

Statement of Community Involvement
Clarendon House, Reading
Prepared on behalf of Reading Heights
Limited

May 2018

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1. Introduction

This Statement of Community Involvement outlines the pre-application consultation undertaken in relation to proposals by Reading Heights Ltd for the development of the Clarendon House site at the corner of Queen's Road and Watlington Street in Reading. This application would see the development of up to 50 units of housing, complementing the consented development on site being undertaken under permitted development rules.

Pre-application consultation on the proposals began in January 2018 ahead of the submission of a full planning application.

Community engagement will, as appropriate, continue following the submission of this application.

2. About Cumpsty Communications

Cumpsty Communications was commissioned by Reading Heights Ltd to assist the pre-application public consultation on these proposals, ahead of the submission of a complete planning application.

Cumpsty Communications has extensive experience delivering community and stakeholder engagement campaigns, to ensure that communities have a real chance to participate in discussions around development proposals, before planning applications are submitted.

Our experience involves work with both private and public sector bodies, and has involved communicating around a variety of planning applications.

Cumpsty Communications always aims to not just match, but to exceed the consultation requirements outlined, in statute, government guidance and each Local Planning Authority's (LPA) adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

3. Meeting the requirement to consult

National Planning Policy Framework

Ahead of the submission of this application we believe Reading Heights Ltd has complied with the requirements outlined in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which places great emphasis on community consultation within the planning system. The principles of consultation detailed in this report are based on the government's advice in the Decision Taking section of the NPPF. It makes clear the central role in the planning process for consultation and participation:

188. Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

189. Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they do offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community before submitting their applications.

190. The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs.

Localism Act

The aim of the Localism Act is to increase public participation in the decision-making process and has particular emphasis on the planning process. The Act, for large scale applications, has introduced a statutory requirement for the developer to consult local communities. Although the scheme is not large enough to be considered a large-scale application (200 homes or above) we have benchmarked our pre-application engagement with the requirements listed in the Act.

The Act under Chapter 4 61W states:

The person must publicise the proposed application in such manner as the person reasonably considers is likely to bring the proposed application to the attention of a majority of the persons who live at, or otherwise occupy, premises in the vicinity of the land.

It goes on to indicate in 61X (Duty to take account of responses to consultation) that the applicant must take in to consideration responses made during the community consultation process:

The person must, when deciding whether the application that the person is actually to make should be in the same terms as the proposed application, have regard to any responses to the consultation that the person has received.

Reading Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement

Reading Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was adopted in March 2014. This document outlines how stakeholders and the local community should be involved in the pre-application process.

The SCI states the importance of pre-application consultation, and encourages the use of various community engagement methods, including the following, ahead of any planning submission:

- Direct discussion with key stakeholders
- Drop-in events
- Publication of the policy or plan online

We believe our programme of engagement, which has utilised all of the above community engagement methods, and more, has not just met the requirements of Reading Borough Council's SCI, but exceeded them.

4. The Site



The site sits south of Reading City centre and is bounded by Watlington Street and Queen's Road. The site is partly occupied by a disused office block currently being redeveloped under permitted development rules.

5. The Proposals

Reading Heights Ltd is proposing to redevelop the Clarendon House site and create an up to 50 unit housing development.

The design of the development pays homage to the history of the area, taking inspiration from the Conservation Area and proposing a contemporary interpretation of traditional materials.

This application will provide up to 50 high quality units with generous communal areas, private balconies, roof terraces and 70% dual aspect. 30% of the housing allocation on site is to be designated as 'affordable'. The ground floor will include four mews houses with access to a landscaped communal courtyard and the site will have a limited amount of parking spaces to encourage public transport.



'Royal Heights' scheme



View of the mews houses within the communal courtyard

6. Consultation

Initial Engagement

The applicant has entered into formal pre-application discussions with the Council as part of the consultation process in support of this planning application and a series of pre-application meetings have been held with the Council and its advisors to consider the development proposals at various stages throughout the design process.

Pre-application advice was first sought in December 2017, where the principles of development and proposed planning programme was shared with officers and members.

Subsequently, meetings were held with technical officers, politicians, local advisory, interest and business groups to help identify issues of importance to design development, which in turn have influenced the Design Team's decision-making process. A brief summary of meetings held is set out below:

- 18th January 2018 – Presentation to the Reading Design Review Panel (DRP), attended by Planning Officers. The purpose of this meeting was to look at design parameters, including height and massing and the approach to landscaping and materiality. Notes of this meeting were taken, the summary of which is provided as Appendix 1.
- 5th February 2018 – Meeting with Ward Members. This meeting provided the Design Team opportunity to understand principles important to local members, so that these could be brought forward in the design. It was explained why a roof and side extension, rather than comprehensive re-development was proposed and also what was being undertaken to assess the scheme in terms of daylight/sunlight, heritage and parking.
- 5th March 2018 – Meeting with Planning Officers. An update was provided on works undertaken further to the January 2018 DRP and also to explain next steps, including desire to discuss approach to affordable housing with Officers.
- 20th March 2018 – Meeting with Reading Civic Society and Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) Members. As part of the stakeholder engagement approach, meetings with key groups, including those with an interest in the Historic Environment, were held. The purpose of this meeting was to determine likely impact on the Wesley and Polish Churches and the Eldon Square Conservation Area and to look at means of appropriately mitigating any concerns by virtue of height, proximity, massing and materiality.
- 21st March 2018 – Meetings with Canon Brian Shenton and Reading UK CIC. Similarly, meetings with local religious and business leaders were

held to understand key interests and concerns arising, so that these could be factored into design development.

- 22nd March 2018 – Meeting with Planning and Heritage Officers. Following on from very successful engagement with local politicians and stakeholder groups, a further meeting to provide opportunity to brief Heritage Officers and to understand key views requiring assessment was held. This also enabled further design development prior to presentation of the updated scheme to DRP.
- 12th April 2018 – Second Presentation to the Reading DRP. The DRP welcomed the update to materiality and the connection provided between old and new buildings and considered the overall concept to be merited, but requested more work was undertaken on the tower to provide a more contiguous form. Minor alterations to design were therefore implemented ahead of the public exhibition process.

The discussions with local stakeholder groups have been of great assistance to the Design Team's understanding of relevant issues affecting built form. Accordingly, and in tandem with comments received from the Public Consultation process, it is considered that a robust and informed design has emerged.

Public Consultation Event

Following the programme of individual meetings, a public consultation event was arranged and held. This took place on Wednesday 18 April between 1.30pm and 7.30pm at the South Street Arts centre. To publicise the event, letters were sent to the 199 closest residents, the event was promoted through key Reading Facebook groups and a press release was issued.

This press release was covered on page 4 of the 12 April version of the Reading Chronicle, and also reported by the Get Reading website. Together with this, the release was distributed to the stakeholders listed under the 'Initial Engagement' heading.

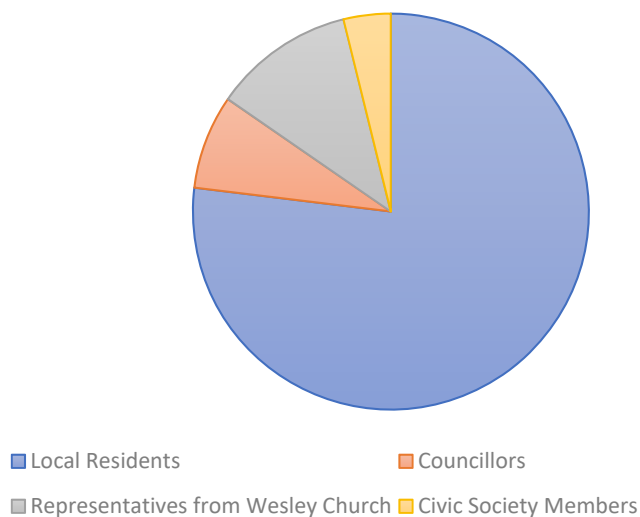
The public consultation event was held on Wednesday 18 April between 1.30pm and 7.30pm at the South Street Arts Centre in Reading. This venue was nominated due to its accessibility and close proximity to the site and was only selected after consultation with local stakeholders

The event was staffed by key members of the project team, including the project architect, town planner, landscape architect and developer.

The proposals were displayed on six A1 boards, with feedback forms available for attendees to comment and an email address provided, to enable the returning of electronic feedback.

In total, 27 residents and stakeholders attended the public consultation event. The attendees were a mix of residents, Councillors, Civic Society members and representatives of the Wesley Church. All attendees confirmed they found out about the event either through receipt of a letter, through a post on social media, from the press release in the Reading Chronicle or by word of mouth.

Consultation Attendee Breakdown

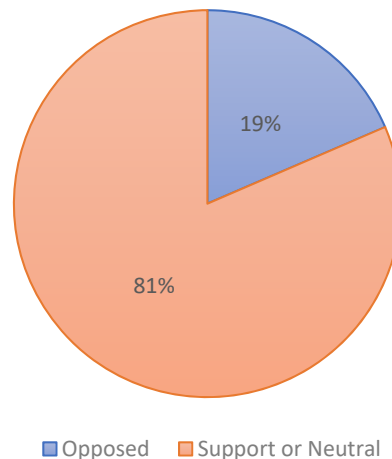


Stakeholders discuss plans with the project team at the Public Exhibition

7. Feedback

The proposals for this site were strongly supported through the engagement process. Of the 27 exhibition attendees, 22 expressed support or interest in the scheme. Only five attendees expressed verbal opposition. This breaks down as:

Consultation Responses



Eight written feedback forms were received. Four of these forms expressed support for the scheme, whilst four opposed the scheme. Given the additional motivation which scheme opponents usually enjoy, these figures are unsurprising.

Positive feedback at the consultation event focussed on:

- The effort taken by the developer to consult residents
- The lack of onsite carparking
- The sympathetic use of building materials
- The percentage of social housing
- The effort to provide open space
- Plans to replace the existing concrete carpark with landscaped green space

Stakeholders were notably impressed by the quality and sincerity of the level of engagement from the project team. Of particular note was the very positive reaction to the water feature and the mews homes in the courtyard and the widespread approval of the green space at the centre of the development which will replace a concrete parking area.

Other feedback highlighted:

- The height and design of the proposed building
- Insufficient space provision
- The proximity of the development to Grantley Heights and Queens Wharf

- Concern that the development would block sunlight and impact of the 'right to light' of residents living in Grantley Heights

Further feedback

Along with the feedback forms returned at the event, we have received six emails from local residents. These focussed on two matters:

- Disruption caused by current work on site
- Concerns regarding impact on light from the new development

The project team took these emails most seriously, and each email was responded to personally by the Chairman or CEO of Reading Heights Ltd within 24 hours of receipt.

In the majority of responses, the Chairman and CEO offered to engage with concerned residents through 1:1 meetings in an effort to resolve issues. At the time of the production of this SCI (May 2018), none of these offers had been taken up.

8. Changes Made

In recognition of feedback received during the course of the pre-application consultation process, the following changes were made to the plans:

1. The height of the roof extension on Clarendon House was reduced to a single storey
2. The land at the corner of Watlington Street and Queens Road, which is in the Council's ownership, was included within the landscape proposals to improve the overall appearance of the public realm
3. The level of on-site car parking was reduced to incorporate a large landscaped area in the central courtyard to be created
4. A detailed approach to materiality, particularly the colour and mixing of bricks to reflect the local vernacular, formed the core of design philosophy
5. The 'link' building was given more differentiation and purpose within design to help reconcile old and new parts of the build
6. More green and brown roof elements were incorporated into design to complement the central amenity spaces and provide significant visual greening to improve current outlook from Queens Wharf and Grantley Heights
7. The upper block façade treatment was revised to make the structure appear more 'residential'
8. The upper block built form was amended by removing a cutback/cantilevered element which visually separated this from the new build below
9. The upper block was also re-aligned to ensure that the building was further set back from Queen's Road and Watlington Street
10. Balcony railings were changed to metal where appropriate
11. Winter gardens were introduced to the Queen's Road aspect to combat noise
12. The design of the water feature in the courtyard was improved

Section 5.4 of the DAS provides further detail regarding how the design and layout has evolved during the pre-application phase.

9. Conclusion

As part of Reading Heights Ltd's commitment to pre-application consultation, the development proposals for extensions to Clarendon House and associated new build have been subject to a lengthy period of formal and informal discussions with Council Officers and Members, members of the wider local community and local stakeholder groups.

This consultation has both met and exceeded the requirements laid out as part of the NPPF, the Localism Act and Reading Borough Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

Comments, ideas and concerns have been gathered and assessed, and wherever possible have been fed into the design process so that the proposals submitted with the planning application meet as many local aspirations for the development and its environs as possible, and also seeks to mitigate concerns and likely objections.

Reading Heights Ltd has sought to be very open about the proposals and has been keen to involve the local community. Reading Heights Ltd and their representatives have held a lengthy public consultation process, first discussing issues with Council Officers prior to refining plans and consulting all stakeholders on a well-considered scheme at public exhibitions.

Events have been well publicised, with the proposals outlined in the local newspaper and displayed at an event attended by 27 people. Local residents and stakeholders have all had a chance to engage with the project team, to discuss the proposals and make comments.

Dialogue with stakeholders including the Council, Reading Civic Society and Reading UK and feedback from the consultation process has been crucial to the further development of the scheme. It is considered that the latest proposals optimise the benefits associated with the regeneration scheme.

The primary purpose of the public exhibitions was to explain the context of the emerging development proposals, to clearly illustrate the extent of the proposals and to gather attendees' comments and ideas as part of the design process, prior to the design team working up proposals to inform the planning application. Members of the project team were in attendance to listen to concerns and expectations for the development and to answer any technical questions arising from the exhibition information.

The results of the exhibitions highlighted a broad acceptance of the principle of development, although ongoing discussions will be required with interested parties to provide re-assurance on the improvements and alterations that have

been factored into development to offset concerns, principally regarding visual amenity.

Attendees at the Exhibitions felt in general that the consultation process had been inclusive and that Reading Heights Ltd had made a genuine attempt to develop the sites in an acceptable manner, albeit with some reservations as detailed in this report. The design team has listened to the various responses to the wider consultation process and, where appropriate, has considered how best to reflect these in the scheme design.

Discussions with the Council and other key stakeholders will continue during the planning application process and it is Reading Heights Ltd's intention to continue discussing relevant matters with key stakeholders to assist the determination process.

Reading Heights Ltd and the design team very much look forward to being kept informed of the Council's own consultation on the application proposals in due course and are committed to considering the responses received.

10. Appendix 1

Reading DRP Notes

Clarendon House, Queens Road, Reading

18 January 2018

Matters raised

1. Would a podium deck work? – north-facing courtyard. Increasing height will help with daylight/sunlight/amenity. Considered to help the scheme
2. Some concern over amenity spaces. Can we meet mandatory requirements?
3. How can we improve the public realm (colonnade could be mis-read, looks commercial). Can we look outside site?
4. Tying blocks together works in massing studies, but gets lost later in presentation. Needs further work.
5. Need to look at junction to demonstrate how site works as part of wider placemaking initiative?
6. Feel shoulder on right-hand side introduces one too many plains, but like the southern-facing view? Like idea of articulation – push in front but extended right-hand shoulder
7. Tackle public-realm, landscaping head-on – get roof gardens to work, prove management structure for green/brown roofs otherwise
8. Can we do more to animate façade, particularly the return from the existing building to the new scheme on Queens Road
9. Will floor levels work, given levels throughout the site – using existing FFL's vs. that proposed in the new build. Need to ensure consistency throughout the site
10. Need to get corner right, central to success of the scheme. Suggest that we get more solid into the façade to provide more residential feel to the building
11. Extra floor on left-hand side seems to be too much – detrimental to the height and massing strategy. Like the link, but the pavilion appears to jar
12. Would be interesting to see height studies for the tower, but need to clarify this in context of Wesley Church – heritage and TVIA important