

Proposed Replacement Staircase at R+, Reading Planning Statement

November 2021

Turley

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Client
Oval Properties 1601 Ltd

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Turley on behalf of Oval Properties 1601 Limited, in support of an application for full planning permission, for the alterations to the existing external staircase at the front entrance of R+, Reading.
- 1.2 The building is located at the end of the urban block positioned between Forbury and Valpy Street, Reading.
- 1.3 This Planning Statement supports the application and provides additional information on the scheme in the context of the adopted development plan and other material considerations. It is supported by the following information:
 - Application Forms and Certificates of Ownership;
 - Application Fee; and
 - Application Plans (Please refer to **Appendix 1** for a list).
- 1.4 The remainder of this Planning Statement is structured as follows:
 - **Section Two** – Site and Surrounding Area;
 - **Section Three** – Proposed Development;
 - **Section Four** – Planning Policy Framework;
 - **Section Five** – Planning Assessment; and
 - **Section Six** – Conclusion.
- 1.5 This Statement explains the purpose of the planning application and analyses its compliance with planning policy.

2. Site and Surrounding Area

The Application Site and Surrounding Area

- 2.1 The application site is located within Reading City Centre and is located within the curtilage of the R+ Reading building. The R+ Building is boarded by Blagrove Street to the south, Valpy Street to the east and Forbury Road to the western boundary.
- 2.2 In total, R+ is comprised of eight floors. The basement is occupied by a car park and locker room; floors 2-7 are primarily utilised as office spaces; and there is access to the roof which encompasses a green roof, photovoltaic panels and planting areas.
- 2.3 Vehicular access to the application site is taken from Forbury Road which leads to the car park on the basement level. The main pedestrian access point to the building is positioned along the north-east boundary where Blagrove Street and Forbury Road converge.

Statutory Designations

- 2.4 The site is subject to the following statutory designations:
- The site is situated in Flood Zone 1;
 - An area of archaeological potential;
 - Within the Abbey Quarter; and
 - Within the boundary of Reading's Central Area
- 2.5 The site has no other statutory designations

Planning History

- 2.6 Following a review of Reading Borough Council's online planning portal, the main planning applications relating to the site are summarised below:
- **Application Ref. 101241:** Retrospective application for mesh banner. Granted 24 November 2010;
 - **Application Ref. 160321:** Application for display of 2 non-illuminated fascia signs at the main entrance and non-illuminated fascia sign at the car park entrance. Granted 27 April 2016;
 - **Application Ref. 180436:** Application for installation of ground floor fire escape door on west elevation and plant equipment within existing rooftop plant enclosure. Granted 09 May 2018; and
 - **Application Ref. 210655:** Application for the erection of external staircase. Granted 07 July 2021.

3. Proposed Development

- 3.1 This section of the Planning Statement summarises the development proposals for which planning permission is sought.

Development Proposals

- 3.2 Full planning permission is sought for the following description of development:

“Construction of new external staircase (replacing existing) at the front entrance of R+, Reading”

- 3.3 The key development objective for this proposals is to provide a new external staircase for the R+ building. The proposed staircase would be positioned on the apex corner of the building and would provide the main public entrance.

Design

- 3.4 The proposal will see the implementation of new stairs and entrance landing which have a concrete finish. Areas of landscaping will be positioned on either side which will reduce the existing five sections of stairs to three.
- 3.5 Four new stainless steel railings and stair strips will be incorporated which will divide the stairs into the three sections. The railings will also be positioned at the top of the podium to encase the new areas of landscaping.
- 3.6 The existing revolving door and aluminium and glazing curtain wall, which encompasses it, will be retained. Fluted glass wall panels will be positioned on either side.
- 3.7 New trim above the canopy will be implemented and the material of the canopy ceiling will be changed to polished stainless steel. The existing glazing will remain above the canopy.

4. Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 This section of the Statement identifies the national, regional and local planning policies and guidance which are relevant to the consideration of the proposed development.

Planning Policy

- 4.2 The adopted development plan for Reading Borough Council comprises of the Local Plan Core Strategy (adopted November 2019)
- 4.3 The revised National Planning Policy Framework ('The Framework') was published in July 2021. This document sets out the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policies for England. The Framework covers a range of issues including sustainable development, building a strong, competitive economy, and achieving well-designed places.
- 4.4 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was published in 2014 and is updates on a regular basis as an online resource. It provides guidance to support the Framework, discussing individual topics in greater detail.

The Development Plan

- 4.5 Reading Borough Council's Local Plan was adopted in 2019 to assist in guiding development up to 2036.
- 4.6 The fundamental objective of the Local Plan is to set out where development will occur within the area until 2036, having regard to health, wellbeing and quality of life. Particular reference is made to the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019 and how carbon neutrality can be achieved by 2030.
- 4.7 Accordingly, the Local Plan aims to *"strengthen the role of Reading as a Hub for Thames Valley, providing an accessible focus for the development of employment, housing, services and facilities, meeting the needs of residents, workers, visitors, those who study in Reading Borough, and the wider area."*
- 4.8 Paragraph 2.2.2 states that, as part of the Council's vision, *"the historic, built and natural environment of the Borough [will be maintained and enhanced] through investment and high quality design."*
- 4.9 Moreover, paragraph 2.2.2 also asserts that there is a need to *"ensure new development and existing areas are accessible and sustainable, in accordance with the sustainability appraisal objective, including reducing its effects on, and adapting to, climate change."*
- 4.10 The policies of the Core Strategy that are considered most relevant to the application are summarised in turn below.

- **Policy CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development.** This policy states that a positive approach to considering development proposals will be taken that reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained within the NPPF. Where appropriate, the Council will work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved whenever possible.
- **Policy CC7: Design and Public Realm.** This policy states that development must demonstrate high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located.
- **Policy EN2: Areas of Archaeological Significance.** This policy stipulates that the Historic Environment Record should be consulted to identify and evaluate sites of archaeological significance. This requires an assessment of the archaeological impacts of development proposals to be submitted before the planning application is determined. Planning permission will not be granted in cases where the assessment of the archaeological impacts is inadequate.
- **Policy EN18 Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems:** This policy states that the sequential approach in accordance with the NPPF will be strictly applied. As outlined in the policy, the application does not require a Flood Risk Assessment because the site is located in Flood Zone 1 and is less than one hectare.
- **Policy CR2: Design in Central Reading.** This policy specifies that development within central Reading should demonstrate:
 - (i) Development will build on and respect the existing grid layout structure of the central area, providing continuity and enclosure through appropriate relationships between buildings and spaces, and frontages that engage with the street at lower levels, and contributing towards enhanced ease of movement through and around the central area;
 - (ii) The architectural details and materials used in the central area should be high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials in areas local to the development site;
 - (iii) Development should be designed with consideration of adjacent development sites, and should not prevent or cause unreasonable burdens on the future development of those sites; and
 - (iv) Development and any associated public realm should contribute to the diversity of the central area, be capable of easy adaptation over time to meet changing circumstances, and be designed to enhance community safety.
- **Policy CR15: The Reading Abbey Quarter.** This policy states that the Council will pursue any opportunities to reinstate features of architectural or historical significance and remove features that harm the asset and its setting.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.11 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') was adopted in July 2021. It sets out the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policies for England and requires the planning system to *"play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions"* (paragraph 9). The Framework covers a range of land issues including, transport, infrastructure, the economy, climate change and the natural and historic environments.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 4.12 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides direction on the consideration and determination of planning applications, alongside various other technical and procedural matters, supporting the overall implementation of the policies contained within the Framework.
- 4.13 With regards to "design", the PPG provides fundamental guidance so as to ensure the planning system delivers high quality buildings and places. As such the PPG states that *"permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it function, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents"*. 001 Reference ID: 26-001-20191001.
- 4.14 Paragraph 7 of the Framework sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
- 4.15 Paragraph 8 of the Framework reiterates that the planning system has three overarching objectives:
- **An economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth;
 - **A social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
 - **An environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land.
- 4.16 Paragraph 10 states that at the heart of the framework is **a presumption in favour of sustainable development**.
- 4.17 Paragraph 11 sets out that, for decision-taking, this means:
- approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

- where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - (i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
 - (ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

4.18 Paragraph 38 of the Framework asks that Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way.

4.19 Paragraph 126 of the Framework states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable in communities.

4.20 Paragraph 130 asks that planning policies and decisions ensure that developments:

- (a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- (b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- (c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- (d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- (e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- (f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

4.21 Paragraph 134 states that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

- (a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or
- (b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

5. Planning Assessment

- 5.1 Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that development proposals are considered against the relevant provisions of the Development Plan, and other material considerations. Proposals are to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise
- 5.2 Accordingly, this section provides an appraisal of the proposed development against the relevant planning policy considerations and any other material considerations. This focuses on the suitability of the site to accommodate the proposed development and the specific issues associated with the suitability and deliverability of the application proposal.

Principle of Development

- 5.3 The Site is located in Central Reading and the Office Core as defined on the Proposals Map, where the provision of employment development and development associated with such employment development is generally considered acceptable in principle.
- 5.4 The proposed development seeks to make alterations to the existing staircase at the front entrance to improve the access arrangements and enhance the street scene and public realm.
- 5.5 The proposed development is acceptable in principle.

Design

- 5.6 The design and appearance of the proposed alterations to the existing staircase has been carefully considered to respect the local context. The proposal does not change the use of the existing building and the materials selected are of high quality and the colours are sympathetic to the existing building. The integration of new landscaping on either side of the stairs also provides diversity to the design.
- 5.7 The proposal would enhance the public realm and street scene which is particularly important given it is public facing and located on an apex of an important corner. This accords with Policy CR2 (Design in Central Reading) and Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm). This also aligns with Paragraph 126 of the Framework which emphasises that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and creating better places in which to live and work.
- 5.8 The proposed development is in accordance with local and national planning policy in respect of design.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 This Planning Statement supports the submission of a full planning application for the improvement to the staircase at the front entrance of R+ building, Reading.
- 6.2 It is considered that the proposals as a whole complies with the policies contained within the Reading Borough Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 6.3 The proposed development seeks to make alterations to the existing staircase at the front entrance of the building to improve the access arrangement and enhance the street scene and public realm. The proposal is a high quality design which is sympathetic to the local context and enhances the character and appearance of the area.
- 6.4 The application justifies a grant of planning permission.

Appendix 1: Application Plans

Drawing Title	Application Drawing Number
Design and Access Statement	N/A
Site Location Plan	01001 Rev PL00
Existing General Arrangement Site Plan	01002 Rev PL00
Existing General Arrangement Ground Level	01100 Rev PL00
Existing General Arrangement Level 01	01101 Rev PL00
Existing Elevation North Elevation	01200 Rev PL00
Existing Elevation West Elevation	01201 Rev PL00
Indicative Existing Elevation Existing Front Entrance Elevation	01202 Rev PL00
Demolition Ground Level	02100 Rev PL00
Reflected Ceiling Ground Level	35100 Rev PL00
Proposed General Arrangement Ground Level	PL100 Rev PL00
Proposed General Arrangement Level 01	PL101 Rev PL00
Proposed Elevation North Elevation	PL200 Rev PL00
Proposed Elevation West Elevation	01202 Rev PL00
Proposed Elevation Proposed Front Entrance Elevation	PL202 Rev PL00
Indicative Proposed Section Ground Floor	PL300 Rev PL00
Proposed Staircase Ground Level	PL500 Rev PL00

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