

Design and Access Statement

Extension, Remodel and Associated External Landscaping
at Kensington House
for The Abbey Junior School, Reading, Berkshire

May 2018

v.3



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d1 Introduction

d1.01 Background

The Abbey Junior School is a Girls' Junior Day School with capacity for 375 students aged from 6yrs to 11yrs old. The Junior school is comprised of three campuses: Kensington, Abbey Gardens and Knell House, and is located in Reading.

This design and access statement accompanies an application involving the:

- formation a new reception and classroom extension with internal remodelling to the front of the Kensington block, following demolition of the existing food technology classroom;
- remodelling of the car park and formation of new vehicular and pedestrian access routes at the Kensington site;
- extension to the Kensington kitchen to form a store;
- extension to the Kensington hall to form a studio with link to the hall and PE store;
- rendering of the external brickwork of Kensington along Vicarage Road;
- new brickwork wall and railing to the boundary of the Kensington campus and netball courts with associated landscaping works.

d1.02 Location

The Abbey Junior School is comprised of three sites; Knell House, Abbey Gardens and The Main School (Kensington & Somerleaze).

The main Junior School site (Kensington and Somerleaze)

Transition (Year 2), Lower I (Year 3), Upper I (Year 4), Upper II (Year 5), Lower III (Year 6) for girls

The main Junior School campus is located in Kensington House at the junction of Christchurch Road and Vicarage Road. The site has been used as a school for over 100 years.

Kensington House is a large late Victorian property, with a mix of two and three storeys. Its slate roof contrasts with the predominantly tiled roofs which surround it. The main elevation to Christchurch Road is grey brick with cream detailing and terracotta panels. There is a mixture of leaded lights, crittall and softwood box sash windows and timber doors. The roof was extensively overhauled with new battens, membrane and partial tile renewal in 2015.

To the rear of the site sits the Somerleaze block. This was opened in 2006 and is red brick and render with a zinc roof.

d1.02 Context

The Kensington site is located within the Christchurch Conservation Area. This is a mixed conservation area, comprising Victorian and possibly earlier buildings, with a variety of differing types and sizes of buildings. Their positioning on their plots is varied yet characterised by frontage development.

The majority of buildings within the Christchurch Conservation Area date almost wholly from the 1870s, and show few notable changes since that period.

There is significant tree cover throughout the Conservation Area and its immediate environs, which gives the area some verdant character.

The larger original buildings have been added to in instances to suit the requirements of changing occupancies, however these alterations have not detracted from the coherence of the Conservation Area.

The polychromatic, highly detailed, patterned brickwork prevalent in the original buildings is typical of Reading's architecture. Prominent, steeply pitched, slate roofs are common in the area and are evident across the three campuses which form the Junior School.

d1.03 Boundary and Site Access

To the front of Kensington House is a tarmac car park area with no formal layout, encouraging poor parking arrangements. There are large trees along the boundary. The boundary of the site is a mix of brickwork walls and close boarded fence which affords limited views into the site. The vehicular route through the site is haphazard with no clear pedestrian access to the school. The proposals set out within this application and as shown on the Highway Consultant's drawings seek to resolve this.

d1.04 Involvement and Process

The school have been closely involved in the form and layout of the extension to maximise the design to facilitate best learning environment in conjunction with the way the curriculum is currently taught.

A number of studies were carried out to establish the best location for the extension. The area to the east was dismissed as access is required to the kitchen and survey for deliveries. This would also be adjacent to a residential property and would not resolve the issues around safe access for pedestrians and vehicles. This location would also not form a link to the existing spaces within the school.

An extension to the existing entrance was also considered but was felt that again, that this would not link to the internal flow of spaces and would create a very large extension to the front of the school obscuring the existing facade.

An extension to the west was considered most appropriate as it would obscure the incongruous 1990s block and link well to existing ground floor and first floor spaces. The existing facade would not be obscured and the flow of pedestrians and vehicles through the site could be resolved through a "one way" system. An opportunity to remove the boundary fencing, landscape the car parking area and manage the existing trees would also be created to enhance the conservation area setting. The form of the extension has been driven by utilising the footprint of the existing classroom to be demolished, and the requirement for a 2m clear zone around the existing services cabinet and substation to the boundary of Vicarage Road.

An initial pre application submission was made in November 2017 and following feedback and dialogue with the case officers, the proposals have been revised to address any concerns. Please refer to the Planning Statement for more information. A summary of the design approach is below.

The Abbey Junior School, Reading

Design and Access Statement

Pre Application One (November 2017)

Initial proposals sought to place a contemporary intervention between the Victorian and 1990s blocks using the material language of the Somerleaze block as shown below.

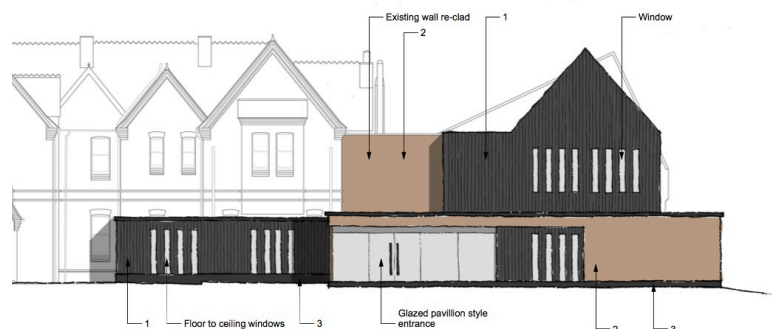


Photographs of Somerleaze

The proposals which formed the pre application presented two options for discussion.



Option A- a two storey block with gable ends to follow the rhythm and massing of the existing building with zinc and timber cladding.



Option B- a two storey set back first floor block with gable ends to follow the rhythm and massing of the existing building with zinc and timber cladding.

The Case and Conservation officer made the following comments and asked that the proposals be revised if they were to be supported.

A summary of key comments were:

- the two gables do not reflect the adjacent historic building form;
- the building appears to have a relatively flat elevational treatment at first floor level which is largely undifferentiated in materiality between the elevation and the roof. This would tend to increase the structure's visual bulk along the front and side elevations.
- the proposed front windows would consist of tall, narrow, slotted windows which do not relate well to the rhythm of the fenestration of the existing historic school building.
- the ground floor extension would also obscure part of the historic school building with a flat roofed single storey building.

Pre Application Two (January 2018)

It was accepted that the design changes, which stepped the extension away from the gable forms, improved the relationship to the existing building, however, concern related to how this may 'obscure' views of the historic building from within parts of the Conservation Area.

It was acknowledged that brick to reflect the main building was appropriate.

Officers outlined that the rendering of the side elevation and the rear extension were supportable, as was the fence replacement with wall/railings.

It was indicated that the scheme would constitute less than substantial harm to the Christchurch Conservation Area but further development was required.

Elevations tabled for discussion are shown below.



Pre Application Three (April 2018)

Following review of the massing, a revised proposal was submitted which was more domestic in appearance to reduce the perceived “harm” and masking of the existing victorian elevation.

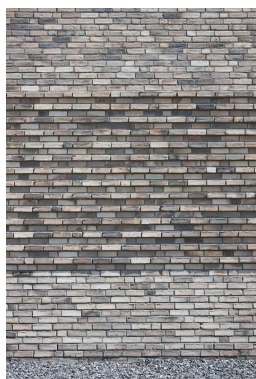
The Case Officer commented that-

It was felt that it was an improvement on what has previously been proposed and the changes have gone some way to addressing the original concerns. The amended proposal is less prominent and the materials are more in keeping with the original building. Weighing up the amended scheme the harm is outweighed by the public benefits.

The only matter raised was whether the chimney is needed and whether this has a functional purpose, if not it is suggested this could be removed and whether the side window to the first floor east elevation could be centralised or made wider as it is currently offset.

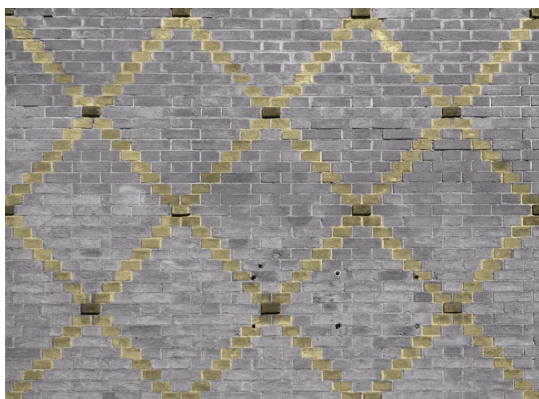
It is proposed to retain the chimney element as act as a natural “endstop” and mirrors the opposite end of the building. Chimneys are also a strong element in the conservation area and is proposed that the chimney would mask the extraction required in the food technology classroom it serves.

Materials proposed would be brick and glass with rendered studio and Vicarage Road elevation. To tie the extension and the 1990s block together the existing stair will be remodelled.



It is proposed that the brick detailing is in keeping with the local vernacular, with window apertures accentuated in a buff brick.

To relieve the mass, the lower section of the imposing brick façade is formed as a highly patterned ‘plinth’, which utilises rustication (recessed alternate courses) to ground the building.



The first floor extension will be formed of a combination of recessed and contrasting brickwork to recreate the diaper pattern of the surrounding conservation area in a modern idiom. This will be accentuated with contrasting detail at different levels and in different forms. The use of “*lively polychromatic brickwork found throughout this part of Victorian/Edwardian Reading*” is supported in the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal, 2008. This was a motif often used by the Victorian Gothic Revivalist architect, Alfred Waterhouse, who’s work is seen in the local area.

The roof will be slate to match the existing materials in the conservation area and adjacent Kensington building.

The boundary wall proposed is to be of a red brick to match the existing materials in the conservation area. The railing is proposed to match that of the senior school campus.

d1.05 Historic/Heritage Considerations

Refer to the Planning and Heritage Statement enclosed with the application and comments throughout the report relating to the Christchurch Conservation Area.

d1.06 Ecology

KP Ecology undertook a Phase 1 Ecology Survey in July 2017 to confirm the presence/absence of any protected species and/or habitats on site and/or the presence of suitable habitats that could be used by protected species.

The report concluded that no bats, or evidence of bats, was found at Kensington House. A copy of the report forms part of the application.

No other protected species were found on site.

d1.07 Trees

An Arboriculturalist has carried out a tree survey which illustrates the predicted root protection (RPA) and constraints. A copy of the report forms part of the application.

A small number of trees are proposed to be removed to facilitate the proposals. Details are contained within the Arboriculturalist’s report and Planning Statement.

d2 Use

The proposals aim to provide a new welcoming entrance with spaces for student support, meetings and visitors. The additional extensions, studio and kitchen extension will enhance the existing facilities and improvements to the offer and functionality of the school and its buildings.

The removal of the fencing will enhance the setting of the school buildings and create an approachable, sympathetic and welcoming presence in the community for visitors and pupils.

More details with regard to the client brief and project need are identified in the accompanying Planning Statement.

There will be no increase in pupil numbers or increase in volume of vehicle movements at drop off and pick up times.

d3 Layout

d3.01 Ground Floor

The focus of the ground floor will be a two storey extension comprising of a secure reception area with support office, medical room and accessible WC. A small meeting room will also be provided.

To facilitate the extension the existing undersized and outdated food tech classroom will be demolished.

The existing stores will be enlarged to form office space and the existing reception repurposed as the Head's study.

A single storey extension is proposed to the kitchen to provide a much needed cold store which can easily be accessed by deliveries.

To the rear, a single storey studio is proposed with link to the main hall and PE store.

d3.02 First Floor

A new food technology classroom will be provided along with a FAB lab. A fab lab (fabrication laboratory) is a small-scale workshop offering (personal) digital fabrication.

The layout of the proposals has been developed in close conjunction with the school to ensure adjacencies, operation and quality of teaching is maintained and enhanced.

The proposed layout of the improved car parking area and landscaping is discussed in sections d5 and a2.

d4 Scale and Appearance

As noted in d1.04, the proposed Kensington front extension will be a combination of single storey and two storey elements to match the existing school. The majority of the proposed footprint for the front extension will occupy the existing footprint of the outdated food technology classroom that currently exists.

The scale of the new front extension is driven by the need to provide adequate volume to the new classrooms so that lighting, ventilation and acoustics are suitable for a teaching environment. The massing has been carefully considered within the context of the Conservation Area. Externally the design has taken reference from Kensington House yet seeks to create a contemporary insertion between this and the incongruous 1990s building beyond. Key materials would be brick, glass and render. The spaces internally would maximise natural light and be serviced appropriately.

The kitchen extension will be single storey to minimise the visual impact on the Victorian elevation and match the design brick palette.

The studio extension size and height is driven by the need to provide adequate volume to the new studio so that it meets teaching criteria for lighting and ventilation. It is proposed this extension be a rendered single storey extension to link with the architectural language of Somerleaze adjacent.

To link the proposed extensions together, and mask the light coloured wire cut bricks of the incongruous 1990s building beyond, it is proposed the elevation facing Vicarage Road be rendered.

d5 Landscaping

The proposal also seeks to remove the boundary fencing to the front of the school (extent as shown on the drawings). The close boarded fence will be removed and replaced with a brick wall with railings above. This will increase visibility into the public areas of the school sites and enhance the characteristics of the conservation area. The railings will be in the style of the senior school site on Kendrick Road.

The Christchurch Conservation Area appraisal notes that *"the pre-eminent local detail throughout this Conservation Area is the presence, with few exceptions, of brick walls and/or brick walls and railings at the front of the properties."* The removal of the timber fence is therefore favourable.

A landscape planting strategy and scheme is proposed to mitigate the loss of trees and soften the public edge of the Kensington site. A copy of the proposals form part of the application and have been developed closely with the school.

a1 Access

a1.01 The proposed extensions will meet the requirements of BS:8300 and Part M of the Building Regulations with the following features:

1. Level access to entrances
2. Circulation areas having a minimum 1500mm width
3. Contrasting colours between walls and floors with contrasting switches
4. Accessible WC facilities
5. Low vision panels on circulation doors with contrasting door furniture and low resistance closing devices

a2 Traffic and Transportation

a1.02 Arrangements for pedestrian access will be improved as currently there is no clear route the school reception through the car park and pedestrians are often in conflict with cars. The proposal will provide a pedestrian landscaped entrance route from the corner of Christchurch Road and Vicarage Road and clear paths within the site.

A pedestrian side gate will also be provided along Vicarage Road to improve security for those visiting the school.

a1.03 A clear highways strategy has been developed in conjunction with the school and Local Authority through the pre application stages. This includes pedestrian, vehicular, deliverer and servicing movements.

It is proposed that a one way system be adopted with traffic entering the site from Christchurch Road and exit via Vicarage Road. Both entrances will have secure automated gates. Refer to the Highway Consultant Report and Drawings for more details.