

PLANNING STATEMENT

PREPARED BY



ON BEHALF OF PROCTOR & GAMBLE

**REPLACEMENT AIR CONDITIONING AND
RELATED WORKS (BUILDING F)**

**GILLETTE INNOVATION CENTRE
452 BASINGSTOKE ROAD
READING, RG2 0RX**

FEBRUARY 2026

CONTENTS

<u>No.</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1	Relevant Background	3
2	Development Retained	5
3	Development Proposed	6
4	Relevant Planning Policy	7
5	Planning Analysis	9
6	Conclusions	11

APPENDICES

<u>Ref.</u>	<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
A	Building and Condenser Location	12
B	Previously Installed Condenser Units	13

1. **Relevant Background**

- 1.1 The Reading Innovation Centre is located on the west side of Basingstoke Road and accommodates Gillette's UK research and development function.
- 1.2 The capability of the centre was significantly enhanced in 2000 with the opening of a dedicated research and development facility (pursuant to planning consent 98/1107, granted 28th April 1998) and again in 2020 when the historic, art deco building on Basingstoke Road was refurbished and extended to create new offices and welfare facilities (pursuant to planning consent PL/16/2108, granted 13th October 2017).
- 1.3 To the east and south of these buildings respectively, sits 'Building F'; a modular office building¹ constructed pursuant to permission 01/01340/FUL, granted on 6th March 2002. The description of development was: "*Construction of 2 storey test facility, demolition of building 460, with modifications to external works and car parking arrangements*". This followed an earlier permission for ostensibly the same development (PL/01/0847) but modified to take account of issues encountered during implementation. The building is identified at Appendix A.
- 1.4 The conditions imposed upon permission 01/01340/FUL were discharged via application 131503/APPCON. Whilst some conditions remained outstanding, subsequent correspondence between Proctor & Gamble and the Council's then Head of Planning, confirms the latter's satisfaction with the situation.
- 1.5 The office modules within Building F were found to overheat in warm, summer conditions. Local air conditioning systems were installed, with related external condensers, screened by landscaping in the space between the building and car park. There were initially 9 No. condensing units.
- 1.6 To meet demand, the number of units increased to 21 No., stretching across the full width of the building's eastern façade, including some double-stacked units. An image of these is provided at Appendix B.

¹ A Duple building system by Portakabin, with 2 x 10 No. modules over each of the two storeys (i.e., total 40 No. modules).

- 1.7 Whilst there are no planning records, a combination of photos, satellite imagery and other documentary evidence, indicates that the 21 No. condenser units were retained at Building F between since at least July 2018 and November 2024; a period of over six years, well in excess of the four year period for establishing lawfulness pursuant to s171(B) (1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).
- 1.8 Following a review of the air handling demands of the building, the existing 21 No. external condensers were removed from the premises in November 2024 and replaced with new condensers, married to efficient internal AC units.
- 1.9 Thus, this planning application seeks: (a) retrospective consent for the current external condensers: and (b) prospective consent for additional vehicle safety barriers. A separate application has been made on behalf of Proctor & Gamble for retrospective Building Regulations consent.
- 1.10 This statement explains the situation in more detail, before reviewing the development plan and relevant policies, guidance and other material considerations. The proposal is then assessed in terms of its compatibility with relevant objectives, including in terms of design and local amenity. Conclusions are then drawn.

2. Development Retained

- 2.1 On the basis that the existing condensers were lawful (see Paragraph 1.7), the proposal is not merely the retention of the current condensers, but the replacement of the existing condensers and related works. The proposed description of development is, therefore...

“Removal of 21 No. external condensers and their replacement with 6 No. external plant units, vehicle protection barrier and associated works (retrospective consent); and the installation of 4 No. additional vehicle protection barriers.

- 2.3 As confirmed at Paragraph 1.8, a review of the performance of the previous air handling facilities serving Building F was undertaken. This concluded that the heating and cooling requirements of the building could be met in a more effective manner, by installing a lesser number of larger, more efficient, units.

- 2.4 The strategy was agreed by Proctor & Gamble’s managing agents and the new plant installed by LH plc, commissioned and first brought into beneficial use on 18th November 2024. The installed plant comprises (name and model):

- VRV Condenser A - Daikin REYA16A
- VRV Condenser B - Daikin REYA12A
- VRV Condenser Out 2 - Daikin REYA14A
- Chiller unit BS1 - Daikin BS8A14V1B
- Chiller unit BS2 - Daikin BS10A14V1B
- AC heat pump BS3 - Daikin BS4A14V1B

- 2.5 The location of the plant units is shown on drawing A020 (Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations) and identified on the photos supplied with the planning application (Ref: A002 452BR Existing Photographs).

- 2.6 The plant units are connected by way of existing and new pipes/ducts. A single vehicle protection barrier was also fitted to protect VRV Condenser Out 2.

3. Development Proposed

- 3.1 It is now proposed to install four further metal protection barriers to protect plants units BS1 and BS2, and the 2 No. VRV Condensers; all located on the east side of the building, as identified on drawing A020.
- 3.2 The barriers are constructed from steel frame sections, bolted to the ground, and painted yellow for visibility. They would be of the same design as the already installed barrier, as shown in Photograph 01.

4. **Relevant Planning Policy**

- 4.1 Central to Reading Borough Council's corporate strategy, is the provision of necessary infrastructure to support the local economy, and this is reflected in the Local Plan vision to harness Reading's economic strength.
- 4.2 The spatial strategy for Reading confirms that employment uses will continue to be focused and protected within 'major existing employment areas', which includes the Basingstoke Road employment zone where Gillette's Innovation Centre is located. The Council has identified a substantial requirement for further employment/industrial development. Paragraph 3.2.10 of the Local Plan states that "*the majority of the employment areas need to be retained and, where possible, intensified and improved, to provide this role*" (our emphasis).
- 4.3. Policy E2 of the Local Plan identifies the locations of 'core employment areas', which includes the Basingstoke Road and is where new and improved industrial development should be located. Policy CS36 seeks retain and enhance employment-generating premises in these core areas.
- 4.4 There are then various non-employment policies and objectives, which are relevant to proposals for new infrastructure.
- 4.5 Policy CC1 ostensibly repeats the NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development, in terms of approving proposal which are consistent with the policies of the development plan.
- 4.6 Policy CC2 sets out more detailed criteria by which to judge design and construction-related aspects of new development. Its requirements are broad. However, the policy explicitly confirms that the "*...refurbishment of existing industrial stock, will be acceptable*" where design and use of natural resources are agreed.
- 4.7 Policy CC3 relates to climate change adaptation and measures to be incorporated into new development, which is particularly relevant here.

- 4.8 Policy CC7 relates to the design of development by applying criteria which seek to improve the quality and character of the relevant area.
- 4.9 Policy CC8 requires that new development must “...*not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties*” and sets out a number of related criteria, including in relation to noise, disturbance, and visual quality. The policy anticipates the imposition of planning conditions where these are needed to assure that relevant criteria are met.
- 4.10 There are then three further development control policies which are relevant to proposals for new/replacement plant:
- Policy EN15 requires development to reduce the effects of poor air quality (but noting that application of the related criteria is only triggered where development would detrimentally affect air quality).
 - Policy EN16 confirms that development will not be permitted where it will be damaging to the noise environment, particularly in terms of sensitive receptors (i.e., residential development); and
 - Policy EN17, which states that: “*Where noise generating equipment is proposed, the noise source specific level (plant noise level) should be at least 10dB below the existing background noise level, as measured at the nearest noise sensitive receptor.*”
- 4.11 The Council has submitted a revised Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate. The related Examination is underway and, therefore, increasing weight may be applied to the revised policies therein. However, our review of the Submission version document confirms that there are no changes that require a different approach to be taken in respect on the policies outlined above.

5. Planning Analysis

- 5.1 The proposal involves a building in commercial use within a core employment area (EM2d), where the continued use of buildings for employment-generating activity is encouraged; as is the continued optimisation of such buildings for their intended use. The surrounding buildings are also in commercial use and frequently involve surface and roof-mounted plant installations.
- 5.2 The positioning of the 6 No. new plant units is acknowledged to be a visual alteration from the previous situation. However, that situation was characterised by condensers more extensive in number and coverage; to the extent that the eastern side of the building was lined by plant units, some double-stacked.
- 5.3 Whilst the visual implication of these units was ameliorated to some extent by: (a) their modest scale; (b) placement within the shingle-filled gap between the building and car park; and (c) colour matching the related office building; they were nevertheless prominent in views of the building, both from within the car park, and the public realm (again, see Appendix B).
- 5.4 By contrast, the current arrangement secures a substantial reduction in the number of units, whilst ensuring that the building continues to be provided with adequate heating and cooling infrastructure. Much of this is owed to the improved efficiency and dual functionality of newer condensers, achieving the same or similar output, using few units. Importantly, none of the units interact with windows and thus, there is no diminution in outlook or daylight for occupiers of Building F.
- 5.5 The works also included replacement external pipework. However, this was confined to ground level (including on the east-facing side of the building) or to the rear side of the building (i.e., facing west, away from the Basingstoke Road). There are no other changes to the building itself.
- 5.6 The additional vehicle protection barriers are considered a proportionate response to perceived risk, balancing operational efficacy with visual amenity. The barriers protecting units BS1 and BS2 are noted to marginally reduce the

width of the adjacent parking space. Notwithstanding this, the space is to be retained, and can be utilised by smaller vehicles or motorbikes.

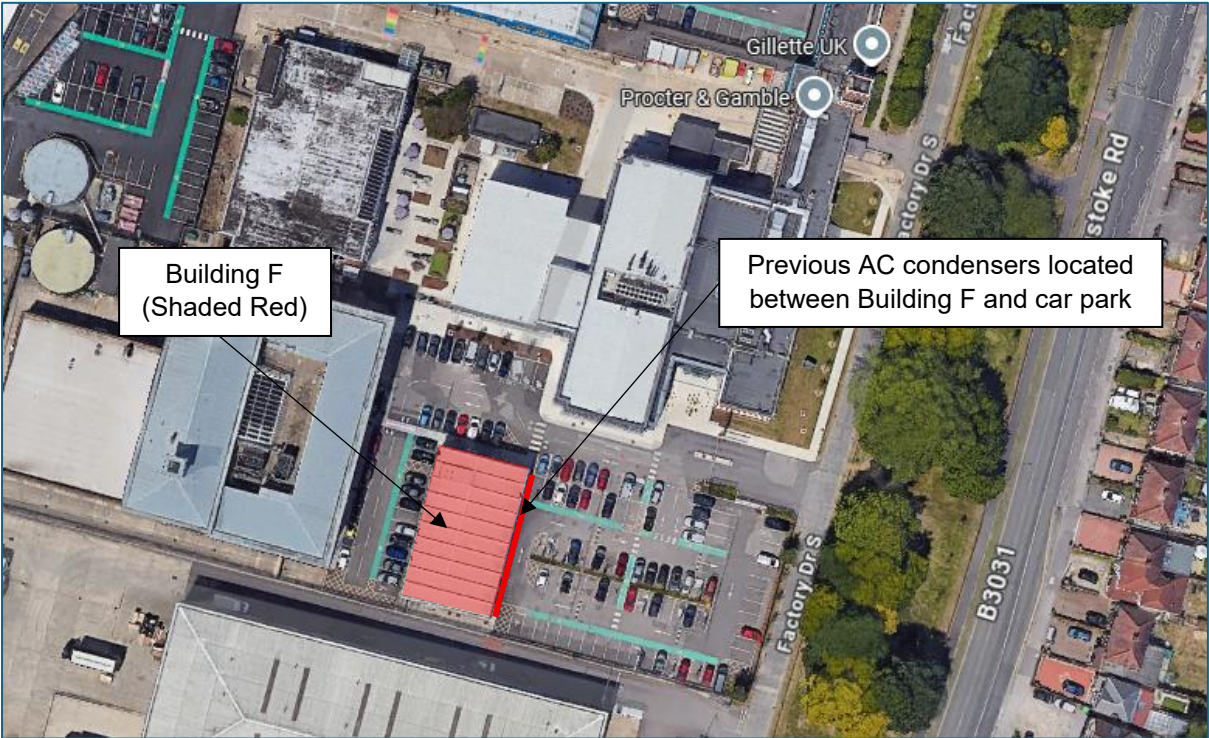
- 5.7 Overall, the proposed plant units are considered appropriate to the use and setting of Building F, and are consistent with objectives of Local Plan policies relating to the improvement of existing commercial stock, along with policies relating to design and visual amenity.
- 5.8 There is nothing about the plant units here which engages with policy EN15, given emissions relate to extraction and chilling from typical employee working environments (i.e., rather than extraction from industrial or other processes). Neither are there any odour-related issues to consider.
- 5.9 Notwithstanding the distance between the installed plant units and residential dwellings, a Plant Noise Assessment has been prepared².
- 5.10 The report identifies the nearest noise sensitive receptors (NSRs); dwellings located on the east side of Basingstoke Road (100m distant) and at Longships Way (175m distant), and describes the acoustic environment, noting the dominant effect of Basingstoke Road to the east, the output of other existing plant, and the effect of intervening buildings to the west.
- 5.11 The report then identifies the plant noise generated and assesses its impact based on known operating characteristics and distance decay principles.
- 5.12 The report concludes that the plant results in -14dB and -19dB excess over background noise levels for Basingstoke Road and Longships Way NSRs respectively; thus well below the Council's objective of -10dB reduction, as expressed by Policy EN17.
- 5.13 Accordingly, the plant is acceptable and does not require any noise mitigation.

2. Taking a similar approach to the Assessment supporting planning application PL/25/0391 (also involving plant installation).

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The application seeks retrospective planning permission for the removal of existing AC condensers and their replacement with 6 No. external units and associated works at Building F, 452 Basingstoke Road, Reading. Permission is also sought for the installation of additional safety barriers.
- 6.2 Notwithstanding that permission is sought in retrospect, the currently installed external plant secures significant operational and amenity benefits over the previous arrangement, being substantially fewer in number, whilst continuing to meet the building's heating and cooling requirements. This is consistent with Local Plan policies which facilitate the improvement of existing commercial premises, particularly those in designated employment areas.
- 6.4 Crucially, the installed plant ensures a high-quality working environment for employees at the Gillette Innovation Centre, thereby securing positive social, economic and environmental outcomes.
- 6.5 Whereas previously the external condensers dominated the public-facing ground floor façade of the building, they are now fewer in number, sporadic and partly moved to the rear of the building. This is beneficial in terms of design and local visual amenity. The RAL of the units closely matches that of the building.
- 6.6 The application is accompanied by a Plant Noise Assessment which confirms that Policy EN17 criteria are readily met, noting the other existing noise sources which dominate the acoustic environment. No mitigation is required.
- 6.7 The retention of the external plant, and proposed vehicle barriers, accord with relevant Local Plan policies. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF confirms that local planning authorities should approve development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.
- 6.8 We respectfully request that planning permission is granted.

APPENDIX A



Previous AC Condenser Position



Previous AC Condensers (October 2020)

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