

PLANNING STATEMENT

Demolition of existing building (mural wall to be retained and restored), construction of new building to accommodate a community hall (Use Class F2) and 17 no. residential flats (Use Class C3), with associated works & landscaping

**Reading Central Club
36-42 London Street
Reading
RG1 4SQ**

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. SITE LOCATION AND CONTEXT	4
3. THE PROPOSED SCHEME	9
4. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	13
5. LOCAL PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	17
6. KEY ISSUES	22
7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES & SUMMARY	33

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This statement has been prepared by Woolf Bond Planning LLP in support of a planning application proposing the redevelopment of the building at 36-42 London Street, Reading, known as the 'Reading Central Club', with a community hall (use class F2) at ground floor level, and 17 no. 1, 2 and 3 bedroom flats over 4 storeys, with associated cycle parking, bin storage and landscaping. The existing mural would be retained and repaired (where necessary) as part of the proposal.
- 1.2. The existing site forms a brownfield site occupied by a one to two storey community use building, that has been vacant for circa 15 years. It is located in a highly accessible location. The site is identified in the adopted Reading Local Plan (2019) for residential development (to include ground floor community provision). It is located within a Conservation Area and adjacent to a listed building. Further, it includes a non-designated heritage asset in the form of a mural. The historic mural was painted on the building in 1990 and is required to be retained and preserved as part of redevelopment proposals.
- 1.3. The allocation policy CR14h allocates the site for:

"Development for residential with potential for ground floor community provision".
- 1.4. The policy sets out the details which an application for development of the site should take into consideration, including making a positive contribution to the Conservation Area, retaining the mural, taking account of potential archaeological significance and addressing noise impacts and air quality.
- 1.5. This statement summarises the acceptability of the proposal having regard to the above, and other relevant planning policy considerations. It details how the scheme responds to local planning policies such that the application can be supported. It concludes that the scheme is development plan compliant and entirely acceptable having regard to all relevant town planning considerations.

2. SITE LOCATION AND CONTEXT

- 2.1. A detailed summary of the existing site and its associated context is provided within the supporting Design & Access Statement.
- 2.2. The application site comprises a prominent corner site, on the road junction of London Street and Mill Lane, adjacent to the IDR, on the edge of Reading town centre. The site is currently occupied by a 1 to 2 storey brick building, which was originally built as a police facility and most recently used as a youth club and music venue. The defining feature of the building is the large historic mural present across the northern elevation of the building. Further details of the history and significance of the mural are included within the accompanying Heritage Statement. Retention of the mural is a requirement of the Local Plan policy allocation for the site and an intrinsic part of the proposed scheme.



Figure 1 – Street view of the eastern elevation of the existing building, from London Street (Source: Google Maps)



Figure 2 – Street view of the northern elevation of the existing building from the IDR, clearly showing the mural (Source: Google Maps)

- 2.3. The site is included within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. London Street is a historic street, with a large number of listed buildings. Adjacent to the site is a row of cottages which are Grade II listed, and opposite the site The Great Expectations pub building is also Grade II listed.
- 2.4. The southern elevation of the building lies adjacent to highway land with a neighbouring run of cottages on London Street beyond. The rear / west of the building faces onto Crossland Road, and the former John Lewis collection depot¹. The rear of The Oracle shopping centre is clearly prominent on the northern side of the IDR in views from the site.

¹ Allocated for redevelopment under Policy CR14g – The Oracle Extension, Bridge Street and Letcombe Street, for additional retail floorspace and car parking



Figure 3 – Street view of the rear elevation of the existing building from Crossland Road (Source: Google Maps)

- 2.5. Crossland Road to the rear of the site provides the only vehicular access to the site. The ground to the rear of the application building, and adjacent buildings is hard surfaced in tarmac, and used for the parking of vehicles, and servicing for those which contain retail / commercial units at ground floor level.



Figure 4 – Aerial view of the site (edged red, not to scale) and its context with surrounding buildings and the highway network (Source: Google Maps)

- 2.6. To the south of the site is a near continuous building line of historic properties on both sides of London Street. The buildings range in height from 2 to 4 storeys, with a variety of uses including retail / services, offices, residential and a public house. The street is intermittently tree-lined and is a busy through-fare with a one way system for most traffic flowing in a southerly direction (up the hill), and a bus / taxi / cycle lane heading northwards (downhill) towards the town centre. Both sides of the street also accommodate metered parking bays. London Street also has wide footpaths, which are well utilised by pedestrians moving into and out of the town centre, as well as to access the various shops and services along London Street itself.



Figure 5 – Street view of the buildings lining the western side of London Street, looking southwards (Source: Google Maps)

- 2.7. The site as existing offers a limited contribution towards the quality of the public realm and Conservation Area. It has no notable presence as a corner building which is situated at a crossroads to the town centre, except for the mural which would only be visible when approaching the site from the north / town centre. In its current state, the building appears somewhat drab and uninviting after years of disuse.
- 2.8. To the north, there is pedestrian access to the eastern end of The Oracle shopping centre, as well as further into the town centre, either through The Oracle, or via Yield Hall Place or London Street / Duke Street through utilising the pedestrian crossing points across Mill Lane and the IDR. Reading railway station is approximately 600m to the north of the site and is walkable in around 10 minutes. Numerous bus routes serve the site, with regular buses to surrounding residential areas available. These attributes make the site a highly sustainable location, with the opportunity to make more efficient use of the land than at present.

- 2.9. This planning application for redevelopment of the site seeks to retain the elements of the building which are important to the cultural and historic heritage of the town, and create a modern mixed-use development, with a design which is bespoke to the site. This will seek to make the best use of the site in terms of efficient land use, whilst balancing the need to retain and enhance the key features of the existing building.
- 2.10. The development proposed in this application is the result of a long and detailed consultation through pre-application with the Local Planning Authority, including the planning officers, design review panel and conservation team. The Design & Access Statement sets out a thorough report of the consultative design process and shows the evolution of the redevelopment proposals to this point. This detailed pre-application engagement is in accordance with the practices encouraged by NPPF paragraphs 39 to 42 and paragraph 132.

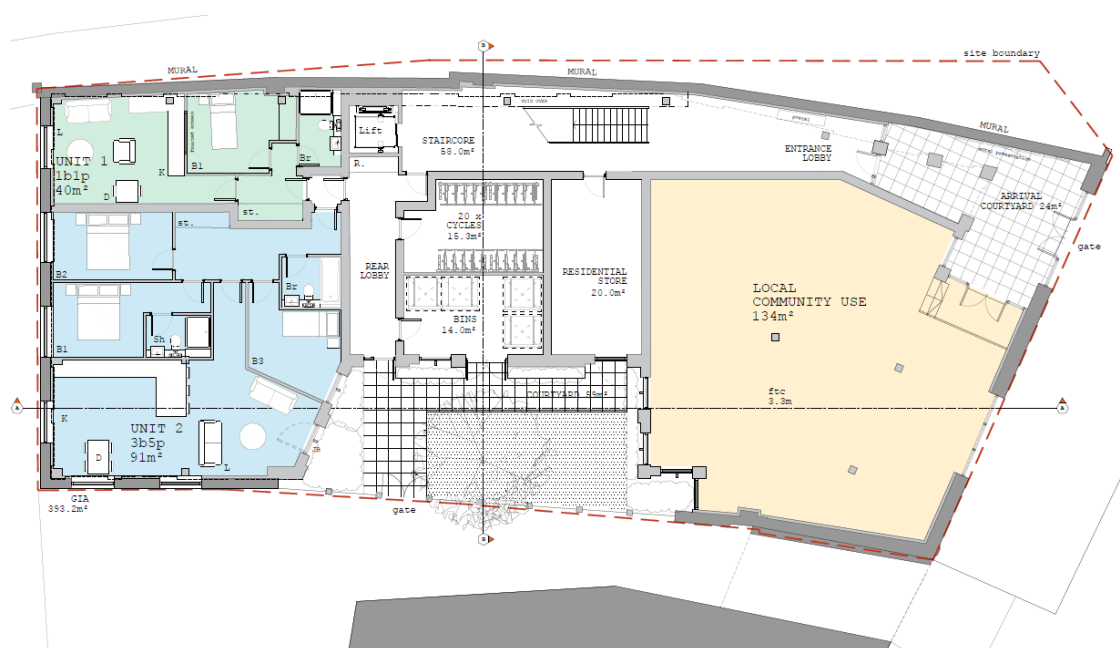
3. THE PROPOSED SCHEME

3.1. The accompanying Design and Access Statement ('DAS') provides further site analysis, an assessment of constraints and opportunities and justification regarding the proposed scheme's design, layout and scale with reference to pre-application feedback. It also includes a detailed summary of the proposed scheme's various elements, and details of materials. Pages 19 – 21 of the DAS set out the history of the mural, explanation of the various images and an overview of the phases for the protection and restoration of the mural (secured through the proposal)

3.2. The scheme's principal elements are as follows:

- The scheme provides a mixed use development, including a community hall space (use class F2), together with 17 residential apartments (use class C3). It comprises a new 4 storey building, which retains the historic mural on the Mill Lane elevation and creates an internal courtyard for the new residents to enjoy.
- The flats comprise a true mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedrooms, ensuring that the need for a range of dwelling sizes on the site is achieved. They have been designed to achieve the national internal space standards.
- Affordable housing is provided in the form of units 1 and 2.
- The existing building is to be largely demolished, however some of the existing fabric is to be retained and used within the fabric of the new building (see detailed demolition plans). The historic mural is to be retained and preserved as outlined in the DAS, in accordance with the policy site allocation requirements.
- A car free development on a highly sustainably located site, with the provision of secure cycle parking provided for all of the residential flats.
- A more efficient use of land in an accessible location on brownfield land.
- The London Street elevations have been designed following a detailed analysis of the street's buildings, in terms of proportions, fenestration, architectural style and materials. The detailed design proposed seeks to reflect the key characteristics of the historic street, with its listed buildings and Conservation Area, without looking to replicate them, so that it fits in with the overall character, but stands out as a contemporary building of its time. This process has included close collaboration with the Council's heritage department.
- A package of low energy and sustainability measures are proposed so to ensure that the scheme meets the Borough's policy requirements and limits its overall demand upon the existing local networks.

- 3.3. The application is supported by detailed reports relating to energy and sustainability, noise and air quality, daylight, affordable housing and heritage. Where relevant to respective planning policy requirements the reader is referred to these respective reports.
- 3.4. The below image forms the proposed ground floor plan and illustrates the ground floor layout of the proposed new building. Both the community use and residential flats will be accessed via separate entrance doors on the London Street frontage (right hand side below). The residential access will be security coded and have a door wide enough to allow residents to bring their bicycles inside the entrance foyer, to access the internal cycle storage. A courtyard is sited on the southern side of the new building, away from the passing traffic and orientated to enjoy sunlight.



Proposed ground floor plan – drawing no. 03-10

- 3.5. The frontage elevation has been set back above first floor level. This is to reveal the gable end of the adjacent listed terrace (44 London Street), thus respecting the heritage status of the building. The height of the building at a maximum of 4 storeys is also offset by stepping back the upper floors. This is illustrated in the CGI image included below. A further impact of this arrangement of the main facade is to emphasise the importance of the community use at ground floor level, with the residential uses above appearing

subservient. This also serves to enhance the retained mural which is a key component of the redevelopment of this prominent centrally located site.



CGI of the proposed building in its context, from a north-easterly perspective

- 3.6. The above image clearly shows that from a 'human' perspective from the street scene passing the mural, the cultural experience of passing and viewing the mural will not change. The added development above the mural does not detract from the mural itself by virtue of its set back and recessionary nature. From London Street, the building will initially appear as a tall single storey building at ground level, with the upper floors of the building set back from view. This will ensure that the building does not dominate the street scene in this location, and there continues to be intervisibility across the road junction to The Oracle shopping centre. The chosen materials palette comprising predominantly brick will contrast with the painted brick and tiled roofs of the adjacent terraces. This will provide clear visual distinction between the historic and contemporary buildings on this side of London Street.
- 3.7. The rear and side of the building (visible from the Mill Lane approach and also within Crossland Road) has also been carefully designed, in particular the southern elevation which sides onto the adjacent listed terrace. The southern elevation has been stepped in across all 4 storeys to create an inset courtyard. This will not only serve to provide the residents with valuable outdoor amenity space, but also creates additional south

facing windows within the elevation which the flats will benefit from in terms of natural light provision. The inset courtyard also serves to take the bulk of the building away from the rear element of the adjacent terraces, providing important separation between the two buildings in this built-up location. The rear (western) elevation is a simple design, with vertical windows. This elevation provides a clear definition to the site, and security for the residents.



CGI image of the building from the south-west

3.8. The dwelling mix of the proposed development is set out below.

Flat size	No. of flats	Market	Affordable
1 bedroom	7	6	1
2 bedroom	7	7	0
3 bedroom	3	2	1
Total	17	17	2

3.9. The scheme therefore provides for a true mix of types and sizes of residential accommodation so to enable a mixed community, alongside a significant community use space.

4. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. This section provides a summary of national policy relevant to the application scheme.

National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF')

- 4.2. A revised NPPF was published in July 2021 and sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It is a material consideration of particular standing in the making of planning decisions.

Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

- 4.3. The NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development and paragraph 8 identifies that there are three dimensions to sustainable development, comprising (i) economic, (ii) social and (iii) environmental. An assessment of the scheme having regard to these three roles is set out later in this statement.

Pre-application engagement and front-loading

- 4.4. Paragraph 39 onwards set out the 'significant potential' for early engagement to **'improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties'**. Paragraph 41 continues by stating that **'For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs'**.

Delivering a sufficient supply of homes

- 4.5. Paragraph 60 explains that **'To support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay'**.

Promoting sustainable transport

- 4.6. Paragraph 105 states that **"The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives. Significant development should be**

focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.... However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, than this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision making’. As mentioned in section 2, the site is very sustainably located having regard to its location within a short walking distance of The Oracle Shopping Centre which forms a key section of Reading town centre with its extensive range of shops, restaurants, services and facilities. The site is also within a few metres of a regular bus service. It is therefore an appropriate and highly accessible location for additional residential development.

Making effective use of land

- 4.7. Paragraph 119 refers to the need for **‘Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or ‘brownfield’ land’.**

- 4.8. Paragraph 120, parts (c) and (d) state that planning decisions should:

c) give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs, and support appropriate opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land;

d) promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively (for example converting space above shops, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure)⁴⁸;

- 4.9. Paragraph 125, part (c) refers to the importance of making an efficient use of land:

125. Area-based character assessments, design guides and codes and masterplans can be used to help ensure that land is used efficiently while also creating beautiful and sustainable places. Where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies 37 and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site. In these circumstances:

...

c) local planning authorities should refuse applications which they consider fail to make efficient use of land, taking into account the policies in this Framework. In this context, when considering applications for housing, authorities should take a flexible approach in applying policies or guidance relating to daylight and sunlight, where they would otherwise inhibit making efficient use of a site (as long as the resulting scheme would provide acceptable living standards).

- 4.10. The scheme is fully consistent with the above objectives by enabling the delivery of a substantial number of new residential dwellings in an appropriate settlement location on previously developed land. As indicated in the Design & Access Statement together with the submitted plans, the proposed dwellings are orientated and arranged on the site to both make more efficient use of the site whilst ensuring adequate separation between existing buildings and the proposed structure to respect the historic character of the conservation area. The proposed layout has also therefore considered the balance envisaged in section 11 of the NPPF in making more efficient use of the site whilst providing a scheme that has considered the area's prevailing character and setting.

Achieving well-designed places

- 4.11. Chapter 12 seeks that high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places are achieved through the planning process and explains that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. The scheme is consistent with these objectives in enabling a high quality design appropriate to the site's prominent location and in enabling a substantial improvement in the overall design quality of the site and its contribution to the public realm. This point is detailed further in the supporting Design and Access Statement that details the collaborative design exercise that has been undertaken (including design review panels).

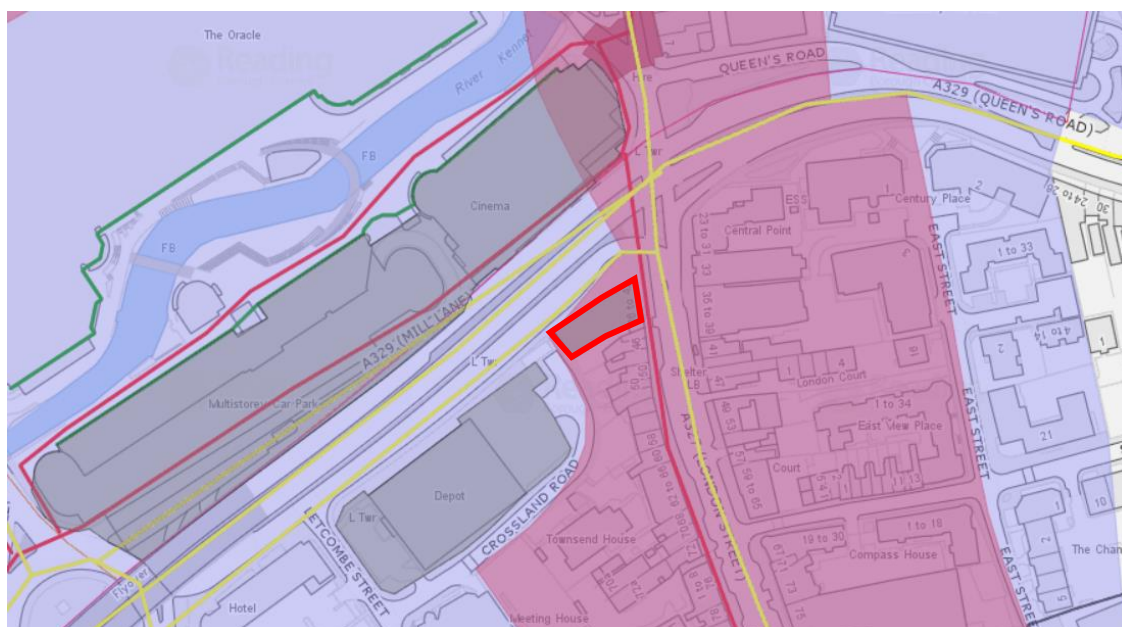
Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

- 4.12. Chapter 16 sets out the policies which support the conservation of identified heritage assets in the development process. **'In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting'** (para. 194).

- 4.13. Paragraph 197 sets out that **‘In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:**
- a) The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;**
 - b) The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and**
 - c) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness’.**
- 4.14. Paragraph 199 goes on to state 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’.** The applicant and project architect have gone to great lengths to ensure that not only the mural is retained as per the allocation policy, but also the London Street facade is sensitive to its Conservation Area location. Furthermore, the design evolution has enabled the gable end of the adjacent historic terrace to remain visible to the public realm. This process has included detailed engagement with the Council’s heritage department.

5. LOCAL PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out a requirement that planning applications are to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant existing development plan comprises the Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted November 2019).
- 5.2. As illustrated on the proposals map extract below (the approximate application site boundary is edged in red), the site is located within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area, is covered by the area of archaeological potential policy and is an allocated development site.



Extract from Local Plan Proposals Map (approximate application site boundary edged in red)

- 5.3. The pink shading indicates the extent of the Conservation Area, and the lilac shading shows the area which is considered to have the archaeological potential. Further, the grey colour covering the site, and others in the vicinity, indicate that they are allocated for development. Finally, the red and yellow lines indicate the site's proximity to key cycle routes and the classified highway network.

Reading Borough Local Plan

- 5.4. Reading Borough Local Plan policies relevant to the acceptability of the scheme are summarised below:

Policy	Acceptability of the Application Scheme
CC1	Policy CC1 outlines how the presumption in favour of sustainable development will be applied. This indicates that proposals according with the development plan will be approved without delay. As outlined below, the application fully accords with the development plan when considered as a whole and consequently can be approved.
CC2, CC3 & CC4	These policies outline how new development should address factors associated with sustainable design and construction to take account of the effects of climate change. As set out within the supporting Energy Report, the proposed development has been designed to include rooftop solar panels and air source heat pumps so to ensure it limits its energy demand upon the grid and is wholly consistent with these policy principles. Further details are set out in the supporting Design & Access and Energy Report.
CC5	This policy sets out how developments should minimise the generation of waste in the construction, and over the lifetime of the building, as well as accommodating waste storage, recycling and composting. The scheme as presented includes a bin storage area, which will have separate receptacles for the storage of waste and recycling. Waste from the demolition process will be reused where feasible and viable.
CC6	This policy highlights the importance of the scale and intensity of development reflecting the accessibility of the site. The site lies within a short walk of The Oracle Shopping centre and the wider town centre and also lies on a bus route. It is therefore a highly sustainable location with easy access to the facilities of the town centre. In planning policy terms, it lies within the defined Reading Central Area boundary. It therefore comprises an appropriate location for high density development that makes efficient use of a brownfield site, whilst the design provides for an appropriate transition between the varying scales of development found on London Street and the greater scale of development found along Queen's Road and at The Oracle shopping centre.
CC7	The policy requires a high quality design and layout. As detailed in the Design & Access Statement, this proposal provides a high quality proposal and a scale appropriate to the site's location within the Conservation Area, balanced with the need to fulfil the development requirements set out in the site's allocation policy.

Policy	Acceptability of the Application Scheme
CC8	The accompanying Design & Access Statement and technical reports indicate how the scheme safeguards the amenity of existing and future residents. The supporting noise report confirms that through careful mitigation significant adverse impacts upon the health or quality of life of future residents can be avoided and the scheme is consistent with the aims of the NPPF, NPSE and PPG-Noise. The air quality statement confirm that air quality factors are not a constraint to the development subject to conventional mitigation. Further, the scheme has been respectfully designed so that there is separation between the proposed building and the existing listed terrace, through the set back of the upper floors on the front elevation, and on the southern elevation through the inclusion of an inset courtyard. The present outlook from properties to the south of the site is curtailed by the existing building being sited along the whole of its long south boundary with either blank frontages or blocked up windows clearly visible of a building this has been vacant for a very long period of time. By proposing an internal courtyard, the proposal steps the building away from the windows that lie to the south and re-introduces a good neighbour use when compared to the present vacant and dilapidated building. The scheme therefore enables an appropriate relationship with neighbouring buildings in an urban setting.
H1	The scheme will make a material contribution towards the Council's minimum housing requirement of 15,847 dwellings over the plan period 2013 to 2036. It is noted that this requirement is to form an 'at least' figure and in addition, there is a need to identify additional housing in neighbouring authorities through both the current housing requirement and in particular when the future standard method approach is applied to any new Local Plan.
H2	The scheme proposes 17 dwellings (in apartment form) on a 0.05ha site. The density of development is therefore 340 dwellings per hectare. As the site is within the Central Area adjoins the defined centre of Reading, this is considered appropriate and reflective of the densities envisaged of the centre. This is especially relevant when one considers that it an apartment form of development, and therefore naturally the density will be higher by virtue of the scheme's character. It is further appropriate to the site's highly accessible location. The scheme includes 7 no. 1 bed, 7 no. 2 bed and 3 no. 3 bed dwellings. The proposal complies with Policy CR6 that requires a maximum 40% of units to be 1 bed and a minimum 5% of units to be at least 3 bed units in the central area. The inclusion of 3 no. 3 bed dwellings in the proposal is considered a particularly strong planning benefit given recent times few apartments of this size have been competed in the central area.

Policy	Acceptability of the Application Scheme
H3	The scheme proposes 2 affordable housing units. This provision will offer a useful contribution on a site that will have considerable viability constraints in its construction process.
H5	The Design & Access Statement and proposed floor plans confirm that the scheme achieves the nationally described space standards. Further, the Design & Access Statement and Energy Statement confirm the scheme complies with the other standards required by the policy.
H10	Communal amenity space is provided in the form of an enclosed courtyard, on the southern side of the building. The detailed design of this space will be subject to hard landscape type condition. However, it could include benches for sitting out, and a landscaping scheme to provide shaded spaces in this south facing amenity space.
TR5	The scheme includes appropriate secure cycle parking provision as envisaged by the policy.
CR2	The proposed scheme seeks to address the various requirements of this design in central Reading policy including: a. ensuring that the frontage engages with the street through inclusion of an internal courtyard which will be open to the public during hall opening hours, this also fulfils the public art requirement, b. landscaping is incorporated into the design, making best use of the compact space available by providing areas of planting, a focal tree and benches, d. use of quality materials including red brick, metal cladding and window frames, e. provision of a level access to the ground floor spaces, fully customisable community space, lift access to upper residential floors and all flats designed to meet M4(2) standards, f. careful design consideration has been given to the adjacent terrace and occupiers.
CR14h	The site specific allocation policy seeks the redevelopment of the site to include a mix of residential and community uses. This is achieved through the proposed development as detailed in the application plans. The proposed design of the building has been developed in consultation with the Council's Conservation and Urban Design Officer, through a detailed pre-application process, which has evolved the scale and design of the scheme. The proposed development includes 17 flats (which is greater than the 8-12 dwellings set out in the policy). This is considered to be a benefit of the proposal, as by designing in additional flats, better use is made of this highly sustainably located site while securing a design that is particularly appropriate in ensuring the mural remains the prominent feature when viewed from the north.

Policy	Acceptability of the Application Scheme
	As required by the policy, the mural is to be retained as part of the development and protected, outlined as follows: 1. Protection of the artwork during construction phase through use of padded protection and plywood boarding, 2. Stabilisation of the wall using a steel frame, 3. Reconnection to the building ensuring long-term stability, 4. Restoration of the artwork. A supporting Schedule of Work for the mural accompanies the application and as detailed in the supporting Design & Access Statement. The potential archaeological significance of the site has been considered in the Heritage Statement. It is anticipated that a suitable programme of archaeological monitoring and recording will be provided and subject to an appropriately worded planning condition the scheme will have a negligible impact upon any archaeological features. This scheme's impact in noise respects is considered in the supporting Noise Impact Assessment. This confirms that future residents will not be exposed to harmful levels of noise subject to appropriate mitigation to be secured by condition. Potential air quality issues have been assessed in the supporting Air Quality Assessment and confirmed as not a limitation to the site's development.

- 5.5. The proposal therefore accords with the site allocation policy, as well as the generally relevant policies in the development plan when considered as a whole (consistent with case law including the 2000 R v Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council and 2014 Arsenal Football Club Plc v SoS for CLG and Islington London Borough Council judgments).

6. KEY ISSUES

- 6.1. Having regard to the above site, scheme and policy context, the key issues relating to the proposal are now considered in further detail below.

Principle of Development

- 6.2. The application site is located within the defined settlement of Reading where national and local planning policies strongly support new residential development. The below commentary taken from the Local Plan explains the Council's spatial strategy and the constrained nature of the Borough:

'3.2.1 The constrained nature of Reading Borough dictates the spatial strategy to some extent. Significant development can only occur where sites are available, which inevitably means a considerable focus on the centre and south of Reading. Opportunities for large-scale expansion of the town onto greenfield sites within the Borough are virtually non-existent, with the small rural areas within the boundaries subject to significant flood risk. This means a need to look within the existing urban area for opportunities, and to ensure efficient use of land'.

...

'4.4.3 However, Reading is a very tightly defined urban area, and sites for new development are limited. The undeveloped land that does exist is mainly either in the functional floodplain or is important public open space. Provision of new housing therefore involves a heavy reliance on previously developed land, and the supply of such sites constrains the amount of housing that can be delivered in the Borough. The Council therefore needs to set targets for housing provision that are capable of being met'.

- 6.3. There are some key points arising from the above. First, there is a considerable focus on the centre of Reading to meet housing needs. As a result, there is a need to actively look for opportunities to enable the efficient use of land. Second, there is a heavy reliance on previously developed land. Finally, the ability for the Borough to use greenfield sites to meet housing needs is virtually non-existent.
- 6.4. The site is of a previously developed nature and has been vacant for many years, resulting in a negative contribution to the character and appearance of the street scene and Conservation Area on this prominent site. Its allocation in the Local Plan for mixed-use redevelopment confirms its suitability for a more intensive use, including both a community space and residential flats. It follows that the site offers a prime

redevelopment opportunity to contribute towards the Borough's minimum housing requirements. The principle of development on the site is therefore very much established and the ability to bring forward such a rare and appropriate site that is fully consistent with the Council's spatial strategy attracts significant positive weight in the overall planning balance exercise. These points are further supported by the NPPF that also advocates the importance of the efficient use of previously developed land especially in accessible locations.

Form of development and compliance with Policy CR14h

- 6.5. As illustrated in earlier sections, the site is located within the Reading Central Area as defined in the Local Plan and is allocated for redevelopment. The form, layout and scale of redevelopment has been explored in detail through a lengthy pre-application process (over many years), resulting in the scheme that is the subject of this application. As presented, the scheme meets with the overarching requirements of the site's allocation policy as follows:

Make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area and the setting of nearby listed buildings

- 6.6. The development proposal has identified and included key areas where the redevelopment scheme is able to make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area; through retaining an existing London Street elevation – this ensures continuity at street level with the public facade of the building which is an established part of the London Road street scene (albeit not listed); retention and restoration of the mural fronting Mill Lane – fulfils the policy requirement, but also ensures protection of a non-designated heritage asset. The fact that the mural will be restored as part of the proposals, and additional information displayed for public education and enjoyment is a further benefit of this scheme. Further, the setting back of the upper floors of the new residential part of the building to ensure the gable end of 44 London Street remains visible means the historic importance of the adjacent terraces will remain visible within the public realm and will provide balance between the two buildings.
- 6.7. The design approach, using mainly brick as the dominant building material, with bronze coloured metal window frames and other metal elements, ensures that the new building will not compete with the nearby listed buildings which are a mixture of render, painted brick, and stone. The new part of the building will read as contemporary, but subtle

addition, to ensure that there is no visual competition or confusion with the listed buildings. The use of high quality materials together with the design approach and the rhythm of fenestration reflects the historic material and will ensure that the development will make a positive contribution to the historic London Street street scene.

Retain the iconic mural on the northern frontage

- 6.8. A key part of the proposals is the retention, protection through construction and restoration of the historic mural. As set out in the accompanying Design & Access Statement, there is a 4 phase plan to securing the future of the mural and its importance within the new development;

PHASE ONE - PROTECTION OF THE ARTWORK

The first step to be taken before any work is commenced on site is to ensure that the painted face of the mural wall is protected from even minor damage. It is proposed to cover the artwork in a protective padded layer, which is boarded over with construction grade plywood to prevent any accidental damage through impact. There is potential for the temporary covering to display community artwork.

PHASE TWO - STABILISATION OF THE WALL

Parts of the existing building are not suitable for future retention and will be removed before construction work can commence. The stability of the mural wall will be ensured during this phase by the insertion of a steel frame to brace the existing wall.

PHASE THREE - RECONNECTION TO THE BUILDING

Once the structural work of the proposed building has been completed the mural wall and its structural frame can be connected back to the building. This will ensure the long-term stability of the wall and the mural.

PHASE FOUR - RESTORATION OF THE ARTWORK

Once the construction works are externally complete there is no further risk to the mural and the protective covering can be removed. At this point the mural will be fully accessible and the restoration can be undertaken.

[Extract from Design & Access Statement]

- 6.9. This demonstrates that consideration of the mural has been of fundamental importance throughout not only the design stage, but also looking forward into the construction phase and beyond. Once completed, the iconic mural will be preserved in situ for visitors to enjoy, with the addition of information regarding the mural's history inside the

foyer of the new community space. It is considered that this approach represents the best possible outcome for the mural and will confirm its importance as part of Reading's local cultural history.

- 6.10. The PPG advises that **“public benefits may follow from many developments and could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives as described in the National Planning Policy Framework”**. The scheme achieves many public benefits. First, it provides a significant contribution towards the Council's pressing minimum housing needs including affordable housing. Second, it secures development in a highly accessible location on previously developed land and on a small site. In spatial strategy terms its development is directly supported. Third, it includes community space provision on a site that has not contributed such provision for around 15 years since its closure. This will result in considerable social benefit to the community. Fourth, the new occupiers and users of the community space will contribute to the local economy through increased spending in the immediate area. Further, considerable employment generation will be enabled through the construction process and potentially through the new community use. Fifth, an improvement in design terms will occur on the site when compared to its present inactive and dilapidated contribution. Finally, investment to retain and as necessary restore the existing mural will be secured through the proposal. The scheme therefore offers a substantial number of public benefits to which substantial positive weight must be attached.

Take account of potential archaeological significance

- 6.11. The potential archaeological significance of the site has been considered in the Heritage Statement. It is anticipated that a suitable programme of archaeological monitoring and recording will be provided and subject to an appropriately worded planning condition the scheme will have a negligible impact upon any archaeological features.

Address noise impacts on residential use

- 6.12. The Noise Impact Statement assesses the impact of the existing background noise sources on the proposed uses. The Report concludes that all residential units will achieve suitable living accommodation and not be exposed to harmful levels of noise subject to appropriate mitigation to be secured by condition.

Address air quality impacts on residential use

- 6.13. The accompanying Air Quality Report assessed the development proposals to be acceptable in terms of the impact of the local air quality upon the future residential users of the development and confirms this matter is not a constraint to the site's development.

Summary

- 6.14. The application site has been vacant for approximately 15 years and is located in a very prominent location within the Reading central area. It represents a rare available brownfield site for redevelopment that can contribute positively towards community use and residential needs and secure a substantive improvement in its contribution towards the public realm. The proposal follows a detailed and comprehensive pre application process and results in a proposal consistent with the identified allocation in the 2019 Reading Local Plan. The scheme as presented therefore wholly accords with the requirements of Policy CR14h and can be supported on this basis.

Density & Dwelling Mix

- 6.15. The scheme proposes 17 dwellings (in apartment form) on a 0.05ha site. The density of development is therefore calculated as 340 dwellings per hectare. Whilst the allocation policy envisaged a range of dwellings being between 8 – 12 (which would result in densities of 160dph – 240dph), through detailed design evolution of development options for the site, it has been agreed with the Council's planners that the proposed scheme meets the design and heritage requirements and aspirations of the Council and the project team, such that the site is able to support additional residential units and that this should be regarded as a benefit of good design. This includes an agreement that the proposed height of the proposal and the set back of the main bulk of the upper floors are appropriate in design terms and subservient to the lower ground floors including the retained of mural.
- 6.16. The scheme includes 7 no. 1 bed, 7 no. 2 bed and 3 no. 3 bed dwellings. The scheme complies with Local Plan Policy CR6 in proposing circa 40% of units as 1 bed dwellings and considerably exceeding the preference for a 5% of units to comprise at least 3 bed by proposing 3 no. 3 bed units. The inclusion of 3 no. 3 bedroom flats provides the development's contribution towards family sized accommodation and is of a size really

offered within the Reading central area. Overall, the scheme comprises suitable mix based on market signals and local housing needs and accords with Policies CR6 and H2 in enabling a true mixed community to form.

Affordable Housing

- 6.17. Policy H3 requires that residential development will make an appropriate contribution towards affordable housing comprising 30% of the total dwellings where a proposal comprises 10 or more dwellings. For the 17 flats proposed, this would equate to 5.1 flats. Of this, 2 are proposed within the development. However, the proposal is also supported by significant investment into the existing murals protection and enhancement in perpetuity and the provision of a substantive area of local community use (use class F2). These further benefits equate to an in lieu contribution towards community needs such that consistent with a viability appraisal an appropriate level of affordable housing is offered through this proposal.

Community Use

- 6.18. The proposal includes a local community use (use class F2) and in doing so will restore a usable community facility to a site that has not offered one for circa 15 years. The ability to successfully restore such a community use comprises a significant social benefit in favour of the proposal and also strongly complies with NPPF paragraph 93 that requires planning decisions to plan positively for the provision of such community facilities. The scheme therefore complies with Local Plan Policy OU1.

Proposed Building Layout, Design, Height & Scale

- 6.19. National guidance and local planning policies require that good design is a key aspect of planning with local policies seeking to ensure that new developments are appropriate to the character of the area.
- 6.20. Moreover, paragraphs 118(d) and 123(c) of the NPPF make it clear that planning decisions should promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings. The scheme is consistent with this objective that provides for an efficient use of land. In addition, it has been discussed how the building's design and materials have evolved in consultation with the Council to put forward the application as proposed, which is considered to be appropriate given the site's location and context.

- 6.21. The accompanying Design & Access Statement sets out in detail the various aspects which contribute towards achieving good design have been identified, analysed and selected in order to create a building which is appropriate in all aspects for the site and proposed land uses.
- 6.22. The building layout broadly reflects the footprint of the existing structure on the site, however clever design has enabled the inclusion of two courtyard spaces for enjoyment as amenity areas; a public entrance courtyard showcasing local art and the history of the historic mural accessed from the London Street entrance, and the residential courtyard on the southern side of the building which will provide communal sitting out space for the future residents.
- 6.23. Possibilities for the height of the building were explored during the iterative pre-application process, and the proposal represents the final outcome of those discussions. The building height is 4 storeys, with space on the roof for solar panels. The 4 storeys comprise what appears to be 2 storeys at ground level of the original building facade, together with the mural, and then 2 additional floors of residential. However internally, there is an additional floor of residential accommodation at first floor level, obscured by the height of the original walls.
- 6.24. This height will create an end viewpoint to London Street, something which is currently lacking, and so will appear relatively tall in short-range views looking up the western side of London Street. However opposite is the substantial Great Expectations stone built public house which is a large 3 storey scale, together with the modern 5 storey office building on the corner with Queen's Road, and numerous other 3-4 storey buildings on London Street. The building will also appear modest with the background of the huge Oracle shopping centre in views northwards. Taking all of the above into account, the height and scale as proposed is considered modest and acceptable, given all of the other factors considered as part of this proposal.
- 6.25. In relation to materials and architectural detailing, the scheme uses red brick as a base but with architectural detailing and a subtle bronze coloured metal as a feature throughout the development to enable a contemporary finish to the building's design. The scheme therefore complies with Policy CC7 in all aspects.

Proposed Amenity Space & Standards for New Housing

- 6.26. As detailed in the Design & Access Statement, the proposed dwellings have been designed to comply with the nationally described space standards, consistent with Local Plan Policy H5. Further, all dwellings benefit from access to the communal courtyard space, which will be landscaped and provide seating. Many of the flats have Juliet balconies included, which will allow for additional sunlight and ventilation into the flats, creating a sense of 'bringing the outdoor in'. Two of the units (7 and 11) will have private terraces, which have been designed into the space over the community hall. As a constrained central area site the proposed scheme includes a range of private and communal amenity space provision consistent with Local Plan Policy H10 and supporting paragraph 4.4.83.

Residential Amenities

- 6.27. The accompanying Design & Access Statement indicate how the scheme safeguards the amenity of existing and future residents. The proposed dwellings all comply with the national space standards and many dwellings will benefit from access to the south facing communal courtyard area. In addition, many of the dwellings benefit from Juliet balconies or in the case of dwellings 7 and 11 private terrace areas. Appropriate mixed amenity space provision is therefore provided consistent with the requirements in central Reading. Most dwellings benefit from a number of aspects and in particular the dwellings located on upper floors often benefit from triple aspect outlooks.
- 6.28. Conventional front to front relationships are achieved between the proposal and the buildings located to the east and north on the opposite sides of London Street and the IDR. Within the scheme, distances between proposed flats ensure no undue privacy issue. This is further achieved through most units benefiting from dual or even triple aspects. The existing building located to the south of the site is on its far eastern side actually attached to the existing building and then if it runs in a westward direction is located around 3 to 4 metres from the existing building's blank long two storey elevation that runs along the site's entire southern boundary. The existing relationship between building to the south (that's planning history confirms an office use) and the existing site is a poor one due to its proximity and inactive frontage but also the building's vacant and dilapidated condition. The introduction of the central courtyard area moves the building footprint in the central southern part of the site approximately 5 metres further away from the building located to the south than is presently the case. The removal of

the existing blank wall and setting back of this central courtyard part of the scheme can therefore enhance the immediate outlook from the building located to the south. It can also provide a well designed positive neighbouring use when compared to the vacant building that has existed for circa 15 years. Through this careful design, an appropriate outlook can be achieved from the building to the south when considered within the context of the existing site conditions and one that is entirely appropriate to the site's urban, central area location. Further, the proposed site's location due north of the neighbouring building to the south ensures there will be no loss of light type issues occurring from the proposal. Careful siting of the building and appropriate setbacks therefore ensure no undue impacts upon neighbouring residential amenities will occur accounting for the need to make efficient use of a site in an accessible location and its urban context. The scheme therefore complies with Local Plan Policy CC8.

Heritage Considerations

- 6.29. The supporting Heritage Statement considers that there is no potential impact on Scheduled Monuments, Registered Battlefields or Registered Parks and Gardens, with the exception of High Bridge, where a negligible adverse effect may apply. A potential adverse effect ranging between slight and moderate has been identified with regard to the Conservation Area and the listed buildings that form key components of it. The potential impact upon the historic and artistic significance of the Central Club itself has been identified as slight. The level of impact upon designated heritage assets is comfortably outweighed by the substantial number of public benefits that exist in favour of the proposals as detailed at paragraph 6.10 of this section. The scheme therefore complies with chapter 16 of the NPPF.

Transport & Highways

- 6.30. The site is in a highly accessible location in the central area, such that journeys can be made on foot or by bicycle to reach a wide range of destinations from the doorstep. Consequently, the development is 'car-free'. Secure cycle parking for each flat is provided at ground floor level, accessed via the residential courtyard. Regular bus services to the local area are available on London Street. The train station is circa 10 minutes walk from the site and Reading's extensive retailing service office is located on the opposite side of the IDR. The proposed approach accords with the provisions of Policy TR5, and the objectives of the NPPF.

Sustainability & Energy

- 6.31. The scheme is supported by an Energy Statement that assesses the predicted energy performance and carbon dioxide emissions from the proposed development. The report proposes solar panels be mounted across the span of the roof, which will allow low carbon technology to be used effectively on the development. Further, air source heat pumps are proposed to further reduce any dependence upon the grid network. The scheme therefore complies when considered against the relevant Local Plan Policies CC2 to CC4. Further, the redevelopment of a previously developed site in an accessible location forms an inherently sustainable approach towards meeting residential needs. Consequently, the scheme's sustainability and energy impact attract positive weight in the overall planning balance.

Noise & Air Quality

- 6.32. The supporting noise report confirms that through careful mitigation significant adverse impacts upon the health or quality of life of future residents can be avoided and the scheme is consistent with the aims of the NPPF, NPSE and PPG-Noise. Further, the air quality statement confirms that air quality factors are not a constraint to development of the site. The scheme therefore complies with Local Plan Policies CC8 and EN15.

Summary

- 6.33. The application proposes the demolition (with retention and protection of the historic mural and some of the existing building fabric) of Reading Central Club with 17 apartments, and a ground floor community hall use. The area is designated as part of the central Reading area but is also a key transitional area from the main Oracle shopping centre, to London Street which is of historic significance in that it contains many statutorily listed buildings, as well as being part of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. Additionally, the existing building includes a piece of artwork of local significance, considered as a non-designated heritage asset; the historic mural.
- 6.34. The development proposals have evolved in consultation and communication with the Council's planning and conservation officers, and design review panel, to present the design as proposed by this application. The scheme's architect has sought to understand in detail the character and features of importance in the vicinity of the site and provide an appropriate design response which retains the mural, respects its Conservation Area location and location adjacent to listed buildings, whilst providing

useable community space and residential flats which are appropriate in design and market terms. The importance of the site locally in terms of achieving a good design outcome, and securing use of the site for the future, has also played an important role in shaping the final proposals. Further, it offers a material contribution towards defined housing needs (including affordable), whilst maintaining the amenity and privacy of both current and future residents. Detailed technical reports have been prepared having regard to relevant disciplines. This statement brings together the supporting information and sets out how the proposals comply with the Local Plan policies and the development plan when assessed as a whole.

7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES & SUMMARY

- 7.1. Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 confirms that determination should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For the reasons stated above, the application scheme is submitted entirely in accordance with relevant development plan policy when considered as a whole, recognising the site's location in a highly accessible location within the Reading central area boundary, and its site specific allocation for a residential-led mixed-use development.
- 7.2. With the above context in mind, the scheme is now assessed in relation to each of the defined pillars of sustainability contained within paragraph 8 of the NPPF.

An economic role

- 1) Increased house building in an area where there is a demand for new housing that in turn drives economic growth further and faster than any industry. In this regard, the proposals would contribute to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is being made available in the right place and at the right time to support growth.
- 2) For the economy to function, sufficient housing is required in the right locations and at the right time. This site, within an immediate walking distance of Reading town centre and transport services. It lies in a highly accessible location.
- 3) The provision of 17 new homes in a Borough where there is an established need for such new homes.
- 4) The application site is immediately available and can deliver much needed housing during the early part of the five year housing land supply period.
- 5) Meeting housing needs is a benefit (especially with the provision of affordable units), consistent with the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of housing.
- 6) In order for the economy to function, sufficient housing is required in the right locations and at the right time. Sites within the centre of Reading and on previously developed land are considered by the Council to be an appropriate location for new housing development having regard to the spatial strategy.
- 7) Creation of construction jobs at a range of skill levels.

- 8) Create or support between 41 and 53 direct, indirect and induced jobs from the homes built on the site²;
- 9) In terms of household expenditure, data from the ONS Family Expenditure Survey 2018-19³ shows that the 'average UK household spend' is £571.80 per week (Table A33) (or £29,815 per year), whereas in South East England it is 19.3% higher than the UK average (Table A33). This means average weekly spend per household is £682.20. For this scheme, the total gross expenditure could be worth circa £600k per year to the economy. A proportion of this household expenditure is anticipated to be spent in local shops and services and will help sustain the existing services in Reading. Given the current economic challenges facing the UK these are significant economic benefits.
- 10) Increased expenditure in the local area will support FTE jobs.
- 11) Potential job creation from the proposed local community use.

A social role

- 1) The re-provision of a local community use on a site that has failed to offer such provision for circa 15 years. This will enable a significant social benefit by providing a high quality space for use by local community groups.
- 2) The retention and restoration (as necessary) of the historic mural on the site in perpetuity. This represents a significant social benefit towards a designated asset of community value.
- 3) The provision of 2 additional affordable housing units in the Borough is a substantial social benefit. Further, future residents will be in close proximity to a wide range of other uses including the shops and services in Reading town centre and the wider area.
- 4) The scheme secures high quality residential accommodation, together with re-provision of community space, consistent with its allocation policy in the Local Plan.
- 5) The scheme provides homes that are immediately accessible to local services.
- 6) A high quality design and materials will enable a notable positive visual improvement when compared to the site's current negative and vacant contribution to the public realm.

² See page 13 of the Homes Builders Federation "Economic Footprint of UK Housebuilding " (July 2018) - <https://www.hbf.co.uk/news/economic-footprint-uk-house-building-july-2018/>

³

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/bulletins/familyspendingintheuk/april2018tomarch2019/relateddata>.

An environmental role

- 1) In terms of the environmental role, the site is not designated for its landscape, ecological value, open space, or recreational value. The scheme would not result in any significant harmful landscape or visual effects.
 - 2) The site's sustainable location of the site ensures that pollution through transport movements would be minimised.
 - 3) The proposals would deliver sustainable homes allowing the fulfilment of this important objective whilst at the same time moving to a low carbon economy and securing an environmentally sustainable form of new residential development.
 - 4) The reuse of previously developed land is inherently sustainable and actively supported by the NPPF.
 - 5) The scheme is supported by an Energy Strategy that seeks to exceed the Council's policy requirements.
- 7.3. By meeting economic, social and environmental goals the proposed development accords with the sustainable development principles contained within the NPPF. It is development plan compliant and can be approved without delay consistent with paragraph 11 of the NPPF.

Summary

- 7.4. The bringing forward of this comprehensive development proposal for this key central area site, which has been vacant for many years, marks an important step in redeveloping this site for the future of Reading. The detailed pre-application consultations which have taken place explored the various aspects of heritage and design which are important to the successful redevelopment of this site.
- 7.5. The proposals as submitted are considered to deliver a balance between the key requirements of the site's allocation in the Local Plan, design aspirations, heritage requirements and the desire to create an attractive multi-purpose building which will provide a new space for the community to come together, as well as in which people can live and enjoy everyday life.
- 7.6. The accompanying plans demonstrate that the layout, orientation, scale and design of the scheme is fully compliant with the design based policies and heritage considerations. Further, the proposal will have no material adverse impact on the

amenity of neighbouring residential properties, nor on the historic or natural environment.

- 7.7. The scheme proposes 17 new residential dwellings, and a new community space, within the central area. It therefore directly contributes towards the Council's housing needs and the pressing need for housing advocated in the NPPF.
- 7.8. The scheme proposes a policy compliant scheme having regard to the development plan as a whole and relevant material considerations including the NPPF. Consequently, the application can be supported and planning permission granted.
