

PLANNING STATEMENT

55A Baker Street, Reading RG1 7XX

Full Planning Application for Change of Use from Commercial Unit to 2 Residential Flats

Prepared for: Keen Partnership

Date: October 2025



1.0.0 Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared to support a Full Planning Application for the change of use of 55A Baker Street, Reading RG1 7XX, from a vacant commercial office (Class E) to two self-contained residential flats (Class C3).

The property lies within the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area and is physically connected to 55 Baker Street, a Grade II listed building (List Entry No. 1154492).

A detailed Heritage Statement prepared by Heritage Fusion (Job No. 2199, September 2025) accompanies this submission, assessing the historical, architectural, and contextual significance of the site. The statement confirms that the proposed works would cause *no harm* to the listed building or its setting and would instead secure its viable reuse and long-term conservation.

The proposal aligns with the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) and the Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted 2019), delivering high-quality housing in a sustainable and heritage-sensitive manner.

1.1.0 The Site & Its Surroundings

The site is located to the rear of No. 55 Baker Street, accessed via a private gated courtyard. It sits within a mixed-use area close to Reading town centre, characterised by terraced Victorian properties and small-scale commercial premises.

The two-storey building is of brick construction with a slate roof and timber sash windows, historically linked to William Henry Fox Talbot's 1844–45 photographic studio, which operated at the front property.

The setting is urban and enclosed, with limited public visibility from Baker Street. The surrounding area includes mainly residential properties, with good access to public transport, shops, and services.

The site lies within the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area but is not within a flood risk zone (Flood Zone 1).

1.2.0 The Proposal

The application seeks permission for the change of use and refurbishment of the existing vacant commercial building to form two self-contained one-bedroom flats.

No extensions or increases in height are proposed. The building footprint, roofline, and external materials remain largely unchanged.

The proposals are illustrated in the Proposed Plans (Drawing Ref: 55A/PROP/01) – reproduced below and accompanying this application.

- Ground Floor (Flat 1 – 37.3 m²)
 - Kitchen/Living Room (24.0 m²)
 - Bedroom (8.6 m²)
 - Bathroom (2.4 m²)
 - New timber stud partitions introduced.
 - Secure cycle storage area for residents.
- First Floor (Flat 2 – 37.1 m²)
 - Kitchen/Living Room (17.6 m²)
 - Bedroom (8.6 m²)
 - Bathroom (2.4 m²)
 - Refurbishment of existing rooms; like-for-like reconstruction of external staircase with new balustrade for access.

These drawings demonstrate a sensitive reconfiguration that enables efficient residential use without adversely affecting the heritage significance of the structure.

1.3.0 The Design

The design approach prioritises heritage preservation and minimal intervention, retaining the original form and character of the building while introducing internal upgrades to meet modern residential standards.

Key design objectives include:

- Retain traditional brickwork, slate roof, and timber detailing.
- Replace poor-quality modern joinery with traditional timber sash windows and doors.
- Improve thermal and acoustic performance with secondary glazing.
- Restore the external staircase in its historic location using matching materials.

The design reflects the original simplicity of the building while subtly upgrading it for contemporary living.

1.4.0 The Amount

The proposal provides:

- 2 no. one-bedroom flats, comprising:
 - Flat 1 (Ground Floor) – 37.3 m²
 - Flat 2 (First Floor) – 37.1 m²
- Total residential floorspace: 74.4 m²

The scale of development is appropriate to the existing structure and consistent with Reading Borough Council's space standards under Policy H5.

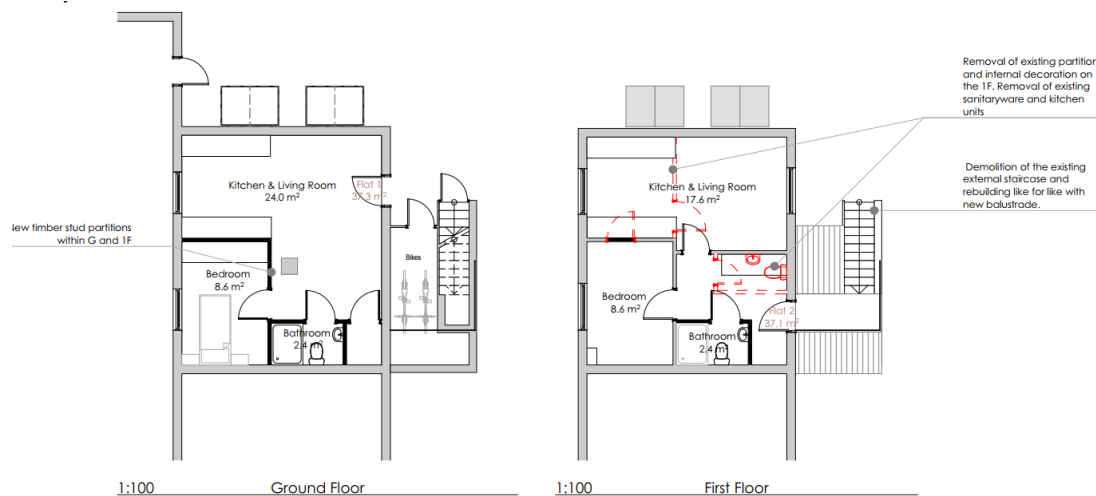
1.5.0 The Layout

The internal layout maximises functionality and daylighting within the constraints of the existing building envelope.

Each flat provides:

- A well-proportioned kitchen/living space.
- A separate bedroom and bathroom.
- Efficient internal circulation and private access.

The proposed layout drawings (Ref: 55A/PROP/01) show how the ground and first floors are independently accessed, maintaining privacy while preserving the building's historic form.



1.6.0 The Scale

There are no changes to the building's overall scale or massing. The two-storey form remains subordinate to the larger front building (No. 55), ensuring continued visual harmony and minimal impact on the Conservation Area.

1.7.0 Appearance

Externally, the building's appearance will be enhanced through careful refurbishment:

- Replacement of poor-quality modern windows and doors.
- Retention and redecoration of traditional timber fascias, soffits, and sash windows.
- Repair of existing brickwork using matching mortar.
- Rebuilding of the external staircase like-for-like.

The result is an improvement in architectural integrity and a net benefit to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

1.8.0 Access

Access to both flats will remain via the existing gated courtyard from Baker Street.

- Flat 1: Ground-floor access via the main courtyard.
- Flat 2: Access via the external staircase (to be rebuilt).

Vehicle access remains unchanged, there is no parking proposed for this development.

The site benefits from excellent public transport links, including nearby bus routes on Oxford Road and Reading Station (approximately 800 metres).

The site therefore satisfies the accessibility objectives of Local Plan Policies CC6 and TR1.

1.9.0 Flooding

The site lies in Flood Zone 1 (low probability) as defined by the Environment Agency.

No increase in impermeable area or alteration to ground levels is proposed.

The development therefore poses no flood risk and complies with Policy CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change).

1.10.0 Transport / Parking Policy

The modest scale of development (two flats) will generate negligible traffic impact.

The site's proximity to local amenities and public transport supports car-free or low-car occupation, consistent with Policy TR1.

Parking provision remains as existing, with informal courtyard spaces available for residents and visitors.

1.11.0 Bin & Cycle Storage

A dedicated bin storage area will be provided within the courtyard, screened from view and accessible for collection. (Please see Proposed Site Plan)

Secure cycle storage (as shown on the proposed ground-floor plan) will accommodate three bicycles, meeting Reading Borough Council's minimum standards and supporting sustainable transport objectives.

1.12.0 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) & Affordable Housing

CIL

The proposal creates new residential floorspace and is therefore CIL liable. A CIL Liability Notice will be issued upon validation, and the applicant confirms willingness to comply with Reading Borough Council's adopted CIL Charging Schedule.

Affordable Housing Contribution

In line with Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) and the Affordable Housing SPD (2021), the applicant proposes a financial contribution equivalent to 5% of the total development value, to be secured via a Section 106 Agreement or Unilateral Undertaking.

This contribution provides flexibility for the Council to fund off-site affordable housing provision elsewhere in the Borough, ensuring compliance with the development plan.

1.13.0 Conclusion

The proposed development at 55A Baker Street delivers a sustainable and sensitive conversion of a vacant heritage building, consistent with national and local planning policies.

The accompanying Heritage Fusion Statement (September 2025) confirms that the works will preserve the significance of the listed building and enhance the character of the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area.

The proposal:

- Provides two high-quality homes in a sustainable location.
- Retains and refurbishes an existing historic structure.
- Causes no harm to the heritage asset or its setting.
- Meets standards for access, design, flood resilience, and sustainability.
- Includes a 5% affordable housing contribution.

Accordingly, the development represents sustainable development in accordance with the NPPF (2024) and Reading Borough Local Plan (2019), and full planning permission is respectfully requested.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Chris Keen', is enclosed in a light blue rectangular box.

Chris Keen MRICS MCABE