



Ref: A103569/BS/bs
Date: 15 November 2017

Mr Steve Vigar

Principal Planning Officer
Planning Section
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices, Level 1 North
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

Dear Mr Vigar

**UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME
UNIVERSITY OF READING, ST PATRICK'S HALL, NORTHCOURT AVENUE, READING
REQUEST FOR EIA SCREENING DIRECTION**

Introduction

WYG has been instructed by University Partnerships Programme (UPP) to request a formal screening opinion from Reading Borough Council to determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required for the redevelopment of the St Patrick's Hall student accommodation, Northcourt Avenue, University of Reading.

As the Council will be aware, an application was submitted in June 2016 for the demolition of St Patrick's Hall of residence buildings, the Northcourt reception/bar building and university residences at 1, 2, 3 & 4 Sherfield Drive and the construction of residences for students, a cafeteria/bar, bin and bike stores, sub-station and energy centre, together with a new access link and landscaping, as well as minor alterations to the elevations of the existing office building (ref no. 161182). In November 2016, Reading Borough Council confirmed that Pearson's Court (located on the application site and due to be demolished as part of the proposals) met the heritage criteria to be locally listed. Thus, in consideration of the listing the applicant withdrew the application on 24 November 2016.

This screening request is made in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 and relates to a revised proposal for the site.

In accordance with the Regulations this formal request for a screening opinion is accompanied by the following information:

- (a) plan sufficient to identify the land;
- (b) a description of the development, including in particular:
 - (i) a description of the physical characteristics of the development and, where relevant, of demolition works;





- (ii) a description of the location of the development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected;
- (c) a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development;
- (d) to the extent the information is available, a description of any likely significant effects of the proposed development on the environment resulting from—
 - (i) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant; and
 - (ii) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity; and
- (e) such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make, including any features of the proposed development or any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment.

The Site

The site is located to the west of the main campus on the south-western side of Northcourt Avenue (see location plan enclosed with this screening request). It forms part of the University residential campus, now occupied by St Patrick's Hall, Benyon Hall, Sherfield Hall and a variety of other smaller residential buildings of varying ages. Sherfield Hall buildings lie to the west and south-west, Benyon Hall to the north-west and the Edwardian houses along Northcourt Avenue to the north-east. The Edwardian houses are situated on the street frontage and are sited amongst a number of mature trees.

The entrance to the main Whiteknights campus is only 400m away with the London Road site about 1km to the north. The surrounding area includes Cintra Park and residential areas of varying age and density. On the opposite side of Northcourt Avenue is a row of early 20th century houses.

The application site itself comprises approximately 3.6 ha, which includes the original St Patrick's Hall, referred to as Pearson's Court, the warden's lodge, New Court and the cafeteria. Pearson's Court is well set back from Northcourt Avenue and faces into a courtyard, with the rear elevations visible from the street. New Court, similar to Pearson's Court, is a three storey block but is set behind the Edwardian houses and not readily visible from the street.

There are two vehicular accesses to the site off Northcourt Avenue with an area of hard standing for car parking located adjacent to the southernmost entrance. Several pedestrian entrances to the site are also available, the principal route being from the entrance between 12b and 14 Northcourt Avenue.

Screening Direction May 2016

In November 2015, a previous formal request for a screening opinion was made to the Council and a subsequent screening enquiry response was issued on 4 May 2016. A copy of the 2016 Screening Opinion response is enclosed with this letter. This request and response related to the previous proposals for the redevelopment of St Patrick's Hall and covered the same area of land now proposed as part of the revised application.

In short, the LPA considered that the proposed development would not result in significant effects on the environment of the wider area that would be of more than local importance and, as such, the LPA adopted a Screening Opinion to the effect that an Environmental Statement is not required to accompany any formal planning application for the development.

The Proposed Development

Following the withdrawal of the previous application, our client has undertaken a detailed design review of the previous scheme and is now seeking to progress with a revised, alternative proposal that satisfies the



University's objectives of responding to the growing demand for bespoke, on-campus accommodation, whilst preserving the campus' heritage. The proposed amended layout drawing is enclosed.

The revised application retains Pearson's Court and redevelops the remainder of the site, providing 884 new student bedrooms with associated catering and social facilities. In short, the main changes between the previous 2016 application and the current proposals are as follows:

- The demolition of the original Pearson's Court building no longer forms part of the plans for redevelopment.
- The withdrawn application proposed 1024 new student bedspaces and 6 no. three bedroom flats for families, resulting in a net increase of 726 bedspaces. The revised application provides 884 new bedspaces and would retain 116 existing bedspaces within Pearson's Court. This results in a net increase of 702 bedspaces at the site (24 fewer bedspaces than the withdrawn application).
- New accommodation is now proposed above the Hub building and to the rear of the site, where the bar, café and dining facilities will be relocated.
- The two low-rise buildings previously proposed in the southern part of the site have been removed in response to concerns raised regarding the proximity of the buildings to the nearby house.
- The Combined Heat and Power (CHP) energy centre has been relocated further away from the southern boundary.
- Warden accommodation and an updated Student Management Plan have been introduced as part of the revised application.

In common with the withdrawn application:

- The Sets building to the south of the Pearson's courtyard will be removed and replaced with new, high-quality accommodation, this element of the scheme has been redesigned to complement the retained courtyard.

The development, as described above, does not fall within any of the descriptions contained within Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations for which EIA is mandatory.

It is considered that the development falls under the description in Schedule 2, 10(b) *Urban Development Projects*. Given that the proposed development includes more than 1 ha of urban development which is not dwellinghouse development, the proposals exceed the indicative thresholds set out in Schedule 2 of the Regulations. As such, the proposed development should be screened in order to determine whether the development is likely to give rise to significant environmental effects and therefore require an EIA.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) notes that the more environmentally sensitive the location, the lower the threshold will be at which significant effects are likely. The PPG provides a series of indicative thresholds to help determine whether significant effects are likely. In terms of urban development projects, it states that an EIA is unlikely to be required for the redevelopment of land unless the new development is on a significantly greater scale than the previous use, or the types of impact are of a markedly different nature or there is a high level of contamination. It is also suggested that key issues to consider are the physical scale of such development, and potential increase in traffic, emissions and noise.

Characteristics of the Potential Impacts

WYG has undertaken a review of potential significant environmental effects and it is considered that these are most likely to be associated with: traffic and transport; ecology; heritage; amenity; and flood risk and drainage. These potential effects have been considered in accordance with Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations and in accordance with the previous screening direction received.

Traffic and Transport

At the outset, it is pertinent to note that the revised application results in 24 fewer bedspaces than the withdrawn application. Therefore, given that the proposals for the larger scheme were negatively screened



previously, it is considered that this revised application for 884 new bedspaces (a net increase in 702) will not result in any substantial additional traffic issues.

The site is situated within a sustainable location and is well connected and readily available by a range of modes of transport. Parking spaces for students are only provided to meet disability needs or for the rare occurrences where a student requires a vehicle to aid their specific degree course. Where these circumstances apply, students need to apply for a parking permit through the University. As a default, the tenancy agreements of each student prohibit them from bringing a car to the University.

In light of this, it is considered that the revised proposals are unlikely to give rise to any additional environmental effects from traffic and transportation which would warrant an EIA.

Ecology

The proposed redevelopment has been informed by a suite of ecological surveys. The site is considered to currently be of low value to biodiversity and there is the opportunity to enhance this through the existing and potential Green Links running along the northern part of the site, wildlife friendly landscape planting and integrating roosting/nesting features within the new buildings.

As per the previous proposals, the revised application will still ensure the biodiversity of the application site will be maintained and enhanced. On this basis, there is assessed to be no requirement to provide an EIA in respect of ecology.

Heritage

One of the most significant changes between the previously withdrawn application and the revised proposals is the retention of Pearson's Court. Reading Borough Council confirmed that Pearson's Court met the heritage criteria to be locally listed in November 2016. As such, the revised application has sought to incorporate the building into the proposals.

A heritage statement has been prepared to accompany the application which describes the impacts of the development ranging in magnitude from none to slight, giving rise to effects ranging from neutral to minor on the setting and hence the significance of the retained parts of the locally listed Pearson's Court. Some positive benefits are recorded through the provision of more appropriately designed buildings within the setting of Pearson's Court.

It is considered that the benefits of the scheme far outweigh any harm caused to the heritage assets that are to be retained as part of the revised application. Thus, it is concluded that the revised proposals will be an improvement in terms of heritage environmental effects and, as such, the development does not warrant an EIA in this respect.

Amenity

The development proposes to locate the taller buildings centrally within the site, with buildings of a more domestic scale at the boundaries. The site also benefits from mature hedges and trees at sensitive boundaries that are proposed to be supplemented through a comprehensive landscape planting strategy. In addition, the existing villas (Crooksbury, Chedworth and no. 16) which are set in a mature landscape setting and the adjoining parkland bordering Northcourt Avenue will be retained as part of the proposed development, thus providing further screening. As such, there is no assertion that these proposals would give rise to any overlooking or overbearing impact upon the amenity of residential neighbours to the site given the significant separation distances involved.

In regard to noise and student behaviour, the accommodation and social facilities have specifically been arranged to minimise disturbance to neighbours. Furthermore, the applicant is also seeking to agree an updated Student Management Plan as part of the Section 106 Agreement which will set out the management regime which will be in operation and proposals for regular ongoing engagement with the local community, recognising the site is within a predominantly residential area.



Flood Risk and Drainage

The site is situated within Flood Zone 1 which has a low probability of flooding. Given the site size is over 1ha, the revised application will be accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy to demonstrate how the equivalent to greenfield runoff surface water rates will be achieved. On this basis the development is not anticipated to cause flooding elsewhere. The drainage proposals also incorporate surface water from the retained Pearson's Court that currently discharges directly to a storm drain. As surface water from Pearson's Court will now be attenuated, the scheme would deliver betterment compared to the drainage regime of the existing site, potentially reducing the risk of flooding elsewhere. Accordingly, no EIA is required in respect of flood risk and drainage.

Conclusion

On the basis of the assessments described above and pursuant to consideration of Schedule 3 of the Regulations, it is concluded that the characteristics associated with the impacts of the proposed redevelopment will not give rise to any significant environmental effects. An EIA is therefore not required.

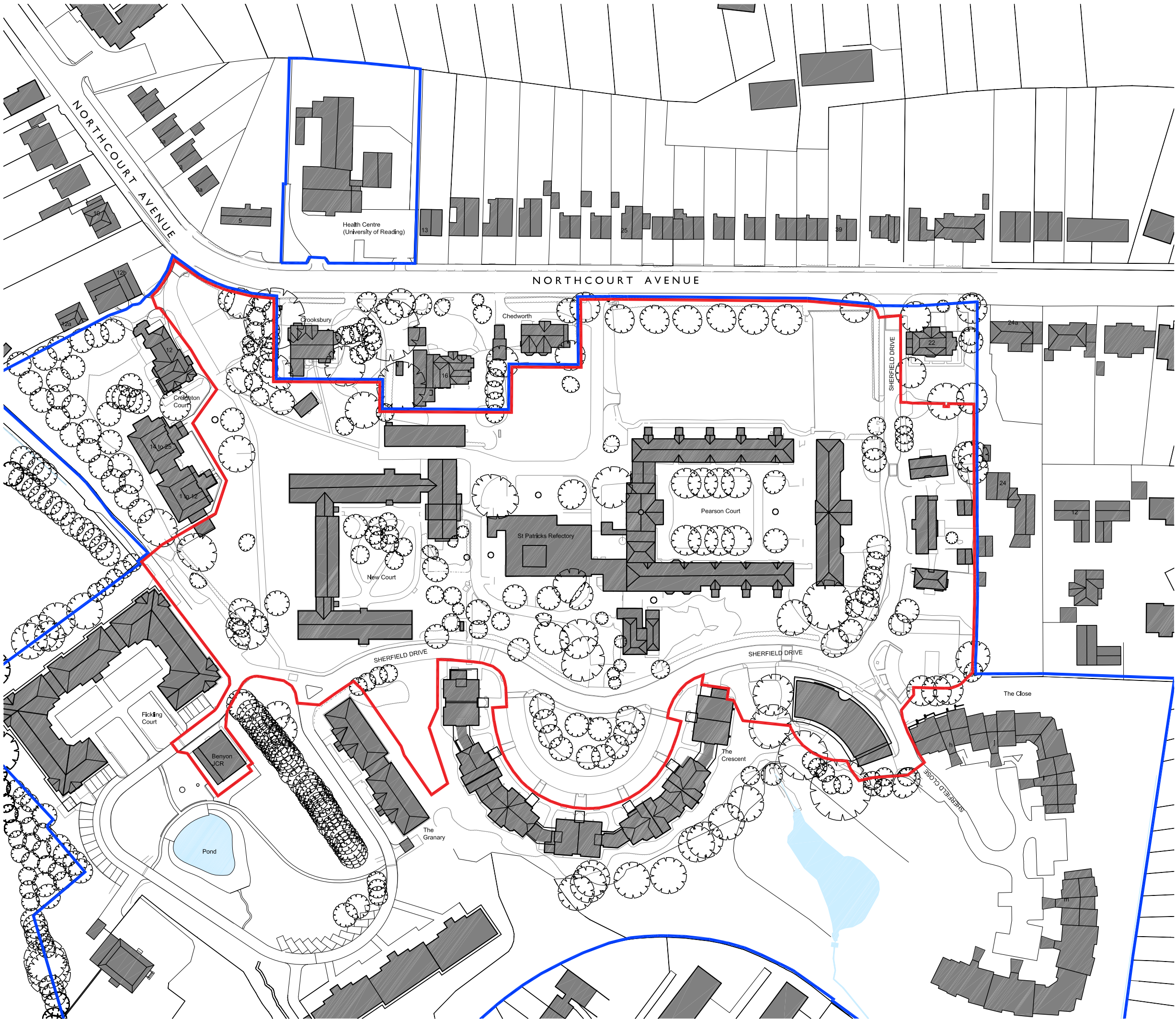
We trust this provides you with sufficient information to prepare and issue the screening opinion. However, if you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robin Upton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robin Upton
Director - Planning

Encs.



Notes

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Project Site

University's Property

Amendment	Drwn	Chkd	Date	Rev

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Drawing Status

PLANNING

Client

UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

Job Title

ST PATRICKS HALL
UNIVERSITY OF READING

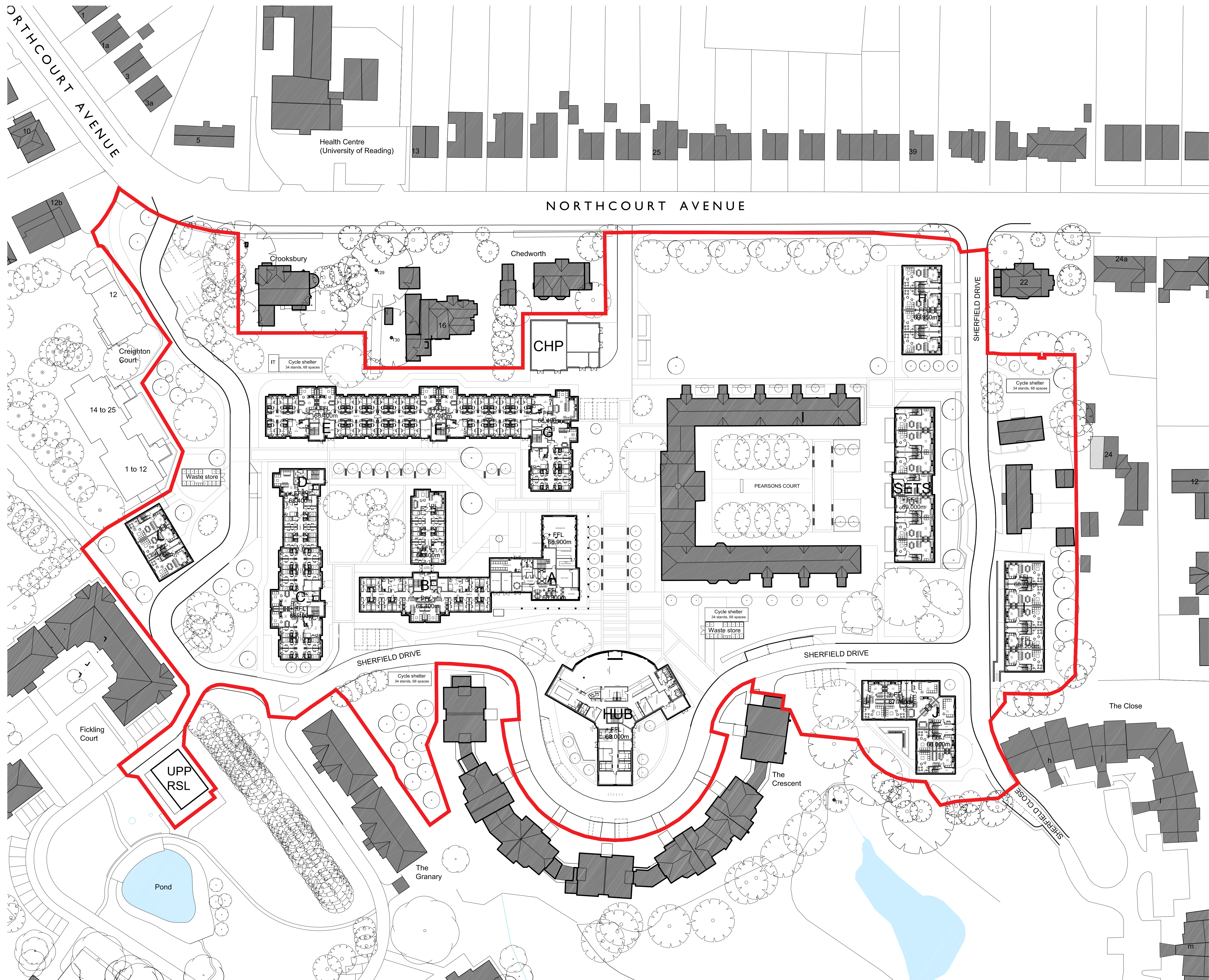
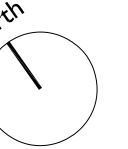
Drawing Title

SITE LOCATION PLAN

Scale	Size	Drawn	Checked	Date
1:1250	A3	CS	RT	NOV 17

Dwg No	Rev
StP-WIA-00-GF-DR-A-000001	-

QMF26 Issue 02 05.03.14



Amendment	Drwn	Chkd	Date	Rev
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Drawing Status **PLANNING**

Client

UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME

Job Title ST PATRICKS HALL
UNIVERSITY OF READING

Drawing Title

PROPOSED SITE PLAN

Scale 1:500	Size A1	Drawn RT	Checked AI	Date NOV 2017
Dwg No StP-WIA-00-GF-DR-A-000003				Rev

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4 May 2016

Your contact is: **Mr Stephen Vigar, Planning**

Dear Mr Renshaw,

SCREENING ENQUIRY RESPONSE

Enquiry Reference: 152106

Address: St Patricks Hall, 20 Northcourt Avenue, Reading, RG2 7HB

Proposal: Request for screening opinion on the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment for the redevelopment of St Patricks Hall

Thank you for your enquiry.

Following consultation with the Council's Environmental Health, Natural Environment and Transport sections, it is considered that the proposed development would not result in significant effects on the environment of the wider area that would be of more than local importance.

Therefore, in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2011 (as amended), the Local Planning Authority hereby adopts a Screening Opinion to the effect that an Environmental Statement is NOT required to accompany any formal planning application for the development referred to above.

Please note that the advice contained within this letter is provided without prejudice to the decision of the Borough Council in the event of a formal application for planning permission.

Yours sincerely



pp Mr Stephen Vigar
Principal Planning Officer