

PLANNING STATEMENT

***For the erection of 2 no. 2 bed semi-detached
houses at land to rear of 52 Norcot Road,
Reading, RG30 6BE***

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This planning support statement has been prepared by Mr Harman Sond, a chartered town planner with almost 8 years of residential planning experience in both local authority and consultancy, on behalf of the applicant, Mr Sanjay Sharma, in support of a planning application for the proposed erection of 2 no houses at land to the rear of 52 Norcot Road, Reading. This statement should be read in conjunction with the plans and supporting documentation including the design and access statement submitted as part of the application.
- 1.2 The aim of this statement is to demonstrate that the proposed scheme would comply with the Council's relevant policies and guidance given the extant permission for a new dwelling on the site and permission obtained in recent years for residential development on the neighbouring plots.

2.0 The Application Site and Surrounding Area

- 2.1 The site lies to the rear of 52 Norcot Road, a predominantly residential road linking Reading to the suburb of Tilehurst. The application site falls within 'backland' development and is bounded by recently built residential development to the west, the rear garden of 52 Norcot Road to the north, the main access route leading to the water tower to the east and the rear of the gardens serving Recreation Road to the south.
- 2.2 The character of the surrounding area can be broadly divided into two distinctive areas; the properties along Norcot Road which feature a strong building line with an older established stock of housing and the newer backland/infill development populating the land to the rear of Nos. 52 through to 72 Norcot Road and the listed former water tower, now flats, including the creation of a new road with houses (Sona Gardens) in recent years.
- 2.3 The site is configured in an L-shape and including access, covers an area of approximately 840 sqm with the site measuring 9m at its widest point and 26m in depth. At present the site is open land. Permission was granted in 2014 under 14/0249 for a two-storey, 3-bed detached dwelling and as yet not been implemented.
- 2.4 The site does not fall within a conservation area, however, would measure over 10m in distance from a grade 2 listed former water tower.

3.0 Background and Relevant Planning History

- 3.1 Outline planning permission was granted under 10/00940/OUT for the construction of a 3 bedroom detached house with 2 parking spaces and new access and demolition of outdoor

store with access and layout considered only. The application was granted and was followed by a reserved matters application to seek approval for all other matters under application referenced 140249/REM. This application was granted in February 2014 and remains the most current extant permission.

- 3.1 The site and surrounding plots have an illustrious planning history with the relevant applications noted as per the following:

Land to rear of 52 Norcot Road (application site)

- **10/00940/OUT** (101083) – Construction of a 3 bedroom detached house with 2 parking spaces and new access and demolition of outdoor store (access and layout only). Granted 23rd February 2011.
- **13/00192/NMC** (130162) – Non-material amendment for relocation of parking space. Approved 5th April 2013.
- **140249/REM** – Application for the approval of reserved matters following outline approval (10/00940/OUT). Granted 15th April 2014.
- **131549/PREAPP** – Pre-application enquiry for 4 options for residential development. Comments received for option 4 by email on 4th March 2014.

Summary of pre-application proposals and advice:

The pre-application sought advice on 3 different options for development on the site, however the case officer's response was to the scheme for the option of 2 x 3-bed semi-detached dwellings, which was considered as most viable of the options presented. The proposed scheme consisted of 2 x 3 bed measuring 80sqm each offering 50 and 60 sqm private amenity respectively and 1 no parking space for each of the dwellings. The enquiry scheme was designed to be of a similar scale and footprint to that approved (extant) on the site.

The feedback suggested that any future application should incorporate an adequate private garden provision for each of the houses and that the proposed plots should be in keeping with those of the surrounding area. The officer also suggested that scaled floor plans and elevations would be needed to fully assess the privacy impact on neighbouring properties. The current scheme has been designed incorporating the comments for the pre-application advice.

Neighbouring sites

Land to rear of 50 Norcot Road

- **12/00941/FUL** (121465) – Demolition of rear of 50 Norcot Road and erection of three 3-bed dwellings in rear (resubmission of 11/01361/FUL). Granted 10th January 2014.

Land to rear of 54a – 66 Norcot Road

- **13/00320/FUL** (130374) – 3 x 4-bed dwellings and 4 x 2-bed dwellings, including parking and landscaping (resubmission of 12/01761/FUL). Granted 24th September 2013.

4.0 Relevant Planning Policies

Introduction

- 4.1 We summarise below the core planning policy context considered to be directly relevant to the current development proposal. This consists of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the local development plan for the site comprising the Reading Borough Core Strategy (2008) with alterations in January 2015, the Reading Borough Sites and Detailed Policies Document (2012) with alterations in January 2015 and relevant Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance.

National Planning Policy

- 4.2 The recently published NPPF replaces the many Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance documents as the principle national planning policy document. The NPPF (Paragraph 14) introduces an unequivocal *“presumption in favour of sustainable development”* which should be seen as *“a golden thread running through both plan making and decision taking”*.

Paragraph 17 of the NPPF sets out a core of land use planning principles which should underpin decision-making. Those relevant to the proposed development include:

- encouraging the effective use of previously developed (brownfield land);
- always seeking to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;
- supporting the transition to a low carbon future;
- promoting mixed use developments, encouraging multiple benefits from the use of land in urban areas; and

- actively managing patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable

- 4.3 In relation to the delivery of sustainable development, paragraphs 18 to 21 of the NPPF state that the planning system should encourage rather than act as an impediment to sustainable growth. In promoting sustainable transport, paragraph 30 states that local authorities should support a pattern of development which, where reasonable to do so, facilitates the use of sustainable modes of transport.
- 4.4 Paragraph 19 makes it clear the Government is committed to ensuring the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system.
- 4.5 Paragraph 47 states that local planning authorities should seek *“to boost significantly the supply of housing”*. Paragraph 49 makes it clear that planning applications for housing should be *“considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development”* and paragraph 50 seeks to deliver *“a wide choice of high quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities”*.
- 4.6 Section 7 of the NPPF states that planning policies should ensure that developments: function well and add to the quality of the area; establish a strong sense of place; optimise the potential of sites to accommodate development (including creating and sustaining an appropriate mix of uses, support facilities and transport networks); respond to local character and history, whilst not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation; create safe and accessible environments; and are visually attractive as a result of good architecture. Added to this, paragraph 63 makes it clear that in determining applications, *“great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative design”*.
- 4.7 Finally section 12 of the NPPF requires an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected. The level of details should be proportionate to the assets importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Para 133 states that where a proposed development will lead to a substantial harm to, or loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local authorities should refuse consent.

The Reading Borough LDF Core Strategy (2008) with alterations in January 2015

- 4.7 Policy CS7 (Design and the Public Realm) states that all developments must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The policy continues to state that developments will also be

assessed to ensure that they respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm.

- 4.8 Policy CS24 (Car/Cycle Parking) states that maximum car parking standards and cycle parking requirements will be applied in relation to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport.
- 4.9 CS33 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) states that historic features and areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings, will be protected and where appropriate enhanced. This will include listed buildings and conservation areas.

The Reading Borough LDF Sites and Detailed Policies Document (2012) with alterations in January 2015

- 4.10 Policy SD1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development) states that a positive approach to considering development proposals will be taken that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. The policy continues to state that planning applications that accord with the policies in the development plan will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.11 Policy DM4 (Safeguarding Amenity) states that development should not cause a significant detrimental impact on the living environment of existing or new residential properties. The policy states that the position of habitable rooms, windows and outdoor living spaces will be particularly important.
- 4.12 Policy DM10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) requires dwellings to provide functional private space that allows for suitable sitting-out areas, children's play areas and several other activities associated with private gardens. The design of the outdoor areas will respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity and not be compromised by the relationship of other buildings which may be detrimental in terms of overlooking, overbearing and overshadowing.
- 4.13 Policy DM12 (Access, Traffic and Highway Related Matters) states that in determining proposals involving a new or altered access onto the transport network, improvement works to the transport network, the creation of new transport infrastructure or the generation of additional trips on the transport network, consideration will be given to the effect on safety, congestion and the environment.

Reading Borough Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/SPG)

- 4.14 The Council's most relevant SPD is the 'Revised Parking Standards and Design' (2011) SPD which provides guidance for new development. The document identifies the site as falling within Zone 3 (Secondary Core Area) within the RBC Zonal Scheme. The RBC Parking Standards for a new 2-bed house within Zone 3 requires 1.5 car spaces and 2 cycle spaces per flat.

5.0 Proposal

- 5.1 The proposed scheme is for the erection of a pair of 2-bed semi-detached dwellings on land to the rear of 52 Norcot Road. The scheme would provide private garden space for each property with allocated off street parking provision, cycle, refuse storage and associated landscaping.
- 5.2 The proposal would sit largely within the footprint of the previously approved scheme at the site, orientated such that there would be two front elevations, one to the east and one to the south, yet retaining an appearance and character of a single building with parking along the front and gardens to the rear.
- 5.3 The proposal would have a traditional appearance, built of brick with a half-hip tiled roof. The entrance for one of the houses (Plot A) would be from the east elevation via a modest porch and the entrance for the second house (Plot B) would be via the south elevation. The scheme would feature a rear dormer, set in to the roof slope, serving both the houses.
- 5.4 The houses would be of a scale similar to the approved scheme on the site. The width of the pair of semis would measure 7.9m with a depth of 9.1m. The height of the scheme would measure 4.9m to the eaves and 7.9m to the ridge. The scheme would consist of two-storeys with habitable accommodation in the roof space.
- 5.5 Each of the units would measure a gross internal area of 75 sqm with gardens to the rear (north). Two parking spaces have been provided to the south of the proposed building in front of the entrance to Plot A and 1 parking space has been provided to the east in front of the entrance to Plot B. Soft landscaping has been proposed along the front and side elevation.

6.0 Planning Appraisal

Principle of residential development

- 6.1 Given the recent approval for a detached house on the site, the principle of residential development is considered acceptable and in this regard the proposal is considered to comply with the Council's relevant policies and guidance.

Design and Appearance

- 6.2 The approved schemes at land to the rear of 50 Norcot Road and to the rear of 54a – 66 Norcot Road, most of which have already been built, include a mixture of pitched, hipped and gable roofs. Whilst the predominant style is that of a pitched roof, all three sites – the application site, the scheme at the land to the rear of No. 50 Norcot Road land to rear of 54a-66 Norcot Road, are read differently in terms of characteristics. These mini-clusters of development over the years has led to somewhat of a hotch-potch of development with variations in designs and external finishing. This uniqueness, although bound the same general form, would allow for a scheme at the application site with some individuality.
- 6.3 The proposal would, on the whole, sit within the footprint of the approved detached house. For comparative purposes a street scene elevation has been included as part of the submission pack (Drawing No. 097-05-02) which includes the approved scheme next door behind No. 50 Norcot Road. It is noted that the proposed houses would match the eaves height of the extant approval and that of the eaves of the approved houses next door. Whilst the proposal introduces a half-hipped roof, which raises the ridge line over that of the approved, the height of the roof now sits in line with the houses at land to rear of No. 50 Norcot Road.
- 6.4 In much the same way that the approved scheme at the application site will be read as a separate development to that of the neighbouring site, the scheme proposed under this application presents some individuality through the new roof form, yet retains enough similarities with the neighbouring sites to be in keeping with the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The proposed fenestrations in particular the front entrance of the properties are similar to the neighbours. It should also be noted that the pre-application scheme was for 2 no. 3-bed units and hence concerns were raised over the small plot for each of the units. The current scheme addresses this through reducing the number of bedrooms and hence results in a less 'cramped' development.
- 6.5 Given the location of the site to the rear of Norcot Road and the varying characteristics of plots and properties in the vicinity the scheme is considered, on balance, acceptable and complies with the Council's relevant design policies and criteria.

Configuration, Internal layout, room sizes and amenity space provision

- 6.5 The proposal would be oriented in a similar configuration to the approved scheme next door with the front of one of the proposed units facing the same direction as the newly built neighbouring site and the frontage of the second unit facing east in the direction of the water tower. The scheme would be set 1.7m further back from the approval to the rear of No. 50, however this is the location of the same footprint as the approved scheme on the site.
- 6.6 The internal layout of the proposed houses would ensure that all rooms comply with Lifetime Homes standards in accordance with Policy DM5 (Housing Mix). The policy states that any room designated as a bedroom should contain at least 6.5 sqm of useable floorspace; the double bedrooms for each of the houses measure 11.2sqm each and the single bedrooms in the loft measure 9.24 sqm of useable space. The kitchen and living rooms are located on the ground floors – the living room would contain sliding doors opening up into the rear garden. The bedrooms are all located on the upper floors. In this regard the scheme provides a suitable layout and rooms that comply with the Council's relevant policies.
- 6.7 The pre-application advice raised concerns over the size of the amenity space proposed for each of the new houses. Policy DM10 requires proposals to provide suitable private amenity space. The policy specifically states that the design of outdoor areas will respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity and clearly identify whether they are private or communal spaces.
- 6.9 The current scheme provides 49sqm of rear garden for each of the houses equating to a garden to house ratio of 66%. Given that the Policy DM10 requires proposals be of a similar size to surrounding properties, it is noted that for one of the houses approved under 13/00320/FUL for 7 new dwellings at Land to rear of 54a-66 Norcot Road, the garden to house ratio was 51% which was considered acceptable. The case officer's assessment notes that *"The plans submitted for application 121517 indicated that the houses would have a floor area of 165 square meters and Plot 1 (the house with the smallest garden) would have a garden ratio of 69 square meters. Officers expressed concerns about this and as part of this application the applicant has reduced the size of the houses, to 146 square meters and increased the size of the gardens. The garden of Plot 1 is now 75 square meters, which results in a garden to house ratio of 51%. The gardens will be large enough to accommodate activities noted in Policy DM10 and therefore the amenity space for the houses is considered acceptable."*
- 6.10 In light of the recently approved scheme and given that the garden to house ratio for the proposed scheme is well above the 51% accepted, the amenity space provision is

considered acceptable and will enable future occupiers to undertake all of the activities listed in Policy DM10. In this regard the scheme complies with the Council's relevant policies and standards.

Impact on neighbours

- 6.11 The properties most likely to be affected by the scheme are the newly built houses to the west of the site at land to rear of No. 50 Nocrot Road. However given that the proposal would sit in the same location as that previously approved and hence would measure the same distance from the neighbouring property and very similar depth along the shared boundary there is considered to be no significant impact on the neighbouring site.
- 6.12 Additionally it is noted that whilst the current scheme proposes a slight increase in height by 1m over that approved under 140249/REM, the half hip element at the boundary with the neighbour to the west would mitigate against any potential overbearing or overshadowing impact arising from the development. It should also be noted that the depth of the proposed building would measure 0.9m less than that approved which would, albeit it slightly, lessen any potential impact on the neighbour.
- 6.13 Notwithstanding the proposed scheme retaining a very similar footprint and positioning as the extant scheme, the site proposal measures over 4m from the flank wall of the approved house next door and would contain only a single obscure glazed window at first floor level serving a landing. The proposed building would measure 11.4m to the rear (north) boundary shared with 63 Recreation Road, with hedging proposed as screening measure, and over 12m to the shared boundary with 52 Norcot Road to the south. Due to the scale, design and proximity of the scheme to neighbouring properties the proposal is not considered to cause any significant harm on the neighbouring amenity by way of an overshadowing or overbearing impact, or the loss of light or outlook and privacy and therefore in this respect the proposal is considered acceptable and complies with the Council's relevant policies and guidance.

Impact on listed building

- 6.14 To the east of the site is an imposing grade 2 listed former water tower, now converted into residential flats. Both section 12 of the NPPF and Policy CS33 of the Reading Borough Core Strategy emphasise the importance of either preserving or enhancing the setting of a listed building. The proposal would measure a distance of over 10.5m from the listed tower and would be significantly shorter in height and of a scale commensurate to residential development in the surrounding vicinity. Given its height, scale and proximity to the tower, the proposal is not considered to harm the setting of this listed building and in this regard the scheme is considered policy compliant.

Access, Car parking, Cycle storage and Refuse

- 6.15 The scheme proposes the same pedestrian and vehicular access as that approved under 140294/REM and in this regard the proposal is policy compliant. The proposed level of car parking will be increased from the 2 no. spaces approved to 3 no. spaces (averaging 1.5 spaces per dwelling) in accordance with the maximum parking standards for new 2-bed houses for sites within Zone 3 (Secondary Core Area) of the RBC Zonal Scheme. The scheme proposes 2 no. spaces along the house fronting the south and 1 no. space will be located to the front of the house facing east. Essentially there will be a net addition of one space beyond that approved, however this would not significantly compromise the quality of landscaping proposed on the site to warrant reason for refusal.
- 6.16 The scheme proposes 2 no. cycle spaces (one for each unit) to be located in a secure lockable shed/store to the rear of each garden serving the properties. This accords with the standards set out in the Council's 'Revised Parking Standards and Design' (2011) SPD. In terms of cycle and car parking standards the scheme is considered policy compliant and therefore acceptable.
- 6.17 Refuse and recycling storage will be provided for each of the proposed units in accordance with the Council's relevant policies and guidance. Both recycling and waste bins will be located discreetly to the back of the rear garden and brought to the front of the site on collection days. In this regard the scheme is considered acceptable.

Landscaping

- 6.18 The proposed scheme provides almost 100 sqm (49 sqm each) of private garden area consisting of a patio and grass with trees and planting along the rear boundary. In addition to this, soft landscaping, including hedging and shrubs are proposed along the frontage to help 'soften' the impact of the development on the surrounding area and improve the amenity for the residents at the water tower in accordance with approved minor amendment referenced 13/00192/NMC. The landscaping proposed is considerably more than that of the approved scheme and whilst the additional parking space would take up some of the potential landscaping, this in itself would not cause a significant issue to warrant refusal on these grounds. As per the extant consent, we consider that a suitably worded condition requiring details of a landscaping scheme would be reasonable, were the Council minded to approve the application. In terms of landscaping the proposal is considered acceptable and complies with the Council's relevant policies and guidance.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 The proposed scheme is for the provision of 2 no. units in place of the single dwelling approved under the extant outline and subsequent reserved matters planning application on the site. This support statement suitably demonstrates that the proposed scheme would largely retain the overall bulk, scale and footprint of that approved under 140294/REM. Whilst the scheme updates the roof design to a half-hip, this is not considered inappropriate given the surrounding context and variations in design. The pre-application advice raised concerns over the proposed plots being smaller than that of the surrounding area; it has been demonstrated that the plots are similar to some of the recently approved units and that the relevant planning criteria has been met in terms of room sizes, layout, configuration and amenity space provision.
- 7.2 The key issue of the lack of amenity for each of the houses raised under the pre-application advice has been addressed through providing a garden to house amenity ratio that is an improvement on the scheme approved and built at land to rear of 54a-66 Norcot Road. The amenity space proposed for each of the units is sufficient to allow future occupiers to carry out all of the activities referred to in Policy DM10 of the Council's Sites and Detailed Policies Document (adopted 2012, altered 2015). In this regards the proposed amenity is considered acceptable.
- 7.3 The scheme provides car, cycle parking, refuse storage and landscaping in accordance with the Council's relevant policies and guidance. The proposal is an example of appropriate housing development in an area where there is demand for this tenure of accommodation (2-bed, affordable, starter homes) which meets all of the Council's planning policies and criteria. As such it is respectfully requested that the application is viewed favourably and approved by Reading Borough Council.