



ABBEY GARDENS
NORTH & CENTRE BLOCK ROOF EXTENSION
DESIGN STATEMENT



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Planning Design Statement

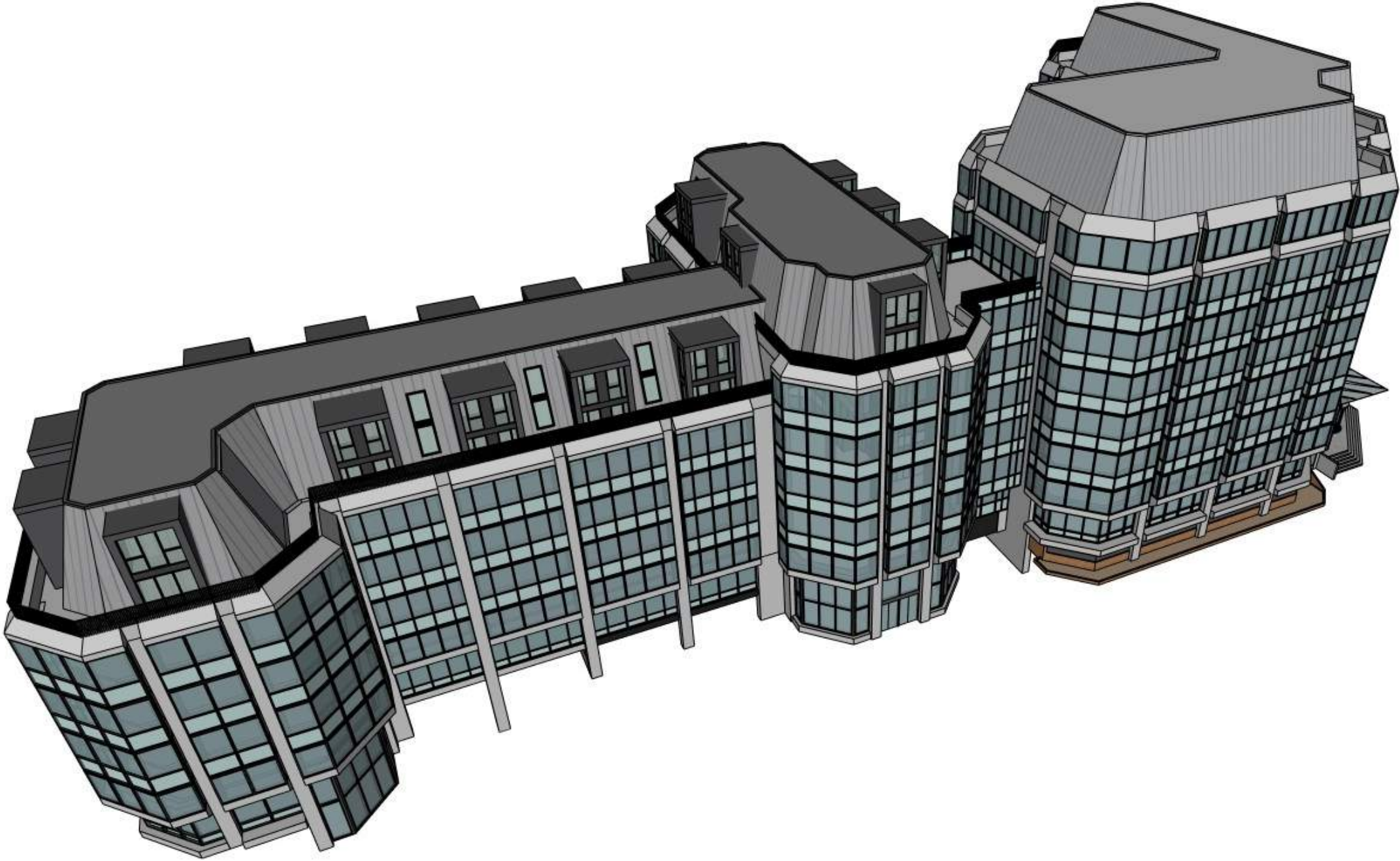
Proposed Roof Extension and Refurbishment (North & Central Blocks) at Abbey Gardens, Abbey Street, Reading, RG1 3BA

Prepared by: Sada Architecture Ltd | **Date:** February 2026

1.0 Project Overview

This Design Statement is submitted in support of a planning application for the extension and refurbishment of the existing mansard roofs on the North and Central blocks of Abbey Gardens. The proposal forms the next stage of a broader vision to repurpose the building from its original 1980s office use into high-quality residential accommodation.

The existing mansard levels currently house redundant plant rooms which are inconsistent in appearance and cluttered with industrial ventilation grilles. The intent of this application is to allow for a more practical and aesthetically coherent use of these spaces. By extending the roof structure in strategic areas, we can provide better internal floor areas for the apartments and create private roof terraces that offer vital outdoor amenity space.



Above: Axonometric looking South East, showing proposed amendments to North & Centre Block Roof

2.0 Planning Strategy and History

The transformation of Abbey Gardens is supported by a comprehensive planning strategy. This application specifically relates to the rooftop areas of the North and Central blocks, but it should be viewed in the context of the other associated applications for the conversion of the building.

2.1 Lower Floor Conversions & Façade

The principle of residential use and the modernization of the building's envelope have been established through the following:

- **Change of Use:** Prior approval for the conversion of existing offices to residential use on the lower floors was granted under references **PL/25/0202** and **PL/25/0918**.
- **Facade Renovation:** A recent application (Ref: **PL/26/0091**) has been lodged to replace the existing curtain walling on the lower floors with a contemporary brick facade.

2.2 North and Central Block (Subject of this Application)

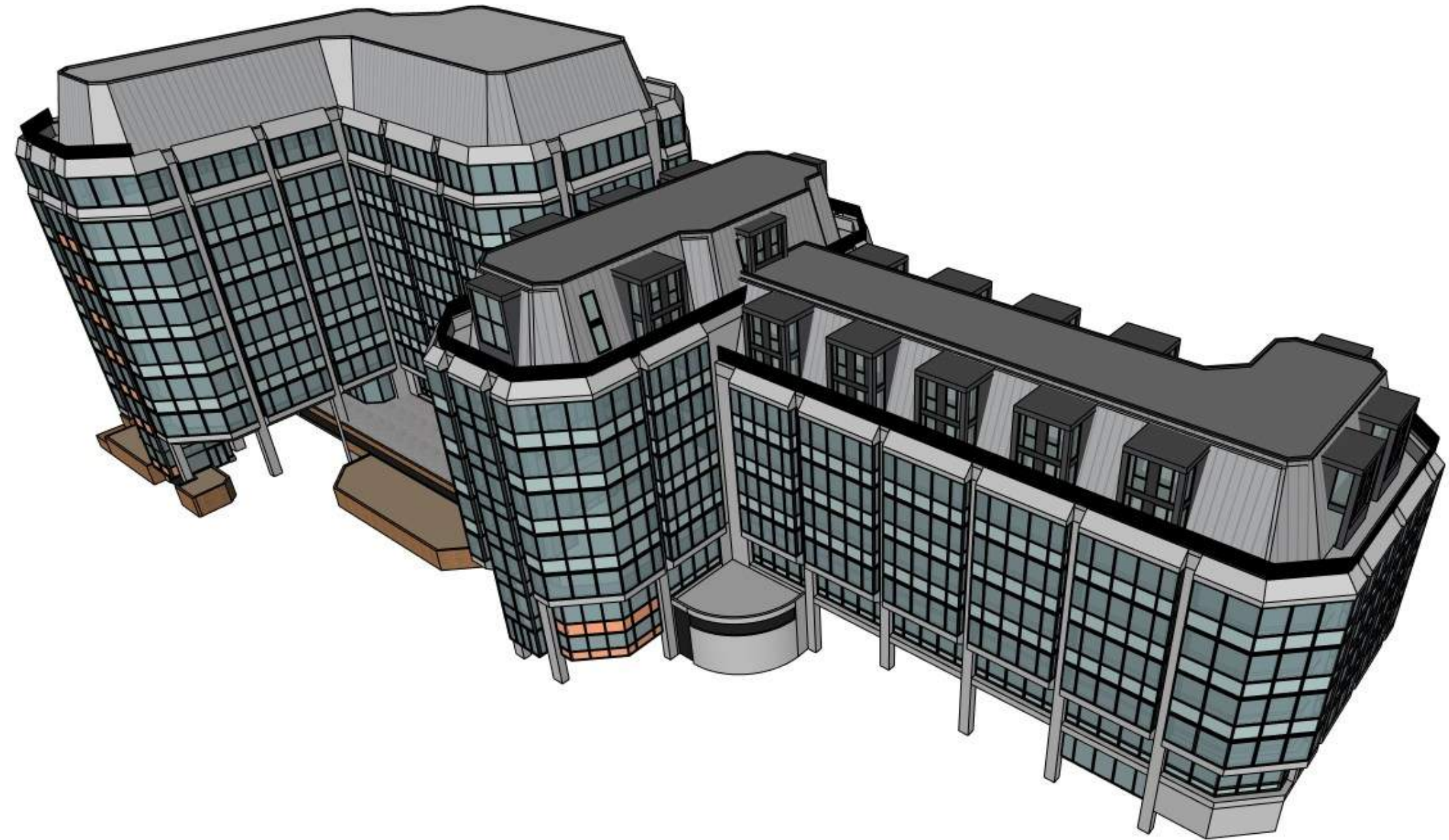
The roof area of these blocks has already seen significant progress toward residential use:

- **Roof Windows:** Permission was granted to create new windows within the existing roof under **PL/25/1175**.
- **Residential Conversion:** Prior approval (PD) to transform the redundant plant area into residential units was granted under **PL/25/1711**.

2.3 South Block (Forthcoming Context)

To ensure the entire building is unified, a similar application for the South block roof will follow this submission. The South block has followed an identical planning path to date:

- **Roof Windows:** Permission for new windows under **PL/25/1729**.
- **Residential Conversion:** Prior approval (PD) to convert to residential units under **PL/26/0012**.



Above: Axonometric looking South West, showing proposed amendments to North & Centre Block Roof

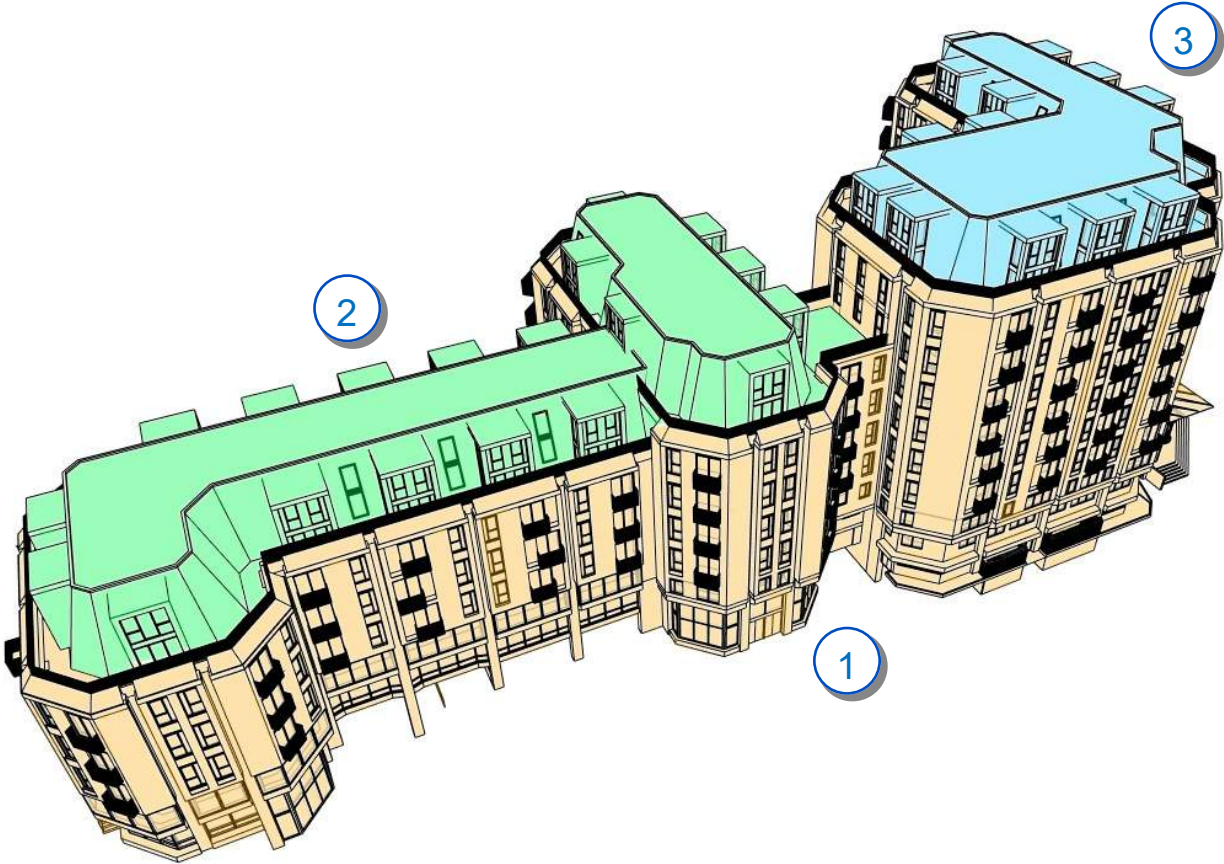
3.0 Design Rationale: Transitioning from Industrial to Residential

The primary intent of the design is to "domesticate" the building's crown, replacing the industrial aesthetic of the plant rooms with a refined residential character. By extending the mansard roof structure outward in strategic areas, we create new habitable bays that significantly improve the internal layout and floor area of the apartments. These extensions are placed to align precisely with the structural bays of the floors below—whether in their current curtain-wall state or their proposed brick-clad form. This vertical continuity ensures the roof works feel like a natural termination of the building’s architecture. A key feature is the creation of private roof terraces in the recesses between the new bays. By utilizing the perimeter of the existing roof, we provide a significant enhancement to the quality of life for future residents. Furthermore, the proposal addresses the current visual clutter; by removing the inconsistent ventilation grilles and infilling redundant openings, we create a cleaner, more ordered silhouette. The new windows integrated into the slope of the roof are designed with a tall, narrow profile to emphasize the verticality of the standing seam design, ensuring they appear flush and integrated.

4.0 Sequence of Applications

The transformation is being executed through a logical sequence of submissions to maintain a coordinated approach to the building's aesthetic:

- **Stage 1 – Lower Facade Works (PL/26/0091):**
Establishes the primary brick material palette for the building’s renovation.
- **Stage 2 – Roof Works (North & Central Blocks) (Current Application):** Extends habitable space and introduces private amenity via roof terraces for the first two blocks.
- **Stage 3 – Roof Works (South Block) (To Follow):** The final stage to ensure the entire complex is visually and technically unified.



Above: Axonometric looking South East, showing proposed amendments Facades on lower to North & Centre Block Roof (subject of this application), South Block Roof & Replacement facades (dealt with under separate application)

Right: Diagram showing sequence of applications

5.0 Materiality and Visual Coherence

The material palette bridges the gap between the existing structure and the proposed brick renovations. The new extended bays will be clad in high-quality aluminium cladding, providing a modern finish that distinguishes the new interventions. Where practical, the existing vertical standing seam metal cladding will be retained, with matching material used to infill areas where grilles are removed.

To achieve "top-to-bottom" unity, the new windows will feature aluminium frames finished to match the dark grey/black tones proposed for the lower-level facade. Similarly, the existing dated railings will be replaced with new balustrades constructed from galvanized steel flat plates (\$50mm \times 10mm\$), painted to match the window frames. This detail matches the balconies proposed for the lower floors, ensuring a consistent architectural language across all levels.



Legend:

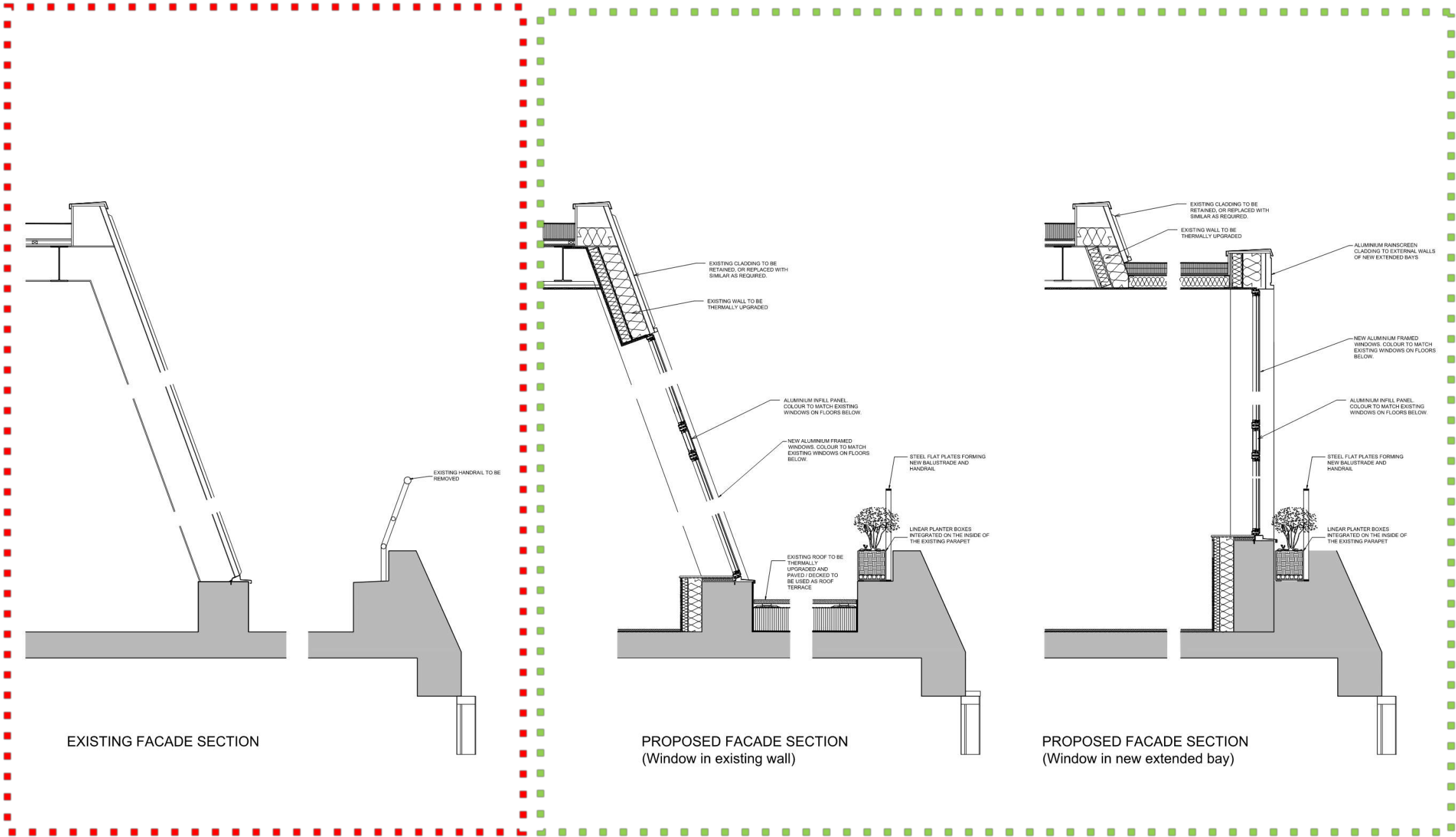
- 01 - Aluminium cladding.
- 02 - Aluminium Framed windows.
- 03 - New Painted Steel balustrade
- 04 - Existing standing seam cladding to be retained / replaced with similar as required
- 05 - Linear planter box integrated on the inside of the existing parapet.

6.0 Technical Strategy and Sustainability

The refurbishment of the mansard roof is a critical opportunity to overhaul the building’s environmental performance, replacing the uninsulated plant rooms with a high-performance residential envelope that drastically reduces the building's carbon footprint. The new roof and bay extensions are designed to exceed standard building regulations, targeting a U-Value of 0.18 for walls and roof using mineral wool insulation for its superior thermal, acoustic, and fire-resistant properties. Furthermore, new windows will feature high-performance glazing targeting a U-Value of 1.2 .

Beyond thermal efficiency, the design prioritizes occupant comfort through natural ventilation. The introduction of high-quality openable windows allows residents to utilize passive cooling and cross-ventilation, reducing reliance on mechanical systems while ensuring healthy indoor air quality.

The transition to a dense, insulated buildup also significantly enhances the acoustic "mass" of the roof, buffering against town-centre noise. Finally, this project maximizes embodied carbon retention by refurbishing the existing structure rather than opting for demolition, supporting a sustainable "retro-first" approach.



7.0 Conclusion

The proposals for the North and Central block roofs represent a significant opportunity to improve both the functionality of the future residential units and the aesthetic appearance of the building's skyline. By replacing redundant, unsightly plant infrastructure with well-designed residential extensions and terraces, the scheme directly supports the wider strategy to regenerate Abbey Gardens into a high-quality residential landmark within Reading town centre. The architectural interventions have been carefully considered to align with the historic context of the "Abbey Quarter," providing a cohesive visual link between the renovated lower levels and the new roofscape. Furthermore, the proposals deliver substantial technical improvements, significantly increasing the building's thermal performance, enhancing acoustic insulation, and supporting natural ventilation for residents. By maximizing the retention of the existing structure, the project aligns with sustainable development principles, offering a responsible solution that converts underutilized industrial space into premium, sustainable housing.

8.0 3D Visualisations

The series of 3D visualisations prepared for this application demonstrate the building in its fully converted state. They show the cumulative visual impact of the new brick facade on the lower levels alongside the proposed roof extensions for all blocks. This "final form" view highlights how the design creates a contextually anchored and aesthetically unified residential landmark, contrasting sharply with the existing 1980s commercial aesthetic.



Above: Proposed aerial view from the corner of Kings Road and Abbey Street.

Left: Existing view.



Right: Proposed aerial view or rear of building looking North West.

Below: Existing view.





Right: Proposed view from the corner of Abbey Square and Abbey Street.

Below: Existing view.





Right: Proposed view from the corner of Kings Road and Abbey Street.

Below: Existing view.



Right: Proposed view of rear of building from Chestnut walk
Below: Existing view.



Right: Proposed view of rear of building from Chestnut walk
Below: Existing view.

