

Jonathan Markwell
Case Officer
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices,
Bridge St,
Reading RG1 2LU

Date: 29 October 2025
Our ref: 67133/08/MLW/FC/40166044v1

Dear Mr Markwell,

Waterfront Square – Heritage Impact Assessment Addendum

Introduction

This Addendum to the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) (July 2024) has been prepared to consider amendments made during the determination of planning application reference PL/24/0958 for:

Demolition of existing office and substation buildings and residential-led site redevelopment within 1-11 storey buildings comprising residential (Class C3) and ground floor commercial uses (Class E), together with various associated works including replacement pedestrian and vehicle access routes, car/cycle parking, hard and soft landscaping and a public open space adjacent to the river”

This Addendum reviews changes to:

- 1 The planning policy context and baseline conditions since the assessment was prepared in 2024 and
- 2 whether the changes to the application scheme alter the conclusions of the HIA

The amended scheme

The scheme has been amended to respond to comments from officers and following a post-submission design review. The following changes to the scheme are relevant to the assessment of townscape and visual effects:

- 1 Alteration in the massing and materials of Block B1 to reduce its extent along Norman Place and break down the massing and a set back along Norman Place to provide additional width at street level
- 2 Block A1 reduced in width and chamfered to allow a wider podium courtyard space

- 3 Architectural design amended to include finer fluting to upper floors of B1, introduction of decorative brickwork to window to create more vertically proportioned window bays and an adjustment to the materials for different blocks to reinforce the articulation of the massing.
- 4 Metal balustrading to replace brick parapets along the river to provide a lighter ‘top’ along the river.

A limited number of visualisations have been updated to reflect the amended scheme. These are included at within the Townscape and Visual Appraisal Addendum at Appendix 1 and comprise:

- View 4 from Reading Bridge
- View 10 from Vastern Road/ Trooper Potts Way
- View 11 from Christchurch Meadows (Thames Path)
- View 12b from Christchurch Meadows

These updated views have, together with the amended application drawings and CGIs informed this HIA Addendum.

Policy context

There have been no changes to adopted policy since the Heritage Impact Assessment was completed in July 2024. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated in December 2024 and further progress has been made on the Local Plan Update.

The relevance of this to the HIA is considered below.

The emerging Reading Local Plan partial update has progressed further in its preparation and was submitted for examination in May 2025. The Site is allocated (ref CR14v)

The proposed allocation confirms the site’s residential potential with potential for 130-190 dwellings identified. It requires that development should (amongst other things):

“... Include tree planting on the Vastern Road frontage to enhance the treed corridor... and set buildings back at least ten metres from the top of the bank of the river”

In the National Planning Policy Framework, December 2024, policy relating to heritage, design and character remains broadly the same. The renumbering of NPPF paragraphs is reflected in the revised policy tests as set out below:

- 1 Does the proposal protect and, where possible, enhance the setting, significance and special architectural or historic interest of the affected listed buildings? (s.66(1) of the 1990 Act; Paragraphs 210 and 212, NPPF; Policy EN1; RBLP).
- 2 Does the proposal preserve and, where appropriate, enhance the setting and significance of the other affected designated heritage assets (Registered Park & Garden and Scheduled Monument? Paragraphs 210 and 212, NPPF; Policies EN1 and EN2; RBLP).
- 3 Does the proposal comprise high-quality design which relates positively to the surrounding historic environment, conserving the appearance, character and setting of locally important heritage assets, and which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design? (Paragraphs 139 and 209, NPPF; Policies EN1, EN4 and CR2).

4 Does the design of the proposal preserve significant views with heritage interest? (Policy EN5).

Baseline conditions

The adjacent locally listed building, 'Entrance building, part of Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE)', 55 Vastern Road, Reading, RG1 8BU (locally listed), which was assessed as part of the HIA, has been demolished. During the preparation of the previous HIA, it had consent to be demolished as part of the redevelopment of this site for housing. This scheme has now come forward, and this asset and the rest of the site has been cleared, removing all of the asset's significance.

We are not aware of any new heritage assets that have been designated, that may be relevant to the assessment.

Review of effects on heritage assets

King's Meadow Swimming Pool (Grade II)

Trees and intervening development would largely screen the proposed development in views of and from King's Meadow Swimming Pool. The proposal would only be possibly visible from small areas to the north and west of the building (as shown on the ZTV). In these views, it is highly likely that only a small part of the proposal would be visible, in glimpsed views only. When considering this, the change would be minor and characteristic of the existing wider setting, which is characterised by taller buildings which create an urban backdrop to the trees in the immediate setting. Only the immediate setting contributes materially to the significance of the pool, which would be unaffected by the proposal.

The amended scheme would not appear materially different in the heavily screened views from near the listed building. Therefore, the conclusion remains that the setting and significance of the King's Meadow Swimming Pool would be preserved.

Main Building of Reading Station (Grade II)

The proposal may be seen from small areas within the southern-most extent of the pedestrianised area fronting the Main Building. The vast majority of views towards the building from this space would be unaffected.

The visibility of tall buildings behind the frontage of the Main Building may affect the existing appearance of the listed building. However, the taller elements of the proposal would be seen to the side of the station building and would not materially extend above the main form of the frontage. The existing setting is characterised by many modern buildings, including the other station buildings and the nearby Thames House. Whilst this would constitute a minor change to the existing setting, the proposed development would be perceived as part of an urban townscape backdrop and would not distinctly affect the experience of the heritage asset.

The change to the architectural treatment and increased interest at the top of the 11-storey building would be seen from within this view, and would improve the visual appearance of the building within this, which would continue to be read as a minor change to the existing urban townscape backdrop. The setting and significance of the Main Building of Reading Station would be preserved.

Reading Abbey Scheduled Monument and Forbury Garden (Grade II Registered Park and Garden) (and other listed building within it)

From the western part of the Reading Abbey Scheduled Monument and Forbury Garden, filtered winter views of the tops storeys of the proposal would be visible beyond the railway line, but would represent a small, distant change to the existing setting, and would be characteristic of the significant 20th-century development surrounding the railway line. There would be no material change to the setting of these assets. Further, no aspect of the setting which contributes to the significance (such as the park itself, and historic buildings to the south of the park) would be affected.

The amended proposals would remain a distant change to the existing setting which would be seen in only limited areas of this park, and would largely not be a perceivable change to the surrounding built environment. The setting and significance would be preserved.

Reading Bridge (locally listed)

Reading Bridge is close to the application site and the proposed development would represent a large change to the setting of the bridge. It would be visible from the bridge itself and the southern and northern banks. However, the setting of the bridge is already characterised by large 20th-century buildings, including the existing building on site and Clearwater Court. The proposed development would be adjacent to these existing large buildings.

The proposal would change the character of the setting by removing the existing building on site, which complements the design of Sovereign House. This would be an improvement, however, as it would introduce high quality contemporary architecture, which whilst larger than the existing building, would remain comfortable within the context of the surrounding townscape and references and complements the surrounding natural environment. The key elements which contribute to the significance, the open green space, river and its banks would be unaffected by the proposal.

The amended massing and changes to parapet treatment would reduce the height of the elements on the river frontage and increase the separation between the blocks. The white brickwork and amended architectural detail would provide further articulation of the massing. These changes will enhance the building's appearance within the setting of the locally listed bridge. The setting and significance of Reading Bridge would be preserved.

Entrance building, part of Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE), 55 Vastern Road, Reading, RG1 8BU (locally listed)

This heritage asset has been demolished, removing all of its significance.

Summary

The amended scheme has refined the architectural response to the site and context and would continue to maintain and reinforce the benefits to the general wider setting of the heritage assets that were previously proposed. The additional articulation and changes to the architectural detailing would provide further visual interest and distinctiveness resulting in a proposal of excellent architectural quality. In all cases, the setting and significance of the surrounding heritage assets would be preserved.

The conclusions of the original HIA remain valid, notwithstanding the changes to the baseline as set out in this addendum.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Felix Charteris', written in a cursive style.

Felix Charteris

Associate Director - Heritage

BA (Hons) MA MA IHBC