

A photograph of the Crowne Plaza Village Hotel Reading. The building is a multi-story structure with a mix of red brick and white panels. It features a prominent entrance with a glass canopy supported by white columns. A large tree with bare branches is in the foreground on the right. The sky is overcast.

Design & Access Statement Village Hotel Reading

8425-LRW-XX-XX-PP-A-00-003_P02 | May 2025

LeachRhodesWalker
Architects

Introduction.

Introduction

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Leach Rhodes Walker on behalf of Village Hotels to support a planning application for a proposed extension at the former Crowne Plaza Hotel site in Reading. The property was acquired by Village Hotels in 2024 as part of their ongoing expansion and refurbishment strategy, bringing the site in line with the brand's established model of combining hotel accommodation with modern leisure and wellness facilities.

Village Hotels operate a successful network of sites across the UK, with high-quality fitness and wellbeing spaces forming a core part of their offer. A key element of this is the provision of purpose-built studios for group fitness activities such as aerobics, spin, Pilates, and circuit training. These classes typically require increased headroom, which the existing building cannot accommodate due to structural limitations. As such, a new extension is proposed to house these studio spaces, enabling Village Hotels to deliver a full leisure offering consistent with their other locations.

The proposed design has been developed through a sensitive and considered approach, shaped by engagement with the local planning authority. Pre-application discussions helped to inform key aspects of the proposal, including massing, materiality, and the role of the entrance canopy. These conversations have guided a scheme that is both functionally effective and visually appropriate within its context.



Site Analysis.

Site Location.

Location Summary

The Crowne Plaza Hotel in Reading boasts an enviable location on the banks of the River Thames, situated on Caversham Bridge. This prominent, large red-brick building is nestled among trees, offering guests a peaceful retreat whilst being close to the vibrant town centre. With its scenic riverside setting, many rooms and balconies overlook the river, providing stunning views.

The hotel enjoys an exceptionally well-connected location, making it easily accessible by a variety of transport options. The hotel is just a short walk from Reading Train Station, offering direct links to major cities, including London, Oxford, and Bristol. This makes it an ideal base for both business and leisure travellers. With frequent services from Reading Station, visitors can reach central London in approximately 25-30 minutes by train, making it highly convenient for those needing quick access to the capital. There is also a bus link from Reading Station to Heathrow Airport.

For those travelling by car, the hotel is easily reached via the nearby M4 motorway which also offers quick access to key locations like Heathrow Airport, which is about 40 minutes away, and the surrounding towns and business hubs, including Maidenhead, Slough, and Newbury.

 Application Boundary

 Ownership Boundary



Site Photos.



Key

- A** View of the south elevation and main entrance as seen from Richfield Avenue.
- B** View of the east elevation from the vantage point of Caversham Bridge.
- C** View of the south-east corner of the building from Caversham Bridge Roundabout.
- D** View of the west elevation and servicing entrance from Thames Side Promenade.
- E** View of the north elevation as observed from Thames Side Promenade.
- F** View of the stepped access route to the northern entrance from the waterfront.



Local Character.

Summary

To the north, across the River Thames, is the St Peter's Conservation Area, one of the town's oldest parts. It developed around the 12th-century St Peter's Church and expanded in the 19th century as a commercial and leisure centre. Key features include the church, Caversham Court Gardens (restored 2009), historic cottages (16th–18th century), river views, green spaces, and mature trees. Traditional materials like brick, stone, and flint are used throughout. Caversham Bridge and nearby listed buildings contribute to its historic character.

To the east is Caversham Bridge, a 1920s Art Deco structure. Beyond it, the northern river frontage features 20th-century residential, leisure, and commercial buildings in mixed styles.

To the southeast are 20th-century leisure buildings and a three-storey late 20th-century office block. Directly south, across Richfield Avenue, is a petrol station and dense Victorian/Edwardian housing.

To the southwest, a business area with large commercial, retail, and industrial buildings, including modern sheds, interrupts the finer urban grain.

To the west are a hotel car park, a public car park for Rivermead Park and the Rowing Club, a Premier Inn, pub, and a new public leisure complex in the park.

To the northwest is public riverfront open space and Reading Rowing Club.

The hotel, built in the late 20th century in a Postmodern 'Italianate' style, has low-pitched hipped roofs with deep eaves. Well-sited at a key transport and river crossing, it integrates quietly into its context. Modest extensions and improvements will enhance its appearance and sustainability while preserving its character. Repairs and subtle upgrades will benefit the area.



A Edwardian Terraces

C Caversham Bridge

E Late 20th Century Office Block

B Reading Rowing Club

D 20th Century Apartments

F Petrol Station

**Design Development
& Consultation.**

Pre-App Design.

Summary

A pre-application meeting was held on 05/03/2025 where Leach Rhodes alker in conjunction with Stantec (Planning Consultant) and Andrew Wesiz (Client - Villiage Hotels) tabled an initial 'Pre-Application Design Statement', to desmontrate key principles in relation to the proposed extension to the front of the existing hotel.

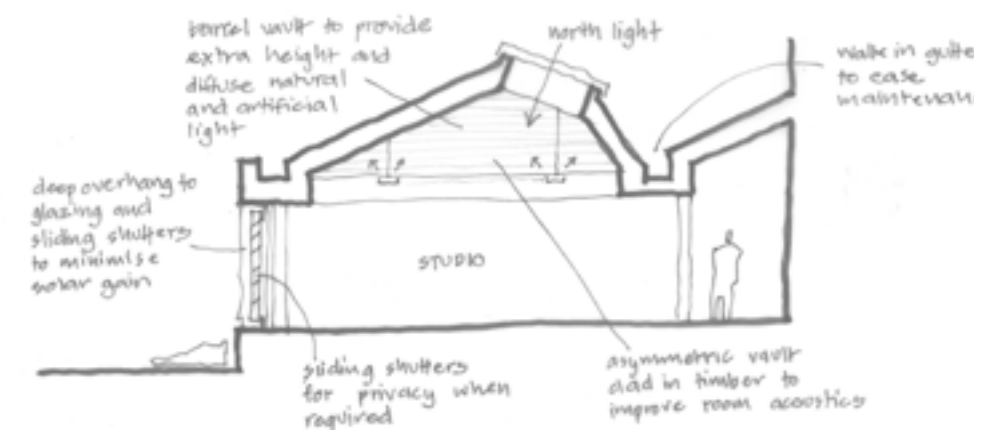
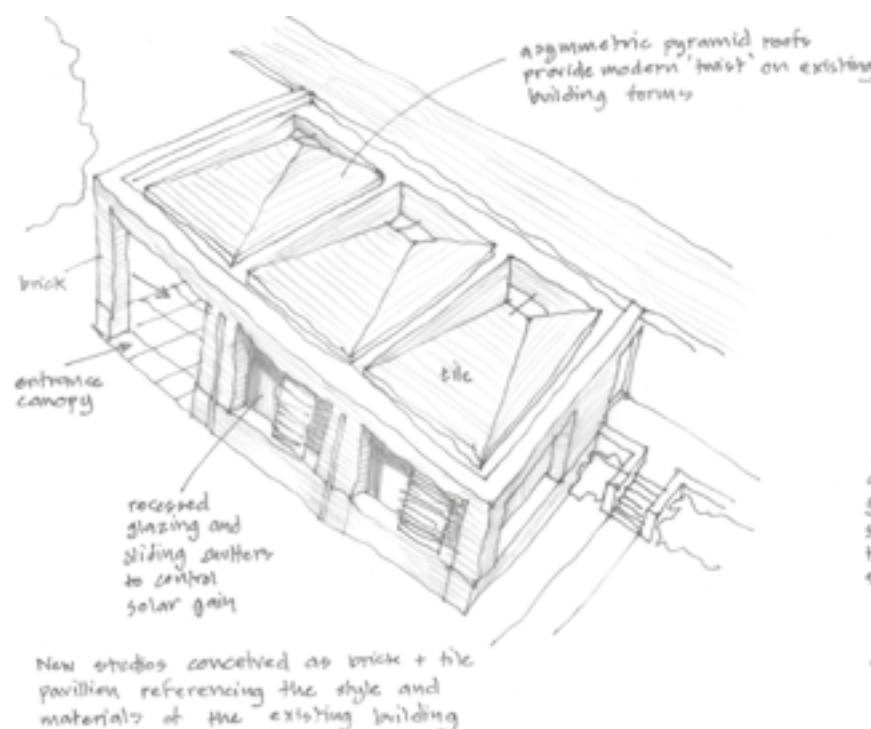
Doc Ref: '8425-LRW-ZZ-ZZ-PP-A-00-001 - Pre Application Design Statement'

The initial design concept centred around a simple, rational three-bay form, with each bay serving a distinct function. The left-hand bay accommodated a prominent entrance canopy, clearly marking the access point and providing architectural emphasis to the approach. The two bays to the right housed the studio spaces, each designed with recessed façade sections incorporating timber panelling and large areas of glazing. These recesses introduced depth to the elevation while allowing natural light into the interior spaces and softening the overall massing of the extension.

Above, the roof design included three pyramidal skylights—one per bay—providing additional daylight to the internal areas and contributing to a calm, well-lit environment suitable for health and fitness activities. The overall composition was driven by clarity, material contrast, and functional design that followed through engagement with the local planning authority.

Pre-App Response:

'there are concerns that the front extension as originally proposed whilst subservient, would appear as an incongruous feature 'tacked on'. It would be close to the boundary, as can be seen by the 'pinch point' on the plans, resulting in a cramped form of development and would jut out visually, exacerbated by the prominent location.'



Pre-App Design.

Following the initial concept, the design was further refined through internal workshops and feedback sessions, including a pre-application meeting with the local planning authority. At this stage, revised concept visuals were presented that had not been included in the original submission. These images illustrated two potential directions for the scheme, both responding to the client's evolving operational and aesthetic requirements.

Option A proposed the removal of the entrance canopy and replaced the three-bay form with a simplified massing under a large hipped roof. The façade treatment introduced corner glazing and regularised brickwork sections aligned with window openings. While this approach provided a more unified volume, it lacked the clarity and architectural emphasis of the original design.

Option B retained the three-bay design and key architectural features from the original concept, including the recessed façades with timber panelling and glazing, as well as the entrance canopy. A flat roof replaced the previously proposed pyramidal skylights, offering a cleaner silhouette and a more contemporary character in line with Village Hotels' brand identity.

Of the two options, Option B was preferred and chosen to be developed further, as it maintained the spatial clarity, material variety, and functional expression of the initial concept, while also responding to practical considerations and planning feedback.



Option A



Option B

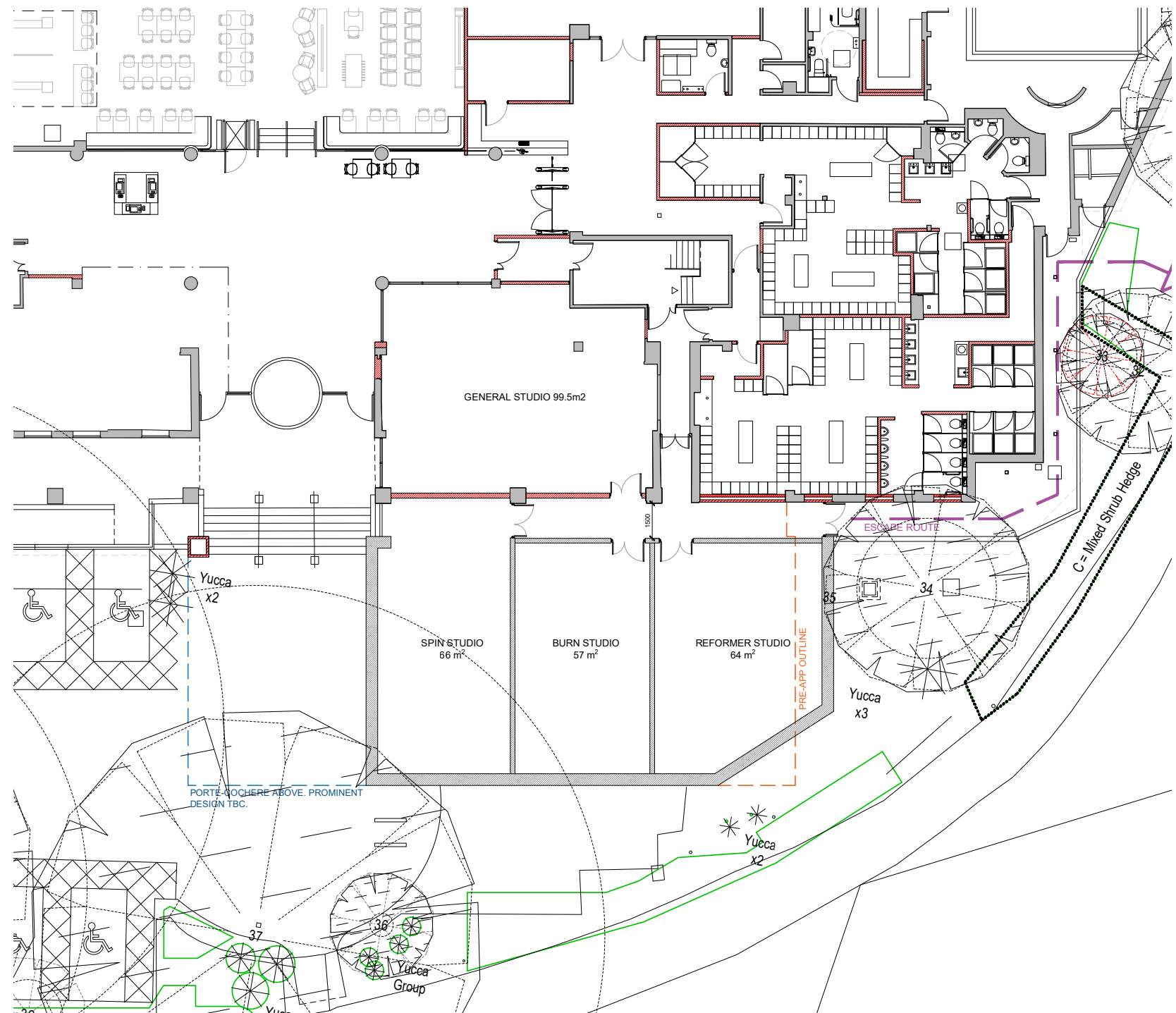
Post Pre-App Submissions.

Summary

A key item raised by the RBC case officer was that the proposed extension created a pinch point towards the South-East corner of the site. In response to this following discussion with Village Hotels, the design team opted to add a chamfer to the area in question to eliminate a 'pinch' point in this area and open up the space for further landscaping to embed the studio into the surrounding greenery.

The chamfered wall also creates an opportunity for a 'living green wall' reducing the extensions prominence in the proposed location - an element which was favored by the case officer.

A revised plan (ref: 8425-LRW-ZZ-00-DR-A-00-104_P01) was issued to the case officer for consideration within the formal feedback on 14/03/2025.



Pre App Response.

Summary

In response to the comments received during the pre-application stage, a number of key design amendments were made to address concerns around massing, visual impact, and clarity of access. Firstly, a chamfer was introduced to the south-east corner of the proposed extension. This intervention softens the building's massing and reduces its visual impact when viewed from key approaches. To further enhance this softened edge, a green wall has been incorporated on the chamfered facade, providing visual interest and a more sympathetic interface with the surrounding context.

Secondly, the roof profile was revised to a flat form, and the previously proposed pyramidal rooflights were omitted to create a more restrained and integrated roofline. Lastly, the entrance canopy was raised to enhance legibility and prominence, acting as a clear visual cue and establishing the entrance as a distinct and welcoming feature in relation to the new extension.

Design Response

- 1 Flat Roof
- 2 Chamfered Corner
- 3 Raise Canopy
- 4 Green Wall



Use & Amount.