



PLANNING BY DESIGN

FROM CONCEPT TO COMPLETION

**Erection of polytunnel in the rear garden
at:
23 Surley Row, Emmer Green, Reading, RG4 8ND**

Planning Statement including Heritage Impact

**Written and prepared by Planning By Design on
Behalf of Matthew Stead**

Date: 09 October 2023

1. Application

Planning By Design (**The agent**) has been instructed to act on behalf of Matthew Stead (**the applicant**) to submit a planning application to Reading Borough Council (**the Planning Authority**) for the Erection of the polytunnel in the rear garden at 23 Surley Row, Emmer Green, Reading, RG4 8ND (**the Site**). In support of this application, the following Planning and Heritage Statement has been constructed to demonstrate the suitability of this site for this proposal and evaluate its accordance with National and Local planning policies.

2. Site Location

The application site includes two storey Grade II Listed building located at the junction of Surley Row and Sheep Walk in Emmer Green, Reading. The application site also falls within the Surley Row Conservation Area. The application site is not associated with any other planning constraints.

The wider area comprises a mixture of detached, semi-detached and terraced properties. The application site benefits from a large garden area to the rear of the property. The proposed polytunnel is proposed to be situated at the far back of the rear garden.

The application site is located in flood zone 1 which means a low probability of flooding.

3. The Proposed Development

This planning application seeks planning approval for the erection of a polytunnel at the far back garden of the site.

The proposed polytunnel dimensions are 4.27m wide x 7.62m long x 2.48m high, to be erected over the current vegetable patch to lengthen the growing season and provide the ability to grow more fruit and vegetables at home while being more water efficient. The polytunnel is proposed to be sited at the rear left side of the property as viewed from the road. Existing high hedges, topiary, and trees would screen the polytunnel from view from the road.

4. Planning History

Searching the council's planning database in October 2023 it was established that the application site has the following planning history:

- 120828/LBC - Internal and external works to provide insulation, new flooring, secondary glazing and re-decoration – Permitted on 5/ 2/2013
- 150557/LBC - Replacement utility room window and landing window, and lounge French doors. Replacement of cracked panes in utility room window and hall window. Refurbishment of all other windows – Permitted on 31/ 7/2015

- 221203/HOU - Replacement of a rotten wooden window, second floor overlooking the driveway with a new wooden double glazed window – Permitted on 02 June 2023

5. Heritage Impact Assessment

The NPPF sets out the government's planning policies for England. The NPPF confirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to achieving sustainable development and that local planning authorities should approach decisions in a positive and creative way.

Whilst the NPPF is not part of the statutory development plan it is a material consideration of significant weight in the planning balance.

At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraphs 11-14). The purpose of this Statement is to assess whether possible future development of the application site is capable of meeting the test of sustainable development as regards its impact on the historic environment.

Paragraph 197 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local planning authorities to take into account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. This states that:

'197. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- (a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- (b) the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- (c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.'

Paragraph 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework states, 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be)...' Paragraph 200 states that 'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification...'

Paragraphs 201 and 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework make a distinction between proposals that will lead to '...substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of)...' a designated heritage asset (paragraph 201) and proposals which will cause '...less than substantial harm...' (paragraph 202).

Significance is the concept that underpins current conservation philosophy. The significance of heritage assets is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework as, 'The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'.

Paragraph 203 of the NPPF states - The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgment will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Surley Row Conservation Area

Surley Row Conservation Area comprises a linear lane running approximately north west from the top of Peppard Road hill across a valley now occupied by Rotherfield Way, which crosses Surley Row towards its northwestern end. It brings together a number of important listed buildings and more recent infill developments. The main part of the lane, southeast of Rotherfield Way lacks footpaths and the highway edge is generally defined by high brick walls. Part of the southwestern side here has cobbled gutters. The north eastern end possesses footpaths but is again defined by high brick walls. Traditional street lighting is absent from the area. There is no through route for vehicular traffic along the main part, which is prevented by bollards on the Surley Row hill just southeast of Rotherfield Way and signage at either end. The overall character of the area contrasts quite markedly with the modern housing developments which surround it, particularly on either side of Rotherfield Way and to the northeast. The area has the feel of a peaceful village street compared with its surrounds, and the busy Peppard Road (classified B481) at its south-eastern end.

Although a small area, it is quite distinctive within Reading Borough, and comprises features justifying its Conservation Area status. It also fits the concept that new Conservation Areas, i.e. those designated after the Planning Committee resolution of 20 February 1987, should be small, easily definable and manageable.

The character and boundaries of the Surley Row Conservation Area remain unchanged since its designation, although development has taken place in the grounds of Caversham Hill (now called Osbert House) and Springfield St Luke within the area. These developments are considered to be in keeping with the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and respect the listed buildings on each site and retain essential boundary features. The Caversham Hill proposals were a redevelopment of existing buildings on the site and are a considerable improvement on what was on the site previously, as well as respecting the character and setting of the listed building on site. The development of the Springfield St Luke site was the subject of a Planning Brief (drawn up in response to pressures to develop

the site) which was adopted for the purposes of public consultation on 21 August 1987 and formally adopted on 23 October 1987.

Listed building

23 Surley Row (Farmcote) is a grade II, 18th-century listed building. It is two two-storey brick cottage, front away from road with catslide tiled roof. It comprises stucco to garden. Regency corner to the west with 3 arched lights and tented verandah extending to garden door. Taller mid 19th century extension with 2 storey bay to south. Interior much altered, one room has stop-chamfered beam (probably early-mid C18) and exposed joists.

Impact on conservation area and listed building

The proposed polytunnel would be of modest size and scale and situated in the far back garden, far away from the Grade II listed building and away from any public vantage points. The polytunnel would be well-screened by existing trees and would be hardly seen from the view of the Listed Building. The position and scale of the proposed polytunnel is therefore not considered to cause substantial harm to the character of the conservation area and listed building. The temporary nature of the polytunnel makes it very easy to dismantle when longer no in use or need.



Figure 1: View towards property No 5 Sheep Walk (southwest)



Figure 2: View towards 21 Surley Row (southeast)



Figure 3: View towards Sheep Walk (northwest)



Figure 4: View towards the main house (Surley Row) northwest

6. Assessment

The following policy and guidance documents are recognized as primary considerations for the decision of the associated application at the site location

- National Planning Policy Framework;
- National Planning Practice Guidance;
- Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted November 2019)

5.1. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

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

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

- ii) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and
- iii) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment, including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

Analysis: *The proposal will positively contribute to all three development objectives outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework. From a social perspective, the proposal will enable the applicant to lengthen the growing season and provide the ability to grow more fruit and vegetables at home while being more water-efficient. This will ensure that the applicants can maximise the harvest and have locally produced food. From an environmental perspective, the proposal will not lead to any visual disruption nor will it result in any impact on residential amenity. Economically, the proposal will help stimulate economic activity at a local level as local fitters and suppliers will be sought following planning approval.*

Section 12 of the NPPF relates to achieving Well-designed Places which states that “The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make the development acceptable to communities

Analysis: *As highlighted through the supplied planning drawings and designs, the proposal will not result in any significant change to the area's existing street scene character as the proposed polytunnel would be discreetly placed to have minimal impact on the residential amenity and heritage asset.*

Furthermore, Section 12 of the NPPF also outlines that Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development.
- b) are visually attractive because of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping.
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

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

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

f) create places that are safe, inclusive, and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users⁴⁹; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Analysis: The proposal considers the importance of a well-designed place that would not significantly affect the character of the place in a negative way.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF describes the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Additionally, paragraph 11 specifically states that for decision-making this means (amongst other things):

- approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
- where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
 - ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole

In line with the National Planning Policy Framework, Planning by Design kindly request a timely decision to be made on the proposal. Additionally, Planning by Design welcomes the opportunity to engage in any relevant discussion with the appointed case officer on behalf of the applicant to address any concerns or further queries.

6.2. Local Plan Context

Of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) there are the following planning policies relevant for this proposal:

- CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

- EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
- EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
- EN6: New Development in a Historic Context

Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm

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. The various components of development form, including: -

- Layout: urban structure and urban grain;
- Landscape;
- Density and mix;
- Scale: height and massing; and
- Architectural detail and materials

will be assessed to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to the following urban design objectives: -

- Character - a place with its own identity and sense of place
- Continuity and enclosure
- Quality of the public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping
- Ease of movement and permeability
- Legibility - clear image and easy to understand
- Adaptability – capable of adaptation over time
- Diversity – meets a wide range of needs.

Developments will also 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;
- Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping.

Analysis: *The proposed polytunnel would be a small-scale development in the far back garden which will sit well with the existing built and natural environment. The proposal will be only for domestic use and the polytunnel is capable of being removed and dismantled at any given*

time if necessary. The temporary nature of the polytunnel provides flexibility and adaptability. It is therefore considered that the proposal accords with policy CC7 of the Local Reading Plan.

CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new 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;
- Crime and safety; or
- Wind, where the proposals involve new development of more than 8 storeys.

The position of habitable rooms, windows and outdoor living spaces will be particularly important. A back-to-back distance of 20 metres between dwellings is usually appropriate, although the circumstances on individual sites may enable dwellings to be closer without a detrimental effect on privacy. As well as immediate impacts, other aspects to which this policy applies will include matters such as hours of operation of businesses, and effects of traffic movements, particularly of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs). Where an otherwise acceptable development could change its character to a use that would have a greater impact on amenity without needing planning permission, conditions will be applied to restrict such changes

Analysis: *The proposed polytunnel will be placed at the corner of the garden of Surely Row 23. Properties No21 Surley Row and No. 5 Sheep Walk are adjacent neighbours and this proposal. The proposed polytunnel will be 2.48m in height and the height of the fence around the property is around 1.8-2.0m. Therefore, the proposed polytunnel will be slightly higher than the existing fence and the layout and design of the polytunnel is that the height part is in the middle while the front and rear parts are slightly smaller. The property No 5 Sheep Walk does not have any habitable windows facing towards the proposed polytunnel, while 21 Surley Row has first-floor rear windows looking towards the proposed polytunnel. However, there is high fence in place and existing mature trees and hedges on the boundary line 21 and 23 Surley Row, so it is not considered that the impact on the amenity will be detrimental with the proposed new polytunnel.*

EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

Historic features, areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings will be protected and where possible enhanced.

This will include:

- Listed Buildings;
- Conservation Areas;
- Scheduled Monuments;
- Historic parks and gardens; and
- Other features with local or national significance, such as sites and features of archaeological importance, and assets on the Local List.

All proposals will be expected to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located.

Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits.

Applications which affect Listed Buildings will not have an adverse impact on those elements which contribute to their special architectural or historic interest including, where appropriate, their settings.

Development will not detract from the enjoyment, layout, design, character, appearance, features or setting of the park or garden, key views out from the park, or prejudice its future restoration.

Applications which affect, or have the potential to affect, the significant features of heritage assets should be justified by a Heritage Statement.

The Council will monitor buildings and other heritage assets at risk through neglect, decay or other threats, proactively seeking solutions for assets at risk including consideration of appropriate development schemes that will ensure the repair and maintenance of the asset, and, as a last resort, using its statutory powers. Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect or of damage to a heritage asset, the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision.

Analysis: *The proposed development will have minimal impact on the heritage asset of conservation area and listed building. The proposal will not change or alter any aspect of the listed building and its character since the proposed polytunnel will be situated at the far back garden, distanced from the grade II listed building. The proposal will protect the historic environment and the proposal will not cause any harm to it. Given the above, it is considered that the proposal is in line with the local policy EN1.*

EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas

The special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and enhanced. Development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Positive consideration will be given to proposals which take opportunities to enhance the character of conservation areas.

These may include:

- Reducing visual clutter caused by negative factors, such as poles and overhead wires, satellite dishes or unnecessary street furniture;
- Restoring original building features;
- Removing inappropriate additions or alterations to buildings;
- Protecting and encouraging the maintenance of green spaces and important trees, particularly where they are intrinsic to the history and character of the area;
- Improving signage and street furniture;
- Restoring or re-establishing appropriate paving, railings or walls;
- Sympathetic landscaping and planting;
- Improving or restoring green spaces, including front gardens, that are appropriate to the historic interest of a Conservation Area;
- Signage that reveals and promotes the Conservation Area and its boundaries;
- Interpretation panels to inform the public of the area's historical significance.

Where a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan has been adopted for a particular Conservation Area, this will be a material consideration in determining applications for development.

Analysis: *The proposed development will be situated and the back garden, away from any public roads, and public views. The proposal will be screened with existing mature trees and hedgerows, some of which are under the Tree Protection Order. However, the proposed polytunnel will have no impact on the existing TPO in the rear garden and all trees will remain. The impact on the historic environment with regards to the conservation area and listed building has been justified in the previous section. It has been demonstrated that no harm will be caused. Having that in mind, it is considered that the proposal accords policy EN3 of the Local Plan.*

EN6: New Development in a Historic Context

In areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment will inform and shape new development. New development will make a contribution to the historic character of the area by respecting and enhancing its architectural and visual qualities and considering how heritage considerations can influence the design of new development.

When determining planning applications for new development, the following factors will be taken into consideration:

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

Analysis: *The proposed development will have a positive contribution to the existing historic townscape and it will be of sympathetic scale, size, and height; and protect key vistas and views. The polytunnel will bring several benefits to the applicant while preserving the historic context of the site and having no detrimental impact on the historic environment.*

7. Conclusion

This proposal for the erection of a polytunnel in the back garden is considered to be an appropriate development, in line with planning policy and the developmental planning context for this area. The proposed development is a modest development with minimal impact on the built and natural environment. As such, it is heavily believed that this proposal is acceptable in principle and should be awarded a grant in planning permission as it will not result in any detrimental impact on the areas existing landscape character, nor will it deter from residential amenity.

The proposal will deliver significant social and economic benefits to the applicant while not resulting in any detrimental harm to the area's surrounding environment or harm the listed building (main dwelling) and conservation area.

For this reason, we see no reason for the Council to withhold our request for planning permission and kindly request that the Council make a reasonable decision on this submission in line with the developmental objectives and timescales of the National Planning Policy Framework. Should the Planning Authority have any further questions in relation to this proposal or feel that certain conditions would be necessary to accommodate this proposal, Planning By Design would welcome a conversation on any of these matters.