

For and on behalf of
Adam Vickers (Adcastle Ltd)

PLANNING STATEMENT

59-61 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7SN

**Prepared by
DLP Planning Ltd
Bristol**

August 2023



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0.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 0.1 DLP Planning Ltd has been instructed by Adcastle Ltd to submit an application to Reading Borough Council for the development of office pods in the rear courtyards of the properties at 59-61 Castle Street, Reading. The current buildings, under Class E, serve as office spaces, but the growing need for additional capacity necessitates the development of these office pods. This statement comprises an integral component of the application submission and should be considered alongside all other plans and documents forming the comprehensive application.
- 0.2 The application site is within the administrative boundary of Reading Borough, with the local authority serving as the Local Planning Authority (the LPA). The site is situated within the central commercial area of Reading and is located within a conservation area. The buildings on site, 59-61 Castle Street, are Grade II listed. The proposed office pods will share existing facilities, including toilets and kitchen areas, with the existing buildings on site.
- 0.3 The expansion into office pods is compatible with the current land usage, underlined by its location in a commercial area. Additionally, there are no infrastructure requirements due to the sharing of existing facilities. The proposed development encourages business growth and supports the creation of new job opportunities within the local community.
- 0.4 The proposal is acceptable in principle complying with the relevant Development Plan policies. This statement has assessed all the other relevant planning considerations and found that the scheme is fully compliant with the Development Plan and other material policy considerations, including national policy and the pursuit of sustainable development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement is submitted in support of the full planning application seeking permission for three office pods to be developed within the rear courtyards of 59-61 Castle Street, Reading.
- 1.2 This Statement sets out the main planning considerations and justifications for the development. In support of the application, this Statement demonstrates that the proposed development is acceptable in principle and expands upon issues relating to principle of development, design and amenity, and impact upon historic environment.
- 1.3 The application submitted comprises the following plans and documents:
- Drawing No. 1123_01 – Floor Plan and Elevations
 - Drawing No. 1123_02 – Location Plan
 - Drawing No. 1123_03 – Existing & Proposed Block Plans
 - Planning Statement by DLP Planning (August 2023)
- 1.4 This statement should be read in conjunction with the plans and documents that make up the application as a whole.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 The application site is located at 59-61 Castle Street within Reading's regional centre, as defined within the Local Plan. Being in a central location, this site is prominently positioned for commercial use.
- 2.2 The site comprises of two buildings that are utilised for office use. The existing properties on site are Victorian terraced buildings. Comprising brick construction and sash windows, the buildings are typical designs of Victorian architecture and are Grade II listed. The site is surrounded by a mixture of uses. This can be seen in **Figure 1** below.



Figure 1 – Site Location (taken from Google Maps)

- 2.3 Access to the site is primarily via Castle Street, ensuring convenient connection to the expansive road network to the west of the site (AS29). The design of this network supports efficient vehicular movement. Furthermore, the site's central location provides easy access for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 2.4 The character of the area is predominantly urban, with buildings on Castle Street typically two and three storeys, built to the back edge of the pavement. This character is reflective of the medieval street pattern of this part of Reading, being the original core of the town, with good examples of buildings dating from all periods from the sixteenth century onwards.

- 2.5 To the north of the site is Castle Street and Thames Valley Police Station. To the south and west of the site is predominantly residential and commercial uses, but beyond that to the west, Reading's main retail shopping centre is located. These elements jointly contribute to a dynamic and multifaceted local environment.
- 2.6 The site does not fall within a Green Belt or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); however, it is positioned within a designated Conservation Area (St Mary's butts/castle street). The entire site is classified within Flood Zone 1, indicating a low probability of flooding.

3.0 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The application seeks planning permission for the development of three office pods to be located on site at 59-61 Castle Street, Reading. It is proposed that these office pods will be strategically located to the rear of the site, hidden from public view, thus maintaining the existing street scene. The proposed office pods can be seen below in Figure 2.

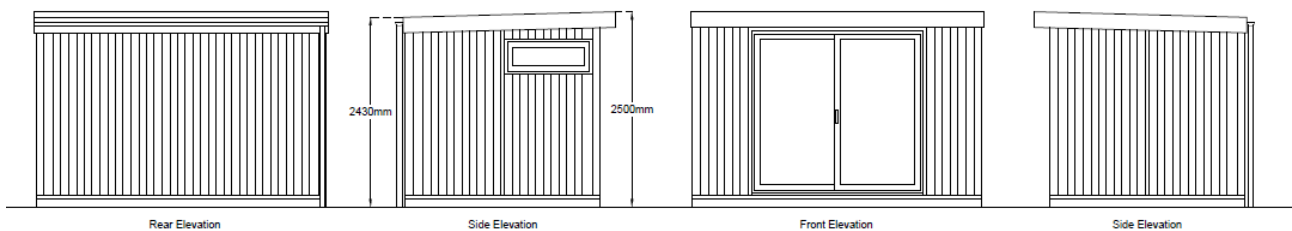


Figure 2 – Site Location Plan

- 3.2 The business operating within 59-61 Castle Street is experiencing growth and requires additional desk space. By introducing office pods at the rear of the existing buildings, the site offers a flexible solution to accommodate the expanding business needs.
- 3.3 The development of the office pods represents a vital opportunity to stimulate the local economy. By meeting the spatial needs of the growing business, the proposal will not only sustain the existing workforce but potentially generate further employment opportunities within the community, fostering economic vitality in Reading.
- 3.4 Employees working within the proposed office pods would have access to the existing facilities within 59-61 Castle Street, such as toilets and kitchen. This integration of resources promotes efficient land use and ensures that the new development is compatible with the existing site functions.
- 3.5 The introduction of the office pods is in harmony with the existing use of the site for office purposes. By positioning the pods at the rear of the existing Victorian terraced buildings, they remain concealed from public view, ensuring that there is no harmful impact on the street scene or surrounding urban fabric.
- 3.6 By supporting the local business's expansion, the proposal embodies a proactive approach to sustainable development and will make a positive contribution to Reading's economy.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 A review of the Council's online planning register shows the following applications which are of relevance to this application:

61 Castle Street

- 120204
Internal alterations to basement, ground floor and first floor including removal and erection of internal walls to accommodate new building layout.
Permitted
- 110761
Change of use from B1a (office) to D1 (chiropractic).
Permitted

- 4.2 There is no publicly accessible planning history that is of relevance to this application from 59 Castle Street.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 5.1 Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning decisions should be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan

- 5.2 The Development Plan for Reading is set out in the Reading Borough Local Plan, which was adopted in November 2019 (the Local Plan), and The Central and Eastern Berkshire Minerals and Waste Plan, which was adopted in January 2023.

- 5.3 The policies that are of relevance to this application are:

- CC1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- 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
- EM1 – Provision of Employment Development
- EM2 – Location of New Employment Development
- EM4 – Maintaining a Variety of Premises
- RL1 – Network and Hierarchy of Centres

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was revised on 20th July 2021. The Framework sets out the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policies for England and details how these are expected to be applied. It is, in itself, a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 5.5 The Framework states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, which can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means "*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 as a whole.”

5.6 The Framework defines the three overarching objectives of sustainable development as:

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 at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*

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*

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.*

5.7 These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of policies in the Framework; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.

5.8 Paragraph 218 of the Framework advises that the policies within the Framework are material considerations which should be taken into account in dealing with applications from the day of its publication.

- 5.9 Paragraph 219 of the Framework advises that existing policies should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted or made prior to publication. Due weight should be given to them, according to their degree of consistency with the Framework and that the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given.
- 5.10 Section 12 of the Framework provides context to design within planning. Paragraph 126 states *“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 development acceptable to communities.”*
- 5.11 Section 6 of the Framework provides context for building a strong and competitive economy. Paragraph 81 states *“Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential.”*
- 5.12 Section 16 of the Framework provides context for the conserving and enhancement of the historic environment. Paragraph 194 states that *“In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.”*
- 5.13 Furthermore, in section 16, Paragraph 199 states that *“When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.”* Additionally, 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."

Other Material Policy Consideration

- 5.14 In the assessment of this application, it is imperative to underline the statutory position accorded by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). The Act states in Section 66(1), *"In considering whether to grant planning permission [or listed building consent] for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses."* This primary test underscores the importance of weighing any potential harm against the architectural or historic significance of a listed building or its setting. The Act offers clear directives on the protection and conservation of listed buildings and areas of special architectural or historic interest. Furthermore, the Act establishes this preservation as a material consideration in determining any planning application. Consequently, any proposal affecting such assets must be evaluated against the Act's provisions, ensuring that due weight is given to the preservation of our valued heritage assets.
- 5.15 Another important material consideration is the "St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal." This appraisal covers the conservation area where the proposed site is located. It documents and analyses the features that give the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area its special architectural and historic interest. Therefore, any development proposals for this site should consider the information and recommendations in this appraisal to ensure they do not harm the unique qualities of this conservation area.

Appropriate Weight

- 5.16 Regarding the weight that is given, Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that, determination of applications must be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance, full weight is given to the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
- 5.17 As it forms the basis of Government policy for planning applications, substantial weight should be given to the policies of the Framework.

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Having regard for the proposed development; the sites planning history; the relevant planning policy context; and all other material issues; the main planning considerations for the determination of this application relate to the principle of development, design and amenity, and impact upon historic environment.

Principle of Development

- 6.2 The main policy considerations relating to the principle of development for this proposal are governed by policies EM4: Maintaining a Variety of Premises and RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres. These policies collectively provide the guiding framework that emphasises sustainable economic growth within Reading's regional centre.
- 6.3 Policy EM4 underscores the importance of preserving and enhancing a variety of employment spaces, advocating for a diverse range of types and sizes of units within the Borough. This policy aligns with the development proposal to create additional desk space through the development of office pods at 59-61 Castle Street, thereby maintaining and expanding the range of premises that encourage business growth.
- 6.4 Policy RL1 stipulates that the majority of development should occur within Reading's regional centre. This proposal complies with this guideline, being situated within the prescribed area, and serves to support the economic objectives of the region by allowing the occupying business to expand.
- 6.5 In accordance with both policies EM4 and RL1, the proposed development aims to increase the provision of desk space at the existing office premises, facilitating the growth of the occupied business. By enhancing the site's functionality, the proposal aims to contribute to the economic prosperity of the area and increase employment opportunities within the region.

Design and Amenity

- 6.6 Policy CC7 states 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."* Furthermore, Policy CC8 asserts that *"Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties."* These policies collectively inform the design principles guiding

the proposal.

- 6.7 The design approach for the proposed office pods embraces a modern and small-scale concept that complements the mixture of architectural designs within the area. This thoughtful integration ensures that the design enriches and respects the diverse character of the surroundings.
- 6.8 The proposed office pods are designed with specific elements such as uPVC windows and sliding doors, which contribute to keeping noise contained. This will eliminate potential disturbances to neighbours and aligns with the principle of maintaining the living environment stated in Policy CC8. Additionally, the orientation of the proposed pods is carefully planned to face towards the existing buildings on site, thus ensuring no overlooking of neighbouring properties. This layout, combined with the considered use of materials and design features, reflects a thorough commitment to protecting neighbouring amenity.
- 6.9 The proposed construction method for the office pods emphasises simplicity and sustainability, aligning with contemporary standards for environmental responsibility. By utilising prefabricated elements and modular construction techniques, the development ensures a more efficient and less disruptive construction process. This approach not only shortens construction timelines but also minimises waste and energy consumption. Moreover, the design and positioning of the pods have been carefully considered to protect the fabric of the existing Grade II listed buildings on site, ensuring that the architectural integrity and historic value of these structures remain uncompromised. This approach represents a sustainable method of expansion that respects both the heritage and the amenity of the area.
- 6.10 The proposed development's design, layout, scale, and material choices are tailored to align with the site's specific characteristics and the broader urban context of Reading. As such, the proposed office pods fully align with the requirements detailed within policies CC7 and CC8.

Impact upon Historic Environment

- 6.11 Policy EN1 states that "*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."

- 6.12 Policy EN3 states that "*The special interest, character, and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and enhanced.*" Furthermore, Policy EN6 states that "*In areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment will inform and shape new development.*"
- 6.13 Beyond these policies, the statutory position underscores the duty of the decision-maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest it possesses, as emphasised in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 6.14 The two principal heritage assets relevant to the proposed site are the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area and the pair of Grade II listed buildings situated directly on the site. The listed buildings' significance is primarily attributed to their front elevations, which exemplify the characteristics of classic Victorian townhouses. Meanwhile, the conservation area's distinctiveness is rooted in the landmark St Mary's Church building and the prominent frontages on Castle Street, which incorporate the buildings on the site. These heritage components play a vital role in defining the significance of this historical area.
- 6.15 The office pods are proposed to be located at the rear of the site. This strategic positioning ensures that the development has no detrimental visual impact on the street scene or surrounding urban fabric. By thoughtfully situating the pods away from direct public view, the proposal demonstrates a respect for the significance of the surrounding heritage assets.
- 6.16 The small size of the proposed office pods plays a vital role in ensuring that the development does not harm the historic environment. Their modest scale is deliberately chosen to preserve the integrity of the site's heritage context. Additionally, the well-designed office pods, with their modern aesthetics, will complement the existing buildings on site, creating a balance between modern innovation and tradition.
- 6.17 Given the aforementioned reasons, it can be stated that the development results in 'less than substantial harm' at the lowest end of the scale, to the historic environment.

- 6.18 The Framework at Paragraph 202 further emphasises, *"Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use."*
- 6.19 The proposed development offers significant public benefits, primarily in the form of employment opportunities. The introduction of office pods is expected to strengthen the local economy, creating jobs and stimulating business growth. In an era where workspace adaptability is essential, these pods can serve as hubs for innovation, collaboration, and economic prosperity. Thus, when weighing the public benefits against the less than substantial harm, it is evident that the benefits outweigh the harm.
- 6.20 In conclusion, the design, location, and scale of the office pods, combined with the significant public benefits they offer, align with policies EN1, EN3, and EN6, as well as the Framework. The proposal embodies a balanced approach that both respects the heritage of the site and promotes economic sustainability.

The Objectives of Sustainable Development

- 6.21 Paragraph 8 of the Framework sets out the three overarching objectives of sustainable development. These are independent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways, so that opportunities can be taken to secure new gains across each of the different objectives. As previously mentioned, these objectives are economic, social and environmental.

An Economic Objective

- 6.22 The proposed development aims to create an innovative, flexible space that caters to the growing needs of the business located within 59-61 Castle Street. By expanding the available workspace, the development encourages business growth and supports the creation of new job opportunities within the local community. This, in turn, strengthens the area's economic fabric, attracting investment and contributing to overall economic sustainability. Therefore, the development encourages economic activity and aligns with the economic objectives of sustainable development.

A Social Objective

- 6.23 With respect to the social objective, the development provides an efficient solution to the rising demand for office space, thereby fostering an environment that facilitates

collaboration, creativity, and professional growth. These attributes contribute to a strengthening community culture, where individuals can grow and prosper in their careers. Moreover, the increased employment opportunities enhance community well-being and social stability. Thus, the proposed development plays an essential role in supporting the social objectives of sustainable development by nurturing a resilient, connected community.

An Environmental Objective

- 6.24 In terms of the environmental objective, the design of the office pods incorporates energy-efficient features, such as uPVC windows and sliding doors, reflecting a commitment to sustainability. The use of pre-fabricated components for the office pods ensures minimal building impact and reduces waste, further aligning with environmental conservation. Additionally, the site's location in the urban centre of Reading offers prime accessibility to sustainable transport links, encouraging the use of public transportation, cycling, or walking. By selecting this sustainable location, the development promotes reduced reliance on private vehicles, thereby lowering emissions. Careful consideration has also been given to protecting the historic environment, ensuring that the architectural integrity of the existing Grade II listed buildings and the character of the conservation area is preserved. The central placement of the office pods also minimises the need for new construction, demonstrating an efficient use of urban space. Thus, the proposed development robustly contributes to the environmental objectives of sustainable development, emphasising both modern efficiency and heritage preservation.

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The application seeks permission for the development of three office pods at 59-61 Castle Street in Reading and offers significant economic, social, and environmental benefits. By adding to the existing office facilities on-site, the development aims to support the growing business, thereby enhancing the local economy and community.
- 7.2 The addition of the office pods will create opportunities for growth, accommodating an expanding workforce and stimulating economic progress. By offering modern, spacious, and comfortable work environments, the development fosters innovation and collaboration. This benefits not only the employees but also contributes to the overall vitality of the region.
- 7.3 Socially, the proposal supports local employment, aligning with the broader goals of community well-being and resilience. Environmentally, the development emphasises sustainable principles. Its urban location promotes accessibility to public transport and other sustainable transport links. Furthermore, the modern design and the use of energy-efficient materials reflect an environmentally responsible approach.
- 7.4 The primary constraint during the planning process was addressing heritage matters, given the historic significance of the area. However, as discussed in the statement, this has been carefully considered and addressed to ensure the development harmoniously blends with the existing heritage assets to ensure less than substantial harm at the lowest end of the scale to the historic environment, while delivering several public benefits.
- 7.5 This Statement has reviewed the relevant Development Plan Policy Framework as it applies in this case, together with other material considerations. Based on the evidence presented, it has been demonstrated that the proposal accords with all relevant Development Plan policies and national guidance, and there are no other material considerations present to override them.
- 7.6 It is therefore urged that the Local Planning Authority grant planning permission for this sustainable development.

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