



553 Oxford Road, Reading

Design and Access Statement

June 2017



3d perspective photo montage of the proposed development at the junction of Oxford Road and Wilson Road



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1.00 Introduction

CPL Chartered Architects (CPL) has been appointed by The Trustees of 'The Gate', formerly Reading Community Church, to prepare a planning application for the land at 553 Oxford Road, known as The Gate Oxford Road Centre. Reading Community Church was formed in 2005 as a merger of two different Christian Fellowships – The Tilehurst Free Church and Grovelands Christian Fellowship.

The church obtained planning consent on 8 April 2013 to redevelop the site (ref: 12/01577/FUL). The consented scheme proposed the demolition of the existing church buildings and construction of a new 3 storey church building to accommodate worship/meeting rooms, offices, cafe, and 2 retail shop units as well as residential accommodation, comprising 1x one bedroom flat, 1x two bedroom flat and 1x Studio flat.

Since obtaining the above consent, the leadership of the Gate has embarked on a strategic review of their buildings across several sites. The Gate now holds its Sunday services at 384 The Meadway, located approximately 2km west of 553 Oxford Road. The church's aim is that a central core facility is provided on the Meadway site and the design of a new church building is underway and will provide seating for a minimum of 400 together with meeting rooms, offices and ancillary accommodation. With such a sizable community building proposed for the Meadway site, the Oxford Road and Wilson Road sites can be redeveloped to retain community use space as well as creating much needed new residential development to help meet Reading's housing needs. If planning consent is granted for the proposed developments at Oxford Road and Wilson Road, the proceeds will help fund the works at the Meadway site, providing a significant community asset.

This application therefore should be viewed in its wider context, that being the evaluation and redesign of several local sites owned by the applicant, with a view to providing high quality modern buildings to serve the local communities for years to come.

The Gate Oxford Rd Centre is currently used as a resource centre for hosting church groups and other events.

1.01 Physical Context

The development site for this planning application is located to the West of Reading town centre on the South side of the Oxford Road, (A329) at its junction with Wilson Road. The site is within the Oxford Road West District Centre.

The main existing building on the site is a late nineteenth century chapel of 315m² gross internal floor area which includes some lean-to ancillary buildings to the rear. The site also contains a small hall in the south-east corner measuring 55m² in gross internal floor area. To the rear of the chapel is a parking courtyard, accessible off Wilson Road.



The development site is bounded by Oxford Road to the north, Wilson Road to the west, a former (recently demolished) commercial workshop/warehouse to the south and a terrace of mixed use properties to the east featuring commercial units at ground floor level with residential accommodation above.

On the opposite side of Wilson Road is an empty church site between 2-4 Wilson Road currently used for parking. A planning application for the Wilson Road site is being submitted at the same time as this planning application. The proposals at Oxford Road can enable the Wilson Road site to be revitalised as a prime site for new housing and will fulfil the affordable housing obligated by the Oxford Road development. To make best use of the Oxford Road site, the Wilson Road site can also be used to provide additional car parking associated to the development on Oxford Road.



Figure 1a: The existing Victorian Chapel at the junction of Oxford Road and Wilson Road

The locality is dominated by the busy Oxford Road which is a key arterial road into Reading. The surrounding streets typically contain Victorian terraced housing but there are a number of large commercial and religious buildings on Oxford Road, some of which are described below. On Oxford Road itself, many of the Victorian properties contain commercial property at ground floor level with residential use above. Other notable nearby sites include Brock Barracks to the immediate west of Wilson Road, Battle Library further east along Oxford Road and a large modern commercial development, including a Tesco Extra, east of Battle Library, built on the former Battle Hospital site.



Figure 1b: Battle Library, Oxford Road



Furthermore, Emmanuel Methodist Church is a large modern worship space located behind Battle Library which replaced the former Methodist Chapel, constructed in 1905. The locality is also home to the Abu Bakr Islamic Centre and Mosque, a very large modern building recently constructed at 330 Oxford Road.



Figure 1b: Abu Bakr Islamic Centre and Mosque, 330 Oxford Road

1.02 Consultation

CPL has undertaken an extensive briefing process with the applicant to ascertain their needs and ambitions for this and their other sites in the locality.

In addition, CPL has consulted with the local authority and submitted a pre-application submission (council ref: 160296) with a response received in May 2016. A further meeting took place on 30 November 2016 between the planning officer, CPL and the applicant. The outcomes of this meeting, the pre-application response and client brief have resulted in a revised design which addresses all of the points raised by the Local Authority.

The design team has engaged a number of consultants on behalf of the applicant as follows:

- Transport Consultant (Transport Statement)
- Geotechnical Specialist (Phase 1 Desktop Land Contamination Report)
- Noise/Acoustic Consultant (Noise Impact Assessment)
- Environmental Consultants (Ecology/Air Quality)
- Sustainability Consultant (Sustainability/BREEAM and Energy Statements)

CPL has produced a coordinated design with specialist input from an experienced design team and the specialist design reports and surveys prepared by others should be read in conjunction with this statement.



2.00 Amount of development

The site area measures 824m². The existing church buildings are single storey and provide 370m² of internal floor area. In order to make sustainable and efficient use of this well located and accessible urban site, the new proposal is mixed use (community and residential) and is arranged over four floors, providing a total gross internal floor area of 1502m². Further details are set out below.

2.01 Community Use

The new development is comprised of community use at ground floor level measuring 372m² in gross internal floor area. This represents a nominal increase in community space compared with the current building. Furthermore, whilst the current building is non-energy efficient and contains areas in need of repair, the new community space will be a modern and sustainable building. The church will manage the community use space which will be available for various community groups and activities. A nursery is to be provided catering for up to 24 two-four year olds at any one time. There will be a maximum of four full time equivalent staff at the nursery.

The church has a history of engagement and partnership with a range of local initiatives and groups and intends to maintain such partnerships wherever possible. The design of the community space has a flexible layout, with sliding folding partitions, enabling the size of spaces to be controlled to suit end user needs. In addition to the three hall spaces, an entrance foyer/cafe area provides a welcoming main entrance/hub and is served by a kitchen.

2.02 Residential Use

The residential component is located above the community space and is arranged over three floors including a set-back penthouse level. The development will provide twelve spacious, modern and sustainable new homes. Two 1 bedroom (2 person*) and ten 2 bedroom (4 person*) apartments are proposed, each with generous private balconies and terraces and benefitting from a shared roof terrace. As a result, the two bedroom properties can be seen as suitable for both couples and small families. The schedule of proposed accommodation is provided below and should be read in conjunction with the proposed floor plans.

*All bedrooms are double/twin bedrooms.

All of the apartments exceed national recommended minimum space standards and all apartments comply with 'Lifetime Homes' standards as is good practise to ensure that dwellings can be adapted over time to suit the physical needs of the occupants.



Schedule of Accommodation:

Ground Floor

Community Use: 370m²

First Floor

Flat 1 (2b4p): 75m²

Flat 2 (1b2p): 58m²

Flat 3 (2b4p): 76m²

Flat 4 (2b4p): 78m²

Flat 5 (2b4p): 76m²

Second Floor

Flat 6 (2b4p): 78m²

Flat 7 (1b2p): 58m²

Flat 8 (2b4p): 76m²

Flat 9 (2b4p): 78m²

Flat 10 (2b4p): 76m²

Third Floor (set back penthouse level)

Flat 11 (2b4p): 100m²

Flat 12 (2b4p): 100m²

3.00 Layout

The layout of the proposed design has taken into consideration a number of factors outlined below.

3.01 Streetscene

The proposed building is L-shaped in plan with the building fronting onto the back of the public footpaths on Oxford Road and Wilson Road. This addresses the street scene by making the principle facades visible to the public realm whilst enabling the area at the rear of the building to be used for car parking and refuse/recycling storage, an area which is hidden from view to Oxford Road. This is in accordance with good design practise ensuring that the 'service' areas do not dominate the streetscene. The ground floor has been recessed, compared with the upper floors and it set back further from the public footpath than the existing building. This in effect widens the pedestrian zone, creates more defensible space between the road and building and creates a more spacious feel to the footpath on Oxford Road.

3.02 Solar Gain

As noted above, it is important that the main elevation addresses Oxford Road. This results in a principle facade which faces north. However, it is also important to maximise south and west facing aspect to living spaces to maximise solar gain and reduce energy consumption for heating. The first and second floor plans are near identical and contain five apartments each. Four out of five apartments at these floor levels contain living spaces and private outdoor amenity space which face either south, south west or west. The third floor penthouse level contains two apartments which feature living spaces and private terraces which are of south facing aspect. In addition, the proposed



communal roof garden has south facing aspect. All of the above ensure that the buildings' passive sustainability credentials are enhanced and that living spaces benefit from good daylight and solar gain.

3.03 Overlooking and Privacy

The layout has been carefully designed to avoid overlooking between:

- proposed dwellings (one to another)
- proposed dwellings and existing dwellings
- proposed dwellings and the new community space
- Proposed outdoor amenity space and neighbouring properties

This has been achieved as follows:

- Careful screening of balconies (opaque glass where appropriate)
- Careful screening of first floor external amenity space (1.8m high opaque glass screening provides two-way privacy whilst allowing natural daylighting)
- New living spaces do not face adjacent new living spaces
- New living spaces do not face existing living spaces or habitable rooms

Further reference should be made to the proposed floor plans.

3.04 Parking/Service Access

As is generally considered good practise, the new car park is located to the rear of the building so as not to adversely affect the Oxford Road street scene. Car parking and cycle parking provision for the dwellings and community space has been addressed as part of a Transport Statement prepared by the Glanville Group and submitted as part of this planning application. The proposed design addresses council parking standards and the responses received during the pre-application submission, namely that the Wilson Road site opposite should be used to provide parking for this development and that a Transport Assessment would need to be submitted as part of the planning application, to include justification for the proposed parking provision.

A new covered refuse and recycling store has been provided to the rear of the building. This is located next to the public highway to provide ease of access by the collection service vehicles and operatives.

3.05 Internal Layout (Community)

The design of the community space has a flexible layout, with sliding folding partitions, enabling the size of spaces to be controlled to suit end user needs. In addition to the three hall spaces, an entrance foyer/cafe area provides a welcoming main entrance/hub and is served by a kitchen. The ground floor area also enables use of the whole space as one large hall. The nursery has been provided with storage to enable equipment to be cleared away if necessary. The nursery will make use of Halls 1 and 2. The circulation and access design enables Hall 3 and the foyer / drop-in cafe area to be used concurrently with the nursery at all times.



The nursery has access (via electro-magnetically held open doors) to a children's WC/washroom area as well as to an external, partially covered soft play area at ground floor level. From the soft play area, a screened external stair provides access to a raised and screened external area at first floor level which will be of benefit to both the nursery and other community groups using the building. Use of the raised external space will be carefully managed in terms of numbers and times of use to ensure that disturbance to residents both on and off the development site is avoided. Two kitchens have been provided, one to serve the foyer/hub space and one to serve the nursery space.

3.06 Internal Layout (Residential)

The apartments are all served by a central common stair and lift core. Protected lobbies provide fire and smoke separation in line with the recommendations of Approved Document Part B. Apartment plans have been efficiently designed to minimise circulation space and to provide generously sized living spaces and bedrooms. All dwellings comply with '*Lifetime Homes*' standards and exceed national recommendations and council guidance for minimum space standards.

4.00 Scale

This section should be read in conjunction with the existing and proposed elevation drawings submitted as part of this planning application.

4.01 Building Massing and Scale

As is currently the case with the existing church building, corner sites often command buildings which are of a greater height than the adjacent terraced properties. In urban design terms, this is considered good practise, assists with way finding and creates visual interest and variety in the streetscape. It also focuses denser development to where it is most appropriate.

Nevertheless, it is important to ensure that new development is not overbearing or un-neighbourly. With this in mind, the proposed development is shorter in height than the existing church building as well as being shorter than the previous planning application design (by others) for which consent was granted (ref: 12/01577/FUL).

As part of the design development process for this planning application, the existing buildings on site and the adjacent buildings along Wilson and Oxford Road have measured and drawn in detail by a specialist land and building surveyor. This has ensured that the design drawings accurately portray the relationship of the proposals to the surrounding context. The survey information also enables the outlines of the existing church buildings (to be demolished) to be indicated on the proposed elevation drawings for comparison of scale.

4.02 Scale and Proportion of Elevations

Besides overall scale in terms of building massing, the proportions of the proposed building elevations have been carefully designed with consideration to the streetscape. Good modern design avoids pastiche and creates architecture which is 'of its time'. Modern buildings can relate well to and compliment historical buildings when the size and proportions of glazing and solid materials are carefully considered. In this instance, the facade has been broken down into separate framed elements, the proportions of which relate to the proportions of the neighbouring terraced houses.



A hand-drawn architectural elevation of the Oxford Road (North) of a building. The drawing shows a three-story structure with a red brick facade, white render columns, and a glazed ground floor. Labels include: 'AEROSOL BALCONY' (top left), 'VENTILATED METAL CHASSIS' (top right), 'RED BRICK PANELS' (middle right), 'RELEASED BALCONY ON CORNER' (middle right), 'GLAZED GROUND FLOOR' (bottom right), 'OXFORD ROAD (NORTH) ELEVATION' (bottom left), 'RENDER' (bottom center), and 'WHITE RENDER COLUMNS' (bottom right). The drawing also shows a 'GLAZED LINK' on the left and a 'GLAZED BALCONY' on the right.

Framed bay widths (in red) relate to widths of terraced houses. Glazed ground floor level relates to adjacent mixed use properties where ground floor is generally a glazed shop-front.



Contrasting brickwork relates to local Victorian style, adds visual interest and breaks down the scale of the building into constituent parts.



Figure 4c: Final 3D visualisation of planning design. Colour of brickwork developed to relate to tone of brickwork displayed on nearby terraced houses and the colour of buff stonework featured on nearby Battle Library.



5.00 Landscaping

5.01 Landscape

Landscaping works are minimal and are limited to areas of hard standing for the new car park. The proposed building is close to the back of footpath line to the public highways of Wilson Road and Oxford Road.

Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) proposals for the site will need to be developed in detail following any planning approval. Establishing a suitable SUDs proposal requires extensive ground tests to determine an appropriate strategy which is suited to site conditions. However, it is clear that a soak-away is unlikely to be suitable due to site constraints and proximity of the new car park to the proposed buildings and existing adjacent buildings.

It is considered that the most practical form of sustainable drainage will be storm water storage tanks which would store surface water on site (below the car park) and would be connected to a flow control manhole which releases water back into the public sewer at a restricted rate so as to limit the load on the public sewer. This would be an improvement compared to existing. It is expected that submission of detailed SUDs designs for approval will be secured by planning condition and that a detailed SUDs proposal will be developed by a civil engineer, following any planning approval, with capacities and flow rates to be by agreement with the Local Authority.

5.02 Ecology

The pre-application advice received stated that no specific ecological/ landscape concerns have been raised. The site has minimal ecological value. However, an up to date bat survey is required and will be submitted in support of this application.

6.0 Appearance

In addition to the scale of the building and elevation, the choice of materials has a key role to play in terms of the appearance of the building. Reference has been made to the local vernacular building style, that being the Victorian terraced house, as well as to larger civic and community buildings in the locality.

The nearby Victorian terraces are predominantly faced with clay brickwork. Some of the finest and most interesting examples include a mixture of red brick and buff brick as shown in the photograph below of the terrace opposite the development site. Grey slate is the predominant roofing material.



Figure 6a: Victorian terrace opposite the development site showing red brickwork with buff brick features

By contrast, the nearby Battle Library makes use of buff stonework and red brickwork infill panelling as seen below.



Figure 6b: Battle Library, Oxford Road

It is therefore appropriate that the new development is clad in clay facing brickwork with contrasting red and buff brick. Depth and texture have been added to the proposed facade by a mixture of brick bonds. For example, horizontal buff brick banding, representative of traditional Victorian buff string coursing, is differentiated from the stretcher bond brick framing elements by being laid vertically. The proposed red brick panels are to be recessed slightly from the buff brick framing elements. This high quality brick detailing will add to the overall quality of the building whilst providing visual interest, contrast and a modern interpretation of the brick detailing seen in Victorian architecture. Below are examples of the types of brick detailing similar to what is proposed.



Figure 6c: Recessed brick banding (left), recessed brick panels (right) and vertically laid brick banding (right)



7.0 Sustainability

The applicant has engaged MES Building Solutions (MES), a sustainability consultant, to assist the design team in ensuring that the proposed development meets the Council's policies on sustainable design and construction. Details of compliance can be seen in the Sustainability Statement and Energy Statement prepared by MES and submitted as part of the application.

BREEAM is part of The Code for a Sustainable Built Environment which is a strategic international framework for sustainability assessment of the built environment. The community use element of the development will achieve the sustainability rating of BREEAM 'Very Good' in accordance with council policy for a space of this size and use.

The Council's sustainability policy requirements for new residential development refer to The Code for Sustainable Homes standards which were recently withdrawn by the government. The design team has liaised with the council to establish what sustainability credentials are required for new residential development and the Sustainability Statement supporting this application is based on the advice received.

The scheme design employs a 'fabric first' approach which will achieve a sustainable building based on good thermal performance of walls, floors, roofs and glazing which, coupled with good levels of air tightness, will ensure that the development minimises carbon emissions and ongoing fuel consumption once in use. Solar photo-voltaic panels mounted on the flat roof of the top storey will generate on site renewable electricity and will offset carbon emissions in line with council policy on zero carbon technologies and carbon emissions offsets.

8.00 Access

8.01 Vehicular Access and Parking

Reference should be made to the Transport Assessment prepared by the Glanville Group and submitted as part of this application. Access to the building entrances from car parking is level or gently sloping. Disabled parking bays are provided close to the main entrance to the stair core, from which access is also available to the community space and lift.

8.02 Vertical Access

A single common stair is provided inside the building. This complies with the requirements of Approved Documents K and M in terms of number of risers in flights and the riser height and going length such that the stairs are accessible for ambulant disabled users. In addition a passenger lift has been provided in the circulation core so as to provide access to all floors of the building for those of limited mobility and for the benefit and convenience of occupants and end users. The raised external amenity space at first floor level is accessed by an external stair. This stair has also been designed to the above requirements. This is especially important for its use by young children attending the nursery. The lift core also provides access to the outdoor amenity spaces, ensuring that all internal and external areas of the building are accessible for those with limited mobility.



8.03 Horizontal Access

The development site is completely flat and therefore the approaches to all entrances from the public footpaths and from the car parking areas are all level or gently sloping. Level access will also be provided in the form of compliant external door thresholds to ensure that a maximum 15mm up-stand is incorporated so as not to impede wheelchair users.

Internally, corridor widths, lobby sizes and clear widths through doors have all been designed to meet or exceed the minimum dimensions set out in Approved Document Part M and additionally for compliance with the Lifetime Homes Standards for the new dwellings.

8.04 Lifetime Homes Standards

The Lifetime Homes Standards were formed because of concerns about how inaccessible and inconvenient many homes are for large sections of the population. Lifetime Homes was developed to ensure that new homes are accessible, inclusive and adaptable so that when a resident's physical needs change, their home has a better chance of being adapted to suit their needs thus reducing the likelihood of them having to move home. The 16 criteria of Lifetime Homes have all been met for all of the proposed new dwellings in line with council policy DM5.

9.00 Conclusion

The proposed redevelopment will make efficient and sustainable use of a highly accessible brownfield site. The design provides an increased amount of community use space, compared with existing, and this space will be modern, flexible and energy efficient.

In addition, much need new residential accommodation is proposed for the upper floors of the development. A mixture of one and two bedroom properties is proposed with all being sized significantly above minimum national space standards. The size of the two bedroom dwellings, together with access to good sized private amenity space and a shared roof terrace makes the dwellings suitable for a range of end users, including couples and small families.

The scale, layout and proportions of the development respect the adjacent properties and the height of the new building will be less than the existing chapel and the previous consented planning design by others.

Through a rigorous consultation process with the applicant and local authority, the submitted design addresses and complies with national and local planning policy and will provide a valuable community asset.

The modern design with use of high quality materials and detailing will complement the nearby Victorian architecture whilst providing a focal point as a landmark new building.