

Memo

To: Marcelina Rejwerska, Planning

From: Amy Daly, Assistant Natural Environment Officer, Planning

CC: GS Ecology; Transport DM

Date: 27th October 2025

Re: Consultation on an Application

Planning Application Ref: PL/25/1263

Application Type: Householder planning permission

Address: 146 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, READING, RG1 2RD

Proposal: The extension and refurbishment of an existing Listed house. New off street parking and external landscaping.

146 Southampton Street is a Grade II Listed Building. The site is located on a 'treed corridor' and is within an AQMA. There is a Silver Birch tree subject to TPO 5/25 on the frontage, which contributes to the street scene and 'treed corridor' status of the area. The existing rear and front gardens are both predominantly soft landscaped; the long front gardens being mentioned in the property's listing.

It is worth noting that a proposal was approved next door at 144 Southampton Street under application PL/25/0313. No tree removals were required for this development and adequate tree protection and working methodology was proposed for any impacted trees, mainly to ensure that the Birch tree at No. 146 was not detrimentally affected. The front garden was mostly retained, and the driveway/path was made of 'Cellweb' allowing grass to pass through this material which preserves the soft landscaping. There was also no loss to the soft landscaping in the rear garden.

Policy EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodlands

Individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended. The quality of waterside vegetation will be maintained or enhanced.

New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity

and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained.

Many streets within Reading, including primary routes into town, are characterised by their tree-lined nature, which should be protected and enhanced. Whilst Reading has some important woodlands and areas with substantial numbers of trees, including two areas of Ancient Woodland, shown on the Proposals Map, other areas lack tree cover. It is therefore vital to ensure that important trees and woodlands are protected and canopy cover extended in areas lacking cover, including in conjunction with new development

Due to the value placed on trees in Reading, the Council produced a Tree Strategy in 2010 , which seeks to significantly increase the amount of tree coverage by protecting trees from development pressure and through planting both on its own land and through development related landscape schemes.

Front Garden

With reference to the BS5837:2012 TREE SURVEY AND ARBORICULTURAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT, 4th August 2025, Ref: GHA/DS/160289:25, and the Proposed Front Garden, 12th June 2025, Drawing No. P108 P1 and Proposed Site Plan P100, I note the following (note there is also a Proposed Front Garden drawing P111 P1 which shows the bin stores in a different place):

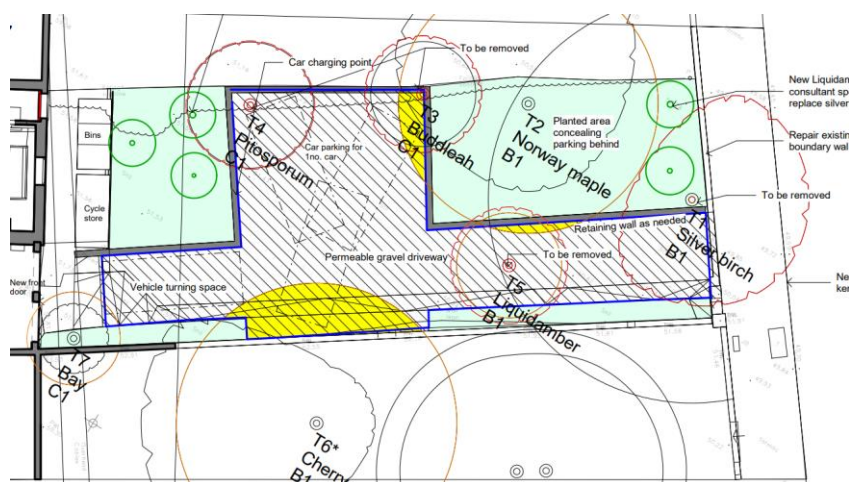
Firstly, the development will lead to the removal of one shrub and four of the trees on the frontage, including the Silver Birch tree which is protected by a TPO. This is an extremely negative aspect of the proposal. Whilst replanting has been proposed, the amenity value of the Silver Birch is not simply replaced by replanting. It is a 'B' category, mature tree which contributes to the street scene, 'treed corridor' and canopy cover of the Borough. Replacing an established, mature tree with young, newly planted trees which are of a lesser size, will result in a loss of amenity value and negative impact to the street scene for many years. The Silver Birch tree in particular is worthy of a TPO - it is unclear if the applicant has undertaken an exercise, with arb input, to see if the tree could feasibly be retained whilst allowing some parking.

The AIA has not provided a Tree Constraints Plan or a Tree Protection Plan. I am unclear why neither of these have been provided as retained trees must be protected from development related harm. The AIA refers to appended plans however they have not been submitted alongside the report and are required. The survey has identified trees adjacent to the site, and the front garden landscape plan clearly shows impacted RPAs. Working methodology within the RPA of these trees is vague and does not mention any reference to retaining roots.

6.10 states '*All new pathways and soft landscaping areas within the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of the retained trees should be designed using no-dig, up and over construction and in close co-ordination with the retained Arboriculturalist using porous materials.*' 6.7 states '*There is a small encroachment into the RPAs of T2 (7%) and T6 (11%); these are assessed to be within acceptable levels as these are healthy trees which will tolerate this small amount of root loss and recover quickly, especially when considering there are large areas of open ground to the other side of the RPAs for compensatory root growth to develop.*' It is not agreed this is an acceptable approach when working in the RPA of retained trees. The consultant has effectively suggested that all roots within the impacted RPA can be severed, which would imply that there will be

excavation and thus the reference to 'no dig' construction is irrelevant to the works in the front garden. When there is incursion into the RPA, and root severance is proposed, it is expected that this impact is mitigated through offsetting the incursion elsewhere and improving the remaining root environment. However, improvements to the remaining rooting environment have not been suggested and may not be feasible given the tree is in adjacent land. Efforts should be made to retain tree roots, as simply severing all roots in impacted RPAs is not acceptable nor does it comply with the advice of the BS5837. As stated in 6.10, the proposed driveway should be designed using a 'no dig' method. Without associated plans it is, in any case, difficult to follow what is being stated.

The driveway should also be made in consideration for future root growth of the retained trees and replanted trees. This has not been suggested in the AIA, and a cellular confinement system should be used to allow for future growth as this can often lead to damage to paths and driveways, resulting in an increased pressure to remove the retained trees. The approach to the construction of the driveway needs to be reconsidered. I also advise it is reconsidered to retain the TPO'd Birch tree.



The placement of the replacement trees are in close proximity to one another, retained trees and structures, and there is not adequate space for them to reach their ultimate size. I have concerns that the retention of these replacement trees will be undesirable as future conflict between the trees, structures and driveway is likely. The three replacement trees adjacent to the dwelling are likely to obstruct light availability into the house. Seasonal nuisance such as leaf fall is often considered a maintenance burden, particularly being so close to structures and the driveway. I have concerns that the positions of the replacement trees will lead to future conflict and their retention will not be desirable. There is a limited amount of space for replanting due to the extent of the driveway.

I am concerned that the removal of the mature Silver Birch tree will set an unwelcome future precedent to remove trees subject to a TPO to facilitate development, which we do not consider acceptable nor does it comply with policy or the aims of the Tree Strategy.

The driveway will also result in a significant loss of soft landscaping on the frontage, effectively changing the character of the frontages completely, having more of an undesirable impact than that approved at No. 144.

I note the replanted trees are to be planted with the arboricultural consultants specification, however these specifications are not detailed in the AIA and thus I cannot assess whether the specification is appropriate. The species will also need to be of a

variety of species and consideration of their ultimate size and proximity to structures is necessary to avoid future conflict. I also note that the five proposed replacement trees on the frontage are of only two species (being three Himalayan Birch trees and two Liquidambar trees), for diversity purposes and resistance to pests and diseases, we expect a palette of species to be used and our preference is for native or naturalised trees.

Rear Garden

The AIA has not provided a Tree Constraints Plan or a Tree Protection Plan for the rear garden either. I am unclear why neither of these have been provided as it is common for these to be included in an AIA, and retained trees should be protected.

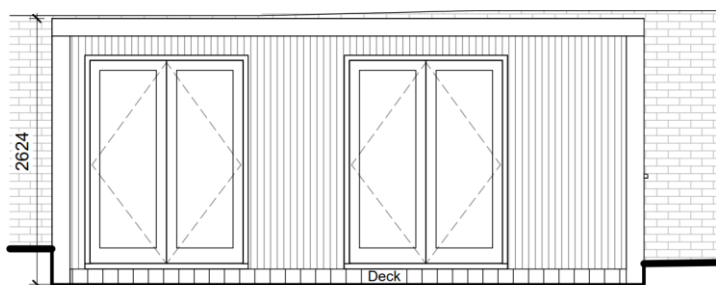
With reference to the Proposed Rear Garden Plan including Garden Rm, 12th June 2025, Drawing. No. P106, Rev: P2, I note the following:

The rear extension requires the removal of three trees, and the outbuilding requires the removal of one, totalling the removal of an additional four trees. Due to the outbuilding and the decking leading to it from the rear of the dwelling, there is a significant reduction in soft landscaping. I question whether the outbuilding is a truly necessary component of the proposal, as this will increase the amount of hard landscaping significantly and result in further tree and soft landscaping loss. This also limits the amount of useable outside garden space. As the useable garden space will be further limited due to the replanted trees, their retention may be undesirable. If the outbuilding was omitted, there would be more space for planting to mitigate for the loss of trees and soft landscaping this development will lead to. The proximity of the replanted trees and the outbuilding is also likely to result in future conflict making their retention undesirable.

In relation to future conflict 7.1 states '*The retained trees are at a satisfactory distance from the proposed new structures and highly unlikely to give rise to any inconvenience.*' I would disagree with this given the proximity of the Beech tree and the outbuilding shown in the rear garden landscape plan. The canopy overhangs the outbuilding and thus future conflict and pressure to prune or remove the tree is likely. There is a path leading from the rear extension to the outbuilding, appearing to be made of decking which would be built above ground level and minimising excavation. However, as the tree also overhangs the decking, seasonal nuisance and future conflict is likely to make the retention of this tree undesirable also. The methodology for constructing the decking has not been described in the AIA.



6.8 of the AIA states 'A portion of the proposed new garden structure would be situated within a section of the assessed Root Protection Areas of T12 as can be seen on the appended plan'. As it does not state a percentage of incursion and no appended plans have been submitted, this incursion is difficult to appreciate and assess. The RPA is also not shown in the rear garden landscape plan. The use of 'screw pile' foundations is an acceptable foundation type within the RPA of retained trees. However, with reference to the Proposed Garden Room (undated), Drawing No. P107, it appears to be built below the existing ground level and thus requiring excavation. I am also unclear whether there is enough clearance between the ground and crown of the tree. The AIA states there is 3m of clearance from the ground to the crown of the tree, however the outbuilding is 2.62m tall if built below the existing ground level. Once placed on screw pile foundations, the finished height of the outbuilding would be closer to the crown of the tree, with less than 40cm clearance currently with reference to the Elevations. 6.3 of the AIA states 'The implementation of the proposal does not lead to the requirement to prune any of the retained trees' and 6.4 states 'The defining branch structure of this tree is however well clear of the proposed upper building line', which I would disagree with as less than 40cm clearance is not adequate. For the reasons I have stated, the outbuilding should be omitted from the application should it receive approval.



As stated for the front garden, the species choice for the replanted trees also needs to be more diverse and considerate of their ultimate size and proximity to structures.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Natural Environment Team are not supportive of this application. It requires the removal of eight trees both on the frontage and rear garden including the 'B' category TPO'd Silver Birch tree which contributes to the street scene and 'treed corridor'. Whilst replacement trees have been proposed, there is not adequate space for them to reach their optimum size, and future conflict is likely to make their retention undesirable. The proposal does not comply with Policy EN14 or the aims of the Tree Strategy and it is an extremely negative proposal in relation to trees and landscaping. The removal of the TPO'd Silver Birch will set an unwelcome precedent for the future, as it sets the impression that felling these important trees to facilitate development is acceptable as they can be replanted, which is not the case.

Should the case officer decide that this application is acceptable, then I suggest the outbuilding is omitted. This will reduce the amount of unnecessary hard landscaping and will create more space from tree replanting and other soft landscaping enhancements to mitigate for the loss of trees and soft landscaping. A tree protection plan is required for both the front and rear garden, along side amendments to the AIA to outline appropriate methodology for working with the RPA of retained trees, as we do not agree the methods put forward i.e. the severance of all roots in the impacted area, are acceptable. I also strongly encourage that an alternative design is put forward for the driveway, aiming to retain the protected Silver Birch tree as it is an important tree given the 'treed corridor' status of the site, also contributing to the street scene.

The species choice of the replanted trees needs to be more diverse and considerate of their ultimate size and relation to future conflict with structures and hard landscaped features. If approved, details could be secured via condition.

As an aside, I question the need for a parking space at this property. There is currently no parking on site and being close to the town centre and other facilities, is this truly a necessary aspect of the proposal considering the required removal of the TPO'd Silver Birch tree alongside other trees? RBC Transport have advised that as the dwelling currently does not have a parking space, there is no requirement for one in this case (I understand that policy would not require one for a property so close to the town centre). It is appreciated that a parking space would be desirable for a family dwelling and that bringing a listed building in poor condition back into use would be positive. However, I would recommend a review of the parking proposals at the very least perhaps to be more in line with No. 144 so less impactful.

I also note that both Transport and Conservation comments may need reconsideration of the location of the bin and bike store. If these are required close to the road, this will impact on the soft landscape area currently shown to be retained, on which replacement trees are shown, hence this element needs to be resolved prior to a decision.

With all of the above being reconsidered, I would be happy to comment on revised plans, prior to a decision, to try and move this application in a positive direction. However, as it stands, we do not consider this proposal to be acceptable in relation to trees and landscaping.