

Planning, Design & Access Statement

**In support of external changes and internal
reconfiguration to ground floor only**



**Site at
Ground Floor only
173-174 Friar Street
Reading
RG1 1HE**

April 2024

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning & Design Statement has been prepared by Allen Planning Limited on behalf of our client to support a planning application for alterations to the ground floor of these “linked” buildings comprising:

Retail Unit 2 internal walls stripped out to form open plan unit.

New doors (one single and one double) to retail unit 2 onto Friar Street/North Elevation

Removal of existing entrance door to retail unit 2, replacement glazing.

Adjustment/squaring off of western side of arcade entrance to allow for new residential access.

New layout to retail unit 1

Removal of second staircase to basement in retail unit 1

New staircase from ground to first for residential units to west side of arcade.

New bin store, cycle store and services cupboard located to the west of the arcade.

New doors from these spaces opening into arcade

New lift for residential units to east side of arcade accessed directly from arcade.

Lift to be provided with fob access for residents.

New service doors to the rear of retail units 2.

- 1.2 The purpose of this Statement is to describe the relevant site context and surrounding area together with the details of the proposed scheme development. It also outlines the planning policy context and provides an assessment of those policies that apply to the scheme development.

- 1.3 Given that the residential permissions for the upper floors were granted under permitted development rights, which do not permit external alterations to the building in any respect, it is not possible to alter the ground floor as proposed through a variation of these existing permissions.

- 1.4 Importantly whilst a number of changes are proposed within the ground floor the existing pedestrian link through the site would remain as would the commercial units to the street frontage.

- 1.5 In policy terms the site is located within the Reading Central Area, Central Core, Office Core and Primary Shopping Area of the town centre as defined by Policy CR1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019. The ground floor level Friar Street frontage of the building is a designated Primary Frontages within the town centre as defined by Policy CR7.

- 1.6 The site lies outside of but adjacent to the Town’s Conservation Area.

2.0 Site Location

- 2.1 Nos 173-174 (Known as the Bristol and West Arcade) is part of a four storey terrace. The site is not a listed building and does not lie within the Conservation area, albeit that the Conservation Area adjoins the site.

- 2.2 The site is highly sustainable being within the heart of the town centre with access to several local bus services, as well as being located in close proximity to Reading Station, but has no off street car parking.

- 2.3 The site does not lie within an area at risk of flooding (Flood Risk Zone 1) and is only partially at low-medium risk from surface water flooding within the existing public walkway.
- 2.4 The building was constructed in the 1950s, following bomb damage from World War II, and the site now comprised of a (vacant) covered retail arcade at ground floor with three further floors of office accommodation above (now with permission to be converted to flats).
- 2.5 The site's location is shown in Figure 1 below.

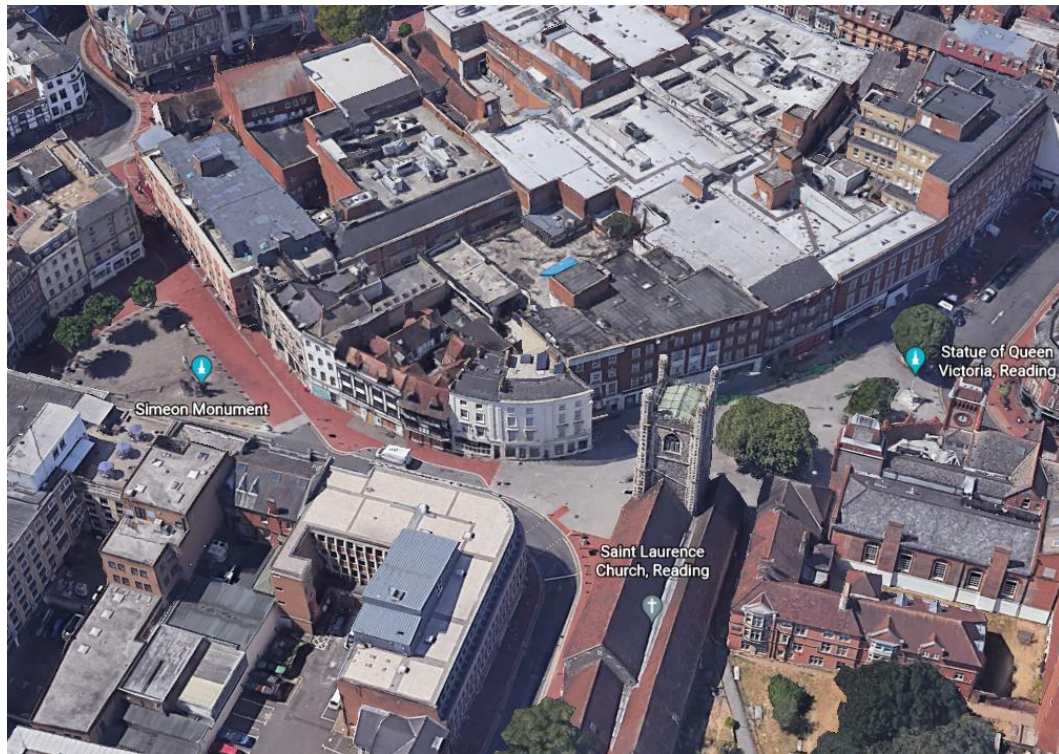


Figure1 – Site Frontage

3.0 Planning History

- 3.1 In terms of material planning history, this site above ground floor has received prior notification permissions, and subsequent s96a approvals, for conversion to residential development.
- 3.2 In terms of recent permissions, the site was the subject of a prior notification application consent under reference 220579 for the conversion of the three upper floors to form 20 apartments.
- 3.3 In addition planning permission was granted for external alterations to the rear elevation of the building under LPA reference 23/0882.

4.0 Planning Policy

- 4.1 For the purposes of Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Development Plan is made up of the 2023 revised National Planning

Policy Framework and the Reading Borough Council's Local Plan (November 2019).

National Policy - Revised National Planning Policy Framework, 2023

4.2 Turning first to national guidance **Paragraphs 8 -10** of the NPPF advise:

8. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

*a) **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*

*b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and*

*c) **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.*

9. These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this Framework; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.

*10. So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development** (paragraph 11).*

4.3 **Paragraph 11** identifies the fundamental thrust of the guidance which states that Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development which for decision taking means:

c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date⁸, granting permission unless:

i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed⁷;

ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole

Design

4.3 In terms of design paragraph 131 advises that:

“The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.”

- 4.4 Paragraph 135 adds that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

“a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;

e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and

f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.”

- 4.5 Furthermore, Paragraph 139 adds that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or

b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings

Key Policies of the Local Plan

- 4.6 The Reading Local Plan was adopted in 2019

- 4.7 **Policy RL1** (Network and Hierarchy of Centres) which seeks the vitality and viability of Reading as a Regional Centre to be maintained and enhanced. In addition,

Policy RL2 (Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development) states that the town centre shall be the focus for new investment.

- 4.8 The site along with the neighbouring buildings at the former Bristol and West Arcade and Nos 173-175 Friar Street are allocated for development within the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 under **Policy CR14d**. This policy states that the development principles for the site are:

“Change of use of listed buildings and development of remainder for residential and/or offices with retail and related uses on the ground floor, retaining the arcade form and that development should:

- ☐ *Avoid detrimental effects on the significance of the listed building and the Conservation Area and their settings;*
- ☐ *Take account of potential archaeological significance;*
- ☐ *Address noise impacts on residential use; and*
- ☐ *Address air quality impacts on residential use.*

- 4.9 In terms of general design approach, **Policies CC7** (Design and the Public Realm) **and CR2** (Design in Central Reading) seek that all development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area within which it is located.
- 4.10 In addition both **Policies CR2 and CR3** (Public Realm in Central Reading) encourage provision of public spaces, use of high-quality materials, provision of soft landscaping and green roofs and that development should also conserve and enhance the historic environment.
- 4.11 **Policy EN12** (Biodiversity and the Green Network) seeks that all development should provide a net gain for biodiversity and **Policy CC8** (Safeguarding Amenity) states that development should not adversely harm the living environments of existing or new residential properties, including privacy, outlook and daylighting.
- 4.12 **Policies TR3** (Access, Traffic and Highway related matters), **TR1** (Achieving the Transport Strategy) and **TR5** (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking relates matters relating to development.

5.0 Planning Issues

- 5.1 At the outset this application does not seek to increase the existing residential permissions on site in terms of quantum and simply seeks alterations to the commercial ground floor uses and layout of the overall buildings at ground floor level only.
- 5.2 On this basis it is submitted that the material considerations for the determination of this application relate to matters of design, and to some degree heritage impacts given that the site lies adjacent to the conservation area, together with matters of the vitality of the town centre and pedestrian and cycle movements from a highway perspective.
- 5.3 The alterations proposed through this application comprise of the following:
- Retail Unit 2 internal walls stripped out to form open plan unit.

New doors (one single and one double) to retail unit 2 onto Friar Street/North Elevation

Removal of existing entrance door to retail unit 2, replacement glazing.

Adjustment/squaring off of western side of arcade entrance to allow for new residential access.

New layout to retail unit 1.

Removal of second staircase to basement in retail unit 1

New staircase from ground to first for residential units to west side of arcade.

New bin store, cycle store and services cupboard located to the west of the arcade.

New doors from these spaces opening into arcade

New lift for residential units to east side of arcade accessed directly from arcade.

Lift to be provided with fob access for residents.

New service doors to the rear of retail units 2.

- 5.4 Turning initially to matters of design on the front elevation it is proposed to create two new doors (one single and one double) to retail unit 2 onto Friar Street together with the removal of an existing entrance door to retail unit 2, with replacement glazing and the adjustment “squaring off” of western side of arcade entrance.

- 5.5 These proposed alterations to the primary frontage are shown in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 – Proposed Front elevation

- 5.6 It is submitted that the proposed alterations to the ground floor would sit successfully within the context of the overall building maintaining an appropriate visual appearance to the commercial frontage of the ground floor of the building and maintaining a central open “arcade” entrance whilst providing the two commercial units with highly visible shopfronts to aid their onward letting.
- 5.7 Underneath the building, which by their very nature would be less visible, a new staircase from ground to the approved residential units above is proposed to the west side of arcade.
- 5.8 Furthermore, a new refuse store, cycle store and services cupboard are proposed to be located to the west of the arcade with new doors from these spaces opening into arcade.
- 5.9 In addition, a new lift for the approved upper floor residential units to east side of arcade is proposed to be accessed directly from arcade itself.

- 5.10 Overall the design changes proposed would be of an individual high standard entirely appropriate to the mixed-use nature of the building, maintaining the existing pedestrian thoroughfare, and providing high-quality commercial “shopfronts” to the active elevation of the building whilst improving the ancillary residential facilities for the approved upper floor flats.
- 5.11 **It is submitted therefore that these proposals would comply with the guidance of the Framework and relevant development plan policy relating to matters of high quality design and would also have no adverse impacts on either the character or the appearance of indeed views into or out of the adjacent conservation area in accordance with the statutory test.**
- 5.12 The vitality of the town centre would not be adversely impacted by these proposals which provide for high-quality shopfronts for the two existing commercial units which would improve their overall viability.
- 5.13 The internal changes proposed to these two commercial units would not impact negatively upon their overall viability and each would retain a store room area to the rear together with excellent pedestrian access to each unit at a very visual point of the overall buildings.
- 5.14 **On that basis it is submitted that these proposals would have no adverse impacts on the vitality of this part of town centre.**
- 5.15 Finally in terms of sustainable transport etc and the quality of the approved residential upper floors the improved cycle storage and refuse storage areas at ground floor together with the provision of a lift would significantly enhance the approved residential units on upper floors as well as promoting sustainable transport options from this highly sustainable site.
- 6.0 Conclusion**
- 6.1 There are considered to be a number of benefits associated with the proposed development which include the upgrading of the ground floor in terms of appearance and materials whilst maintaining a commercial and active frontage.
- 6.2 Secondly the internal layout of the ground floor would now provide for an enhanced layout to the approved residential upper floors in terms of matters of refuse storage and sustainable transport together with the provision of a lift thereby improving housing quality.
- 6.3 All of the above is achieved within a high standard of design whilst creating no harm to either the vitality of the town centre or indeed views into or out of the conservation area.
- 6.4 **On the basis of all of the above it is concluded that the development proposed is in accord with the development plan, would create good quality development in a highly sustainable location and on that basis is compliant with sustainable development and allocation Policy CR14 (d) of the Development Plan.**