

24 April 2024



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT
Ward	Abbey
Planning Application Reference:	231190/FUL and 231191/LBC
Site Address:	20-30 Kings Road, Reading
Proposed Development	<p>231190/FUL Change of use from E(g)(i) to F1(g) Law Courts for both The Carbon Building and Highbridge House. Fitout of the buildings for use as a Law Court, installation of a new internal lift and new plant to existing roof plant enclosure. New gate and external ramped entrance to the rear of The Carbon Building. Streetscape security features including bollards to footpaths and obscuring film to windows.</p> <p>231191/LBC Listed building Consent for alterations to Highbridge House, re-opening of opening in rear wall at ground floor and new opening at first floor level to form connections to The Carbon Building</p>
Applicant	Ministry of Justice
Report author	Ethne Humphreys
Deadline:	An extension of time has been agreed with the applicant until 26 th April 2024
Recommendation	GRANT full planning permission GRANT listed building consent
Conditions (summary) (to include)	<p><i>231190/FUL</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Time Limit – 3 years2. Approved plans3. No development shall commence on site until details of the method of storage and proposed re-use of all original bricks have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All bricks shall be stored and re-used in accordance with the approved details at all times thereafter.4. No development shall commence on site until details of the privacy films have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details at all times thereafter.5. No development shall commence on site, including any works of demolition, until a site specific Construction Method Statement has been submitted to and been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Works in accordance.6. The development hereby permitted shall not be first occupied until all bicycle parking facilities have been provided in

accordance with the approved plans. The facility shall be kept available for bicycle parking at all times thereafter.

7. The development hereby permitted shall not be first occupied until all vehicle parking spaces have been provided in accordance with the plans hereby approved. The spaces shall be kept available for parking at all times thereafter.
8. The development hereby permitted shall not be first occupied until the refuse and recycling storage facility has been implemented fully in accordance with those details shown on the approved plans. The facility shall be vermin proof and retained solely for storage of refuse and recycling at all times thereafter.
9. Notwithstanding the submitted details, no development shall commence on site until drawings showing the position of all bollards to be installed within the footway have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. No bollard shall be installed otherwise than in accordance with the approved details at any time.
10. In the event that contamination is found at any time when carrying out the approved development not previously identified, development shall be halted on that part of the site the contamination reported in writing to the Local Planning Authority.
11. No mechanical plant shall be installed until a noise assessment of the proposed mechanical plant has been submitted and approved by the Local Planning Authority. Installed in accordance.
12. No development shall commence on site until a copy of an Interim BREEAM Certificate in accordance with the BREEAM Sustainability Standard demonstrating compliance with a minimum standard of BREEAM 50% Very Good rating has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development in accordance.
13. The development hereby permitted shall not be first occupied until a copy of a Final BREEAM Certificate in accordance with the BREEAM Sustainability Standard following a post-construction stage review carried out by a licensed assessor has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
14. No construction, demolition or associated deliveries shall take place outside the hours of 0800hrs to 1800hrs Mondays to Fridays, and 0800hrs to 1300hrs on Saturdays, and not at any time on Sundays and Bank or Statutory Holidays without prior written approval from the Local Planning Authority.
15. No materials or green waste produced as a result of the clearance of the site, demolition works or construction works associated with the development hereby approved shall be burnt on site.
16. Notwithstanding the provisions of Schedule 2, Part 3 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (or any order revoking or re-enacting

	<p>that Order with or without modification), the premises shall be used for Class F1(g) Law Court Use only and for no other purpose (including any other purpose in the same Use Class of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020, or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking or re-enacting that Order with or without modification.</p> <p>17. Prior to first occupation of the development hereby approved an End User Phase Employment, Skills and Training Plan (ESP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority</p> <p><i>231191/LBC</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time Limit Listed Building 2. Works specified 3. No development shall commence on site until details of the method of storage and proposed re-use of all original bricks have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All bricks shall be stored and re-used in accordance with the approved details at all times thereafter. 4. No development shall commence on site until details of the privacy films have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details at all times thereafter. 5. All new external and internal works and finishes, and any works of making good, shall match the existing original fabric in respect of using materials of a matching form, composition and consistency, detailed execution and finished appearance, except where indicated otherwise on the drawings hereby approved.
<p>Informatives</p>	<p><i>231190/FUL</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms and Conditions • Building Regulations • No signage approved; requires advertisement consent • Pre-commencement Conditions • CIL • Highways • Access Construction • Construction • Encroachment • Positive and Proactive <p><i>231191/LBC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms and Conditions • Building Regulations • For the avoidance of doubt, no other works are approved except those as authorised by this Consent • Positive and Proactive

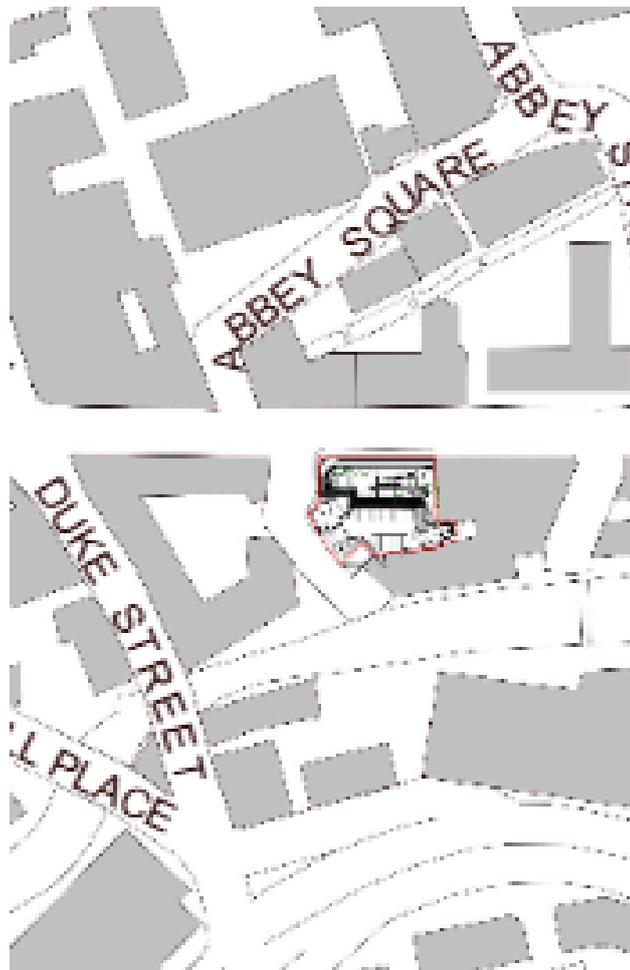
1. Executive summary

The proposal seeks planning permission and listed building consent for the change of use of the Carbon Building and Highbridge House from office use to law court to locate the County and Family Courts.

- 1.1 The proposals would have no unacceptable heritage impacts, nor would there be any unacceptable impacts on neighbouring properties nor adverse transport impacts. There are no significant detrimental effects of the proposal and as such the proposals are recommended for approval subject to the conditions as set out above.

2. Introduction and site description

- 2.1 The site relates to 20-30 Kings Road located on the corner of Kings Road and Highbridge Wharf. The main building frontage faces onto King's Road, with the main entrance facing west towards the city centre at the corner of King's Street. The site consists of two buildings; the Carbon Building which is a five storey office building and Highbridge House, a three storey Grade II listed building and dates from the early 19th century with traditional red brick, timber sash windows and tiled roof. The most notable feature is the stone portico over the front door.



Site Location Plan (not to scale)



Front view of the site

2.2 The Carbon Building was until recently used as an office building however it is currently unoccupied since it was refurbished in 2020 together with the adjoining Highbridge House. The two buildings are connected by an internal link at ground floor level however this was blocked during the recent refurbishments.

2.3 The site is within the central area of Reading Borough. The site is just north of the River Kennet and falls within an area of archaeological potential and an Air Quality Management Area. Part of the site on the western side falls within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. The area is characterised by large buildings mainly in retail and commercial office use.

2.4 The Listing for Highbridge House is as follows:

“HIGH BRIDGE WHARF 1. 5128 House at rear of Nos 18 and 20 Kings Road SU 7173 SE 3/499 II 2. Early C19 detached. 3 storeys. 3 bays, glazing bar sashes. Red brick with stone cills and stone courses over 2nd floor to flat eaves. Hipped slate roof with 4 side chimneys. Projecting Greek Doric porch with fluted columns etc and entablature. 6 panel door with plain rectangular overlight. Ground floor windows blocked and sliding garage doors inserted between.”

2.5 The application is being considered at Planning Applications Committee as the floorspace exceeds 1000sqm.

3. The Proposal

The proposal is for the change of use from Class E(g)(i) office to Class F1(g) Law Court. The proposal includes the following:

- A new ramped entrance to the rear of the building and a new canopy
- A new ramp to the side of Highbridge House
- Change in fenestration using obscured window films to the existing glazing
- Streetscape security features such as bollards
- New gated entrance into the car park to replace the existing and provide level access into the side entrance of Highbridge House

In addition, internal works would include partitioning of internal floor spaces to create smaller office spaces and installation of an internal lift within the Carbon building. New plant equipment would also be installed/

Other works include reopening of the old connection between the two buildings and a new first floor structural opening to form a new link between the buildings.

4. Planning history

4.1 The site history is extensive. However, the most recent and relevant is considered to be:

171428/FUL Various external alterations to Kings Wharf including new ground floor entrance on corner of Kings Road and Highbridge Wharf, canopy at first floor level, louvres at first to fourth floor level, removal of roof level rotunda and partial removal of ground floor entrance attached to Highbridge House, new cycle storage and associated works. Permitted.

171429/LBC Various internal and external alterations to Highbridge House, including partial removal of existing attached entrance to Kings Wharf. Permitted.

171815/FUL Installation of 2 condenser units at roof level of the link building between Kings Wharf and Highbridge House, and associated works. Permitted.

171816/LBC Internal and external alterations associated with installation of 2 condenser units at roof level of the link building between Kings Wharf and Highbridge House, and associated works.

5. Consultations

Statutory & Non-Statutory

5.1 Conservation Officer: Further to revised plans, no objection, subject to conditions. Discussed further below.

5.2 Transport: Further to revised plans and additional information, no objection, subject to conditions. Discussed further below.

5.3 Environmental Protection: No objection, subject to conditions. Discussed further below.

5.4 Conservation Area Advisory Committee: No comments received.

5.5 Reading Civic Society: No comments received.

Public:

5.6 Notification letters were sent to nearby properties, a site notice was displayed, and a press notice published. No neighbour letters of representation have been received.

6. Legal context

- 6.1 Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the LPA 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 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the LPA to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 6.3 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'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).
- 6.4 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).
- 6.5 Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023

- 2. Achieving sustainable development
- 4. Decision-making
- 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 9. Promoting sustainable transport
- 11. Making effective use of land
- 12. Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
- 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

National Planning Policy Guidance (2014 onwards)

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

- CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC3: Adaption to Climate Change
- 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
- EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
- EN6: New Development in a Historic Context
- EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
- EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
- EN15: Air Quality
- EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
- EN17: Noise Generating Equipment
- TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy

- TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
- TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
- CR1: Definition of Central Reading
- CR2: Design in Central Reading

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)
- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)

Other relevant documentation/guidance/legislation

- Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal
- Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England, 2016)
- Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015a)
- Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b)
- Principles of Conservation (Historic England, 2008)
- Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings (British Standards Publication BS 7913:2013, 2015)
- National Design Guide: Planning practice for beautiful, enduring and successful places (2019)

7 Appraisal

Land Use Considerations

- 7.1 The NPPF states that LPAs should “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”.
- 7.2 The site is not located within the office core and nor is it within a core employment area. Nevertheless., the buildings would remain in employment use and there are no in-principle land use issues, subject to other material considerations discussed below.

Design and Heritage Considerations

- 7.3 Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks to ensure that new development enhances and preserves the local character and Policy CR2 (Design in Central Reading) seeks to acceptable relationships between buildings in the town centre are created. Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) states that historic features and areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings, will be protected and where appropriate enhanced and Policy EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) states that the special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and enhanced and that development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- 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 Paragraph 205 of the NPPF 2023 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.
- 7.6 Paragraph 206 of the NPPF 2023 details that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.
- 7.8 Paragraph 208 of the NPPF 2023 details that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
- 7.9 The site is surrounded by multi storey retail and commercial office buildings with varying designs and styles comprising a mix of both traditional red brick Victorian buildings and contemporary modern structures.
- 7.10 The majority of the proposed external works would be limited to the rear of the site and not considered to have any adverse impact on the character of the building nor harm the appearance of the immediate surrounding area.
- 7.11 Detailed section and plan drawings in relation to the proposed works to the rear elevation/rear wall of the listed building were requested and provided during the course of the application. Internally, the proposed modified openings at the ground and first floor rear walls would refer to the original door and windows with larger area resulting in little loss of historic fabric. It was noted during the site visit that the existing modern decorative brick slip lining is blocking the original brickwork of the listed building. The revised proposal includes removal of this unsympathetic feature, repairing and exposing the original wall. As such, this would contribute to the historic and architectural interest of Highbridge House, balancing the low-level harm on historic fabric. The Council's Conservation Officer concludes that the impact of the internal works would cause neutral harm to the significance of the listed building.
- 7.12 Externally, revisions made to the proposed ramp mean it would be modest in scale with a simple design and appropriate materials. It would not attach to or touch Highbridge House, which is appropriate. The design and material specification for the new timber and timber clad gates is acceptable.
- 7.13 The Council's Conservation Officer has confirmed that the proposals would result in no substantial harm to the special historic and architectural interest of the listed building, with minimal/limited harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 7.14 Conditions are proposed requiring details and sample of the proposed privacy film/reflective screening. In accordance with Policies CC7, EN1 and EN3.

Residential Amenity

- 7.15 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) seeks to ensure development does not cause harm to the living environment of existing properties, in terms of loss of privacy, overlooking and visual dominance, amongst other matters. Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water

Resources) seeks to protect surrounding occupiers from the impact of pollution. Policy CR6 (Living in Central Area) seeks to safeguard neighbour amenity from potential noise disturbance.

- 7.16 Given the nature of the proposals, they are not considered to result in any material loss of amenity to any nearby property through overbearing effects or loss of privacy.
- 7.17 Obscure films are proposed to be added to existing windows for operational privacy, given the nature of the proposals. This is not considered to significantly reduce natural light for users of the buildings.
- 7.18 A condition is proposed to be attached requiring submission of a noise assessment prior to installation of any mechanical plant. There are no Environmental Protection objections to the proposals. In accordance with Policies CC8, EN15 and EN17.

Transport

- 7.19 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. The Parking Standards and Design SPD sets out guidance in respect of parking provision.
- 7.20 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.
- 7.21 The proposed development site is accessed via Highbridge Wharf from Kings Road which is part of the Red Route 'no stopping' corridor. Directly outside the property fronting Kings Road is a loading bay and pay and display and disabled bays. The Council's Residential Permit Scheme also operates in the surrounding area, thereby restricting unauthorised on street parking.
- 7.22 Policy TR5 states that development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport. Local parking standards are set out in the RBC, Revised Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which takes into account the accessibility of the site. There are no adopted parking standards for this type of use. Therefore, the proposal is considered on its own merits considering business operations and local circumstances such as access to public transport, the availability of parking and on-street parking regulations.
- 7.23 The site currently provides 16 parking spaces and the proposal illustrates 14 parking spaces which includes 1 disabled bay located within the car park at the rear of the site.
- 7.24 Considering the sustainability of the site, Transport Officers are satisfied that the proposed change of use is unlikely to have a significant impact on the trips and parking demand generated by the premise. On street parking in the vicinity of the site is either restricted or regulated. The site is in close proximity to public car parks and, therefore, any increase in parking demand would not be accommodated on street. In view of this the proposed parking provision is acceptable. Notwithstanding, confirmation was sought

as to whether parking spaces are currently used by any residential units, and if it is to be used for staff only. The applicant confirmed that the adjacent residential units, Mayflower Court, have parking located under the building. Currently the parking for The Carbon Building is located within its own segregated boundary, with no access to residents.

- 7.25 The proposals include bollards to be located at 1.2m centres around the perimeter of the Carbon Building on the public footway. Transport officers confirmed that the proposal would need to identify that the bollards would be 450mm away from the kerb edge and that the footway would be retained (with footway width no less than 2m).
- 7.26 Transport officers confirmed that a layout plan would need to be submitted, to fully identify the impacts to the disabled bays. Revised plans were submitted reflecting the bollard alterations, as well as demonstrating the setting out on the pavements of the bollards. Transport officers confirmed that the bollard type is acceptable, and that adequate disabled access would be maintained but that additional drawings are required to show 450mm clearance from the kerb to the protruding edge of the bollard. It is considered that this can be dealt with via condition.
- 7.27 Pedestrian ramps are proposed for access to the building. The applicant confirmed that the proposed ramps comply with relevant British Standards Guidance in respect of disabled access which is appropriate.
- 7.28 Replacement gates are proposed and have been shown opening into the site which is acceptable as they would not obstruct the pavement when open.
- 7.29 The site currently provides 16 cycle storage spaces which are to be retained and are in covered and secure units. These would be for staff. Space for public cycle parking is limited due to security requirements.
- 7.30 Bin storage has been provided near the gates entrance. Refuse collection arrangements would be private which is typically standard for commercial use. Transport officers are satisfied that sufficient space exists, and that collection/storage would not harm highway safety.
- 7.31 A Construction Method Statement will be required given the town centre location. There are no Transport objections to the proposals, in accordance with Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5.

Sustainability

- 7.32 Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) requires new development to reduce the consumption of resources and materials and includes that "*All minor non-residential developments or conversions to residential are required to meet the most up-to-date BREEAM 'VERY GOOD' standards, as a minimum*" and that "*Conversions to residential should incorporate water conservation measures.*"
- 7.33 The application submission confirms that it is targeting BREEAM 'very good', and a requirement to meet this standard will be secured via condition. In accordance with Policy CC2.

Contaminated Land

7.34 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.

7.35 The rear of the site lies on the site of an historic works. Environmental Protection officers recommend that should contamination be found at any time when carrying out the development, that works stop and the applicant submits an assessment to the LPA for review. This will be secured via condition.

Employment, Skills and Training Plan

7.36 As the scheme has a gross internal floorspace greater than 1000sqm it would be required to provide an Employment Skills and Training Plan for the 'User Phase', or equivalent financial contribution. In this instance the applicant has specified their intention to provide a site specific ESP. The exact form is, at the time of writing, under discussion with Reading UK CIC (who delivers ESPs on the behalf of the Borough Council). It is proposed in this instance, as it will not require a financial contribution to be secured, for this to be secured by a suitably worded condition rather than secured through s106 legal agreement.

Equality implications

7.37 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.

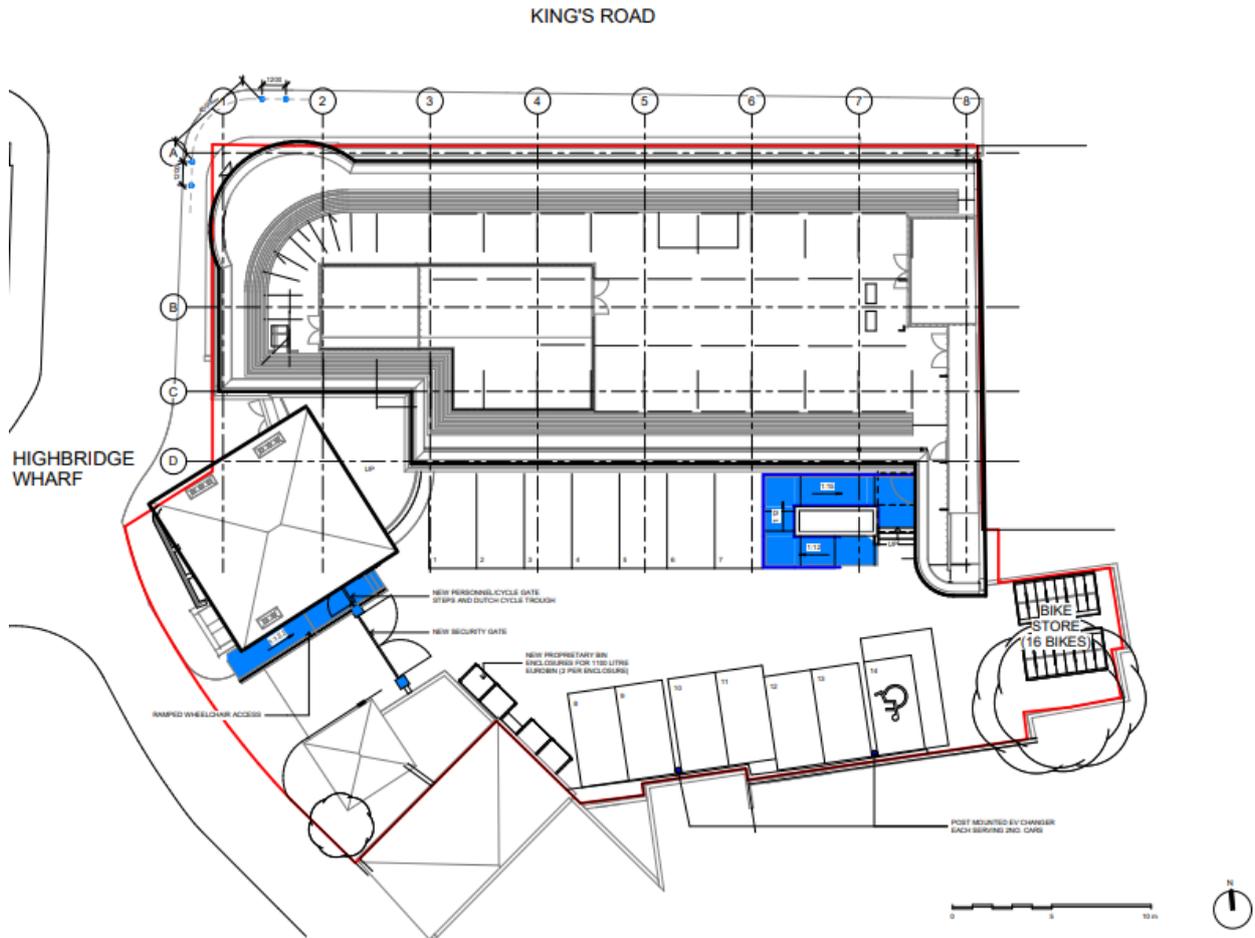
7.38 The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that there is no indication or evidence that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular application.

8 Conclusion & Planning Balance

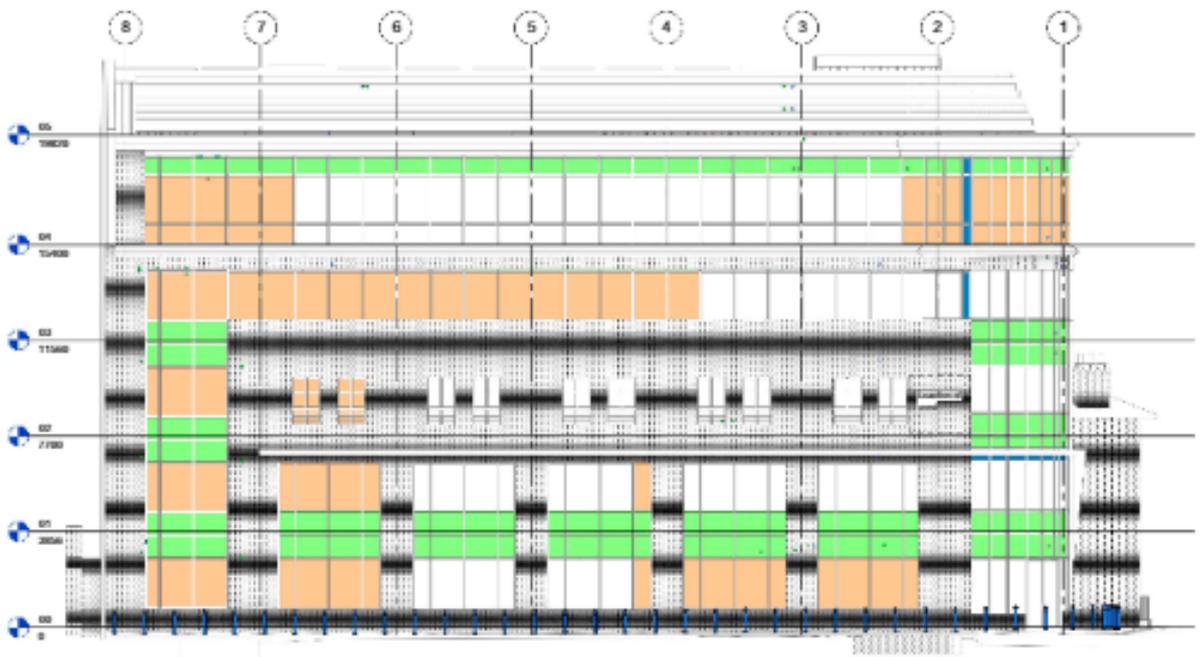
8.1 As with all applications for planning permission, the application is required to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

8.2 The proposals are considered to be acceptable within the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above, including the preservation of the listed building, the proposed use and the effect on local amenity and highway safety. The proposals would be acceptable in terms of environmental sustainability and would be acceptable in terms of equality. As such, full planning permission and listed building consent is recommended for approval.

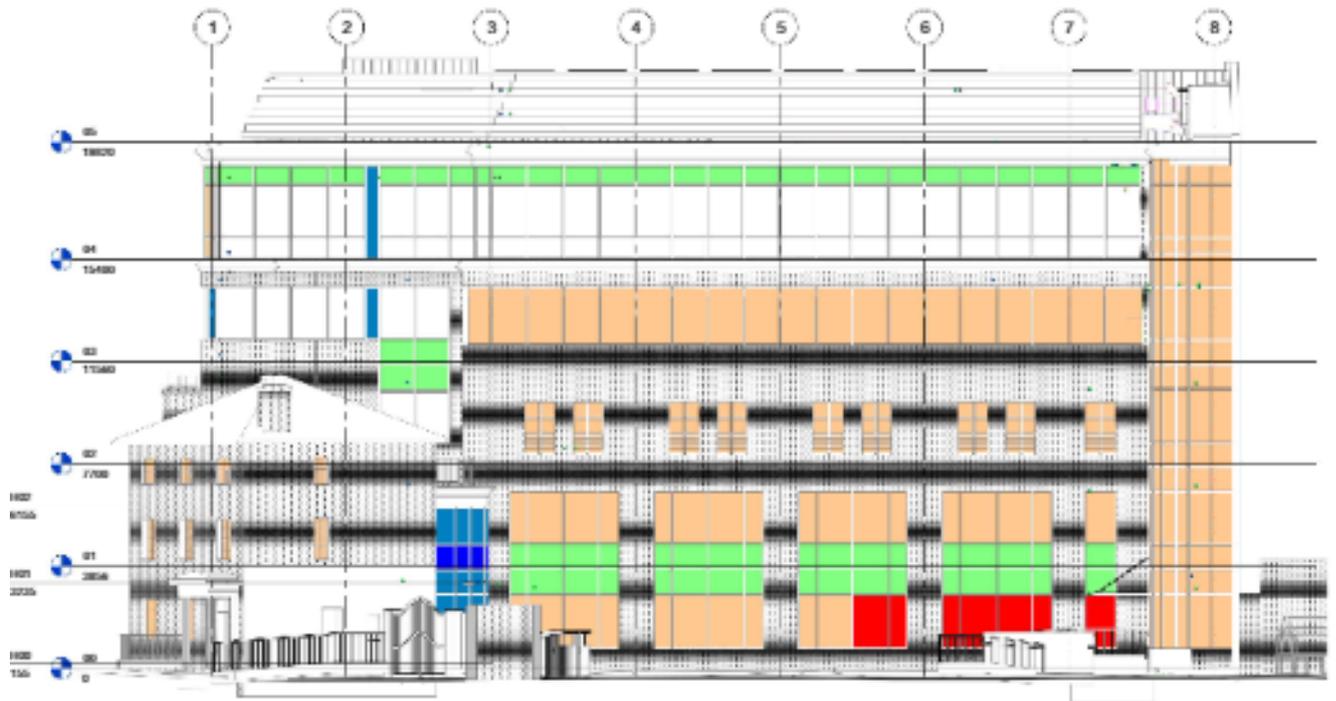
Proposed Plans shown below:



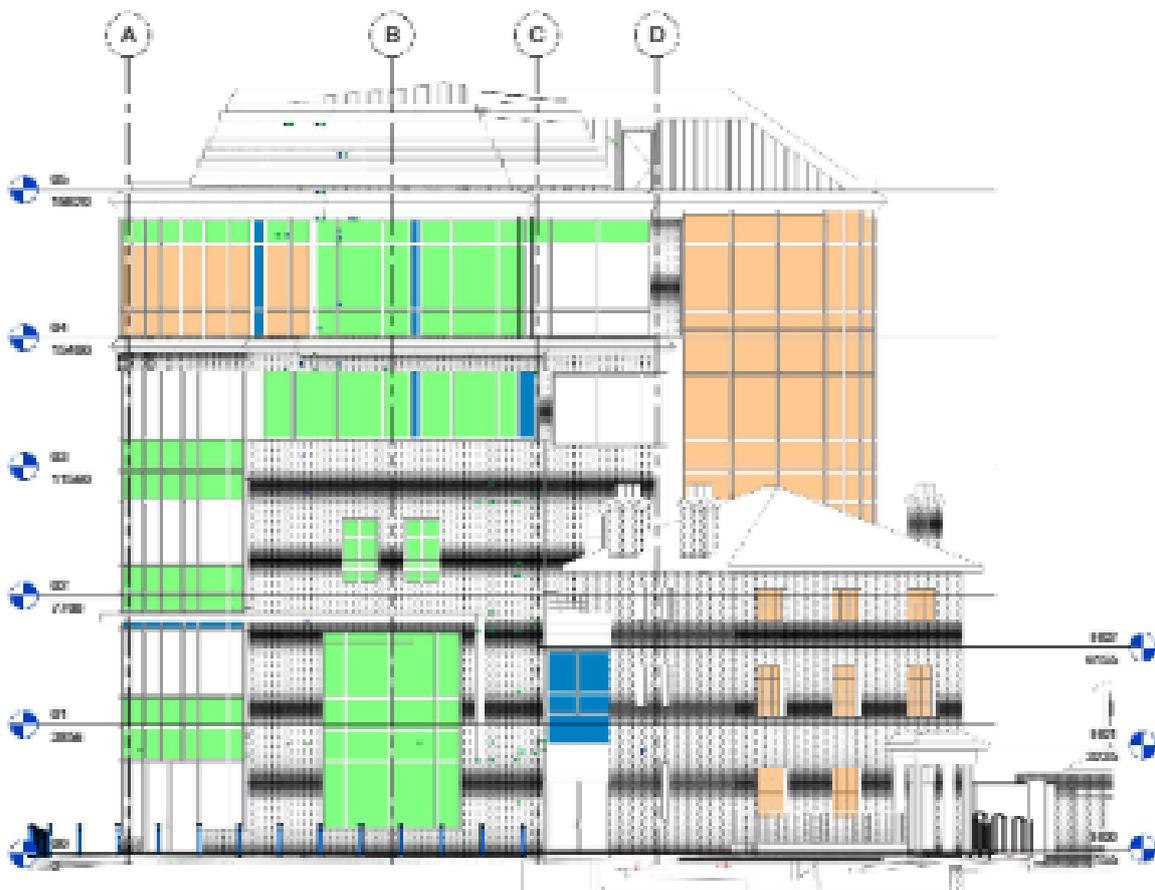
Proposed Site Plan



North Elevation Proposed



South Elevation Proposed



West Elevation Proposed