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DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

in respect of a rear extension and formation of an HMO above a self-contained
basement apartment at

**48 Watlington Street
Reading
Berkshire**

Project ref: 1183

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DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

In respect of forming a two-storey rear extension and converting the enlarged house into a basement flat below a remodelled six-person HMO at

48 Watlington Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 4RS

1. ENVIRONS

The site is situated on the west side of Watlington Street in a terrace of four similar four-storey houses (including basements), being the northernmost of a series of such terraces located near the western edge of the Eldon Square Conservation Area. It is a short walk to all the facilities in Reading town centre, to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, to churches in Watlington street itself, and to bus routes in London Road, Eldon Road, Queen's Road and King's Road; and a short cycle ride to local commercial facilities in Earley Road and Wokingham Road.

Surrounding houses, generally built in the middle of the 19th century, are of traditional two-, three- and four-storey construction, with brick walls supporting timber-framed pitched slate roofs punctuated by facing brick chimneystacks. The external walls at the front, including those on the application site and its immediate neighbour at No.46 Watlington Street [henceforth referred to as 'No.46'], are mainly of red brickwork although, at the other end of the terrace, the facades of Nos.50 and 52 Watlington Street are in yellow stock brickwork. Both rear elevations of Nos.46 and 48 have been fully stucco rendered, but the adjoining Nos.50 and 52 are in facing brickwork. In common with many of the neighbouring properties, the front elevations are embellished with stone or stucco quoining, bands, projecting stone sills, brackets, arch tympani and lintels with keystones. The front elevations of the basements have been rendered in white stucco.

The area consists mainly of similarly constructed residential houses with outdoor private amenity space augmented by the public outdoor amenity space of Eldon Square on the north side of London Road. Within sight of the property are the twin spires of the Wesley Methodist Church and the Church of St John the Evangelist forming two major historical landmarks in central Reading. Very close by are the two Listed Buildings of Watlington House and The Oval, and The Lyndhurst public house on the corner of Watlington street and Queen's Road.

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Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal observes that .. “Historically, the conservation area was developed as a residential area that contained various communal facilities such as church and Sunday school, shop, public houses, park and small scale industrial activity ... The main working class source of employment would have been Huntley and Palmers.

Today, the area is still predominantly residential but some of the larger houses are now in multiple occupation or converted into, for instance, surgeries ... or offices... . A few shops remain”

The neighbouring rear extension at No.46 is a relatively recent construction of ample proportions. It is known that planning consent was granted last year for a reduced extension on this end-of-terrace site, involving the setting back and narrowing of the upper ground floor in order to reduce its impact on the neighbouring Watlington House, a listed building, and on the conservation area beyond, the extension being easily visible from the street there due to its being end-of-terrace. This planning consent for No.46 included the formation of self-contained flats, the basement one being very similar in almost all respects with the one currently proposed at No.48.

2. THE SITE

48 Watlington Street is part of a terrace of mainly four-storey (including basement) residential houses, each with an existing two-storey rear extension. The site is currently registered as a six-person HMO containing shared sanitary and cooking facilities. The main entrance is separated from the public pavement in Watlington Street by a paved front area.

A basement lounge currently provides access to a substantial rear garden, while the front of the basement contains a kitchen/dining room. The ground floor contains two bedrooms, a shower room, and a separate wc. There are four more bedrooms, a cupboard and a bathroom at first and second floor levels.

Note has been taken of the historical context of the existing house which originally formed part of the rapid expansion of Reading during the second half of the nineteenth century. The conservation area appraisal observes that “Terraced houses in the Eldon Road Conservation Area served the employees of Huntley & Palmers whose factory was located a short walk away on the north side of the Kennet & Avon Canal”.

The site is an important and continuing reminder of its historical value as a ‘dwelling for artisans’, and is identified on the appraisal map as one of a number of buildings of townscape merit. This is expanded in the appraisal: “ ...commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered 19th century buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provide the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly they make a positive contribution to the special interest of the conservation area.”

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3. PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

3.1 First application:

An application, ref: 162349, for planning permission to construct a two-storey rear extension, and to convert the enlarged building to form a new basement flat below a six-bedroom small C4 HMO on the floors above was refused consent on 31 March 2017 due to the standard of accommodation in the basement apartment being considered poor, with restricted outlooks and light levels, while the HMO was considered to have a reduced and convoluted communal area, with potential noise disturbance to the flat below. Use of the front undercroft as a cycle store, particularly by occupants of the HMO impinging on the privacy of the basement bedroom there, was also considered unacceptable.

3.2 Second application:

An application, ref: 170975, for planning consent for similar proposals was submitted on 12 June 2017, the principal aims of the design were to provide an above-average standard of accommodation, including the provision of *en suite* sanitary facilities for each occupier of the existing HMO.

Criticism of the previous scheme was addressed as follows:-

3.2.1 Daylight to basement flat:

Light levels to the basement unit have been increased by enlarging the front bedroom window, and maximising the width of the rear glazing, with an additional rooflight now introduced to improve daylight levels in the rear bedroom. In any event the previous levels had been demonstrated by specialists to comply with current standards and closely resemble the daylight available to the basement rooms in the recently approved development at the No.46.

3.2.2 Outlooks from basement flat:

The enlargement of windows to the front and rear of the basement flat enables an improvement to their respective outlooks, particularly as the rear garden is considerably longer than the previous scheme.

3.2.3 Ceiling height to basement flat:

As before, it is proposed to raise the ground floor structure to improve ceiling heights within the basement apartment below. This proposal has now been more clearly presented on the submitted drawings.

3.2.4 Communal area to HMO:

The proposals provide 27m² of communal area, and drawing 1183/6 has been prepared to provide an indicative furniture layout to demonstrate its practicability, now improved by reducing the number of doors that may have been otherwise obstructed. In addition, although the proposed communal space narrows to 3.0m and min.2.7m towards the window, its general 4.5m width is greater than the 4.0m width of the existing spaces.

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3.2.5 Cycle stores

The front undercroft remains a cycle store, but only serving the basement flat in order to protect the privacy of its front bedroom. Secure cycle stores for each of the six occupants of the HMO would be located in the rear garden. It is noted that the planning consent for similar development of the neighbouring No.50 Watlington Street has a condition requiring the introduction of secure cycle stores. In the context of the Conservation Area it would be inappropriate for these to be located on the front hardstanding, leaving only the rear garden as a suitable location. As many modern bicycles are designed to be collapsible for easier portability, it is anticipated that the rear cycle stores would be entirely practicable for these.

3.2.6 Car parking

While the front hardstanding is not deep enough to meet current dimensional standards for off-street car parking, it is the only space available. It was noted during the previous consultation period that a small car can park there without obstructing the street, the public pavement or access to the house and that, as this is current practice, its use for parking cars is likely to continue without detriment.

3.2.7 No.50 Watlington Street:

The previously designed rear extension was criticised for having an overbearing effect on the neighbouring No.50 Watlington Street, although this was not included in the reasons for refusal. Nevertheless the rear extension has been modified to reduce that effect by stepping the upper storey back by nom.1.5m where it abuts the shared boundary.

3.3 Appeal:

On 6 October 2017 the application was nevertheless refused planning consent for very similar reasons as the previous application. An appeal was submitted, ref: APP/E0345/W/17/3189394, but was unsuccessful solely due to the application having failed to make a financial contribution to affordable housing off-site.

All other aspects of the design described above were found acceptable.

4.0 CURRENT PROPOSALS

This third application is for an identical scheme as the second application but, in accordance with the appeal decision, contributions are now specifically offered as a contribution to affordable housing off-site, as detailed in the Affordable Housing Statement.

5.0. ACCESS

5.1 Specific Access Issues

The proposed development is situated on a broadly level site that is unlikely to provide unusual difficulties for those with mobility problems.

The existing house is in general compliance with Part M of the Building Regulations, but is not suitable for wheelchair users due to existing entrance steps. The introduction of a ramped access to the main front door could be contrived but, being uncharacteristic for this type of property, would likely detract from the appearance and be detrimental to the appearance of the surrounding Conservation Area.

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5.2 Access from Existing Transport Network

The site lies a short distance from public transport links to commercial facilities in Reading town centre and all destinations eastwards, and within walking distance of local commercial, religious and social establishments.

5.3 Access Points and Layout

The HMO will be approached as now from the main entrance in Watlington Street, to the front of the property. The proposed basement flat will be accessed by using and upgrading the existing front steps down from the paved front area.

5.4 Maintenance of Access

The existing access points are of robust hard material requiring minimal maintenance.

6.0. DESIGN

6.1 To provide good quality self-contained apartment in the basement in accordance with the Council's policies that seek to maintain standards of residential accommodation while restricting impact upon public resources;

6.2 To provide good quality accommodation that is affordable for key workers in the borough and in keeping with the residential nature of the surrounding Conservation Area;

6.3 To maintain the prevailing relative residential, density in the immediately surrounding area;

6.4 To construct a rear extension in keeping and subordinate to the host property and characteristic of those to be found in neighbouring properties;

6.5 To respond to government policy seeking to better utilise underused urban sites;

6.6 To bring an existing site into improved economic use without undue detriment to its surroundings, thereby maintaining the quality of the Conservation Area in a sustainable way and in the long-term public interest.

7. INFRASTRUCTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

It has been calculated that a contribution of **£8873.75** is due for affordable housing off-site, as detailed in the Affordable Housing Statement and Proposed Heads of Terms.

June 2018