

Clarendon House Ecology and Biodiversity Statement



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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Wilder Associates were appointed as Landscape Consultants by Reading Heights Ltd to develop landscape proposals for Clarendon House in support of a planning application for a residential development consisting of a permitted development scheme and an extended scheme.
- 1.1.2 On 18th December 2017 we visited the site to carry out observations of the existing landscape and townscape context of Clarendon House to inform both the opportunities and constraints as well as the ecological potential of the site.

2 Planning Policy

2.1 National Planning Policy

- 2.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) describes the Government's national policies on 'conserving and enhancing the natural environment' (Chapter 11).
- 2.1.2 The NPPF is accompanied by Planning Practice Guidance on 'Biodiversity, ecosystems and green infrastructure' (2014) and ODPM Circular 06/2005.
- 2.1.3 The NPPF takes forward the Government's strategic objective to halt overall biodiversity loss, as shown at Paragraph 109, which states the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- 2.1.4 *'minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures'*
- 2.1.5 The approach to dealing with biodiversity in the context of planning applications is set out at Paragraph 118:
- 2.1.6
- 2.1.7 *'When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the following principles:*

If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;

The above approach encapsulates the 'mitigation hierarchy' described in British Standard BS 42020:2013, which involves the following step-wise process:

- Avoidance – avoiding adverse effects through good design;
- Mitigation – where it is unavoidable, mitigation measures should be employed to minimise adverse effects;
- Compensation – where residual effects remain after mitigation it may be necessary to provide compensation to offset any harm;
- Enhancement – planning decisions often present the opportunity to deliver benefits for biodiversity, which can also be explored alongside the above measures to resolve potential adverse effects.

The measures for avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement should be proportionate to the predicted degree of risk to biodiversity and to the nature and scale of the proposed development (BS 42020:2013, section 5.5).

2.2 Local Context

2.2.1 Readings Local Development Framework (LDF) adopted in January 2008 sets out its response to National Planning Policy, in particular PPS 9, relating to protection and enhancement of Biodiversity in the borough.

2.2.2 Policy CS36 on Biodiversity and Geology sets out that:

a. Development should retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity or geological interest (including protected species and their habitats) found within the application site into their schemes.

On sites with recognised biodiversity or geological value, development will not be permitted where there would be a direct or indirect adverse impact on the site, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that:

- i. The need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site; and
- ii. Appropriate compensation, impact minimisation and mitigation are provided.

b. Local Nature Reserves and Wildlife Heritage Sites will be safeguarded and where possible enhanced. Permission will not be granted for any development that would adversely affect a designated nature reserve or Wildlife Heritage Site.

c. Any development that would sever or threaten the integrity of an established wildlife link, as indicated on an adopted proposals map, will not be permitted. Where applicable developments should be designed to protect, consolidate, extend and enhance the network of wildlife links and corridors in and adjoining the Borough, working with neighbouring authorities where appropriate.

2.2.3 In addition to the policy CS36 states that proposals should seek ways to enhance and restore the quality and integrity of Local Nature reserves and Wildlife heritage Sites (where appropriate), by maximising the inclusion of significant biodiversity and nature conservation features as part of good design. In addition, it must be clearly demonstrated that such measures will be effectively managed and maintained, to a high standard. This contributes to meeting the aims of the reading Biodiversity Action Plan.

2.3 Reading Biodiversity Action Plan

- 2.3.1 Readings Biodiversity Action Plan sets out a number of priority habitats and species that have been identified as important to the Borough. This includes urban and sub-urban habitat areas that accommodate key species.
- 2.3.2 Reading has a long history as an urban area, which has given an inheritance of a wide variety of building structure and material that can attract different species. Its large suburban periphery has become important to many species that are declining rapidly in city centres and rural areas. Even the more densely built up areas are able to support many species, particularly where terraces or rows of houses have gardens forming long linear habitats.
- 2.3.3 As Reading continues to undergo development, many habitats and species are being adversely affected both by the loss of land and older buildings, but also by the materials and form of land or building management afterwards. This is affecting both visiting and resident species. Whilst not seeking to halt redevelopment, the Action Plan sets out opportunities and proactive measures to protect and/or mitigate/re-provide the loss of important habitat.
- 2.3.4 Urban species most likely to be affected by development include bats, which may roost in derelict buildings and structures, or birds such as Black Redstarts that thrive on neglected pieces of land. Both species have been identified key species in Readings Species Action Plan Priority List.

3 Site Context

- 3.1.1 Clarendon House sits on the junction of Queens Road and Watlington Street on the south side of the River Kennet. The building location is at the south-eastern rim of Reading's ring road network.
- 3.1.2 The site is bounded by Clarendon House to the south, Grantley Heights to the north, Watlington Street to the east and Queens Wharf to the west. The central space between the buildings and the Watlington Street Bridge abutment is currently car parking and set to hard standing only with the exception of a small patch of ran grass and shrubs along the eastern wall of Queens Wharf.
- 3.1.3 There is an existing shrub bed at the south eastern corner of the site that lies outside of the site boundary and contains a selection of ornamental shrubs. It is not well maintained and shows evidence of pedestrian foot traffic through the bed as a short cut from the corner of Queens Road and Watlington Street through to Kennet Side.
- 3.1.4 The southern façade of Clarendon House is populated by a variety of shrubs, climbers and ground cover plants. Whilst the majority of the planting is non-native evergreen species, there are a number native species including Dogwood, Holly and Ivy.



Figure 1 View of car park from Clarendon House towards Grantham heights

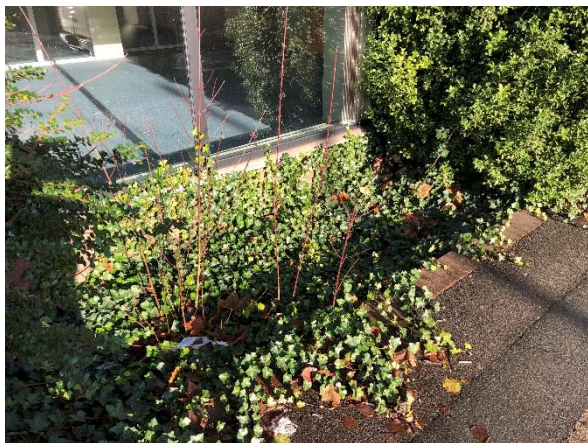


Figure 6 Ivy and Dogwood planting



Figure 7 Eclectic selection of planting along Queens Road



Figure 5 Shrub planting along the north-west boundary



Figure 4 Rank grass in a planting bed



Figure 3 Emerging weeds in car park



Figure 2 Planting on the south east corner of the site

3.2 Site Ecological Value

- 3.2.1 The majority of the site ecological value is likely to come from urban regeneration species such as Buddleia, Ragwort, Herb-Robert and Common Daisy that have sprung up in the crevices or cracks in paving and at the edges of the car park. These plants provide some sources of nectar for bees, butterflies and insects.
- 3.2.2 The site lacks any trees which would provide nesting for birds or shelter for insects. There is also no layer of mulch or wood piles to provide refuge for beetles or burrowing insects.
- 3.2.3 The site exists as an island within the urban context of reading and due to the lack of vegetation or soil zone, is unlikely to support any terrestrial mammals.

3.3 Potential for Bats

- 3.3.1 The site and the building were inspected for signs of bat movements and bat droppings that would indicate activity. The building is well sealed with no broken windows or entry points for bats and no evidence was found to suggest there was or had been any bat roosts within the building.
- 3.3.2 Due to the sites proximity to the River Kennet, it is likely that the area could be part of a bat foraging route.

4 Ecological Enhancement Measures

4.1 Landscape Proposals

- 4.1.1 The landscape design provides a central green space with the potential for medium sized trees of British origin that would provide shelter and potential for bird roosting. There are also proposals for enhanced planting along the southern site frontage and for improvements to the planting on the south-eastern corner of the site.
- 4.1.2 There are proposals for an increased proportion of the planting to be native shrub and groundcover species and a greater proportion of natural soil zone in which insect and invertebrate activity can take place, therefore encouraging birds.
- 4.1.3 A green roof is proposed for the roof area on top of Clarendon House. This would contain a mixture of wildflower species and perennial plants that provide a food source for insects and pollinators as well as refuge for macro-invertebrates.
- 4.1.4 A brown roof is proposed for the upper roof level of the new building fronting Watlington Street. This would contain a variation in substrates that provide habitat for burrowing insects.
- 4.1.5 Wood piles are proposed to be located on both green and brown roofs which would provide refuge and hibernaculum for insects and beetles.



Figure 8 Landscape Masterplan

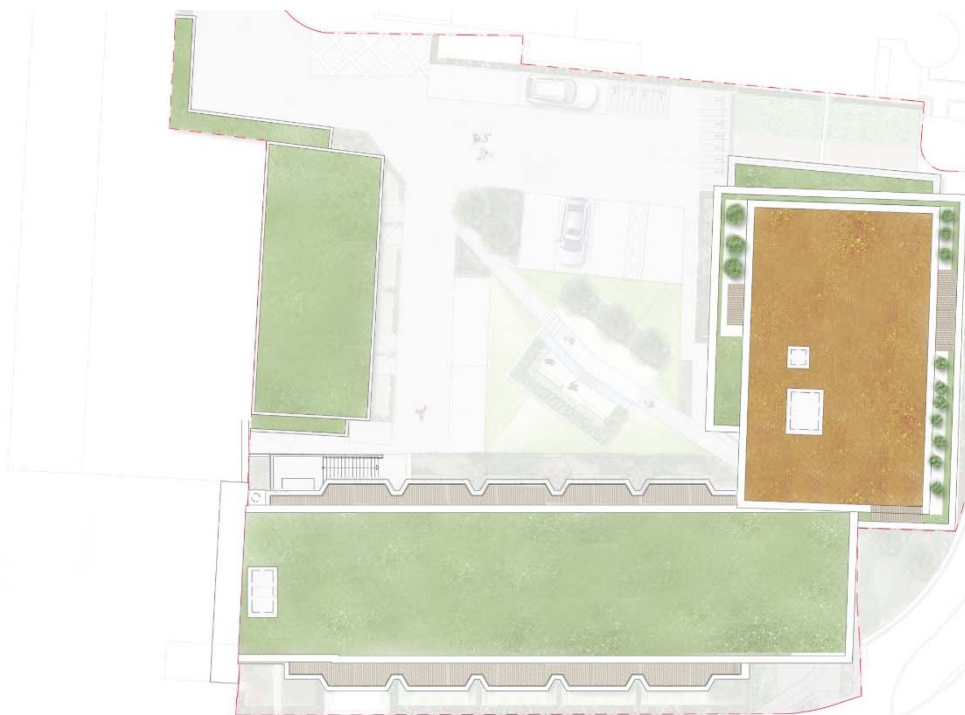


Figure 9 Green and brown Roof plans

4.2 Additional Ecological Enhancements

- 4.2.1 Additional ecological enhancements have been considered, such as the installation of bird and bat boxes both within the landscaped courtyard and on top of the building. This is subject to the final design of the building façade and the specification of trees for the courtyard.
- 4.2.2 Planting of nectar rich plant species and a diversity of plants, both native and exotic, will be encouraged in the final design of the planting palette. The RHS Perfect Plants for Pollinators will be referred to as guide to selection of plants, particularly those on the south east corner. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators>

5 Conclusion

- 5.1.1 The site currently has a very low ecological value due in part to the large areas of open tarmac and little opportunity for native or non-native plants that provide food or shelter to native species populations.
- 5.1.2 The landscape proposals for Clarendon House provide a great improvement on the tarmac encased car park that currently features as the predominant surface finish to the site. The potential to introduce new habitats at both ground and roof level offers an opportunity to widen the species diversity of the site.
- 5.1.3 The provision of green and brown roofs in particular will help to provide additional habitat that is consistent with derelict urban areas and attracts key species identified within Readings Species Action Plan Priority List such as the Black Redstart.
- 5.1.4 Landscape improvements will include mature native trees within the courtyard to improve microclimate and to provide opportunities for nesting and refuge for insects.
- 5.1.5 In addition to landscape improvements, bird and bat nesting boxes, log piles and nectar rich planting would provide both food and shelter for key species.
- 5.1.6 The overall net effect of the development will be an improvement in terms of landscape amenity and biodiversity.