

PLANNING STATEMENT

Dukesbridge Court

Duke Street

Reading Town Centre

RG1 4SA

**Conversion of existing two-storey 1-bedroom
maisonette into two self-contained flats**

Proposal:

Conversion of existing two-storey 1-bedroom maisonette into two self-contained flats:

- One studio flat (53.5 sqm) with balcony on the second floor
- One 1-bedroom, 2-person flat (53.5 sqm) on the third floor

Introduction:

This planning application relates to the subdivision of an existing two-storey maisonette within Dukesbridge Court—an established residential block comprising 16 flats in Reading town centre. The maisonette is located on the second and third floors and is currently accessed by two separate doors from the communal staircase—one per floor.

The proposal involves reconfiguring the internal layout to create two self-contained residential flats, each with its own dedicated entrance, in line with national and local housing policy that encourages the efficient use of the existing housing stock.

Description of the Proposal:

- The second floor will be converted into a studio flat (53.5 sqm), which will retain the existing private balcony for sole use by this unit.

- The third floor will be converted into a 1-bedroom, 2-person flat (53.5 sqm), taking up the entire top floor of the maisonette.

No external alterations are proposed, and the work is restricted to internal reconfiguration. Each flat will be independently accessed using the two existing entrances off the communal stairwell, meaning no changes to the external envelope or circulation core are required.

Planning Policy Compliance:

The proposal supports key objectives set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including:

- Making effective use of land and buildings (Chapter 11)
- Supporting sustainable development in well-connected urban areas (Chapter 2)
- Delivering a range of housing types and tenures (Chapter 5)

Locally, the scheme complies with the Reading Borough Local Plan, particularly:

- Policy H2: Securing the efficient use of housing land
- Policy H5: Housing standards (both flats exceed minimum space standards of 37 sqm for studios and 50 sqm for 1-bed, 2-person units)
- Policy CC1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- Policy CC3: Adaptation to climate change and accessibility

Conclusion:

The subdivision of the existing maisonette into two high-quality, policy-compliant flats will make a positive contribution to local housing supply without increasing the building's footprint or negatively affecting residential amenity. The building has the capacity to accommodate an additional two residents, and the proposed flats offer viable, comfortable living environments in a highly sustainable town centre location.

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Dukesbridge Court

Duke Street

Reading Town Centre

RG1 4SA

**Conversion of existing two-storey 1-bedroom
maisonette into two self-contained flats**

1. Use

The building is in residential use (Class C3), and this will remain unchanged. The proposal seeks to subdivide an existing maisonette to provide two self-contained residential flats.

2. Layout

- The second-floor flat will be a studio layout with open-plan kitchen/living/sleeping space, a separate bathroom, and direct access to the existing balcony.
- The third-floor flat will be a 1-bedroom unit with a separate bedroom, bathroom, and open-plan living/kitchen/dining area.

Both flats meet the Nationally Described Space Standards and provide well-proportioned, usable internal spaces suitable for modern urban living.

3. Scale

There will be no change to the building's external scale or height. The proposal involves internal alterations only.

4. Access

Each flat will have its own independent entrance:

- The existing second-floor entrance becomes the studio's front door.
- The existing third-floor entrance becomes the 1-bedroom flat's front door.

This arrangement avoids the need for new openings or alterations to the communal stairwell and ensures secure and private access for both units.

5. Landscaping

There are no changes to the landscaping. The existing communal amenity areas and refuse storage remain unaffected and accessible.

6. Transport and Sustainability

The site is located in **Reading town centre**, offering excellent access to sustainable transport. Reading railway station, with extensive regional and national connections, is within walking distance, and multiple local bus services operate along Duke Street.

The existing property has **no associated car parking spaces**, which supports Reading Borough Council's strategy to promote car-free,

sustainable urban living in highly accessible locations. This ensures that the proposal will not increase local traffic congestion or parking demand.

Residents will benefit from access to the existing **secure communal cycle storage facility with capacity for 30 bicycles**, encouraging active travel and further reducing reliance on private cars.

The proposal therefore fully aligns with:

- **NPPF Chapter 9 – Promoting Sustainable Transport**, which encourages reduced car dependency in well-connected areas.
- **Policy TR3 (Reading Borough Local Plan 2019)**, which seeks to manage parking demand and promote sustainable modes of travel.
- **Policy CC2 (Reading Borough Local Plan 2019)**, which directs development to locations that minimise the need to travel by private car.

Located in Reading town centre, the site offers excellent access to public transport, including Reading train station and multiple bus routes. This central location supports car-free living, consistent with local policy. Secure cycle storage is available and will continue to be used by occupants.

7. Community Impact

The existing building is an established, purpose-built block of 16 flats and is well-equipped to accommodate two additional residents without undue impact on services or amenities. The proposal makes better use of underutilised internal space to improve housing availability within the town centre.

8. Affordable Housing Statement

As the proposed scheme increases the residential unit count by one (from one to two), it falls below the threshold requiring an affordable housing contribution, in accordance with Reading Borough Local Plan policies and national guidance. Therefore, no affordable housing contribution is applicable or proposed.

9. Air Quality Statement

The scheme involves internal alterations only and does not include any increase in vehicular parking provision. As the property has **no existing or proposed car parking spaces**, the development will not contribute to additional traffic emissions.

Its **town centre location**, combined with excellent public transport accessibility and provision of **secure cycle storage for 30 bicycles**, actively supports low-emission lifestyles.

As such, the development will have **no negative impact on local air quality**, aligning with Reading Borough Council's Air Quality Action Plan and wider climate objectives.

10. Sustainability Statement – Energy Efficiency

The scheme aligns with the principles outlined in the **Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document** through:

- Reuse of the existing building structure, which retains embodied energy
- Increased efficiency in land use by creating an additional dwelling within the existing footprint
- Potential inclusion of modern fittings and improved insulation during refurbishment, reducing energy consumption
- Promotion of low-carbon lifestyles through car-free accessibility and cycle parking provision

Overall, the scheme enhances the building's functional sustainability while maintaining architectural integrity.

11. Heritage Statement

Designation and Policy Context

The site at **Dukesbridge Court, Duke Street** lies within the **Market Place / London Street Conservation Area**, designated under **Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** as an area of special architectural or historic interest whose character or appearance it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

- **Section 72** of the Act requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

- The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023)** (paragraphs 199–208) emphasises that great weight must be given to the conservation of heritage assets, and any harm (including less than substantial) should be clearly justified and outweighed by public benefits.
- Locally, **Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)** policies **EN1** and **EN3** reinforce this duty by requiring development to conserve, and where possible enhance, the character and appearance of conservation areas.

Character of the Conservation Area

The Market Place / London Street Conservation Area is divided into four character areas. The application site falls within **Character Area 3: Duke Street, Jackson’s Corner and the River Kennet**. The appraisal identifies this area as a transitional zone between the historic shopping core and a mix of commercial, hotel, and residential uses.

Positive features include:

- The historic crossroads at Jackson’s Corner and landmark late-19th century corner buildings.
- Surviving historic buildings such as the George Hotel and the former Ship Hotel.
- Views to the River Kennet and riverside trees, as well as glimpses of St Laurence’s Church.

Challenges and negative features include:

- **Traffic noise and fumes** along Duke Street.

- **Dilution of architectural character** by modern, undistinguished development.
- **Vacant properties** (including the former Ship Hotel) detracting from vitality.
- **Unsympathetic signage** and alterations that undermine historic integrity.

Assessment of Proposal Against Appraisal

The proposed subdivision of an existing maisonette into two flats involves **entirely internal works**. There are **no external alterations** to the building envelope, roofline, fenestration, or materials.

- **Preservation of Character:** The works will not affect the external form or detailing of the building and will therefore preserve the established streetscape and architectural rhythm identified as key to the conservation area's special interest.
- **Avoidance of Identified Harms:** By avoiding external change, the scheme mitigates against the risks highlighted in the appraisal — including loss of original features, inappropriate modernisation, or design that conflicts with historic context.
- **Sustainable Use:** The reconfiguration provides modern, policy-compliant homes that ensure continued occupation and investment in the building, helping to counter issues of **vacancy and underuse** raised in the appraisal.
- **Public Realm & Cumulative Impact:** As the proposal is invisible from the public realm, there will be no cumulative impact on the street

scene, no additional signage, and no contribution to street clutter or loss of architectural detailing.

- **Support for Conservation Area Objectives:** By making efficient use of the housing stock without imposing additional external pressures, the scheme aligns with the appraisal's concern that **new development must be carefully managed** to avoid further erosion of character.

Mitigation of Wider Concerns

- **Council concerns:** risk of incremental loss of heritage character, inappropriate alterations, and poor-quality modern development are avoided entirely.
- **Public concerns:** relating to traffic, vacant premises, and insensitive change are addressed by ensuring sustainable residential use and no adverse external impact.

The proposal will:

- **Preserve the character and appearance** of the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area in full accordance with Section 72 of the 1990 Act.
- Avoid any of the negative impacts identified in the **Conservation Area Appraisal**, including the loss of original details, poor-quality design, or cumulative harm.

- Contribute positively to the long-term **vitality and sustainable use** of the area by securing high-quality residential accommodation within the existing building stock.

12. Conclusion

This proposal reflects a careful and policy-compliant approach to intensifying residential use in a sustainable, high-accessibility location. It preserves the character and functionality of the host building while delivering two high-quality new homes with no external impact.

Affordable Housing Statement

Site: Dukesbridge Court, Duke Street, Reading Town Centre, RG1 4SA

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1. Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023)

- **Paragraph 62** confirms that affordable housing should only be sought for major developments (i.e., 10 or more homes, or where the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more).
- **Paragraph 64** provides further clarification that small-scale schemes below these thresholds are not expected to make affordable housing contributions.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- The PPG (Housing and Economic Land Availability, 2023 update) reiterates that affordable housing requirements should not place undue burdens on small-scale developers and should align with viability and proportionality principles.

Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted November 2019)

- **Policy H3 (Affordable Housing)** requires affordable housing provision on sites of **10 or more dwellings** (or where the site exceeds 0.5 hectares).
- The supporting text confirms that developments below this threshold are not required to make affordable housing contributions.

2. Application of Policy to the Proposal

- The current proposal increases the housing stock from **one unit to two units** (a net gain of **one additional dwelling**).
- The application site is significantly below the 10-unit threshold set out in both **Policy H3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan** and **Paragraph 62 of the NPPF**.
- The site area is also well below 0.5 hectares.
- As such, the development does not trigger a requirement to provide on-site affordable housing, off-site contributions, or commuted sums.

3. Contribution to Housing Mix and Choice

Although the scheme is exempt from affordable housing obligations, it nevertheless delivers a positive contribution to Reading's housing stock by:

- **Making more efficient use of existing housing** (in line with Policy H2 of the Local Plan and NPPF Chapter 11).
- **Delivering two well-sized, policy-compliant units** (exceeding Nationally Described Space Standards, thereby ensuring quality housing).
- **Providing housing diversity** by offering both a studio and a 1-bedroom flat, meeting varied demand in a sustainable, town-centre location.

This approach complements Reading Borough Council's objectives to increase the supply of smaller, high-quality homes suited to younger households, single occupiers, and couples.

4. Conclusion

In line with the **NPPF (2023), Planning Practice Guidance, and Reading Borough Local Plan Policy H3**, this development falls below the thresholds for affordable housing provision. No affordable housing contribution is therefore required.

Nevertheless, the proposal supports the Council's strategic housing objectives by:

- Delivering **two high-quality new homes** without external alterations.
- Optimising the use of existing housing stock in a **highly accessible urban location**.
- Contributing positively to the mix and balance of Reading's housing market.

Accordingly, the scheme fully complies with national and local planning policy requirements in respect of affordable housing.

