

ET Planning

Planning Statement

Hill Meadows Car Park Caversham, Reading, RG4 8DH

Temporary erection of an ice rink, single marquee for skate hire/first aid, ancillary wooden chalets (trading/food), and a limited number of fairground rides for a fixed period (not before 13th October and not beyond 16th January) with operation between 8th November to 4th January, for a period of one year

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement is produced to support a planning application for temporary erection of an ice rink, single marquee for skate hire/first aid, ancillary wooden chalets (trading/food), and a limited number of fairground rides for a fixed period (not before 13th October and not beyond 16th January) with operation between 8th November to 4th January, for a period of one year, at Hill Meadows Car Park, Caversham, Reading.
- 1.2 This planning statement will cover the background to the application and provide the necessary information to enable its determination by officers at the Council. It will consider the proposal in light of relevant planning policies and other material considerations. The conclusion reached is that key material considerations and the wider objectives of National and Local planning policy support the grant of permission.
- 1.3 In addition to this planning statement, the application is accompanied by the appropriate planning application forms and ownership certificate, duly signed and completed, and the following documents:
- Site Location Plan
 - Event Management Plan 2025/2026
- 1.4 The relevant application fee will be submitted by the applicant separately.

2. Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The Hills Meadow Car Park is situated on the north bank of the the River Thames by Reading Bridge. It is within a highly sustainable location, in close proximity to Reading town centre and key public transport hubs.
- 2.2 The land comprises predominantly hardstanding (gravel/tarmac) with existing surface drainage gullies. The area is regularly used as an overflow parking area and historically has accommodated temporary events, due to its adaptable nature.
- 2.3 It is connected to established pedestrian routes along the riverside and public access is maintained during events through signposted routes that control the flow of footfall.

3. Planning History

- 3.1 **211918/FUL** - Part retrospective temporary planning permission for erection of an ice rink, with marquee structure housing skate hire (and first aid) and ancillary side stalls in connection with holding a themed Christmas festival for a period of time not to be before 24 October 2021 and not extend beyond 16 January 2022 for a period of one year (Allowed at Committee)
- 3.2 Within the committee report attached to **211918/FUL**, it was concluded that any future events at the site should be covered by a formal planning application, prior to the commencement of development.

4. Development Proposals

- 4.1 The proposal relates to the temporary erection of an ice rink, with marquee accommodating skate hire (and first aid) and ancillary side stalls to facilitate a themed Christmas festival.
- 4.2 For operating hours, these will be as follows:
- Monday to Friday – 15:00 to 22:00
 - Saturday to Sunday – 11:00 to 22:00
- 4.3 Additionally, Christmas Day will have customised, limited operating hours:
- Christmas Day – 12:00 to 18:00
- 4.4 In terms of site layout, the central structure will comprise the 'Ice Rink' as the main attraction, which is approximately 30m × 15m. This will be accompanied by an ancillary marquee to accommodate skate hire and first aid.
- 4.5 With regards to rink capacity, this is capped at 118 skaters per 45-minute session, with a similar waiting cohort (site-wide peak capacity: approx. 500 patrons).
- 4.6 On the wider site, to complete the 'Christmas Market' aesthetic, ancillary wooden chalets will house individual food outlets and traders. Additionally, there will be several fairground rides.
- 4.7 The process of construction and de-rig will involve excavation or ground anchors. Structures are raised on limited bearing points (~4–6 per unit) and sit atop temporary track/protection (e.g., rola-trac and carpet). To reiterate, all existing surfaces are protected and reinstated after de-rig.

- 4.8 An Event Management Plan was submitted to support approved application [ref: **240898/FUL**], this has been replicated for the enclosed proposal and accompanies the submission documents.

5. Policy Assessment

- 5.1 **National Guidance:** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a relevant material consideration to the application.
- 5.2 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 39 of the NPPF states that “Local planning authorities should approach decision on proposed development in a positive and creative way” and “at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible”. Paragraph 124 of the NPPF comments that planning should “promote an effective use of land” in “meeting the need for homes and other uses, whilst safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions”.
- 5.3 Paragraph 131 identifies that “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”, whilst paragraph 139 states that significant weight should be given to “outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.”
- 5.4 The National Design Guide builds on the above, and clarifies that new development reinforces existing places by enhancing local transport,

facilities and community services, and maximising their potential use (para 109).

- 5.5 **Principle of Development:** Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.6 **Policy RL2** highlights that for cultural, leisure and retail development in Central Reading, this should seek to “*maintain and enhance the centres’ vitality and viability*”. In light of this, the enclosed proposal will increase the Town’s tourist appeal and enhance its cultural reputation, through providing an in-demand seasonal attraction that is aptly suited to urban centres. Further to this, the site has approximately 50 employees and as such generates opportunities for locals and injects into Reading Town’s economy.
- 5.7 **Policy CR3** explicitly encourages *imaginative* uses of the public realm, and this is bolstered by **Policy CR4** which pertains that “*leisure, cultural and tourism uses that would attract a wide range of people into the centre will be encouraged*”. Due to the far-reaching appeal of a ‘Winter Wonderland’ across all demographics, this hits the main points of both **Policy CR3** and **CR4**.
- 5.8 With the above considered, the development is acceptable in principle.
- 5.9 **Character and Appearance of the Area:** To clarify, the event involves lightweight and temporary structures coupled with an organised layout that minimises any visual clutter. Due to the Town Centre location, the ‘Winter Wonderland’ will assimilate effectively into the mixed retail and commercial character of this area of Central Reading. Therefore, no conflict exists with the prevailing character of the area.

- 5.10 **Residential Amenity: Policy CC8** refers to safeguarding amenity, including impacts from noise and lighting on neighbouring uses.
- 5.11 The hours of operation are limited to daytime and evening (starting earliest at 10:00 and ending latest at 22:00). Moreover, the background music is tightly controlled, with any short live performances monitored to agreed limits. The Premises License secures this element, and a planning condition can be included to reflect its wording and parameters.
- 5.12 The lighting scheme will be intuitively designed to avoid glare/spill to neighbouring receptors and is switched off outside operating hours. Within the Event Management Plan, this covers complaint procedures and a rapid response protocol form. Overall, all noise on site will be carefully monitored and licensed, therefore, this is considered to be in accordance with **Policy CC8**.
- 5.13 **Transport and Parking: Policy CC6** indicates that development should be commensurate to the degree of accessibility of the site. As this aspect is dictated by location, the site is highly sustainable and immediately accessible by alternative modes of transport (including, foot, cycle, bus and rail). Further to this, the site provides clear access points and emergency exit areas.
- 5.14 With the above considered, there will be no highway alterations necessary, and a method statement can be provided at conditions stage for the Construction/De-Rig if the Council deem necessary.
- 5.15 There are over 200 car parking spaces available at Hill Meadows car Park, which will serve the operation. This provides ample parking provision for visitors, staff and any emergency/service vehicles.
- 5.16 Overall, the proposals will demonstrate full compliance with **Policy CC6**.

- 5.17 **Drainage and SuDS: Policy EN18** (Flooding and SuDs) identifies that sites should reduce flood risk, incorporate sustainable drainage systems and provide safe access/egress. It is acknowledged that there are parts of the wider site that are located within Flood Zones 2/3. To clarify, the installation involves zero ground penetration, and all structures are both raised and reversible.
- 5.18 The public entrances and exits are positioned in higher areas and an agreed Flood Response Plan provides for controlled shutdown and safe egress, in the event that river levels rise.
- 5.19 In terms of surface water, this is controlled and drained to exiting gullies beneath temporary protection systems. Due to the temporary nature of the application and the mitigation as detailed, these flood risk management measures are proportionate and demonstrate compliance with **Policy EN18**.
- 5.20 **Trees and Landscaping:** There are no protected trees on the site, or within immediate proximity. Existing trees and hedges are safeguarded through stand-off distances and will be monitored by an on-site supervision during the build/de-rig.
- 5.21 **Ecology:** Due to the site's urban location, there are no known habitats or protected species in the vicinity. Further to this, the proposal is reversible, on a limited operational period and comprises mainly hardstanding, therefore, any impacts to the biodiversity network is negligible. Any temporary lighting scheme follows best practice, to ensure light spill to the river corridor is limited.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 This statement has demonstrated that the proposed development is acceptable in principle and makes an efficient use of land.

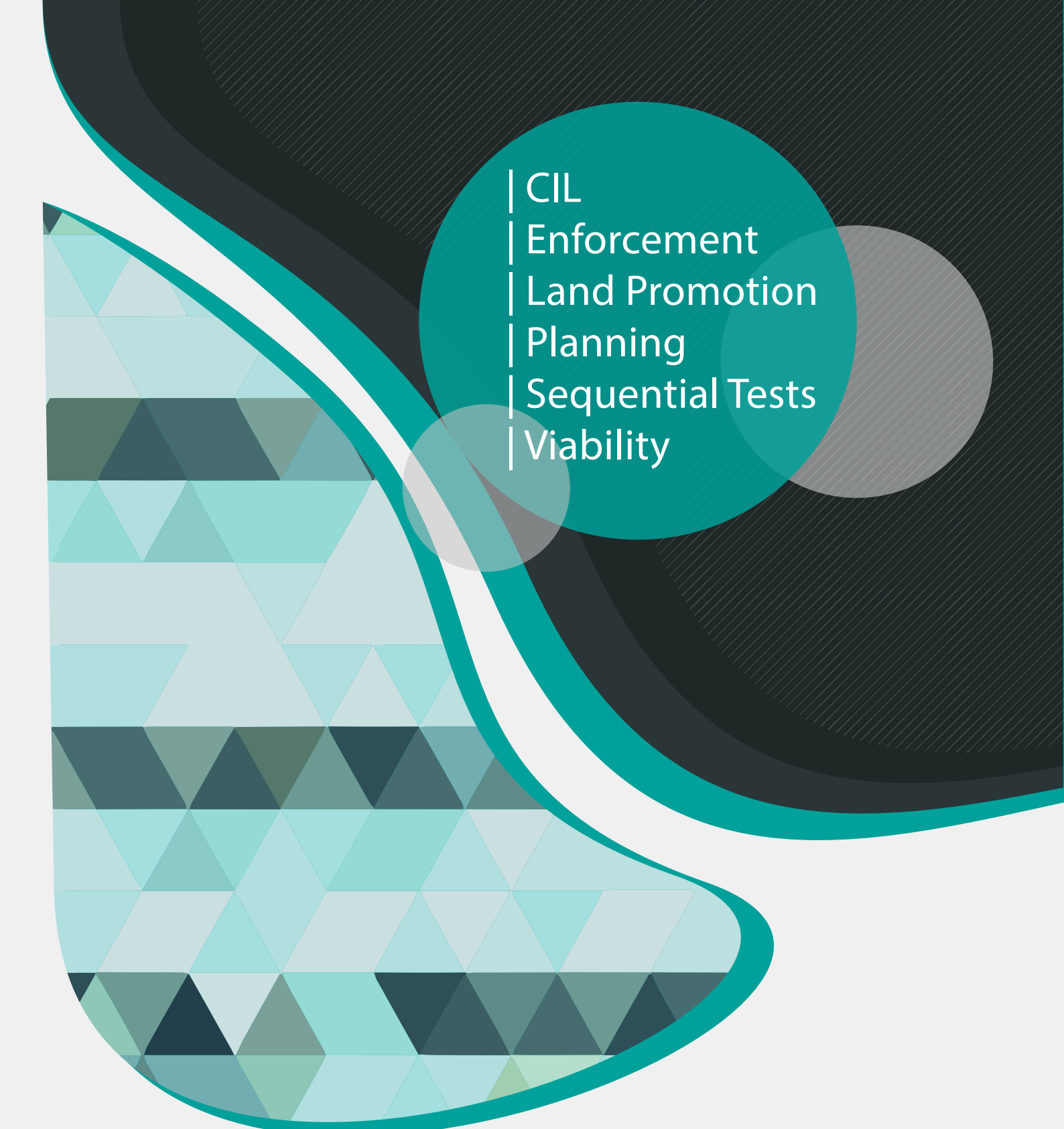
- 6.2 Material planning considerations have been carefully considered and analysed, as evidenced in section 5 of this statement and the supporting plans and documents. It is considered the proposed development would contribute to the tourist economy of Reading Town, whilst generating employment opportunities. This would be without adverse effect on the character of the area, transport network or the amenity of neighbouring residents.
- 6.3 The proposals are time-limited, reversible and will be streamlined through an Event Management Plan (2025/2026) that amalgamates transport, amenity, flooding and environmental considerations.
- 6.4 It is considered that the proposed scheme complies with relevant Development Plan Policies and is further supported by National Guidance. Therefore, it is respectfully requested that planning permission is granted.

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