

Memo

To: Matthew Harding, Planning
From: Amy Daly, Assistant Natural Environment Officer, Planning
CC:
Date: 17th June 2025
Re: Consultation on an Application

Application Ref: PL/24/1669

Application Type: Full planning permission

Address: 72 George Street, Reading, RG4 8DW

Proposal: Erection of covered building

The site of 72 George Street is an identified AQMA. Christchurch Meadows, which is situated along the Thames Valley, is adjacent to the site, and is a designated Major Landscape Feature and Local Green Space/Public Open Space. Given the nature of the site, there are several policies to consider. There are 4no. mature, Lombardy poplar trees that have been identified which are on the boundary between Christchurch Meadows and 72 George Street and are part of an area of high treescape value, described in the Tree Strategy.

Policy Considerations

EN7: LOCAL GREEN SPACE AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

- *This policy has been informed by the Council's Open Spaces Strategy where the protection of publicly accessible recreational open space was considered to be of great importance. This is useable space which provides a resource for sport, leisure and informal recreation.*

EN13: MAJOR LANDSCAPE FEATURES

- *Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature.*
- *Reading is primarily an urban area, but it benefits from a number of natural features that have remained largely undeveloped. The urban context means that the preservation of these features as a backdrop is of particular importance. New development should seek to maintain and enhance the natural beauty and visual amenity of the identified major landscape features.*

EN14: TREES, HEDGES AND WOODLANDS

- *Individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended.*
- *New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained*

EN15: AIR QUALITY

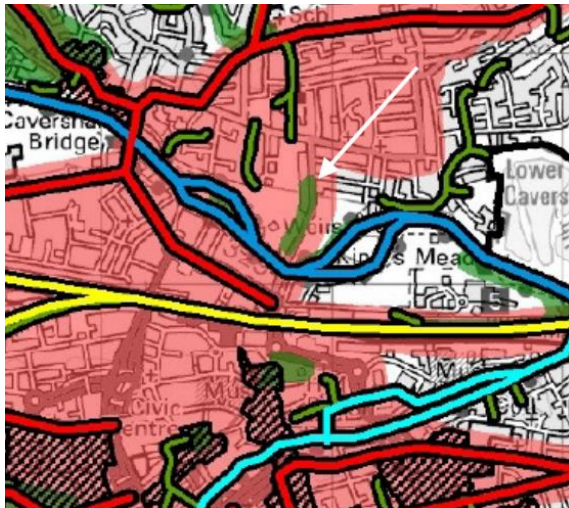
- *Development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality.*

Concerns

With reference to the Arboricultural Development Report, 18th February 20215, I note the following:

A section of the report describes '*assessed trees*', which states '*4 category B trees were identified; none have high individual merit but may benefit the general landscape.*' Whilst it recognises none of the identified tree are of high individual merit, their collective group value has not been fully recognised. The trees form a part of the row of vegetation, which forms boundary line between Christchurch Meadows and 72 George Street, along with other trees not included in the report.

It is argued that the trees are of higher merit than that recognised in the report. The 4no. mature poplar trees have a high amenity value as they are visible from Christchurch Meadows, which is used frequently by the public. They are also visible from the popular B3345 road. A section of this road, where the site is situated, is within an area of high treescape value as identified in the Tree Strategy (green area without black outline). The tree line as a whole is visible from much further afield, they can be seen from much further away in the borough and beyond, making their collective landscape value high.



The positioning of the proposed building may affect the visibility of the trees. The building, which is 10m x 20m, and over 6m tall at its apex, it will fall directly behind the trees, if they were being viewed from Christchurch Meadows. The building would also partially block the visibility of the trees, if they were being viewed from the B3345 road. However, due to the buildings that used to be in the proposed location (as seen on Google St View), a relatively small building won't cause a significant impact.

The AIA recognises there to be a '*slight detrimental impact on the retained trees*', due to the development. However, the potential impact is mitigated and therefore deemed acceptable.

The reasoning of the tree surgery required is questionable. The AIA recommends '*Remove epicormic growth on the main stem up to 6m above ground level.*' It is unclear why this is required, as it is not stated that this is needed to facilitate development or provide clearance from the proposal; the canopy outline is of an appropriate distance from the proposal. Whilst removing epicormic growth can improve the appearance of trees, it contributes to the foliage, which supports tree health. Lombardy Poplars have naturally feathered growth, which develops in the lower section of the tree, so it is questionable what the author is taking to be 'epicormic growth'. Clarity is required.

The need for ivy severance is agreed as prudent. The trees have been previously reduced, and it is assumed that there is ongoing management of these trees.

Specialist foundations are not required as the report states '*As the building is to be located on the concrete surface of the vehicle area, and that there will not be any requirement for a new base and that its 1.3m above the ground where the trees are located there cannot be any possible root damage which needs any mitigation.*' It is assumed that the proposed building will need foundations as the existing concrete surfacing is likely to not be suitable to support a building of this size. Some clarification on the depth of foundations is required to determine whether they are greater than 1.3m deep, although roots are not expected to be found beneath concrete depths of that level.

To conclude, there is no objection on tree grounds as the proposal offers minimal impact to the trees and to the character of designated Major Landscape feature and Public Open Space.

Methods such as including tree planting and/or soft landscaping into the design would help meet with policies EN14 and EN15. Due to the characteristics of the site, and the adjacent land, the design should be one which is more sensitive and demonstrates policy considerations.

The development site is mostly a hard landscaped area, with the development further adding to the urbanisation of the area. As the area is of high treescape value, it would ideal if tree planting and/or soft landscaping could be incorporated into the development. Alternatives could include the use of green walls/roofs to satisfy various policy aims. As there will be slight negative impact on a Major Landscape Feature (EN13) and Local Green Space/Public Open Space (EN7), the above techniques should be considered to demonstrate these policies have been adequately considered and that the impact is somewhat mitigated.