

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 21st June 2023

Ward: Katesgrove

Application No.: 220385/FUL

Address: Trinity Hall, South Street, Reading

Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings and erection of 22 apartments.

Applicant: Mr Hardeep Hans

Application target decision date: Originally 2/9/2022; a formal extension of time for the determination of the application 23/6/2023

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE planning permission for the following reasons:

1. The proposal, due to its excessive scale, plot coverage, density, cramped overdeveloped character, visual prominence and proximity to Grade II Listed Buildings would result in harm to the setting of those Listed Buildings and would fail to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context) and H2 (Density and Mix) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
2. The proposal, due to its inappropriate architectural detailing and visually incongruous appearance would not be of high design quality and would not respond positively to its local context or create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness. As such the proposal would fail to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area and would fail to protect and enhance the historic environment. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) and EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
3. The proposal, due to the overprovision of one-bedroom units, would fail to provide an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes with consequent harm to meeting identified housing needs in Reading Borough. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
4. The proposal would fail to make adequate provision for tree planting and soft landscaping within the site including the retention of existing trees with consequent harm to visual amenity, air quality, biodiversity and environmental quality of the area, contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), EN15 (Air Quality) and EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) of the Reading Borough Council (2019) and the Tree Strategy (2021).
5. The proposed ground floor units, due to their layout, arrangement of windows and proximity to communal routes would result in harm to the amenity of future occupiers in terms of outlook, privacy and disturbance, The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) and CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
6. The proposal would provide insufficient amenity space and open space to serve the

development as a result of the excessive footprint of the building and dominance of hardstanding with consequent harm to the amenity of future occupiers. This would be worsened by the lack of access to green open space locally. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity), H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space), EN9 (Provision of Open Space) and EN10 (Access to Open Space) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

7. The proposed development, due to its excessive overall scale, height and proximity to No.49 South Street would result in harm to the amenity of this neighbouring property due its overbearing effects, contrary to Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

8. The proposed development, in the absence of an acceptable landscaping-led Sustainable Drainage Strategy, has failed to provide for sustainable drainage, with consequent harm in respect of attenuating localised flooding, achieving ecological benefits, securing linkages to the existing Green Network and integration with tree planting and landscaping. Therefore, the proposal is contrary to Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019).

9. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure the provision of an acceptable amount, mix and tenure of Affordable Housing, the proposal fails to make an appropriate contribution to the housing needs of Reading Borough, contrary to Policies H3 (Affordable Housing) and CC9 (Securing Infrastructure) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the Council's Adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (2021) and Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2015).

10. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure an appropriate financial contribution towards carbon off-setting in Reading Borough, the proposal would not acceptably adapt to climate change, achieve zero carbon homes standards and not provide appropriately towards energy infrastructure, contrary to Policies CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change), CC9 (Securing Infrastructure) and H5 (Standards for New Housing) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019) and Planning Obligations under S106 SPD (2015).

11. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure an acceptable Employment and Skills Plan (construction phase only; employment and skills plan, or financial contribution), the proposal fails to contribute adequately to the employment, skills or training needs of local people with associated socio-economic harm, contrary to Policy CC9 (Securing Infrastructure) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the Employment Skills and Training SPD (2013) and Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2015).

Informatives

1. Plans
2. Positive and Proactive
3. Future appeal
4. CIL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The proposal is for the demolition of the existing three storey Trinity Hall and its replacement with a four and five storey building comprising 22 flats. The site is within a prominent location at the corner of South Street and Sidmouth Street and close to Grade II listed buildings. The site is within the Central Area of Reading.

- 1.2 The report identifies a number of significant shortcomings of the proposal, largely as a result of the excessive scale and overdeveloped nature of the scheme. These include harm to the setting of nearby Listed buildings; harm to the character of the area; poor quality of accommodation in terms of outlook, daylight and privacy; harm to neighbour amenity through overbearing effects; lack of amenity space and access to open space; insufficient tree planting; and absence of sustainable drainage. The mix of dwelling sizes has not been justified. Benefits of the scheme largely comprise the proposed 100% Affordable Housing although the report finds that this does not outweigh the harms identified,

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The application site comprises an existing three-storey brick building containing 24 bedspaces of student accommodation (including a warden's flat and office). It was constructed in the 1980s and is located on the north side of South Street, at the junction with Sidmouth Street (to the east), with frontages onto both roads. Vehicular access is from South Street, providing off-street parking for 12 vehicles. One of these spaces is within a detached garage, located at the South Street frontage adjacent to the vehicular access to Livery Close (to the west). There is also some existing landscaping surrounding the existing building at the site.
- 2.2 The building has been vacant since 2014.
- 2.3 This application site is located within the Reading Central Area, just within the boundary (the buildings opposite on the east side of Sidmouth Street lie outside). The site is also within an air quality management area.
- 2.4 The surrounding area comprises a mix of both commercial and residential uses and a variety of styles and ages of building. To the north is the parking area relating to 54-58 Queens Road (in residential use via prior approval applications). To the east is the Grade II listed 3&5 Sidmouth Street, a 1880s 2½ - 3 storey pair in the Butterfield Vicarage style in use as a Montessori School. Also to the east is the recent 3 storey Sidmouth Court flats. Diagonally to the south-east is the Grade II Listed 9 Sidmouth Street, a 2 storey end of terrace grey brick building from the 1850s. 50-52 South Street, to the south of the site, is a 3 storey building occupied by the Reading Islamic Centre. To the west of this is the 4 storey Shepton House residential building. To the west of the application site No's 43-49 (odd) South Street are Grade II listed, comprising a mid-19th century 2 storey and basement residential terrace with Bath ashlar front and flint with brick dressings and quoins behind.
- 2.5 The application is brought to the Planning Applications Committee at the request of Councillor Challenger.
- 2.6 The site is shown outlined in red below, together with a site aerial view.



Site Location Plan (not to scale)



Aerial view – red arrow to site.

3. PROPOSALS

- 3.1 Full planning permission is sought for the erection of a part 4, part 5 storey building following demolition of existing building. The building would house 22 flats: one 3-bed, seven 2-bed and fourteen 1-bed.
- 3.2 The scheme proposes eleven allocated car parking spaces including two disabled spaces - and twenty-two cycle parking spaces. Indicative tree planting and soft landscaping is proposed, and two areas of green wall at ground floor level.
- 3.3 The scheme proposes 100% on site affordable housing.
- 3.4 Drawings received June 2023:
Drawing No: Proposed Ground Floor Plan/Site (Block) Plan PL05 Rev A
Drawing No: Proposed First and Second Floor Plan PL06 Rev A
Drawing No: Proposed Third and Fourth Floor Plans PL07 Rev A
Drawing No: Proposed Roof Plan PL08 Rev A
Drawing No: Block Plan Proposed Scheme PL09 Rev A
Drawing No: Proposed South Street and Sidmouth Street Elevations PL10 Rev A
Drawing No: Proposed Livery Close and North Elevations PL11 Rev A
Drawing No: Proposed Section Through the Ramp PL12 Rev A
Proposed CGI – South Street x 2
- 3.5 Drawings/documents received July 2022:
Drawing No: Existing Ground and First, Second Floor Plans PL16
Drawing No: Existing Site Plan PL17
Drawing No: Site Survey K3321-T
Design and Access Statement / Heritage Statement dated May 2022
Ecological Appraisal dated May 2022
Energy Statement issue 03 dated May 2022
Planning Statement dated May 2022
- 3.6 Drawings/documents received March 2022:
Drawing No: Location Plan
Drawing No: Existing Plans PL03
Drawing No: Existing Elevations PL04

4. PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 151356/FUL Erection of part 3, part 4 storey building to provide 25 student units (42 bedspaces) (Sui Generis) and associated works, following demolition of existing 3 storey building (Sui Generis). Permitted, not implemented.

Other sites nearby

- 4.2 *49 South Street*
220091/FUL and 220092/LBC Change of Use from Office (Class E) to single residential dwelling (C3) with internal alterations to Grade II Listed building. Permitted.

5. CONSULTATIONS

RBC Transport

- 5.1 No objection subject to conditions relating to submission of CMS, vehicle parking and access as specified, electric vehicle charging points, cycle parking and refuse

details to be submitted and conditions relating to prohibition of parking permits. Discussed further below.

RBC Natural Environment

- 5.2 Object due to insufficient soft landscaping, inappropriate proposed tree species, impact on the existing False Acacia and lack of landscape-led SuDS. Discussed further below.

RBC Ecology Consultant

- 5.3 No objection subject to conditions relating to bird nesting season and ecological enhancements. Discussed further below.

RBC Environmental Health – Environmental Protection (EP)

- 5.4 No objection subject to conditions relating to noise mitigation, noise and dust and pest control.

RBC Housing

- 5.5 Numbers proposed are acceptable in principle; however, need to ensure appropriate number of 2-bedroom units.

Berkshire Archaeology

- 5.6 No objection or conditions required.

RBC Lead Local Flood Authority

- 5.7 No comments received; to be provided via update report if appropriate.

Thames Water

- 5.8 No objection subject to appropriate suds strategy.

Public consultation

- 5.10 Notification letters were sent to nearby occupiers on 20/06/22. A site notice was displayed at the site and a press notice was published on 27/06/2022.

- 4.11 A petition with 350 signatures, and three letters of representation received (two from the same property), with the issues raised being summarised as follows:

- Overdevelopment
- Out of character
- Excessive height, number of units and density
- Excessive layout
- Insufficient parking
- Traffic congestion
- Noise and air pollutants
- Impact on climate change
- Erode sense of community

6. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 6.1 Section 16(2) 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.

- 6.2 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).

- 6.3 For this Local Planning Authority, the development plan is the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019). The relevant national / local policies / guidance are:

National

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

National Planning Policy Guidance (2014 onwards)

Local

Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019):

- CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
- CC4: Decentralised Energy
- CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
- CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
- CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- CC9: Securing Infrastructure
- EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
- 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
- H1: Provision of Housing
- H2: Density and Mix
- H3: Affordable Housing
- H5: Standards for New Housing
- H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
- TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
- TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
- TR4: Cycle Routes and Facilities
- TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
- CR1: Definition of Central Reading
- CR2: Design in Central Reading
- CR6: Living in Central Reading

RBC Supplementary Planning Documents

Affordable Housing (2021)

Employment, Skills and Training (2013)

Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2015)

Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

Other relevant documentation

Reading Tree Strategy (2021)

Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (2021)

The National Design Guide (2019)

The National Model Design Code (July 2021)

7. APPRAISAL

The main issues are considered to be:

- Land use Considerations
- Density and Housing Mix
- Provision of Affordable Housing
- Heritage and design considerations – Effect on setting of Listed Buildings, demolition, layout, scale and appearance
- Residential amenity – Neighbours and future occupiers.
- Transport and highways
- Natural environment – Trees and landscaping
- Ecology
- Sustainability and energy
- SuDS
- S106 and CIL
- Other Matters

Land Use Considerations

- 7.1 Policy CC1 (Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development) requires a positive approach to development proposals that reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which lies at the heart of the National Planning Policy (NPPF). To achieve sustainable development a proposal needs to meet economic, social and environmental objectives.

Loss of existing use

- 7.2 The existing building was last used for student accommodation (*Sui Generis*) and, has been vacant since 2014. The applicant considers that the current accommodation is substandard when compared to modern student accommodation, particularly as it has been vacant for such a significant period of time. There is no specific policy which would seek to prevent the loss of this student accommodation.

Principle of housing

- 7.3 Further to the above, the proposed replacement with residential development would provide additional dwellings to the Borough's housing stock on previously developed land – the principle of which aligns with the broad objectives of Policy H1 (Provision of Housing) in assisting meeting annual housing targets. The site is within the Central Area, at its south-eastern boundary and the supporting text to Policy CR6 notes at para 5.3.22 '*The centre of Reading is becoming ever more important as a residential location*'. In terms of the weight to be given to this in the overall decision, it is noted that the Council is currently meeting its annual housing targets for general housing whilst there is an undersupply in the provision of Affordable Housing.

Density and Housing Mix

- 7.4 The NPPF seeks to '*boost significantly the supply of housing*' and deliver a wide range of homes, of different types and tenures. Achieving an efficient use of the land within the context of any central and sustainability located site is a key priority both at a national and local level. The NPPF states that LPAs should actively '*encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value*'.
- 7.5 Policy H2 (Density and Mix) specifically considers density and mix and requires that an appropriate density of residential development is informed by the character and mix of uses of the area in which it is located and its current and future level of accessibility.

Density

- 7.6 The proposed development is for 22 dwellings. This equates to 255 dwellings per hectare (ha) (22 dwellings on a 860m² site). This is significantly above the indicative density range of 'above 100' in town centre locations, as set out in Figure 4.5 of the Local Plan. Policy H2 recognises the appropriate density of residential development will be informed by a range of factors, including the character and mix of uses of the area, the housing mix, the need to achieve high quality design, site accessibility, and the need to minimise environmental impacts. As such, density should not be considered in isolation - it is a useful indicator in seeking to meeting housing targets, but not necessarily a good indicator of an acceptable form, quality, or appropriateness of a scheme. In this instance, given the concerns relating to scale, layout, design, amenity, open space, landscaping and impact on character of the area discussed elsewhere in this report, the density is excessive and indicative of the overdeveloped nature of the site.

Housing Mix

- 7.7 Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) requires that residential developments within the town centre area should incorporate as a guide, a maximum of 40% of 1-bedroom units and a minimum of 5% of 3-bedroom units.
- 7.8 Following revisions during the course of the application, a 3-bed unit has been introduced to the scheme.
- 7.9 The proposed dwelling mix is as follows:
- 1 bedroom units 14 no. = 63.63%
 - 2 bedroom units 7 no. = 31.81%
 - 3 bedroom units 1 no. = 4.54%
- 7.10 The proposal is therefore broadly compliant in provision of 3-bedroom units (at the minimum). However, it is not compliant in its provision of 1-bedroom units, with an notable overprovision of 1 bedroom units (63% instead of a maximum 40%). Policy CR6 states that a maximum of 40% of units should be 1-bed '*unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would render a development unviable*'. No viability argument has been put forward as part of this submission and as such cannot form a basis from deviating from the clear policy intention. In the absence of this justification, the proposed development would not adequately contribute towards meeting the needs for the mix housing in the Borough, contrary to Policy CR6 and this is reflected in the recommended reasons for refusal.

Provision of Affordable Housing

- 7.11 Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) seeks to ensure that development proposals of more than 10 dwellings should provide the equivalent of 30% on-site provision of affordable housing. This is in order to meet identified housing needs and to contribute towards sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities. It is noted that although the need for general housing is being met by current supply, the Council's Annual Monitoring Report finds that there is a significant shortfall in provision of Affordable Housing compared with identified need.
- 7.12 The Council's updated Affordable Housing SPD (2021) requires that new development should include a range and mix of tenures of affordable housing (as appropriate depending on site size) to reflect local needs. Specifically, the SPD identifies a tenure mix of 38% shared ownership and 62% rented, with rented allowed to be Affordable rent but capped at 70% of Market Rent ('Reading Affordable Rent') is required to meet the Borough's most pressing needs.

- 7.13 The scheme originally proposed 30% on site affordable housing. Further to discussions, wherein the applicant was advised of concerns relating to the scale, layout, design and impact on heritage assets, the affordable housing offer was amended to proposed 100% affordable housing unit on site.
- 7.14 It is *possible* in certain circumstances that the additional benefit arising from extra Affordable Housing above the policy minimum *could* outweigh areas of harm and tip the balance in favour of a proposal. It is important to note that any weight given to such benefits should be based solely on Planning grounds. A willing applicant does not in itself justify the additional provision – and Planning Permission cannot be bought. The extent to which any additional benefit applies in respect of the current proposal and any weight attributable is discussed further below.
- 7.15 It is clear that a policy-compliant 30% Affordable Housing provision is the basic requirement and should not be afforded additional weight in the overall balance.
- 7.16 It follows that the proposed 100% should be afforded some additional weight as exceeding the basic requirement – although the apparent benefits are tempered to some extent due to the lack of a mix of housing tenures (both affordable and market) within the building which is less beneficial in terms of achieving a sustainable, inclusive and mixed community. The benefits are further lessened by the inappropriate mix of dwelling sizes (an excessive number of one-bedroom dwellings) which do not meet housing need. It is also important to consider that the benefits arising from additional Affordable Housing are not dependent on the particular design proposed (which this report finds to be harmful for a variety of reasons). A building which preserved the setting of Listed Buildings and did not harm the character and appearance of the area, and which provided an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, would still be capable of accommodating Affordable Housing. Overall, the proposal is unbalanced in Planning terms. There is clear harm in terms of design, heritage, mix, amenity, landscaping (etc) and there is a limit to which increasing the amount of Affordable Housing can reasonably be seen to compensate for these fundamental shortcomings.
- 7.17 As discussed in other parts of this report, there are a range of harms which would arise from this proposal. However, officers do not consider that these would be mitigated by a more-than-policy-compliant amount of affordable housing being secured.
- 7.18 Should the application have otherwise been recommended for approval, the affordable housing units would have been secured via a S106 legal agreement. The Council's Housing Manager commented on the original scheme that the proposal was acceptable so long as there were sufficient 2 bedroom units in the mix. Given the significant concerns raised with the proposals which are not supported at officer level, no further discussion has been held in this respect. As noted above, there is a concern that the proposals do not incorporate enough 2 (or more) bedroom units. It is also noted that the type of Affordable Housing has not been agreed. As referred to above, the Affordable Housing SPD seeks at least 62% of the Affordable Housing to be Reading Affordable Rent tenure. If a lower proportion of this tenure were to be proposed, then this would further weaken the benefits arising from the proposal.
- 7.19 For future reference any legal agreement would also need to include a clause such that should an affordable housing provider not be secured (either a registered provider or the Council) the developer would be required to pay to the Council a sum equivalent to half the Gross Development Value of the whole development for provision of Affordable Housing elsewhere in the Borough which would allow affordable housing equivalent to 100% on site provision to be provided elsewhere.

- 7.20 Without an acceptable level of affordable housing having been agreed and secured by S106 agreement the proposal is contrary to Policies H3 and CC9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Design Considerations – Demolition, Scale, Appearance and Effect Upon Heritage Assets

- 7.21 Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks to ensure that new development enhances and preserves the local character. The policy places importance on the layout of the urban structure and urban grain, stipulating that development should respond positively to the local context and create safe and accessible environments. The policy requires a “high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located”. Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) requires that historic features and their settings will be protected and enhanced will not have an adverse impact on those elements which contribute to their special architectural or historic interest including, where appropriate, their settings. Policy EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context) applies as the area contains a number of listed buildings and requires new development to respect and enhance the historic character, setting out a range of considerations in terms of townscape, historic context, heritage themes that contribute to local distinctiveness.
- 7.22 Paragraph 130 of the NPPF 2021 details that decisions should ensure that developments are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and are sympathetic to local character including the surrounding built environment.
- 7.23 Paragraph 199 of the NPPF 2019 details that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.
- 7.24 The National Design Guidance identifies 10 key components for good design and of particular note is the characteristic of ‘Context’ and it states that “well designed new development responds positively to the features of the site itself and the surrounding context beyond the site boundary. It should enhance positive qualities and improve negative ones.” Additionally, there is specific reference to ‘views inwards and outwards’.

Demolition

- 7.24 The existing building is not considered to be of any particular special architectural merit to warrant its retention in its own right, although it is noted that it has an appropriate scale and siting which respects its context. Its loss would not result in any harm to the character and appearance of the area, providing it is replaced with a building of high quality design. Demolition is, therefore, considered acceptable subject to the proposed replacement building being suitable in design and related matters detailed below.

Scale, Appearance and Effect on Heritage Assets

- 7.25 Within the immediate surrounds of South Street and Sidmouth Street there is a broadly characteristic scale of three storeys on Sidmouth Street with a lesser two-to-three storey scale on South Street. Whilst there is no objection to the demolition of the existing building, nevertheless, it respects the distinctive eaves and ridge lines of key surrounding buildings and sits comfortably in the streetscene in terms of its scale and siting. Importantly, this existing scale and siting in relation to the Grade II

Listed terrace adjacent the site to the west (43-49 South Street) and 3 to 5 Sidmouth Street across the street to the east is appropriate within the setting of these listed buildings. It is apparent that any proposal for redevelopment should be of a carefully considered design. The Planning Authority has a statutory obligation to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of these listed buildings. The scale and visual dominance (as well as style and appearance) of the proposals on this site will inevitably affect the setting of the neighbouring heritage assets.

- 7.26 Taking these matters into account, it is considered that that the scale of the proposed part four/part five storey building would be excessive within this context and would contrast unsympathetically with the characteristic scale of good quality buildings that exist within the area, including that of listed buildings that surround the site – particularly the two storey listed terrace to the west but also 3 to 5 Sidmouth St opposite. The dominant scale, prominent siting and overall incongruous appearance of the proposal would harm the setting of the listed buildings and the character of South Street and Sidmouth Street. This inappropriate design would also be readily visible from the southern end of Sidmouth Street which is a main approach to the town centre and would therefore be experienced by a large number of visitors to the town.
- 7.27 It is noted that application 151356 which was approved but not implemented, was significantly more restrained in terms of its scale and appearance within the streetscene. Conversely, the proposed four storey scale – which would also be in closer proximity to the listed terrace than that approved - is considered to unacceptably overwhelm the terrace.
- 7.28 The proposed building would be wide and deep, with limited relief to the side boundaries. Whilst indicative soft landscaping is shown, there would be a dominance of built form and hardstanding with little space for meaningful soft landscaping, resulting in an overdeveloped character. It would be reasonable to expect tree planting to frontages, particularly given the site's prominent location and within a canopy area of 10% or less cover – as well as the importance place on trees in terms of their contribution towards the character of the area – and the scale and layout of the development needs to provide sufficient space for this.
- 7.29 The overall architectural approach does little to break up the mass and is considered to contrast poorly with adjacent properties. It is unclear where the proposed development takes its design cues from – it does not appear to reflect local character or successfully reinterpret it in a modern way. The proposed vehicle entrance way beneath the upper floors of the proposed building is considered to be uncharacteristic of the immediate context and would result in a visually unattractive 'tunnel' at the front of the building, with little activity at ground floor level. This effect would be further worsened by the deadening effects of the proposed bin and bicycle store at the south west corner. This unsatisfactory arrangement would be immediately adjacent to the listed buildings to the west. At the rear, the ground floor would open up into a large undercroft feature that spans near on the width of the proposed building. Such features are not characteristic of the area the need for this arrangement suggests an overdevelopment of the site. This unsatisfactory arrangement would be readily visible from Sidmouth Street and the appearance is akin to that of a building on stilts. The whole assemblage appears contrived and accentuates the overlarge scale of the building with the detailing and appearance also lacking architectural merit.
- 7.30 As referred to above, the proposed architectural approach lacks coherence due to a lack of clarity in terms of the proportions of the building. The facades lack the simpler proportions and ordering of façade elements characteristic of existing good quality

buildings in the adjacent streets, (even the existing building to an extent). The proposal appears to be made up of a series of visually jarring, and poorly proportioned windows, bays, oversailing upper floors, stairwells, protruding balconies and other discordant elements. The recessed top floor and lift overrun also adds to the jumbled appearance.

- 7.31 Whilst the proposed materials may reflect that used in the locality, the materials are not considered sufficient in themselves to create a visually interesting building or to mitigate the shortcoming of the architecture. The proposals are considered to introduce a dominant form of development in a prominent location that would appear visually incongruous with the adjacent buildings and wider street scene. This would further harm the setting of the listed buildings at South Street and Sidmouth Street.
- 7.32 In overall terms, the excessive scale, overdeveloped nature and unsatisfactory visually unattractive detailing of the proposal would appear incongruous, jarring and overly dominant in its context and would harm the setting of adjacent Grade II listed buildings. The proposal would not be of high design quality and would not maintain or enhance the character and appearance of the area within which it would be located. The proposals would not respond positively to their local context and would not create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness. As such the proposals are contrary to Policies CC7, EN1 and EN6.

Residential Amenity

- 7.33 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) of the Reading Borough Local Plan states that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

Impact on neighbouring amenity

- 7.34 No.49 South Street, the Grade II listed building to the west of the site has recently received planning permission (and listed building consent) for conversion of office to residential dwelling (see history section above). The approved plans included amenity space at the rear for the new dwelling. The proposed plans under the scheme originally proposed several balconies on the flank elevation facing directly across the rear of No.49 South Street, which was considered to result in an unacceptable loss of privacy and overlooking. Revised plans now omit these balconies. Whilst balconies are proposed on the rear elevation close to the side boundary, any views would be to the rearmost part of No.49 South Street and not considered to result in such material loss of overlooking to warrant a refusal on this basis alone. However, linked to the concerns raised above about the dominance of the proposals in relation to this listed terrace, there is a concern that given the proximity of the proposed building that would project approximately 8m past the rear of No.49 South Street at four storey height this would result in an overbearing effect to occupiers of No.49 South Street and is included as a reason for refusal in the recommendation above.
- 7.35 In relation to No.54-58 Queens Road to the rear (north) of the site, these former offices are in residential use. Whilst the proposed building would be clearly visible to occupiers of these properties, there would be a distance of more than 20m between the buildings which complies with the back-to-back guidance set out in Policy CC8. As such, no material loss of privacy or overbearing effects would result.
- 7.36 Similarly, given the intervening roads of South Street and Sidmouth Street to other nearby properties, no other overbearing effects or loss of privacy would occur.
- 7.37 In terms of other amenity-based matters (noise and disturbance, dust and fumes and crime and safety), the proposals are considered appropriate in these regards. Had

the proposals been supported a series of conditions would have secured various matters (e.g. construction method statement / waste collection details).

- 7.38 In overall terms, there are clear instances where the proposals would harm the amenity of nearby occupiers. It is also noted that the harm to amenity identified above further demonstrate that the proposals would be an overdevelopment of the site. The proposals are therefore considered to be contrary to Policy CC8.

Amenity of future occupiers

- 7.39 In addition to Policy CC8 above, Policies H5 (Standards for New Housing) and H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) also apply. Policy H5 states that new build housing will need to comply with the nationally prescribed space standards. Policy EN15 (Air Quality) requires development to have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality. Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) states that proposals for development that are sensitive to the effects of noise or light pollution will only be permitted in areas where they will not be subject to high levels of such pollution, unless adequate mitigation measures are provided to minimise the impact of such pollution. Policy H10 sets out that *“Dwellings will be provided with functional private or communal open space wherever possible, that allows for suitable sitting-out areas, children’s play areas, home food production, green waste composting, refuse storage, general outdoor storage and drying space. Houses will be provided with private outdoor space whereas flats may be provided with communal outdoor space, balconies and/or roof gardens.”*
- 7.40 All of the proposed dwellings would meet the nationally described space standards (as outlined in Policy H5) at the minimum with adequate size bedrooms and living accommodation.
- 7.41 Whilst the upper floor units would have reasonable levels of outlook, daylighting and privacy, neither ground floor unit would have private defensible space. Furthermore, Unit 1 as annotated would be single aspect with only two windows serving the flat. These would face directly on to the shared path and the combined effect of this arrangement would result in a poor standard of amenity for future occupiers in terms of privacy, disturbance and access to daylight. There would also appear to be a conflict between this arrangement and the need to provide trees to the frontages which may further affect access to daylight.
- 7.42 Twenty of the twenty-two units proposed would have their own balcony. However, the two ground floor units would not have access to a balcony/terrace and there is no communal area proposed. The dominance of hardstanding, vehicle parking and the extent of the building itself, means there would be no space within the site for suitable outdoor amenity space. This is a densely urban area and there is no meaningful public open space nearby which would mitigate this harm. The absence of sufficient on-site amenity space and access to open space is harmful to the amenity of future occupiers and contrary to Policies H10, EN9 and EN10. It is a further indicator of the overdeveloped nature of the site.
- 7.43 With regard to noise & disturbance and air quality matters, Environmental Protection officers have confirmed that the proposals would be satisfactory subject to conditions. Thus, had the proposals been supported by officers, these elements would have been secured via condition.

Accessibility

- 7.44 Policy H5(f) requires that on all developments of 20 or more new build dwellings, at least 5% of dwellings will be wheelchair user dwellings in line with M4(3) of the Building Regulations. Any market homes provided to meet this requirement will be 'wheelchair adaptable' as defined in Part M, whilst homes where the Council is responsible for allocating or nominating an individual may be 'wheelchair accessible'.
- 7.45 The development includes this provision and officers are satisfied that the accessibility/adaptability of the units could meet these requirements. Should the application have otherwise been supported, a condition would have been recommended to ensure these units are provided and maintained as such.

Crime and Safety

- 7.46 Should the application have otherwise been acceptable, it would have been reasonable and necessary to secure details of a robust security strategy via condition, for the benefit of existing nearby occupiers as well as future occupiers.

Transport and Highways

- 7.47 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 relates matters relating to development. The Parking Standards and Design SPD sets out guidance in respect of parking provision.

Parking and Access

- 7.48 The site is located in Zone 2, Primary Core Area, of the Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD. This zone directly surrounds the Central Core and extends to walking distances of 2 kilometres from the centre of Reading. This zone is well served by public transport, with buses continuing either into or out of the Central Core Area via this zone.
- 7.49 The existing access off South Street would be altered to provided access to a new refuse store, cycle and the 11 no. undercroft parking spaces. In accordance with the Parking SPD, the development would be required to provide 1no. on-site parking space per 1-2 bedroom dwelling. The appropriate level of car parking in new developments involves striking a careful balance to ensure that there is not a knock-on effect on the safety and function of the highway and public transport network through on-street parking.
- 7.50 The applicant has submitted justification for the proposed parking provision stating that the site is located in a highly accessible location by means of public transport or active travel options. In addition to this, the applicant contends that the local highway network is subject to a number of waiting restrictions that preclude the ability of vehicles to park on-street without the necessary permits. This justification has been accepted by the Council's Transport team. Should the application have otherwise been supported, a condition would have been recommended confirming that any future residents of the properties would not be entitled to apply for a residents parking permit for the surrounding residential streets where parking is under considerable pressure. This would have ensured that the development would not harm the existing amenities of the neighbouring residential properties by adding to the already high level of on street car parking in the area.
- 7.51 To meet the Policy TR5 requirements, a minimum of 10% of all vehicle parking spaces within the site should be provide with electric vehicle charging points. Should the application have otherwise been considered acceptable, this would have been secured via condition.

Cycle and Bin Storage

- 7.52 In accordance with the Parking SPD, a minimum provision 0.5 cycle storage spaces should be provided per flat. A cycle store is proposed to be located on the ground floor of the site, accessed from the parking area. Further details would be required to ensure that a suitable layout could be achieved. Transport officers consider that this could have been dealt with via condition should the application have otherwise been considered acceptable. Bin storage has been illustrated on plans which is considered acceptable and would have been secured via condition.
- 7.53 To confirm, there are no Transport-based concerns with the proposals. Should the application have otherwise been considered acceptable, a number of transport-related conditions would have been recommended. These would have included matters relating to: construction method statement; car parking spaces being ready for occupation prior to first occupation (and only used for parking thereafter); electric charging points; cycle spaces; waste storage/collection/management details; on-street parking restrictions.

Natural Environment - Trees and Landscaping

- 7.54 Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) seeks to extend the Borough's vegetation cover and that development should make provision for tree planting whilst Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks proposal should include appropriate landscaping. Proposals should demonstrate an appropriate level of greening and/or net gain in the tree number.
- 7.55 It is noted that the existing building has a significantly smaller footprint than that proposed. Whilst the majority of the existing site is given over to hardstanding, it is not considered that this is a justification for an absence of appropriate landscaped areas and planting within the current proposal as the Local Plan Policies set a clear new direction for enhancing sites that are to be redeveloped.
- 7.57 Tree planting is proposed, as well as two green walls. However, the landscaping is pushed to the extremities of the site and there is limited space for meaningful tree planting to enhance the area and provide amenity for future occupiers.
- 7.58 There is a False Acacia tree overhanging the north boundary of the site. The applicant suggests this may be removed. However, this is not under the applicant's control and the retention of trees is an objective policy of EN14. No information has been provided regarding protecting this tree and without evidence to the contrary, it would appear that the development is incompatible with its retention. In which case, the development should provide appropriate replacement tree planting to mitigate the effects of its loss.
- 7.59 Overall, the proposal makes inadequate provision for tree planting and soft landscaping within the site, contrary to Policies CC7 and EN14.

Ecology

- 7.60 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.
- 7.61 An Ecology Report has been submitted with the application and the Council's Ecologist considers this has been undertaken to an appropriate standard. The conclusions of the report, that once precautions are in place to protect nesting birds

the proposals are unlikely to impact upon protected species, are agreed with. As such, there are no ecological objections to the demolition of the existing building.

- 7.62 However, it would have been appropriate to ensure that ecological enhancements were provided, namely bird/bat boxes and wildlife friendly landscaping. Should the application have otherwise been considered acceptable, this would have been secured via condition.

Sustainability and Energy

- 7.63 Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) and 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.
- 7.64 Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) and the Council's Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019) identify that, as a minimum, new dwellings should achieve 35% improvement in regulated emissions over the Target Emissions Rate (TER) in the 2013 Building Regulations, with financial contribution required to off-set any remaining carbon emissions to zero.
- 7.65 The applicant has submitted an energy statement with the application which follows the relevant policies and Sustainable Design and Construction SPD guidance applying the recognised energy hierarch of 'be lean', 'be clean' and 'be green'. In short, the details proposed are considered to be acceptable in principle. The scheme incorporates a variety of acceptable features, such as an efficient building fabric (e.g insulated walls and efficient glazing), air source heat pumps and solar PV panels at roof level.
- 7.66 The submitted energy report projects that the development would achieve a 67% improvement of carbon emission rate set out in building regulations which complies with the requirements of Policy H5. In terms of decentralised energy, there are no heat networks which extend near the site; however, the submitted energy report explore a range of options and proposes air source heat pumps and a solar photovoltaic system as a viable option to generate energy. Should the application have otherwise been supportable, then a s106 obligation would have been required to secure a financial contribution to off-set carbon emissions to zero. However, given the recommendation is to refuse planning permission for other reasons, completion of a s106 legal agreement is not being pursued and lack of such an agreement to off-set carbon emissions to zero would represent a further reason for refusal of the application.

Sustainable Drainage Systems

- 7.67 Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems) requires all major developments to incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) with runoff rates aiming to reflect greenfield conditions and, in any case, must be no greater than the existing conditions of the site.
- 7.68 It is clear from Policy EN18 that that a landscaping-led SuDS scheme should be incorporated within the proposals in accordance as supported by guidance in the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD. This is to maximise ecological benefits, link into the existing Green Network and provide the benefits of connecting tree planting with proposed SuDS drainage so that the trees and smaller plants can filter surface water within the site.

- 7.69 The application does not propose any detailed SuDS scheme which requires detailed consideration at early stages due to the need to integrate with landscaping, underground services, site layout and foundation design. As such, it is not appropriate to secure via condition. This is therefore a failure of the current scheme and forms a reason for refusal.

Section 106 Legal Agreement

- 7.70 An Employment, Skills and Training Plan (construction phase) would have been required to be secured via s106 legal agreement had planning permission been recommended for approval. In the absence of an acceptable scheme, this consequently forms a further reason for refusal of the application. The same is applicable in terms of affordable housing units via legal agreement, as detailed earlier in the appraisal. An informative will specify that this could be overcome by entering into a S106 or unilateral undertaking for a scheme that was in all other respects acceptable.
- 7.71 The applicant duly completed a CIL liability form as part of the submission of this application. Had the application been able to be supported, then the scheme would have been CIL liable, with the standard informative included on any planning permission. In the circumstances, an informative will be added to the decision notice specifying that the scheme would have been liable to a CIL contribution.

Other matters

Equality

- 7.72 In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that there is no indication or evidence that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular application.

Representations

- 7.73 All material planning considerations raised in public representations received have been considered above in the above appraisal.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The application is required to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the harmful impacts of the proposed development and the failure to meet relevant policy requirements need to be weighed against the benefits of the proposed development.
- 8.2 There are a number of significant shortcomings of the proposal, largely as a result of the excessive scale and overdeveloped nature of the scheme. These include harm to the setting of nearby listed buildings, harm to the character of the area, poor quality of accommodation in terms of outlook, daylight and privacy, harm to neighbour amenity through overbearing effects, lack of amenity space and access to open space, insufficient tree planting and absence of sustainable drainage. Furthermore, the mix of dwelling sizes has not been justified.
- 8.3 The proposals would provide some material benefits including the provision of affordable dwellings. However, it is apparent that this benefit is not dependent on the particular design proposed and would not provide a suitable mix of accommodation in terms of size of dwelling and tenure.

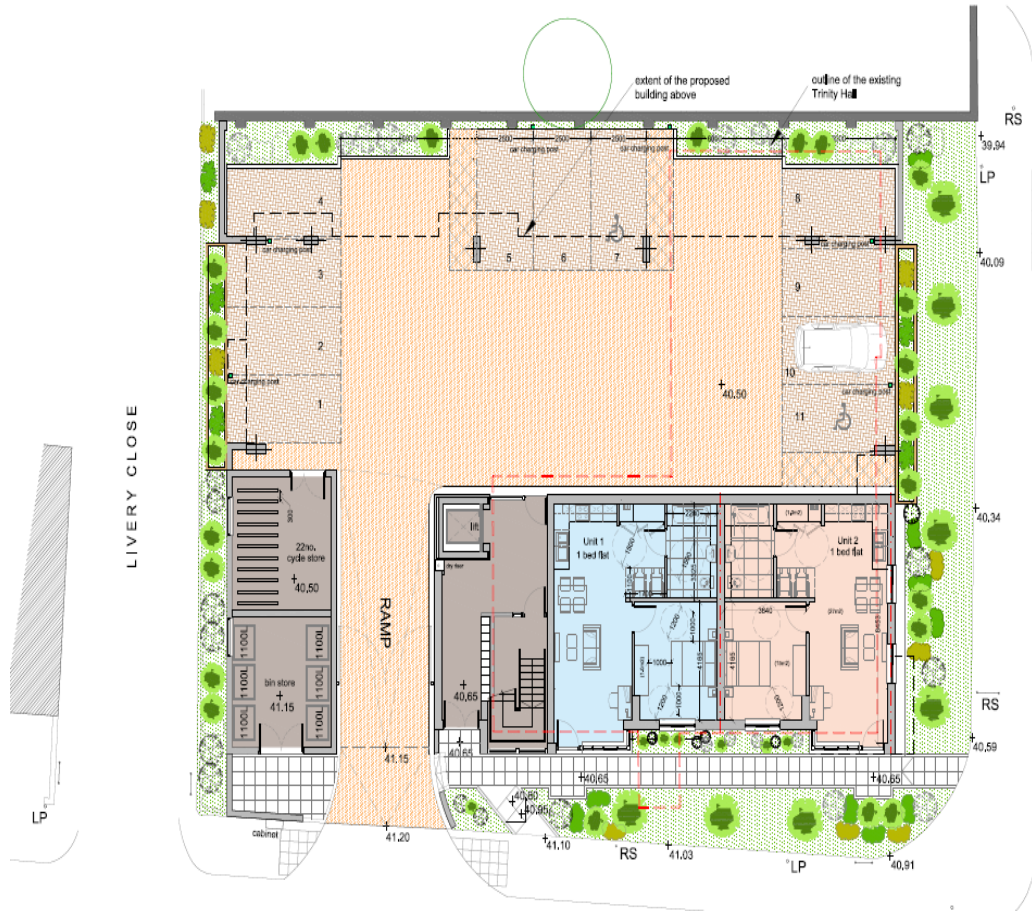
8.3 Overall, the harm caused by the proposal and the associated conflict with the Local Plan would not be outweighed by the limited benefits of the scheme or any other material considerations. Accordingly, within the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above, full planning permission is recommended to be refused as set out in the recommendations above.

Case Officer: Ethne Humphreys

Proposed Plans and Drawings (selection):



Proposed Site Block Plan



ACCOMMODATION SCHEDULE

Level	Type of Unit	Quantity	GIA m2
Ground floor	1 bed	2	57
		2 Units	

Proposed Ground Floor Plan



proposed first floor plan

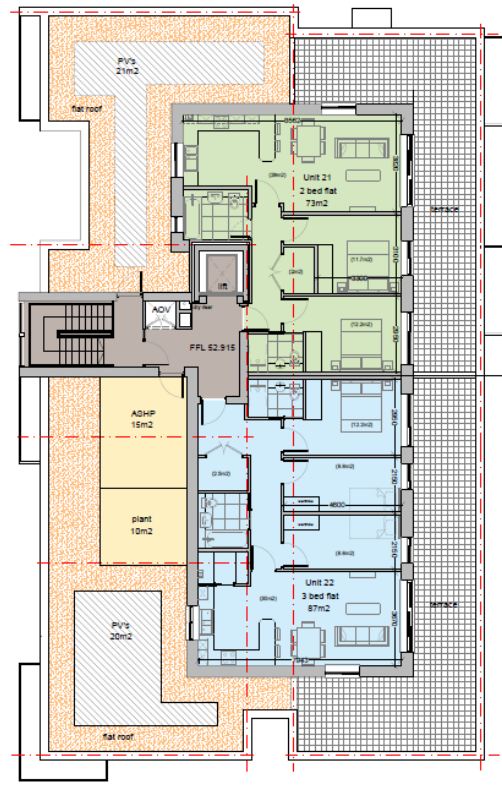


proposed second floor plan

Proposed First and Second Floor Plans

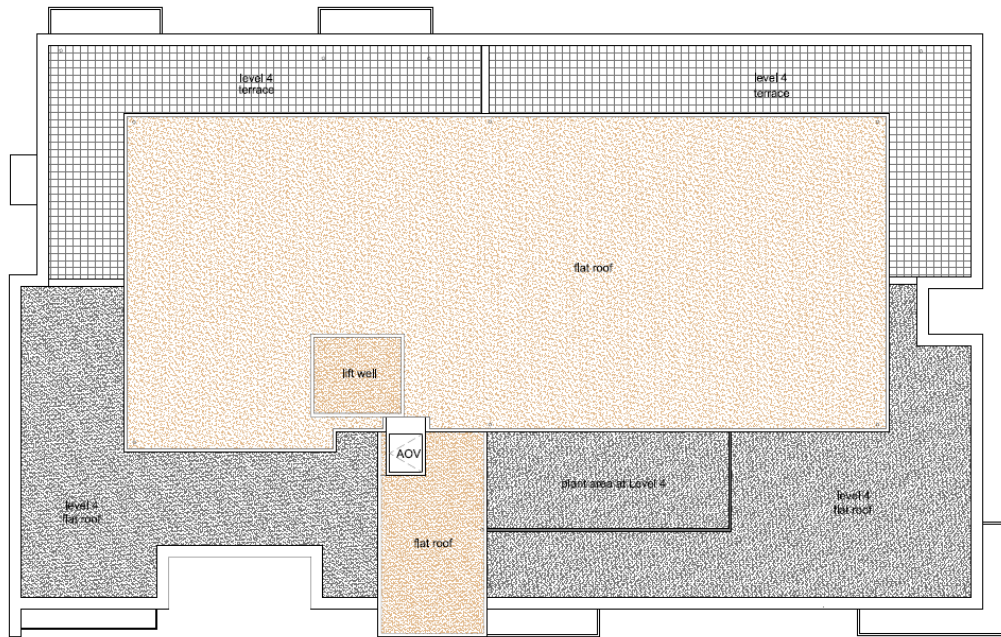


proposed third floor plan



proposed fourth floor plan

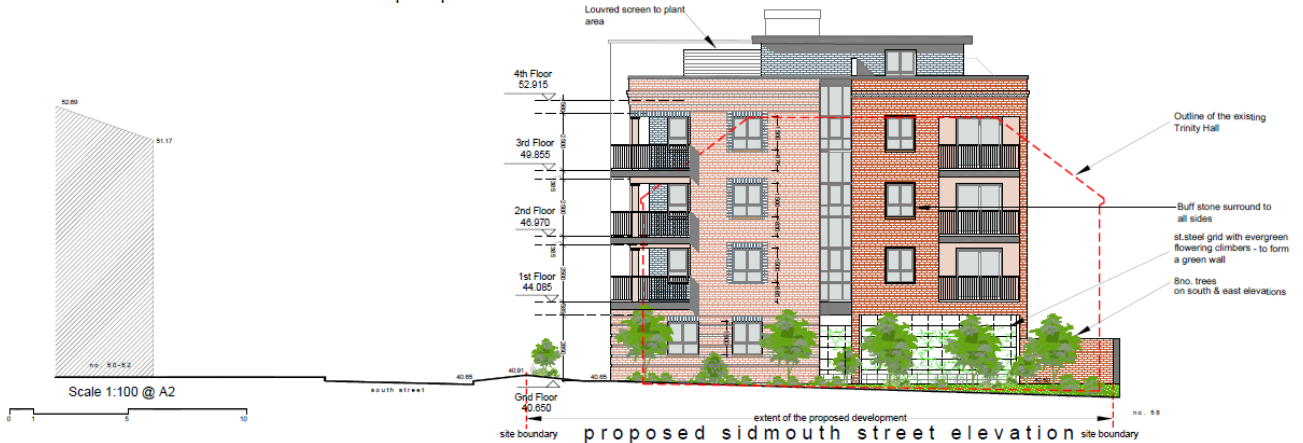
Proposed Third and Fourth Floor Plans



proposed roof plan
Proposed Roof Plan



proposed south - south street - elevation



Proposed South and East Elevations

