

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

SITE ADDRESS: 121-122 Broad Street, Reading, RG1 2BD

APPLICATION NUMBER: PL/25/0876

PROPOSAL: Installation of an external fire escape staircase and associated alterations at rear first and second floor level.

APPLICANT: Oracle Limited Partnership, c/o Hammerson PLC

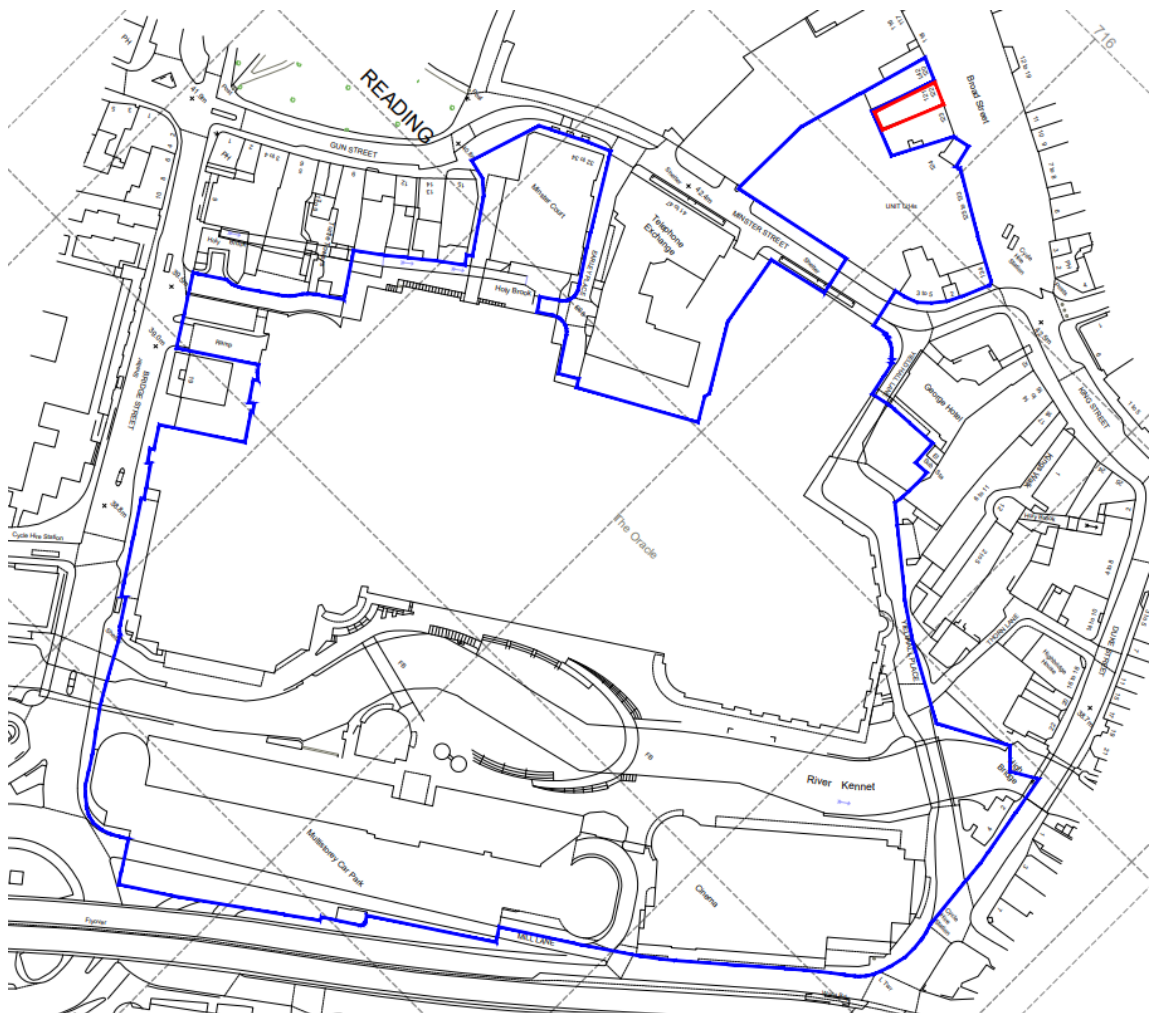
VALIDATION DATE: Valid as of 30/07/2025, having been first received on 17/06/2025

DETERMINATION DATE: 24/09/2025

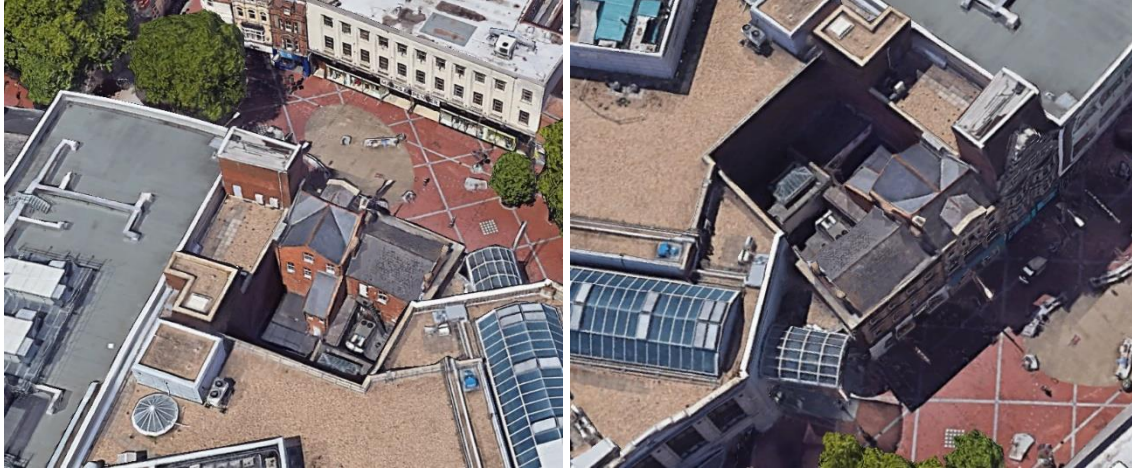
CASE OFFICER: Jonathan Markwell

1. Site Description and Surrounding Area

- 1.1 The application site comprises a basement and four-storey commercial unit located on the south side of Broad Street, close to the entrance to the Oracle Shopping Centre. The unit is presently vacant. To the rear the unit is partly enclosed by the demise of the shopping centre, with other retail and related units surrounding all sides of the application site.



Above: Extract of the red line application site boundary submitted. The blue line indicates other nearby land the applicant has an interest in.



Aerial views of the site looking north (left) and south-west (right), via Google Maps.

- 1.2 The application site building is not listed, nor is it located within a conservation area. The boundary of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area is to the north-east of the site, with buildings on the north side of Broad Street within the conservation area. The site is not allocated for development within either the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 or the emerging Local Plan Partial Update, which was submitted to the Secretary of State in May 2025 and an examination-in-public is anticipated to take place later in the year.



Broad Street elevation (15/08/2025)

- 1.3 The site is within a designated primary frontage in Central Reading (thereby it is also within the Reading Central Area), the central core, the office core, an area of archaeological potential and an air quality management area.

2. Proposal

2.1 Planning permission is sought for the installation of an external fire escape staircase and associated alterations at rear first and second floor level. More specifically, the applicant advises that the precise works comprise:

- Installation of new padstones (high-strength concrete blocks) into perimeter walls
- Installation of new supporting steelwork
- Installation of new galvanised steel staircase
- Removal of existing brickwork and installation of new door into the Oracle Shopping Centre

2.2 The rationale for the works, as stated by the applicant, are as follows:

The staircase is required to improve the fire safety arrangements of the unit. At present the unit has only one alternative means of escape which is via a escape route into the adjacent unit (123 Broad Street). This arrangement relies heavily on both tenants keeping the escape free of obstructions, unlocked and having sufficient staff training.

Therefore it is proposed to construct an external staircase into the Oracle Shopping Centre to serve both units and will only be utilised in the event of fire.

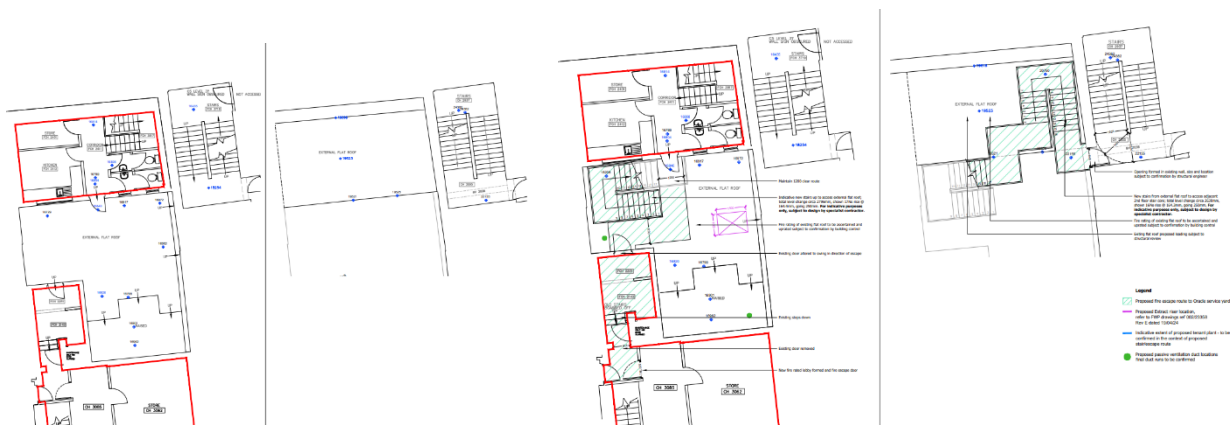
Character

The staircase will be constructed from galvanised steel with open treads and a simple balustrade. The finish will be a neutral colour (e.g. dark grey or black) to reduce visual prominence. The industrial character of the rear elevation allows the staircase to blend into the functional rear setting.

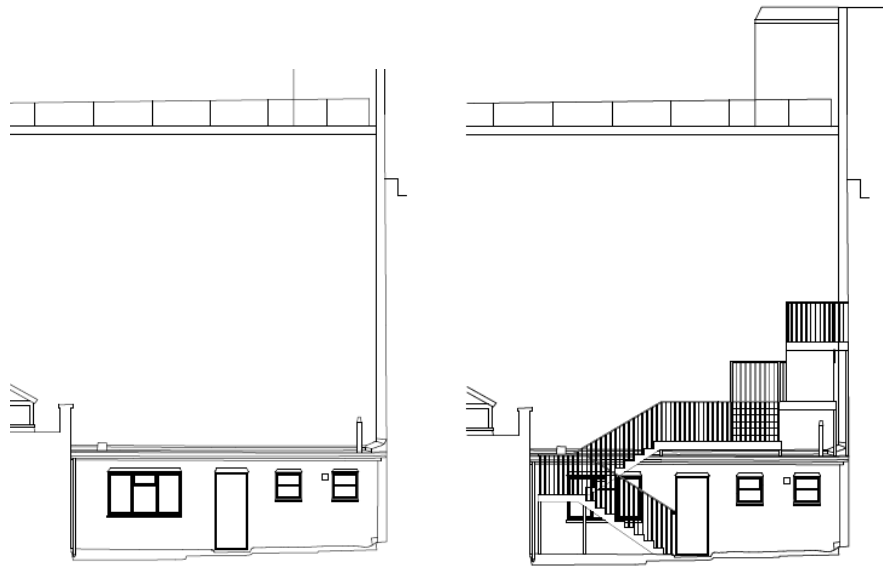
Movement to, from and within the development

The escape will only be used in the event of emergency and not affect regular movements.

2.3 During the officer site visit, it was seen that the shared alternative means of escape with the neighbouring unit (occupied by Fat Face) was internally at first floor level.



Existing 1st & 2nd floor plans (left) and Proposed 1st & 2nd floor plans (right)



Existing (left) and proposed (right) south elevation plans



Existing (left) and proposed (right) east elevation plans



Site photographs from third floor (left) and looking west (middle) and east (right)

2.4 Prior to the registration of the application, existing and proposed elevation plans were submitted, as these were not included when the application was originally submitted.

2.5 Plans and documents considered:

- G170744-122-01 - 122 BROAD STREET, LOCATION
- B222310-A01-50 – BASEMENT, GF, 1F, 2F, EXISTING
- B222310-A01-52 – BASEMENT, GF, 1F, 2F PROPOSED OPTION 2
- B220310 – 121-122 Broad Street, Reading - Design and Access statement - Installation of External Fire Escape by Workman Ref MMZ/HAB/B220310, dated June 2025
As all received on 17/06/2025
- B222310-A09-01 – 121 BROAD STREET LEASE (not for approval)
- B222310-B01-01 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE EXISTING NORTH ELEVATION
- B222310-B01-02 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE EXISTING SOUTH ELEVATION
- B222310-B01-03 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE EXISTING EAST ELEVATION
- B222310-B01-04 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE EXISTING WEST ELEVATION
- B222310-B02-01 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE PROPOSED NORTH ELEVATION
- B222310-B02-02 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE EXISTING SOUTH ELEVATION
(Actually the proposed south elevation)
- B222310-B02-03 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE PROPOSED EAST ELEVATION
- B222310-B02-04 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE PROPOSED WEST ELEVATION
As all received on 30/07/2025

2.6 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – A CIL form has been submitted with the application, which indicate that the proposals will not be CIL liable. This is confirmed to be the case, owing to the nature of the proposals.

3. Relevant Planning History

3.1 010675/ADV - New fascia and projecting sign – Application Permitted 31/10/2001.

3.2 211293/ADV - Removal of existing signage and replacement with new signage - Application Permitted 06/10/2021.

3.3 PL/24/0332 - Installation of plant to rear of building. Granted 09/05/2024.



Approved first floor plan as part of permission PL/24/0332

4. CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY

- 4.1 No internal / external consultations were considered to be required for this proposal.
- 4.2 Public Consultation – A site notice was erected on 06/08/2025, expiring on 27/08/2025. No press notice was considered to be necessary, as although the site is relatively close to the boundary of a conservation area and listed buildings, the location of the proposed works to the rear of the application site means there will be no impact on the setting of the conservation area / listed buildings.
- 4.3 No responses have been received.

5. Equality Act 2010:

- 5.1 In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

6. Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance

- 6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations

indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – among them the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12). In this case the development plan consists of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

6.2 In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

6.3 Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

6.4 National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework December 2024 (and update February 2025)

2. Achieving sustainable development

4. Decision-making

6. Building a strong, competitive economy

7. Ensuring the vitality of town centres

8. Promoting healthy and safe communities

11. Making effective use of land

National Planning Practice Guidance (2014 onwards) (PPG)

6.5 Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

CC1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC7 Design and the Public Realm

CC8 Safeguarding Amenity

EN12 Biodiversity and the Green Network

RL1 Network and Hierarchy of Centres

CR1 Definition of Central Reading

CR2 Design in Central Reading

6.6 Other relevant documentation

Reading Borough Local Plan Submission Draft Partial Update, May 2025

6.7 Local Plan Update

6.8 The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) turned five years old on Tuesday 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up to date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A consultation version of the draft updated version of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024. Subsequent to this consultation a submission draft was sent to the Secretary of State on 9th May 2025. At the time of writing, the examination-in-public of the partial update to the local plan is scheduled to take place in late 2025.

6.9 Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become “out of date” when they are five years old. It is a matter of planning judgement rather than legal fact

whether a plan or policies within it are out-of-date. This will depend on whether they have been overtaken by things that have happened since the plan was adopted, either on the ground or through changes in national policy, for example.

- 6.10 Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to this application is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remains very similar in the submission draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the determination of this planning application and are not considered to be 'out of date'.

7. APPRAISAL

- 7.1 The main considerations are:

- Land use principles
- Design
- Amenity
- Other matters

Land use principles

- 7.2 The building is presently vacant and the proposals will, as part of other measures (for example, see the plan approved at the site in 2024, as per paragraph 3.3 above), assist in helping to let the unit in the future. This is supported in the context of the Central Reading / designated primary shopping frontage location of the site, by maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the centre, in line with Policy RL1.

Design

- 7.3 As per section 2 above, the proposed external stair will be made of galvanised steel and be finished in a neutral colour, looping up and above the existing structure in the rear part of the site at first floor level. Whilst acknowledged to be somewhat utilitarian in nature, the fire escape will not be visible from the public realm and is fit for purpose in terms of its function. In normal circumstances the provision of an external staircase of this scale and nature would not be the optimal design solution (with officers likely to have tested whether less intrusive solutions could have been advanced), but in this specific instance, with the structure not visible from the public realm, there is no demonstrable harm caused. Set within this context, it is considered to comply with Policies CC7 and CR2. The steel door (finished in grey) access at second floor level into the wider Oracle site (close to the back of house associated with Boots) represents a minor addition to a blank brick façade at this point, which is again outside of any view from the public domain and considered appropriate. The standard condition for materials to be as per the stated details will be secured.

Amenity

- 7.4 In terms of fire safety for future staff and patrons, the existing arrangement of a single alternative means of escape into the neighbouring building is sub-optimal, albeit not altogether unusual in a dense urban setting. The provision of a separate and external alternative means of escape, into the main complex of the Oracle Shopping Centre, as proposed, therefore creates a betterment in this regard. Given the commercial nature of

the surrounding area, no residential amenity considerations are considered to be engaged.

- 7.5 In addition, the stair would be installed on the west side of the plot at first floor level, away from the separately approved plant, which as per paragraph 3.3 is approved on the east side of the first floor external space. Accordingly, no immediate siting conflicts would arise between the two separate permissions.

Other matters

- 7.6 In terms of biodiversity net gain, it is agreed that the development is subject to the de minimis exemption.
- 7.7 This proposal relates solely to an external rear stair and associated works, rather than anything associated with the use of the building or any associated advertisements either.
- 7.8 It is noted that proposed fire exit door would be installed into a structure on the red line boundary of the application site, possibly leading to Party Wall Act impacts. The Council's standard informative will be added to the permission, but as per the location plan shown in section 1 above, the applicant also owns the neighbouring and surrounding land, so in practice this is unlikely to be an issue.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 On the basis of the above, it is considered that the application can be supported, with there being no conflicts with the development plan and the proposals being appropriate in design, amenity and all other regards.

Conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall begin no later than *three* years from the date of this planning permission.

REASON: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) in order to prevent an accumulation of unimplemented planning permissions.

2. The development hereby permitted shall ONLY be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

B222310-A01-52 – BASEMENT, GF, 1F, 2F PROPOSED OPTION 2

As received on 17/06/2025

B222310-B02-01 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE PROPOSED NORTH ELEVATION

B222310-B02-02 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE EXISTING SOUTH ELEVATION
(Actually the proposed south elevation)

B222310-B02-03 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE PROPOSED EAST ELEVATION

B222310-B02-04 – 121 BROAD STREET & ORACLE PROPOSED WEST ELEVATION

As all received on 30/07/2025

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out and adhered to in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.

3. The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of this development shall be as specified on the plans and application form.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and ensuring the new development responds positively to the local context and character in accordance with Policies CC7 and CR2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Informatives

IF1 Positive and Proactive Working - approval

The Local Planning Authority has worked positively and proactively with the applicant to resolve relevant matters to allow permission to be granted within the prescribed target timescale for the decision to be issued.

IF3 Highways

- i) The attention of the applicant is drawn to Section 59 of the Highways Act 1980, which enables the Highway Authority to recover expenses due to damage caused by extraordinary traffic.
- ii) Any works affecting the Highway shall be in accordance with Reading Borough's Council's document "Guidance Notes for Activities on the Public Highway within the Borough of Reading". The applicant should note that compliance with this document is mandatory and licences to work on the Highway will only be issued if the requirements contained within it are met. A copy can be obtained from the Council's website.

IF5 Terms

Your attention is drawn to the terms and conditions of this permission. Any development which is carried out but which differs materially from the approved plans and details, or does not comply with any condition(s) or planning obligation(s) attached to the permission may result in the Council taking action to remedy the breach of planning control. If you are in any doubt please contact the Council.

IF6 Building Control

A Building Regulations application may be required for the proposed development. Please go to our website for more advice.

<https://www.reading.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/building-control/apply-for-building-control/>

You can also find advice and submit an application using the Planning Portal.

IF7 Complaints about construction

Complaints are commonly received about noise and dust caused by construction and demolition works, particularly working outside reasonable hours and smoke from bonfires associated with the burning of waste on site. The developer is reminded that construction and demolition associated with the approved development will be subject to environmental health law.