



Planning Department
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

29 July 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

ABBAY GARDENS, ABBAY STREET, READING, RG1 3BA

Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) Schedule 2, Part 3, Class MA

Notification for prior approval for a proposed change of use of a building from office use (Class E) to Residential (Class C3)

We write on behalf of our client, Mc Grath Group, to submit an application for Prior Approval in relation to the above property at Abbey Gardens, Abbey Street, Reading, RG1 3BA.

The application is for the change of use of the lower and upper areas of the 5th and 6th floors from office use (Class E) to residential (Class C3) in accordance with permitted development under Class MA of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) (2015) as amended. Car and cycle parking, storage, plant and refuse storage are to be located at the lower ground floor level with residential accommodation proposed on the lower and upper areas of the 5th and 6th floors.

The site benefits from office to residential permitted development rights, as evidenced through the recent grant of prior approval for the change of use of part of the ground to fifth floors of the central and northern block to 92 units (ref: PL/25/0202). A permitted development application was submitted for 107 1 and 2 bed units in the south block on 27 June 2025 and this application is currently under consideration. A further planning application was also submitted on 11 July for the installation of windows within the roof space of the north and central blocks. It is the intention that this application, for 14 units within the north and central blocks to be implemented in conjunction the application to install windows, controlled by a condition requiring the windows to be installed prior to occupation of the new units. The principle of doing so has been established through case law, see: R on the Application of LW Zenith Limited v Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Case Number: CO/1057/2022.

The Application Submission

The application submission comprises of the following documents and architectural plans:

- Application forms duly completed and signed;

- Existing floor plans;
- Proposed floor plans;
- Schedule of Accommodation;
- Fire Safety Strategy prepared by Ryan Consulting;
- Noise Impact Assessment prepared by KP Acoustics;
- Flood Risk Assessment prepared by EAS;
- Phase I Desk Study prepared by GW Ltd;
- Daylight Sunlight Assessment prepared by T16 Design; and
- Transport Statement prepared by Markides Associates.

The requisite planning fee of £3,585.00 incl VAT will follow under separate cover.

The Site

Abbey Gardens is located in the centre of Reading, close to key amenities, services and excellent public transport links, including less than a 10-minute walk to Reading Train Station and local bus routes.

The area surrounding the property is largely in commercial use but there are residential uses above ground floor in the vicinity. The site is located adjacent to Abbey Ruins and the River Kennet. The property is not statutorily listed nor located within a Conservation Area or a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Abbey Gardens comprises a 1980s purpose built office building that has been in its entirety within Class E (formerly B1(a)) since first occupation. The building extends up to seven seven-stores with a mansard roof and two car parking levels below. It has a mostly glass window exterior, supported by concrete slabs. It is a multi-tenanted building with main entrances to the 'South Block' from Kings Road, to the 'Middle Block' from the west via Abbey Street and to the 'North Block' opposite Abbots House. Chestnut Walk continues under the building to connect to Abbey Street.



Figure 1: Abbey Gardens (as existing)

Planning History

A desktop search for the planning history has been undertaken on Reading BC website and summarised as follows:

Decision Date	Description of Development and Reference	Decision
N/A (submitted 11/07/2025)	Installation of windows within the roof space of the north and central blocks.	Awaiting validation
N/A (submitted 27/06/2025)	Change of use from Class E (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 107 dwelling units. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.	Under consideration
23 May 2025	Change of use of part of ground, first, second, third, fourth and fifth floors from Class E (offices) to C3 (dwellinghouses) to comprise 84x1 bed and 8x2 bed flats. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.	Approved

19/04/2023	New glazed entrance and external step platform lift (ref PL/23/0211)	Approved
01/03/2021	Removal of 1No. glazed panel and the installation of a new air intake/outlet to match existing (part retrospective)	Approved
27/05/2020	Remove existing glazed panel and replace with new entrance door to terrace area (ref: PL/20/0477)	Approved
10/01/2020	Removal of 2no glazed panels and installation of new Air Intake Louvres to match existing (ref: PL/19/1777)	Approved
10/05/2018	External terrace and decked area (ref: PL/17/2261)	Refused
04/10/2012	Non-material change to planning permission 11/01726/FUL for modifying and raising the levels of the planters to the south elevation along Kings Road to include for the existing floor structure below (ref: PL/12/1582)	Approved
04/10/2012	3 Maples - crown reduced by 2-2.5m, crown clean and crown lift to 4m (ref: PL/12/1851)	Split
22/08/2012	Hoarding marketing wrap and 2 halo illuminated entrance signs (ref: PL/12/0497)	Approved
15/08/2012	Certificate of Lawfulness for proposed new door (ref: PL/12/1616)	Approved (Permitted Development)
28/06/2012	Discharge of condition 4 of planning permission 11/01726/FUL (ref: PL/12/1139)	Approved
11/02/2012	Non-Material Amendment to permitted application 200477 - revise the design from a single door to a single door with side and overhead glazed panels.	Approved

07/02/2012	Installation of new plant and alterations to the roof to create associated louvre openings (PL/11/1790)	Approved
04/01/2012	Remodelling of existing office entrance area and alterations to access to include disabled entrance and lift (PL/11/0658)	Approved

As above, prior approval was issued on 23 May 2025 for the change of use of parts of the ground to fifth floors of the central and northern blocks to 92 units (ref: PL/25/0202). This extant prior approval establishes the principle acceptability of the application of permitted development rights under Class MA at the site. A permitted development application was submitted for 107 1 and 2 bed units in the south block on 27 June 2025 and this application is currently under consideration. A further planning application was also submitted on 11 July for the installation of windows within the roof space of the north and central blocks. It is the intention that this application, for 14 units within the north and central blocks will be implemented in conjunction with application for the installation of windows.

Permitted Development Right

Class MA allows for development consisting of a change of use of a building and any land within its curtilage from a use falling within its curtilage from a use falling within Class E to C3 dwellinghouses.

Development is not permitted in certain circumstances:

Reference	Restriction	Comment
MA.1. (1) (b)	unless the use of the building fell within one or more of the classes specified in sub-paragraph (2) for a continuous period of at least 2 years prior to the date of the application for prior approval	The use of the subject part of the building has been in lawful Class E (or B1(c)) since its construction in the 1980s. Whilst the areas currently sought permission is currently used as use as plant space, this is deemed to be ancillary to the Class E use. The Class E use still applies and therefore these areas benefit from the permitted development rights.
MA.1. (1) (d)	if land covered by, or within the curtilage of, the building— (i) is or forms part of a site of special scientific interest; (ii) is or forms part of a listed building or land within its curtilage; (iii) is or forms part of a scheduled monument or land within its curtilage; (iv) is or forms part of a safety hazard area; or (v) is or forms part of a military explosives storage area	None of these restrictions apply. It is noted that the Abbey Ruins Scheduled Monument is adjacent to the site but does not extend to the curtilage of the application building.
MA.1. (1) (e)	if the building is within— (i) an area of outstanding natural beauty;	None of these restrictions apply.

	(ii)an area specified by the Secretary of State for the purposes of section 41(3) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(3); (iii)the Broads; (iv)a National Park; or (v)a World Heritage Site	
MA.1. (1) (f)	if the site is occupied under an agricultural tenancy, unless the express consent of both the landlord and the tenant has been obtained	The site is not occupied under an agricultural tenancy.
MA.1. (1) (g)	before 1 August 2022, if— (i)the proposed development is of a description falling within Class O of this Part as that Class had effect immediately before 1st August 2021; and (ii)the development would not have been permitted under Class O immediately before 1st August 2021 by virtue of the operation of a direction under article 4(1) of this Order which has not since been cancelled in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 3.	No relevant because the application is made after August 2022.
MA.1. (2)	The classes mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(b) are the following classes of the Use Classes Order— (a)the following classes of the Schedule as it had effect before 1st September 2020— (i)Class A1 (shops); (ii)Class A2 (financial and professional services); (iii)Class A3 (food and drink); (iv)Class B1 (business); (v)Class D1(a) (non-residential institutions - medical or health services); (vi)Class D1(b) (non-residential institutions - crèche, day nursery or day centre); (vii)Class D2(e) (assembly and leisure - indoor and outdoor sports), other than use as an indoor swimming pool or skating rink; (b)on or after 1st September 2020, Class E (commercial, business and service) of Schedule 2.	The subject part of the building is in lawful Class E Use.

Under MA.2 of the GDPO, an application for prior approval must be made to the Local Planning Authority in relation to a number of requirements. These are:

- a) transport and highways impacts of the development;
- b) contamination risks on the site;
- c) flooding risks on the site;
- d) impacts of noise from commercial premises on the intended occupiers of the development;
- f) the provision of adequate natural light in all habitable rooms of the dwellinghouses;
- g) the impact on intended occupiers of the development of the introduction of residential use in an area the authority considers to be important for general or heavy industry, waste management, storage and distribution, or a mix of such uses; and
- h) where the development involves the loss of services provided by - (i) a registered nursery, or (ii) a health centre maintained under section 2 or section 3 of the National Health Service Act 2006.

Criterion (E), the impact of the change of use on the character or sustainability of the area is not a relevant consideration as the subject building is not located in a conservation area or involves a change of use of the whole or part of the ground floor. Criterion (h) is not relevant either due to the existing building not comprising a nursery or a health centre.

Under 2020 Amendment to the GDPO, there is also a requirement for the new dwellinghouses to comply with the nationally described space standards, including a minimum floor to ceiling height of 2.3m (for at least 75% of the dwelling).

Permitted Development Class MA Criteria

Assessment of the proposal against each of the six Permitted Class MA criteria is set out below:

Highways

A Transport Statement prepared by Markides is submitted in support of the application. The property benefits from excellent accessibility, being located within walking distance of Reading Train Station and several local bus stops. As a town centre location, future residents will have convenient access to local services and amenities, reducing the need for car dependency.

One accessible car parking space is proposed for future residents within the existing lower ground floor, with six additional accessible parking spaces for the extant prior approval (ref: PL/25/0202) and the prior approval application currently under consideration (ref: PL/25/0918).

It is acknowledged that the car parking requirements for Reading are out of date and the requirement for three accessible parking spaces is considered excessive in this location considering its accessibility and the low take up rate of blue badge uptake in Reading. As outlined within the Transport Statement, the data from the Department for Transport Valid Blue Badges held and population measures states that the blue badge uptake is only at 2.6% of the total population. On this basis, it's considered appropriate to provide a 2.6% provision of blue badge parking as part of the proposals which would equate to one accessible parking space.

The proposal includes adequate cycle storage (8 spaces) in accordance with the Revised Parking Standards and Design document (2011). A secure cycle storage facility is proposed at the lower ground floor level.

An assessment of the trip generation contained within the Transport Statement concludes that the proposed development will have a positive impact on the existing highway network, with a reduction of vehicle trips to and from the site, when compared to the consented use.

Communal bin storage is located on the lower ground floor level as demonstrated on plan ref: 24-013-309 rev P.01.

Based on the above and the recent approval of application PL/25/0202 it is considered that the application is acceptable from a highway's perspective.

Contamination

A Phase 1 Ground Conditions Assessment has been submitted in support of the application. The Assessment recommends that further investigations should be undertaken to confirm that there are no pollutants present on-site. It is considered that requirements for further investigations under a Phase II Assessment can be secured under planning condition, as is common and was used in the recent grant of prior approval at the site.

Flooding

A Flood Risk Assessment has been submitted in support of the application. The site is partially located within Flood Zone 3. The source of flooding is the River Kennet, an EA Main River.

Assessing the 2D flood levels against the topographical survey levels at the site, it can be confirmed that the finished floor levels at the ground floor level remain above even the 0.1% AEP 2D flood level of 37.19mAOD. It should also be noted that the residential conversion proposed as part of the current application, is on the 5th and 6th floors only and therefore has a significant freeboard above any sources of flooding.

All entrances into the building are located in Flood Zone 1 and the southern and northern entrances remain outside the modelled surface water flood extent therefore a suitable access and egress route has been demonstrated.

Appropriate mitigation measures have been outlined in the accompanying Flood Risk Assessment which reduces flood risk to future residents. On this basis, the proposal is considered to be acceptable from a Flood Risk perspective.

Noise

A Noise Report prepared by KP Acoustics is submitted in support of the application. The report demonstrates that there should be no unacceptable impacts from noise generated by nearby commercial uses on the intended occupiers of the residential development, satisfying the requirements of Class MA under Permitted Development Rights without the need for mitigation measures.

Measured noise levels allowed a robust glazing specification to be proposed, which could be installed at the discretion of the client, under the separate planning application for new windows, which would provide internal noise levels for all residential environments of the development commensurate to the design range of BS8233:2014.

While mitigation measures have been recommended to protect the proposed habitable spaces from external and internal noise intrusion, it is important to note that these measures are not strictly required under permitted development (PD) rights. However, implementing the suggested upgrades, including internal insulation, would improve the overall living environment and ensure compliance with the recommended internal noise levels for residential use.

Natural Light

The application is accompanied by an Internal Daylight Report prepared by T16 Design. A separate planning application has been submitted for the installation of windows within the roof space of the north and central blocks. It is the intention to implement this planning permission alongside of the conversion proposed under this permitted development application.



The report demonstrates that all of the units will comply with the BRE guidance and BRE EN 17037:2018. It can therefore be concluded that the adequate light will be provided to all of habitable rooms, as per the Class MA requirements.

As explained above, a planning condition requiring the new windows to be installed ahead of occupation is seen by the High Court to be an 'obvious solution' in such situations. We therefore expect Reading BC to adopt a similar approach. We would be happy to provide draft condition wording if deemed helpful by officers.

Impact on Heavy Industry, Waste Management and/ or Storage

The surrounding area is largely a mix of commercial (Class E) and residential uses. There are no heavy industry, waste management and/or storage and distribution uses within the immediate area. Accordingly, the change of use to residential will not detrimentally impact the carrying on of such uses.

Space Standards

The layout of the proposed units, as shown on the provided drawings will be in line with the nationally described space standards in terms of the area and size of rooms.

The proposal does involve the creation of mezzanine floors (which in itself doesn't require planning permission) and there is sufficient headroom to achieve the minimum space standards floor to ceiling height requirements (minimum of 2.3 m for at least 75% of the GIA).

Summary

This application seeks prior approval for the change of use from office use (Class E) to residential use (Class C3) to 14 units (1, 2 and 3 bed units).

For the reasons outlined above this prior approval application should be supported by the Council. The site benefits from Class MA permitted development rights, as demonstrated from the recent grant of prior approval ref: PL/25/0202. Furthermore, the proposed development would not result in any negative impact in terms of flood risk, contamination risk, natural light, noise or transport and highways. As such, the proposal is compliant with the requirements of Class MA of the GDPO.

I trust the enclosed information is sufficient to allow the prompt registration of the application and its determination within the statutory period. However, should you have any queries or require additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Alfie Yeatman