

ELDER

GREYFRIARS HOUSE

20 - 30 GREYFRIARS ROAD , READING

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

OPUS WORKS



Consultation Statement

Greyfriars House, Greyfriars Road, Reading,
RG1 1NS

1st November 2024

Contents

1.	Introduction	4
2.	Stakeholder Engagement	5
3.	Pre-Application Meetings	8
4.	The Public Exhibition	11
5.	Issues requiring further consideration and Design Team Response	15
6.	Conclusions	17

Appendix 1 – October 2024, Exhibition Boards

Appendix 2 – Feedback Forms

Appendix 3 – October 2024, Website Analytics

Appendix 4 – Comments Received (redacted)

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Our reference
OP-08-24

1st November 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Consultation Statement has been prepared by Opus Works Group Ltd to accompany an application for detailed planning permission at Greyfriars House, Reading.
- 1.2. The application is submitted on behalf of Elder Developments (Greyfriars) Limited (hereafter referred to as the 'Applicant').
- 1.3. Detailed planning permission in respect of the Proposed Development is sought for:
"Demolition of the existing building and the erection of a part-7, part-13 storey building comprising 266 Co-living units (Sui Generis) and associated communal amenity facilities, refuse storage, cycle parking and plant equipment"
- 1.4. The submission of this application for the Proposed Development follows wide-ranging, multi-stage pre-application discussions with a wide range of stakeholders and statutory consultees, including RBC Planning Officers, Ward and Senior Council Members, the Design Review Panel (Frame), local heritage groups, local residents and businesses and community organisations either located within or in close proximity to Greyfriars House (hereafter referred to as "the site").
- 1.5. The feedback provided has enabled significant, beneficial changes to the scheme to be identified and brought forward within the Proposed Development, as set out further in Section 5 of this document.



Figure 1 – Site Location, adjacent to Station Hill

2. Stakeholder Engagement

- 2.1. In addition to the technical meetings with Planning and Policy Officers, the detail of which is set out in the '*Design Consultations*' section of the DAS, the Design Team has sought to engage with Reading Borough Abbey Ward and Cabinet Members, local stakeholder groups and local residents and businesses during the pre-application stage. The feedback received has specifically influenced the overarching design approach.

Consultation undertaken to date

- 2.2. Meetings have been held with the following groups to date:
- Abbey Ward Members – 13th June 2024 and 18th September 2024 (the latter within the Public Exhibition)
 - Cabinet Member for Planning and Assets - 13th June 2024 and 18th September 2024 (the latter within the Public Exhibition)
 - Public Exhibition – 18th September 2024
 - Reading Civic Society, Conservation Area Advisory Committee, 13th June 2024 and 18th September 2024 (the latter within the Public Exhibition)
 - NHS Berkshire, Senior Management Team – 11th October 2024
 - Royal Berkshire Hospital and NHS Berkshire, Senior Management Team – 30th October 2024
- 2.3. The above groups, alongside Reading Economic Development Agency (REDA) were invited to the public exhibition.
- 2.4. To provide notice of the exhibition, a leaflet drop to 1,086 homes and businesses was undertaken a week before the event. Figure 2, overleaf, reproduces the notice. Figure 3, which follows, identifies the extent of the letterdrop, as denoted by the green line.
- 2.5. To support the direct outreach, public notices, which replicated that sent via direct post, were placed on Nextdoor and InYourArea. Press releases were also sent to Reading Chronicle, Reading Today and Thames Tap, who published details of the event in their respective publications and online.
- 2.6. To enable a range of comments from a diverse range of interested parties, a dedicated project website – www.greyfriarsreading.co.uk was developed, with this published online on 18th September to coincide with the public exhibition.
- 2.7. The detail of meetings held with stakeholders and response to the public and online exhibitions is set out in following sections.

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Redevelopment Proposals, Greyfriars House, Reading

PUBLIC EXHIBITION

AT: Broad Street Mall (use Main Entrance on Oxford Road—the exhibition is being held in a unit adjacent to the lifts and TK Maxx)

ON: Wednesday 18th September, 3.30pm—7.30pm

ONLINE

www.greyfriarsreading.co.uk

Elder is seeking to progress redevelopment proposals at Greyfriars House, located on Greyfriars Road, Reading.

The wider locality is undergoing a successful transformation and these proposals seek to complement the emerging new residential area with a Co-Living scheme that will provide wider residential choice and a more affordable product fit for 21st century needs.

To enable local residents and businesses to comment on the proposals, a public exhibition has been arranged at the time and location set out above.

The exhibition boards will also be available to view **online** at www.greyfriarsreading.co.uk from 3.30pm on the day of the exhibition to allow those unable to attend to review and provide comment.



The views of local residents matter to us. We therefore seek your views at this pre-application stage to allow amendments to be made to the scheme, as appropriate.

Comments can be made:

- in person on the day of the public exhibition
- via the website www.greyfriarsreading.co.uk or
- emailed directly to feedback@greyfriarsreading.co.uk

We look forward to welcoming you at our exhibition. This is a drop-in event that allows interested parties to attend at their own convenience during the stated opening hours.

Figure 2 – Extract from Public Exhibition Notice

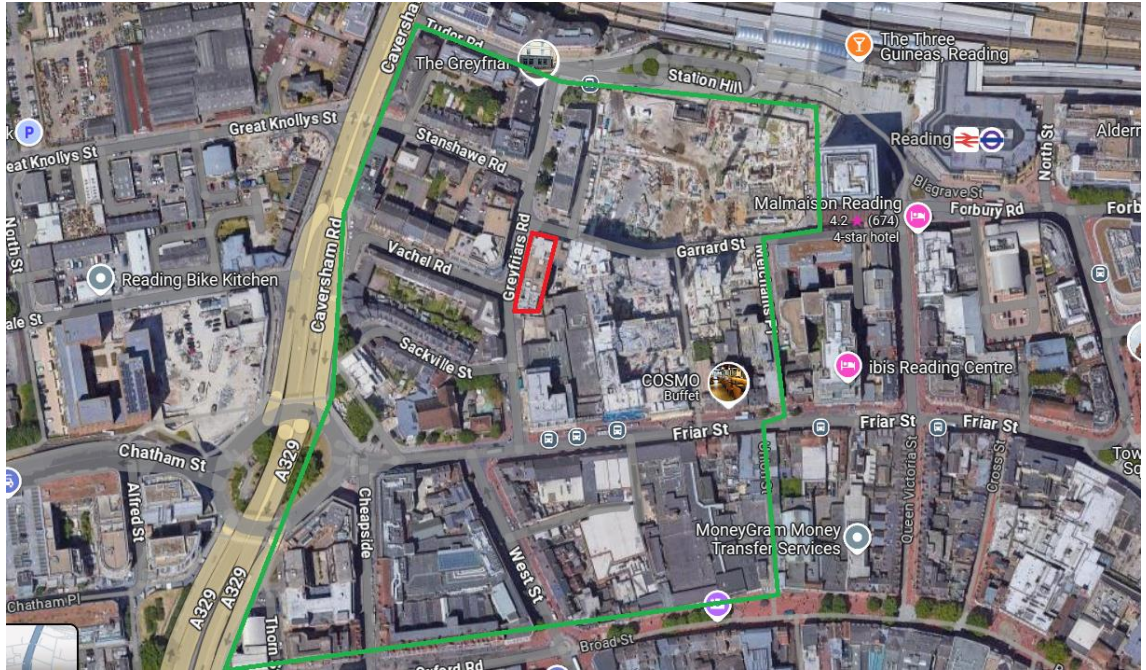


Figure 3 – Area of leaflet drop for September 2024 Public Exhibition

3. Pre-application meetings

- 3.1. The meetings held with key local decision-makers and stakeholders, in addition to the formal approaches to the Council's Planning Department and the Design Review Panel (Frame) has been invaluable in terms of understanding what is important to Reading in terms of the housing product being proposed, as well as identifying elements of the proposed development requiring further consideration or clarification in terms of approach.
- 3.2. The following paragraphs summarise key issues discussed at each of the stakeholder meetings. More detailed minutes have been produced and can be provided upon request.

Meeting with Abbey Ward Members and Cabinet Member for Planning and Assets, 13th June 2024

- Members desired to see greater materiality and finessing to the proposed design to ensure a scheme that would complement the character of the surrounding area and provide more visual interest
- Members were keen to understand how anti-social behaviour would be controlled and to have this set out within the planning submission
- Similarly, Members wished to see the relevant controls in place to ensure different cultural norms could be properly accommodated
- There was a strong desire to ensure that existing residents could benefit from the housing offer, including those on lower incomes
- It was suggested that the design include more vertical elements within the brickwork to help articulate the building
- Some concern was raised about the usability of the courtyard space at ground floor level, given the potential for reduced daylight
- The need for careful management of deliveries to the site was strongly advised, alongside off-street space for this
- Members requested that a clear description of Co-Living and the need for this in Reading was provided to assist with consideration of the proposals post-submission
- It was advised that the smaller element on Greyfriars Road could be made more distinct and different to the larger part of the building
- Members appreciated the housing product and how it could accommodate new entrants to the market or those working in the town on contracts
- Members were interested in proposals to house key workers on site to meet the affordable housing requirement and suggested meetings with Council Policy Officers, the NHS and University of Reading

Meeting with Reading Civic Society and Conservation Area Advisory Committee, 13th June 2024

- Some concern regarding sealed communities was raised and the potential for this to create a divide between existing and new residents

- Stakeholders were keen to understand the difference between BTR and Co-Living
- It was asked if Co-Living was a defined use and whether the Council had a policy to guide it.
- The re-use of the existing building was queried and whether this could be considered in preference to demolition and rebuild
- Further information on proposed ground floor uses was sought.
- The cascading approach to the design was queried and it was asked whether alternatives had been considered, including the significant stepdown between proposed parts of the building
- The use of red brick was queried, given significant other proposed and emerging developments featuring this, and it was suggested that some contrast could be beneficial
- The status/future of the Sainsbury's lapsed consent, which is adjacent, was queried
- Stakeholders asked for details of similar schemes and locations and how this had influenced the proposals
- It was requested that the site be made available to community/arts groups during the planning phase
- Reassurance was sought regarding the retention of the proposed accommodation quality over the longer term
- More detail regarding where residents were likely to be drawn from was requested

Meeting with NHS Berkshire, 11th October 2024

- Interested in the proposals and would like to understand more, including the structure for how units could be secured by the NHS for use, as well as the quantum and location of these
- Some concern about lack of parking on site, which would not benefit all NHS workers such as District Nurses, but recognised that arrangements could be made with existing providers for cover if necessary and this would suit staff using public transport or based centrally in the town.
- Recognised a strong need to house NHS key workers, citing staff retention being linked to cost of living and lack of supply
- Noted that space was needed for nurses and Doctors on rotation
- Identified that the space would appeal to newly qualified staff and that part of the NHS offer for new students could be to link the units to those due to go through the Nursing courses at this stage.
- Stated that the location close to the station was a key factor in the appeal of the offer to the NHS
- Significant research by the NHS had identified strong demand for the accommodation being offered, which would be shared with the applicant for use within the planning application
- It was agreed to continue discussions and to involve Royal Berkshire Hospital with a view to formalising an agreement to provide a long-term commitment to key worker accommodation on site

Meeting with Royal Berkshire Hospital, 30th October 2024

- It was reiterated that there is strong demand for this type of accommodation within the NHS, that there was support for the project and a desire to find an agreed structure between parties to enable delivery of key worker housing on site for NHS use. This provided a form of professionally managed accommodation in the town that is not currently available to the staff.
 - It was agreed that well designed, communal space was the right product for this use
 - How to accommodate family members or a plus one was raised
 - Further advice on how to group tenants to protect night shift workers was requested
 - Allowing certainty regarding tenancy was cited as a major factor in terms of the key worker offer working for the NHS (in terms of having access to an agreed amount of rooms for NHS use)
 - It was agreed that having one, larger resource in which to house key workers was significantly preferable to dealing with several landlords.
 - Further detail regarding the eventual owner/operator of the premises was requested
 - The NHS requested a local link within any structured deal for units to ensure that this would benefit nurses working in Reading, rather than those commuting to London
 - The NHS asked for detail regarding how people would be selected to live in the scheme
 - Detail of the proposed rental offer(s) for key workers was requested
 - The NHS requested more detail in terms of unit appearance, internal views etc alongside detail of similar schemes, noting that it would canvass opinion from potential users
 - Landlord flight, due to changes in Buy to Let policy was identified as a major issue for key workers seeking accommodation.
 - The NHS also recognised that affordability, particularly amongst new starters and those facing or going through relationship break-up was a key consideration and that Co-Living could help meet some of the issues faced, including provision of an establishment point for those living in the area to test the location over a shorter period before determining where to live.
 - It was agreed to seek further meetings with the Council to discuss the NHS' interest in the scheme and to meet within one month to develop details of a potential offer for key worker accommodation on site between parties.
 - The NHS offered to take part in discussions with the Council and to assist with submissions to the emerging Local Plan regarding use of Co-Living accommodation to support key workers in Reading.
- 3.3. More detail regarding the Design Team response to comments received during the pre-application process is summarised in Section 5 of this document.

4. The Public Exhibition

- 4.1 To ensure that a range of interested parties could comment upon the proposals, a well-publicised public engagement event was held on 18th September 2024, with this supported by an online presence.
- 4.2 The public exhibition was held within a vacant unit within the Broad Street Mall between 3.30pm and 7.30pm. The location chosen was highly visible close to the Dusseldorf Way entrance to encourage footfall and this was advertised within the Mall and directly outside of the unit itself to attract passers-by.



Figure 4 – Location of the public exhibition within Broad Street Mall

- 4.3 To support the direct notification to local residents and businesses, stakeholder groups subject to the earlier June 2024 consultation were invited to the exhibition to discuss matters and to review the updated proposals.
- 4.4 To aid understanding of the proposals, a series of Exhibition Boards were produced to explain the nature of the redevelopment, rationale for new build, site location, emerging context, plans, landscape plans, elevations and images, but also to explain more about Co-Living; what it is, who's it for and how it works. A copy of the exhibition boards forms Appendix 1 of this document. The project website replicated the detail shown on the exhibition boards to ensure that all interested parties, whether attending in person or viewing online had access to the same level of information.
- 4.5 To enable comments from interested parties, a feedback form including some targeted questions regarding the proposed use was provided at the exhibition. The feedback form was also provided online. A copy of the feedback form is provided within Appendix 2.



Figure 5 – photograph from the public exhibition, 18th September 2024

- 4.6 Despite the significant advance notification, a relatively low total of 12 people attended the exhibition.
- 4.7 The website attracted 144 individual users over the following 21 day engagement period for submission of comments. The website analytics are provided in Appendix 3 for review.
- 4.8 At the time of writing, 5 sets of comments have been received from the exhibitions and online, a summary of which is set out below.

Summary of Comments Received

- 4.9 Interested parties were asked to provide their responses to a series of questions regarding the development and proposed use. The responses are as summarised below:

1. Are you:
Resident – 5 Business – 0 Organisation – 0 Other – 0
2. Have you previously heard of Co-Living Accommodation?
Yes – 4 No – 1
3. A number of design, location, environmental and technical considerations have influenced our proposals. Are there any other factors that should have been taken into account?

- Consider going higher as a signature corner building, to allow larger units
 - Family homes
 - Yes, the building you want to knock down cost millions to build, architects design. Do not knock it down.
 - Thousands of new residents are moving into central Reading which has a Victorian sewage system
 - How do you propose to integrate residents into Reading life (not just commercial life, with discounts etc?) e.g. the voluntary sector, community gardening
 - Architectural merit
4. Do you agree that Reading has significant, unmet housing need?
Strongly Agree – 4 Agree – 0 Neutral – 0 Disagree – 0 Strongly Disagree – 0
5. Do you support Co-Living as a means of meeting this need through a more affordable housing product?
Strongly Agree – 1 Agree – 2 Neutral – 2 Disagree – 0 Strongly Disagree – 0
6. Would you like to see more key worker accommodation in Reading?
Yes – 5 No – 0
7. Do you agree that Co-Living schemes could meet Key Worker need?
Strongly Agree – 1 Agree – 1 Neutral – 1 Disagree – 2 Strongly Disagree – 0
8. What aspects of the scheme do you like? (tick all that apply)
Accommodation – 2 Gym – 3 Cinema – 3 Shared Kitchen – 2
Workspaces – 3

Landscaping – 3 Internal Amenity – 2 External Amenity – 2
Other – 1 (bike share scheme)
9. Do you have any other comments?

Design

- The block looks architecturally boring, give it a bit of flair
- The building to knock down is nice, imaginative, diverse. The building to go up is hideous

Housing

- I'm interested in the future management of the scheme

- Family homes

Landscaping

- I'm interested in how the landscaping will be maintained. No irrigation system?

Other

- Thank you for spending time introducing the scheme. It is very thought provoking.

4.10 A copy of all comments received (with personal details redacted) is provided within Appendix 4 for consideration.

5. Issues requiring further consideration and Design Team Response

5.1 Given the relative scarcity of comments and the numerous methods employed to ensure local interested parties were aware of the proposals, it is considered that the proposals are not considered controversial and that there is a mix of support and relative apathy in respect of the scheme.

5.2 Notwithstanding this, the engagement undertaken has identified some key themes:

- There is support for housing delivery in Reading
- It is agreed that Co-Living can contribute towards housing need
- There is support for key worker accommodation within the scheme
- The range of amenities offered is considered positive and beneficial

5.3 In respect of areas flagged for further consideration, the Design Team has sought to investigate these further and positively respond as part of the planning submission, as follows:

- *How to further improve the design/CGI's to provide more certainty regarding the quality of scheme design*

Significant design development has been undertaken to provide more detailing and contrast to brickwork, window treatment and the framing of the structure, providing differentiation between the higher and lower elements of the scheme and creating a clear top, middle and bottom order to the proposed built form. Further detail is set out on pages 98 – 102 of the DAS.

Robust assessment regarding use of existing built form

Further work has been undertaken to determine whether to retain and extend the existing building. It was concluded that this was less preferable to a new build structure given the very poor environmental performance of the existing building alongside prohibitive costs associated with refurbishment. Through new build, a more sustainable and biodiverse building can be produced that is purpose-built which more effectively and efficiently meets the needs of its residents.

- *Provision of further information following discussions with the NHS to clearly identify that the scheme can benefit key workers*

Further to two meetings in October 2024, there is a commitment to continue dialogue, jointly discuss matters with the Council and to submit supporting detail as part of the emerging Local Plan process.

- *Clear advice regarding any services/infrastructure issues and how these are being dealt with, including any potential S106 contributions*

The approach to these matters is set out in more detail in the Planning Statement, Energy and Sustainability Statement and Drainage Strategy documents. The applicant remains committed to discussing detailed matters with statutory consultees during the planning determination process.

- *Thought as to whether any initiatives to assist local community groups are merited - Jelly, which is a local arts-based group are always looking for contributions towards programmable space initiatives. Food4Families is also a local food growing group that is active in the locality.*

Initial discussions have been held with local community groups and it is intended to advance these further over coming weeks, so that the matter can be reported on to the Council during the planning determination process.

How will Anti-Social behaviour be controlled?

It is intended that the premises will operate using licencing agreements, as is common in similar Co-Living schemes, which provide a set of rules regarding expectations and behaviour. The agreement will operate on a 3 strikes and out rule. There will be Resident Ambassadors whose job it is to create the right ethos within the building, one of self-policing. In addition to this, the Management Team will be present on-site and take regular walk abouts.

Concern about the usability of the Courtyard space

The proposals offer a range of differing internal and external amenity spaces that will meet the varying needs of residents. Having a mix of exposed and shaded external areas allows for use throughout the year and in different conditions. The amenity offer is significant and provides a significant project benefit.

How will the scheme guard against sealed communities?

The proposed development is similar in many ways to traditional flatted or BTR schemes in that most spaces are there for the enjoyment of residents. Notwithstanding this, guests of residents can use the facilities and stay and there are a number of public places proposed within the ground floor layout.

How will the development remain attractive and not deteriorate over the long-term?

The proposals will be owned by investors looking for low-risk, long-term revenue from the asset. As such, to ensure that value is maintained there is an in-built need to retain quality and ensure that residents stay and/or new ones are attracted. This approach, which is similar to BTR, offers a significant benefit over traditional build for sale where the asset value is realised upon sale, often leading to lower ongoing investment in the asset.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 This Consultation Statement has been prepared by Opus Works to accompany a detailed planning application for:

“Demolition of the existing building and the erection of a part-7, part-13 storey building comprising 266 Co-living units (Sui Generis) and associated communal amenity facilities, refuse storage, cycle parking and plant equipment”

- 6.2 The planning application has been submitted following significant pre-application engagement with Council Officers and Members, local stakeholder groups and local residents and businesses, which has helped positively mould the proposals submitted for consideration as set out within this document and the DAS.
- 6.3 Further to the pre-application process held and comments received, it is clear that demand for Co-Living in Reading is strong and can help meet the Council deliver on housing need. The proposals themselves do not appear to be controversial or unsupported.
- 6.4 The applicant remains committed to positive and proactive engagement with the Council during the planning determination process and welcomes further discussions in respect of on-site key worker provision.

Appendix 1 – October 2024, Exhibition Boards

Appendix 2 – Feedback Forms

Appendix 3 – October 2024, Website Analytics

Appendix 4 – Comments Received (redacted)

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