



HEXAGON STUDIO THEATRE

Planning Statement

October 2024



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Statement has been prepared by CMA Planning Ltd (“CMA”) in support of a second planning application by Reading Borough Council (“the Applicant”) for a high-quality development that will deliver a new studio theatre and sister venue for The Hexagon Theatre.

1.2 The site is located at the northern side of the existing Hexagon Theatre, Queens Walk, Reading, Berkshire RG1 7QF (“the Site”) and comprises a 0.57 hectare parcel of land within central Reading, within the boundaries of Reading Borough Council (“RBC”). The application seeks permission for:

“Application under s.73 - Variation of condition 2 (approved plans) of planning permission 240063 for Demolition of some of the existing back of house areas and erection of an extension of the existing Hexagon Theatre to provide a new studio auditorium, flexible rehearsal space, community studio with workshop space and back of house space, along with improved public realm by providing a new podium connection between the new proposed extension and Queen’s Walk, along with other associated works”.

1.3 The application scheme has been sensitively designed in response to a detailed analysis of the site and local context, taking into account the character of the local area, and the Council’s objective of delivering a high-quality development. The planning and layout of the building has been developed in close collaboration with the Council, including executive and technical staff from the Hexagon Theatre and South Street Arts Centre. The proposed scheme responds to the Council’s priorities around conviviality, functionality, inclusion & accessibility, and environmental & social sustainability. Furthermore, the proposals have been the subject of pre-application discussions with the Council and the local community, which has helped to inform the scheme.

1.4 The scheme was previously submitted for consideration in January 2024 and was granted planning permission (Ref: 240173) by the Borough in April 2024. The scheme was then developed to Stage 4 detail, which was issued for tender in May

2024, which unfortunately came back over budget. Consequently, since August, the design team and client have amended the original proposal, and have now developed a more compact and energised scheme, which still delivers on the key aims of the original proposal. This revised scheme is being resubmitted as a Minor Material Amendment (MMA) (a Section 73 application) to the original planning permission.

- 1.5 All proposals take place within the context of national, regional and local planning policy and recognised best practice. This development is notable in that it accords with the adopted Local Plan and the latest national and regional guidance on the provision of new development and the enhancement of the built environment.

Purpose and Structure

- 1.6 This document reviews the planning context for the issues associated with the development and is structured as follows,
- Section 2 provides a description of the site and local context;
 - Section 3 provides an overview of the application proposals;
 - Section 4 sets out the planning policy context for the project;
 - Section 5 considers the key planning issues associated with the development; and
 - Section 6 sets out our summary and conclusions.

Other Supporting Documents

- 1.7 This document forms part of a series of reports submitted in support of the application and should be read in conjunction with these other documents. For this MMA application, a number of new documents have been prepared, which include:
- Planning application forms, parts 1 and 2, ownership and agricultural holdings certificates;
 - Application drawings including plan showing the site outlined in red, drawings and visuals of the proposal;
 - CIL Additional Information Form;
 - Design & Access Statement by Haworth Tompkins Architects, including Visuals of the proposal, the Statement of Community Involvement and Schedule of Accommodation;

- Access Statement by Hada;
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment by TMA;
- Daylight/Sunlight Assessment by Point2;
- Drainage Strategy by Momentum;
- Energy Statement by Skelly & Couch;
- Landscaping Statement by JCLA;
- Land Contamination Report (Desk Study & Ground Investigation) by GEA
- Noise Assessment by Charcoal Blue; and
- Transport Statement by Caneparo; and
- Travel Plan by Caneparo.

1.8 A number of other reports from the original application remain unchanged, but have been submitted again for ease of reference, These reports include the following,

- Air Quality Assessment by Tetra Tech;
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment by TMA;
- BREEAM Report by B Sussed;
- Ecological Survey and Report by TMA; and
- Sustainability Statement by Skelly & Couch.

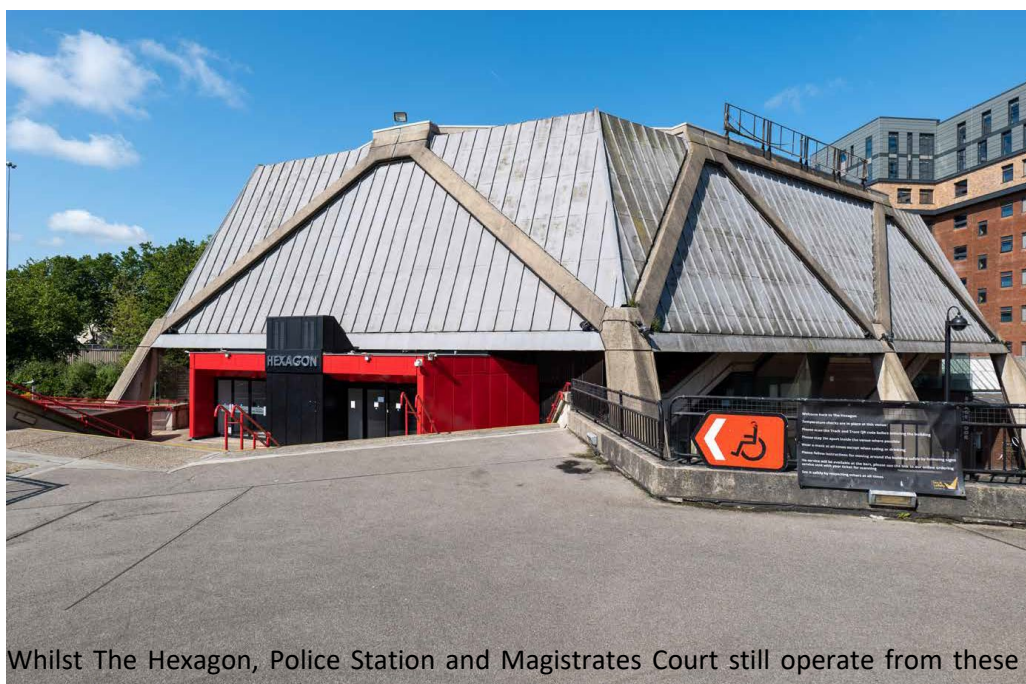
1.9 These proposals, as will be explained in the rest of this Statement, will contribute to the long term regeneration objectives for the area and assist in meeting the Council's wider corporate and community objectives.

2.0 THE SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 A full description of the site and surrounding area is provided in the Design & Access Statement (DAS), prepared by Haworth Tompkins Architects, which includes a detailed analysis of the local context which has been a key consideration in formulating the application proposals.

The Application Site

- 2.2 Located in Reading City Centre, the Hexagon (as shown below) is a multi-purpose theatre and arts venue, designed by Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall & Partners (RMJM) in 1977. At the time of its opening, The Hexagon formed one of four interlinked civic buildings on the site, connected via the still existent raised podium.



- 2.3 Whilst The Hexagon, Police Station and Magistrates Court still operate from these buildings, the Hexagon's closest neighbour - the Civic Centre, was demolished in 2016, following Reading Borough Council's relocation. In its place, there is now a neglected landscape. This has led to The Hexagon Theatre becoming an isolated monument in an increasingly dilapidated area of the city centre.
- 2.4 The Hexagon Theatre is the largest cultural venue in Reading, with a maximum capacity of 1,686 people for standing events or 1,200 with seats. With the exception of a limited number of car parking spaces which are reserved for staff, performers and blue badge holders, other parking for guests takes place within the town centre car parks. The Hexagon Theatre hosts a range of different performances across the

year including music events, drama performances, school events, dance performances and comedy events.

- 2.5 The Hexagon name itself describes the shape of the exterior of the building, and is reflected also in the form of the auditorium. Of particular architectural significance is the Hexagon's elongated hexagonal plan shape, with an expressive concrete warren truss infilled with standing seam cladding, overstepping the solid masonry base. The Hexagon is a rare example of a good 1970s multi-purpose hall with a distinctive design, which when opened was praised due to its radical appearance.
- 2.6 The Hexagon is neither a listed building, nor is it located within a conservation area. Despite this, it is a building of architectural significance within Reading, due to its iconic brutalist form. Historic England (EH) were asked to consider it for statutory listing in 2021 (and also in 2006). After examining all the records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, EH felt the criteria for listing were not fulfilled.
- 2.7 The auditorium has five cantilevered balconies on three sides with three sides of seating behind the stage. It can readily be converted from concert hall to proscenium theatre form, whilst the width of the proscenium is flexible. Seating capacity can be varied to suit the production or event. Currently, the theatre is an established receiving house with an imaginative programme of theatre, comedy, music and panto.
- 2.8 However, the Hexagon has limitations as a theatre. The form of the auditorium, and arena-style seating, inevitably means that sightlines are poor from some seats. The foyers are exceptionally generous, but the current entrance sequence both at podium and street level is particularly uninviting. The original curvaceous reception points and bars have been replaced with space hungry counters and the clarity of the original foyers are lost under the silt of non-original accretions. Current limitations on lift access also means that not all areas of the building are accessible, including the balcony.



- 2.9 Adjacent to the existing hexagonal form is the current back of house support spaces; get in, workshop, dressing rooms/studio spaces, stage door and kitchen, as shown here.

The Local Area

- 2.10 The Hexagon sits within a varied townscape, both in building types and uses, as shown below.



- 2.11 To the south of The Hexagon is the neglected landscape mentioned above. To the east, which is the main frontage of the Hexagon, is the extensive raised concrete

podium, providing pedestrian access to the Hexagon and its adjacent buildings, whilst vehicular traffic, service routes and public parking are located below. The western edge of the site is then delineated by the high-traffic Inner Distribution Road (IDR). Though it is partially shielded by trees, the IDR causes significant noise pollution on the site. Finally, to the north of the Hexagon is a student accommodation block, Queens Court, which overlooks the site, and is situated just two metres from the site boundary.

- 2.12 The Hexagon sits within the Minster Quarter Area Development Framework (as detailed later). The Minster Quarter Area lies in the south west part of Central Reading. It is situated on the edge of the core retail area, and provides easy access to the Oracle shopping centre.
- 2.13 The site is approximately ten minutes' walk from Reading Station, and offers frontage onto the Inner Distribution Road (IDR). It also bounds Castle Street and St Mary's Butts, which are historic streets that once formed part of the Saxon centre of Reading.
- 2.14 The Minster Quarter plan includes building several hundred new homes (including much needed affordable housing) in a significant area of the town centre, creating a vibrant thriving new community at the heart of the town. It will bring new commercial spaces, new areas of improved public realm, jobs and growth which will benefit local residents and the local economy. All proposals focus on improved sustainability as part of the Council's commitment to working towards a net-zero carbon by 2030.
- 2.15 The Hexagon sits within the Hexagon Quarter, which will be a distinctive, dense and high-quality urban quarter within Reading's Central Core. The site will provide a unique character and sense of place that will be unified by a high quality public realm and seek to create an inviting new gateway to and from the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area and the residential areas of West Reading.
- 2.16 In addition to the emerging Minster Quarter plans is a major new development for Broad Street Mall. The Broad Street Mall redevelopment will include a range of retail and leisure uses at ground floor level, with improved frontages on Queens

Walk and Dusseldorf Way with mixed-tenure residential accommodation towers above. An application for these proposals was submitted in February 2024 (ref 240173), seeking planning permission for the following,

“Part-demolition of existing retail units, car park and service areas, demolition and rebuild of car park ramp, and construction of a residential-led, mixed-use development fronting Queens Walk and Dusseldorf Way, including all necessary enabling and alteration works required.”

- 2.17 An image of the scheme is shown below, where the existing Hexagon Theatre can just be seen in the bottom left corner.



- 2.18 There are no Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings or Registered Parks and Gardens likely to be affected by the proposals. There are two conservation areas nearby, St Mary Butts & Castle Street to the south and Russell Street & Castle Hill to the west, but due to the scale of the proposal, it is not considered that the proposals would impact on the setting of either.
- 2.19 The site is located within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) which encompasses all the main arterial routes in and out of Reading and the central area. The AQMA was declared due to exceedances of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂).

- 2.20 The Site is not subject to any international, European, or national ecological designations. There are 15 statutory designated sites within 7 km of the proposed development and nine non-statutory designated sites within 2 km of the site. The three closest statutory sites are Lousehill Copse, McIlroy Park and Round Copse, all between 2.5km and 3.2km from the site. The closest non-statutory designated site is Holy Brook, which is 0.4km away.

Planning History

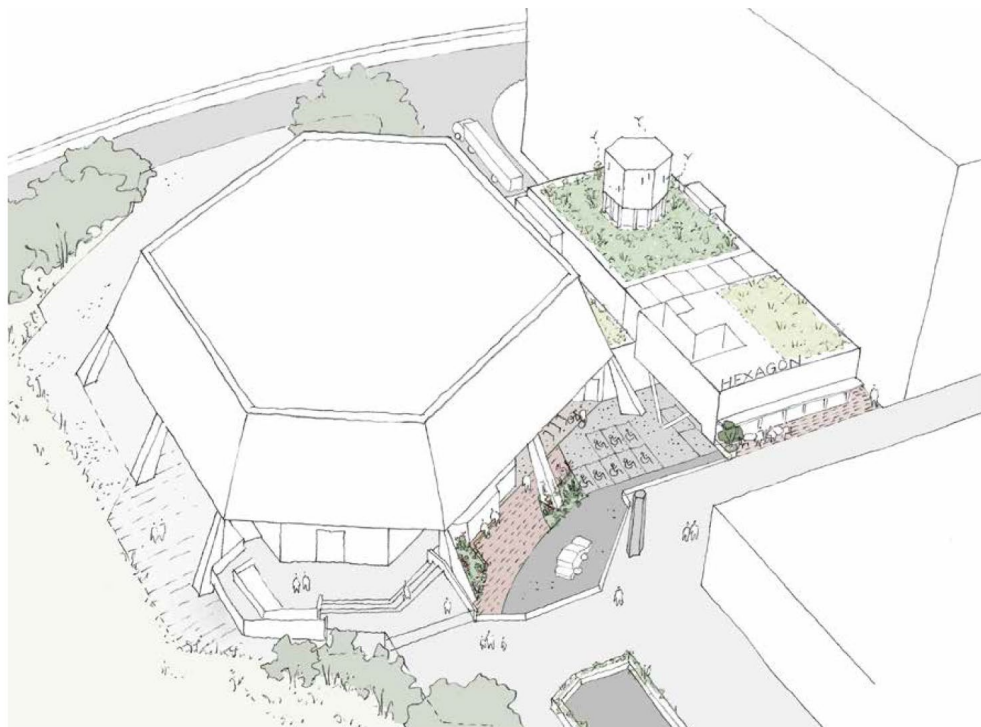
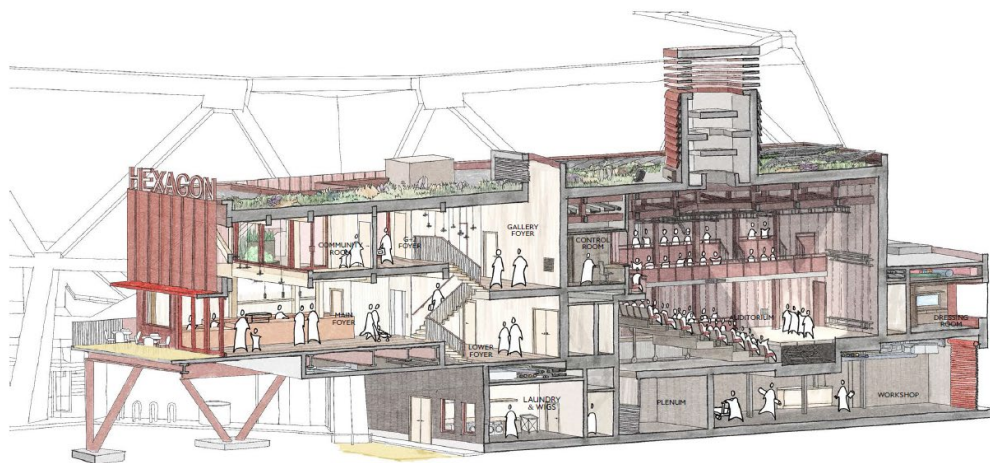
- 2.21 The original application for the Hexagon extension was submitted in January 2024. It was considered by the Borough and then approved at committee in March, with the decision notice being issued on 24th April 2024. The planning permission (LPA Ref: 240063) was for the following,

“Demolition of some of the existing back of house areas and erection of an extension of the existing Hexagon Theatre to provide a new studio auditorium, flexible rehearsal space, community studio with workshop space and back of house space, along with improved public realm by providing a new podium connection between the new proposed extension and Queens Walk, along with other associated works.”

- 2.22 In considering this application, Planning Officers at the Council concluded in their Committee Report at paragraph 2.80 as follows,

“The proposals would result in significant benefits, including the provision of a new theatre within the town centre, alongside community space which can be used in conjunction with the rehearsal space and other facilities at the site. The proposals would also provide improvements to the existing theatre facility at the Hexagon, through greatly improved back of house space, a reorganised delivery and servicing provision and the provision of cycle parking for staff. These improvements to the arts and culture offer within Reading Town Centre carry great weight in considering the proposal. Furthermore, the proposals bring significant public realm improvements in a key location within an allocated Opportunity Area, and would introduce a building of high quality design in a key cultural quarter of Reading. The high quality design and public realm improvements carry significant weight when assessing the application.”

2.23 Some images of the approved scheme are shown below.



- 2.24 25 planning conditions were attached to this planning permission, including condition 2 which lists out the approved plans for the scheme. An application (PL/24/0772) was submitted in June 2024 for approval of details reserved by conditions 6, 9, 10, 11, 17 and 25. This submission is currently being considered by the Council.

3.0 SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 A full description of the proposed development is provided in the Design and Access Statement prepared by Haworth Tompkins Architects which supports this detailed planning application. The detailed application proposes the following,

“Application under s.73 - Variation of condition 2 (approved plans) of planning permission 240063 for Demolition of some of the existing back of house areas and erection of an extension of the existing Hexagon Theatre to provide a new studio auditorium, flexible rehearsal space, community studio with workshop space and back of house space, along with improved public realm by providing a new podium connection between the new proposed extension and Queen’s Walk, along with other associated works.”

- 3.2 As set out earlier, the scheme was previously submitted for consideration in January 2024 and was granted planning permission (Ref: 240173) by the Borough in April 2024. The scheme was then developed to Stage 4 detail, which was issued for tender in May 2024, which unfortunately came back over budget. Consequently, since August, the design team and client have amended the original proposal, and have now developed a more compact and energised scheme, which still delivers on the key aims of the original proposal. This revised scheme is being resubmitted as a Minor Material Amendment (MMA) (a Section 73 application) to the original planning permission.

- 3.3 The key changes to the original scheme have been summarised below:

- Omission of the G+2 level, including;
 - Staff office
 - Community studio
 - AWC
 - External terrace
 - External escape stair
- Merging of the foyer and rehearsal room into one space, with a more flexible and provisional feel. This assumes use as a foyer or use as a

rehearsal space/community space, subject to performances in the studio theatre.

- Staff offices have been re-provided in the G+0 back of house.
- Omission of the BOH lift, and the addition of G+0 to the FOH lift, providing efficient stepfree access from ground floor to foyer for staff and performers.
- Pushing of the auditorium mass west to condense the scheme and accommodate the foyer within the footprint of the existing building. In turn, this reduces the load on the podium bridge link, simplifying the bridge to a pedestrian footbridge.
- Reduction in the size and capacity of the auditorium, from 230 to 200 seated; plus the simplification of the theatre tech, including the replacement of adjustable rostra with static deck.
- Omission of the internal bike store, secondary get-in and green room.
- Replacement of the existing WC block, to create a more efficient arrangement, giving more space back to the scene dock.
- Omission of PVs on the roof, due to the overshadowing of the proposed BSM development.
- Addition of two extra staff parking spaces, and the introduction of an external covered bike store for staff and visitors.

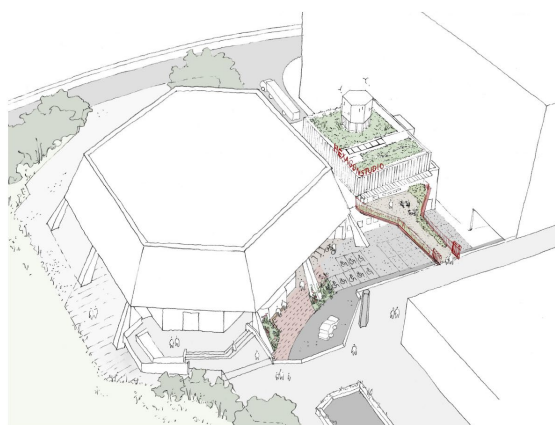
3.4 The previously approved building had a GIA floorspace of 1,7323sqm, whilst this amended scheme comes to 1,278sqm, which represents a 454sqm reduction.

3.5 In summary the scheme seeks to provide an extension to the existing Hexagon Theatre to offer a new performance / audience space to accommodate up to 300 visitors standing or 200 seated, revised servicing arrangements and improved facilities for staff and performers. The new proposal can be broken into two parts:

- Front of house (FoH); a zinc clad extension to the existing theatre, accessed via a new bridge connection from Queens Walk podium. The FoH block contains the new flexible studio theatre and an adaptable multi-level foyer and rehearsal space.
- Back of house (BoH); the BOH provides a new get in, scene dock, flexible dressing rooms, stage door, wigs & laundry, sub-stage and WC block at G+0.

At stage level on G+1, the BOH offering includes two new accessible dressing rooms.

- 3.6 The new bridge link will create a vibrant and active public space outside of the new studio theatre, enhancing the Hexagon's appeal and civic value. Daytime and evening activation will animate Queens Walk and increase footfall towards the Hexagon. Constructed from an expressed timber frame, wrapped in glazing and a lightweight perforated zinc screen, the new studio will be a welcoming space to gather.
- 3.7 Accessibility is a key driver of the proposals. The entire building will be accessible for wheelchair users, with accessible WCs on each level, step-free connections to the existing Hexagon foyers and back of house corridors, wheelchair accessible dressing rooms, plus wheelchair positions for patrons at stalls and gallery level of the auditorium.
- 3.8 Sustainable and regenerative design is also integral to the scheme. Natural ventilation, a mass timber structural frame, renewable energy sources combined with a range of measures to minimise energy use and running costs, all ensure that the proposal will deliver and operate an exemplar low-carbon building. The scheme is on course to achieve BREEAM "Excellent".
- 3.9 As set out in the Landscape Statement by JCLA and shown below, the landscaping proposals to be implemented as part of the project look to create welcoming public spaces with moments of greenery bringing seasonal interest and biodiversity to an otherwise predominantly urban landscape.



- 3.10 As set out in the Design & Access Statement, before construction can commence, a series of relocation works will need to happen, to ensure that the Hexagon can remain operational whilst the current BoH is demolished and replaced. It is envisaged that a range of temporary cabins south of the site would be needed, where direct access off the A329 slip-road can be attained. The details of these will be further developed in collaboration with the contractor during the next stage of the project.

Pre-application consultation

- 3.11 The planning system encourages engagement, with the NPPF saying at paragraph 40 that applicants are encouraged to engage with the local community.
- 3.12 As detailed in the Consultation Section of the Design and Access Statement (DAS) submitted with the original application, the proposals evolved in response to pre-application discussions with the local planning authority, including meetings with Planning and Highway Officers. In terms of the local community, the Consultation Section of the original DAS summarises community engagement activities that have taken place. Part of this involved meeting neighbours such as Aparto (the operators of the Queens Court student accommodation block north of the site) and McLaren (the developers of the Broad Street proposals).
- 3.13 The consultation for the original application also included holding a public exhibition in the Hexagon itself. Key points that emerged from this included support for a new venue in Reading and for a smaller scale venue, noting that development of the area is necessary and long overdue, that accessibility is a high priority, both inside and outside of the building, comfort of the auditorium is important, sustainability aspirations are appreciated, use by amateur groups is important and external planting is supported.

4.0 PLANNING POLICY BACKGROUND

4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with relevant development plan policies, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2 For this purpose, the statutory development plan comprises: The Reading Borough Council Local Plan (2019). In addition, national planning policy, supplementary guidance and emerging policies are relevant material considerations. We set out below the planning policy context within which the application should be considered. A list of the relevant development plan policies is provided at Appendix CMA1.

National Planning Policy & Guidance

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023); and
- National Planning Practice Guidance (2019)

Local Planning Policy

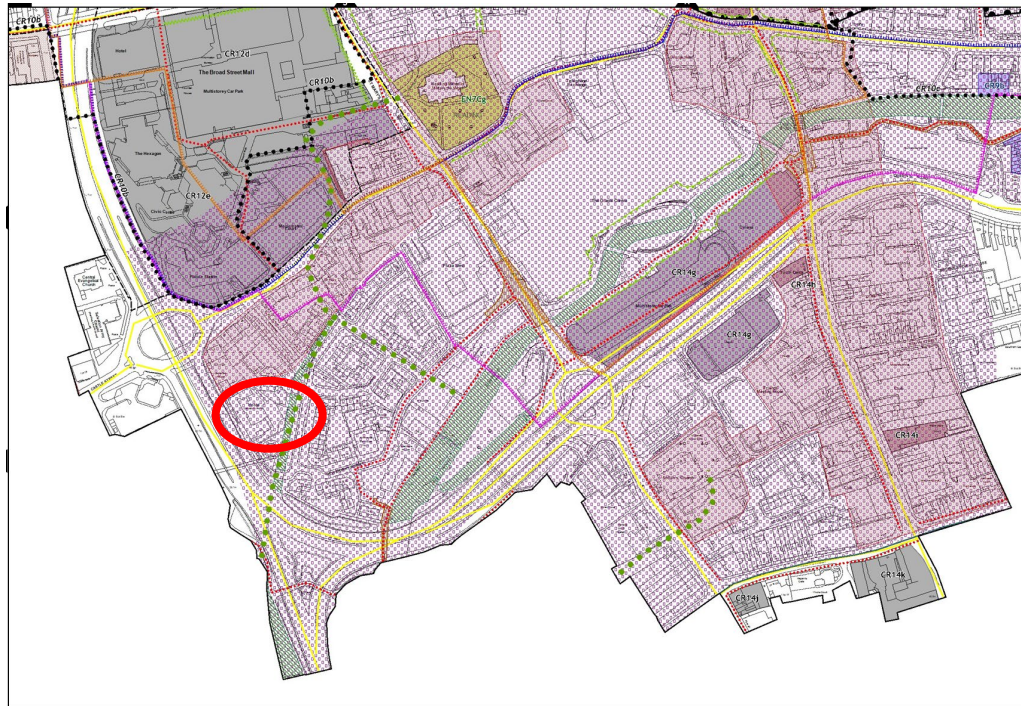
- Adopted Local Plan (2019);
- Employment, Skills and Training SPD (2013);
- Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)
- Planning Obligations SPD (2015);
- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019); and
- Minster Quarter Area Outline Development Framework (2018); and
- Reading City Centre Framework (2008).

4.3 A review of the Local Plan was carried out in March 2023. This concluded there was a need to update 45 of the 90 policies in the Local Plan, and therefore, a partial update rather than a full update of the Local Plan will be required.

4.4 There are no Neighbourhood Plans in place or in preparation that cover the Site.

Key Planning Designations

- 4.5 As illustrated in the below extract from the Reading Adopted Policies Map, the site is not designated for any specific uses. However, it is classed as a “site identified for development or change” and falls within the Central Core area.



Policy Summary

- 4.6 From the above analysis of the planning policy framework there are four main issues which emerge. These are:
- The importance of making the most efficient use of land through the encouragement of residential developments in sustainable locations;
 - The need to protect, retain and enhance cultural and leisure uses such as theatres;
 - The advantages of providing development at the site to encourage regeneration within the area; and
 - The importance of good design to ensure that development enhances the character and appearance of the area.

5.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT – KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 In light of the redevelopment objectives of the applicant and in the context of the planning policy position outlined above, the following paragraphs consider the key issues and themes associated with the application proposals.

A. The Principle of Redevelopment

- 5.2 The general thrust of national and local policies is to secure sustainable patterns of development and the re-use of previously developed urban land. This objective is the common thread running through Government Guidance and the Reading Local Plan which both encourage redevelopment to result in sustainable development and sustainable communities.
- 5.3 Both Government Guidance and the Local Plan encourage development in order to make optimum use of valuable urban land and achieve increased levels of development upon brownfield sites to contribute towards urban renaissance and sustainable development.
- 5.4 The site falls within the defined area of Central Reading, which is one of the most successful shopping centres in the UK and has a wide selection of leisure, cultural and entertainment facilities. It also falls within the Minster Quarter Area Development Framework, which sets out plans to build several hundred new homes in a significant area of the town centre, creating a vibrant thriving new community at the heart of the town. It seeks to bring new commercial spaces, new areas of improved public realm, jobs and growth which will benefit local residents and the local economy.
- 5.5 There are four Character Areas for the Minster Quarter Area, with the site falling within the Hexagon Quarter, which will be a distinctive, dense and high-quality urban quarter within Reading's Central Core. The site will provide a unique character and sense of place that will be unified by a high quality public realm and seek to create an inviting new gateway to and from the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area and the residential areas of West Reading. Two illustrative views from the Framework are shown here.



Indicative perspective view from Castle St. roundabout



Indicative perspective view axis between Hexagon and Minster

- 5.6 In addition to the emerging Minster Quarter plans is a major new development for Broad Street Mall, as mentioned earlier. It is considered that the proposals will compliant these and provide an enhanced cultural and leisure facility for residents and users of that scheme to enjoy.
- 5.7 The proposals will make efficient use of the site to bring forward new and enhanced cultural space. But in addition to this, the development will help with the ongoing regeneration of the area, and help realise the objectives of the Minster Quarter Area Development Framework. The development will therefore comply with the strategic aims of the NPPF and the Local Plan.

B. Theatre Use

- 5.8 The existing use of the site is as a theatre, so the use would continue and there would be no change of use. However, the theatre use on site would intensify as a result of the proposals. In planning policy terms, the theatre use is considered to fall within the 'Leisure and Cultural' category, as set out in the Local Plan. The Plan sets out at paragraph 4.6.16 that theatres are considered a 'centre use'.
- 5.9 Policy RL2: Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development sets out that provision will be made for up to 34,900 sqm of retail and related facilities in Reading to 2036, together with new leisure facilities. It then says that retail and main town centre leisure and culture development will take place in the centre of Reading. The proposal complies with this policy and would help to support Reading centre.

- 5.10 The Minster Quarter Area Framework sets out for “the Council also welcomes and supports additions to the existing leisure provision within the area” and that “the area is an ideal location for additional leisure facilities to serve the growing population of Reading”. Again, the proposal would be in-line with these objectives.
- 5.11 The Framework also sets out “*The Hexagon Theatre will be retained and enhanced as a cultural focus within the master plan. Access for deliveries and coach parking need to be integrated into the new development proposals and remain accessible during construction stages*”. Again, the proposal complies with these objectives.
- 5.12 In 2022, Reading successfully secured Levelling Up Funding for a new flexible studio theatre as part of the Hexagon Theatre Cultural Campus, within the wider Minster Quarter redevelopment plans. This new development will re-energise the existing theatre, and allow the Hexagon to deliver more diverse programming, which will appeal to wider audiences.
- 5.13 The Hexagon’s context is due to significantly change over the next 10 years. The proposed residential and mixed-use schemes nearby will transform the wider site into a thriving new community with arts, culture and learning at its heart. The new Hexagon studio theatre will be an energiser, providing a new venue to eat, drink, connect and socialise, reinvigorating the town’s cultural infrastructure and leading to greater engagement with the arts.
- 5.14 It is considered that the existing uses (to be extended and intensified) are therefore appropriate and in accordance with Local Plan Policies as well as Government Guidance, and will help to support the West Side Major Opportunity Area and Reading as a whole.

C. Design Considerations

- 5.15 The NPPF places considerable emphasis on the importance of achieving high-quality design. The Framework states that “*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*” (paragraph 131).

- 5.16 Paragraph 139 of the NPPF states that, *“development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design”*. As a corollary to this, bullet point b of the same paragraph states that *“significant weight should be given to 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.”*
- 5.17 Local Plan Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm sets out that all development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. It goes on to say that developments will 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;
 - Create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;
 - Address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them, including providing suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily; and
 - Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping.
- 5.18 In terms of design, this application includes a Design & Access Statement produced by Haworth Tompkins Architects, which summarises the design rationale of the proposal. In accordance with Policy CC7, the design constitutes a high quality development which will result in a significant enhancement to the area, as the image over the page shows.



- 5.19 The current Hexagon Theatre presents a handsome facade to Queens Walk and Düsseldorf Way, but in recent years has become increasingly isolated as its context becomes derelict. Owing to decreased footfall and its increasingly neglected surroundings, the experience of the Hexagon from the podium, is that of a building that is closed and uninviting. Visible signs of activity are important in altering this perception, which can be achieved through the new studio theatre extension.
- 5.20 Therefore, the extension of the podium to connect the new studio to the public realm and the activation of the Queens Walk frontage have been considered an essential move to not only provide an entrance to the new studio, but also to revitalise the podium and Hexagon site. The use of distinctive paving, glazed façades signalled by a vibrant canopy and striking signage will make the theatre more legible to the public, increase footfall towards the Hexagon, and enliven the podium with activity.
- 5.21 During the day, the facade to this theatre terrace will be activated by the rehearsal space. If appropriate, and the drapes are open to the public, passers by will be able to catch glimpses of the activities happening within. Glazed doors along the facade that can be fully opened up during warm weather will offer an insight into the activities taking place, and highlight the building's offerings and availability to the community.

- 5.22 In the evening, this will transform into a lively extension to the foyer before shows and during the interval; it will also be utilised by patrons dropping by for a drink without even seeing a show, helping to diversify audience appeal.
- 5.23 The hexagonal ventilation stack will become a signifier that announces the studio theatre to visitors as they approach from afar. This will also be visible from the A329, enhancing the connection between the theatre and the wider town.
- 5.24 The existing stage door is located at street level, in what is quite an unpleasant and unwelcoming environment. Unclear zoning, a lack of lighting and a heavy vehicular presence, makes the pedestrian experience disjointed. At present, this space also provides the Hexagon's get-in, as well as vehicle parking, making the site congested.
- 5.25 In relocating the get-in to the rear of the building to create one unified loading dock for the back of house operations for both theatres, the need to park articulated lorries at the front of the Hexagon is eradicated, and the setting of the Stage Door is instantly improved. Whilst there are still requirements for vehicular parking, new greenery and seating will create a destination and a sense of arrival for performers.
- 5.26 National Guidance places considerable emphasis on the importance of achieving high quality design. The Local Plan also emphasises the need for high quality design to ensure that new developments are in-keeping with the local character of established areas of townscape. As set out in the Design & Access Statement submitted with the application, the proposal meets these key objectives.
- 5.27 As set out in the Design and Access Statement and the Access Statement, both submitted with the application, the project team are committed to providing a high level of accessibility throughout the new building. Therefore, a key driver at the outset of this project has been to ensure that wheelchair users, those with limited mobility and people with buggies, are able to move freely throughout the new studio theatre. Inclusive design has driven many aspects of the proposal, including:
- Step free access to all levels, achieved via slopes, ramps or passenger lifts, with step free connection between the existing Hexagon foyer and the new studio theatre foyer.

- New passenger lift between the Hexagon BoH and the new studio theatre BoH, offering step free access between the existing Hexagon BoH corridors.
- Accessible WCs, a baby changing facility and shower.
- Up to 10 wheelchair positions within the auditorium.
- Powered entrance doors.

5.28 In summary, the proposals have been carefully designed to ensure they respond positively to the site's location and setting. The scale and massing of the proposals is considered to respond positively to the prevailing urban form and would improve the character and appearance of the area.

D. Impact on Local Amenity

5.29 Local Plan Policy CC8: Safeguarding Amenity sets out that development should not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties in terms of:

- Privacy and overlooking;
- Access to sunlight and daylight;
- Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;
- Harm to outlook;
- Noise and disturbance;
- Artificial lighting;
- Vibration;
- Dust and fumes;
- Smell; or
- Crime and safety.

5.30 As detailed in the updated Daylight and Sunlight assessment by Point2 submitted with the application, an updated study has been undertaken to look at the impact of the proposed development on the relevant rooms in the surrounding buildings. This report provides an update on the daylight and sunlight impacts as outlined in their November 2023 report (the 'Approved Massing Report') which was submitted as part of the permitted application (ref: PL/24/0063).

- 5.31 As set out in the Approved Massing Report the only building likely to be notably affected by the Proposed Development is the student residential property immediately on the northern boundary known as Queens Court. The overall Revised Application massing is smaller than the approved massing and the impacts to Queens Court are therefore reduced.
- 5.32 The results of the Vertical Sky Component (VSC) assessment for the approved massing showed that of the 212 windows assessed all but 25 windows met the BRE recommended criteria. For the Revised Application massing, the VSC results show that all but 17 windows will meet the BRE recommended criteria. The overall impact of the Revised Application massing on Queens Court is therefore smaller than the approved massing.
- 5.33 When considering the sunlight impacts using the Annual Probable Sunlight Hours (APSH) test, of the 135 rooms assessed for daylight, 127 rooms have a site-facing window which is orientated within 90 degrees of due south. The results of the APSH assessment for the approved massing indicated that 12 rooms would not meet the BRE guidelines. For the Revised Application massing, the APSH results show that all but 8 rooms will meet the BRE recommended criteria. The overall impact of the Revised Application massing on Queens Court is, therefore, again smaller than the consented massing.
- 5.34 Where the daylight and sunlight impacts are beyond the BRE guidelines the reasoning as to why these effects can be considered acceptable is as set out in the Approved Massing Report. However, in addition, on the basis that the impacts of the consented massing were deemed to be acceptable and the effects from the Revised Application massing are smaller, we can conclude that the effects from the Revised Application massing can also be acceptable. Given the above, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in sunlight daylight terms.
- 5.35 The proposal would reduce the outlook to some of the lower level student bedrooms within Queens Court (a very small number overall within the building), however, for similar reasons to the daylight issue mentioned above, this is considered acceptable. The student use means any effect on any individual occupants is not permanent. Equally, Queens Court offers a range of amenity

facilities for the student residents, so they are not solely reliant on their own accommodation. Given this, the change in outlook is considered acceptable.

- 5.36 There would be no issues caused in respect of privacy and overlooking to Queens Court, as the proposed building is generally inward focused, with the entrances and terrace focused on the existing entrances and public realm areas.
- 5.37 In terms of the other potential impacts on local residents set out in Policy CC8, issues relating to noise and dust are covered in the sections (and relating reports) on noise and air quality. The proposal is not considered to have any impacts to nearby residents in terms of vibration or smell.
- 5.38 The proposal would generate a need for some additional lighting as well as external signage, some of which would be illuminated. Details are shown in the Design and Access Statement at section 4.20, which have been designed in such a way to minimise impacts to adjoining residents.
- 5.39 The last point from Policy CC8 covers crime and safety, and the proposal is considered to have a positive benefit in this respect. Levels of activity would be increased and some of the poorer elements of public realm replaced and upgraded. The landscape proposals at the street level entrance area to the existing theatre building are aimed at creating a more welcoming external space for theatre visitor arrival and spill out at performance intervals, whilst the existing disjointed surfacing will be replaced with red clay paving to reference the original podium level landscape design.

E. Transport Considerations

- 5.40 The overarching aim of planning policy at all levels is to promote more sustainable patterns of development, including locating uses in areas which are accessible by public transport, cycling and walking in order to reduce the need to travel by private car.
- 5.41 Local Plan Policy TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy says that proposed development should contribute appropriately to meeting the objectives of the most

up-to-date Local Transport Plan or any successor document, including sub-strategies, specific projects identified and the local action plans. It then says permission will not be granted for major development proposals unless there is a commitment to implement measures to promote and improve sustainable transport facilities, such as through provision to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport; and through agreed travel plans, safe routes to local facilities and services, including schools and parks, and similar measures.

- 5.42 TRI then adds that all development proposals should make appropriate provision for works and contributions to ensure an adequate level of accessibility and safety by all modes of transport from all parts of a development, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling, in accordance with any agreed transport assessment submitted as part of the application.
- 5.43 Local Plan Policy TR4: Cycle Routes and Facilities sets out that developments will be expected to make full use of opportunities to improve access for cyclists to, from and within the development and to integrate cycling through the provision of new facilities.
- 5.44 Local Plan Policy TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging sets out that development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport.
- 5.45 A Transport Statement (TS) by Caneparo Associates submitted as part of the application and considers the wider transport implications of the project, including its impact on the highways network, public transport and pedestrian environment. In summary, the TS sets out the site is located within Reading town centre and is highlight accessible to public transport services. The site is also surrounded by a number of cycle routes which operate across Reading encouraging the use of active modes by visitors. The proposal seeks to offer public realm improvements by offering a new podium level link to connect to Queens Way offering an attractive open frontage to the new performance space and provide an improved pedestrian access route into the site.

- 5.46 The proposal seeks to reduce the existing parking numbers associated with the Hexagon Theatre, due to the new bridge structure taking up space at street level. The proposal would see 18 staff bays reducing to 14, but the existing eight accessible bays would be maintained. No visitor parking will be provided, other than accessible parking, therefore visitors driving to the theatre will be required to make use of the available public car parks which surround the site.
- 5.47 New and improved cycle parking will be provided for staff, located within an internal cycle store along with end of trip facilities. This is an improvement in comparison to the existing use which does not offer staff cycle parking. Visitor cycle parking numbers will also be maintained and included within the new public realm improvements.
- 5.48 All delivery and servicing activity will be undertaken on-site where a dedicated loading area will be provided to the west of the site. Daily deliveries are expected to remain at per the existing situation and therefore will not impact on the existing highway network.
- 5.49 The trip generation of the proposed extension is expected to generate an increase in guest trips, however these vehicle trips and public transport movement associated with the development proposals will occur outside of traditional peak commuting hours and therefore will not impact movement on the surrounding road and public transport networks.
- 5.50 The proposals include a BREEAM Travel Plan which will encourage trips to be undertaken by sustainable modes of travel, with targets included to promote a shift to active travel modes.
- 5.51 In conclusion, the proposed development is well-positioned in a location which facilitates both sustainable travel and therefore will not have a detrimental impact on the highway or local transport network, and is in accordance with relevant adopted national, regional and local policy guidance. It therefore meets the test of the NPPF and paragraph 115, which states that:

“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”

- 5.52 In light of this, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable on transport grounds.

F. Sustainability

- 5.53 The NPPF states that plans should *“take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes, and the risk of overheating from rising temperatures.”* (Paragraph 158).

- 5.54 Reading Local Plan Policy CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction sets out that proposals for new development will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change. The Policy then sets out all major non-residential developments are required to meet the most up-to-date BREEAM ‘Excellent’ standards, where possible.

- 5.55 Policy CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change says all developments will demonstrate how they have been designed to incorporate measures to adapt to climate change. It notes the following measures shall be incorporated into development:

- Wherever possible, new buildings shall be orientated to maximise the opportunities for both natural heating and ventilation and reducing exposure to wind and other elements;
- Proposals involving both new and existing buildings shall demonstrate how they have been designed to maximise resistance and resilience to climate change for example by including measures such as solar shading, thermal mass, heating and ventilation of the building and appropriately coloured materials in areas exposed to direct sunlight, green and brown roofs, green walls, etc;
- Use of trees and other planting, where appropriate as part of a landscape scheme, to provide shading of amenity areas, buildings and streets and to help to connect habitat, designed with native plants that are carefully selected, managed and adaptable to meet the predicted changed climatic conditions; and

- All development shall minimise the impact of surface water runoff from the development in the design of the drainage system, and where possible incorporate mitigation and resilience measures for any increases in river flooding levels as a result of climate change).

5.56 Policy CC4: Decentralised Energy sets out that in meeting the sustainability requirements of this plan, developments of the sizes set out below shall demonstrate how consideration has been given to securing energy for the development from a decentralised energy source. Any non-residential development of over 1,000 sq m shall consider the inclusion of decentralised energy provision, within the site, unless it can be demonstrated that the scheme is not suitable, feasible or viable for this form of energy provision.

5.57 In terms of energy, the proposals have been designed in accordance with an 'Energy Hierarchy' as set out in the updated Energy Statement prepared by Skelly and Couch, which reflects the outcome of the remodelling exercise for the reduced scheme. The overall Energy Strategy remains unchanged with the exception of:

- The proposed new development to the east of the Studio Theatre will substantially reduce the viability of PVs to the roof of the Studio Theatre and they have therefore been omitted.
- As the testing for the open loop borehole installation has proved successful the Studio Theatre will now be able to connect to the main Theatre Ground Source Heat Pump installation for heating and cooling and the generation of hot water.

5.58 The proposals follow the 'Energy Hierarchy' as set as below:

Use Less Energy – 'Be Lean'

5.59 The building design adopts a number of passive and active design measures which respond to the specific conditions of the site and building orientation. These measures include: high performance insulated fabric, including minimising thermal bridging and good detailing, airtight construction, balanced G-value and light transmittance glazing to optimise solar gains and internal daylight levels and promotion of natural ventilation and passive cooling techniques.

- 5.60 The following active efficiency measures are also proposed: High efficiency Electric Ground Source Heat Pumps; Compensated and optimise control of heating system; Thermostatic control of all heated spaces; Variable speed pumping and fans; Demand controlled mechanical ventilation (where provided), either by carbon dioxide, humidity, or temperature monitoring; Mechanical ventilation with high efficiency heat recovery; Simple and non-intrusive automatic controls; Energy sub-metering and monitoring; High efficacy LED lighting; and Daylight Dimming and Occupancy switching.

Supply Energy Efficiently – ‘Be Clean’

- 5.61 As set out in the Energy Strategy, there is currently no district energy infrastructure within the vicinity of the site, however, as part of the Reading Borough Council Climate Emergency Action Plan, the Council have commissioned an extraction and discharge borehole test on the site with the intention that a Ground Source Heat Pump (GSHP) installation will be provided as the heat source for the Hexagon Campus and potentially linked to a wider District Energy Network for the Minster Quarter. This GSHP installation will provide heating, cooling and hot water for the Hexagon Studio Theatre.

Use Renewable Energy – ‘Be Green’

- 5.62 Ground Source Heat Pumps (GSHP) are proposed to provide low carbon heating and cooling to the new Hexagon Studio theatre, as part of the wider decarbonisation strategy for the existing Hexagon Theatre.
- 5.63 Due to the position of the building in proximity to the site of several proposed tall buildings, which are due to be constructed shortly, and would increase the shading on the Hexagon Studio Theatre roof, in addition to shading from other surrounding structures, it is not possible to optimise a photovoltaic installation on the roof of the Hexagon Studio Theatre.

BREEAM

- 5.64 A BREEAM Pre Assessment Report by B Sussed was submitted with the original application. This Pre Assessment Report demonstrates that the development has the potential to achieve the required Policy rating with a target score points of 75.51%, whilst the threshold for Excellent is 70%. The credit strategy has been

agreed with the design team following a BREEAM workshop with the BREEAM Assessor and represents the most appropriate way of meeting the target rating.

Sustainability

- 5.65 A Sustainability Statement by Skelly & Couch has been included with the application, which sets out that a holistic sustainable design approach has been adopted when developing the design of the new studio theatre. The key sustainability and energy strategy measures are described within this report, and the Sustainable Design Checklist for non-residential development contained within the SPD has been adopted.

G. Environmental Considerations

(i) Trees

- 5.66 Adopted Policy EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands sets out that individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended. The quality of waterside vegetation will be maintained or enhanced. It adds that new development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained.
- 5.67 The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA), prepared by TMA. This confirms that the development does not require the removal of any trees to facilitate its implementation. It does require the pruning of two trees (T2 & T3) and one shrub group (S6) to provide clearance for high sided vehicles that will use the existing access road for deliveries during development. However, it is considered that the pruning required is relatively minor and is unlikely to have a significant negative impact on the long-term health of the affected trees and shrubs.

- 5.68 The AIA also notes that built development is proposed within the Root Protection Area of Tree T1. However, it is considered that the impact to the long-term health of this tree will be low, so long as the works are undertaken under observation of the arboriculturist and in accordance with the measures detailed within the AIA.

(ii) Ecology

- 5.69 The NPPF at paragraph 180 requires local authorities to avoid and minimise impacts on biodiversity and to provide net gains in biodiversity when making planning decisions. Adopted Policy EN12 – Biodiversity and the Green Network sets out that 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. The policy says 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 wherever practicable.

- 5.70 The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) prepared by TMA, which sets out the relevant legislative and policy framework and provides a detailed ecological appraisal of the existing site.

- 5.71 The PEA noted the site is dominated by a large building and hardstanding habitats, although it does contain potentially suitable habitat for nesting birds. It concluded that the proposed development would not result in the loss of significant habitats of ecological value, and sets out recommendations to minimise the risk of impact on habitats of ecological value and protected and notable species.

- 5.72 The PEA explains that the closest designated site is Holy Brook, located 400 metres south of the site. However, the scale of the proposed works is such that there is unlikely to be a direct impact on this or any other designated sites.

- 5.73 The application also includes an updated Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment by TMA. The project seeks to maximise Biodiversity Net Gain on site, via biodiverse green roofs and retention of trees within the site. The Landscape Statement also details

the proposed ecological features including the green roofs and the bird boxes to be fixed to the ventilation chimney structure.

- 5.74 The Biodiversity Net Gain Report confirms that the scheme will achieve net gains in biodiversity for the site of 10.51%, which complies with the policy requirement to provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible.

(iii) Ground Contamination

- 5.75 The NPPF states planning policies and decisions should ensure that: “a site is suitable for its proposed use taking account of ground conditions and any risks arising from land instability and contamination. This includes risks arising from natural hazards or former activities such as mining, and any proposals for mitigation including land remediation” (Paragraph 189).
- 5.76 Local Plan Policy EN16: Pollution and Water Resources says development will only be permitted on land affected by contamination where it is demonstrated that the contamination and land gas can be satisfactorily managed or remediated so that it is suitable for the proposed end use and will not impact on the groundwater environment, human health, buildings and the wider environment, during demolition and construction phases as well as during the future use of the site.
- 5.77 The application is accompanied by an updated Land Contamination Assessment Desk Study & Ground Investigation dated May 2024 by GEA. This desk study outlines that the historic maps show the site was originally occupied by housing, with a school bordering to the southwest. Then between 1962 and 1970, the site is shown to be cleared, prior to the construction of the theatre and its completion in 1977. The site has remained essentially unchanged since that time.
- 5.78 Contamination testing carried out indicates that the samples tested do not contain any elevated chemical concentrations with respect to the adopted commercial end use. It noted that all samples tested were found to be free from asbestos. Lastly, it notes there is not considered to be a potential for hazardous ground gases or vapours to be present on or migrating towards the site” and “there should be no need to consider ground gas exclusion systems, or ground gas monitoring at this site.

- 5.79 In conclusion, the report sets out there should be no requirement for remediation of ground contamination at the site.

(iv) Air-Quality

- 5.80 The NPPF states: *“planning policies and decisions should sustain and contribute towards compliance with relevant limit values or national objectives for pollutants, taking into account the presence of Air Quality Management Areas and Clean Air Zones, and the cumulative impacts from individual sites in local areas.”* (Paragraph 192).
- 5.81 Local Plan Policy EN15: Air Quality sets out development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality. It says development that would detrimentally affect air quality will not be permitted unless the effect is to be mitigated. The following criteria should be taken into account:
- Whether the proposal, would worsen air quality;
 - Whether the development is within an Air Quality Management Area; and
 - Whether it can be demonstrated that a local worsening in air quality that would not detrimentally affect human health or the environment would be offset by an overall improvement in air quality, for instance through reduction in the need to travel.
- 5.82 The application is accompanied by an Air Quality Assessment, prepared by Tetra Tech, which identifies and addresses the potential air quality impacts during both the construction and operational phases of the proposed development. For both phases, the type, source and significance of potential impacts are identified, and the measures that should be employed to minimise these proposed.
- 5.83 The potential effects during the construction phases include fugitive dust emissions from site activities, such as demolition, earthworks, construction and trackout. During this phase, site specific mitigation measures detailed within this assessment will be implemented. With these mitigation measures in place, the effects from the construction phase are not predicted to be significant.

- 5.84 For the Operational Phase, detailed dispersion modelling of traffic pollutants has been undertaken for the proposed development. An operational year assessment for 2025 traffic emissions has been undertaken to assess the effects of the Proposed Development. The impacts during the operational phase take into account exhaust emissions from additional road traffic generated due to the proposed development.
- 5.85 The long-term (annual) assessment of the effects associated with the proposed development with respect to Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) is determined to be 'negligible'. With respect to PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} exposure, the effect is determined to be 'negligible' at all identified existing sensitive receptor locations. Therefore, no further mitigation is required to protect local amenity.

(v) Noise

- 5.86 The NPPF provides guidance on planning policies and decisions with respect to noise in order to avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life; mitigating the impacts of noise; recognizing the impact of noise on business; and identifying and protecting areas not effected by noise for their recreational and amenity value.
- 5.87 Local Plan Policy EN16: Pollution and Water Resources outlines that development will only be permitted where it would not be damaging to the environment and sensitive receptors through land, noise or light pollution. It adds that proposals for development that are sensitive to the effects of noise or light pollution will only be permitted in areas where they will not be subject to high levels of such pollution, unless adequate mitigation measures are provided to minimise the impact of such pollution.
- 5.88 Local Plan Policy EN17: Noise Generating Equipment then sets out that where noise generating equipment is proposed, the noise source specific level (plant noise level) should be at least 10dBA below the existing background level as measured at the nearest noise sensitive receptor.
- 5.89 The application is supported by an updated Noise Assessment prepared by Charcoal Blue, which outlines that a noise survey has been undertaken which measured noise levels to then calculate and assess suitable specifications for the project. The report

demonstrates that the site is suitable for the proposed theatre extension, subject to the recommendations and design criteria set out in the report.

(vi) Flooding and Drainage

- 5.90 Reading Borough Local Plan Policy EN18: Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems sets out that development will be directed to areas at lowest risk of flooding in the first instance and taking into account the effects of climate change. It will consider flooding from all sources, including fluvial, surface water, groundwater and sewer flooding. Where development in areas at risk of flooding is necessary, it will not reduce the capacity of the flood plain to store floodwater, impede the flow of floodwater or in any way increase the risks to life and property arising from flooding. Wherever possible, development should be designed to reduce flood risk, both on- and off-site.
- 5.91 The policy then sets out all major developments must incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) as appropriate and in line with the Government's Technical Standards. Runoff rates should aim to reflect greenfield conditions and, in any case, must be no greater than the existing conditions of the site. Schemes should ensure that the movement of water through vertical infiltration as well as horizontal run-off does not worsen contamination effects. Wherever possible, SuDS provision should maximise ecological benefits, link into the existing Green Network, incorporate tree planting and landscaping and avoid damage to existing significant trees, including through changes to the site hydrology.
- 5.92 The application is accompanied by an updated Drainage Strategy by Momentum which sets out the development is in flood zone 1 (low risk) and is shown to be at low risk of surface water (pluvial) flooding. There is a small area of flood risk indicated on the east side of the site and into Queens Walk with an annual probability of up to 0.1% (1:1000 year return period). From examination of the topographic survey, this appears to be a localised low point near the existing buildings and ramp down to form the loading dock. There is also an area of surface water flood risk indicated in the ground to the south of the existing Hexagon Theatre but well away from the proposed extension building. As such, there is considered to be at a negligible to low risk of flooding from all sources.

- 5.93 The Strategy notes the site is not considered suitable for infiltration drainage or soakaways due to the proximity of existing foundations and limited space. From nearby historic boreholes, the shallow soils are expected to be clay with gravel and unlikely to be suitable for shallow infiltration.
- 5.94 The proposed building and parking to the east are to discharge at an attenuated rate of 2l/s to the existing drainage to the east of the existing Hexagon Theatre. The reconfigured access and loading dock to the west are to continue to drain to the Thames Water surface water sewers without attenuation but with the replacement building draining to the east, there will be a significantly reduced area connected to the western outfall giving betterment to the sewer system.
- 5.95 The proposed scheme is to be drained using a sustainable drainage system based the use of green roofs, permeable paving and attenuation with controlled outflow discharging to the existing private drainage system. The proposed building is in replacement of an existing building at the same location. The paved areas to east and west will be at broadly the same levels as the existing paved areas. The overall exceedance flow routes and risks will not be significantly changed in the proposed situation.
- 5.96 The proposed surface water drainage strategy is compliant with Reading Borough Local Plan Policy. As such, the development is considered appropriate in terms of drainage strategy.

H. Community Infrastructure Levy

- 5.97 The scheme could also be potentially liable for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments. The levy can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure, including transport, flood defences, schools, hospitals, and other health and social care facilities. In terms of the Reading Brough CIL, this proposal would fall within the “*all other chargeable developments*” category, for which the charge is £0 per sqm. As such, no CIL would be payable for this proposal.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 This Planning Statement is submitted in support of revised proposals for a high-quality development that will deliver a new studio theatre and sister venue for The Hexagon Theatre. The scheme was granted planning permission (Ref: 240173) by the Borough in April 2024. The scheme was then developed to Stage 4 detail, which was issued for tender in May 2024, which unfortunately came back over budget. Consequently, the design team and client have amended the original proposal, and have now developed a more compact and energised scheme, which still delivers on the key aims of the original proposal. This revised scheme is being resubmitted as a Minor Material Amendment (MMA) (a Section 73 application) to the original planning permission.

6.2 The key changes to the original scheme have been summarised below:

- Omission of the G+2 level, including;
 - Staff office
 - Community studio
 - AWC
 - External terrace
 - External escape stair
- Merging of the foyer and rehearsal room into one space, with a more flexible and provisional feel. This assumes use as a foyer or use as a rehearsal space/community space, subject to performances in the studio theatre.
- Staff offices have been re-provided in the G+0 back of house.
- Omission of the BOH lift, and the addition of G+0 to the FOH lift, providing efficient stepfree access from ground floor to foyer for staff and performers.
- Pushing of the auditorium mass west to condense the scheme and accommodate the foyer within the footprint of the existing building. In turn, this reduces the load on the podium bridge link, simplifying the bridge to a pedestrian footbridge.
- Reduction in the size and capacity of the auditorium, from 230 to 200 seated; plus the simplification of the theatre tech, including the replacement of adjustable rostra with static deck.

- Omission of the internal bike store, secondary get-in and green room.
- Replacement of the existing WC block, to create a more efficient arrangement, giving more space back to the scene dock.
- Omission of PVs on the roof, due to the overshadowing of the proposed BSM development.
- Addition of two extra staff parking spaces, and the introduction of an external covered bike store for staff and visitors.

6.3 The previously approved building had a GIA floorspace of 1,7323sqm, whilst this amended scheme comes to 1,278sqm, which represents a 454sqm reduction.

6.4 The amended scheme seeks permission for demolition of some of the existing back of house areas and erection of an extension of the existing Hexagon Theatre to provide a new studio auditorium, flexible rehearsal space, community studio with workshop space and back of house space, along with improved public realm by providing a new podium connection between the new proposed extension and Queen's Walk, along with other associated works. The nature of the amended proposals is fully in accordance with the Council's objectives.

6.5 The revised scheme has been sensitively designed in response to a detailed analysis of the site and local context, taking into account the character of the local area, and the Council's objective of delivering a high-quality development. The proposed scheme responds to the Council's priorities around conviviality, functionality, inclusion & accessibility, and environmental & social sustainability.

6.6 As it currently stands, this element of the existing site represents an inefficient use of land. The proposed development offers the opportunity for a positive outcome whereby a new extension to the existing building and new theatre facilities can be provided in a highly sustainable manner, addressing all the drivers of good design currently advocated by central government and local government.

6.7 The proposal represents a significant opportunity for Reading and the redevelopment of this site in a sustainable manner would send out a clear message that regeneration is taking place and continuing, acting as a catalyst for further investment in the Minister Quarter area. The amended design of the proposal is of a

high quality and has been formulated in response to the site's location. It would enhance the character and appearance of the area.

6.8 In summary the scheme would deliver the following planning benefits:

- Redevelopment of an under-utilised part of the site and the provision of new high-quality extension that would enhance the local townscape;
- Reconnecting the Hexagon to the wider city centre and improving the accessibility and visibility of the Hexagon Theatre;
- Improving public perceptions of the area around the Hexagon and increasing a sense of place, identity and pride amongst the existing community;
- Providing new arts, community and performance spaces for the community;
- Providing a new venue to host a wide variety of performances, including live music;
- Supporting learning and skills in the local community, with new accessible spaces;
- Providing a focal point as the Minster Quarter develops; and
- Delivering a sustainable form of development that utilises innovative design solutions and provides an exemplar low-carbon public building in Reading.

6.9 It is considered that the application proposal represents an exciting opportunity to deliver a sustainable cultural scheme which would provide a significant benefit to the local area. For these reasons, it is considered the revised scheme is acceptable in planning terms, and therefore that planning permission should be granted.

Appendix CMA 1

List of Relevant Development Plan Policies

Key Development Plan Policies

Reading Council Local Plan

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

CC3: ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

CC4: DECENTRALISED ENERGY

CC5: WASTE MINIMISATION AND STORAGE

CC6: ACCESSIBILITY AND THE INTENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

EN12: BIODIVERSITY AND THE GREEN NETWORK

EN14: TREES, HEDGES AND WOODLAND

EN15: AIR QUALITY

EN16: POLLUTION AND WATER RESOURCES

EN17: NOISE GENERATING EQUIPMENT

EN18: FLOODING AND DRAINAGE

TR1: ACHIEVING THE TRANSPORT STRATEGY

TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS

TR4: CYCLE ROUTES AND FACILITIES

TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

RL1: NETWORK AND HIERARCHY OF CENTRES

RL2: SCALE AND LOCATION OF RETAIL, LEISURE AND CULTURE DEVELOPMENT

RL5: IMPACT OF MAIN TOWN CENTRE USES

RL6: PROTECTION OF LEISURE FACILITIES AND PUBLIC HOUSES

OU1: NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES

CR1: DEFINITION OF CENTRAL READING

CR2: DESIGN IN CENTRAL READING

CR3: PUBLIC REALM IN CENTRAL READING

CR4: LEISURE, CULTURE AND TOURISM IN CENTRAL READING