

DELEGATED PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Redlands

App Ref: 231025/FUL

Address: Hamilton Academy, 40 Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7AY

Proposals: Demolition of existing single storey rear extension, steps, and ramps. Recladding and upgrade of existing single storey building. Upgrade to all hard and soft landscaping with new MUGA enclosure at the rear of the site.

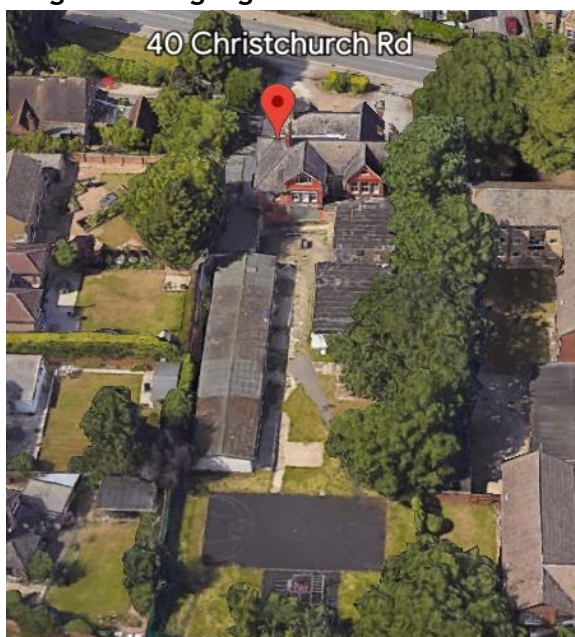
Case Officer: Sian Hickey

Date received (valid from): 24 July 2023 **Decision date (ext):** 15th November 2023

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is a three storey detached redundant school building on Christchurch Road. The site was used as a school until it closed in 2022. The building has single storey extensions projecting at the side and rear. The property is not a listed building, nor does it fall within a conservation area. The front of the site is opposite The Mount Conservation Area and the rear of the site backs onto Cintra Park. The surrounding area is predominantly residential.

Imagine from google earth:



Proposed site plan:



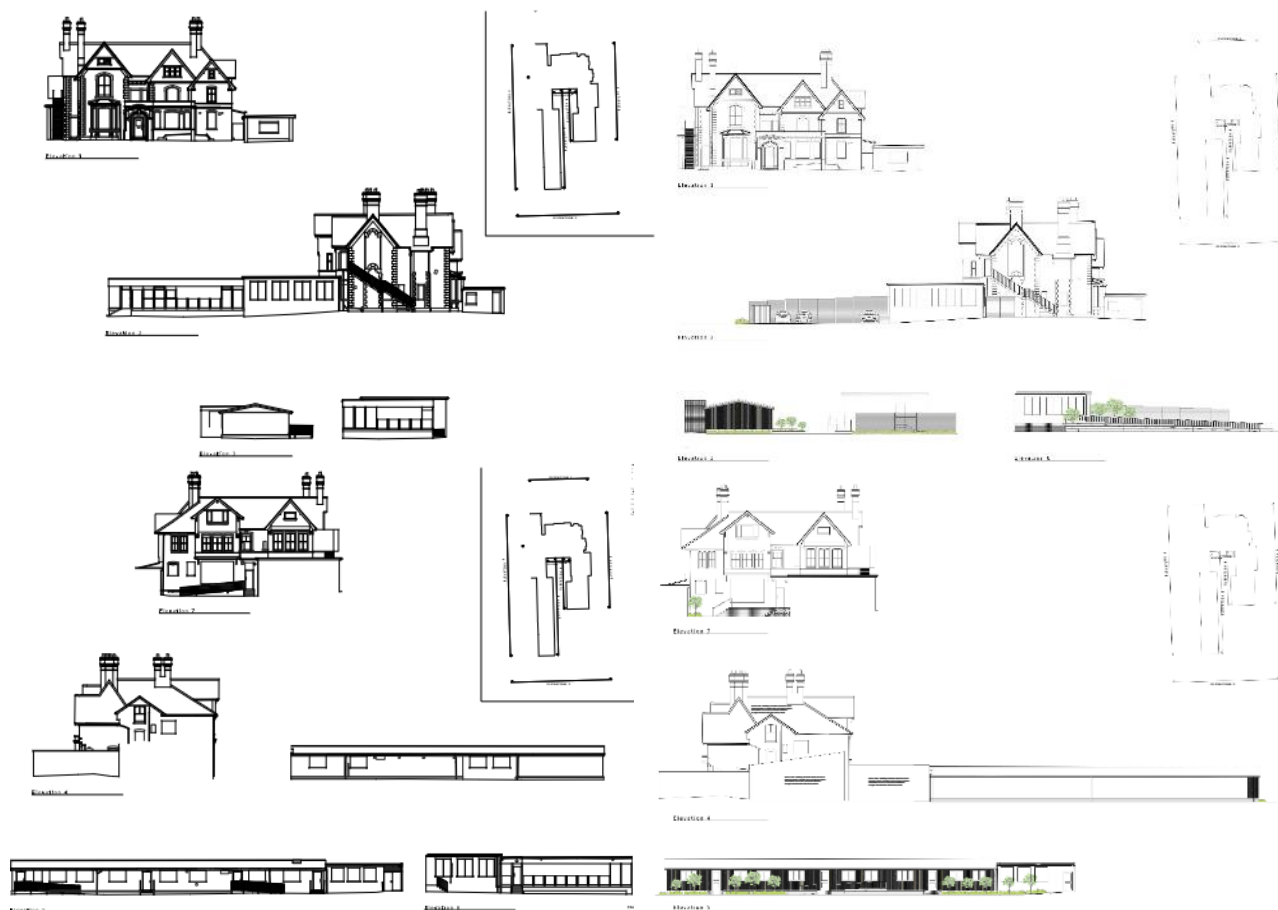
2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Planning permission is sought for the demolition of one of the existing single storey rear extensions along with some existing external steps and ramps. The proposal also includes the recladding and upgrade of the existing single storey building, including new windows and doors, and internal alterations and enhancements. The fenestrations and external finishes will be updated across the whole site. All hard and soft landscaping is to be upgraded and a

new enclosure for the existing multi-use games area (MUGA) is proposed at the rear of the site.

Existing Elevations

Proposed Elevations



Plans considered:

- Drawing No. 23-062 004 P01 - Existing Elevations received 24th July 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 003 P01 - Existing Floor Plans received 24th July 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 002 P01 - Existing Block Plan received 24th July 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 001 P02 - Location Plan received 24th July 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 013 P02 - Proposed Elevations received 14th September 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 012 P03 - Proposed Elevations received 16th October 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 011 P02 - Proposed Plans received 16th October 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 0100 C02 - Proposed Block Plan received 4th October 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 005 P01 - Existing Elevations received 9th October 2023
- Drawing No. 23-062 0014 P01 - Proposed MUGA Elevations received 18th October 2023

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

080634 -Temporary application for the construction of two single storey infill classrooms and equipment store. - PERMITTED

231010 - Demolition Prior Approval - One outbuilding to the rear of the property will be completely removed. Some external steps and ramps will also be demolished. - WITHDRAWN

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following addresses were consulted by letter:

7 Morton Court, 42 Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7BB
2 Morton Court, Christchurch Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG2 7BB
5 Cintra Avenue, Reading, RG2 7AU
7 Cintra Avenue, Reading, RG2 7AU
21 Morton Court, Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7BB
22 Morton Court, Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7BB
18 Morton Court, Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7BB
17 Morton Court, Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7BB
16 Morton Court, Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7BB
1 Morton Court, Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7BB

Letters of representation have been received as follows: None

RBC Transport

Updated comments following receipt of the Transport Statement prepared by Paul Basham Associates on behalf of Acorn Education and Care Ltd.

This application is for full planning approval for alterations to the former College at 40 Christchurch Road which closed in 2022. The proposals include the erection of a new single storey rear extension to serve as a kitchen. Internal and external alterations and enhancements including an upgrade to all hard and soft landscaping providing 16 on-site parking spaces.

The site consists of one main three-storey building with several single storey extensions and outbuildings. Vehicle access is from Christchurch Road in the form of a one-way in/out horseshoe arrangement for student drops with new staff parking spaces.

The site was formerly known as Phoenix School (now Hamilton School), a 64-pupil school for children aged 11-18 with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The proposed amendments are to accommodate the site becoming an Acorn Education School. This would provide a 60-pupil school for children aged 11-18 with complex needs. The proposed site would therefore provide a reduction in 4 pupils, for a similar school setting.

It is anticipated that the proposed school would have 30 full time staff and 10 part time staff (or 4 FTE). Full time staff are anticipated to arrive on-site at 08:30 and leave at 16:30. The part time staff would be accompanying pupils in an activity off site in addition to 5 catering staff who would be on-site between 11:30-14:00.

Access into the site would remain from Christchurch Road, via the existing in/out arrangement. Similarly, to the former site, most pupils will arrive to site in private vehicles or collectively via school minibus/school vehicle. The application includes amendments to the existing parking area to provide a more formalised arrangement for drop off and pickups.

The site is located in Zone 2 of the Council's adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD which requires a maximum of 1 space per 2 Full Time Equivalent. The site would provide a total of 30 full time staff and 4 full time. 17 parking spaces are proposed in addition to a formalised drop off/pick up bay at the site entrance which can accommodate two vehicles dropping off/picking up students although the layout can accommodate additional vehicles

queueing off the highway. 2 electric vehicle parking spaces (10%) are also proposed in line with TR5 of the Reading Local Plan.

Cycle parking is proposed, however, given the complex needs of pupils, no cycle parking is proposed for pupils. However, 10 cycle spaces for staff are proposed. Considering the unique nature of the school, the proposed provision is acceptable.

In terms of traffic generation, an impact assessment has been undertaken to compare the former school with the proposed development. The net impact assessment is provided in Table 3 and indicates that the proposed development would result in a reduction in 5 trips in the AM peak and 5 trips in the school peak when compared to the former school which is associated with the reduced pupil numbers and associated reducing in staffing numbers.

All the servicing and delivery arrangements for the proposed development would be similar to that of the former school via the existing in/out arrangement. Tracking drawings have been undertaken of a delivery vehicle to confirm this can enter and exit the site in a forward gear.

In summary, given that the site will remain in education use providing a special educational needs school which is comparable in size to the former school (in terms staff and pupil numbers), there are no transport objections to this application. Subject to conditions.

Planning Officer Note: An updated Transport Statement was received on 10th October 2023 following amendments being made to the scheme. The Transport Officer reviewed the minor amendments to the parking bays (as shown on revision C02) and has confirmed this is acceptable.

No further update to previous Transport comments is required.

Ecology

The application site is the former school at 40 Christchurch Road. The proposals include the demolition of the existing single storey extension to the rear and upgrade of the classrooms to the rear. Changes to the hard and soft landscaping are proposed and a fence will be installed around the existing MUGA enclosure.

Bats

The Ecology Report (Ecology Works Ltd, October 2023) includes the results of two emergence bat surveys. Five common pipistrelle bats were seen to emerge from the three different locations of the building and the report concludes that the proposed renovation works to the main school building will disturb or harm roosting bats.

As such, a licence for development works affecting bats will need to be obtained from Natural England - for derogation from the provisions of the Habitat Regulations - before works which could impact upon the roost can commence.

Planning Officer Note: The agent contacted the planning officer to advise that urgent repair works were needed to the valley roof, due to the theft of leadwork. Therefore, the Ecologist consultant submitted a request for a Bat Mitigation Class Licence, which was granted.

Ecology confirmed that as the bat licence is now submitted it does not now need to be conditioned and both methods of working suggested are acceptable.

Other protected species, and priority habitats

Habitats on site comprise predominantly hardstanding/building, improved grassland, introduced shrub, small patches of tall ruderal vegetation, hedgerow, and scattered trees. The trees will be retained, and loss of vegetated areas will be minimal with new tree planting proposed. The ecology report concludes that the proposals unlikely to adversely affect priority habitats or other protected species subject to the implementation of mitigation measures within the report. These measures could be secured via a planning condition.

Lighting

External lighting details have not been provided as part of this application. As lighting has become cheaper and more accessible, there is a tendency for excessive amounts of lighting to be installed around developments. As such, a condition should be set to ensure that if external lighting is necessary, the lighting scheme will be minimal and wildlife friendly.

Landscaping and Biodiversity Enhancements

The applicant has submitted an outline landscaping scheme that includes new planting. However, there are no species specified on the submitted plans. As such, a condition should be set to ensure that full details are submitted.

In summary, there are no Ecology objections to this application. Subject to conditions.

RBC Environmental Protection

The Environmental Protection team originally raised concerns with regards to the following:

- Noise arising from development - MUGA
- Construction and Demolition phase
- Bin storage - rats

Further to these concerns, the agent submitted an Air Quality and Dust Management Plan, and a Construction Noise Management Plan on the 12th September 2023. The Environmental Health Officer confirmed these details were acceptable.

Additional details for the MUGA were also submitted by the agent, regarding the operational hours, the EPDM insert system on the fence enclosure, and confirmation that there will be no floodlights. The Environmental Health Officer confirmed these details were acceptable, subject to a condition for the EDPM system.

An updated site plan was received to show the proposed bin store location but this didn't include detail on the construction of the bin store to demonstrate that it will be vermin proof. Therefore, a condition is also attached to ensure details of bin store.

In summary, there are no Environmental Protection objections to this application. Subject to conditions.

RBC Natural Environment

The parking at the front on the west side is within the potential RPA of the off-site Council Horse chestnut and requires conversion of soft landscape (grass) to parking. The age of these walls (as indicated) is likely to mean shallow foundations and given the proximity of the Horse chestnut, roots could easily be under the grass area (depth unknown) - without any trial investigations confirming the contrary, it should be assumed that roots will be present. As such, greater detail is required on the intended conversion of soft to hard. Similarly, the formalisation of parking on the east side is within the RPA of the off-site, TPO Holm oak, hence confirmation is required of any works intended to up-grade the surfacing.

The eastern parking spaces will also result in parking coming under the canopy of the Horse chestnut, i.e. under the canopy of an old tree which has already experienced limb failure. The current grass area provides a buffer; the new parking spaces will result in a greater risk from the tree and potential pressure to manage it more intensively.

With regards to the proposed single storey rear extension, given the nature of the existing building, confirmation is required that either existing foundations can be used / no excavation for foundations is required for the extension below existing.

It can be seen when comparing the existing and proposed plans, the current extent of the none surfaced (soft - grass and 'woodland floor') area, compared to the proposed, which comes close to the trunk of the TPO Beech leaving only a small soft area around the base of the trunk, to the north and west of it.

Given the sensitivity of Beech trees to root disturbance and drought, the change is not a positive one, hence is of concern. Whilst a CCS and porous surfacing is proposed, this will be less permeable than grass.

In conclusion, the AIA does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the development is acceptable in relation to high amenity Council and TPO trees, contrary to EN14 and aims of our adopted Tree Strategy.

Planning Officer Note: Following the original comments from the Natural Environment Team above, the agent made some changes to the scheme including amendments to the parking spaces and removing the single storey rear extension from the proposal completely. Subsequently, a revised AIA was submitted. The Natural Environment officer confirmed the revised AIA was acceptable and in conclusion there are no objections subject to conditions.

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

5. 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'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION
CC3: ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE
CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM
CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

CC9: SECURING INFRASTRUCTURE
EN12: BIODIVERSITY AND THE GREEN NETWORK
EN14: TREES, HEDGES AND WOODLAND
TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS
TR4: CYCLE ROUTES AND FACILITIES
TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

SPD

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

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APPRAISAL

Principle of use

The previous use of the building was as a school and the alterations would improve the facilities. The proposed development would be in accordance with Policy OU1, which supports proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities. The principle of the proposed development would, therefore, be acceptable subject to meeting other policy requirements, as set out below.

Design, Appearance and Effect on the Conservation Area

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) states that all development must be of high design quality that maintains the character and appearance of the area within which it is located including layout, landscape, density, scale and architectural detail and materials of similar spaces in the vicinity.

The proposed development is considered acceptable in relation to the surrounding area and the Mount Conservation Area (which is opposite the school). The proposal site would retain its existing character.

In terms of design, the proposed development is considered visually acceptable and will not harm the character of the building, nor the surrounding area. The proposals will enhance the appearance of the building. The fenestrations and external finishes will be updated across the whole site and the landscaping will also be enhanced. The proposed materials and finishes are considered suitable, the colours proposed for the cladding will be grey, charcoal antique.

The scale and layout is similar to that of the existing arrangement and therefore is considered to be acceptable and accords with policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Neighbouring Amenity

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) seeks that development proposals should safeguard the amenity of both existing and future occupiers and Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) seeks that development will only be permitted where it would not be damaging to the environment and sensitive receptors in terms of pollution.

The proposed development does not involve enlarging the existing building or increasing the buildings footprint. Therefore, there are no identified risks of the proposals causing overbearing effects or visual dominance to neighbouring properties. Furthermore, the proposed development will not result in any additional loss of light to any nearby occupiers.

With regards to overlooking, no additional openings are proposed in the first or second floors of the building.

The MUGA area is the same as the existing area from the previous school. There will be no floodlights and the operational hours will be within the school opening hours of 08:30 to 16:30. An EPDM (ethylene propylene diene monomer), which is a synthetic rubber material, insert system will be used on the fence to reduce noise from impact. A condition is attached to this permission for the use of the EPDM system.

Fires during construction and demolition can impact on air quality and cause harm to residential amenity, as well as dust, dirt and other airborne pollutants. Therefore a condition is attached to ensure that a Construction Method Statement has been submitted to and been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to commencement of the development.

Transport

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.

Transport has confirmed that the amount of parking spaces would accord with the Parking Standards SPD and all the servicing and delivery arrangements for the proposed development would be similar to that of the former school via the existing in/out arrangement. The proposed development would result in a reduction in 5 trips in the AM peak and 5 trips in the school peak when compared to the former school. The amount of cycle spaces proposed is considered acceptable.

Overall, therefore, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of Transport matters and accords with policies TR1, TR3, and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Biodiversity & Trees

Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) seeks that development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and should provide for a net gain of biodiversity wherever possible by protecting, enhancing and incorporating features of biodiversity on and adjacent to development sites and by providing new tree planting and wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements wherever practicable.

Policy EN14 states individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended. New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained.

The Council's Ecologist confirmed that the proposals would disturb or harm roosting bats and that a bat licence would be required for the proposal. However, the applicant confirmed, during the course of the application, that a request for a Bat Mitigation Class Licence had

already been granted. As such no further detail in this respect is required. Conditions are attached to this permission as per the Ecologist's comments regarding mitigation measures and lighting.

The proposal would result in the loss of two category C trees, however, these are not considered to be of significant visual amenity value and the key site and surrounding feature trees remain. Conditions are recommended to ensure that tree protection and ground protection measures are in place during the course of the development and a condition is also attached requiring the submission and approval of a comprehensive scheme of hard and soft landscaping.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of Ecology and Natural Environment matters and accords with policies EN12 and EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

CONCLUSION

The proposed development has been assessed and the proposed works are considered to be in accordance with the above relevant policies and planning permission can be granted.

RECOMMENDATION:

GRANT, subject to conditions and informatives