

E D G A R S

Planning and Heritage Statement

The Abbey Junior School, Christchurch Road, Reading

Prepared for: The Abbey School

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List of Appendices

The following Appendices are included as part of this Planning Statement:

Appendix 1. - Photographs of the Site

Appendix 2. - Internal Photographs of the School

Appendix 3. - Historic Maps



1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning and Heritage Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client, The Abbey School (hereafter referred to as the Applicant) in support of a planning application for the erection of single and two storey extensions to the front and rear of the existing building. Creation of new access and alterations and adaptations to existing access points. Re-arrangement of existing parking area, landscaping and provision of railings.
- 1.2 The application is accompanied by the following documents:
- Application Forms;
 - CIL Form;
 - Planning and Heritage Statement (this document);
 - Design and Access Statement;
 - Arboricultural Report;
 - Arboricultural Impact Assessment;
 - Ecology Report;
 - Transport Statement;
 - Energy Statement;
 - Planting Proposals (1284-02A);
 - Landscape Sketch;
 - Location Plan (100E);
 - Existing Site Context Plan (101B);
 - Existing Ground Floor Plan (103A);
 - Existing First Floor Plan (104A);
 - Existing Roof Plan (105A);
 - Existing Kensington Elevations (106);
 - Existing Kensington Sections (108);
 - Existing Kensington Street Elevations (109A);
 - Proposed Site Context (121A);
 - Proposed Ground and Basement Floor Plan (123 E);
 - Proposed First Floor Plan (124F);
 - Proposed Roof and Attic Plan (125A);
 - Proposed Elevations 1 of 2 (127B);
 - Proposed Elevations 2 of 2 (128B);
 - Proposed Street Elevations (129C);
 - Proposed Sections (132A);
 - Proposed Netball Courts Plan (126)
 - Approach Visuals (133); and
 - Drainage Plan (ASR-HYD-00-xx-DR-C-7000 P01);
 - Tracking Plans (J32-3197-005).
- 1.3 This Statement considers the site and surrounding area, planning history, the Heritage Assets and the planning policy context before addressing the key planning matters to be addressed in relation to the application.
- 1.4 The Statement concludes that the scheme would provide significant planning benefits to the school, to highway safety and to the character of the Conservation Area and setting of the Listed Buildings due to the visual improvements to the front elevation of the building, the re-arrangement and landscaping of the front courtyard, the segregation of pedestrian and vehicular movements and the removal of the majority of the close boarded fence and that the less than substantial harm caused by the loss of the tree would be outweighed by these other public benefits.



2 Site and Surrounding Areas

The Local Area

- 2.1 The site is located approximately two kilometres to the South of Reading City Centre. The local area is largely residential and is characterised by Victorian and Edwardian properties centred on Christchurch itself. The site to which the application relates is within Area 1 of the Christchurch Conservation Area which is characterised by large detached and semi-detached dwellings in larger grounds. The Conservation Area Appraisal identifies that properties in the area are linked by frontage brick walls or low brick walls and railings above and good tree cover.

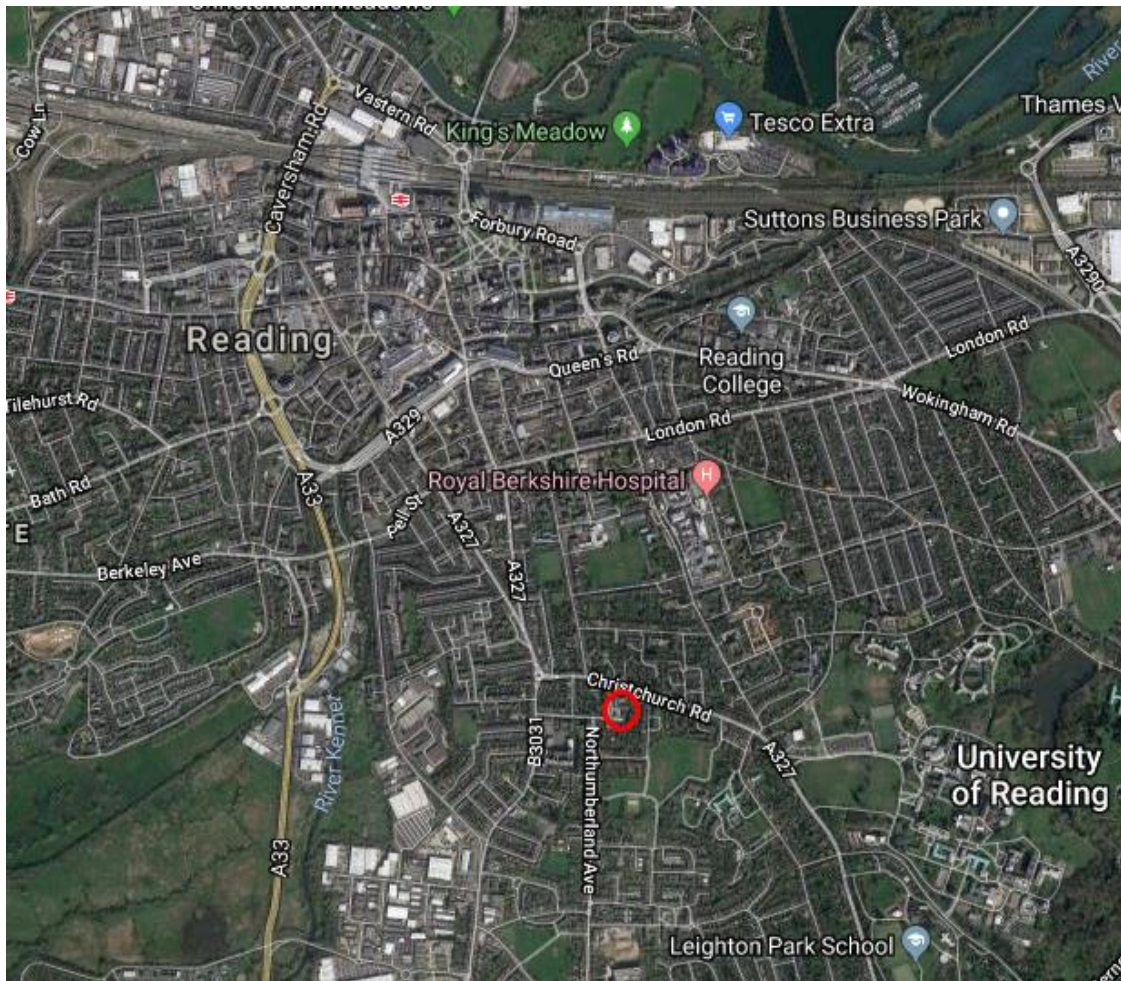


Figure 1: Wider Area with Site



The School

- 2.2 The Abbey School is an Independent girl's day school established in 1887 for children and students aged from 3 to 18 years old. The School comprises four sites with the Junior School spread over three sites at Knell House, Abbey Gardens and The Main School (which contains the Kensington Building and Somerleaze) shown as sites A, B and C on the plan below. The Senior School is identified as site D on the Figure 2 below.

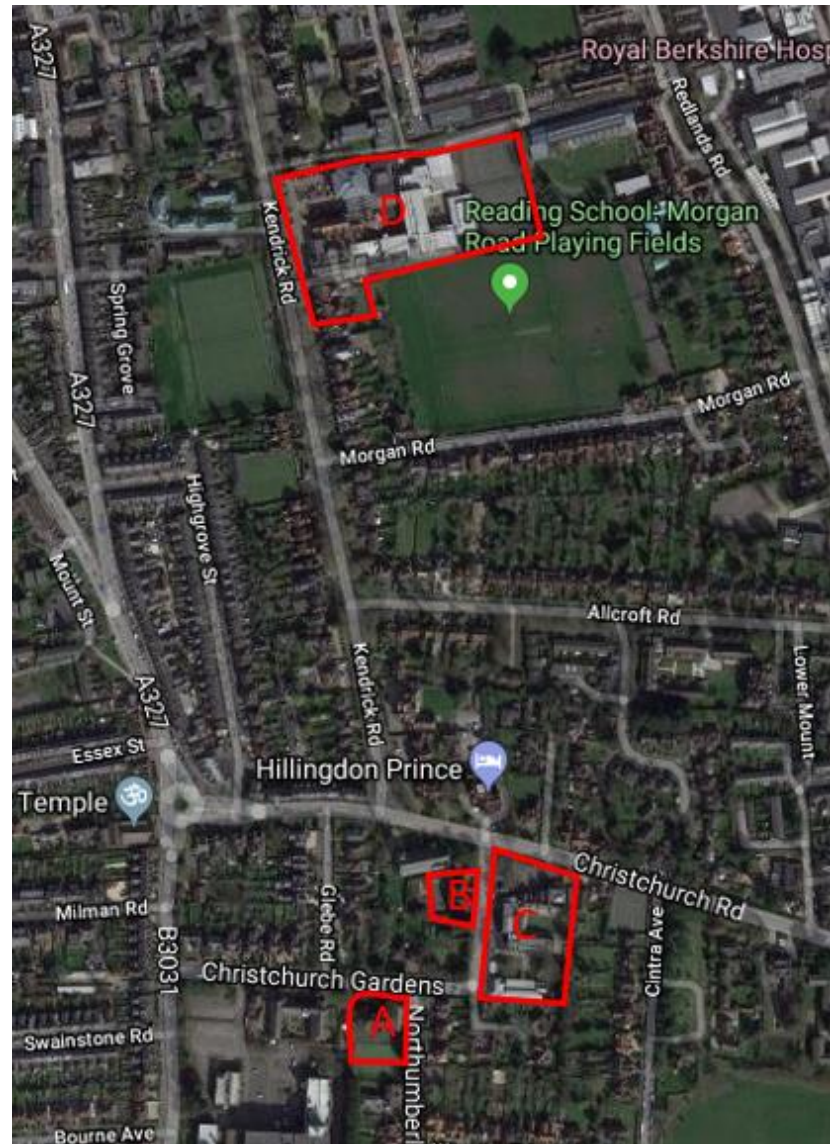


Figure 2: Abbey School Sites

The Site

- 2.3 The Abbey Junior School site which is the subject of this application is located on the corner of Vicarage Road and Christchurch Road. The site lies within the Christchurch Conservation Area. On the opposite side of Vicarage Road lies the Grade II* Listed Christchurch and the Grade II Listed Christchurch Vicarage.
- 2.4 The Kensington campus comprises the main school building and a series of later additions and new buildings which comprise the teaching and associated space. The main building is in keeping with the character of the area and is constructed of brick under a slate roof. The main building was extended with a large addition on the western side of the site constructed in the 1990's. This is not a particularly sensitive form of development and is visible in the context of the Conservation Area and the setting of the adjacent Listed Church and former Vicarage. This extension projects south in the site before turning through 90 degrees and projecting eastwards. Photographs of the site and immediate context are included in Appendix 1.



- 2.5 The site is surrounded by a tall (approximately 1.8 metre) close boarded fence which restricts views into and out of the site obstructing the more open nature of boundaries in the area as recognised in the Conservation Area Appraisal and impacting upon the setting of the nearby Listed Buildings. It is considered that this fence has a significant negative impact upon the character of the Conservation Area and the setting of the Listed Buildings.
- 2.6 There is a group of trees to the north of the existing buildings and protected trees exist to the rear of the site, albeit that one of these trees was recently felled for health reasons. The trees on the site are visible in the Conservation Area however, the trees which add the most value are those on the site frontage. At present the environment around the trees is compromised by permanent parking under the canopy and previous additions which impact upon root protection areas.
- 2.7 Pedestrian and vehicular access into the site is achieved from the corner of Christchurch Road and Vicarage Road with vehicles having to cross the junction to gain access to the site. The current arrangement causes conflict not only between pedestrians and vehicles on the highway network (as there is no separate footpath) but it also causes conflict between highway users who are seeking to enter or exit Vicarage Road and those who are trying to enter the site. Vehicular egress is directly onto Christchurch Road with a one-way system in operation. Visibility at this junction is sub-standard, with no pedestrian visibility between the site and the footway as a result of the 1.8 metre tall fence along the boundary. Buses currently do not enter the site but park and drop-off on Vicarage Road.

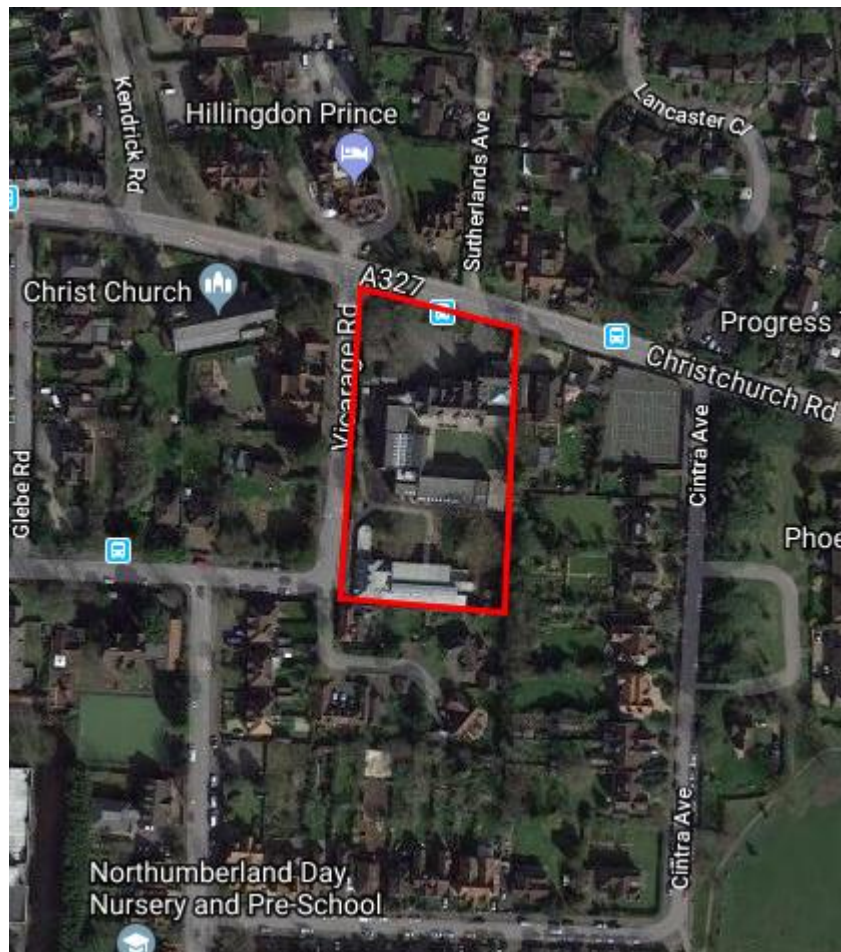


Figure 3: Immediate Site Context



3 The Brief and The Proposed Development

Brief

3.1 The applicant's brief to the project team stemmed from the desire to make improvements to the safety and functionality of the school and its buildings. As a starting point The Abbey School set out a schedule of deficiencies with the current Junior School site to inform the improvements they would like to achieve. These are summarised by the points set out below and supported by the schedule of photographs which are included as Appendix 2 of this report:

- The school is not currently identifiable as a Junior School;
- There are aesthetic clashes between the Victorian Building and the 90's and early 2000 additions;
- The fencing conceals the site;
- The car park is poorly marked out;
- The entrance to the site crosses a road junction;
- Traffic flow through the site is haphazard;
- There is no clear pedestrian access to the school;
- Parent/ student pick-up and drop-off arrangements are unsatisfactory;
- The classroom sizes and configurations are limited and do not offer flexibility for the variety of modern teaching methods;
- Food Technology classroom is dated;
- Cloakroom space is insufficient (bags and coats are left in corridors);
- Office space is insufficient;
- The entrance is cramped with no space for waiting parents;
- No internal temperature control in the building;
- Insufficient medical room facilities;
- Insufficient food cold storage facilities; and
- Head Teacher's office is currently hidden away.

3.2 As such, in summary the following improvements were required as part of the proposals:

- Open up the view of the school and create a welcoming and approachable entrance with sufficient space for meetings, waiting parents and to create a sense of unity with other Abbey School Sites;
- Rationalise the space to the fore of the school to maximise the number of accessible parking spaces, create safe vehicular movements into, through and out of the site and create safe pedestrian movements through the site;
- Ensure that classrooms are enhanced and provide new drama studio;
- Provide cloakroom facilities to ensure corridors are kept clear and provide appropriate support for learning space and medical rooms to cater for students and staff;
- Ensure a satisfactory learning environment can be maintained by ensuring appropriate heating/ cooling is provided;
- Provide appropriate space for kitchen facilities to ensure the school can cater for the needs of students; and



- Provide the Head an office which is located in a central position within the school.

Proposed Development

- 3.3 The planning application therefore relates to the provision of extensions and alterations at the Junior School. The proposed extensions are detailed on plans outlined in paragraph 1.2 above.
- 3.4 The two storey front extensions are to provide additional teaching space for the school use including a new classroom (food tech) and group study room (Fab Lab). The extensions will also provide for the relocation of the reception area providing a clearer more recognisable main entrance to the school. Internal alterations are also proposed which will result in the provision of an appropriate medical room and a new cloakroom (preventing hazards in corridors). Also new meeting rooms will be available for staff and parents and the Head Teacher will be relocated.
- 3.5 In addition, a single storey rear extension will be provided wrapping the south western corner of the 1990's extension to provide a ground floor drama studio. The extension will reflect the curved appearance of the single storey range to the south (Somerleaze).
- 3.6 The school currently has limited cold storage available for the kitchen meaning almost daily deliveries of food stuffs. Cold store fridges are currently housed in the room used for dry storage and as the kitchen office. The application proposes a small additional ground floor front extension to provide a dedicated cold storage room for the kitchen area. This enables the office and dry goods store to be returned to its correct use.
- 3.7 Externally to the building a reconfiguration of the access area is proposed. Vehicular access is currently taken from the north western corner of the site which involves vehicles crossing the junction between Christchurch Road and Vicarage Road. The application proposes an alternative solution whereby access is reconfigured to provide access only from Christchurch Road and a new egress point from the site is created on the western boundary enabling vehicles to exit onto Vicarage Road. With this proposal the access point on the north-west corner will be made pedestrian and cycle access only. This proposal will remove the highway safety concerns regarding the existing access arrangement to the site and provide access which conforms to design guidance, providing pedestrian, vehicular and servicing access to the site.
- 3.8 The remainder of the land to the north of the building will be re-configured to provide appropriate parking which does not obstruct the free passage of vehicles through the site as required. The area beneath the retained trees will therefore be returned to soft landscaping to protect the tree root structures in the longer term. The proposed development will result in the loss of three trees at the site however, a replacement landscaping strategy is provided as part of the submission. Railings will be provided around the school site as well as around the tennis courts located to the east of the main school.



4 Planning History

- 4.1 There is a range of planning history relating to The Abbey School, none of which is of significance to the consideration of these proposals, however, the following history relates specifically to the application site.
- 4.2 05/00560/CON – Enlargement of the existing vehicular entrance way to allow access for emergency vehicles (Withdrawn 13/07/2005)
- 4.3 05/0577/CON – taking down and rebuilding a section of boundary wall to the Abbey Junior School and Two Ways Cottage. Permitted 17/06/2005.
- 4.4 90/00689/FUL – Kitchen Extension and minor internal alterations. Permitted 24/08/1990.
- 4.5 78/00077 – Extension to form classroom, toilet facilities and hall. Permitted 04/07/1978
- 4.6 5483 – Dining room. Permitted 06/12/1978.



5 Pre-Application Advice

- 5.1 Initial pre-application advice was sought from the Borough Council on the 23rd November 2017. A site meeting was undertaken on the 21st December 2017 where the planning officer was shown around the school and the site. The scheme, at that time, proposed a contemporary pitched roof form of extension to the front elevation as detailed in Figure 4 below

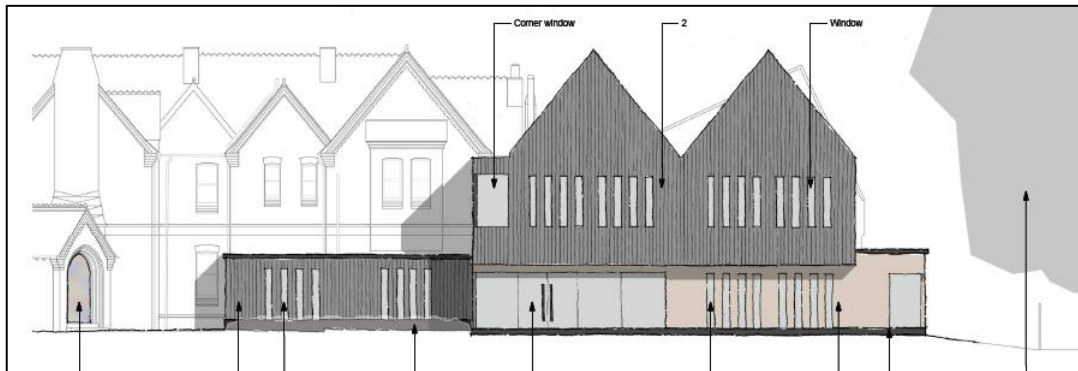


Figure 4: Initial Design Sketches

- 5.2 A response was received on the 22nd January 2018 (See Appendix 3) which raised the following matters:

- Principle – No objections to the principle of extending the school building.
- Highways – there are telegraph poles which will need to be relocated at the applicants cost. In principle the layout is considered acceptable subject to confirmation that sufficient staff parking spaces will be provided.
- Trees – the proposals involve the loss of some trees. Any application would need to be supported by an appropriate arboricultural report in relation to retained trees. Landscaping proposals will be required to mitigate the loss of existing trees.
- Historic buildings – the replacement of the close boarded fence with railings at the front would be welcomed. The proposed two storey extensions would be visually prominent in the Conservation Area and would dominate and partly obscure the front elevation of the historic Abbey School Building.
- Impact upon Neighbours – the proposed development would not be harmful to the living environment of neighbouring properties.

- 5.3 Following on from this response a set of revised elevations were prepared and submitted to the Council for further consideration (see Figure 5 below).



Figure 5: Second set of design proposals



5.4 A subsequent meeting took place with officers on the 8th February 2018. The following feedback was received in relation to the amended proposals.

- Design changes represented an improvement but concern remained regarding the proposals obscuring the view of the building from parts of the Conservation Area.
- The proposed rendering of the side elevations of the existing building were supportable.
- It was agreed that the scheme constituted less than substantial harm but officers still considered that the benefits did not outweigh the harm.

5.5 A final set of drawings were submitted to the Borough Council on the 8th March. The changes are outlined in Figure 6 below and reflect a more traditional form with subservient detailing.



Figure 6: Final set of design proposals

5.6 The Council responded via email on the 12th April advising that the proposed extensions were now supportable and that overall the benefits of the scheme were considered to outweigh the harms.



6 Assessment of Significance of Heritage Assets

- 6.1 The site is located within the Christchurch Conservation Area which was designated in November 1987. The Conservation Area is centred around the Grade II* Listed Christ Church which is located on the corner of Vicarage Road and Christchurch Road. The Church was largely constructed between 1861 and 1862 and was designed by Henry Woodyer who worked on St Pauls, Wokingham and Clewer Abbey in Windsor. The tower, spire, south aisle and vestries were not completed until 1874. The Church exhibits a number of stained glass windows of which most date from the Victorian age.
- 6.2 As well as the main Church which forms the centre of the Conservation Area there are a number of other Listed buildings within the vicinity which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area Appraisal was completed in September 2010 and this identifies the Church as being the key building of significance in the Conservation Area. It further notes that the mix, variety and blending of architectural styles within the Conservation Area add to its interest. The area began developing between 1850 and 1900 and following the introduction of the post-railway expansion of the settlement (see Historic maps in Appendix 3). The Conservation Area was generally sparsely developed however, over more recent times this is largely only evident along Christchurch Road.
- 6.3 The Conservation Area is largely flat with Christ Church, particularly its spire, being the key focal point within the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area has limited open space and it is notable that the Church has limited space around it for a church of this size. The links within the Conservation Area primarily relate to tree planting and the frontage brick walls with railing above.
- 6.4 Aesthetically, the Conservation Area provides a mix of architectural styles which are of interest when considered alongside the historic evolution of the area however, the central viewpoint and main feature is the Church. The church is seen in close context with neighbouring buildings and sites due to its limited churchyard. There are features within proximity of the site which are not characteristic of the Conservation Area and could be considered to detract from the significance of the Conservation Area. These include the timber close boarded fence surrounding the school site and the uncharacteristic 1990's extensions to the school building.
- 6.5 From a community perspective the Conservation Area provides homes for a large number of residents however, only the Church itself has community appeal and would attract visitors from outside of the Conservation Area, with the exception of the Abbey School site.
- 6.6 The application site itself makes a contribution to the Conservation Area by virtue of its construction and form which is a contributor to the mix of architectural character in the area. The building begins to appear on historic maps in 1877 and is extended sometime between 1883 and 1899. At this point the access to the site is from Christchurch Road however, it is indicated that the important elevation of the building is that which overlooks the gardens to the south of the property. This arrangement continues until 1931 after which the development of facilities associated with the school begin to appear and the main frontage of the building swaps to the northern elevation.
- 6.7 The church is clearly the most significant building in the Conservation Area and provides a central focus for it. The significance of the building derives from its historic importance and architectural design however, the setting of the church, and its close relationship with the former Vicarage all contribute to its significance.
- 6.8 The significance of the Conservation Area stems from its mix of architectural styles which reflect the historic evolution and expansion of Reading. The large Victorian Villas are characteristic with later infill development eroding the space associated with the original development. This form of development is interspersed with tree cover which makes an important contribution to the character of the area. There are some unifying features within the Conservation Area including low boundary brick walls with railings all of which contribute to its specific character.



7 Planning Policy

- 7.1 Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 state that planning decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is supported by the National Planning Policy Framework which stresses the importance of a planning system which is plan-led. A development Plan comprises local plans and neighbourhood plans and any saved policies from previous policy documents.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 7.2 The National Planning Policy Framework was published in March 2012 and sets out the Governments planning policies for England. It confirms that at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision taking. For decision-making purposes, this means that applications which accord with the development plan should be approved without delay. The following paragraphs of the NPPF are considered to be particularly relevant to the consideration of this proposal:

- Chapter 7 – sets out the importance of good design in development proposals. In particular it identifies that developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area; create a strong sense of place, respond to local character and history, create safe and accessible environments and be visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.
- Paragraph 32 – identifies that developments should demonstrate how safe and suitable access can be achieved for all people.
- Paragraph 72 – identifies that LPA's should take a pro-active, positive and collaborative approach to proposals relating to schools. It identifies that great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools and that LPA's should work with schools to identify and resolve key planning issues.
- Chapter 12 – relates to the Historic Environment identifying that developments should pay appropriate regard to features or areas which are designated due to their heritage value. Where proposals impact upon a heritage asset or its setting the NPPF outlines that a suitable heritage assessment should be undertaken to consider the impact of the development upon the significance of the feature.

Reading Borough Council Development Plan Documents

- 7.3 The Reading Borough Council Development Plan comprises of two key documents, the Core Strategy adopted in January 2008 and the Sites and Detailed Policies Document adopted in October 2012. In addition to the above, the Council are currently preparing a new draft Local Plan, the draft version of which was published for consultation between 1 May and 14 June 2017. The key policies of each of these documents will be considered below.

Core Strategy (CS)

- 7.4 The core strategy was adopted in January 2008. The following policies of this document are considered relevant:
- CS1 – Sustainable Construction and Design. All developments are required to maximise the use of energy efficiency and energy conservation measures and sustainable drainage facilities
 - CS5 – Inclusive Access. Buildings should be designed to provide suitable access for all potential users.
 - CS7 – Design and the Public Realm. All development must be of high quality design which responds to its context; protects the historic environment; creates safe environments; and, is visually attractive.



- CS31 – Additional and Existing Community Facilities. This policy outlines support for new, extended or improved community facilities.
- CS33 – Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment. Development should protect or enhance Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas
- CS36 – Biodiversity and Geology. Development should incorporate features of biodiversity within the application sites
- CS38 – Trees, Hedges and Woodlands. Trees, groups of trees and hedges should be protected from damage.

Sites and Detailed Policies Document (SDPD)

7.5 This document was adopted in October 2012 and the following policies are considered to be of relevance.

- DM19 – Air Quality. Development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality.
- SA14 – Cycle Routes. Cycle routes will be maintained and enhanced.

Draft Local Plan (DLP) May 2017

7.6 As identified above the Council has consulted on a Pre-submission Draft Local Plan (November 2017). The plan, following this consultation, has been submitted to the Secretary of State for examination (March 2018). Limited weight can be attached to the policies of this plan at the current time however, in due course, this document will replace both the CS and the SDPD and as such, the relevant policies are outlined below:

- CC1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development. This policy reflects the wording of the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF.
- CC2 – Sustainable Construction and Design requires the design and site layout of developments to use energy, water, minerals, materials and other resources efficiently.
- CC7 - Design and the Public Realm. Requires all development to be of high quality design which maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. It also requires developments to respond to their local context, create safe and accessible environments and provide visually attractive built forms.
- EN1 – Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment. Development is required to make a positive contribution to local character and not to have an adverse impact upon heritage assets and their settings.
- EN3 – Enhancement of Conservation Areas. The policy outlines that the special character of Conservation Areas will be conserved. Development proposals must make a positive contribution to the character and distinctiveness. In particular it identifies restoring or re-establishing appropriate paving, walls or railings.
- EN14 – Trees, Hedges and Woodlands. Trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected where they are of importance. New development will also make provision for tree planting within the application site and particularly on the street frontage.
- EN15 – Air Quality. Development will have regard to the need to improve air quality.



Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal

- 7.7 The Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal categories the Conservation Area into four distinct parts.
- 7.8 The appraisal serves the purpose of outlining the important features of the area and identifies that the following negative features provide opportunities for enhancement:
- Busy, noisy traffic on London Road;
 - Loss of original windows, doors and other architectural features in unlisted buildings of townscape merit;
 - Loss of front boundaries and gardens to create car parking;
 - Modern development on the western side of Kendrick Road; and
 - Feeling of personal insecurity in Crown Place, Acacia Road and alley.



8 Planning Considerations

- 8.1 As identified above Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 state that planning decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is supported by the National Planning Policy Framework which stresses the importance of a planning system which is plan-led.
- 8.2 The sections above highlight the constraints associated with the site and the matters which are of significance in the local area which the development proposals must have regard to. In this particular case, having regard to the preceding section, the key planning matters for consideration are identified as:
- Principle of Development;
 - Design, Form, Scale and Massing of the Extensions;
 - Impact upon Heritage Assets;
 - Impact on Trees;
 - Access and Highways; and
 - Other material considerations.

Principle of Development

- 8.3 There are no policies within the Local Plan which specifically preclude alterations or extensions to existing schools. Policies for the protection of community facilities outline support for proposals which improve such facilities. It could be argued that the provision of a range of school places has a community function and as such, the principle of development is supportable. In the absence of any specific policy in this regard the NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of development unless there are significant and demonstrable harms which would outweigh the benefits of the scheme. Furthermore, at paragraph 72 the NPPF sets out that LPA's should take a pro-active and positive approach to proposals relating to schools with great weight being attached to the need to expand and alter schools.

Design, Form, Scale and Massing of the Extensions

- 8.4 The proposed extensions have been designed and developed through discussions with the Local Planning Authority at pre-application stage. The design has been revised in order to better preserve views of the front elevation of the main building (although studies do indicate that this would originally have been the rear of the property).
- 8.5 The change in direction of the pitch to the front extensions has been designed to read as a clearly distinct and separate element to the main school building indicating a later phase in the evolution of the building by not replicating the Victorian gabled form.
- 8.6 The palette of materials proposed for use in the extensions have been chosen to tie with the main building. The provision of render to the side elevation of the 1990's extension has been included to provide some visual link with the newly proposed rear extension and the more contemporary curved extension which sits at the southern end of the site (Somerleaze).
- 8.7 The extensions, whilst provided in a form which will read as a later phase of development, will reflect the palette of materials used in the main building to provide a visual unity between the phases of development. the extensions will be subservient and will serve to conceal the uncharacteristic 1990's extension which currently is prominent and visible in the street scene. The secondary form which reflects the character of the main building would therefore result in a visual improvement to this elevation in design terms.



- 8.8 The extensions are not considered to give rise to any harm to the Conservation Area, however, even if it were concluded that the extensions gave rise to some harm this would be less than substantial harm. The proposal is considered to accord with Policies CS1 and CS7 of the Core Strategy and policies CC1, CC2 and CC7 of the emerging Local Plan.

Impact upon Heritage Assets

Conservation Area

- 8.9 The provision of a two-storey extension as detailed on the proposed plans would enable the front of the previous 1990's extension to be masked with a more appropriate, welcoming and characteristic façade which is prominently visible from within the street scene. The extension would enhance this immediate area and result in the removal of the accumulation of outbuildings which currently lie underneath the canopy of the trees (proposed to be removed) and which are visible above the close boarded fence. The scheme also proposes the removal of the close boarded fence and its replacement with railings to reflect those used on other Abbey School properties and the provision of the same railings around the tennis courts. This would further open views through the site therefore, the existing buildings would be more visible in the street scene.
- 8.10 The internal arrangement of the site is proposed to be re-configured to enable a suitable planting scheme to be provided which will contribute positively to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in the longer term. The proposed re-arrangement of the space to the front of the building will also provide a visual improvement of this space which is visible in the Conservation Area.
- 8.11 The Conservation Area Appraisal notes that trees are an important part of the character of the Conservation Area however, the associated Conservation Area plan does not identify the trees on this site as making a contribution to its character of significance. The Appraisal identifies that the replacement of traditional brick walls around the site with timber fencing has a negative impact upon the character and appearance of the Conservation area. The re-provision of the low brick wall with railings above is therefore considered to provide an enhancement to this part of the Conservation Area. Furthermore, the appraisal identifies the recent additions at the Abbey Junior School as detracting from the character of the Conservation Area. The provision of the new extensions to conceal the most uncharacteristic elements of this extension is therefore also considered to provide an enhancement to the Conservation Area.
- 8.12 The rear elevation of the 1990's extension is also visible in the street scene on Vicarage Road. The proposed curved extension which wraps the corner between the existing 1990's additions concealing the awkward junctions which occur between the buildings and the external staircase which is needed for roof access. A secondary vehicular access to the school for emergency purposes is proposed in this location and therefore this curved addition will provide a more attractive viewpoint from the newly created gates in this location.
- 8.13 Noting these matters, it is considered that the proposed development would enhance an extension which is specifically identified as detracting from the Conservation Area, improving both the front and rear approaches to the site. In addition, longer term landscaping proposals are offered providing a legacy of tree cover at the site. The trees can be strategically placed and planted so as to avoid future pressure for lopping and be put in locations where the maximum contribution can be gained. Finally, the loss of the fence and its replacement with a low wall and railings re-introduces one of the key features identified as defining this Conservation Area, further providing a significant contribution to the overall character of the area, particularly on this prominent corner plot.

Setting of Listed Building

- 8.14 Christchurch is a Grade II* Listed structure which sits on the opposite side of Vicarage Road to the application site. The Church is a prominent and important feature within the area and, indeed, the Conservation Area is focussed on this landmark feature. The setting of the Church is important to its significance along with the structure itself. The building has relatively limited grounds associated with it particularly for a church of this size.



- 8.15 Views of the Church can be achieved on approach from the West however, views from the east are limited by the tree cover. As identified above, the immediate area is characterised by low boundary walls or low boundary walls with railings. The presence of the uncharacteristic close boarded fence around the whole of the Junior School site, detracts from the immediate setting of the Church and its replacement with railings would form an immediate and significant enhancement to that setting, opening up the site.
- 8.16 The former Vicarage Building (now part of the Junior School and known as Knell House) is also Grade II Listed. Its setting is also compromised by the close boarded fence and the cluster of additional buildings and modern extensions to the side of the main site. Whilst the application does not propose the total removal of these extensions it provides the opportunity to wrap the corner of the most prominent part and replace the complicated and awkward roof form with a more appropriately considered design which is more reflective of the traditional Victorian forms.
- 8.17 The positive changes to the settings of these two buildings are considered to provide significant enhancements which would further conserve the heritage significance of the buildings. The NPPF identifies that proposals which give the opportunity to enhance the setting of a heritage asset or give the opportunity to better reveal the significance of the setting should be treated favourably. Overall the proposals are considered to comply with Policies CS33 of the Core Strategy and EN1 and EN5 of the emerging Local Plan. It also accords with the aims of the Conservation Area Appraisal.

Impact on Trees and Landscaping

- 8.18 An Arbicultural report and Arbicultural Impact Assessment are submitted as part of the planning application. These consider, in detail, the arbicultural implications of the development.
- 8.19 As currently proposed the scheme would result in the loss of three trees. The trees proposed for removal are not protected under a Tree Protection Order but are protected by virtue of being within a Conservation Area.
- 8.20 The trees on the site frontage have historically been compromised by various works within close proximity to and within root structures. Further, the poor arrangement to the front of the school means that cars park right up to the trunks of trees T1, T2 and T3. The root protection areas for these trees are therefore largely covered in hardsurfacing, built development or are being heavily compacted by repeated parking of vehicles.
- 8.21 The proposals would result loss of trees T1, T2, T3 and T7. T1 is a Norway Maple with a Category Grading of C2, T2 is a Copper Beech with a Category Grading of A1, T3 is a Yew with a Category Grading of C2 and T7 is a Holly with a Category Grading of C2. Trees T1 and T3 are small specimens with a low category rating and the loss would have minimal impact upon the character and appearance of the wider Conservation area. Retained on site are six trees; T5 (Category A1), T4, T6 and T8 (Category B) and T9 (Category C). The remaining trees on the site are all proposed to remain unaffected by the scheme.
- 8.22 In relation to T2, it is acknowledged that the loss of this tree would have an impact upon the immediate area. Whilst not visible in more distant views (due to intervening landscaping and built form) the tree is particularly visible from Vicarage Road. Where views from other vantage points are gained the tree is however, seen in the context of trees T5 and T6 within the site (both of which are retained), the trees on the opposite side of Christchurch Road, trees within the Listed Churchyard and the street trees in Vicarage Road. As such, in the wider views the impact of the loss is not considered to be of significant harm to the Conservation Area and in order to achieve the significant planning benefits of the proposals, visually and in highway safety terms, there is no option but for the tree to be removed.
- 8.23 The application is supported by a replacement planting scheme which provides for mitigation planting. Whilst these trees will take time to establish they provide the opportunity to have less constrained growth. Their position on the road frontage will also ensure that the contribution they make to the Conservation Area will increase with their growth. The location of the trees has been chosen to enable their growth to be protected and to ensure that the impact on the root structures will be minimised.



- 8.24 Overall, the loss of this tree is noted as having an impact upon the character of the immediate area and the public domain and it is considered that the proposal gives rise to less than significant harm to the Conservation Area. Whilst this is the case, the landscape improvements along with other benefits covered in other part of this chapter provide benefits which outweigh this less than substantial harm. The scheme is considered to accord with policy CS38 of the adopted Core Strategy and EN14 of the Emerging Local Plan.

Highway and pedestrian safety improvements

- 8.25 Submitted in support of the planning application is a detailed Transport Statement which considers the current deficiencies at the site and outlines the highways improvements which will be secured as part of this planning proposal.
- 8.26 The existing entry access is on the corner of the junction of Vicarage Road and Christchurch Road and gives rise to highway safety concerns due to the potential for conflicts to arise between vehicles accessing the site and vehicles approaching the junction between Vicarage Road and Christchurch Road. The proximity of the school access to the junction does not accord with good practice design standards. In addition, this point is the preferred point of entry for pedestrian access with young children and parents arriving at and leaving the school along this access. The narrowness of this access and lack of footpath means there is also a significant risk of conflict between pedestrians and vehicles. Furthermore, the narrowness of the access point means vehicles may not be able to achieve access in a single movement which can result in vehicles reversing on to the highway at the junction. Finally, the current egress onto Christchurch Road also gives rise to safety concerns because it does not provide adequate visibility splays, both for pedestrians on the footway and also vehicles passing along the main carriageway, this is hampered by the close boarded fence.
- 8.27 A key aim, as part of the redevelopment proposals was finding a solution that ensures the future access arrangements are safe and provide suitable access and egress for the site. Furthermore, a safer access point for pedestrians is sought to ensure that there is no conflict with the movement of vehicles. Given the internal layout and constrained size of the site, the options for improvement require a new access along either the Vicarage Road frontage or Christchurch Road, or a combination of both to make the site efficient and also to design the accesses to appropriate standards.
- 8.28 Various options for access have been considered however, that which provides the safest option for the movement of pedestrians and vehicles is to operate an 'in and out' arrangement with one-way movement of traffic through the site but with an altered position for current access point.
- 8.29 The application therefore proposes alterations to the existing access off Christchurch Road to provide it as the access point. The existing access point across the junction will be closed to vehicular traffic and a new egress point will be provided onto Vicarage Road. Some alterations would be required to the highway network through relocating the traffic calming measure and local Traffic Regulation Orders to facilitate the access arrangements. Due to the constrained site there are limited options for where to route the road through the site which would give rise to the greatest improvements for safety, providing servicing access, minimise the loss of on-site parking and have the least impact visually.
- 8.30 The egress point has therefore been located in a position which would ensure no conflict with the existing junction between Vicarage Road and Christchurch Road. The through route in the site provides good separation between pedestrians and vehicles and can provide a zebra crossing in the site to ensure pupils can cross the vehicle flow safely. The designed route also enables delivery vehicles (i.e. for food delivery or stationary etc) can enter the site and make deliveries safely without having to turn within the tight parking area improving the movement of traffic on the adjacent roads when deliveries occur (see drawing J32-3197-002 which demonstrates tracking within the site).
- 8.31 Alternative positions for the access were considered but would have resulted in the loss of more prominent trees on the site frontage and would minimise the ability for replacement planting.



- 8.32 The proposed development will lead to significant improvements in terms of the safe movement of pedestrians and vehicles in and around the site. With the removal of the tree mini buses could also access the site for drop off within the site grounds. Significant improvements would take place in relation to the movement of pedestrians who would have a dedicated access route which could be shared by cyclists. A series of bike hoops will be provided for the storage of bikes during the day encouraging alternative modes of transport to the private car.
- 8.33 The proposed scheme would result in the loss of two parking spaces (although two further spaces will be provided as designated disabled parking spaces) when comparing the existing to the proposed. The school have an ongoing relationship with the hotel located on the opposite side of Christchurch where teachers can park within the hotel grounds during the school's operating hours. This is on the basis that these times are when the hotel car parking is least used therefore, not causing conflict with patrons of the hotel. Importantly, whilst there is a reduction in the number of spaces, the spaces are now designed to standard and are laid out in a way to not cause obstruction to the movement of other parked vehicles.
- 8.34 Overall, the parking and access arrangements at the school will be significantly improved by virtue of the proposed alterations. The scheme will result in improved safety for the movement of vehicles and pedestrians within the site and will further improve access and viability at junctions into and out of the school grounds providing benefits to the safety of vehicles and pedestrians utilising the highway network.

Benefits to the Function of the School

- 8.35 The existing school has some current operational issues which hinder day to day operations at the school and which also give rise to health and safety concerns. The plans submitted as part of this enquiry enable to school to provide improvements to the function of the school in the following ways:
- Improved operations with useable teaching spaces provided and corridors being kept clear;
 - Provision of appropriate support facilities including meeting rooms, medical room and 'support for learning' room;
 - Improved access for pedestrians;
 - Provision of enhanced teaching opportunities including Drama, Design Technology and Food Technology; and
 - Provision of an enhanced entrance to the school and increased presence in the street scene.

Other Considerations

Ecology

- 8.36 An ecology survey has been submitted in support of the application which demonstrates that there are no protected species utilising the school building or the trees within the site. As such, no protected species will be disturbed by virtue of the works proposed.

Air Quality

- 8.37 The application proposes no increase in capacity at the school nor any increase in staff numbers. The scheme is solely to provide enhanced space for existing attendees and as such, would not give rise to an increase in vehicular movements associated with the school. The proposed improvements to the kitchen facilities will potentially lead to a reduction in the number of deliveries which need to be made to the school (currently a daily basis). The scheme therefore accords with policy DM19 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document and EN15 of the emerging Local Plan.



9 Planning Balance and Conclusions

- 9.1 Various options for alterations and additions to the school and the courtyard to the front have been considered which enable the school to operate safely, to grow and to adapt to current requirements. The proposed scheme has been chosen as the most appropriate solution which provides for the best improvements for the function of the school and also offers associated benefits which result in the improvement and enhancement of the Conservation Areas, improvements to the setting of the Listed Building and benefits in terms of highways safety and the movement of pedestrians within and around the site.
- 9.2 The proposal would result in the loss of tree T2 which is identified as important to the locality however, this tree is not identified specifically as making a significant contribution to the area (in the Conservation Area Appraisal) and it is seen in the context of the plethora of nearby trees which will mitigate the harm of its loss. The loss of the tree however, is essential in finding any solution to the highway safety issues currently experienced at the site. The scheme would also be supported by a replacement planting scheme which would enable the offer of the site to be enhanced and provide a longer-term contribution to the area.
- 9.3 The only marginal harms which can be associated the scheme are considered to be less than substantial harms. These include the harm associated with the provision of the extensions and the marginal concealment of a small part of the front elevation of the original building from a limited public vantage point. The loss of the tree is also considered to result in some harm to the Conservation Area. The loss however, does not result in a significant change to the overall contribution trees make to the significance of the Conservation Area given the level of tree cover in the immediate vicinity and that other trees within the site will be retained. This is therefore considered to give rise to less than significant harm which is outweighed by the public benefits.
- 9.4 There are limited harms associated with the proposed development., however, in line with paragraph 134 of the NPPF, where there is less than substantial harm to a heritage asset, in this case the Conservation Area, this should be outweighed by the public benefits associated with the scheme. Overall the benefits associated with the scheme can be summarised as:
- Concealment and improvements to the uncharacteristic 1990's extensions which are identified as harmful to the significance of the Conservation Area;
 - Visual improvements to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area through the re-introduction of characteristic railings;
 - Visual improvements through the re-organisation and improvement of the area to the front of the building including legacy planting;
 - Practical improvements to the parking layouts and manoeuvrability of vehicles within the site;
 - Significant improvements to highways safety through the provision of a safer access and egress;
 - Benefits to the school resulting from enhanced facilities; and,
 - Improvements for them movement of pedestrians within and into the site.
- 9.5 On this basis, it is considered that the benefits of the proposed development, as set out above, outweigh the limited harm associated with the loss of the tree which can also be further mitigated by a replacement planting scheme.
- 9.6 The development proposals are considered to constitute sustainable development offering benefits in all three strands. Socially the proposal provides improvement to the school site which would encourage parents to walk or cycle to school and would provide areas for parents to interact whilst waiting for children. The proposal would also provide health and safety benefits to the school. Environmentally the proposals provide for significant improvements to the character and appearance of the area. The built environment would be enhanced, and replacement planting would provide enhancements and long-term benefits for the Conservation Area. Economically the project provides employment opportunities during construction. On this basis the scheme is considered to constitute sustainable development.

E D G A R S

Appendix 1

Photographs of the site





View of the front (north) elevation of the building



View of north elevation from vehicular access point





View of access on junction between Christchurch Road and Vicarage Road





View of front of building from existing egress point





View of existing 1990's extension





View of Existing Side Elevation from Vicarage Road





View of rear elevation from Vicarage Road



E D G A R S

Appendix 2

Internal Photographs of the School





Reception



Kitchen





First Floor Corridor

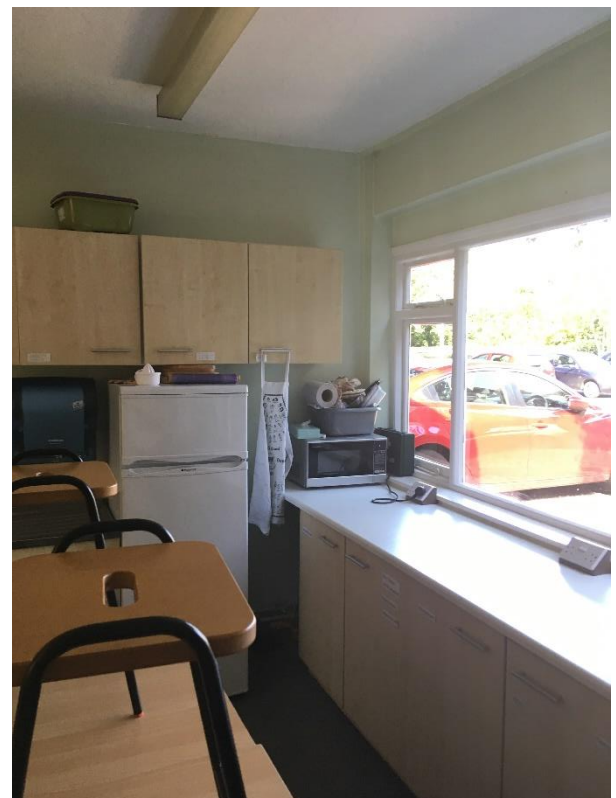


Medical Room





Existing Food Technology Room



E D G A R S

Appendix 3

Historic Maps

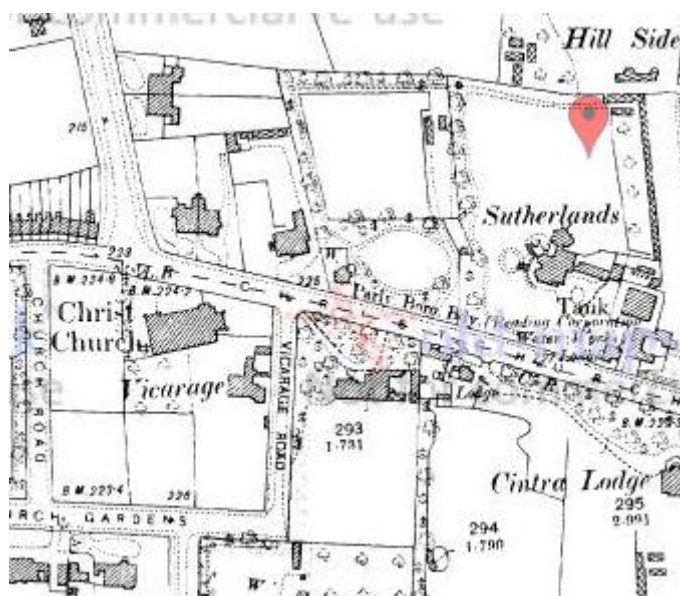




1877 – 1879



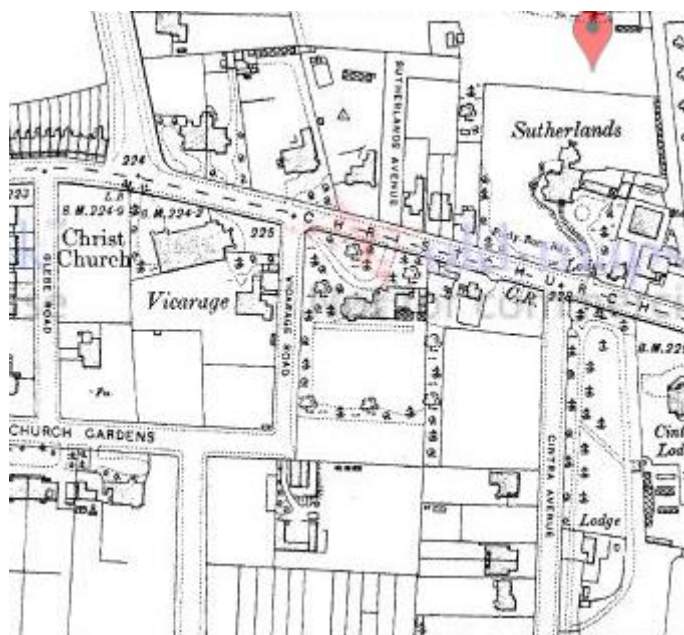
1883



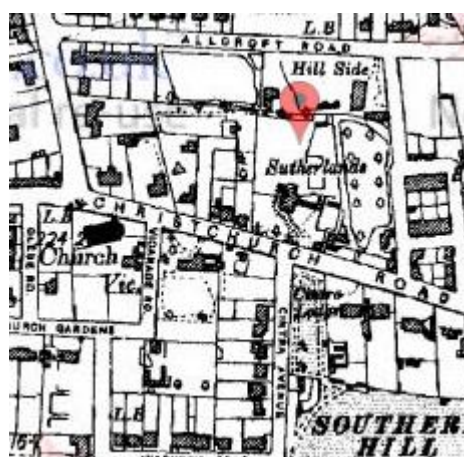
1899



1900



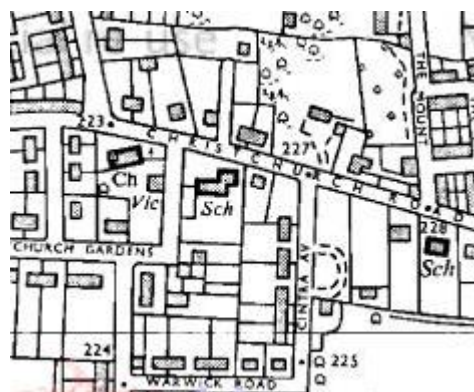
1912



1931



1958



1961-1962



1992-1995

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