

Planning and Heritage Statement

at...

**17 Christchurch Gardens
Reading
Berkshire
RG2 7AH**

January 2026

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1. Introduction

This Planning and Heritage Statement accompanies a Full Planning Application seeking permission for the retention of an existing lightweight ancillary structure attached to the rear of a semi-detached property comprising self-contained flats, located within the Christchurch Conservation Area, Reading.

The application has been submitted following engagement with the Local Planning Authority and subsequent receipt of an Enforcement Notice. This Statement has been prepared to assess the proposal against relevant planning policy, statutory duties relating to heritage assets, and to demonstrate that the development preserves the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in accordance with legislation and the Reading Local Plan.

2. Site and Surroundings

The application site comprises a semi-detached red brick building set within a generous rear garden, characteristic of the Christchurch Conservation Area. The surrounding townscape is defined by late-19th and early-20th century residential buildings, spacious plots, mature boundary treatments, and predominantly private rear garden spaces.

The rear garden is enclosed by brick boundary walls and is not widely visible from public vantage points. Views within the garden are largely private in nature and experienced only by occupants of the host building.

3. Description of Development

The development comprises a lightweight, single-storey timber structure, positioned to the rear of the existing building and used for ancillary residential purposes. The structure...

- Is modest in height and scale relative to the host building and plot size.
- Is of lightweight, reversible construction.
- Utilises natural timber cladding and a simple roof form.
- Does not involve permanent alteration to historic fabric beyond a limited and reversible point of attachment.

The structure does not project beyond the established building line in a manner that disrupts the legibility of the original dwelling when viewed from public areas.

4. Heritage Context and Significance

4.1 Christchurch Conservation Area

The Christchurch Conservation Area is designated for its coherent historic residential character, architectural consistency, and the contribution of generous garden plots to its overall significance.

The significance of the Conservation Area derives primarily from...

- The form, scale and materials of its buildings.
- The rhythm of plots and boundary treatments.
- The cumulative townscape experienced from public streets and spaces.

Rear gardens, while contributing to spaciousness, are generally private and not key elements of public significance unless development results in clear and demonstrable visual harm to the wider area.

4.2 Statutory Duty

Under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, decision-makers must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas.

This duty does not preclude development, but requires careful assessment of whether harm arises, and if so, whether it is justified.

5. Assessment of Heritage Impact

5.1 Effect on Character and Appearance

The retained structure is located to the rear of the property, within an enclosed garden setting. It is not visually prominent in public views and does not disrupt the established street scene, roofscape, or primary elevations that define the Conservation Area's character.

The modest scale, simple form, and subdued materials ensure that the structure remains visually subordinate to the host building. Its appearance does not compete with, obscure, or erode the architectural distinctiveness of the original dwelling when viewed from public areas.

5.2 Garden Character and Spaciousness

While spacious rear gardens are a characteristic feature of the Conservation Area, the structure occupies only a limited portion of a generous plot and does not result in overdevelopment. The remaining garden area continues to read as open and spacious, retaining its essential character and function.

Importantly, the structure does not result in garden subdivision, hard urbanisation, or loss of boundary definition that would undermine the broader spatial pattern of the area.

5.3 Views

No identified or significant views into, out of, or within the Conservation Area are materially affected by the proposal. The structure is largely screened by existing boundary walls and surrounding built form, and views of the structure are limited to private perspectives within the site.

5.4 Level of Harm

Any perceived impact would fall at the lowest end of “less than substantial harm”, as defined by national policy, which requires careful consideration of the effect of development and having regard to the statutory duty to preserve or enhance their character and appearance. However, it is the applicant’s position that the development preserves the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and therefore gives rise to no heritage harm.

5.5 Response to Matters Raised During Enforcement Proceedings

The applicant is aware of the concerns expressed by officers during enforcement proceedings and has carefully considered these matters as part of this Full Planning Application.

Rear Garden Character and Spaciousness

It is acknowledged that spacious rear gardens form a characteristic element of the Christchurch Conservation Area. However, the retained structure occupies only a limited portion of a generous rear plot and does not result in overdevelopment, subdivision, or the erosion of the garden’s overall openness. The structure is located within a deeply shaded area of the rear garden, which has limited functional amenity value for residents.

The remaining garden area continues to read as spacious and functional, and the development does not undermine the established pattern of plot sizes that contributes to the Conservation Area’s significance. The structure is confined to the rear of the site and does not visually or physically dominate the garden when considered in the context of the plot as a whole.

Scale, Appearance and Architectural Relationship

Concerns have been raised regarding the scale and appearance of the structure and its relationship to the host dwelling. In response, it is noted that the structure is clearly subordinate to the main building in terms of height, massing, and function. Its lightweight construction, simple roof form, and timber cladding ensure that it does not compete with or detract from the architectural primacy of the historic building.

The design has been deliberately kept simple and utilitarian, reflecting its ancillary role and avoiding pastiche or false historicism. The materials used are recessive and appropriate for a garden context, and the structure is read as a secondary element within the plot rather than an extension of the principal building.

Building Composition and Plot Legibility

The retained structure does not obscure or disrupt the primary elevations or architectural composition of the host dwelling when experienced from public viewpoints. The original form and hierarchy of the building remain legible, and the structure does not alter the established building line or roofscape that defines the Conservation Area’s character.

The development is experienced largely within a private rear garden environment and does not give rise to public visual harm that would justify a finding of adverse impact on the wider Conservation Area.

Planning Judgement

While officers have previously expressed the view that the development may be unlikely to receive planning permission, this application enables the proposal to be assessed afresh against the statutory duty under Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the policies of the Reading Local Plan.

For the reasons set out in this Statement, it is concluded that the retained structure preserves the character and appearance of the Christchurch Conservation Area and represents an acceptable form of development

6. Planning Policy Considerations

6.1 Reading Local Plan 2019 – Policy EN1

Policy EN1 seeks to protect and, where possible, enhance heritage assets and their settings. The retained structure respects this objective by...

- Retaining the dominance and legibility of the historic building.
- Avoiding harm to significant public views.
- Being of reversible construction.
- Maintaining the spatial integrity of the plot.

The proposal therefore accords with Policy EN1.

6.2 Other Material Considerations

- Residential Amenity: The structure does not result in loss of light, outlook, or privacy to neighbouring properties.
- Functionality: The structure provides a practical ancillary function supporting the continued residential use of the building.
- Sustainability: Reuse and retention of existing built form aligns with sustainable development objectives by avoiding unnecessary demolition and waste.

7. Planning Balance

In accordance with Section 72 and relevant planning policy, great weight has been given to the Conservation Area designation. Having done so, it is concluded that the development preserves the character and appearance of the Christchurch Conservation Area.

Even if minor harm were identified, it would be clearly outweighed by...

- The limited and private nature of any impact.

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- The reversible and lightweight design.
- The absence of public visual harm.
- The functional benefits to the site's ongoing use.

8. Conclusion

This Statement demonstrates that the retained structure...

- Constitutes an appropriate form of development within its context;
- Preserves the character and appearance of the Christchurch Conservation Area;
- Complies with the statutory duty under Section 72;
- Is consistent with Policy EN1 of the Reading Local Plan 2019.

Planning permission for the retention of the structure is therefore respectfully requested.