

10 January 2024



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT
Ward	Abbey
Planning Application Reference:	231495
Site Address:	Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading.
Proposed Development	Proposals to extend the Reading Borough Council Offices on Bridge Street to enable the accommodation of the relocated Reading Central Library function, currently on Kings Road, Reading, and provide an enhanced Customer Services reception. Site is currently Sui Generis use class, proposal to co-locate with library - use class F1.
Applicant	Reading Borough Council
Report author	Nicola Taplin
Deadline:	Original target date: 13 December 2023, extension of time date 17 January 2024
Recommendations	Delegate to the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services (AD PTPPS) to (i) GRANT full planning permission subject to the satisfactory completion of a Section 106 legal agreement.
S106Terms	Off-site Tree Planting - Secure a biodiversity compensation scheme to comprise 6 street trees to be delivered elsewhere in the Borough to include timetable for implementation.
Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Full - time limit - three years2. Approved Plans3. Pre-commencement archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation4. Materials (samples to be approved prior to commencement of above ground works)5. Pre-commencement hard and soft landscaping (including green roof details) to be submitted and approved6. Pre-commencement Arboricultural Method Statement to be submitted and approved7. Construction Method Statement to be submitted8. Cycle Parking as specified9. Servicing Management Plan10. Unidentified Contamination11. Noise Mitigation Implementation (external plant)12. Off-site tree planting scheme13. Pre-commencement lighting scheme submission and approval.14. Ecological enhancements
Informatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive and Proactive• Pre-commencement conditions• Highways• Building Regulations• Complaints about construction

- Noisy Construction
- Contamination
- CIL

1 Executive summary

- 1.1 The proposal seeks planning permission to extend the Reading Borough Council Offices on Bridge Street to enable the accommodation of the relocated Reading Central Library function, currently on Kings Road, Reading, and provide an enhanced Customer Services reception. The site is currently Sui Generis use class, proposal to co-locate with library - use class F1. The proposal will provide further enhancements to the function of the existing civic centre in a highly sustainable and central location in Reading where there is a choice of travel options. The proposal is considered acceptable in visual terms, would not result in an undue loss of amenity and would represent an appropriate development in transport terms. The application is recommended for approval subject to the conditions as set out above.
- 1.2 The application is referred to Committee as this is a Council-own (Regulation 3) development.

2 Introduction and Site Description

- 2.1 The Civic Centre building is located towards the southern edge of Reading Town centre, on Bridge Street to the West of the Oracle Shopping Centre. It was constructed in the mid/late 1980s as office accommodation originally known as 'Plaza West', and is arranged over three floors formed around two square courtyards. Externally the ground and first floors are defined by brickwork bays separated with vertical slot windows between, with double height arched window openings to each bay, defined with contrasting brickwork. The building is entered via a protruding draught lobby which was constructed as part of the 2014 refurbishment and repurposing of the building as council offices. The majority of the parking associated with the building is in the basement, although there is a visitors' car park which includes accessible parking bays to the south of the building, accessed from Simmonds Street. The Grade II Listed Riverside House is located on Fobney Street and the northern part of the application site it within the St. Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. There are a number of trees across the site. A large ash tree sits on the corner of Bridge Street and Fobney Street.

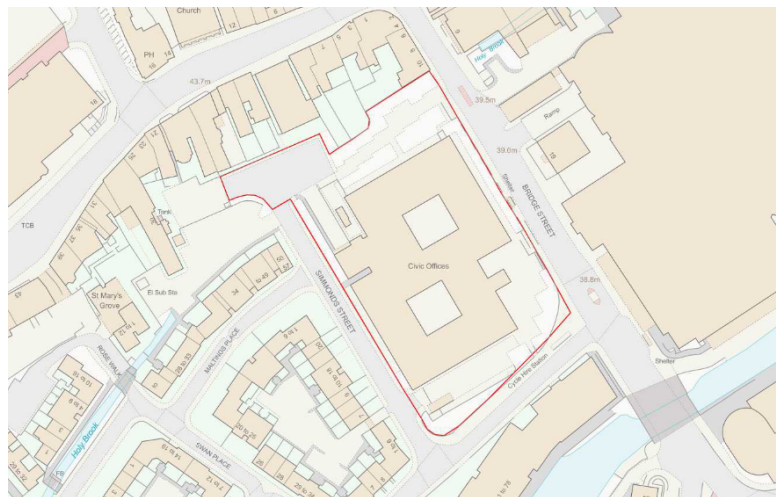


Figure 1 – Site location Plan (Not to scale)

3 The proposal

- 3.1 The proposal is to extend the Reading Borough Council Offices on Bridge Street to enable the accommodation of the relocated Reading Central Library function, currently on Kings Road, Reading, and provide an enhanced Customer Services reception. The

site is currently in Sui Generis use and the proposal will be to co-locate with the library use (Class F1).

- 3.2 In 2021, Reading Borough Council identified a requirement to improve the Library Service accommodation currently located at Kings Road, central Reading. A number of options were considered, but the Council agreed that that the relocation of the Central Library to the Civic Offices could engender a new, welcoming, 'Team Reading' public image to the building, and that the library function is well placed to enable this, given its diverse audience, from all across the Borough. In January 2023, Central Government announced that the Culture and Community at Minster Quarter bid, which included the re-provisioning of the Central Library at the Civic Offices, had been successful. The Council's Policy Committee on 20 February 2023 agreed delivery of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) programme which included the re-provisioning of the Library at the Civic Offices.
- 3.3 The extension will form a new atrium-style front entrance to the Civic Offices with a solid flat-roofed customer services area and glazed front canopy. The proposal also includes the erection of a glazed roof over the southern courtyard in order to form additional space for the library.

Figure 2 – Proposed Site Plan (Not to scale)

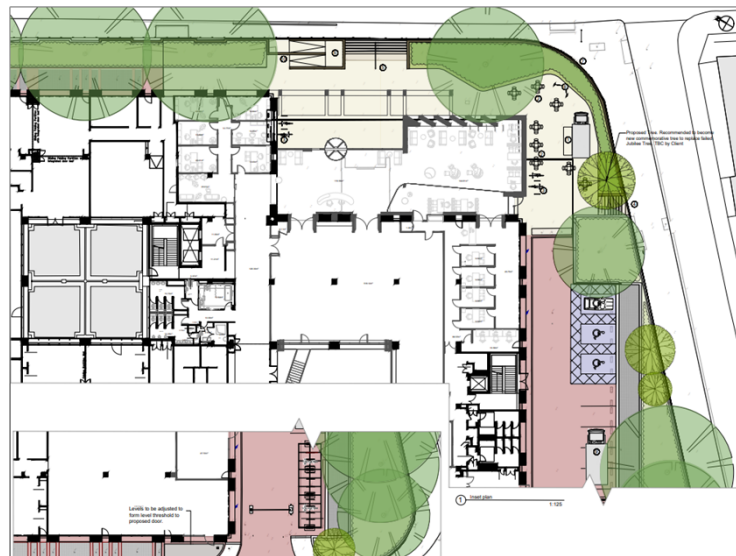


Figure 3 – Applicant's visualisation of the proposed scheme



3.4 The applicant has submitted the following documents for consideration:

- Archaeological Heritage Statement
- Access Strategy
- Plant Noise Assessment
- Transport Statement
- Ecological Appraisal and Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment
- Design and Access Statement
- Refuse and Waste Strategy
- 3D Visuals
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment
- Arboricultural Method Statement
- Landscape Design Principles
- E05236-HCC-00-B1-DR-A-2000-P1
- E05236-HCC-00-B1-DR-A-2100-P1
- E05236-HCC-00-00-L-7000 P02
- E05236-HCC-00-00-L-7007 P01
- E05236-HCC-00-00-DR-A-1000
- E05236-HCC-00-00-DR-A-2001
- E05236-HCC-00-00-DR-A-2101
- E05236-HCC-00-00-DR-A-3000
- E05236-HCC-00-00-DR-A-3050
- E05236-HCC-00-01-DR-A-2002
- E05236-HCC-00-01-DR-A-2102
- E05236-HCC-00-RP-DR-A-2005
- E05236-HCC-00-RP-DR-A-2103
- E05236-HCC-00-RP-DR-A-2105
- E05236-HCC-00-ZZ-DR-A-3100
- E05236-HCC-00-ZZ-DR-A-3150

4 Planning history

130687 - Change of use from B1 Office to Local Government Offices with ancillary Post Office, and external works to include erection of front lobby; and generator and secure screen to rear. – Application permitted 7 May 2013.

230442 - – Re-location of Reading Library and extension to Civic Offices. Pre-app response provided.

5 Consultations

The following consultation responses were received from statutory and internal consultees:

RBC Transport - There are no objections to the proposed development subject to conditions (discussed below).

RBC Conservation Officer - The proposal would have neutral impact on the settings of Grade II and Grade II* listed buildings on Castle Street and Bridge Street and St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area, therefore it would be acceptable.

RBC Environmental Protection - No objection subject to the imposition of conditions relating to unidentified contamination and noise mitigation measures (detailed in the Noise Assessment).

RBC Ecology – No objection subject to conditions to secure ecological enhancements, precautionary measures to protect nesting birds and a condition to secure off site tree planting. Concerns raised about lighting and the impact that this could potentially to

disrupt the life cycles of invertebrates and birds that are trying to occupy these trees and reduce their wildlife value.

RBC Natural Environment – No objection in principle subject to the imposition of conditions to secure landscaping, A revised Arboricultural Method Statement and details of lighting to be approved.

Berkshire Archaeology - As shown, the application site falls within an area of archaeological significance and archaeological remains may be damaged by ground disturbance for the proposed development. No objection subject to a condition requiring programme of archaeological work including a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) to be submitted and approved prior to the commencement of development.

Public Consultation

Notification letters were sent to nearby occupiers on 6 June 2023. Site notices were displayed on 1 November 2023.

6 Legal and Planning Policy context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) – among them the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as ‘the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

National Policy – National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2023

Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development
Section 4 – Decision Making
Section 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
Section 6 – Building a strong, competitive economy
Section 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities
Section 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
Section 11 – Making Effective Use of Land
Section 12 – Achieving well-designed places
Section 14 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

National Planning Practice Guidance (2014 onwards)

Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019) 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
EN3: Enhancement of conservation areas
EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network

EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
EN15: Air Quality
EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
EN17: Noise Generating Equipment
OU1: New and Existing Community Facilities
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

RBC Supplementary Planning Documents

Planning Obligations under S106 (2015)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)
Parking Standards and Design (2011)

Other relevant documentation

Reading Tree Strategy (2021)
Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (2021)
The National Design Guide (2019)
The National Model Design Code (2021)

7 Appraisal

The main considerations are:

- Land Use Considerations
- Design Considerations – Layout, Scale and Appearance
- Impact on Parking/Highways
- Natural Environment – Trees and Landscaping
- Ecology
- Environmental Protection Matters – Contaminated Land
- Residential Amenity

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 Framework (NPPF). To achieve sustainable development a proposal needs to meet economic, social and environmental objectives.
- 7.2 Policy OU1 supports new, extended or improved community facilities, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site. Proposals for on-site intensification of important facilities, such as schools and healthcare uses, will be supported, subject to other policies in the plan. The Policy goes on to state that new community facilities should be located where there is a choice of means of travel (including walking and cycling), and in existing centres where possible. In this respect, the proposal involves the co-location of the library with the existing civic functions conducted at the site. The proposal is being funded via the Government's 'Levelling Up' Fund. The site is located in a highly sustainable, central location in Reading where there is a choice of travel options and the proposed extension will provide further enhancements to the function of the existing Civic Offices' function. Therefore, subject to the detailed considerations set out below, the principle of development considered to be acceptable.

Design Considerations – Layout, Scale and Appearance

- 7.3 Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks to ensure that new development enhances and preserves 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, “...*high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located*”.
- 7.4 Paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2023 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.
- 7.5 The National Design Guidance identifies 10 key components for good design and of particular note is the characteristic of ‘Context’ and it states that it is important 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’.
- 7.6 The extension will square up the entrance along Bridge Street and will involve a two-storey height, predominantly glazed, extension. While the host building has a more traditional red brick appearance, the extension does take some architectural cues from the building and the rationale for a predominantly glazed extension to serve as an enhanced welcome area to the civic building is considered acceptable in design terms. The enclosure of the courtyard is not considered to result in any adverse visual impact.
- 7.7 Policy EN1 requires that all proposals to protect and, where possible, enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. It echoes the NPPF by stating, “Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits”. Policy EN3 requires that development proposals within Conservation Areas contribute positively to local character and distinctiveness. Policy EN6 also requires new development to contribute to, respect and enhance the architectural and visual qualities of the historic environment characterised by heritage assets.
- 7.8 The application site partly lies within the St Mary’s Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. Given the location of the application site and the position of the proposed front extension, the proposal would have possible, limited heritage impacts on the on the character and appearance and views into the Conservation Area.
- 7.9 The Council’s Conservation Officer has advised that overall, the proposed development would have a neutral impact on views to the St Mary’s Butt/Castle Street Conservation Area. It would not have any impact on the Grade II* Listed Culvert to the Holy Brook as the proposal would not touch the listed building physically and/or visually. Similarly, due to the distances involved, the extension would result in no harm to the settings of the various Grade II listed buildings on Bridge Street, Fobney Street or Castle Street.

Impact on Parking/Highways

- 7.10 Policies TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway related matters), TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) of the Local Plan seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking related matters relating to development.

Pedestrian Accessibility

- 7.11 Footways are provided on both sides of Bridge Street, with street lighting located on either side of the carriageway. The site's pedestrian access will be retained on Bridge Street, which also includes a ramp in place to accommodate disabled site users. The site's vehicle access will be retained via Simmonds Street, where access is restricted via a barrier and limited to 'authorised parking only.' The Council's Transport Manager has confirmed that in principle the above present access arrangements remain acceptable for the proposed development.

Cycle Accessibility

- 7.12 The library in its current location on Kings Road has 6 full time and 9 part time staff members and, on this basis, an additional 3 cycle spaces should be provided for staff and providing this is secured, this complies with the Council's standards. The proposed library has approximately 1500m² gross internal area and based on the Council's requirement of 1 space per 300sqm this equates to 5 spaces. The Council's Transport Manager has confirmed that the provision of 4 Sheffield type stands (8 cycle spaces) is therefore considered acceptable. The cycle parking is to be located within the proposed covered area located to the site frontage and is considered acceptable. To the south of the building, cycle parking in the form of 6 Sheffield stands are currently provided and these are to be relocated to an acceptable location.

Bus Services

- 7.13 The nearest bus stop to the site is Bridge Street Stop MI, which is located within 100 metres of the site. There are further route stops in St. Mary's Butts meaning the application site is well served by buses, and then to Reading Station.

Car Parking

- 7.14 With reference to the Parking and Design SPD, the application site is in Zone 1, within Reading Central Area and Reading's primary shopping area. As such and considering the excellent public transport provision in the surrounding area, the library element of the site will remain a car-free facility, as is the existing site in Kings Road. The Council's Transport Manager has confirmed this is acceptable given the parking restrictions that surround the site.

Servicing and Waste Collection

- 7.15 It is stated within the applicant's Transport Statement that delivery / servicing vehicles will access the site in the same way as the existing situation. However, it has been confirmed that library book deliveries will occur from the southern elevation of the building, ie. via the visitors' parking area. These deliveries will take place infrequently and by smaller transit-van type vehicles that could be accommodated within the car park and as such this is considered acceptable in highway terms.

Trip Generation and Impact Assessment

- 7.16 Consideration has been given to the use of the existing library facility at Kings Road and the proposed increase in footfall/pedestrian flows to the Civic Offices using the Bridge Street footway resulting from the combined use of the Civic Offices for its Sui Generis council use and proposed library use. The applicant has provided data in relation to users of the existing Reading Central Library on Kings Road and this equates to 461 visitors (equating to 922 total trips) a day. In relation to the existing use an assessment of the Trip Rate Information Computer System (TRICS) has been undertaken by the Highway Authority and this has identified that this would generate a provision of 338 total trips a day. Overall, this equates to an increase of 584 total trips although it is appreciated that not all trips will utilise the footway in Bridge Street for the purpose of this assessment, they have been assumed that they do as a worst case scenario.
- 7.17 To calculate an hourly trip rate, the 584 total trips have been divided by 9 (number of hours the library is open) which equates to a provision of 65 total trips per hour. This equates to roughly one trip per minute which along with the fact that the peak use for the existing library is a Saturday when the Council offices would not be in use thereby

freeing up capacity on the surrounding footways. This increase has been deemed acceptable by the Council's Transport Manager.

- 7.18 The proposed development will result in alterations to the basement area to facilitate support structures and an updated drawing has been provided that requires revisions to the car parking layout. This includes the loss of a car parking space but given the town centre location, this loss is acceptable.
- 7.19 Overall, the proposals would represent an appropriate development in transport terms and would comply with the Local Plan policies above.

Natural Environment - Trees and Landscaping

- 7.20 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.
- 7.21 The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment. A landscape plan has also been submitted with the application which has been revised during the course of the application. The landscape proposals include the provision of 4 new trees (3 replacement). The Council's Natural Environment Officer has confirmed that the principles of the proposed landscape layout and planting, particularly trees, are considered acceptable. Detailed clarification is required within the AMS, the landscape maintenance arrangements and detailed specifications of the green roof. A pre-commencement landscaping condition is recommended which will secure planting details to include the species, maintenance, and management schedule. Officers are satisfied that the overall scheme is acceptable in principle, subject to clarification of these points and therefore complies with policies CS7 and EN14.

Ecology

- 7.22 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.
- 7.23 The application is supported by an Ecological Appraisal and Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment report (Hampshire County Council, September 2023) which concludes that the proposals are unlikely to adversely affect bats or other protected species. The Council's Ecologist has confirmed that no objection is raised in this respect subject to a number of precautionary measures to protect nesting birds, detailed in the report which can be secured by way of condition.
- 7.24 The report concludes that the development will lead to a slight net loss of biodiversity. Recommendations are made within the report for the planting of 6 additional off-site trees which would result in a net gain of 12.18%. At the time of writing, this provision is proposed to be off-site tree planting and is proposed to be secured by way of a S106 Legal agreement. A fuller discussion of this matter is to be provided in the Update Report.
- 7.25 The Council's ecologist has expressed some concerns about lighting of trees and the potential to disrupt the life cycles of invertebrates and birds that are trying to occupy these trees. It is considered appropriate and necessary to secure details of a lighting scheme by way of condition to ensure that the potential disruption to wildlife can be minimised.

Environmental Protection Matters

Contaminated Land

- 7.26 Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) required that developments on land affected by contamination can be satisfactorily managed or remediated against so that it is suitable for the proposed use. Past uses of the application indicate that contamination may be present/possible.
- 7.27 The Council's Environmental Protection Officer is satisfied subject to the imposition of a condition relating to unexpected contamination in accordance with Policy EN16.

Noise

- 7.28 The nearest noise-sensitive properties are within Riverside House, Fobney Street and also properties on Simmonds Street. The application has been supported by a Noise Assessment which confirms that mitigation will be required in order for the proposed replacement plant to meet the Council's Standards. The Council's Environmental Protection Officer has confirmed that the proposal is acceptable subject to a condition requiring the proposed implementation of the mitigation.

Residential Amenity

- 7.29 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) of the 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.
- 7.30 The proposed layout does not negatively impact on the surrounding properties and public space. The distance between the proposed and the existing buildings as well as the locations of windows has been carefully considered to ensure overlooking into existing properties is not exacerbated.

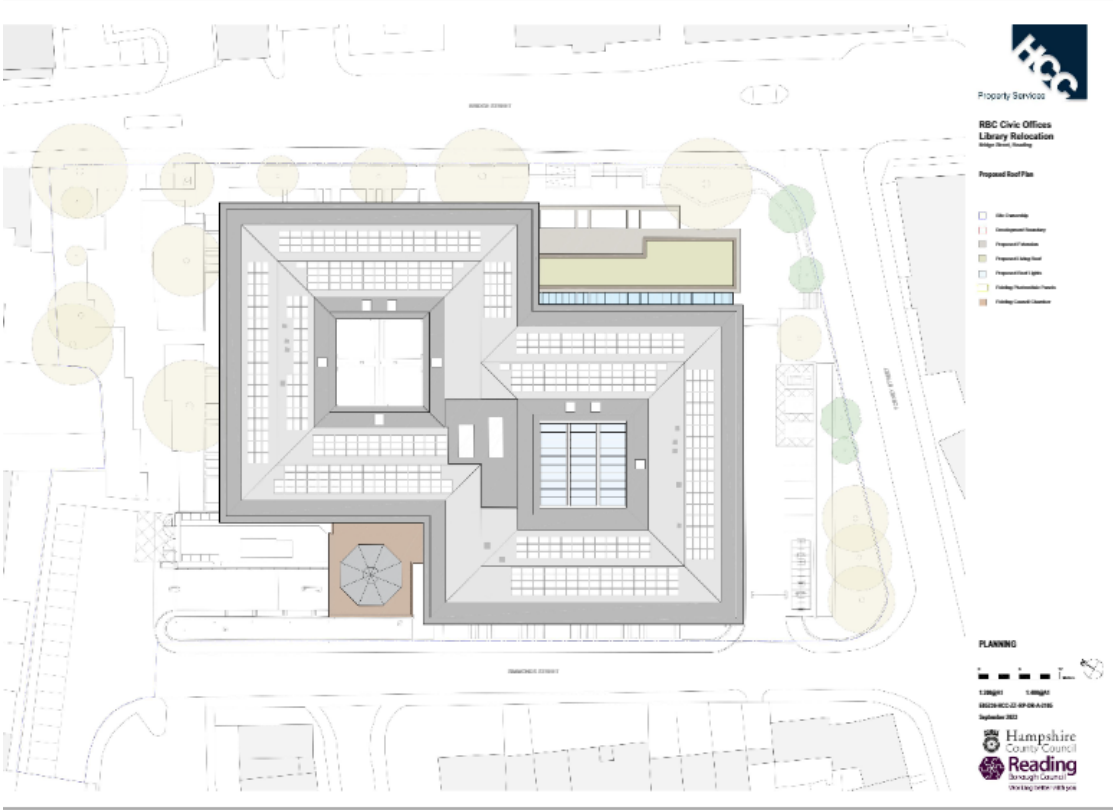
8 Equality implications

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2 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. Furthermore, the proposal would be a positive addition to Reading in terms of its use and the complementary nature of the uses.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 As with all applications considered by the Local Planning Authority, the application is required to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 9.2 The proposed extension will provide further enhancements to the function of the existing Civic Offices in a highly sustainable and central location in Reading where there is a choice of travel options. The proposal is considered acceptable in visual terms, would

not result in an undue loss of amenity and would represent an appropriate development in transport terms.





Property Services

RBC Civic Offices Library Relocation

Bridge Street, Hastings

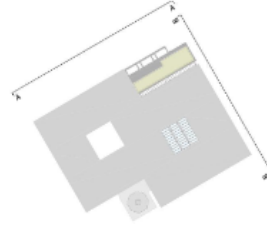
Proposed Elevations and Sections

Legend

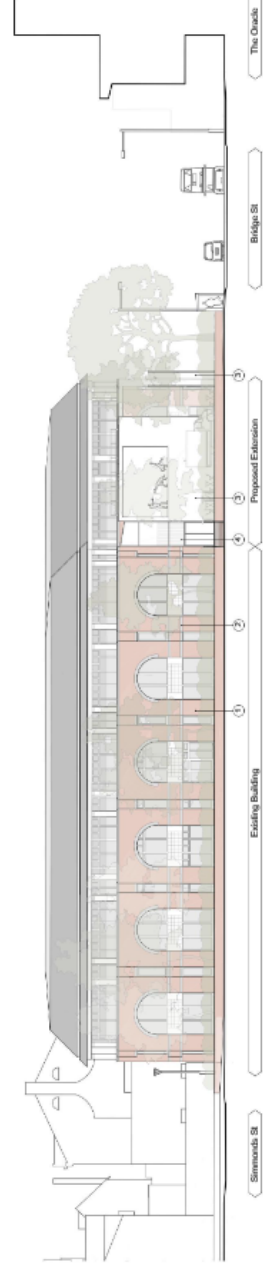
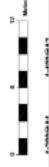
- ① Existing Red Brick
- ② Existing Grey Brick
- ③ Proposed painted cladding
- ④ Proposed glazing with curtain wall
- ⑤ Proposed window door with curtain wall



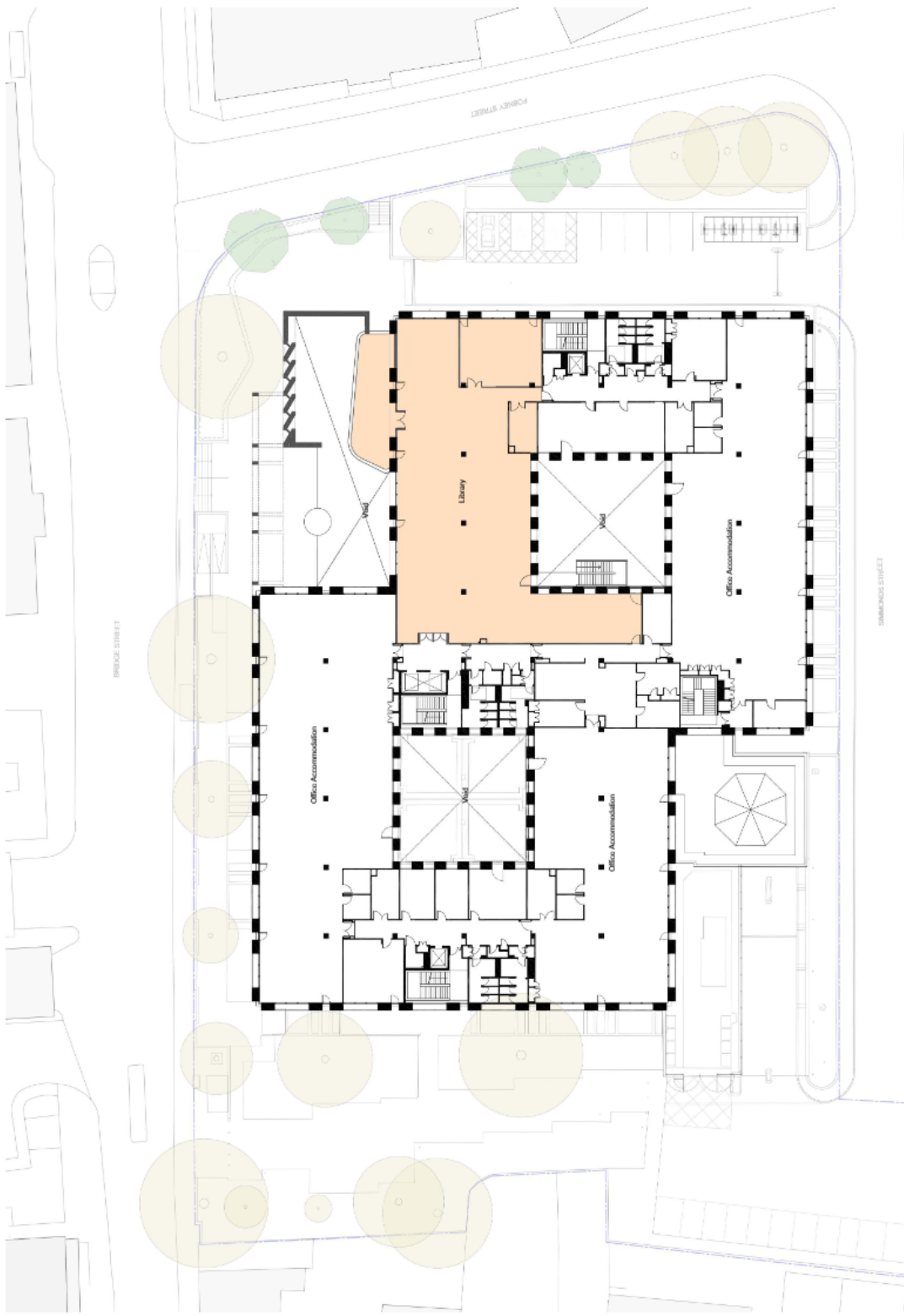
1
Proposed Elevation A



PLANNING



2
Proposed Elevation B



**RBC Civic Offices
Library Relocation**
Bridge Street, Auckland

- Proposed Plan
First Floor**
- Site Ownership
 - Development Boundary
 - Proposed Extension
 - Proposed Library

PLANNING

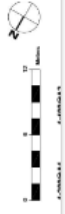




Figure 34. 1:100 development model