
DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Supporting a planning application for the removal of existing development and the construction of a four-storey building to comprise 19 dwellings and associated works
at 75 – 81 Southampton Street, Reading RG1 2QU

September 2021

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement accompanies a planning application for the demolition and clearance of existing development and the erection of a four-storey building to provide nineteen dwellings, with service vehicle parking area, secure cycle parking, bin storage, amenity space, biodiversity features, and renewable energy facilities at the site of 75 – 81 Southampton Street, Reading RG1 2QU. It follows on from Council advice in respect of two pre-application enquiry responses, references 210207/PREAPP (June 2021) and 201237/PREAPP (October 2020).

1.2 Part 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. The NPPF also states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and 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.

1.5 The Reading Local Plan (LP), adopted in November 2019, Policy CC7 (copied to the right) states that all development must be of high design quality. As the site is in the defined Central Reading area, Policy CR2 also sets out additional Design expectations (copied on the next page).

Design and the Public Realm

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

All development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form, including: -

- *Layout: urban structure and urban grain;*
- *Landscape;*
- *Density and mix;*
- *Scale: height and massing; and*
- *Architectural detail and materials*

will be assessed to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to the following urban design objectives: -

- *Character - a place with its own identity and sense of place*
- *Continuity and enclosure*
- *Quality of the public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping*
- *Ease of movement and permeability*
- *Legibility - clear image and easy to understand*
- *Adaptability - capable of adaptation over time*
- *Diversity - meets a wide range of needs.*

Developments will also be assessed to ensure that they: -

- *Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm;*
- *Create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;*
- *Address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them, including providing suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily;*
- *Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping.*

Applications for major developments, or other relevant developments, should be accompanied by a design and access statement that deals with all the above matters.

Design in Central Reading

CR2: DESIGN IN CENTRAL READING

Applications for development within Central Reading should demonstrate the following attributes:

- a. 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;
- b. Development will provide appropriate, well designed public spaces and other public realm, including squares, open spaces, streetscape, utilising high quality and well-maintained hard and soft landscaped areas, and public art, that provide suitable functions and interest, sense of place and safe and convenient linkages to adjoining areas;
- c. Development should consider and, where possible, include ways of providing green infrastructure designed into the development, for instance through roof gardens, green walls and green roofs, to enhance the otherwise very urban environment;
- d. 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;
- e. 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; and
- f. 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.

The National Design Guide is a material consideration. It indicates that there are ten characteristics of a well-designed place, illustrated in the diagram below.



1.6 In summary the pre-application advice provided by the Council referred to the design policies mentioned above and LP Policies EN1 and EN6 relating to the protection of historic features including their settings and the use of these assets in informing design. A number of listed buildings are close to the site, identified in figure 2 below and considered more specifically in the Heritage Statement provided separately.

2.0 EXISTING CONTEXT & IDENTITY

The Site

2.1 The site is 0.07ha in size. It comprises an empty single storey, mostly flat roofed, building with adjacent hardstanding/parking area. It was formerly occupied by 'Co-op Funeralcare', a commercial use (Use Class E(a)(c)).

2.2 The building has direct street frontage. It has rendered walls over red brick, large display windows and a partly pitched roof to the front. One side is pebble dashed, over red brick.

2.3 Whilst the building is modest in scale, it has no intrinsic architectural value. It has a utilitarian appearance that is incongruous. Along with its poor state and the boarded up empty site next door, these generate an aura of neglect and deterioration; that is harmful to the street scene as well as the settings of the nearby heritage assets.

2.4 Figure 1a shows the front elevation of the existing building. Figure 1b is an aerial view of the site, although the site next door appears green from the air, the street view is less attractive (see figure 3 photo no. 2).

2.5 Its immediate neighbour to the south comprises a three-storey modern red brick building, with rendered detail at ground floor and a mansard style roof with parapet detail.

2.6 To the north, there is an empty plot located on the cross- roads

Figure 1a: Street elevation of the site



Figure 1b: Aerial (google) view of the site



of Southampton Street and Crown Street. It is allocated in the Local Plan for residential development at Policy CR14j. The policy states that the site 0.08ha in size is suitable for 13-19 dwellings and should: Enhance the setting of nearby listed buildings; Take account of potential archaeological significance; Address noise impacts on residential use; and Address air quality impacts on residential use.

2.7 The above Local Plan requirement is a relevant consideration and influence for this site.

Location and Area

2.8 The site is in central Reading. It is in a sustainable location: with essential provision shops close by and the Oracle shopping centre approximately 500m away; there is good public transport access with bus stops close by and the railway station is 1km away (with direct bus connections). Figure 2 provides an aerial view of the site, highlighting some features.

2.9 The surrounding area is mostly residential interspersed with commercial development. There is a range of urban architecture, in the main 19th to 21st Century, comprising two storey and three storey terraced houses, modern offices and apartment blocks that vary between three storeys and six storeys in heights. Figure 3 highlights the architectural forms and street elements that create a sense of urban diversity and commotion.

Figure 2. Aerial (from Google) showing main locational context (LB – Listed Building)



Figure 3: Character & appearance of the area

1. Street view to site looking northwards (St Giles church is an important feature).



2. Street view to site looking southwards (boarded empty site is a negative feature).



3. Southwards street view showing listed building opposite the site.



4. Crown Street nearby, modern 3,4,5,6 storey & traditional 2 storey terraced development.



3.0 DESIGN AIMS

3.1 A number of criterial aims have been established through the pre-application proposals; these are:

- The northwards street view down Southampton Street towards St Giles should be protected or enhanced.
- Any new development that is higher than current development should be set back to avoid a domineering street presence.
- Whilst modern buildings with a greater storey height than 4 storeys exist in the area, including further north in Southampton Street, a maximum height of 4 storeys is acceptable.
- Soft landscaping should feature to the front, with tree planting. Other biodiversity elements such as green roofs are promoted.
- Reflect characteristic features within the street-scene, including window alignments and proportions.

3.2 The design must also take into account criteria to provide good quality living conditions for future occupiers, these are:

- Acceptable levels regarding natural light, noise and air.
- Acceptable living space and layout.
- Amenity space, secure cycle parking, waste and recycling and service vehicle parking provision.
- Accessible, legible, and easy to use public space and layout.
- Security and defensible space for residents.

Figure 4: Design influences



Dominant materials, large windows, alignment & decorative features



4.0 LAYOUT

4.1 The layout is constrained by the size, shape and frontage aspect of the site, as well as pre-application advice regarding maintaining space to either side of the building and providing a frontage set back.

4.2 The layout ensures that existing neighbours and all new dwellings have appropriate levels of privacy and space. Frontage dwellings overlook the street, providing appropriate legibility and passive surveillance. To the front greenery and trees improve the street & provide defensible space. Gaps to the sides allows service access. The back maintains planted open space for shared amenity space

4.3 Internally the building is designed for easy residential access and privacy. The main entrance provides the main lobby with stairs and a lift, the stairs positioned to make the most of natural light from windows. All apartments are served via a secondary lobby area, providing security and quiet. There is direct access to shared amenity space from the building, protecting privacy. A side gate provides security & convenient access to the cycle storage. The bins and recycling facilities are stored to the front in a green building, easy to use and to service. Figure 7 below shows these design aspects.

Figure 5: Layout sketch existing and aims:



Figure 6: Height, side space & set-backs ensure an appropriate non domineering scale



5.0 SCALE & HEIGHT

5.1 Whilst the building is 4-storeys high, it steps down in height from the neighbouring building and sits lower than buildings to the rear.

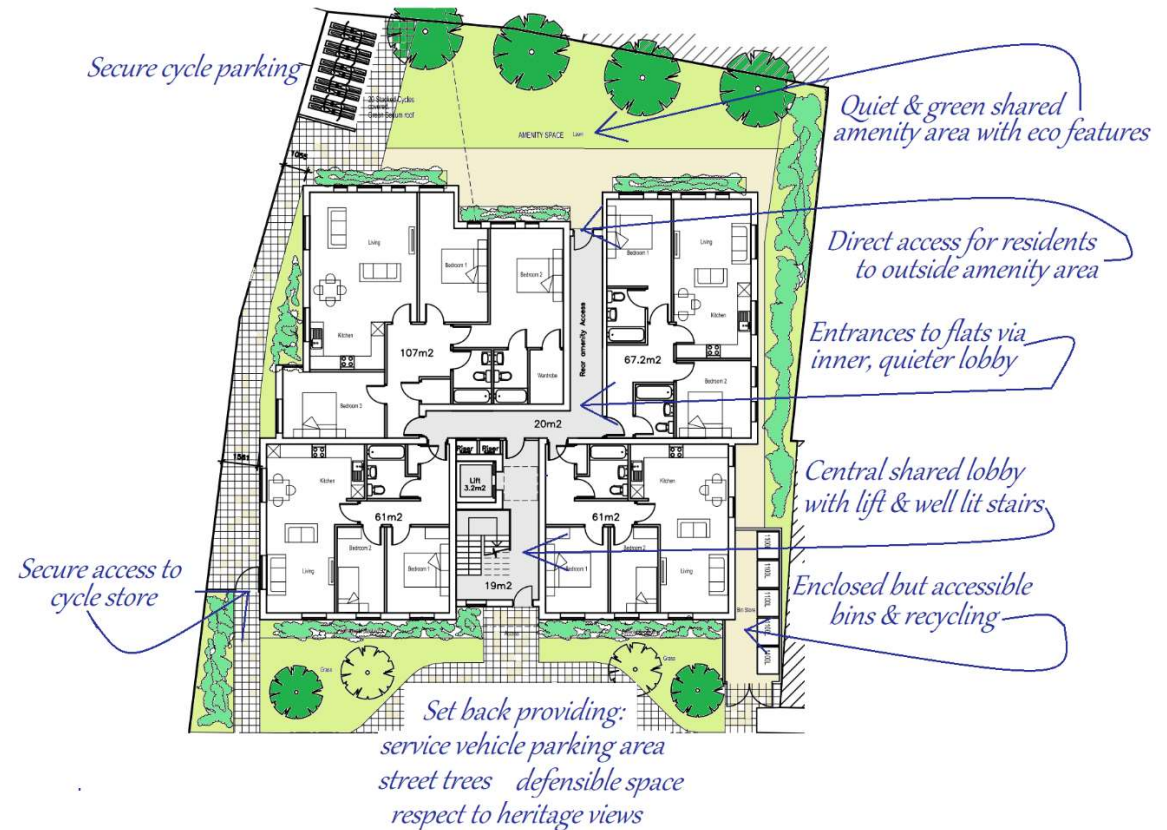
5.2 The building has a generous set back of approximately 5m. The frontage, along with the gaps to the side and the additional set back of the central entranceway, serve to reduce any sense of bulk and street dominance. See figure 6 above.

6.0 APPEARANCE & MATERIALS

6.1 The appearance is traditional and reflective of neighbouring buildings and the traditional townhouses in the area.

6.2 Materials will comprise rendered finish to the ground floor level, similar to the next-door building, with red brick above and slate mansard style top floor. Windows and doors will be white upvc, glazed appropriately for high insulation values in respect of both heat and sound. Windows are aligned to provide a regular vertical rhythm to the building, whilst serving the practical requirements of providing sufficient natural light for future occupiers.

Figure 7: Internal layout providing residential convenience, security & amenities.



7.0 LANDSCAPING & BIODIVERSITY

7.1 Further details and information on landscaping are provided separately. It has been designed for safety, accessibility and good natural surveillance, as well as providing greenery and biodiversity enhancements.

7.2 In summary:

- Planting to the front adds a further dimension to the appearance. It provides attractive street features, as well as defining defensible space for the ground floor occupiers. Two trees, described as tidy and attractive columnar forms of the beloved native hornbeam add to the symmetry and traditional style of the design. The set back also provides for a service vehicle parking area, centralised to enhance the design symmetry and

with a contrasting surface from the highway and pavement, to add definition to public and semi-public space.

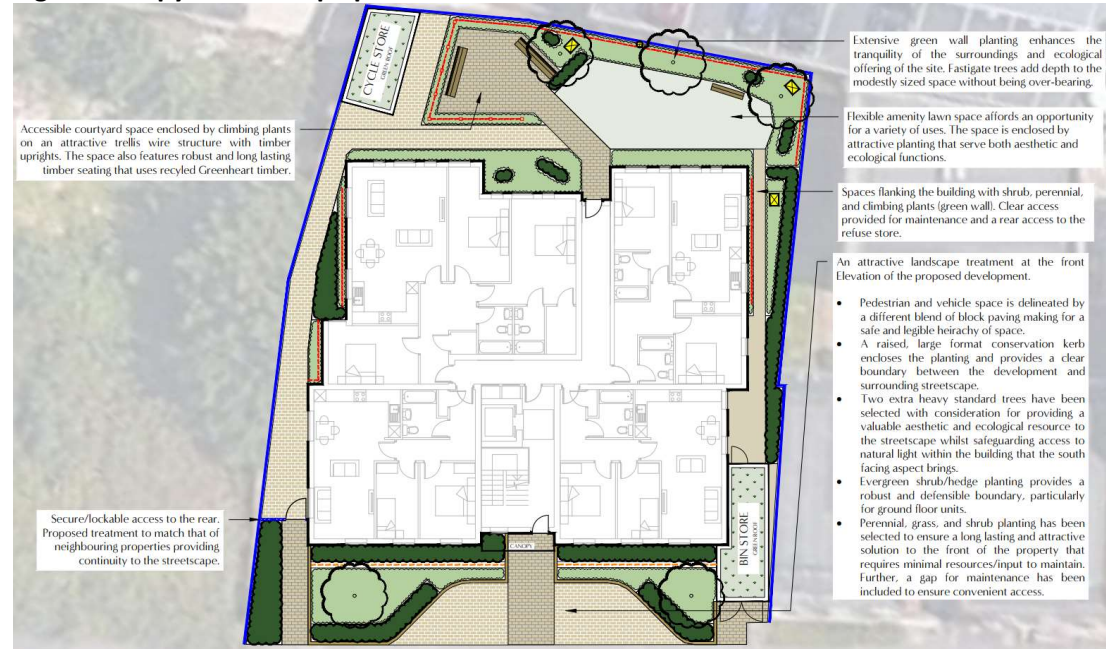
- Green walls and roofs, as well as ecological interventions feature, providing a blend of ecological, aesthetic, and climatic benefits.

8.0 ACCESS

8.1 The site, as described already, is in a sustainable location where services, facilities and access to public transport is very good. For this reason, the scheme will be car free.

8.2 Secure cycle parking provision is provided to the back of the building, with direct access along the side of the building.

Figure 8: Copy of landscape plan



8.3 Each dwelling is accessible from the central access corridors, where there are stairs and a lift. Direct private access to the shared amenity space is provided on the ground floor through a rear door.

8.4 Waste and recycling bins are provided in a secure storage area to the front and side on the building. The space allows for the provision of bins in accordance with Council policy. The bins are convenient and easily accessed for the waste removals services.

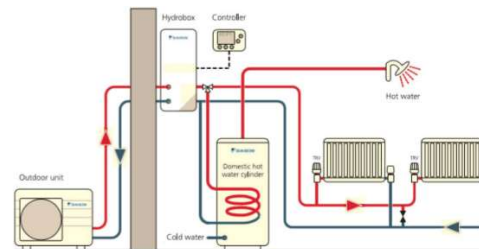
8.5 An on-site layby area has been provided to the front of the building for van sized service vehicles.

9.0 LOW CARBON & CLIMATE RESPONSIVE DESIGN

9.1 The proposal includes the provision of Air Source Heat Pumps, along with high level insulation, use of LED lighting and water saving equipment the design will ensure high energy efficiency. The green roofs help with insulation, rain water catchment and biodiversity. Being car free encourages walking, cycling and use of public transport.



Low-Energy Lighting | Dual Flush Toilet | Increased Insulation | Heat Recovery System | Locally Sourced Materials | Efficient Appliances | Recycling and Composting



Bicycle Storage

10.0 CONCLUSION

10.1 Having regard to the Development Plan policies, advice in the NPPF and advice provided pre-application, this Statement demonstrates, that the design and access principles associated with the proposal have been carefully considered and appropriately developed. The proposal positively responds to the site and surroundings and achieves the following:

- A layout, scale and form that respects and preserves views to St Giles, as well as other nearby heritage assets.
 - A development that makes efficient use of brownfield land.
 - A design that reflects the traditional styles and materials pertinent to the area.
- Improved on-site biodiversity, ecology friendly measures and street trees.
 - A high-quality living environment for future occupiers, without harming neighbouring amenity levels.
 - Safe and secure access and clear legibility of spaces.
 - Inclusion of energy efficient systems and biodiversity and ecology friendly measures and features.



CGI of the proposal