

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT
Reading Crown Court
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OFFICIAL

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Feilden+Mawson LLP, on behalf of the client, HMCTS. This report has been prepared to support an application for Full Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent for the integration of an additional Crown Court Hearing Room within the ground floor of the existing Reading Crown Court building, located at Old Shire Hall, The Forbury, Reading (RG1 3EH). The project also includes ancillary spaces such as consultation rooms, video link rooms, and updated WC provisions.

1.2 The proposal is part of a larger refurbishment plan to modernise the court facilities while maintaining the historical integrity of the Grade II listed building. The proposed design includes alterations to a less significant part of the building (the modern, 1990s extension), with minimal changes located in the historic north wing. Above all, the proposals have been developed to be sensitive to the building's heritage.

The site

Location

1.3 Reading Crown Court is a Grade II listed building designed in the Baroque Revival style by John Clacy and was completed in 1861. The court underwent significant modern additions between 1989 and 1997. The proposed development focuses predominantly on the modern section of the building, where the jury assembly area and other ancillary rooms are located.

Heritage and conservation

1.4 While the court building has architectural and historical significance, particularly the front Baroque Revival structure (north wing), the area being developed is part of the modern extension and is of less historical importance. Listed Building Consent will be sought, but the internal changes are expected to have no impact on the significant heritage elements of the court building (please refer to the accompanying heritage statement, document number: 56379-9573-FMW-RCC-XX-RP-A-0009-S2-B0700).

Constraints

1.5 The following key constraints have been acknowledged and used to inform the design process:

- The building's listed status imposes limitations on alterations to its internal and external features.
- HMCTS design guide provides the standards for refurbishment and redevelopment which have informed these proposals.
- Structural challenges include maintaining the building's integrity while making functional upgrades, such as the new hearing room.
- Maintaining accessibility throughout the court for staff, jurors, and the public is a key design priority.
- The building is situated within a flood zone (Flood Zone 1) however the proposed works are not at risk from the flood zone and the design will not increase the risk of surface flooding.

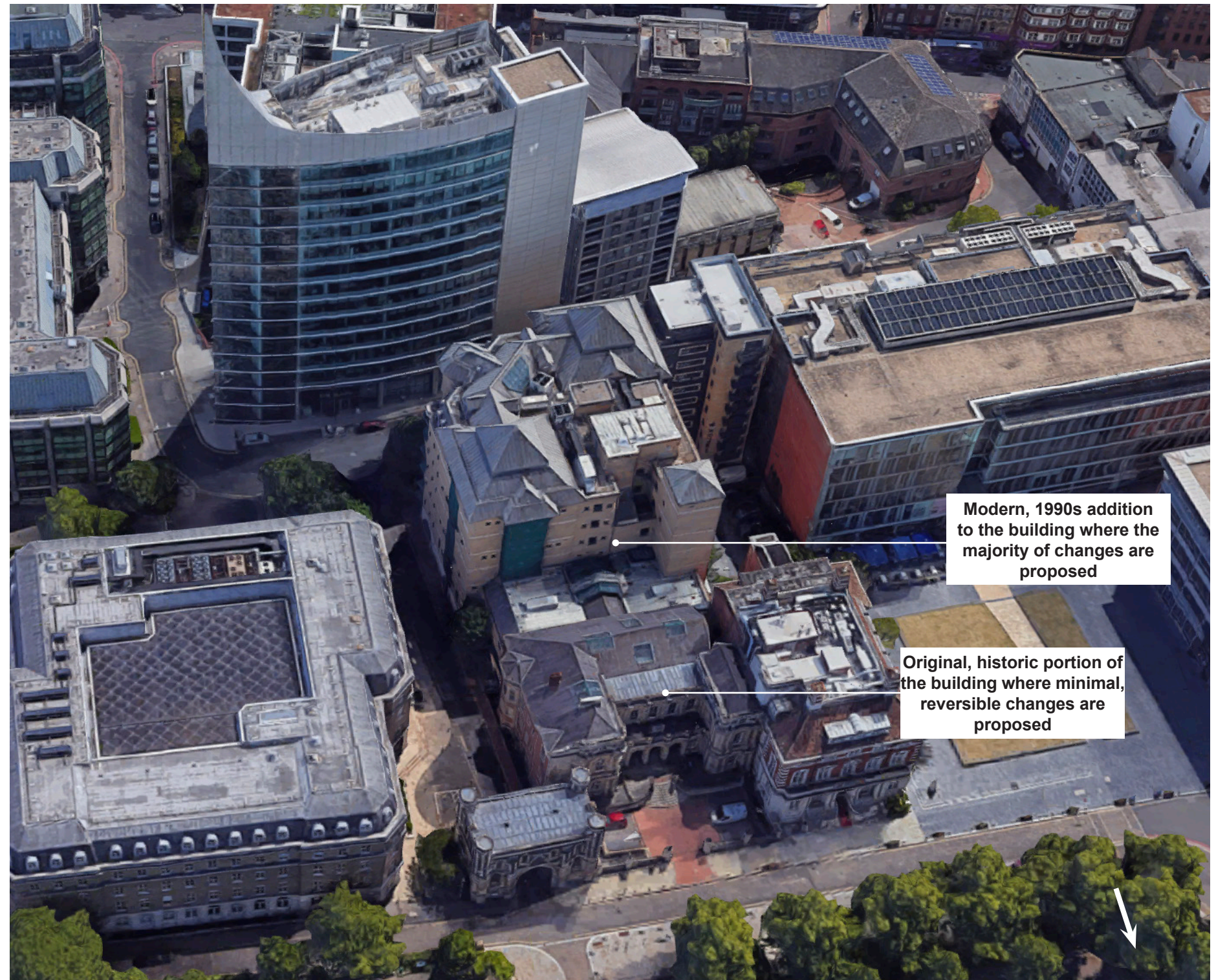


Fig.01 Aerial View of Reading Crown Court. (extracted from Google Maps and produced here for information only: https://www.google.com/maps/place/Reading+Crown+Court/@51.4578623,-0.9663121,269a,35y,180h,39.41t/data=!3m1!1e3!4m6!3m5!1s0x48769b3d00df5b57:0x3eadb45921c2696f!8m2!3d51.45621!4d-0.9670782!16s%2Fg%2F1tflrhtw?entry=tlu&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAwMi4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D [accessed: October 2024].

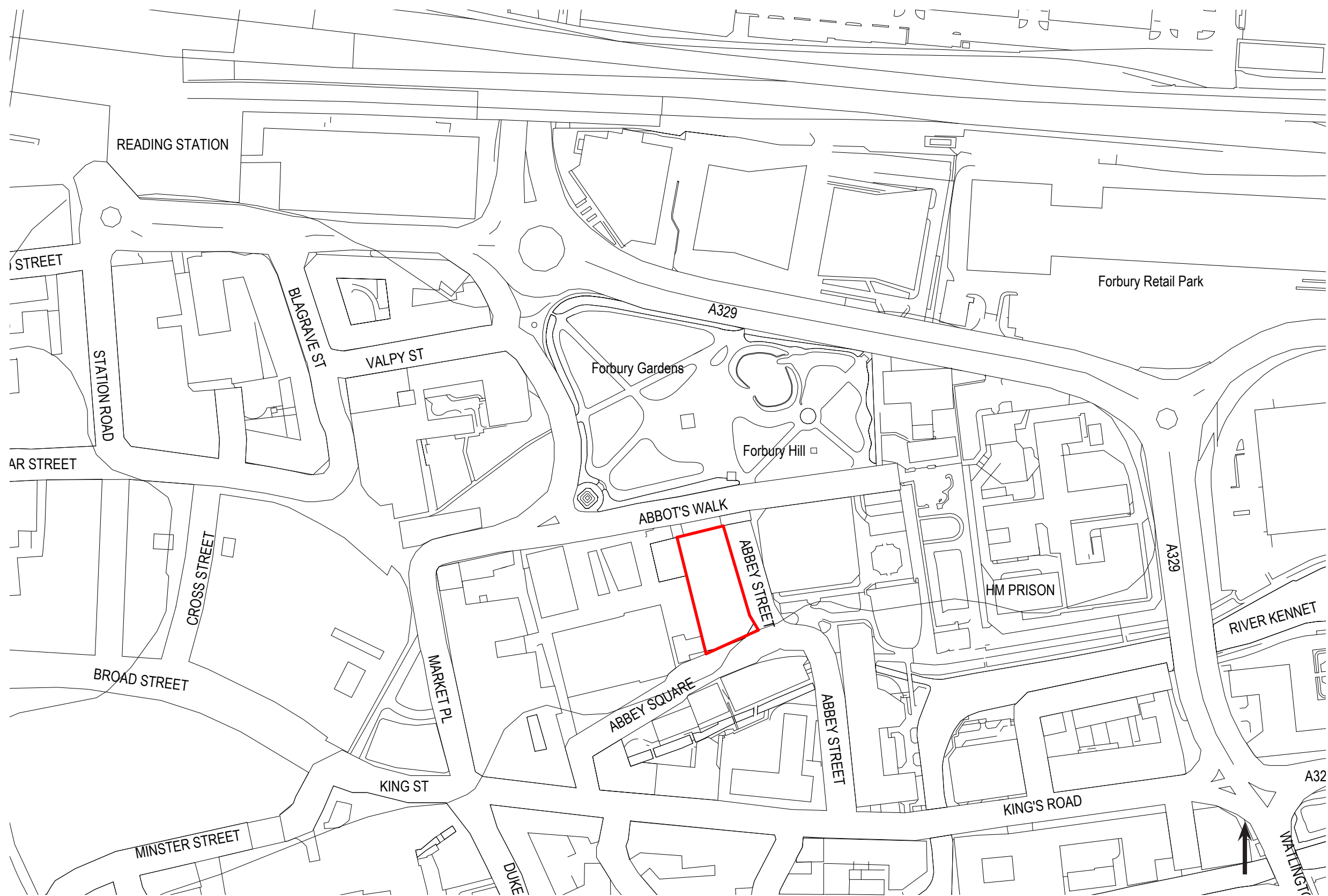


Fig.02 Site location plan

2.0 Summary of proposals

2.1 Extensive works were undertaken on the site in the late 1980s and during the 1990s which involved the demolition of much of the original Assizes Court, and the addition of a new building complex at the rear to house six modern court rooms.

2.2 The existing concrete frame construction allows for greater flexibility of the ground floor space and it is within this space where the majority of the work is proposed. Where possible existing internal walls and services have been retained and with the exception of the removal a single column and new vents through the west facade, few other structural changes are proposed.

2.3 The proposals forming this application are summarised as follows:

Internal changes:

- 1 x additional crown court hearing room with secure dock and Jury seating.
- 1 x new virtual hearing room and associated public gallery.
- 1 x new jury deliberation room.
- 1 x new jury assembly room with small meeting room and associated WCs.
- 2 x new consultation rooms.
- 2 x new video link rooms.
- 1 x new video call room.
- 1 x new baby changing room / WC.
- 1 x new judicial accessible WC.
- Refurbished advocates robing room.
- Redecorated and refurbished administration office space.
- New WC provision throughout the ground floor.
- Service lift 5 to be reinstated to benefit the movement of materials up to the ground floor by the contractor.
- Modification and reprogramming to lift core No.3 with a new structural opening and lift level opening to allow defendant level access to the ground floor.
- New structural opening in Stair core no.3 to enable defendant access to the ground floor.
- Relocation and redesign of the reception desk in the public foyer, along with a barista point.

External changes:

- The current proposals require minor interventions to the external fabric with a need to make penetrations for ventilation, which will be shrouded with metal louvres. These interventions will be on the Northwest elevation above the neighbouring property's car park (The Roseate Hotel).
- The door at the new restricted entrance will be replaced. The replacement door will be a six panel solid timber door with paint finish, five lever lock

and intercom/electronic card or fob access control.

2.4 The proposed design is predominantly located in the modern portion of the building complex which does not hold any heritage significance, and will mainly require the demolition and reinstatement of new partition walls with new access and circulation for jurors and members of the judiciary. No changes are proposed which impact the original, historic fabric of the building.

2.5 The existing use class of the building (F1(g)), is to be retained.

Consultation

2.6 Consultation with Reading Council's planning and conservation officers has taken place throughout the design process. Pre-application feedback was received in April 2024, with detailed comments guiding the design's evolution. Stakeholders, including HMCTS, judiciary, and facilities management, have provided input at key stages of the project, ensuring the design meets operational needs while preserving the historical integrity of the building.



Fig.03 1. View from The Roseate Hotel car park to the west elevation of Reading Crown Court, showing the proposed size and location of new ventilation grilles.



Fig.04 2. Public foyer where a new reception desk and barista point are proposed.



Fig.05 3. Existing door at restricted (north) entrance to be replaced..



3.0 Design principles

3.1 Use: The new development will add one Crown Court hearing room with secure dock and jury seating, in line with HMCTS specifications. Additional spaces include a jury deliberation room, consultation rooms, a virtual hearing room, and video link rooms. The refurbished spaces will enhance the building's capability to conduct modern court proceedings.

3.2 Layout: The internal spaces will be reconfigured to maintain efficient circulation and ensure secure, separate routes for judiciary, jurors, and defendants. Existing rooms such as the jury assembly area will be repurposed to meet modern needs, with minimal changes to the external façade.

3.3 Scale: The scale of the proposed internal alterations is modest, maintaining the building's existing massing and spatial configuration. The new hearing room will occupy 159m², with associated support rooms housed within the ground floor. The proposals do not increase the footprint of the existing building (ground floor GIA: 1865.939 sqm).

3.4 Appearance: Externally, the proposed changes are minimal. Minor external penetrations for ventilation will be made on the west elevation of the south wing, shielded by metal louvres. Internally, the alterations are focused on modernising the layout while respecting existing features where possible.

3.5 Sustainability: The design includes measures for energy efficiency, such as improved air handling systems and minimal disruption to the existing structural and mechanical framework.

3.6 Accessibility: Ensuring the building's compliance with the Equality Act is a priority. The new courtroom and associated spaces will be accessible to all users, including those with mobility impairments. Level access is provided to key areas, and new accessible WCs will be installed. Ramped access will be integrated into the hearing room dock area. Currently all hearing rooms are above ground level. The introduction of a hearing room at ground floor level improves access for all users without reliance on lifts.

4.0 Design in detail

- 4.1 The proposals for the refurbishment and redesign of the building focus on improving the functionality of key areas while ensuring compliance with accessibility, security, and fire safety standards.
- 4.2 Demolition and Partition Reinstatement: The design focuses on less significant areas of the building, primarily involving the demolition and reinstatement of partition walls to create improved access and circulation for jurors and the judiciary. The current jury cloaks area will be repurposed into a jury assembly room, complete with newly provided gender-neutral, self-contained WCs. The provision of WCs will comply with British Standard BS 6465.1.2006.
- 4.3 Conversion to a Secure Hearing Room: The jury assembly area in the southwestern corner will be converted into a secure hearing room. Structural and mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) solutions will support this change. Minor external interventions are required for ventilation, involving metal louvres on the northwest elevation above the neighbouring Roseate Hotel's car park.
- 4.4 New Hearing Room: A 159m² hearing room will be created with a new access route from the custodial stair core to the dock. There will also be provisions for wheelchair access to the dock. Bespoke joinery will be used for court furniture due to the room's non-standard shape. Specific room layouts have been developed, and certain derogations will be required for the new space.
- 4.5 Raised Floor for accessibility: To allow for containment routes and floor boxes, the ground-floor hearing room, sound lobby, consultation rooms, and nearby toilets will be raised 150mm. A compliant ramp will ensure access for wheelchair and mobility aid users, improving accessibility for disabled visitors. Virtual Hearing Room and Associated Facilities: The disused cafeteria in the southeastern part of the building will be converted into a new virtual hearing room, with two new video link rooms, a virtual public viewing gallery, and a large consultation room. New public baby-changing facilities and accessible WCs will be provided, and the existing female WCs will be converted into gender-neutral accessible WCs. A judge's retiring room will also be created with ramped access to the courtroom dais.
- 4.6 IT and AV Provision: The existing comms and patch rooms near risers will be utilized for new IT requirements in the hearing room. Dedicated server racks may be added as needed, and the AV and IT systems will be coordinated by HMCTS and Baker Hicks.
- 4.7 Repurposing Northwest Section: The northwest section, currently allocated for family waiting, first aid, and public restrooms, will be restructured to accommodate a new jury reception area and cloakroom/locker space. This will include gender-neutral, self-contained WCs, designed in line with Document T. New waiting rooms are relocated elsewhere in the ground floor.
- 4.8 Furniture and Seating Layout: Indicative internal layouts for the jury deliberation room, assembly room, and cloak/locker rooms meet the spatial requirements of the Court & Tribunal Design Guide (CTDG). Seating for the jury assembly area will feature HMCTS-approved chairs, with 127 seats integrated as requested.

- 4.9 Lift and Vertical Transportation: The previously used service lift (Lift No. 5) has been inspected and will be brought back into use.
- 4.10 Office Space Refurbishment: HMCTS office spaces will undergo light refurbishment, including the installation of gender-neutral WCs and a new tea point. A new staff locker room will be added near the main entrance, and the probation room will be repurposed for video calls. Security portals at the entrance will be replaced and upgraded to improve flow and access with pedestrian flow barriers to direct users through the security process.
- 4.11 Public Foyer Barista Point and Reception: A "grab-and-go" barista point with commercial catering equipment will be installed in the public foyer. This will include multideck refrigerators for prepacked food. A new reception desk will be installed, with associated PC connectivity for two receptionists. Both the reception desk and the barista point will be fixed to the floor but not make contact with the stonework on the walls. The existing reception point in the centre of the public hall will be removed and flooring repaired.
- 4.12 Car Parking: Existing secure car parking for the judiciary will remain unchanged, though it may be temporarily used by the contractor for staging, welfare, or material storage during construction, subject to further confirmation.
- 4.13 Access Control and Fire Safety: Existing access control systems will be reviewed, with the potential for modernisation to enhance fire safety, security, and out-of-hours working. A preliminary access control and locking plan has been proposed.
- 4.14 These proposals will enhance the building's functionality, improve accessibility, and update security and IT infrastructure while respecting the structural integrity of the building.
- Non-standard adjustments**
- 4.15 The proposal for the hearing room addresses several design and structural challenges while aiming to meet the required standards for judicial spaces. Below is a summary of the key points:
- 4.16 Nonstandard Layouts and Ceiling Heights: Due to the building's existing structure and mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) provisions, the hearing room will have nonstandard layouts.
- 4.17 Structural Adjustments: A structural column will be removed to maintain clear sightlines, which necessitates adding a beam that further lowers the ceiling height at the room's periphery to 2.66m. A coffered ceiling design has been proposed to add a sense of gravitas, with the central coffer at 3.1m above the courtroom floor, though this may require changes due to lighting and services design in the next stage.
- 4.18 Accessible Dock: The dock will include a custom-built ramp to accommodate wheelchair users. The ramp will be integrated into the dock's frontage and can be pulled out or folded down as needed for temporary access, ensuring accessibility for defendants on bail.
- 4.19 MEP and Cooling: Cooling will be provided to the hearing rooms, jury

assembly area, and consultation rooms. Other areas, such as offices and the advocates' robing room, will rely on natural ventilation through openable windows. This may require a derogation if external temperatures exceed 23°C, as the CTDG standard requires 21°C ±2°C.

4.20 The hearing room's design, while constrained by structural and MEP limitations, aims to deliver a functional space that meets key judicial requirements with necessary adjustments.

5.0 Access

5.1 Vehicular and Transport Links: The court's location offers good access to public transport links. Secure parking is available for judiciary members, with contractor access during construction phases.

5.2 Inclusive Design: All new and reconfigured spaces will be fully accessible. This includes ramped access to the hearing room, wheelchair-accessible docks, and new gender-neutral, self-contained WC facilities. The design ensures that all user groups, including jurors, judiciary, staff, and the public, can navigate the building safely and comfortably.

5.3 Security and Safety: Security measures, such as upgraded access control systems and enhanced sightlines in public areas, will be incorporated to ensure the safety of all building users.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The proposed development at Reading Crown Court carefully balances the need for modern, functional court spaces with the protection of the building’s heritage. The internal alterations are limited to the modern extension, ensuring minimal impact on the historically significant portions of the building. With full accessibility and security features, the new facilities will enhance the court’s operational capacity while respecting its historic character and features.