

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No's: 240279

Address: Land adjacent 43 Upper Redland Road, Reading

Proposal: Erection of a single detached dwellinghouse with associated access, parking and landscaping.

Case officer: Ethne Humphreys

Decision date: 13/06/2024

Site Description and Surrounding Area:

The site relates to land adjacent 43 Upper Redlands Road, located on the south side of Upper Redlands Road.

The site is located in the Redlands Conservation Area and the Grade II Listed Wantage Hall is located opposite the site to the north. The site is also located within a Green Link.

The surrounding residential properties are between 2 and 3 storeys in height, and their designs vary within traditional architecture. There are examples of grey and red brick, mostly Victorian, with Stucco and render. The majority of the properties in the area are grand buildings, within generous plots and walled gardens.

Proposal:

This application seeks planning permission for the erection of a single detached dwelling with associated access, parking and landscaping.

The proposed materials would include:

Reading red brick in a Flemish bond

Natural slate

Cream aluminium windows and doors

Three car parking spaces are proposed at the front of the site.

It is noted that on Elevation drawing 9242-106, the front elevation shows a single storey side element with hipped roof; however, the rear elevation shows the side element to have a gable end.

Plans and Documents considered:

Location Plan 9242-100

Proposed Site Plan Overlay 9242/111

Proposed Site Plan 9242-102

Proposed Ground Floor Plan 9242-103

Proposed First Floor Plan 9242-104

Proposed Roof Plan 9242-105

Proposed Elevations 9242-106

Proposed Side Elevations 9242-107

Conceptual Model 9242-109

Street View 9107-108

Received 5th March 2024

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by The Ecology Co-Op P6162 dated 19th February 2024

Biodiversity Impact Calculation by The Ecology Co-Op P6162 dated 19th February 2024

Received 5th March 2024

Planning Statement

Received 18th April 2024

Heritage Statement rev B by Heritage Fusion 2062

Received 21st May 2024

Arboricultural Report by Harper tree consulting 2023038 v2.0 dated May 9th May 2024

Received 16th May 2024

Relevant Planning History:

231288/FUL The proposal is to construct a two storey L shaped hipped roof dwelling adjacent to the eastern boundary in a similar location to the approved scheme under reference 210308. Refused.

210308/FUL Erection of a single detached dwellinghouse with associated access, parking and landscaping. Permitted.

182214/FUL - Erection of 4 dwellinghouses and accesses with associated landscaping and parking. Refused and dismissed at appeal.

Internal Consultation Responses:

Conservation Officer: OBJECT. Discussed below.

Transport Officer: No objection subject to revised plans. Discussed below.

Natural Environment Officer: OBJECT. Discussed below.

Ecologist: OBJECT. Discussed below.

External Consultation Responses:

Reading CAAC: Noted need for full heritage statement.

Neighbour letters were sent to the occupiers of nearby properties and site notices were displayed.

8 letters of objection received concerned with (in summary):

Out of keeping with character of area

Poor design / pastiche not appropriate / poor material choice

Unacceptable impact on Wantage Hall

Unacceptable impact on Conservation Area

Overlooking / unneighbourly
Loss of trees/greenery
Impact on nesting birds and wildlife
Removal of World War II shelter
Concerns over future development of site / wider site / subdivision of site
Previous approval much better / more appropriate scheme
Obstruct views in area
Unacceptable impact on level of sunlight to trees
Inconsistencies / inaccuracies in documents submitted

Summary of discussions with applicant/agent:

The agent was advised of concerns relating to unacceptable impact on the conservation area/street scene, design concerns and natural environment/ecology concerns.

The applicant confirmed that they wished to receive the decision notice.

No pre-application advice for the specific proposal was sought prior to submission of this application.

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore, in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the LPA to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the LPA to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', which means 'approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay' (NPPF paragraph 11).

The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

The following NPPF chapters are the most relevant (others apply to a lesser extent):

- 2. Achieving sustainable development
- 4. Decision-making
- 5. Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 9. Promoting sustainable transport
- 11. Making effective use of land
- 12. Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
- 14. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

National Planning Policy Guidance (2014 onwards)

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

- CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
- CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
- CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
- CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- CC9: Securing Infrastructure
- EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
- EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
- EN6: New Development in a Historic Context
- EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
- EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
- EN15: Air Quality
- EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
- H1: Provision of Housing
- H2: Density and Mix
- H3: Affordable Housing
- H5: Standards for New Housing
- H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
- H11: Development of Private Residential Gardens
- TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
- TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
- TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging

RBC Supplementary Planning Documents

- Affordable Housing SPD (2021)
- Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)
- Revised SPD on Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2019)
- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)
- Reading Tree Strategy (2021)

Biodiversity Action Plan (2021)

Other relevant documentation / guidance / legislation

Redlands Conservation Area Appraisal (2008)

Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England, 2016)

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015a)

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b)

Principles of Conservation (Historic England, 2008)

Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings (British Standards Publication BS 7913:2013, 2015)

National Design Guide: Planning practice for beautiful, enduring and successful places (2019)

Appraisal

Land Use Considerations

The NPPF states that LPAs should “*encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value*”. The NPPF definition of ‘previously developed land’ excludes private residential gardens.

Therefore, it is clear that the priority for development should be on previously developed land, in particular vacant and derelict sites and buildings. However, that does not mean that the development of private residential garden land is unacceptable in principle, rather that previously developed land should be the first choice for housing development.

Policy H11 (Development of Private Residential Gardens) requires that new residential development that involves land within the curtilage of private residential gardens will be acceptable where:

- 1) It makes a positive contribution to the character of the area;
- 2) The site is of an adequate size to accommodate the development;
- 3) The proposal has a suitable access;
- 4) The proposal would not lead to an unacceptable tandem development;
- 5) The design minimises the exposure of existing private boundaries to public areas;
- 6) It does not cause detrimental impact on residential amenities;
- 7) The emphasis is on the provision of family housing;
- 8) There is no adverse impact on biodiversity, and
- 9) The proposal does not prejudice the development of a wider area.

From a purely land use perspective, provision of housing would align with the broad objectives of Policy H1 (Provision of Housing) in assisting meeting annual housing needs. Indeed, a scheme for 1 dwelling was approved under application 210308 and as such a new dwelling is acceptable in principle. However, this is subject to the more detailed

consideration of relevant Local Plan policies and the context of the application site. As the remainder of this report demonstrates, the proposal has failed to satisfactorily meet a number of other policy criteria.

Design, Impact on Heritage Assets and Street Scene

Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) requires all development to be of high quality design and maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the surrounding area. In this specific case; this concerns the following components:

Layout

Landscape

Scale: height and massing; and

Architectural detail and materials

The application is also subject to the relevant criteria of Policy H11 as outlined above.

The site lies within the Redlands Conservation Area and as such there is a duty imposed by Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requiring decision makers to have special regards to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. This is reflected in Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) which requires proposals to protect and enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. It echoes the NPPF by stating, “Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits”.

Policy EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) requires that the special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and enhanced and that development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Policy EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context) also requires new development to contribute to, respect and enhance the architectural and visual qualities of the historic environment characterised by heritage assets through:

- “a. The positive contribution of the development to the existing historic townscape (scale, height, mass, proportion, plot size, street form, materials, significant vistas and views, and open space);
- b. Sensitivity to historic context;
- c. Reflection of borough-wide major heritage themes that contribute to local distinctiveness (e.g. patterned brickwork or former worker terraced housing);
- d. Whether development promotes and/or improves access to previously undiscovered or neglected historic significance.”

Paragraph 96 of the NPPF 2023 states that decision should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings.

Paragraph 131 of the NPPF 2023 states that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2023 details that decisions should ensure that developments are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and are sympathetic to local character including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.

Paragraph 136 of the NPPF 2023 states that trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments.

Paragraph 205 of the NPPF 2019 details that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

The National Design Guidance identifies 10 key components for good design and of particular note is the characteristic of 'Context' and it states that "well designed new development responds positively to the features of the site itself and the surrounding context beyond the site boundary. It should enhance positive qualities and improve negative ones." Additionally, there is specific reference to 'views inwards and outwards'. The Council will, therefore, have regard to both the quality of the townscape and the quality and interest of the area, rather than solely that of the individual building.

The site comprises undeveloped land between No's 43 and 45 Upper Redlands Road. The site can be viewed from Upper Redlands Road, Redlands Road and New Road to the rear (south). It is a prominent site, that forms part of the Upper Redlands Road and 17-19 Redlands Road Character Area within the Conservation Area Appraisal. This character area is primarily characterised by large detached and semi-detached houses standing in extensive and well-tree grounds. The Inspector for the 182214 appeal (for 4 houses) noted the spacious and verdant grounds being reflective of this part of the conservation area and making an important contribution to the character and appearance of the designated heritage asset.

A heritage assessment was submitted during the course of the application. It doesn't, however, appear to acknowledge the characteristics of the conservation area as noted above.

Application 231288 was refused for the following reason:

The proposed development, due to its inappropriate design and architectural form, excessive scale and layout and its prominence in the street scene would appear as an incongruous and unsympathetic development that would not be of a sufficient high quality design. This arrangement would be exacerbated by the loss of important trees and existing spaciousness which currently contribute positively to the existing character. Consequently the proposal would harm the character and visual amenity of the area, would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area and would harm the setting

of the Grade II Listed Wantage Hall. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) and EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

In design terms, the main difference between the refused scheme and the current scheme is the removal of the link attached garage. This omission and reduction in built form is an improvement. However, no other design changes have been made to the main dwelling itself (concern of which was raised in the officer report for application 231288, discussed below).

The agent states that the proposal would be similar in location and of similar built form as the dwelling approved under application 210308. It is acknowledged that the location is similar. However, the contemporary design of the approved scheme incorporated less bulky, subservient elements to the main house, visually interesting detailing on the flank elevation, and green roof which had added sustainability and environmental benefits alongside a soft landscaping scheme. It was considered to be a good example of contemporary design that was designed to sit in its garden setting echoing the green character and the historic boundary walling within its design. It follows that the approved scheme would sit comfortably within the street scene, would respond well to the site context and would take the opportunities available to enhance the character of the area.

In terms of design, it is noted that the supporting text to Policy EN6 (New Development in Historic Context) states that the aim is not to copy existing heritage, but to use new developments to underline key consistent elements of the local historic environment. It further states that good, modern design that is complimentary to the historic environment will be acceptable and preferable to 'pastiche'.

In terms of its detailed design, the agent has stated that the proposal is of *a traditional Victorian design, that would be in keeping with the character of the area*. The agent further states *that this is not a pastiche design, there is no issue with this approach as long as the design, materials and detailing are accurate to the period*. The agent contends that the *proposed design is a true Victorian design which sits comfortably in this location*.

This is not accepted. It is considered that the building would be overly bulky in terms of its form, proportions and overall appearance and would appear contrived and incongruous within its setting due to the varying roof forms and overuse of replicated architectural elements. The side and rear elevations lack architectural detailing, visual interest and refinement. Overall, the elevations would have a poor appearance. The Council's Conservation Officer considers that in an historic environment characterised by the richness of architecture styles and detailing, the proposed design would lead to a superficial echoing of historic features in the new building - such as the front portico - which serves to erode the character of the area in the same manner as the bulky built form referenced above.

As discussed elsewhere in this report, the proposal is not clear on tree removal, replacement tree planting and landscaping. The scheme is not considered to incorporate appropriate greenery and biodiversity features, which are considered an important element given the

sites prominent location and siting within a Conservation Area. The omission of such details, especially following the refusal of 231288, is therefore a significant failing of the scheme.

The agent has quoted the following paragraph from the previous officer report:

It is relevant to note that the Inspector for the appeal, which was dismissed, did not raise any specific design concerns with the proposed dwellings themselves. The concern was largely to do with the substantial loss of garden space to facilitate the four dwellings proposed, the siting of the proposed dwellings and erosion of the spacious character, the substantial loss of trees 6 and removal of large areas of brick wall to provide several accesses.

It is apparent, however, that this does not mean that any future design is acceptable. Instead, it is a clear indication that the dwelling which was subsequently approved was an exceptional design with particular qualities which served to preserve the spacious garden character identified. The extant approval does not set a precedent for other houses and the Inspector's findings therefore remain the baseline for assessment of any alternative design such as that currently proposed.

The issue in this case is that the treatment of the building, whilst perhaps faintly reflective of other nearby properties, would accentuate rather than diminish the apparent size and massing of the building. Rather than sitting modestly and using its architectural approach to respect its plot and wider setting, it would be excessively large and visually prominent in the street scene, exacerbated by and the form, massing and architectural detailing .

The site is in a prominent location within the street scene, conservation area and opposite the listed Wantage Hall, important heritage designations. The special interest of the Redlands Conservation Area, as noted in the appraisal, is that houses derive to a large extent from the variety, exuberance and blending of the architectural styles of the Victorian period. The proposed dwelling is not considered to have the appearance of a traditional Victorian dwelling as has been asserted, due to the proportions, layout and bulky form, coupled with lack of appropriate detailing. Whilst the NPPF 2023 supports innovation in architecture, it also emphasises the importance of appropriate design in context.

The 'nod' to the Victorian period is considered to be discordant and pastiche, leading to a tense juxtaposition of architectural forms. This would not be mitigated by the hipped roof when viewed from the front. The proposal is not considered to create a visually interesting building sufficient to mitigate the shortcomings of the architecture - in this specific location, nor is it considered to result in a 'beautiful' building as required by the NPPF 2023. The previously permitted scheme is better proportioned, demonstrating understanding of the historic environment without creating a poor copy of nearby existing buildings. Given the above, the proposals cannot be considered to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

S72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. The unacceptable impact of the proposals, as discussed

above, would be relatively localised in comparison to the total size of the conservation area and as such the harm to the Conservation Area identified above would be less than substantial. In these circumstances paragraph 207 of the NPPF says that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

The public benefits of the proposal in this case lie in the provision of one unit of accommodation in an accessible location. In addition, there would be some limited economic benefit attached to the development. Nevertheless, in weighing up the planning merits of the proposals and applying a critical planning balance, it is considered that the benefit of the contribution to the supply of housing (1 dwellings) is small. Consequently, it carries little weight when balanced against the failure of the proposal to preserving or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and indeed the conclusion reached that the Conservation Area would be markedly diminished by reason of the building's scale, layout and poor architecture.

In conclusion on this point, it is not considered that the proposed development would preserve or enhance the appearance of this part of the Redlands Conservation Area and its contribution to the designated area as a whole, and would fail to preserve or enhance local distinctiveness, causing harm which would not be outweighed by the benefits. As such the proposal would be contrary to Policies CC7, EN1, EN3, EN6 and H11 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the NPPF 2023.

Impact on Neighbour Amenities

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenities) requires developments to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing properties in terms of: Privacy and overlooking; Access to sunlight and daylight; Visual dominance and overbearing; Harm to outlook; Noise and disturbance; Artificial lighting; Vibration; Dust and fumes; Smell; and Crime and safety.

The neighbouring properties potentially most affected by the proposals are No's 43 and 45 Upper Redlands Road located to the east and west of the site respectively.

In relation to No.45, given the distance from the proposed dwelling to this property (over 20m from the main dwelling itself) it is not considered to result in any overbearing effects. A first-floor balcony is proposed on the flank elevating facing across to No.45. Given the distance, no significant material loss of privacy is considered to arise.

In relation to No.43, this property has the benefit of a deep two storey rear addition close to the western boundary. The two storey rear projection of the proposed dwelling would project just beyond this and the roof would be slightly higher. However, the roof would be hipped away and no significant material overbearing effects are considered to arise. Three first floor windows are proposed on the flank elevation facing towards No.43. Two would serve a bathroom and en-suite and could be conditioned to be obscurely glazed. One would serve a bedroom and would be high level. Given this room would feature two other windows and a balcony, the high-level window could also be obscurely glazed. It is not considered that there would be any harmful loss of privacy to the occupiers of No.43.

The construction phase of the proposed development would also have potential to impact on the amenity of surrounding occupiers. Should the application have otherwise been supportable, conditions would have been recommended to secure a submission and approval of a construction method statement and to control construction hours to mitigate potential noise and dust impacts on the surrounding area.

Amenity of Future Occupiers

Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) seeks that all new housing is built to high standards. Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) seeks to protect future occupiers from the impacts of pollution and Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) seeks that residential developments area provided with adequate private or communal outdoor amenity space.

It is considered that the proposals would provide an overall good standard of accommodation throughout with largely regular shaped rooms providing suitable outlook, natural lighting and ventilation. Internally, the floor spaces would comply with the space standards as set out in Policy H5. The proposed garden area would be commensurate to the size of the dwelling - albeit irregular in shape - and not out of keeping with the wider area which features gardens of similar size.

Should the application have otherwise been supportable and in order to help ensure future residents maintain sufficient amenity space (and to protect neighbouring amenity as above) a condition would have been attached removing PD rights in relation to Class A (enlargement improvement or alteration), B (roof additions) and Class E (outbuildings).

Transport Issues

Policies TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy), TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking relates matters relating to development.

The site is located within Zone 2, the primary core area but on the periphery of the central core area which lies at the heart of Reading Borough, consisting primarily of retail and commercial office developments with good transport hubs.

In accordance with the Council's Parking Standards and Design SPD, the proposal would be required to provide parking provision of 2 off road parking spaces. The plans illustrate 3 car parking spaces which is considered acceptable.

Plans indicate that a new opening in the boundary wall to provide a new access. Visibility splays of 2.4m x 43m are required. The Council's Transport officer has confirmed that this could have been dealt with by way of condition should the application have otherwise been supportable.

The plans illustrated a 3m wide access and a 3m wide access protection marker. The width of these are acceptable. The applicant is advised that license from the Highways Department would need to be obtained to undertake any work on the Public Highway; this includes access protection markers and introduction of new accesses.

With regard to the proposed gate, this would need to be set back a minimum of 5m into the site to avoid vehicles waiting in the carriageway to enter the site. An electric charging point should also be provided. The Council's Transport officer have confirmed that these elements could have been dealt with by way of condition should the application have otherwise been supportable.

As the development site is located in an area where the Council's Residents Parking Permit Scheme operates, under the Borough's current parking standards, this proposal would generate additional pressure for parking in the area, therefore there should be an assumption that any future occupants of the houses would not be issued with resident or visitor parking permits; the appropriate condition and informative would be applied if a the application was otherwise supportable.

In line with the Parking Standards and Design SPD, the proposal would require 2 secure cycle parking spaces. Whilst not shown, the Council's Transport officer confirms this could have been dealt with by way of condition.

Bin storage has been illustrated located to the front of the site allowing for kerb side collection, this is considered acceptable.

The construction phase of the proposed development would be likely to impact the surrounding highway network given the prominent location. Should the application have otherwise been considered supportable, a condition would have been attached to secure submission, approval and implementation of a detailed Construction Method Statement.

Natural Environment - Trees/Landscaping

Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) seeks to extend the Borough's vegetation cover and that development should make provision for tree planting whilst Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks proposal should include appropriate landscaping. Given that the site is also located within a Conservation Area, tree retention and planting is a high priority and proposals should demonstrate an appropriate level of greening and/or net gain in the tree number. The site also forms part of a Green Link.

The Redland Conservation Area Appraisal acknowledges the importance of trees in the area, stating:

"..the Area is epitomised by mature properties situated in mature gardens, with extensive tree cover throughout, giving a general verdant feel to the area of buildings and trees in harmony.

Trees therefore make a significant contribution to this suburban Conservation Area's special character and sense of identity.."

Any tree removal must therefore be fully justified and, if agreed, will have to be mitigated by appropriate replanting which should be demonstrated prior to decision.

The application was originally supported by the same Arboricultural Report as that submitted under application 231288. This was queried by the case officer (and noting the tree/landscaping concerns raised under application 231288 and subsequent reasons for refusal) and a revised Arboricultural Report was submitted during the course of the application.

There are some inconsistencies between the report and plans i.e para 3.4 refers to incursions in the RPA of T1 for a garage, but a garage is not proposed. Para 4.3 makes reference to *'cellular confinement without a finishing layer installed to act as ground protection'*. Discussions during previous application 231288 confirmed that this approach is unacceptable and it is unclear why the applicant persists in proposing this approach. Para 4.8 states *"Once the approved tree protection measures are in place and G6 has been removed, demolition of the bunker/air raid shelter will be carried out in the normal way. All waste from demolition will be stored away from the RPAs of all retained trees until it can be removed for disposal"*. This is not relevant and again has not been updated as it is assumed that the trees are remaining.

The Tree Survey Schedule states (in relation to G6): *'Fell trees, remove bunker and replant with higher quality trees'*. This is not consistent with the Tree Removal Plan or proposals under this application which indicate G6 trees as being retained so should have been updated. As they are retained, any proposed works should be clarified.

Para 4.9 states that there will be no services within the RPA of retained trees. However, it is noted that the proposal include a sliding gate at the front, and clarity is required on whether this is electric and if it is, the route of the cable to this.

Notwithstanding comments on Ecology further below, Figure 2 in the Ecology report does not indicate the removal of the two trees proposed for removal but shows the removal of some of G6, which is not proposed within the Arb report (on the Tree Removal Plan), hence clarity is required. It is noted that this is the same plan on P.8 of the Planning Statement.

In short, there are inconsistencies within the submissions.

Reason for refusal 2 of application 231288 stated *'The proposed development fails to demonstrate that there would be no harm to existing trees on site and fails to demonstrate acceptable provision of replacement tree planting and landscaping with consequent harm to the visual amenity, biodiversity and environmental quality of the area including the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area'*. The current proposal is unclear on which trees will be removed and, therefore, the impact on retained trees. Furthermore, no landscaping proposals have been submitted to demonstrate a clear gain in the quality and numbers of trees to mitigate tree loss and provide an appropriate setting for the development. These concerns apply equally to the current proposal and as such, should form a reason for refusal.

The Planning Inspector for application 182214 (dismissed at appeal) specifically commented on the loss of trees:

“Additionally, the proposal would require the removal of a number of mature trees which currently form a substantial part of the green backdrop in the street scene. Their loss would dilute the visual impact that this group of trees collectively makes to the conservation area. Although the proposal includes a replanting scheme, this would likely take a considerable length of time to mature before additional landscaping is able to satisfactorily mitigate for the loss of the trees.”

Given the above, the tree removal has not been justified. Furthermore, no landscape principles have been submitted. Tree removal is not clearly confirmed. As such, the proposed development fails to confirm required tree loss, fails to demonstrate that there would be no harm to retained trees on site and fails to demonstrate acceptable provision of replacement tree planting and landscaping. As such the proposals are contrary to Policies CC7, H11, EN3 and EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and to the Tree Strategy 2021. It would not comply with the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD which states that ‘development will not be permitted which would undermine current levels of tree cover as this is likely to be damaging to climate change adaptation strategies’.

Ecology

Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) states the following:

On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible.

Development should:

- Protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and*
- Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable.*

In exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site, and it is demonstrated that the impacts cannot be: 1) avoided; 2) mitigated or; 3) compensated for on-site; then new development will provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is “no net loss” of biodiversity.

Provision of off-site compensation shall be calculated in accordance with nationally or locally recognised guidance and metrics. It should not replace existing alternative habitats, and should be provided prior to development.

The Policy also states:

New development shall demonstrate how the location and type of green space, landscaping and water features provided within a scheme have been arranged such that they maintain or link into the existing Green Network and contribute to its consolidation. Such features should be designed to maximise the opportunities for enhancing this network. All new development should maximise opportunities to create new assets and links into areas where opportunities are as yet unidentified on the Proposals Map.

The site comprises grassland, hedge line and mature trees. The site also forms part of a Green Link. An updated Ecology report has been submitted. This concludes that the site is not

suitable for bats or other protected species. The Council's Ecologist agrees with the conclusion reached and raises no concern over impact on protected species itself. Should the application have otherwise been supportable and noting that a number of trees would be removed, a condition would have been attached to ensure vegetation clearance took place outside of the bird nesting season.

Given the nature of the scheme, it would also have been appropriate to ensure that ecological enhancements were provided, namely bird/bat boxes and wildlife friendly landscaping. In overall terms, there is little proposed in the way of meaningful biodiversity enhancements and soft landscaping.

Notwithstanding the above, the application has not been submitted with a biodiversity net gain calculation using the latest DEFRA Metric. Despite being requested by the case officer during the course of the application (30/4/24 and 10/5/24), this has not been received. Furthermore, as above, no landscaping strategy have been provided. The Council's Ecology Consultant has stated that, as such, the development will result in a net loss in Biodiversity using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. Furthermore, the applicant has failed to demonstrate that there are 'exceptional circumstances where the need for the development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site'. As such, the proposals are contrary to Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, criteria 8 of Policy 11 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and paragraph 186 of the NPPF.

Affordable Housing

In accordance with Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) the proposed development, being for 1 additional dwelling, would be liable for an off-site affordable housing contribution equivalent of 10% of the GDV of the development.

The applicant stated they agreed in principle to enter into a legal agreement to secure a financial contribution. However, GDV valuations to calculate the contribution have not been submitted and as such an affordable housing contribution has not been agreed (in any future application it would be expected that at least two independent valuations would be submitted at the outset to resolve this matter). Given that the proposal is not considered acceptable in other planning terms, the Council has not pursued the S106 legal agreement to secure the financial affordable housing provision. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies H3 and CC9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

An informative will specify that this reason for refusal could be overcome, in the context of an acceptable scheme in all other respects, by entering into a S106 legal agreement or unilateral undertaking.

Sustainability

Policy CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change) requires that development proposals incorporate sustainable design practices to take account of climate change. Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) requires that all new housing is be built to the higher level of water efficiency standards under Building Regulations and achieves at a minimum a 19% improvement in the dwelling emission rates above the Building Regulations standards.

Should the application have otherwise been recommended for approval, conditions would have been recommended to ensure the development meets the following requirements:

- Higher water efficiency standards of 110 litres per person per day; and
- A 19% improvement over building regulations energy requirements

Although secured by planning condition, these new requirements would have been administered through the Building Regulations, with confirmation of compliance submitted to the LPA to discharge the condition.

CIL

The proposal would be a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) liable development. The applicant has provided the CIL Additional Information Form. Based on the information provided by the applicant and the 2024 CIL rate, this is estimated to amount to £51,873.97 (289.33m² of the proposals x £120 per m² x 2024 indexation (£179.29)). If the scheme had been acceptable an informative would have been attached to the decision notice to advise the applicant of their responsibilities in this respect.

Other matters raised in representation

All material considerations are covered in the above report.

Overall Planning Balance and Conclusion

There are inaccuracies on the plans and lack of clarity within report submissions which hampers the assessment of the application.

It is acknowledged that there would be some planning benefits associated with the proposed development, such as the provision of an additional residential unit to assist with the Borough housing targets. However, this is a general benefit and not specific to the site. In contrast, it is clear from the assessment in the heritage section above that harm would arise in respect of the impact on the conservation area and setting of listed building. Associated with this, there is harm to the street scene and visual amenity of the area due to the proposed scale, massing and design deficiencies. In addition, the affordable housing element is not agreed, while the impact on biodiversity and insufficient landscaping are further shortcomings.

Given the above, the application is recommended for refusal for the following reasons:

1. The proposed development, due to its inappropriate design and architectural form, excessive scale and layout and its prominence in the street scene would appear as an incongruous and unsympathetic development that would harm the existing spacious character and would not be of a sufficient high quality design. This unsatisfactory arrangement would be exacerbated by the loss of trees and lack of suitable landscaping. Consequently, the proposal would harm the character and visual amenity of the area, would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area and would harm the setting of the Grade II Listed Wantage Hall. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas), EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context)

and H11 (Development of Private Residential Gardens) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and paragraphs 96, 131, 135, 136, 205, 208 and 212 of the NPPF 2023.

2. The proposed development fails to demonstrate that there would be no harm to trees which are to be retained on site and fails to demonstrate acceptable provision of replacement tree planting where trees are to be removed with consequent harm to the visual amenity, biodiversity and environmental quality of the area including the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) and EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 as well as the Reading Borough Council Tree Strategy 2021 and paragraphs 135, 136 and 180 of the NPPF 2023.

3. The proposed development fails to demonstrate that it would not result in a net loss of biodiversity. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network), EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) and H11 (Development of Private Residential Gardens) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the paragraph 186 of the NPPF 2023.

4. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure an acceptable contribution towards the provision of Affordable Housing, the proposal fails to contribute adequately to the housing needs of Reading Borough. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies H3 (Affordable Housing) and CC9 (Securing Infrastructure) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the Council's Adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document 2021 and paragraph 64 of the NPPF 2023.