

**Proposed New External Staircase at R+,
Reading**
Planning Statement

April 2021

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Client

Oval Properties 1601 Limited

Our reference

OVAS3000

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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 erection of an external staircase within the existing lightwell at R+, Reading.
- 1.2 The building is located on the end of the urban block positioned between Forbury and Valpy Street, Reading.
- 1.3 The proposal for the external staircase sought through this planning application will see the improvement of the fire escape for the existing building. This constitutes part of a wider refurbishment to modernise the office floor plates and communal areas.
- 1.4 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;
 - Community Infrastructure Levy Form 1;
 - Application Fee;
 - Design and Access Statement; and
 - Application Plans (please refer to **Appendix 1** for a list).
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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. 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
 - **Application Ref. 101241:** Retrospective application for mesh banner. Granted 24 November 2010

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:

“The erection of an external staircase”

- 3.3 The key development objective for this proposal is to provide a new external staircase for the R + Reading building. The proposed staircase would run from the basement to the fifth floor and be positioned to the rear boundary of the building.
- 3.4 This would result in the loss of existing car parking spaces A and B.
- 3.5 The building currently has two staircases but an additional staircase is required in order to comply with travel distances and to allow each wing of the building to be subdivided.

Design

- 3.6 The existing cladding of the building is to be retained due to structural limitations and a single curtain wall panel is being replaced with a solid panel and access door. The cladding will match the existing grey panels
- 3.7 The stair well will be clad with perforated full-height metal panels to provide adequate fire protection. This will provide daylight into the space supported by its south aspect.
- 3.8 . The route from ground to basement has been rotated 90degrees to allow for maintenance access.
- 3.9 A green roof will be incorporated to the basement level.

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 In addition, there are also a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that are considered to be of relevance to the application. These are also discussed below.
- 4.4 The revised National Planning Policy Framework ('The Framework') was published in February 2019. 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.
- 4.5 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was published in 2014 and is updated on a regular basis as an online resource. It provides guidance to support the Framework, discussing individual topics in greater detail.

The Development Plan

Local Plan

- 4.6 Reading Borough Council's Local Plan was adopted in 2019 to assist in guiding development up to 2036.
- 4.7 The fundamental objective of the Core Strategy 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.
- 4.8 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."*
- 4.9 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."*
- 4.10 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."*

4.11 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 reflects 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 CC3 Adaption to Climate Change.** This policy states that all developments must demonstrate design to incorporate measures to adapt to climate change. This includes, inter alia:
 - Proposals involving both new and existing buildings shall demonstrate how they have been designed to maximise resistance and resilience to climate change for example by including measures such as solar shading, thermal mass, heating and ventilation of the building and appropriately coloured materials in areas exposed to direct sunlight, green and brown roofs, green wall, etc.
 - Orientation to maximise the opportunities for both natural heating and ventilation and reducing exposure to wind and other elements.
- **Policy CC7 Design and the 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 states 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 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.
- **Policy CR2 Design in Central Reading:** This policy states that development within Central Reading should demonstrate:

- 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
- 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

Supplementary Planning Document

- 4.12 There also exists a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) which assist in transcribing the retrospective policies into formal guidance for applicants
- 4.13 For the purpose of this application, the only relevant SPD is the Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document (adopted 2019)

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD

- 4.14 The Sustainable Design and Construction SPD provides guidance on the implementation of key sustainability policies set out in the Reading Local Plan. It provides practical advice on forms of sustainable design and construction, as well as waste minimisation that will meet policy requirements
- 4.15 For non-residential development, a BREEAM 'Excellent' standard is required. To achieve this the following methods are proposed:
- Natural day lighting
 - Ventilation
 - Green and brown roofs

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.16 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') was adopted in February 2019. 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
- 4.17 Paragraph 7 of the Framework sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development
- 4.18 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.

4.19 Paragraph 10 states that at the heart of the framework is **a presumption in favour of sustainable development**.

4.20 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.

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

4.22 Paragraph 124 of the Framework states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creating better places in which to live and work.

4.23 Paragraph 127 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.
- 4.24 Paragraph 130 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 functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or SPDs.
- 4.25 Paragraph 150 states that new development should be planned in ways that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location, orientation and design.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 4.26 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.
- 4.27 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

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 the construction of an external staircase to improve the usability and fire escape provision of the building and thereby its attractiveness to existing and potential tenants. It is therefore acceptable.
- 5.5 Whilst the proposed development will result in the loss of two parking spaces, policy TR5 is clear that development should provide car parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport.
- 5.6 The site is located in close proximity to a number of local transport services, namely with the Blagrove Street bus stop directly outside of the building providing a wide variety of services. In addition, the railway station is located directly to the north of a site.
- 5.7 Given the sites proximity to a range of public transport facilities and the clear modal shift desire of the local plan it is considered that the loss of two parking spaces is *de minimus* to the consideration of the proposals and acceptable in policy terms.
- 5.8 The proposed development is acceptable in principle.

Design

- 5.9 The design and appearance of the proposed external 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. This accords with Policy CR2 Design in Central Reading and Policy CC7 Design and the Public Realm. This also aligns with Paragraph 124 of the NPPF which emphasises that good design is essential for sustainable development and creating better places to live and work.

- 5.10 The location of the proposed external staircase has been strategically positioned to conform to fire safety regulations regarding travel distances and the subdivision of the wings. The staircase has also been positioned in such a way so as to not cause interference with neighbouring properties. This aligns with the recommendations in Policy CR2 Design in Central Reading which states that development should be considerate of adjacent sites.
- 5.11 A green roof has been incorporated on the roof staircase at the ground floor level. The design also takes advantage of natural lighting as it located in a south-facing position and the perforated metal cover means that the space has adequate ventilation. This is in accordance with Policy CC3 Adaptation to Climate Change and Sustainable Design and Construction SPD.
- 5.12 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 full planning permission for an external staircase to existing R+ building.
- 6.2 It is considered that the proposal 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 provide an external stair case to the building to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations, specifically in relation to travel distances and the ability for each wing to be subdivided.
- 6.4 The proposal is a high quality design which is sympathetic to the local context. The positioning means that it does not interfere with neighbouring properties and the green roof and perforated metal cover subsequently means that climate change adaption measures have been incorporated.
- 6.5 The application justifies a grant of planning permission.

Appendix 1: List of Application Plans

Drawing Title	Drawing Reference
Area Schedule	N/A
Existing General Arrangement Location Plan	010ZZ-LOCATION REV. PL01
Existing General Arrangement Site Plan	010ZZ-SITE REV.PL01
Existing General Arrangement Basement Level	0110B1 REV.PL01
Proposed General Arrangement Basement Level	0310B1 REV.PL01
Existing General Arrangement Ground Level	01100 REV.PL01
Existing General Arrangement Level 01	01101 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement Level 02	01102 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement Level 03	01103 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement Level 04	01104 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement Level 05	01105 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement Level 06	01106 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement North Elevation	01200 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement South Elevation	01201 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement Lightwell – North Elevation	01202 REV.PL00
Existing General Arrangement West Elevation	01203 REV.PL00
Proposed General Arrangement Ground Level	03100 REV.PL00
Proposed General Arrangement Ground Level	03100 REV.PL01
Proposed General Arrangement Level 02	03102 REV.PL00

Proposed General Arrangement Level 02	03103 REV.PL00
Proposed General Arrangement Level 04	03104 REV.PL00
Proposed General Arrangement Level 05	03105 REV.PL00
Proposed General Arrangement Level 06	03106 REV.PL00
Proposed General Arrangement Lightwell – North Elevation	03202 REV.PL00

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