

Statement of Community Involvement for River Academy Reading

Prepared by Stonyrock Limited on behalf of Bowmer + Kirkland



14th December 2021

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1.0 Engagement summary

1.1 Introduction

This Statement of Community Involvement has been prepared on behalf of Bowmer + Kirkland by Stonyrock Ltd. It supports the planning application for River Academy on a site off Richfield Avenue in north Reading.

The scope of the engagement exercise was to inform the community and stakeholders about the plans and seek their feedback. The exercise complemented the consultations undertaken by other members of the project team who continue to liaise with statutory consultees and Reading Borough Council (RBC) officers through the planning application process.

- The community engagement strategy has been to involve and seek feedback from a range of stakeholders, including;
 - Neighbours of the site (residential, leisure and businesses)
 - Potential parents, staff and governors
 - Political and community stakeholders
- Analysis of stakeholders influence and interest was undertaken to assist with targeted engagement. Categories are set out below;



- Headlines from the community engagement;
 - Private and public webinars with opportunity to ask live questions
 - Over 1000 flyers distributed to the community
 - Emails to stakeholder database
 - Project website – riveracademyreadingplans.co.uk
 - Online poll and feedback form to share views
 - Press and social media coverage
 - 68 people registered and 47 people attended the public webinar
 - 14 people registered and 13 people attended the private webinar
 - 24 people provided feedback during the webinars and via the online survey
 - 59% of respondents support the plans for River Academy.
- Feedback received has been responded to by the project team and followed four key themes: design, SEND, access and flooding.
- Community engagement was undertaken digitally due to Covid-19 restrictions, the flyer shared a telephone number for those without internet access so that they could contact the project team for paper copies of material and return a feedback form by freepost.

1.2 Community engagement guidance

- In undertaking community engagement for the plans, Stonyrock followed best practice, the guidance provided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF June 2021) and **Reading Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement Adopted March 2014**.
- In response to Covid-19 the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) guidance on plan-making was revised on 15th July 2020. Paragraphs 78 and 80, provide advice for local authorities conducting community engagement. Although not directed at applicant engagement, it sets out alternative options to traditional community engagement.

“Paragraph 78 - How can a Statement of Community Involvement be reviewed and updated to comply with COVID-19 guidance?”

“Local planning authorities will need to assess their Statements of Community Involvement to identify which policies are inconsistent with current or any superseding guidance.

“The local planning authority should then make any temporary amendments that are necessary to allow plan-making to progress, and that continue to promote effective community engagement by means which are reasonably practicable. Local planning authorities are strongly encouraged to use online engagement methods to their full potential. Appropriate methods include virtual exhibitions, digital consultations, video

conferencing, social media and providing documents for inspection on a public website. Authorities will also need to take reasonable steps to ensure sections of the community that don't have internet access are involved and consider alternative and creative ways to achieve this."

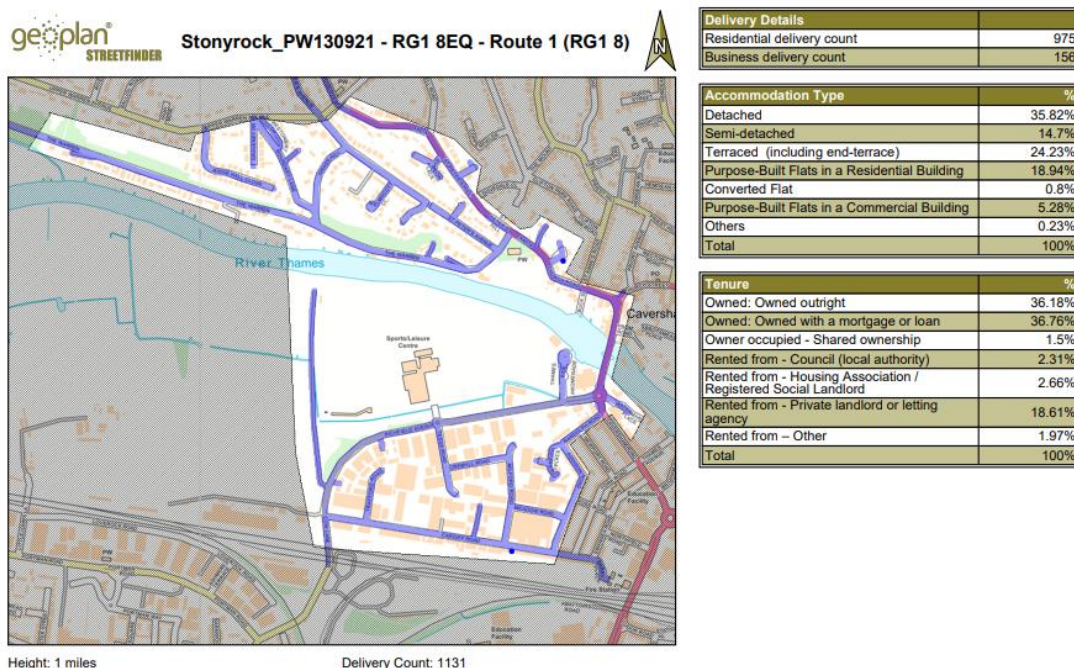
"Paragraph 80 - How should local planning authorities continue to promote effective community engagement during the response to the coronavirus pandemic?"

"Local planning authorities should consider how they can continue to promote effective community engagement by means which are reasonably practicable, in particular to reach those sections of the community that do not have internet access. Paragraphs 76-79 of this guidance set out how local authorities can review and update their Statements of Community Involvement to provide any temporary amendments that are necessary to allow plan-making to progress and to engage sections of the community that do not have internet access."

- Stonyrock Limited is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. The UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals.

1.3 Community engagement materials

- Flyer distribution area - This was agreed with Reading Borough Council planning officers and is in line with the consultation area used during the adjacent leisure centre planning applications.



- Flyer



- Website homepage riveracademyreadingplans.co.uk showing flythrough of the proposals — B+K will maintain the maintain the site and send updates throughout the planning process, through construction until project completion.



- Example webinar slides







Welcome to the River Academy webinar



Artist impression of draft proposals for River Academy

Plans for a new secondary school for north Reading

River Academy – Plans for a new secondary school for north Reading

Design

Through a detailed and collaborative design engagement process with the DfE and Maiden Erlegh Trust our plans deliver an inspiring and sustainable place to learn and teach. The design includes:

- Construction of two linked school buildings; the teaching block and sports hall.
- Use of materials and technology to create an energy efficient, low acoustic environment that takes advantage of natural light.
- Flexible internal and outdoor learning and dining spaces in support of adaptable school management.
- Accessible and inclusive design, learning and social spaces that are suitable for people of all abilities
- Carefully considered layout that permits the widest community use to occur outside of school hours.
- Sixth form social and study cluster and own entrance.



Aerial image of proposals looking north

■ Website feedback form

1. About you

Name

Post Code

Email Address

2. How did you hear about our plans for River Academy, Reading?

- ☐ Email ☐ Social media
- ☐ Flyer
- ☐ Other (please specify)

3. Have you watched the animation of the plans?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Have you seen our webinar presentation?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. If yes, did you find it informative?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. What is your interest in the plans?

- ☐ Prospective parent ☐ Community representative
- ☐ Local resident
- ☐ Other (please specify)

7. Which elements of our proposal would you consider to be the most important?

(Please choose your top three)

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Provision of a modern, welcoming, energy efficient school for 1,500 students | ☐ Landscape design and building orientation that carefully considers the riverside setting and access to the festival site |
| ☐ High quality architectural design reflecting Maiden Erlegh Trust's vision and core values | ☐ Facilities designed for community use outside of school hours |
| ☐ Sustainable and biodiversity led approach which will achieve BREEAM very good | ☐ Comprehensive management plan and modern methods of construction help minimise disruption to neighbours |
| ☐ Careful consideration of access and separation of vehicle and pedestrian routes | |

8. Do you support our new building plans for River Academy, Reading?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

9. Do you have any other comments?

10. Do you wish to be kept updated about our proposal?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

- Letter to neighbours of site



Neighbour

15th November 2021

Dear neighbour

Invitation to webinar

I am writing to you on behalf of Bowmer + Kirkland (B+K) who has been selected by the Department for Education (DfE) as the main contractor on the plans for a new secondary school - River Academy - for north Reading.

The DfE has been working in partnership with Reading Borough Council. The plans are for a site off Richfield Avenue, adjacent to the ~~Rivermead~~ Leisure Complex and owned by the Council, which will be used to meet the demand for additional school places in Reading and to serve the needs of children and the local community.

As a neighbour of the proposed school, we would like to invite you to a webinar event on **Monday 29th November 2021, 6.30 pm – 7.45 pm**. There will be a presentation of the plans followed by a live Q&A. If you would like to attend, please register on the project website riveracademyreadingplans.co.uk. You can also pre-submit questions for the project team.

We will be launching a full project website (including a feedback form) to coincide with the event and materials presented will be available if you are unable to attend. If you do not have access to the internet please call us on 07592 570528. If you have any questions, please email info@riveracademyreadingplans.co.uk

Yours faithfully



Rebecca Darling - Community Engagement

email – info@riveracademyreadingplans.co.uk
website – riveracademyreadingplans.co.uk

Stonyrock is providing community engagement support to the project team.
address – Stonyrock Limited, 26a Childs Hall Road, Bookham, Surrey, KT23 3QG

2.0 Engagement programme

The open and collaborative engagement programme was designed to:

- Identify different stakeholder groups
- Establish a collaborative relationship with all stakeholders
- Complement the engagement with statutory consultees*
- Present the plans clearly and widely within Covid-19 guidelines
- Listen to views from the community
- Adapt plans and respond to any issues raised.

*Being undertaken by Nexus Planning as part of the planning process.

The engagement programme included the following:

Activity	Date 2021
Emails to key stakeholders	12 th November
Website to register attendance launch	12 th November
Flyer delivery	15-17 th November
Letters posted to neighbours	15 th November
Private webinar (4.30-6.15pm)	29 th November
PUBLIC WEBINAR (6.30-8.00pm)	29th November
Full Website launch	30 th November
Survey closed	10 th December

Engagement activity will continue throughout the planning process and beyond and will include:

- Update emails to subscribers
- Letters or newsletters as required
- Website updates
- Guidance on how to comment on the application
- Sharing information on committee outcome
- Press management
- Next steps through construction until project completion.

3.0 Engagement activity

3.1 Webinars

Both events **Private – Monday 29th November 2021, 4.30pm-6.15pm** and **Public - 6.30pm-8.00pm** shared the plans in detail through a 20-minute slide presentation by members of the project team. Attendees were then given the opportunity to ask questions live which was followed by a poll and animation of the plans.

Key stakeholders private webinar

The private event was held for key stakeholders including; Festival Republic, Rivermead Leisure Complex, Caversham Bridge Garden Centre, ward councillors, Cabinet members and Trustees of Maiden Erlegh Trust. Invitations were issued via email and phone calls. There were 13 attendees.

Public webinar

115 near neighbours of the site were posted letters inviting them to the public webinar, 1000 flyers were delivered, it was covered in local press and Maiden Erlegh Trust informed staff of the event. Email invitations were issued to local residents associations, charities and Reading schools. The public webinar had 47 attendees.

Panelists

Members of the project team presenting and answering questions included;

- Main Contractor - Bowmer + Kirkland
- School Trust – Maiden Erlegh Trust and Principal Designate
- Brighter Futures for Children
- Planning Consultants – Nexus
- Architects – Jestico + Whiles
- Landscape Architects – Ares
- Transport Consultants - Hexa
- Community Engagement – Stonyrock provided the webinar housekeeping.

3.2 Website

Our detailed project website riveracademyreadingplans.co.uk contained all information presented in the webinars and hosted the animation to give those unable to attend the live events the opportunity to review the plans and leave their feedback.

The website will continue to be updated through the planning and construction process to provide the community with a resource for information on the project.

The website has had almost 800 unique users. With the majority in the Reading area, so we are confident that a large number of local people have a good understanding of the project.

3.3 Digitally isolated

Our flyer was delivered to over 1000 addresses and provided a phone number for people to call to ask any questions or to receive paper copies of materials and a feedback form to return by freepost if they do not have access to the internet.

3.4 Media Coverage

Coverage in the local press included an article in The Reading Chronicle and their Facebook page which has nearly 21,000 followers, as well as being featured on local Twitter pages, including East Reading Community with nearly 5000 followers.

News
19th November

Plans for new Reading secondary school to teach 1,500 pupils

By Brad Young | @Bradley_J_Young
Digital Journalist



A mock-up of River Academy secondary school



The proposed location of the school

Plans for a new school in Reading have been proposed catering for 1,500 students.

River Academy secondary school would be built off Richfield Avenue, adjacent to the Rivermead Leisure Complex.

Developers Bowmer + Kirkland, who have been selected by the Department for Education as the main contractor, said the school will meet the demand for additional places, in a statement on their website.

Most read **Commented**

- 1 Four people on ventilators as new map shows Omicron cases in Berkshire
- 2 Disney to become first clients of 'state-of-the-art' Shinfield Studios in 2022
- 3 The time for excuses is over: Reading are sleepwalking towards relegation
- 4 Travellers given deadline to leave proposed encampment site
- 5 Where, when and how you can book a Covid booster jab in Reading

Kwik Fit - Kingston Upon Thames
Your Nearest Kwik Fit
Your One Stop Shop For Car Maintenance From Tyres To MOT.

Kingston upon Thames NORBITON

Store info Directions

4.0 Community feedback

We received 24 responses to our feedback poll and form. 2 people filled in the website form and 22 people used the poll during the webinar. There were detailed discussions with attendees during the webinars which are summarised below.

4.1 Discussions during the webinars covered four themes

DESIGN • Use of PV panels • Maximising natural daylight • Building layout • Energy efficiency	SEND • Accessibility • Facilities • Future proofing for demand
Access • Reading Festival • Cycle and pedestrian routes • Bus connectivity • Catchment	Flooding • Main building • Surrounding area • Outdoor facilities/pitches

4.2 Poll responses

The poll was run at the end of both webinars and was completed by just under half of attendees.

- Q1. What device are you watching on? A large majority were watching on a PC/laptop. This question helps us understand how easily attendees can view the detail on slides.
- Q2. How many of you are watching? There were a few people watching with others which enables us to estimate that 60 people took part in the webinars.
- Q3. How did you hear about the webinars? The vast majority had been informed via email so we know the careful targeting of community stakeholders was successful.
- Q4. Have you previously attended a webinar for a planning application? This enables us to understand if people are familiar with the webinar format. The majority had not attended one before.
- Q5. Did you find the webinar informative? 86% found the webinars informative.
- Q6. What is your interest in the proposals? There was a broad mix of other (mostly trust staff), local residents, community representatives and prospective parents.

- Q7. Do you support our plans for River Academy? 59% supported the plans, 33% were not sure and 8% did not support.

4.3 Website feedback form responses

Two local residents filled in the website feedback form. Their comments are below.

☐ The overall building design is boringly block-like with little to inspire admiration or interest. The mock-up lacks context - I would like to see its relationship either surrounding buildings and land

12/9/2021 7:58 AM [View respondent's answers](#)

☐ What consideration has been given to the impact of the new school on traffic flows. Richfields Avenue is already very busy at peak times, and Caversham Bridge and the main arteries of Caversham are over capacity with traffic in peak times. Won't this school have an adverse affect on these?

12/1/2021 4:14 PM [View respondent's answers](#)

4.4 Responding to feedback

The key themes raised during the community engagement are responded to below. Other technical reports accompanying the application provide more detail on the proposals.

Design

The project team were able to explain that the design has optimised the site in terms of building orientation and layout, with classrooms strategically placed to maximise natural daylight and enable efficient management of the school and departments. B+K use a 'fabric first' principal, in line with the energy hierarchy, where the building's energy consumption is reduced through high levels of building fabric efficiency. There are no PV panels proposed as part of the design.

The building design achieves a building which reduces the quantity of carbon below that required of Building Regulations Part L2A.

The building has also been designed to allow future reduction of carbon emissions by including connection points to the centralised heating plant for introduction of Low and Zero Carbon (LZC) technology and the heating system is designed to work with LZC technology such as heat pumps.

Energy is consumed cleanly utilising heat recovery for the ventilation systems and using the building fabric to help cool which avoids unnecessary cooling energy. The design targets a BREEAM 'Very Good' standard.

SEND

The school is accessible and inclusive in its design with learning and social spaces suitable for people of all abilities with a lift serving both floors. The SEND department have their own zone on the ground floor with access to a private outdoor space. The buildings are designed

to allow for future possible replanning of internal spaces if for example the SEND department needed to expand.

The car park includes accessible parking spaces located close to the main entrance, properly lit with appropriate markings. The routes into the buildings are clear and will be signed and demarcated appropriately using landscape treatments. There are no abrupt changes in level on the approach to the new proposed building.

Access

Reading Borough Council have agreed with Festival Republic that site access during the festival will continue and this has been taken into account during the design of the school with specified access points to the school playing fields for camping and to the main festival site.

A school Travel Plan will be introduced encouraging all staff, students, parents and visitors to use sustainable means of transport. Cycle and pedestrian routes are separated from vehicular access points. A bus route already serves the area and the site is close to the train station. A thorough travel assessment is being undertaken to determine if additional bus capacity or highways improvements are required.

There is no set catchment for the school, however, due to demand for secondary places locally it is anticipated that most students will live in close proximity of the school.

Flooding

The proposed site is within Environment Agency Flood Zones 2 and 3 which means there are strict design guidelines regarding flood water storage displacement. The design of the school building and external site levels have been carefully considered so that no displacement of flood volumes will occur during the 'design flood event' as a result of the development.

The Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) demonstrates that through assessment of pre and post development levels, a 'level for level, volume for volume' solution has been achieved to ensure no off-site increase in flood risk.

The site has been identified as being at low risk of flooding from surface water, groundwater and sewers. The overall flood risk associated with the proposed building is deemed to be low as a result of the evolved design, therefore, the site is considered appropriate for development.

5.0 Conclusions and next steps

Consultation summary

- The community engagement supported the planning application for River Academy, Reading.
- Key activities included flyer delivery, emails to key stakeholders, private and public webinars, opportunity to feedback, media coverage and a project website.
- The project team discussed the proposals in detail with attendees during the webinars and were able to explain how the plans responded to the key issues raised; design, SEND, access and flooding.
- Although restricted on holding public events due to Covid-19 the project team were pleased to have been able to engage digitally with hundreds of local people visiting the project website.

Ongoing engagement

Following the submission of the planning application Bowmer + Kirkland is committed to continuing dialogue with local residents and stakeholders. We will issue updates and maintain the website throughout the planning process and if granted consent through the new school construction.