

UPDATED Design and Access Statement

Greyfriars Church

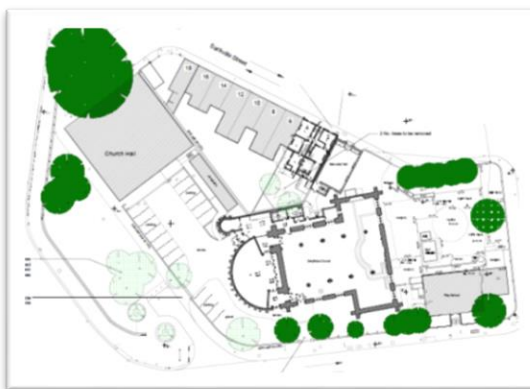
Friar Street Reading RG1 1EH

February 2021

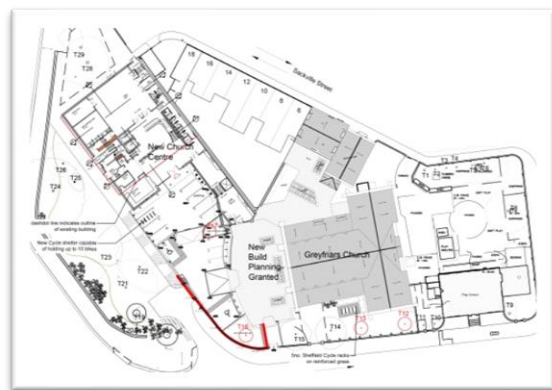
Jeremy Bell

B.Arch. M.Ed. RIBA Architect and Director

JBKS Architects



Existing Site Plan



Proposed Phase 2 Plan showing phase 2 in floor plan form **TO BE UPDATED**



1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This revised and updated Design and Access Statement accompanies the February 2021 revisions to the planning application for **Phase 2** of the proposed development at the site of Greyfriars Church Reading. Phase 1 has already received planning approval under application No. 190650 with Reading Borough Council. Phase 1 is now under construction.
- 1.2 Phase 2 is the construction of the new church centre.

2.0 THE CHURCH and THE SITE

- 2.1 Greyfriars Church is a former Franciscan Friary, in Reading town centre in the Royal County of Berkshire. It is an Anglican church and is part of the Diocese of Oxford. It is listed Grade 1. The church is very well attended for Christian worship. It also hosts a full programme of church and community events and activities during the week. Approximately 400 children and adults attend two Sunday morning services and approximately 200 adults attend Sunday evening services. Weekday bookings are made by a wide range of community and church groups. These include mothers and toddlers' groups, bible study groups and prayer meetings, as well as NHS bookings, School groups, Reading Borough Council groups, Alzheimer's groups, Alcoholics Anonymous, and the John Lewis Retirement Fellowship. A third arm of the church's work is to run a Nursery School on the site of the original Vicarage. This is on the East End of the church - a self-contained secure site but owned and run by the church for children of the general public.



- 2.2 Such intensive use requires not only meeting spaces, but support facilities like offices, toilets, foyer space, storage space and refreshment provision. The church has reached a stage where they could do significantly more, but their buildings are too restrictive and difficult to function in. Something needs to be done not only to enable the current work to continue in a safe and satisfactory manner, but also to improve the provision. The vision for the church is to work with the community, both in Christian service and in wider missional support to the local community.



Greyfriars Church in action

- 2.3 The site is on Friar Street, originally an ancient road leading out of the town centre towards the west. The church was set within a churchyard, surrounded by a metal and stone pillared fence. It lay on the periphery of the town and was established there to deal with the poor and other needs of the town. By the time of the 1863 restoration of the church, the area around Greyfriars had been developed into high-density housing. For this large population, the church rapidly built a school on what is now the site of the Centre and carpark. The trend of high-density housing is set to continue, with many approved developments around the church. A full history of the site is documented in the Statement of Significance.
- 2.4 The lower (north) part of the site is currently occupied by the existing Church Centre, a brick-built structure dating from the 1980's. It contains a sports hall, a small café space, a bookshop, two meeting rooms, and some very cramped gallery offices. There are also toilets. Although a relatively recent building, it is over-used and far too small to deal with all the community and church activities. It should be able to serve the local community in a more extensive way. For this reason, this building is to be replaced.
- 2.5 Between the West End and the Church Centre there is a sloping car park, and a raised embankment. On the raised embankment is a line of porta-cabins which serve as part of the church office provision, the other part being in the gallery of the church centre. These porta-cabins have been there for more than a decade now. They are freezing cold in winter, and hot in summer, and as cramped now as they were when they were installed as a temporary measure. It is planned to replace the porta-cabins with an enclosed link to connect the church and the new Centre together.
- 2.6 There is a useful car park.

3.0 The process leading up to the current proposals

- 3.1 In the years since the re-ordering of the interior of the church building in 2000, explorations have been attempted to try to resolve some of the problems not solved by the internal re-arrangement. These are particularly the functional restrictions imposed by the very limited entrance lobby, the lack of adequate meeting rooms and children's spaces, and the very poor provision for toilets. There are no disabled toilets, and very poor provision for staff offices.
- 3.2 The church re-ordering did make it possible to serve many more members of the outside community more effectively, with all sorts of activities. However, this in turn, made the facilities of the 1970's and 1980's less able to cope.
- 3.3 As a result there followed design exercises for minor extensions to the west end, for filling in the tiny

space between the church and the Sackville Street Memorial Hall, and trying to create more toilet space in the very narrow north side external area of the church. Nothing was satisfactory and no scheme was implemented.

- 3.4 In the year 2006 the old vicarage was purchased from the Diocese and it opened as a much-needed Day Nursery. This still serves admirably for people working in Reading (not exclusively) and provides an income stream for the church. The vicarage had a garden, and inevitably there arose the question, "Could not a new East End garden provide all space that is required for new facilities?" Two main reasons emerged which set this idea aside. First, the nursery required outdoor space and the east end of the church was the only space available for that. The second reason is that the east end is not the place – from within the church – where you would want to make a link to the existing or a new Church Centre, or toilets, or meeting rooms. The east end is the altar end and for centuries the church has had an east/west axis, with the altar end being the focal point for worship and most other uses. It would be inappropriate to have toilets off the east end, the main focus of the church congregation.
- 3.5 In 2007, the church embarked on an architectural competition to try to deal with the whole problem in a cohesive and comprehensive way. They produced a brief of all their requirements, which, when added together were extensive and difficult to achieve without considerable ingenuity and lateral thought. The accommodation of the list of requirements required radical action to achieve.
- 3.6 The conclusion of the work during this period was an ambitious proposal, creating a basement car park to be entered from Sackville Street, and a very large three-storey building replacing the existing Centre. It would extend right over the current car park, along the back wall of the Sackville street houses. This would be linked into the new large proposed semi-circular west end extension connected to the church.
- 3.7 The whole proposal was an extremely large proposed building project. Although it met all the stated needs of the brief, it was just too ambitious to be achievable.
- 3.8 What this exercise did do was involve the main stake holders in the decision-making process. The result was that the Reading Borough Council planning staff, the Council for the Care of Churches, English Heritage (as it was then) and the Oxford Diocesan Advisory Committee all reached a point where they were satisfied with the proposals and gave the church the green light to proceed to a planning application. However, the anticipated cost of the project was beyond the reach and expectations of the congregation and it was decided not to proceed with the project at that stage. However it was a major step forward to have consensus among the stake holders that a major development was acceptable in principle.
- 3.9 Despite shelving the larger project, the needs had not gone away. The purchase of 2 and 4 Sackville Street eased the space to the north greatly, and literally cleared a major blockage. At this stage thoughts turned to a more modest proposal to sufficiently address the needs and for a more realistic cost. Part of this consideration was for a new Centre, and an under-cover disabled friendly link to it. All this was carefully considered in a master-plan. Phase 1, for replacing the west end, and for incorporating the Sackville Street properties has been progressed and the planning application approved. Phase 1 is now under construction. Phase 2 has been submitted as planning application No 191874 and has now reached the point of discussion where it is ready for re-submission.

4.0 Phase 2 – The New Church Centre and Link

- 4.1 The footprint of the existing Church Centre is on three of the boundaries of the existing site at the north end, at a level approximately 1.2m lower than that of the church. The entrance is via the car park.
- 4.2 It is proposed to place the new building almost entirely onto the footprint of the existing one.
- 4.3 As regards to massing, the proposed new building follows the lower portion of the 'right to light' envelope established in the early stages of the design process. This has been adjusted after consultation with Historic England, to further mitigate the degree of perceived overbearingness to the rear of the properties at the north end of Sackville Street.
- 4.4 The resultant massing however still contains the interest of a partial wedge shape sloping down eastwards from the sheer face of the west, and mitigating the mass in relation to the Sackville Street properties.
- 4.5 The elevations are carefully and neatly clean-cut, with windows in rectangular shapes perforating the facades. On the south and north are long strips of louvered openings.
- 4.6 In order to create further unity and interest, as well as to break up the scale of the Centre, the lower floor is set back and differentiated by a strip of glazing, so that the entire building will be perceived as standing importantly on a plinth.
- 4.7 The original planning application , ref No 191847 was submitted on 19 November 2019. This was for a building with a stone clad finish. The result was a resolution to grant permission. However the official approval was delayed for various reasons. During this time, Greyfriars Church reconsidered the deliverability of the project, and one of the main issues was the very high cost of the stone cladding.

- 4.8 **New proposal to have a brick finish instead of stone cladding.** As stated above external material was to be real stone cladding. The cost of this placed the entire project in jeopardy. Care was taken in searching for an alternative using brick. Stone coloured bricks (Gault Bricks) are available. This option has been explored and discussed with Richard Peats of Historic England. His response was that brick was a viable option but that the buildings design should be amended to be more in keeping with brick construction. For example, angles and tapers are not suited to brick construction.

For this reason, the elevational configuration has been altered along with the materials. Sharp edges and tapering angles have been removed. However, the essence of the design remains, that is blocks penetrated by fenestration separated by glass bands and floating on a dark blue long-brick plinth.

The proposals have been passed back to Richard Peats of Historic England and he has indicated his approval of the proposal. A copy of the rationale and key correspondence is included in Appendix 1.

Details of the proposed brick specifications is included in Appendix 2

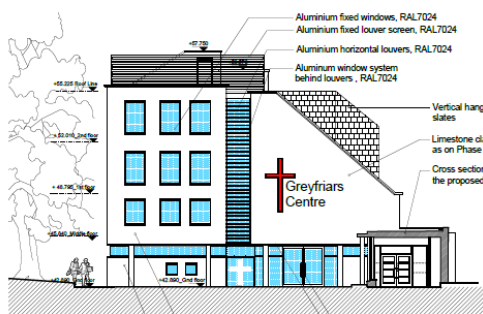
- 4.9 The link is a very important component to the development of the site. The link is a key element within the Churches safeguarding policy, particularly in terms of moving children around the site. The link is also an important access point for the disabled between the church and the church centre

which is currently only accessible via the exposed and steeply graded car park. There are many wheelchair users in the church congregation who have made a significant contribution to the design brief during consultation. It is necessary to have a proper link between the two buildings, with both a staircase, and a lift.

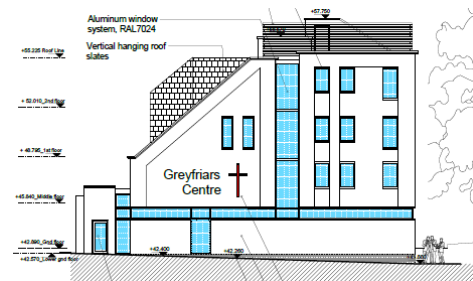
For this reason the link has been designed as an elegant wide and spacious connection with a glazed wall so that it is a quality space and not just a basic corridor.

Architecturally it will be in harmony with the church extension, the church centre, and will tie the two buildings together both practically and aesthetically.

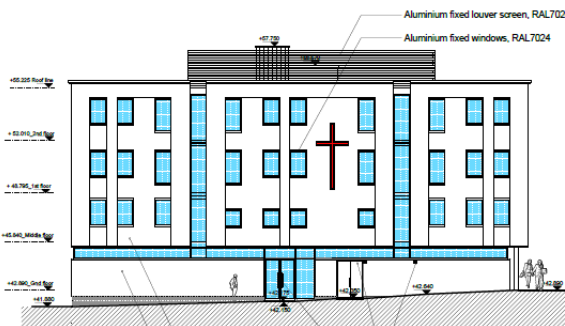
4.10 Revised Elevations



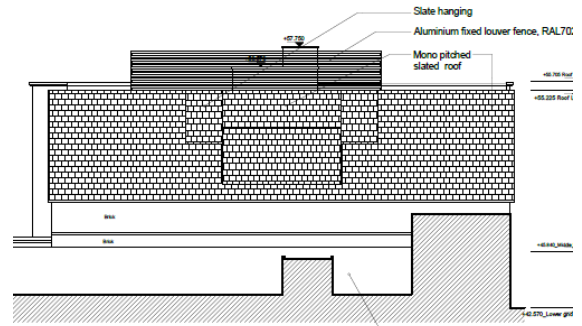
South Elevation



North Elevation



West Elevation



East Elevation

5.0 The Internal Plans (These have been only very slightly revised)

- 5.1 The new building will have three main internal floor levels and a mezzanine between the ground and first floor.
- 5.2 On the ground floor is the entrance foyer, together with toilets and a welcome/ refreshments area

served by a back-of-house kitchen facility, capable of producing snacks and light meals.

- 5.3 This will lead into the main hall, which will be able to be used either as a single large space, or subdivided into smaller rooms. The main hall is going to be a multi-purpose room, suitable for Sunday School type groups on Sundays and a whole range of church and community uses throughout the week.
- 5.4 The existing building's ground floor is used intensively and the ground floor of the new building will be the same. The difference will be that there will be more space, more toilets, better refreshment facilities and a spacious and welcoming foyer. The mezzanine level will house two meeting rooms, a youth room and a plant room.
- 5.5 On the first floor there will be a church office area and meeting rooms. Access will be via an elegant sweeping staircase as well as two large lifts. The lifts are purposely larger than normally required, to accommodate the type of wheelchair which allows the users to have their legs extended. Also there are two, in case one is out of action for one reason or another.
- 5.6 Each floor will be served by its own toilets and refreshment making facilities.
- 5.7 On the second floor there will be further meeting rooms.
- 5.8 The meeting rooms will be available to the community to hire for any appropriate meetings or activities, as well as for age-group meetings on Sundays. Some of these meeting rooms have their own internal toilet provision so that small children's activities can be accommodated and good safeguarding practice will be much easier to implement.

6.0 Sustainability of the building

- 6.1 Following submission of the detailed BREEAM assessment for the building prepared by the Ridge sustainability team in Autumn 2020, it has been agreed with the RBC planning team that the building will be required to achieve the BREEAM Very Good standard.

The sustainability features will include:

- High standards of insulation of walls, windows and roof structure.
- Air source heat pump.
- Solar panels on the roof.
- Heat recovery ventilation
- Occupancy controls for both heating and lighting, so that when not in use rooms or zones do not have to be lit or heated to occupancy standards.
- There will be a high thermal mass in the thick, solid floors designed to retain heat.
- There will be L.E.D. lighting throughout.
- Electric charging points and cycle racks will be provided.
- There are excellent and frequent public transport connections within Reading and beyond by bus or train, or car, if need be.

7.0 Access and Accessibility

- 7.1 Greyfriars Reading is on Friar Street on the edge of the middle of the town, on the western side. It is close to the road network out west, joining the A4. Public transport links are excellent. There is a bus stop almost outside the door. It is a 10 minutes walk from the major bus terminus at the Railway Station. It is also 10 minute walk from the railway station itself, where there are main line links from Reading to London, Oxford and Didcot, and further afield to Bristol and Exeter in the west. Main line trains travel to London on a frequent basis, allowing Reading to be a popular commuter town.
- 7.2 Car travel is also convenient, even though there is limited parking. There is the Garrard Street carpark within a 5 minutes walk, and the Chatham street carpark is diagonally across the main IDR roundabout that is up to modern international standards. Reading is on the banks of the River Thames and this means that for cyclists it is relatively flat and easy to get around in.
- 7.3 Access is ideal. There is almost no impediment to achieving access to Greyfriars from anywhere, near or far.
- 7.4 For these proposals of Phase 2, which are the subject of this planning application, there will be level access through the front doors.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The new Centre will extend and improve the church and community facilities that Greyfriars uses to engage with people of all types, nationalities and creeds alike.
- 8.2 The extensive and meaningful service to society at large in Reading will be greatly improved. One of the purposes of the Church is to serve people in ways that support their needs for physical, mental and social well-being. This building is to be a servant to both the church and the community.
- 8.3 There are no known reasons why this replacement building should not be granted Planning Permission. We request that the Application be Granted.



9.0 Gross internal and external areas of the revised proposals. (all in m²)

Existing Centre.					
Ground floor		GIA	455	GEA	481
First Floor		GIA	49		
	Totals	GIA	504	GEA	481
Proposed Centre – Original Application November 2019					
Ground floor		GIA	502	GEA	537
Link		GIA	85	GEA	102
Middle Floor		GIA	175	GEA	193
First Floor		GIA	421	GEA	463
Second Floor		GIA	333	GEA	374
Roof area access		GIA	4	GEA	8
	Totals	GIA	1,520	GEA	1,677
Proposed Centre – This Application February 2021					
Ground floor		GIA	521	GEA	557
Link		GIA	85	GEA	102
Middle Floor (including void)		GIA	175	GEA	193
First Floor		GIA	432	GEA	470
Second Floor		GIA	333	GEA	374
Roof area access		GIA	4	GEA	8
	Totals	GIA	1,550	GEA	1704



10.0 Appendix 1

Correspondence with Historic England. Mr Richard Peats.

10.1 14th September 2020

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your very helpful advice on the Zoom call recently in respect of altering the external finish of Greyfriars Phase 2 to a brick finish.

We have now re-designed the elevations, albeit that they look very similar. The objective was to take your advice and configure the forms to be suitable for a brick. Brick is by nature rectangular; therefore the basis of the new design is rectilinear.

The main features are:

- Sharp angles have been avoided.
- The original suggestion you made of a series of blocks, which works very well, remains.
- The similarity to the previous proposal, which has gone through the planning process with Reading Borough Council approval, means that this proposal is more likely than not to be also met with approval.
- The fenestration configuration retains a randomised form, which is contemporary, although there is an ordered arrangement and a pattern repeat. There are only 4 basic window sizes, but their alternating and mirrored use adds interest.
- There is a fall across the site, which affects the north elevation in that the ground floor, (base level upon which the whole building stands), and which gets a little deep on that side. I have added a plinth line to retain the proportions.

There is another layer of detail to work on further. This includes the coping details, lintel and sill details, and the underlining course at the base of each of the blocks. There are numerous other refinements which will be picked up on the way.

The client team has indicated their approval to the amended design and have asked us to consult with you again. We would really like your feedback in principle, so that if you are in agreement, we can proceed further with the detailing.

If you would like to discuss the proposal, we could arrange a Zoom meeting as we had before.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Jeremy

17th September 2020

Dear Jeremy

I think that we would be content with this provided that the quality and detailing of the brickwork was very high. The elevations are very simple and so will need excellent brickwork to carry it off.

Richard

Richard Peats MA IHBC

Team Leader - Development Advice (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight & Oxfordshire)

11.0 Appendix 2

11.1 Material Specifications for brick and stone

Main elevation material Bradgate light buff for upper levels

South Elevation and Link Panels. Jura Limestone, Beige Cross-cut and Sandblasted.

Main Plinth Staffordshire Linear Natural Blue Riven bricks 440 x 102 x 65mm

Below Plinth Line Staffordshire Slate Blue for North-West and North elevations below level line where ground level drops.

Refer to Elevational drawings, JBKS GRE-180.05

11.2 Main Elevation Material



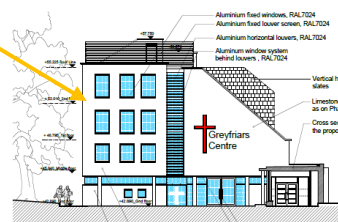
Images may vary slightly from actual products due to natural variation in colour and screen resolution.

Ibstock Bradgate Light Buff 65mm Brick

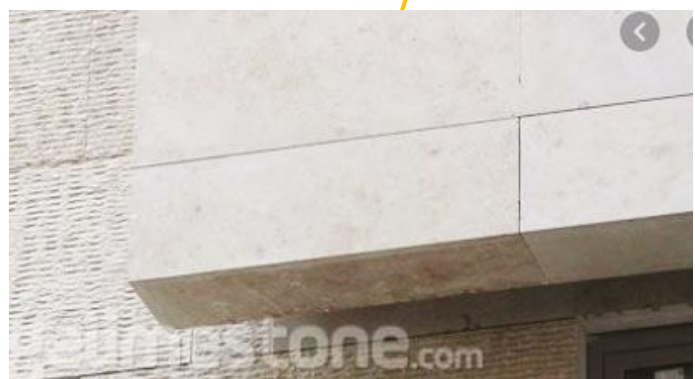
Part Number : 2122855

Standard - Ibstock - Width: 102mm - Length: 215mm - Weight: 2kg - Colour: Buff - Texture: Sandcreased - Style: Stock

The real life appearance of this brick is lightened considerably by the pale whiteish dusting of the surface. It matches very well with the Jura Limestone shown below



11.3 Jura Limestone Cladding

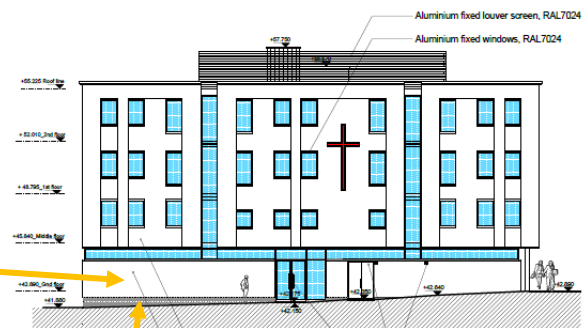


Jura Limestone comes from limestone deposits in Southern Germany. It is hard and very suitable for external surfaces. The specification will be Sandblasted, which evens out the appearance. It is very pleasing.

11.4 Main Plinth



IBSTOCK NATURAL BLUE RIVEN LINEAR BRICKS



11.5 Below Plinth

Staffordshire Slate Blue
Smooth



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4 February 2021