC)

4.10 No comments received.

Lead Local Flood Authority (SuDS)

4.11 No objection subject to conditions to secure submission, approval and implementation of drainage strategy and maintenance plan.

RBC Waste Operations Manager

4.12 No objection, subject to a condition to secure a refuse management strategy.

RBC Housing

4.13 No objection, consider the proposals to be acceptable in terms of the affordable housing offer and tenure split of units. Particularly welcome the proposed inclusion of a three-bedroom unit at Reading Affordable Rent tenure level.

Public Consultation

4.14 Two site notices were displayed at the application site on 18th October 2022. One notice was displayed to the front of the site within Market Place and the other to the rear within Abbey Square.

4.15 The following neighbouring properties were notified of the application by letter:

- 1-2, 3, 4, 5, 9-10 and 11-12 Market Place
- Units 1, 2 and 3 Jacksons Corner 1-9 Kings Road
- 9, 11, 13 Kings Road
- 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11 and 12 Abbey Hall Abbey Square
- 7, 8 High Street
- Flats 1-3 no. 7 High Street

- Flats 1-34 no. 6 High Street
- Davidson House Forbury Square The Forbury
- Flats 1-5 8A High Street

- 4.16 No letters of representation have been received.
- 4.17 The Applicant also carried out their own public consultation exercise prior to submitting the planning application. This included a community newsletter which was sent to 689 residential properties and a follow up online presentation and question and answer session. The Applicant's Statement of Community Involvement sets out that that 5 local residents attended the online presentation, and the comments received covered matters of car/cycle parking provision, affordable housing provision and sustainability measures.

5 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 5.1 Section 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.
- 5.2 Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.
- 5.3 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', which means 'approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay' (NPPF paragraph 11).
- 5.4 National Planning Policy Framework (2021). The following chapters are the most relevant (others apply to a lesser extent):
- 2. Achieving sustainable development
 - 4. Decision-making
 - 6. Building a strong, competitive economy
 - 7. Ensuring the vitality of town centres
 - 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities
 - 9. Promoting sustainable transport
 - 11. Making effective use of land
 - 12. Achieving well-designed places
 - 15. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
 - 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

5.5 The development plan for this Local Planning Authority is the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019). The relevant policies are:

- 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
- EN2: Areas of Archaeological Significance
- EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
- EN6: New Development in a Historic Context
- 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
- EN17: Noise Generating Equipment
- EN18: Flooding and Drainage
- EM3: Loss of Employment Land
- 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
- TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
- RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres
- CR1: Definition of Central Reading
- CR2: Design in Central Reading
- CR3: Public Realm in Central Reading
- CR6: Living in Central Reading
- CR7: Primary Frontages in Central Reading
- CR14: Other Sites for Development in Central Reading

5.6 Relevant Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) are:

- Supplementary Planning Document: Affordable Housing (2021)
- Supplementary Planning Document: S106 Planning Obligations (2014)
- Supplementary Planning Document: Parking Standards and Design (2011)
- Supplementary Planning Document: Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)
- Supplementary Planning Document: Employment, Skills and Training (2013)

5.8 Other Relevant Documents:

BRE Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight - A guide to good practice, (BR 209 2022 edition)
Market Place / London Street Conservation Area Appraisal (2007)
Reading Borough Council Tree Strategy (March 2021)
Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (March 2021)
The National Design Guide (2019)
The National Model Design Code (July 2021)
Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015)
Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3 (2nd Edition) The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2017)
Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance (Historic England 2008)
Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings (British Standards Pub. BS 7913:2013, 2015)

6 APPRAISAL

6.1 The main matters to be considered are:

- Principle of development
- Development density, unit mix and affordable housing
- Design considerations and effect on character and heritage
- Residential amenity/Standard of accommodation for future occupiers
- Transport, access and servicing
- Sustainability
- Natural environment

Principle of Development

6.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) encourages the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land) and seeks that all applications for housing should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The accessibility of the site, located within the Reading Central Area as defined by the Reading Local Plan 2019, is considered acceptable for the proposed development in accordance with Policy CC6 (Accessibility and Intensity of Development) whilst the provision of new housing to the upper floors of the development would align with the broad objectives of Policy H1 (Provision of Housing) in assisting in meeting the annual housing targets and those of the site allocation Policy CR14e which outlines development of the site with residential/or offices to upper floors.

6.3 To reiterate Policy CR14e states:

Retail and related uses on ground floor with residential and/or offices on upper floors, designed to enhance contribution of site to Conservation Area. Possible pedestrian link between Market Place and Forbury Square/Abbey

Square. Rear servicing and preservation of historic building line and that development should:

- *Enhance the Conservation Area and the setting of adjacent listed buildings;*
- *Reflect the prevailing height of Market Place;*
- *Take account of the high potential for archaeological significance;*
- *Address noise impacts on residential use; and*
- *Address air quality impacts on residential use.*

(Site size: 0.29 ha / 46-70 dwellings plus ground floor town centre use

- 6.4 In terms of ground floor uses the existing application building incorporates a dentist (E e Use - Provision of medical or health services) and supermarket (E a Use - Retail) at ground floor level fronting Market Place, whilst in between these two units, also fronting Market Place, is the entrance/reception/lobby area to the upper floor offices (E g i Use - Offices). The proposals do not seek to change the existing ground floor dentist and supermarket units but seek to convert the entrance/lobby/reception area to the offices to form a similar residential entrance/lobby/reception area to the flats proposed to the upper floors of the building. The proposed residential entrance/lobby/reception area would also serve the 144 studio flats proposed to be created by way of conversion of the existing building the under the extant the prior approval consent ref. 210478 which was granted on appeal.
- 6.5 The retention of the existing ground floor dentist and supermarket uses to the Market Place frontage would accord with the site allocation Policy CR14e which states that new development should provide retail and related uses at ground floor. The Market Place site frontage is within a designated active frontage and retention of the two existing units would also accord with Policy CR7 which requires that uses on the ground floor frontages are within town centre or related uses unless it would be an entrance to upper floors. On this basis the conversion of the existing ground floor office entrance/lobby/reception area to a similar space for the proposed upper floor flats is also considered to accord with Policy CR7.
- 6.6 To the Abbey Square (east) side of the building there is an existing lower ground floor level (basement) and upper ground floor level car park and servicing area. There is a change in levels across the site which slopes down from north to south from Forbury Road down to Abbey Square and from east to west from Market Place down to Abbey Square. As such the ground floor street level frontage units to Market Place are at upper ground floor level when approached from Abbey Square with the existing lower ground floor (or basement) level car park forming much of the street level frontage to Abbey Square. As per the prior approval consent (ref. 210478) the proposals seek to retain the existing lower ground floor level (basement) car park and servicing area but convert the upper ground floor car park and servicing area to residential use. The site allocation Policy CR14e requires that servicing is to be provided from the rear (Abbey Square) as existing.

Retention of the basement level car park and servicing area is considered to satisfy this requirement.

- 6.7 The broad principle of the land uses proposed is therefore considered to be acceptable.
- 6.8 The application proposes both roof top extensions to the existing building as well as façade upgrades and partial replacement to both the Market Place and Abbey Square facades of the building. In general terms it is pertinent to note that in allocating the site for development under Policy CR14e, officers' expectation for the site is not for conversion of the existing building, given it is a negative contributor to the historic character and setting of the conservation area, but that the site would come forward in the form of demolition of the existing building and provision of a new-build development on the site. This is to be able to meet the requirements of the site allocation policy, particularly in terms of a development which 'enhances the conservation area and setting of adjacent listed buildings.
- 6.9 However it must be acknowledged that the existence of the prior approval consent (ref. 210478) for conversion of the existing building from office to flats significantly limits the likelihood of a proposal for demolition and replacement of the existing building coming forward and implementation of the prior approval consent is a legitimate fallback position for development on the site which the Application has indicated will be implemented.
- 6.10 Given the proposals seek façade alteration/replacement and to extend upon the existing building, it is considered that the proposals need to demonstrate a very high level of design quality in order to overcome the negative visual impact of the existing structure. The contribution of the proposed development to the historic character and setting of the London Street / Market Place Conservation Area and surrounding listed buildings and the other specific elements of Policy CR14e are considered in more detail within the rest of this report.

Development density, unit mix and affordable housing

Development Density

- 6.11 The proposed development seeks to create 38 additional residential dwellings, which if considered in isolation would fall below the indicative number of dwellings envisaged to be brought forward on the site by Policy CR14e of 46-70. However, in this instance the application is clear that the proposals are intended to compliment and extend upon the prior approval consent given on appeal for 144 studio flats (ref. 210478). If considered together with the prior approval consent the proposals would result in 182 new dwellings which would far exceed the number of dwellings envisaged for the site under Policy CR14e.
- 6.12 It is pertinent to note that paragraph 5.4.33 of the supporting text to Policy CR14e states that '*where dwelling or floorspace figures are included alongside the allocations, these are intended as a guide, and usually reflect an indicative*

maximum capacity. They are based on an initial assessment taking into account the characteristics of each site. However, the capacity of sites will ultimately depend on various factors that need to be addressed at application stage, including detailed design and layout. The fact that a site is allocated in CR14 does not preclude the need to comply with all other policies in the local plan'. In addition, it should be noted that Policy H2 (Density and Mix) does not prescribe an upper limit for development density on town centre sites and sets out that factors such as site characteristics, accessibility and need to achieve high quality design / minimise environmental impacts will inform appropriate levels of development. Therefore, whilst the site is located in a central and sustainable location in terms of accessibility in accordance with Policy CC6, the assessment of detailed matters including site layout, design and level of amenity for future and surrounding occupiers in the rest of this report will ultimately inform whether Officers consider the level of development proposed to be appropriate for the site.

Unit Mix

- 6.13 Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) requires development proposals in the town centre to provide for a maximum of 40% one-bedroom units and minimum of 5% three-bedroom units.
- 6.14 As discussed above the conversion of the existing building from offices to flats is not included or under consideration as part of this planning application given the Applicant has already obtained prior approval (ref. 210478) for this work under permitted development rights for conversion to 144 studio units. Officers consider that this piecemeal approach to the development on the site is disappointing given the mix proposed under the prior approval conversion would strongly conflict with the unit mix for new residential development within the town Centre sought by Policy CR6 (maximum of 40% one-bedroom units and minimum of 5% three-bedroom units) and fails to provide any much-needed family sized or affordable homes. Unfortunately, the legislation under which the extant prior approval consent was obtained allows for consideration of only a limited number of factors of which unit mix or provision of affordable housing are not included.
- 6.15 The unit mix assessment for the current application can only be made in respect of the 38 additional flats proposed where the proposed mix of 16 x one-bedroom units (42%), 18 x two-bedroom units (50%) and 3 x three-bedroom units (8%) would broadly accord with Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) and is considered to be acceptable.

Affordable Housing

- 6.16 Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) requires that development proposals for ten or more new residential dwellings should provide 30% of units as affordable housing.
- 6.17 The proposals would provide 11 of the 38 units proposed (29%) as affordable housing (5 x one-bedroom units, 5 x two-bedroom units and 1 x three-bedroom unit). The provision of 5 x two bedroom and 1 x three-bedroom units is welcomed

and would assist in providing over half the affordable dwellings as family-sized units of which Policy H3 identifies most demand within the Borough. The proposed tenure mix of the affordable housing proposed is 6 units (55%) at Reading Affordable Rent levels and 5 units (45%) as Shared Ownership dwellings. Whilst this falls marginally below the target unit mix for affordable housing within the adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document of at least 62% of units at Reading Affordable Rent level and maximum of 38% of units as Affordable Home Ownership dwellings (Shared Ownership) the RBC Housing Manager welcomes the provision of a three-bedroom unit at Reading Affordable Rent tenure level and considers the affordable housing offer as a whole to be acceptable.

- 6.18 Furthermore, all the proposed affordable dwellings would meet nationally described space standards. The affordable dwellings to be provided at Reading Affordable Rent levels would be located on the ground floor of the development whilst the Shared Ownership homes are proposed across the second and third floors. All the proposed affordable units would be accessed from Abbey Square to the rear of the site. The units on the ground floor would be accessed from two entrances on Abbey square whilst the affordable units to the upper floors would be accessed via the southern entrance from Abbey Square. Two of the proposed affordable units will be wheelchair user complaint with Part M4(3) of the Building Regulations.
- 6.19 An off-site affordable housing commuted contribution is also to be secured by way of a section 106 obligation equivalent to the remaining 1% of the development to top up the affordable housing provision of the proposals to the 30% compliant level in accordance with Policy H3.

Design considerations and effect on character and heritage

- 6.20 The site does not contain any statutorily or locally listed buildings however it is located within the Market Place/London Road Conservation Area. There are a number of listed buildings adjacent to the site and within its local and wider setting when viewed from Market Place, including Grade II, II* and I listed buildings and structures. The closest listed buildings include nos. 1 and 2 Market Place (Grade II), no. 10 High Street (Grade II) and the Simeon Monument within Market Place (Grade II*) amongst others. Further to the north and east of the site The Grade I listed Church of St Laurence, Grade II* Town Council Chamber and Offices (65m away) and The Forbury Garden Registered Park and Garden (Grade II) (130m away). The rear of the building which fronts on to Abbey Square is located within but on the edge of the Conservation Area.
- 6.21 Paragraph 199 of the NPPF sets out 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).
- 6.22 Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) states that heritage assets, including their settings will be protected and where possible

enhanced. Policy EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context) seeks that in areas characterised by heritage assets the historic environment will inform and shape new development. In terms of general design approach, Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) and CR2 (Design in Central Reading) seek that all development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area within which it is located.

- 6.23 The site allocation Policy CR14e also further stipulates that development on the site should enhance its contribution to the Conservation Area and setting of adjacent listed buildings as well as preserve the historic building line (to Market Place), reflect the prevailing height of Market Place and explore possible pedestrian link between Market Place and Forbury/Abbey Square.
- 6.24 The Council's Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal document (2007) identifies that Market Place and its continuation into the pedestrianised space in front of the Town Hall has its origins in the 12th century. The presence of the large public square, the collection of tight knit historic buildings looking into the square as well as the nearby presence of the Grade I listed St Laurence's Church and the Grade II* listed Town Hall are features identified as forming part of the significance of this part of the conservation area. Natural stone and brick are the predominant materials within the conservation area.
- 6.25 Market Place was partly destroyed by a bomb in 1943 and the buildings around the square now show a variety of styles and periods in which, mid-20th century 'Brutalist' architecture figures largely and of which the application site is a prime example, dating from 1965. The Conservation Area Appraisal identifies such modern and undistinguished architecture, loss of original architectural features as well as the presence of vacant commercial premises and conflict of pedestrians and traffic within the square as features which detract from the significance of the conservation area.
- 6.26 The Brutalist form of the application building which currently detracts from the character and appearance of the conservation area presents itself as a large utilitarian concrete structure of little architectural merit. The building presents a five-storey concrete façade to Market Place with a proliferation of windows within concrete sectional panels to the upper floors. The building's Market Place elevation is very wide which, combined with its appearance makes it a dominant feature within the Market Place public square, where the majority of other buildings are of similar storey height (four to five storeys) but have much narrower frontages and display greater verticality and architectural articulation to their front elevations. The front of the building also presents a stepped building line to Market Place with the southern two thirds of the building steps forward at full height creating the ground floor level covered colonnade area which covers the entrance to the ground floor supermarket. The remaining one third of the building to the north steps back in at full height and is reflective of the consistent building line found to this side of Market Place. To the rear, the building steps down to three and four storeys to the Abbey Square frontage presenting a similar concrete, utilitarian façade.

- 6.27 In terms of the listed buildings surrounding the square, their setting is largely derived from views of their historic front facades obtained from within Market Place both individually and collectively. St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall (Grade II and II*, respectively) further to the north in Town Hall Square display more grandeur and prominence in their own right as does the Grade II* Simeon Monument within Market Place. Whilst the storey height of the existing building is in-keeping with the general scale of the historic buildings surrounding the square, the utilitarian concrete form of building and its wide dominant presence currently detracts from the setting of the closest listed buildings to the site (nos 1-2 Market Place, no. 10 High Street and the Simeon Monument). Given their location over 65m to the north, the setting of the landmark listed buildings of St Laurence's Church and the Town Hall is not considered to be impacted upon.
- 6.28 As discussed in the Principal section of this report in allocating the site for development under Policy CR14e, Officers' expectation for the site is not for conversion of the existing building, given it is an identified negative contributor to the historic character and setting of the conservation area, but that the site would come forward in the form of demolition of the existing building and provision of a new-build development on the site. Given the proposals seek façade alteration/replacement and to extend upon the existing building it is considered that the proposals need to demonstrate a very high level of design quality in order to overcome the negative visual impact of the existing structure.

Upward Extensions

- 6.29 The proposed upward extensions would range from between one and three storeys. The top (fifth) storey of the existing building is recessed and set back from the parapet of the fourth storey Market Place elevation and spans two thirds of the width of the building reflecting the stepped profile and building line of this part of the building. The proposals seek to extend the existing recessed fifth floor to span the full width of the building (extension A1 on diagram 1 below) but with the extension being further recessed than the existing roof top extension, reflecting the stepped profile of the front elevation of the building. Incorporating the stepped profile of the building within the proposed fifth floor extension would ensure this element retains a subservient appearance relative to the lower floors of the building and is reflective of other buildings within Market Place where recessed top floors are evident.

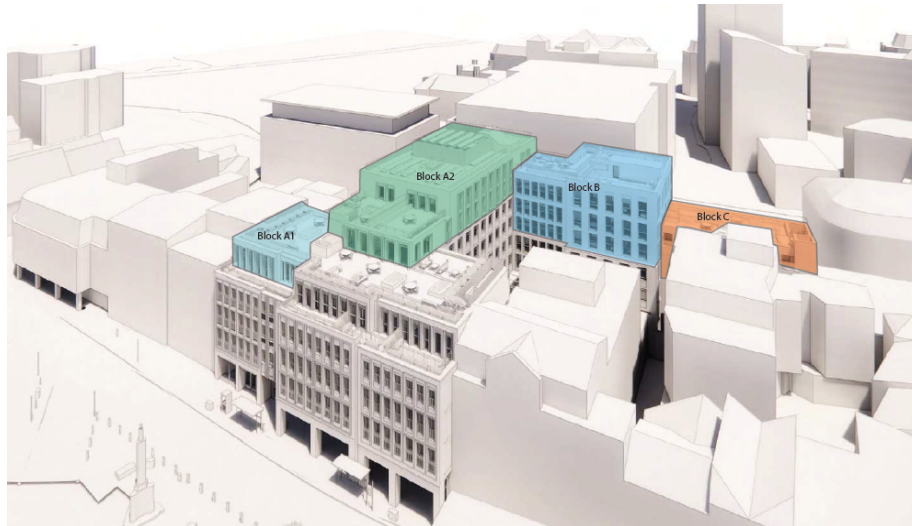


Diagram 1 - Proposed Extensions

6.30 A further part one part two storey roof extension (extension A2 on diagram 1 above) to create a sixth and seventh floor of accommodation is also proposed, with the sixth-floor element set back 8m and the seventh-floor element set 16m from the main Market Place elevation of the building.

6.31 The Applicant has submitted a Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) with the application which identifies a series of short to medium range viewpoints of the building from in and around Market Place and a longer-range view from London Street to the south to assess the visual impact of the proposed development. Officers are of the opinion that the recessed nature and significant setback of the proposed upward extensions is such that their scale and massing would appear in keeping with the general scale of buildings surrounding the square and that they would not appear prominent to views from within an around Market Place and the Conservation Area or within the setting of the closest listed buildings (no.s 1-2 Market Place, no. 10 High Street and the Simeon Monument). This conclusion is supported by the views study presented in the Applicant's HTVIA such as the existing and proposed views below looking east towards the application site from within Market Place. In this respect Officers considered that the layout and massing of the proposed extensions would adhere to the requirement of Policy CR14e that any development on the site reflects the prevailing building heights within Market Place.



Existing view east from within Market Place



Proposed view east from within Market Place

- 6.32 The proposed sixth and seventh floor extension would extend back in the site to increase the height of the part of the building which fronts on to Abbey Square (extension A2 on diagram 1 above). The rear elevations of the existing building, similar to the Market Place frontage, are of concrete structure and of little architectural or heritage value and similarly detract from the historic character of this part of the conservation area. The rear part of the site is located on the edge of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and is a transitional area between the site and the larger more modern office buildings around Abbey Square. The buildings either side of the application site are predominantly between four and five storeys, but heights vary to the rear of the buildings as they project towards Abbey Square/Forbury Square. The closest building opposite the application site to the rear is Davidson House on The Forbury which is a six-storey glazed office building.
- 6.33 The layout of the application building forms an L shape which stretches south along Abbey Square towards the junction with Kings Road to the rear of no.1-2 Market Place. Part three-part two storey roof extensions are proposed to this part of the building (extensions B and C on diagram 1 above) resulting heights to this part of the building of between five and seven storeys with heights reducing towards the junction with Kings Road.



3D model showing proposed massing to Abbey Square



Existing view east looking towards Abbey Square elevation



Proposed view east looking towards Abbey Square elevation

- 6.34 Where the proposed extensions would increase the overall height of the Abbey Square elevation of the building to seven storeys (extensions A2 and B on diagram 1 above) this would be located directly opposite Davidson House, which whilst a six-storey building, presents itself at a similar height to the application proposals as a result of variation in site levels between the two buildings and the presence of a part basement level to the application building. In this context the seven-storey massing proposed to this part of the building is considered site comfortably within the environs of Abbey Square (see existing and proposed visuals from Abbey Square above taken from the HTVIA).



Existing view south towards Abbey Square from St Laurence's Church yard



Proposed view south towards Abbey Square from St Laurence's Church yard

6.35 The resultant seven storey element of the proposals would also be visible to longer range views from the south along Forbury Square towards Abbey Square, including from the church yard of the Grade I listed Church of St Laurance's but as demonstrated in the visuals from the churchyard above, taken from the HTVIA, the scale of this part of the proposals is not considered to impinge upon or appear unduly prominent or harmful to such views.



Existing view Looking north along Abbey Square from Kings Road



Proposed view looking north along Abbey Square from Kings Road

- 6.36 Similarly the stepping down of the massing to five storeys (extension C on diagram 1 below) is considered to respect the reduction in heights of buildings to the south towards Kings Road where heights are predominantly three and four storeys (see existing and proposed visuals looking north from Kings Road above taken from the HTVIA). This part of the extensions would also be set back over 25m from the junction with Kings Road such that it would not appear unduly prominent to views from Kings Road. The height proposed to this part of this site would also reflect the recently built five storey new build block of flats located to the rear of Jacksons Corner at no.s 1-9 Kings Road as shown in diagram 2 below.



Diagram 2 - Showing application site in blue and recently completed new build five storey block of flats to the rear of Jacksons Corner (no.s 1-9 Kings Road) in pink

6.37 It is considered that the proposed approach to the layout and massing of the development has been well thought out and justified appropriately in the context of the site's surroundings, including impact on heritage assets, however, as discussed above, the detailed design of the proposals requires similar detailed assessment and consideration.

Façade Alterations

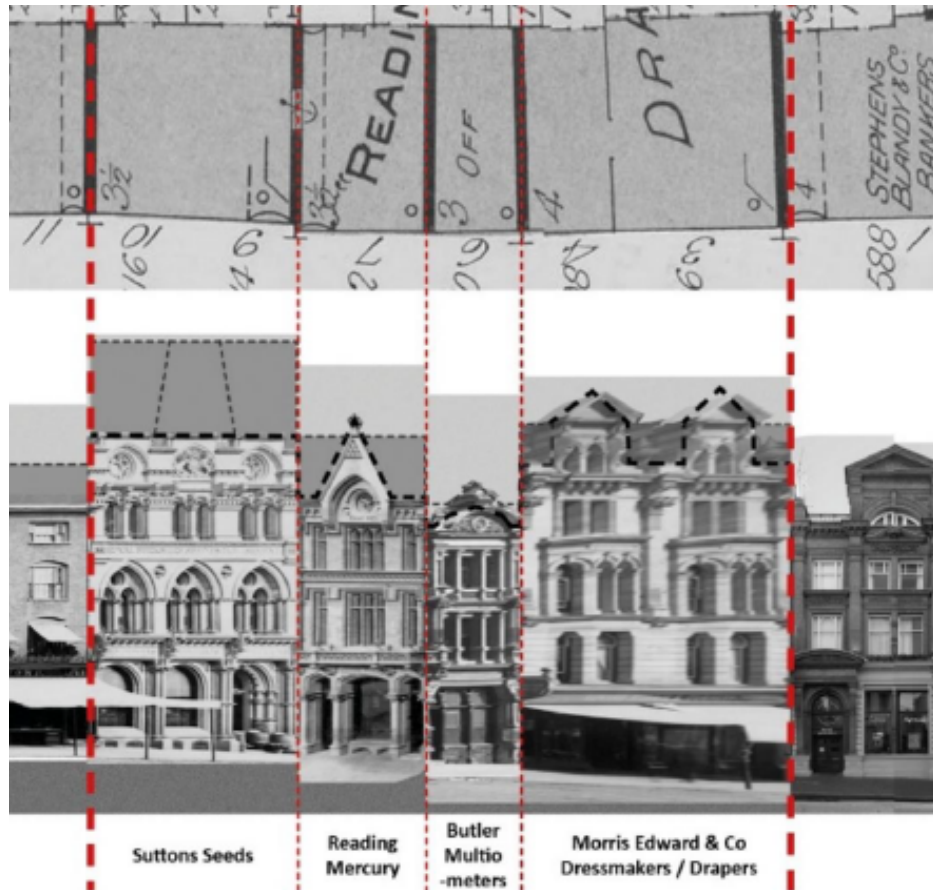
6.38 A significant aspect of the proposed development is the proposed alterations and part replacement of the front principal Market Place façade of the building. As detailed within the Applicant's HTVIA a key aspect of the approach to alterations to the façade has been to add greater verticality, articulation and variation to address the current wide, uniform and utilitarian appearance of the concrete structure of the existing building when viewed from Market Place. The current appearance and proportions of the building are out of keeping with the narrower plots and more articulate frontages of buildings found around the square and within the wider Conservation Area and are detract from the significance of the Conservation Area and the setting of surrounding listed buildings.

6.39 The HTVIA sets out research undertaken by the Applicant's Heritage Consultant including maps and photographs which show that the application site remained intact following world war two but was redevelopment post war to its current form. The historic maps and photographs provided (see below from 1887 and 1890) evidence that the buildings which previously stood on the site reflected the narrow burgage plots of the many of other buildings which surrounding Market Place to this day, the tight knit character of which, is likely to trace back to the areas original medieval layout. This tight knit layout and pattern of frontages is considered to be key to the significance of the Conservation Area.



*Photographs of the application site
From 1887 and 1890*

6.40 Using the photographs and historic plans the HTVIA has modelled what the Market Place façade of the application site would have looked like around the turn of the 19th century (see below). This portrays four separate units/plot frontages of different widths as well as variation in terms of heights and architectural articulation and use of stone and brick finishes.



Modelled Market Place façade of the application site circa. 1900

- 6.41 Building on the analysis set out above the design approach to the treatment of the front façade of the application site proposed is to present the elevation as four different frontages of varying width. Further visual variation between the four different elements is proposed by way of used of materials and cladding to provide varied floor, window and parapet heights, subtle differences in the depth and forward projection of each of the elements above ground floor level (see proposed façade section below). Window proportions are also designed with brick infill panels so as to reduce in size upwards between the first and fourth floors of the building to deal with the repetitive and uniform appearance of the window openings to the existing building.



Proposed Market Place façade section

- 6.42 To achieve the above detail and variation to the façade, the proposals seek to replace the existing concrete facades and build new brick clad and metal clad facades over and above them. However, the bay design has to respond to the constraints of the existing structure which sits behind. Behind each of the concrete fins of the main facades are structural concrete columns that need to be retained and do present a significant constraint to any structural alterations to the building that can be made and as a consequence, the rhythm of the façade retains an overall a grid like appearance.
- 6.43 The proposals also include use of a range of materials, notably different brick colours and tones to add variation between the cladding to the four sections of the façade. Proposed materials for the cladding include red brick with grey brick detail (Bay 1 as shown on drawing above), dark grey brick with dark grey spandrel panels (Bay 2), buff brick and vertical buff brick panels (Bay 3) and grey brick and vertical grey field brick panels (Bay 4). The proposed brick tones are reflective of the materials forming the principal façades of a number of the listed buildings around Market Place and with brick being a characteristic material of the conservation area. Notably the use of red and grey bricks is reflective of the brick tones found to the Town Hall and no.s 1-2 Market Place which adjoins the application site, whilst buff brick is reflective of the grand upper façade of no.42 Market Place. Further variation is also proposed to the recessed fifth storey with use of green-bronze panels and framing, darker buff-coloured bricks and standing seam panels to distinguish between the main building façade and recessed, subservient upper storeys.



Proposed Market Place façade visual

- 6.44 Alterations are also proposed to the ground floor colonnade fronting Market Place where the existing round blue colonnade columns are to be replaced with square stone surround columns, plinth and fascia's which reflects the stone finishes to the street level facades of a number of the listed buildings within Market Place. The introduction of such street level enhancements within Market Place is considered to align with the targets of the Council's High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) initiative which seeks to improve the physical condition of Reading's historic high streets.
- 6.45 Similar façade alterations are proposed to the Abbey Square elevation of the building with the introduction of buff and grey brick cladding and standing seam metal cladding to replace the existing utilitarian concrete and blue panel boarding. As per the Market Place façade of the building the façade alterations and new materials have been used to break up the uniform window layout to the upper floors and add variation to the appearance of the elevations. The alterations to the Abbey Square façade present less detailed articulation than to Market Place but this is reflective of the more modern and simple character of the larger buildings found around Abbey Square.
- 6.46 To the Abbey Square side of the building there is an existing lower ground floor level (basement) and upper ground floor level car park and servicing area. There is a change in levels across the site which slopes down from north to south from Forbury Road down to Abbey Square and also from east to west from Market Place down to Abbey Square. As such the ground floor level street level frontage units to Market Place are at upper ground floor level when approached from Abbey Square with the concrete façade of the existing lower ground floor (or basement) level car park and servicing area forming much of the street level frontage to Abbey Square which provides limited activation or architectural interest at street level to this part of the site.
- 6.47 As per the prior approval consent (ref. 210478), given the proposals seek to convert the upper ground floor car park to residential but retain the existing

lower ground floor level (basement) car park and servicing area. Retention of servicing to serve the existing ground floor commercial uses is required in accordance with the site allocation Policy CR14e and therefore limits changes to improve the activation and appearance of this part of the site at street-level. Notwithstanding this it is proposed to re-render the existing street-level concrete elevations to the car park and servicing area and replace the existing window grills with new black metal balustrades. It is also proposed to replace the existing black metal gates to the vehicular entrance to the car park and servicing area from Abbey Square with new gates. The application sets out that the design of the new gates is proposed to incorporate artwork relating to the historic uses of the site and the design of which is to be secured by way of a public competition. Submission and approval of the final design by the Local Planning Authority would be secured by way of condition. It is considered that the replacement gates with decorative artwork would present an enhancement to the street-level façade.



Proposed Abbey Square elevation

- 6.48 The proposed development also includes provision of areas of both hard and soft landscaping. This includes provision of two central communal paved and landscaped amenity courtyards as well as a series of roof top communal paved and landscaped garden areas and green roofs which are facilitated by the stepped massing of the proposed extensions to the roof of the building and would be enclosed by glass balustrades. A notable area of hard and soft landscaping is also proposed around northmost pedestrian access to the site from Abbey Square. Due to levels changes this access incorporates steps and a ramped to the edges of which soft landscape planting is proposed to create a new green access way into this part of the site and helps provide further enliven this part of Abbey Square.
- 6.49 The existing site consists entirely of built form and hardstanding and contains no existing vegetation. It is considered that the landscaping strategy and principles proposed for the site would represent an enhancement in terms of the appearance and greening of the site within the town centre in accordance with Policies CC7 in terms of providing appropriate landscaping and EN14 in terms of extending the Borough’s vegetation cover. Submission and approval by the LPA of

detailed specifications of the proposed landscaping are recommended to be secured by condition.



Visuals of proposed landscaping to northern entrance from Abbey Square and roof top areas

- 6.50 The development proposals for the site were assessed by the Reading Design Review Panel (DRP) at pre-application stage who strongly supported the approach of adding verticality to the sensitive Market Place elevation of the building through splitting the façade into the appearance of a series of different ‘blocks’ using different brick colours and articulation to break up the strong horizontal emphasis of the existing building and very repetitive grid pattern of windows. The Panel as well as the Council’s Conservation and Urban Design Officer welcome the verticality of the proposed Market Place façade alterations and historic references to the former burgage plots and suggested further emphasis of this is given via greater variation to the parapet height, brickwork combinations and tones for each of the sections of the building with reference to the varying heights of the historic roofline of buildings to the site.
- 6.51 Officers are of the opinion that the detailed design of the proposals in terms of the treatments and use of materials to the various facades of the buildings is well considered. The approach of adding visual cues of the historic burgage plots layout of the site to the Market Place elevation is considered to be inventive and the detailed articulation and variation in materials proposed to each of the four ‘sections’ of the façade is considered to be effective at adding verticality to the and breaking up the dominant, wide and utilitarian appearance of the existing building, which currently harms the significance of the conservation area and setting of the various listed buildings within Market Place.
- 6.52 It is acknowledged the rigid concrete structure and form of the building is still evident in the proposals. The supporting information submitted with the application sets out that the uniformity of the building’s appearance is integral to its structure and as such any proposal which retains the existing building will be subject to limitations as to the extent of changes that can be made to this uniform structure. As part of the application the Applicant has also submitted an assessment detailing the carbon savings and sustainability benefits of redevelopment of the site as opposed to demolishing the existing building and rebuilding it which will be discussed later in this report.

- 6.53 Notwithstanding the above, it is considered that the treatment of the Market Place façade still represents an enhancement to the building's contribution to the character and appearance of Market Place. Similar enhancements are also identified to the alterations to the Abbey Square façade of the building, including treatment of street-level frontage and areas of landscaping.
- 6.54 The above, combined with what is considered to be a well thought out approach to the siting and scale of roof top extensions to the building is considered to improve its architectural and aesthetic quality, its relationship with neighbouring listed buildings and the public realm of Market Place, and the Site's overarching contribution to the character and appearance of the Market Place/London Road Conservation Area and Abbey Quarter Area.
- 6.55 Officers agree with the findings of the submitted HTVIA that the proposed roof top extensions to the building would not appear prominent within views in and around Market Place or the Conservation Area, including the identified landmark view of St Laurence's Church. Officers further agree that the proposals would result in a degree of enhancement to the historic significance of the Conservation Area and setting of the identified closest listed buildings and structures within Market Place by way of its sympathetic design approach and reintroduction of elements which are important to the significance of the Conservation Area that had been eroded by the introduction of the current 1960s building. This includes re-introduction of visual cues of the appearance of the former narrow burgage plots and more tightly knit building frontages and adding greater verticality, whilst respecting the prevailing scale of buildings surrounding Market Place and re-introduction of materials, brick and stone, which are characteristic of those found historically within the Conservation Area.
- 6.56 It is considered that the proposed development complies with Policies CR1, CR2, CR14E, CR15, EN1, EN3, EN6 and CC7 and meets the statutory requirements of Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to preserve the setting of listed buildings and to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas respectively.

Residential amenity/Standard of accommodation for future occupiers

Future Occupiers

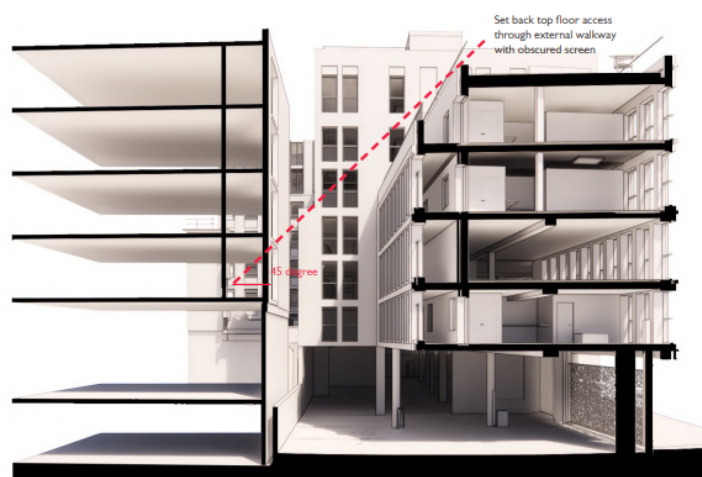
- 6.57 Policy H5a (Standards for New Housing) requires all new building housing located outside the Central Area to comply with the nationally prescribed space standards. Whilst the application site is located within the Central Area it is welcomed that all of the proposed flats would accord with the space standards. Policy H5a is clear that new dwellings within the town centre are not required to meet nationally prescribed space standards the proposed dwellings would all achieve and exceed these minimum standards providing good sized units of accommodation for future occupiers. Part f of Policy H5 requires that at least 5% of dwellings are wheelchair user adaptable dwellings in line with M4(3) of the Building Regulation. The proposals include three dwellings which meet this

standards which is 8% of the proposed dwellings and therefore exceed the requirements of Policy H5f. The three wheelchair adaptable units would be located at ground floor level within the development accessed from Abbey Square to the rear of the site. The existing building incorporates a series of lifts which would be extended to serve the additional storeys and flats proposed. Retention of the lifts would be secured by way of condition to ensure inclusive access to the development.

- 6.58 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) seeks to protect the amenity of existing and future occupiers including matters of overlooking, privacy and access to daylight, sunlight.
- 6.59 A daylight and sunlight assessment has been submitted with the application which assess the receipt of daylight and sunlight to future occupiers of the proposed flats. This assessment has been independently reviewed on behalf of the LPA. The independent review conclude that all the flats and amenity space areas proposed as part of the development would meet the relevant Building Research Establishment (BRE) guidelines for receipt of daylight and sunlight. As a roof top extension to the building all the proposed units are considered to be served by good levels of outlook and over half the units proposed are dual aspect.
- 6.60 It is considered that future occupiers of the proposed would also be served by adequate levels of privacy and to protected from undue overlooking from exiting surrounding residential buildings. The closest neighbouring residential building with the potential to have the most impact on the proposed flats is the recently built five storey block of flats to the rear of Jacksons Corner. The east elevation of the Jacksons Corner block and facing windows would be located 6m from the west elevation of the two-storey roof extension proposed to the southernmost element of the extension to Abbey Square (orange block on the visual below). However, the west elevation of the proposed roof extension would contain circulation corridors and not habitable rooms such that no undue overlooking would occur. The southwest corner of the three-storey roof extension to Abbey Square (blue block on the visual below) would also be sited in close proximity (3m) to the northeast corner of the block to the rear of Jacksons Corner. However, given this is a corner-to-corner relationship window would face each other at an angle and not directly which is considered to ensure there would be not unacceptable overlooking or loss of privacy.



6.61 There is an existing hotel to the upper floors (first and second floors) of Market House at no. 1-2 Market Place. The rear (east) elevation of the hotel and hotel room windows would face the west flank (rear) elevation of the three-storey roof extension to Abbey Square and habitable room windows of 6 flats located at third, fourth and fifth floor level at a separation distance of 7.5m. Such a close relationship has potential for overlooking from the hotel to the windows of the flats. However, in this instance, given the proposed flats would be located at a higher level than the top floor of the hotel potential for direct overlooking is considered to be limited. The site is also located within the central core of the town centre where development is generally at a high density and buildings are located within closer proximity. It could also be argued that the existing hotel is borrowing some of its outlook from the application site. On balance, Officers are satisfied that the relationship with the adjacent hotel is acceptable and no adverse overlooking or loss of privacy to future occupier of the flats would occur.



Relationship with new build block to rear of Jacksons Corner

6.62 In terms of the relationship with the 11-12 Market Place site to the north of the application site, this building does not include any clear glazed habitable room windows facing south. The proposed flats would be sited 10m away from the

shared boundary at their closest point such that no overlooking or loss of privacy from no. 11-12 is considered to result.

- 6.63 Policy H10 (Private and Communal Amenity Space) seeks that dwellings are provided with appropriate functional private or communal amenity space and acknowledges that within Central Reading access to such spaces may be more limited. The proposals would provide a generous areas of outdoor communal amenity space for residents in the form of a large terrace areas located at roof level to the fourth and fifth floors of the development and also at ground floor level in the northeast corner of the site towards Abbey Square. Eight of the proposed flats would also be served by generous private outdoor terrace amenity spaces located at fourth and sixth floor level. The proposals are considered to be well served in this respect as well as being in walking distance of town centre leisure and recreation facilities including Forbury Gardens which is located less than 100m to the north of the site.
- 6.64 Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) seeks to ensure development is not damaging to the environment and sensitive receptors by way of pollution. Policy EN15 (Air Quality) specifically seeks to protect existing occupiers from poor quality and EN17 (Noise Generating Equipment) from noise associated with plant equipment. Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) requires new residential type development within the defined Reading Central Area to demonstrate how issue of noise and other disturbance from town centre uses have been considered and where necessary mitigated.
- 6.65 The site is located within the Central Core area of the town centre where there are a number of sources of commercial and traffic noise. A noise assessment has been submitted with the application and Environmental Protection Officers are satisfied that the glazing specification and mechanical ventilation proposed demonstrates that future occupiers of the flats would subject to acceptable internal noise levels. Environmental Protection Officers advise that seven of the flats within the development may experience noise levels above recommended levels when they open a window as result of existing plant equipment serving the adjacent hotel and restaurant at no. 1-2 Market Place.
- 6.66 However, it is noted that in allowing the appeal relating the conversion of the existing building to flats the Planning Inspector accepted a similar approach to noise mitigation was acceptable and that the mechanical ventilation proposed was designed to prevent the need for windows to be opened. It is also pertinent that the supporting text to Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) acknowledges that in some instances within the town centre it will be necessary to provide mechanical ventilation that removes the necessity to open windows, even in hot weather, due to the noisy environment. The units affected would also be served by more than one window and therefore would allow the opportunity for occupiers to move to another room to escape any undue noise with a window open. Given the limited number of flats affected and given the previous appeal decision, officers are satisfied that the noise mitigation measures proposed are satisfactory in this instance.

- 6.67 The site is also located within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and an air quality assessment has been submitted with the application which concludes that the air quality levels measured nearby by are below the limit values which would trigger the need for further mitigation. The submitted air quality assessment also concludes that there would not be significant impact on air quality in the local areas as a result of the proposed development given the relatively modest number of units proposed and public transport options available close to the site.
- 6.68 Overall the proposals are considered to provide a good standard of amenity for future occupiers in this location.

Surrounding Occupiers

- 6.69 The closest existing residential occupiers to the site are the flats to the upper floors of no. 11-12 Market Place which adjoin the application site to the north and the five-storey new build block of flats located to the rear of Jacksons Corner at no. 1-9 Kings Road which adjoins the site to the south. The amenities of future residential occupiers of the 144 studio flats proposed by way of conversion of the existing building under the extant prior approval consent are also a pertinent consideration.
- 6.70 The daylight/sunlight assessment submitted with the application has also assessed the impact of daylight and sunlight on these surrounding occupiers and this has also been independently reviewed on behalf of the LPA. The independent review concludes that the proposed development would not result in unacceptable harm to no. 11-12 Market Place, or the flats proposed under prior approval to the existing building at the application site in respect of receipt of daylight/sunlight.
- 6.71 With regard to the impact on the block of flats to the rear at the Jacksons Corner site, the independent review identifies some sub-optimal impacts upon habitable windows and rooms of this development. The independent review report sets out that in accordance with BRE guidelines the impacts of development on existing surrounding properties in terms of receipt of daylight is assessed via two parameters: the Vertical Sky Component (VSC) which is a measurement of the amount of daylight falling on a vertical wall or window; and the No Sky Line (NSL) which is a measurement of the how much sky can be seen from a room/window. An assessment of the receipt of sunlight is made using the Annual Probable Sunlight Hours (APSH) parameter which is a measurement of the average of the total number of hours during a year in which direct sunlight is expected be received.
- 6.72 The independent review identifies 20 windows to the Jacksons Corner block have been identified as potentially being adversely affected by the proposed development. In terms of the daylight VSC assessment, 7 of these windows are considered to satisfy BRE guidelines, 2 to experience a 'low' magnitude of impact beyond the BRE guidelines, 4 a 'moderate' impact and 7 windows a 'major' impact. The daylight and sunlight report submitted with the application identifies a number of factors which contribute to the sub-optimal VSC measurements in

relation to the Jacksons Corner block, including the design and siting of the building which is located close to the shared boundary and already close to neighbouring buildings, whilst a number of the affected rooms at Jacksons are served by recessed balconies which hinders the existing ability of these rooms to receive daylight. The independent review agrees that these factors are reasonable justification and also notes that living/kitchen/dining areas to the Jacksons Corner block are dual aspect and not reliant upon a single window for daylight. The independent review report notes that in terms of the NSL daylight assessment and also the sunlight APSH assessment, all assessed rooms to the Jacksons Corner block would nonetheless satisfy BRE guidelines. In overall terms, officers are satisfied that the development would not have an unacceptable impact upon the neighbouring occupiers of the Jacksons Corner block.

- 6.73 As discussed in paragraph 6.51 of this report there is not considered to be any undue overlooking or loss of privacy in terms of the relationship of the proposed development with the new build block to the rear of Jacksons Corner to the south and 11-12 Market Place to the north of the site.
- 6.74 By nature of the roof top level of the proposed extensions to the building these are not considered to result in any undue impacts in terms of privacy and overlooking to potential future occupiers of the flats to be provided by way of conversion of the existing building under the extant prior approval consent.
- 6.75 A condition is recommended to restrict the use of all proposed roof top terrace areas to the hours of 0800 to 2300 only to prevent undue noise disturbance to nearby occupiers during late night-time hours. The proposed hours reflect those permitted to the existing roof top terrace at the hotel at no. 1-2 Market Place which adjoins the application site to the south.

Transport, access and servicing

- 6.76 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.
- 6.77 The site is located within the Reading Central Area and within Reading's primary shopping area. The site is located within Zone 1 of the adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD which is an area at the very heart of Reading Borough, consisting primarily of retail and commercial office developments, with limited residential. This area is well served by rail and bus links and also contains the largest proportion of public car parking spaces. Market Place accommodates a broad mix of town centre uses, with retail shops, restaurants, cafes, bars, offices and other services being commonly found at street level in the vicinity to the site. Market Place has vehicle access restricted to buses, taxis and permit holders between 07:00-11:00 and 16:00-19:00 and forms part of the town centre bus loop.
- 6.78 A Transport Statement has been submitted with the application. The proposals seek to retain and utilise the existing vehicle access off Abbey Square. The site currently benefits from an on-site underground car park and servicing area at

lower ground floor and parking area at ground floor level. The ground floor level car park would be lost as a result of the proposed development. In accordance with the adopted 'Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD' (October 2011) each one and two-bedroom flat is required to provide 0.5 parking spaces and each three-bedroom flat, 1 parking space. The proposed development is to be made up of 35 x one or two flats and 3 x three-bedroom flats meaning a total required provision of 20.5 parking spaces.

- 6.79 The application proposes to provide a total of 20 spaces within the ground floor car park and servicing area which represents an under provision of 0.5 spaces against the SPD standards. 3 of the proposed parking spaces would be disabled spaces. Given the sites central and sustainable location within close proximity to various public transport options, the very minor under provision of car parking is accepted. There are extensive on-street parking controls on the roads surrounding the site such that the proposals would not have the potential to result in overspill parking on surrounding roads. A condition is recommended to ensure future occupiers are made aware that they would not be automatically entitled to on-street parking permits which are under considerable pressure locally. It should be noted that no vehicle parking is required to be provided as part of the prior approval consent for conversion of the existing building (ref. 210478).
- 6.80 In accordance with Policy TR5 two vehicle parking spaces (10% of the total number of spaces proposed) would be electric vehicle charging spaces.
- 6.81 The Transport Statement sets out that based on the anticipated person trip generation and modal split, only a small proportion of trips to the development would be made by car given the highly accessible location of the site. It is anticipated that 30% of trips will be undertaken on foot, 7 two-way trips in the AM and PM peak hours. It is estimated that there will be 7 two-way trips in the AM and PM peak associated with residents driving a car or van. On this basis and given the extensive parking restrictions in the area it is not considered that the proposed development would have a material impact on the character of the traffic in the vicinity of the site.
- 6.82 The proposed development will have pedestrian access from both Market Place and Abbey Square. As per the 'Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD', a minimum of 21 cycle parking spaces would be required to be provided for development. Cycle parking is proposed to be provided within a secure cycle store within the lower ground floor car park and servicing area, accessed from Abbey Square. In principle, the store and its location are considered to be acceptable but further details regarding the design and specification of the cycle stands are recommended to be secured by condition.
- 6.83 In respect of refuse collection, the proposals incorporate two bin stores within the lower ground level car park and servicing area. The Application proposes that refuse would be collected by private contractor. RBC Waste Services do not raise objection to the proposals subject to a condition to secure submission, approval and implementation of a refuse management strategy to details how waste would be managed and collected from within the site.

- 6.84 In addition to the servicing and car park access from Abbey Square the proposals would also provide the 2 residential accesses from this side of the site which would also assist in improving activation of this area from street-level. Policy CR14e seeks that provision of a possible pedestrian link between Market Place and Abbey/Forbury Square is provided to improve public connectivity. The HTVIA submitted with the application concludes that there is no evidence that such a link would have existed historically and such introducing a link would not be restoring or reinstating a historic feature. Given the proposals seek to retain and extend upon the existing building any pedestrian link through the site would have to be internal through the existing building.
- 6.85 Officers consider that an internal link through the building is unlikely to fully achieve the Policy CR14e aspiration of creating a functional link between Market Place and Forbury Square/Abbey Square that would be attractive to a pedestrians. By its nature an internal link would very likely lack legibility, surveillance and would raise safety and security concerns for occupiers of the building. The submitted information also sets out that given the layout of the building, the most feasible connection through the building would exit on the Abbey Square side via the back of the Forbury Square car park which is not an attractive desire line and would necessitate passage via a series of narrow corridors. There is also a change in levels within the building between Market Place and Forbury Square/Abbey Square which further complicates the provision of an internal access. Failure to provide such a pedestrian link as a result of the retention of the existing building is a shortfall of the proposals in failing to meet one of the stipulations of Policy CR14e and as such needs to be considered as part of the overall planning balance of the application proposals, albeit this is not considered fundamental to redevelopment of the site.
- 6.86 Given the prominent location of the site within the town centre there would be significant transport implications of constructing the proposed development. Therefore, a condition is recommended to secure a construction method statement to manage the impact of construction works upon the surrounding highway network.

Sustainability

- 6.87 Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) seeks that all new-build housing is built to high design standards. In particular, new housing should adhere to water efficiency standards more than the Building Regulations and achieve zero carbon homes standards (for major schemes). Policy CC3 (Adaption to Climate Change) seeks that development proposals incorporate measures which take account of climate change. Policy CC4 (Decentralised Energy) seeks that developments of more than 20 dwellings should consider the inclusion of combined heat and power plant (CHP) or other form of decentralised energy provision or to connect to existing decentralised energy system if there is one within the vicinity of the site. Policy EN18 (Flood and Sustainable Drainage Systems) requires that major category development proposals are accompanied by a sustainable drainage

strategy whereby run off rates for the development sites should not exceed existing.

- 6.88 Policy H5 and the Council's adopted Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019) details that in order to achieve zero carbon homes standards all development must, as a minimum, achieve a 35% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over 2013 Building Regulations Standards with financial contribution required to off-set any remaining carbon emissions to zero. The improvement of the dwelling emission rate is measure by way of a SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure).
- 6.89 The application is accompanied by a sustainability and energy efficiency statement which includes a design stage SAP which projects that the development would achieve a 50% improvement above the dwelling emission rate over the 2013 version of the Building Regulations which exceeds the minimum requirements of Policy H5. The remaining 50% to achieve zero carbon performance, would be offset by a financial contribution in accordance with the methodology outlined in the SPD to be secured by way of s106 legal agreement. The sustainability and energy efficiency statement submitted with the application estimates that this contribution would be around £34,200. This would be ring-fenced for carbon saving, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in Reading.
- 6.90 In achieving the above carbon savings the development proposes a 'Be Lean' (Use Less Energy), 'Be Clean' (Supply Energy Efficiently) and 'Be Green' (Use Renewable Energy) approach. In terms of 'Be Lean' and a development which reduces energy demand it is proposed to use materials with high thermal efficiency and mechanical ventilation heat recovery systems with high efficiency performance.
- 6.91 In terms of 'Be Clean' and how a development utilises local energy resources and supply efficiently to reduce CO₂ and 'Be Green' and how a development utilises sources of renewable energy, both approaches relate to Policy CC4 (Decentralised Energy Provision) which requires that new residential developments of more than 20 dwellings consider the inclusion of decentralised energy provision unless it is unviable. The Policy also requires new development of 10 or more dwellings to link into existing decentralised energy networks unless this it is unviable.
- 6.92 In respect of these requirements the submitted sustainability and energy efficiency statement does not identified any existing decentralised networks close to the site that the development could link in to. However, the statement does note that the Council has commissioned a Heat Network Feasibility Study for the Town Centre as part is its commitment to a goal of 'Net-Zero' Reading by 2030 and therefore there will be a provision of heat exchangers within the development & pre-insulated pipework routed from the site its boundary for potential future direct heating network connections. The development also proposes to incorporate its own sources of renewable energy in the form of air source heat pumps (ASHPs) which will provide the hot water for the development whilst the significant flat roof areas of the building are proposed to be utilised to

provide 61 photovoltaic panels. Electric panel heaters would provide the heating for the development. In this instance ground source heat pumps (GSHP) have been discounted, given the development relates to roof level extensions to an existing building only and no groundworks which would allow discount any potential for GSHP.

- 6.93 The Applicant has also carried out a 'whole life carbon assessment' which compared the carbon impact of a complete demolition and re-build approach, to that of the prior approval refurbishment and roof extensions approach. The assessment concludes that a refurbishment and extensions approach would result in 20% less whole life carbon being released in comparison to a rebuild approach. Such an approach would align with the thrust of Policy CC5 (Waste Minimisation and Storage) which states that development should minimise the generation of waste in the construction, use and life of building. The supporting text to the policy (paragraph 4.1.23) sets out that the beneficial restoration and reuse of buildings should generally be considered before demolition and redevelopment.
- 6.94 The proposals also include a scheme of sustainable drainage (SuDS) based around the proposed introduction of green roofs and attenuation at the roof level, along with permeable paving at the ground floor level. This results in a reduction in run off rate for the site compared to existing and is therefore considered to be acceptable.
- 6.95 Policy H5 also requires that all new build housing will be built to the higher water efficiency standard under Regulation 36(3) of the Building Regulations 2015 and the submitted sustainability and energy statement confirms that the proposed development would achieve this standard.
- 6.96 The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in respect of matters of sustainability and energy efficiency subject to conditions to secure provision of all the measures outlined above. The proposals are considered to comply with Policies CC3, CC4, H5 and EN18.

Natural Environment

- 6.97 Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) seeks that development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and should provide for a net gain of biodiversity wherever possible by protecting, enhancing and incorporating features of biodiversity on and adjacent to development sites and by providing new tree planting and wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements wherever practicable. Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) states that individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended. Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) sets out that good design should incorporate appropriate landscaping.

Ecology

- 6.98 The application is accompanied by a bat survey report which concludes that the building does not host roosting bats. The survey has been reviewed by the Local

Planning Authority's (LPA) Ecological Adviser who is satisfied with the conclusions of the report and that the survey has been carried out to an appropriate standard. Whilst the site does not have a current biodiversity value Policy EN12 sets out that development should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. A biodiversity net gain metric has been submitted with the application which sets out that the development can reasonably achieve a biodiversity net gain of 10% or more largely through the proposed landscaped roof terrace and green roof areas of the development. The LPA's Ecological Adviser is content with the submitted metric and recommends that a more detailed biodiversity net gain plan, in line with the submitted metric, is submitted to and approved by the LPA and then implemented.

6.99 In securing a biodiversity net gain on the site the LPA's Ecological Adviser also recommends a condition to secure a scheme of ecological enhancements including provision of integral nesting opportunities for birds on the proposed extensions, including for swifts which are birds of conservation concern and also bat roosts given roosts have been recorded less than 30m away from the application site

6.100 Abbey Ward, within which the site is located, is identified as ward of low canopy cover within the Reading Tree Strategy (2021) whilst as discussed above the site is also located within an AQMA. There are no existing trees or vegetation on the site. The proposals include significant areas of roof level landscaped terrace amenity areas and also planting to the ramped site access from Abbey Square which includes low level furniture, paving and planters containing multi-stem shrubs and hardy perennials. Tree planting is also proposed within the central courtyard area of the building. The principles of the proposed landscaping approach are considered to be acceptable and to significantly enhance the landscape and green character of the site. Detailed landscaping plans and planting plans are recommended to be secured by way of planning condition.

Other Matters

Archaeology

6.101 Policy EN2 (Areas of Archaeological Significance) requires that developments proposals should identify and evaluate sites of archaeological significance and remains should be either preserved in situ or if not possible, excavated, investigated and recorded.

6.102 Whilst the site is located within an area of archaeological potential, Berkshire Archaeology have reviewed the proposals and are satisfied that the proposals, as presented, do not indicate the need for any below ground excavation. Nonetheless, as a precaution, a condition is recommended that should any below ground excavation be required, then an archaeological written scheme of investigation is required to be submitted to and approved by the LPA prior to any such works commencing.

6.103 The proposals are considered to accord with Policy EN2.

Employment Skills and Training

6.104 Policy CC9 (Securing Infrastructure) seeks that development that would result in employment should provide mitigation in line with its impacts on labour and skills. As a major category residential development and in line with the adopted Employment Skills and Training SPD (2011), the development is expected to provide a construction phase employment and skills plan to demonstrate how it would benefit the local employment market or an equivalent financial contribution towards local skills and training. The Applicant has stated that in this instance they will provide the relevant contribution which would be secured by way of section 106 obligation, to be paid prior to commencement of the development. In accordance with the SPD the contribution is projected to be £8,632.

Non-Material Amendment to Prior Approval Consent

6.105 There is a report relating to an application for non-material amendments (ref. 221766) to the extant prior approval consent (ref. 201748) for conversion of the existing building to 144 flats also on the committee agenda. The non-material amendment application seeks changes to the approved internal layout of the flats. Should the non-material amendment application be approved then either the original or amended layout could be implemented alongside the planning application proposals subject of this report.

Equalities Impact

6.106 When determining an application for planning permission 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 as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this 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 proposed development.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 This proposal has been carefully considered in the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and supplementary planning documents.

7.2 The proposals are considered to demonstrate a broad level of compliance with the various elements of Policy CR14e whilst providing new market and affordable housing within the town centre. The proposals are considered to have demonstrated that it would provide for an acceptable standard of accommodation for future occupiers and would not have an unacceptable impact upon existing surrounding occupiers. The proposals are also considered to have demonstrated compliance with the Council's sustainability, energy efficiency and biodiversity policies.

- 7.3 Policy CR14e does seek that development of the site provides for a ‘possible pedestrian link between Market Place and Forbury Square/Abbey Square’ however this has been investigated by the Applicant and valid reasons for its non-provision have been demonstrated. Officers therefore advise that they agree with the Applicant’s assertion, that the public route is neither feasible, nor attractive in this instance.
- 7.4 Officers also acknowledge that despite the proposed detailed and imaginative design approach to treatment of the building’s facades the existing unsympathetic and uniform concrete structure of the building is still evident in the overall appearance of the development, given it forms part of the building’s structural integrity. Nonetheless, it is considered that façade alterations proposed are successful in dealing with a number of the negative aspects of the external appearance of the existing building and the proposals are considered to represent an overall positive improvement to the building’s contribution to the character and appearance of Market Place and similar enhancements are also identified to the alterations to the Abbey Square façade of the building, including treatment of street-level frontage and areas of landscaping. In overall terms the proposals are considered to result in an enhancement of the site in terms of its appearance, including landscaping, and impact upon the setting of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and closest surrounding listed buildings (no.s 1-2 Market Place, no. 10 High Street and the Simeon Monument).
- 7.6 The approach to the development of the site as a whole, in building upon the prior approval consent for conversion of the existing building to flats, is considered sub-optimal in terms of a number of matters; such as standard of accommodation, unit mix and affordable housing provision within the existing building, however these matters do not form part of the consideration of this current planning application given consent for conversion of the existing building has already been granted under separate permitted development legislation.
- 7.7 Whilst acknowledging that the presence of the prior approval consent does limit the potential for a more comprehensive redevelopment of the site, when applying an overall critical planning balance of all material considerations presented, the application is recommended for approval, subject to the recommended conditions and completion of a S106 agreements as set out in the recommendation box at the top of this report.

Case Officer: Mr Matt Burns

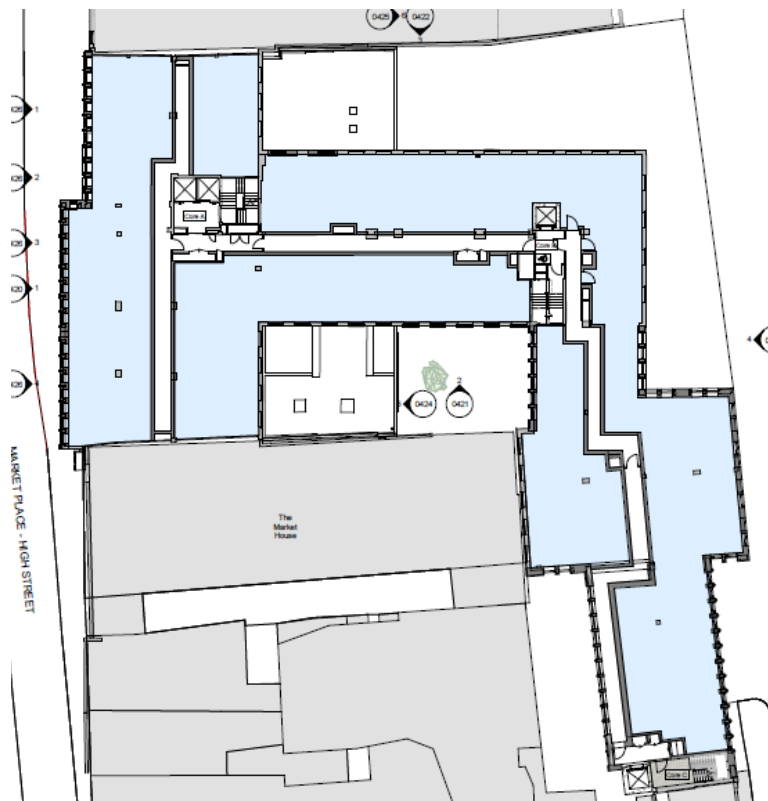
Plans and Drawings:



Proposed Site Plan



Proposed Ground Floor Plan



Proposed First Floor Plan



Proposed Second Floor Plan



Proposed Third Floor Plan



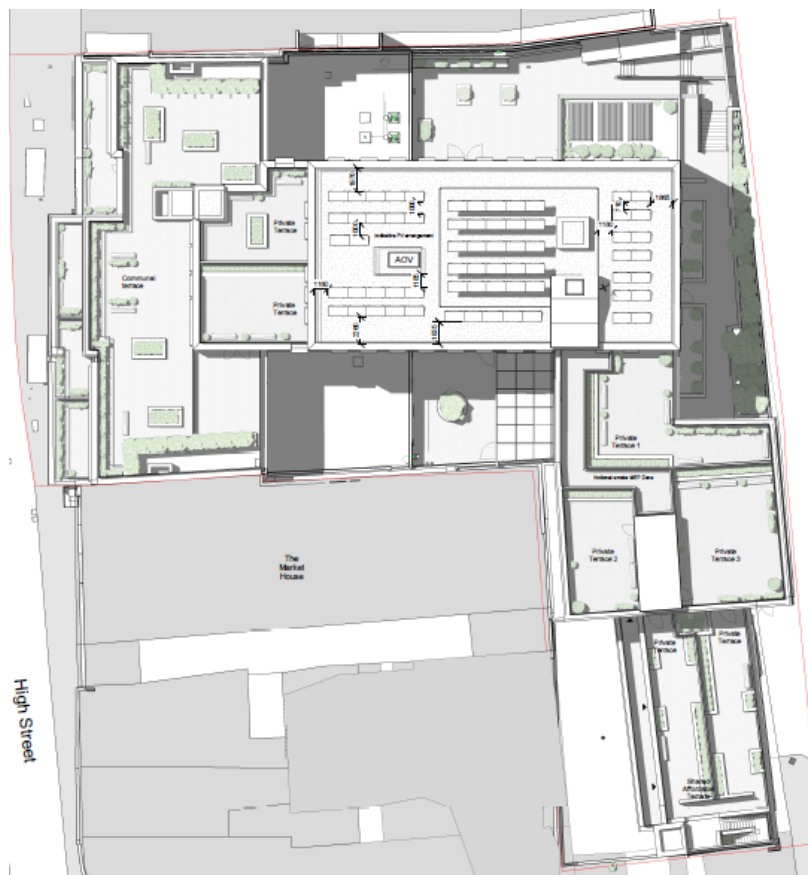
Proposed Fourth Floor Plan



Proposed Fifth Floor Plan



Proposed Sixth Floor Plan



Proposed Roof Plan



Proposed Market Place Elevation



Proposed South Elevation



Proposed North Elevation



Proposed East Elevation



Proposed Interior East Elevation



Proposed Interior West Elevation

Market Place frontage
Keeping faithful to the structure of the building, the grid is retained and the brutalist character of the facade is carefully stripped away leaving a simple and elemental expression of the burgeois plot that would have previously been reflected in the Victorian buildings that used to occupy the site. By adding to upper floors, variety is added and a complexity of detail reminiscent of its diverse surroundings is brought to the building. The materials are kept simple and locally appropriate.



Proposed Market Place Elevation Visual



Proposed Market Place Elevation Visual

Abbey Square frontage
There is more scope for variety in this frontage. The existing building resembles a collection of plot frontages already and the design strategy builds on this grain to bring a family of facade types together, appropriate to the underlying form of the building's existing elements. In contrast to the Market Place frontage, this is more transformational in effect, creating a new identity for the street.



Abbey Square Elevation Visual