



ABBEY GARDENS

DESIGN STATEMENT - SOUTH BLOCK ROOF WINDOWS

Proposed Addition of Windows to Existing Mansard Roofs of South Block at Abbey Gardens, Abbey Street, Reading, RG1 3BA

Introduction

This Design Statement has been prepared by Sada Architecture Ltd in support of a planning application for the installation of new windows to the existing mansard roofs on the South Block of Abbey Gardens, located on Abbey Street, Reading RG1 3BA.

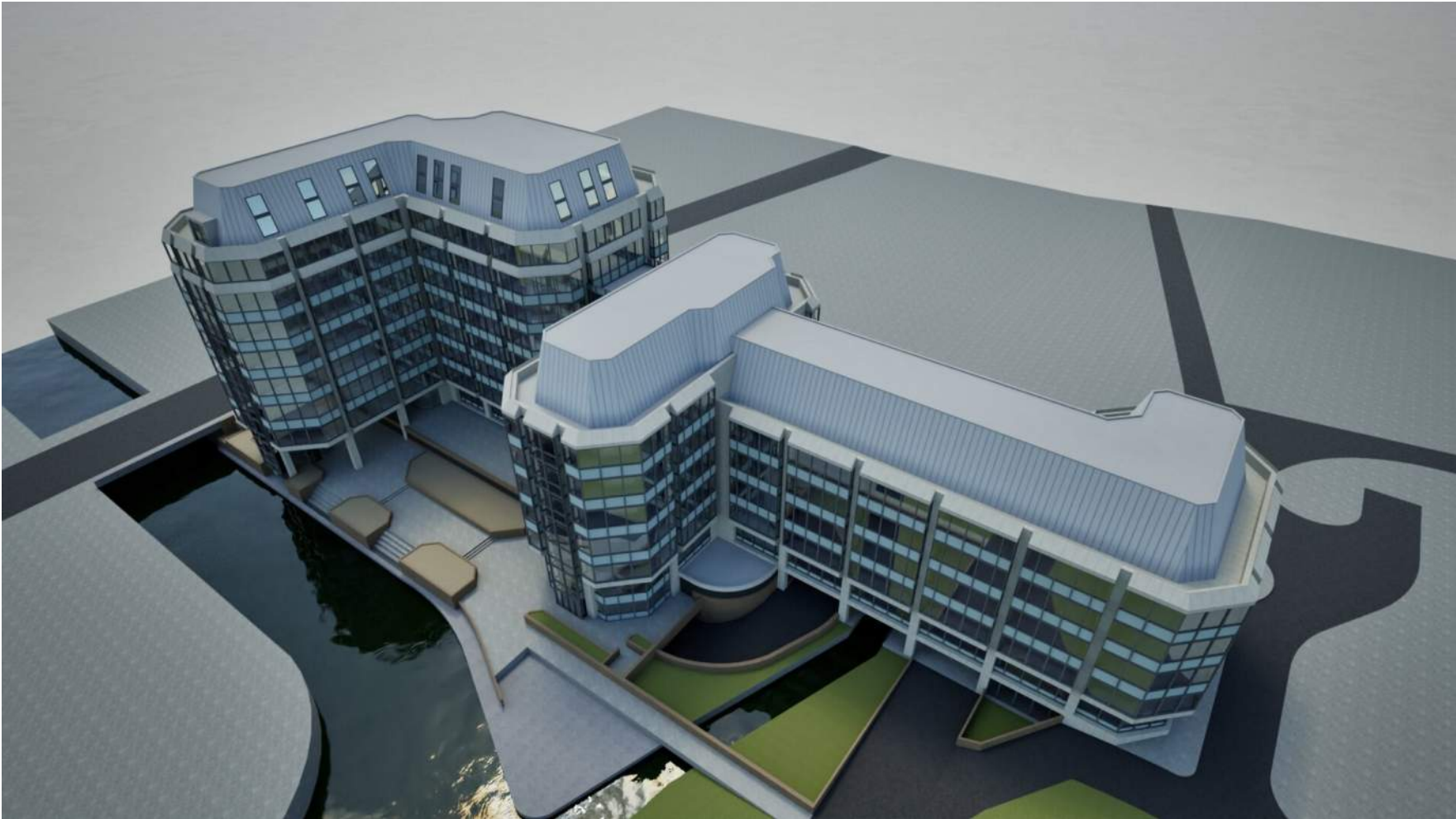
The proposals form part of a broader vision to repurpose the existing building from office use to residential accommodation. While the change of use will be addressed under a separate application, this submission focuses solely on the proposed external alterations to the mansard roofs.

The existing mansard levels currently accommodate plant rooms which are now redundant. The intent of this application is to allow for a more practical and aesthetically coherent use of these spaces, aligned with the future residential conversion.

A similar application has been lodged for the North and Central Blocks under planning reference PL/25/1175. Together, these proposals will provide a consistent and coordinated improvement across the whole building, enhancing both the functionality and visual coherence of Abbey Gardens as it transitions to residential use.



3d view of front looking north east



3d view of rear looking south west

Design Rationale and Visual Impact

The proposed windows will be sensitively integrated into the existing mansard roof structure, which is clad in vertical standing seam metal. The new openings will follow the existing rhythm and slope of the roof, aligning flush with the cladding to reduce any visual disruption. The windows will adopt a tall, narrow profile that complements the vertical emphasis of the standing seam design, enhancing the architectural consistency of the façade. A single extended bay window is also proposed at the eastern end of the south block to provide the necessary head height for the future extension of the existing escape stairs to this level.

At present, the mansard levels contain numerous ventilation grilles related to their historic plant room use. These grilles are inconsistent in placement and appearance, resulting in a disjointed and cluttered façade. The proposed works will remove these grilles where new windows are installed, significantly improving the overall appearance and coherence of the roofscape. The new windows will introduce a more ordered and refined aesthetic.

Importantly, the existing mansard roofs are set back from the primary façade and situated at high level, significantly reducing their visibility from the public realm. As demonstrated in accompanying photographs taken from Abbey Street and the Scheduled Ancient Monument at the Abbey Ruins, the proposed windows will have minimal visual impact when viewed from surrounding areas.

Rather than appearing incongruous, the addition of windows to the mansards will help the building relate more appropriately to its wider context, where mansard roofs with windows are common.



View of front of Abbey Gardens from Abbey Street



View of Abbey Gardens from Abbey Ruins



Ventilation grilles to existing mansard roof





Above: Existing view on Abbey Street looking north east
Left: Proposed view on Abbey Street looking north east



Above: Existing view on Abbey Street looking south east
Left: Proposed view on Abbey Street looking south east



Above: Existing view on Abbey Street looking north west
Left: Proposed view on Abbey Street looking north west



Above: Existing view on Abbey Street looking south west
Left: Proposed view on Abbey Street looking south west

Local Context and Precedents

The inclusion of windows within mansard roofs is a well-established architectural feature in the local area. A number of nearby buildings incorporate similar elements in varying forms, providing strong contextual precedent for the proposals.

The most relevant and immediate example is Abbots House (189 Abbey Street), which adjoins the Abbey Gardens building to the north. Abbots House features a full-width mansard roof with integrated windows. When viewed from Abbey Street and the Abbey Ruins, Abbey Gardens sits adjacent to and in visual dialogue with Abbots House. The proposed additions will ensure Abbey Gardens relates more harmoniously to this neighbouring building, creating a more unified streetscape and roofline treatment.

A diagram of contextual precedents has been included as part of this application, demonstrating the commonality of such features in the immediate vicinity and reinforcing the appropriateness of the proposed intervention.

Sustainability Statement

The proposal takes a sustainable approach by repurposing the existing mansard roof space for future residential use while upgrading the thermal performance of the retained fabric. New roof windows with a minimum U-value of 1.2 W/m²K will provide daylight and ventilation to the converted space, while the thermal upgrades to the existing roof will achieve an overall roof U-value of 0.15 W/m²K.

Additional internal improvements to the existing cladding will further enhance the enclosure, bringing it up to modern standards of insulation and energy efficiency. Collectively, these measures reduce operational energy demand, improve occupant comfort, and extend the lifespan of the existing structure. By upgrading and reusing the current building fabric rather than replacing it, the project minimises waste and delivers a sustainable, long-term residential conversion.



(1) 189 Abbey Street - Abbots House



(2) Abbey Square

Conclusion

The proposed addition of windows to the mansard roof of the South Block of Abbey Gardens represents a thoughtful and sensitive upgrade to a currently underutilised part of the building. By replacing redundant ventilation grilles with well-proportioned, appropriately detailed windows, the proposals enhance both the functionality and visual quality of the existing structure.

The intervention respects the existing architectural language of the building while drawing upon strong local precedents. Given the limited visibility of the mansards from the public realm and the alignment of the works with future residential conversion plans, the proposals are considered modest yet beneficial in terms of design and context.



(3) 26 The Forbury



(4) 13 Crane Wharf



(5) 854 Abbey Square



(6) 1-5 Kings Street



(7) 20 Market Place



(8) Royal Court, Kings Road



(9) 130 Queens Road



(10) 165 Kings Road



(11) 194 Kings Road