



Acacia Road Enhancements, Reading

Planning Statement

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 On behalf of our client, the University of Reading, we are pleased to submit a full planning and listed building application to Reading Borough Council ('RBC') for highway and public realm enhancements at Acacia Road and Redlands Road, Reading ('the Site').
- 1.1.2 The proposed description of development for which planning permission is sought is as follows:
- 1.1.3 **"Full planning application and Listed Building Consent for proposed public realm and highway improvements to Acacia Road and its junction with Redlands Road, to include the partial demolition of one section of existing wall to enable wider access to MERL, the reconfiguration of parking areas, enhancement of pedestrian routes and associated landscaping."**
- 1.1.4 The improvements seek to address long standing pedestrian and cyclist safety concerns, rationalise vehicular movements, and enhance the character and setting of this key entrance to the campus. The scheme provides an opportunity to improve the visual quality of the gateway, strengthen the heritage setting of nearby Listed Buildings, and create a more welcoming approach for visitors.
- 1.1.5 This statement demonstrates that the proposed development at the Site is a suitable form of development within this location which meets the requirements of Reading Borough Council Local Plan, the Local Plan Partial Update and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 1.1.6 The following documents are submitted in support of the planning application:

Reports

- Covering Letter, ref: 33103062 A3 260326 P1 IS BP Acacia Road Cover Letter
- CIL Form 1
- Planning Statement, ref: 33103062 A3 260326 P1 IS BP Acacia Road Planning Statement
- Ecological Impact Assessment, ref: NPA 30013 0400 P02
- Design & Access Statement, ref: 30013 NPA XX XX RP L 1030 P01
- Heritage Statement, ref: 333103062 A5 ET 2026 Acacia Rd HS_V2.0
- Transport technical note, ref: 089077-CUR-00-XX-T-C-00001-P02

Plans

- Site Location Plan, ref: 30013 NPA XX XX DR L 0010 P03
- Existing Site Plan, ref: 30013 NPA XX XX DR L 3000 P02
- General Arrangement Plan, ref: 30013 NPA XX XX DR L 3001 P07
- Existing and Proposed MERL Wall Elevations, ref: 30013 NPA ZZ 00 DR L 4001 P01
- Photos: MERL Wall, ref: 30013 NPA ZZ 00 DR L 4002 P01
- MERL Entrance Planting Plan, ref: 30013 NPA XX XX DR L 5001 P01
- Vehicle Tracking Refuse Vehicle, ref: 089077-CUR-XX-XX-D-C-04004 P02
- Vehicle Tracking MERL Van Tracking, ref: 089077-CUR-XX-XX-D-C-04005 P02
- Vehicle Tracking Fire and Delivery, ref: 089077-CUR-XX-XX-D-C-04006 P02
- General Arrangement Plan, ref: 089077-CUR-XX-XX-D-C-95001 P06
- Tree Constraints Plan, ref: TCP-AR5943 Rev 0
- Tree Survey Schedule, ref: AR5943



2 Site, Surrounding Area and Planning History

2.1 The Site

- 2.1.1 The Site (Figure 1; National Grid Reference: SU 72379 72750) is located within the administrative boundary of Reading Borough Council (RBC) and forms part of the landholding of the UoR. The Site measures 3,042 sqm.

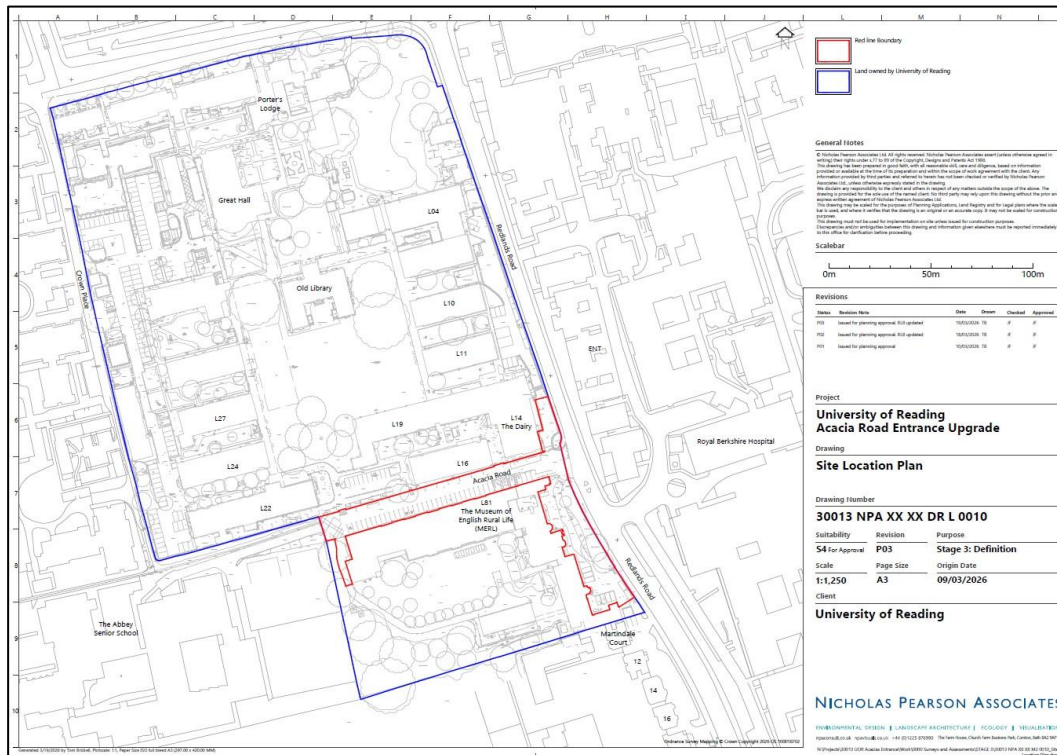


Figure 1. Site Location © Nicholas Pearson Associates 2026

- 2.1.2 The Site encompasses part of Acacia Road and land associated with the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), a Grade II Listed Building (National Heritage List for England (NHLE): 1321880) also known as Front Block of St Andrew's Hall and Stable Lodge to North. The Site includes areas of hardstanding used for vehicle access and car parking, together with areas of planting.
- 2.1.3 These elements are visually separated from the Redlands Road streetscape by a stepped red brick boundary wall, which forms part of the curtilage of MERL.
- 2.1.4 The Site is located within Kendrick Road Conservation Area. The Site is not affected by surface water and or fluvial flooding. The Site is not within flood zone 1, 2 or 3.



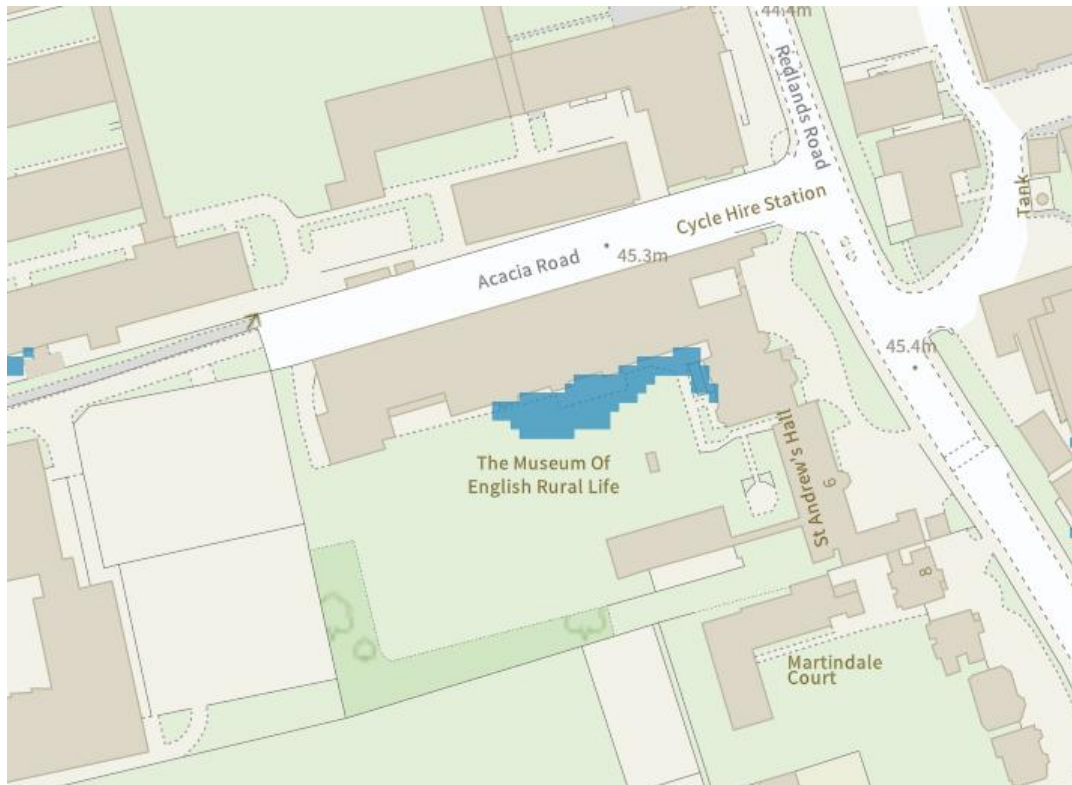


Figure 2. Flood map for planning showing the is not in any flood zone and is not at risk from surface water and fluvial flooding

- 2.1.5 The MERL is operated by the University and is directly linked to the Campus by Acacia Road and Redlands Road, where the museum entrance and exit is located.
- 2.1.6 The Site borders Redlands Road, a main road serving both the London Road Campus and the MERL. Redlands Road connects directly with London Road (A4), a major route into the town centre. Acacia Road, which adjoins the museum's northern boundary, is incorporated within the Site and provides additional access for specific parking needs.
- 2.1.7 The wider area includes further local roads such as Morgan Road, Sheridan Road, Queens Road and Sidmouth Street, which integrate the campus area into the surrounding Redlands neighbourhood.
- 2.1.8 The nearest bus stop within 50 yards from the Site is RBH Redlands Road which is served by bus services 9b Buzz, 3 leopard, 9 Buzz to town centre and wider areas of Reading town. The nearest train station is Reading Train Station and is a within 20-minute walk or 10-minute bus ride.

2.2 Planning History

- 2.2.1 The Site has no relevant planning history according to the Council's website.

3 The Proposed Development

- 3.1.1 This planning application seeks permission for the following description of development:

“Full planning application and Listed Building Consent for proposed public realm and highway improvements to Acacia Road and its junction with Redlands Road, to include the partial demolition of one section of existing wall to enable wider access to MERL, the reconfiguration of parking areas, enhancement of pedestrian routes and associated landscaping.”

- 3.1.2 The proposed works are related to highway, landscape and accessibility improvements. The planning application includes the following proposed development.

Improvements to Acacia Road

- 3.1.3 This includes rationalisation of informal parking spaces with the removal of 26 parking spaces in total to facilitate a new safe, segregated pedestrian route.
- 3.1.4 Reduce the width of the existing bellmouth at Redlands Road to shorten crossing distance and moderate vehicle entry speeds.
- 3.1.5 Provide widened pavements and introduce a new segregated pedestrian route along the north side of Acacia Road, replacing areas currently used for informal parking.
- 3.1.6 Introduce a pedestrian crossing to create a clear gateway and enhance safety for vulnerable users.
- 3.1.7 Stop up the non emergency vehicular access to MERL from Acacia Road to allow a traffic free, step free approach to the museum. This will be achieved with removable bollards.
- 3.1.8 Provide a formalised loading bay to address operational efficiency.
- 3.1.9 Enhance the entrance to The Dairy outdoor seating area and improve visual definition at the interface with pedestrian routes.
- 3.1.10 Integrate and rationalise EV charging infrastructure, with relocation where necessary.

Improvements to MERL Frontage

- 3.1.11 A limited section of the curtilage-listed boundary wall will be removed to widen the entrance/exit to Redlands Road.
- 3.1.12 Pedestrianise the main museum entrance space, removing vehicle conflict and establishing a safer, more welcoming forecourt.
- 3.1.13 Rationalise and reconfigure parking to create a clear turning head, improve vehicular flow, and maintain access for visitors requiring Blue Badge provision.
- 3.1.14 Increase areas of soft landscape, including new planting beds and raised planters, to improve amenity, enhance biodiversity and strengthen the heritage setting.
- 3.1.15 Ensure cycle parking is retained and conveniently accessed.

The Dairy Deliveries

- 3.1.16 Formalise delivery arrangements through a defined loading area, reducing the need for complex manoeuvres currently performed near pedestrian desire lines.



3.1.17 Improve turning arrangements for medium-sized vehicles by utilising controlled gate management and clearer geometric layouts.



4 Planning Policy Context

4.1 Planning Policies

- 4.1.1 This chapter of the Planning Statement identifies the national and local planning policies and guidance considered to be of relevance to the determination of this application. The development proposals accord with all the relevant planning policy guidance relating to the Application Site.
- 4.1.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.1.3 National policy is set out in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024). It is supplemented by the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) which is updated on a regular basis. These documents carry significant material weight.
- 4.1.4 The National Design Guide sets out the fundamental principles for good design and demonstrates what good design means in practice, covering ten characteristics including identity, built form, movement, nature, public spaces, context, uses, homes and buildings, resources, and lifespan.
- 4.1.5 The Development Plan for Reading Borough Council consists of:
- Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019) along with the Proposals Map; and
 - Central and Eastern Berkshire Minerals and Waste Plan
- 4.1.6 There is no made neighbourhood plan for this part of Reading.
- 4.1.7 The Applicant has also had regard to the Supplementary Planning Documents adopted by RBC including:
- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)
 - Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
- 4.1.8 RBC is preparing a Local Plan Partial Update. It consulted on the Pre-Submission Draft of the Partial Update to the Local Plan through a Regulation 19 consultation which concluded in December 2024. The Local Plan Partial Update was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination on 15th May 2025. Stage 1 hearings were held in November, followed by Stage 2 hearings in February 2026 but the Inspector's Report has yet to be published. It therefore has limited weight in decision making.

4.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

- 4.2.1 At a national level, The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in March 2012 sets out the overarching national planning policy principles, providing guidance for local planning authorities and decision-takers. The NPPF has been subsequently updated with the most recent update published in December 2024. It is a material consideration in determining planning applications and the relevant paragraphs are outlined below.
- 4.2.2 Chapters of the NPPF that are most of relevance in this instance include:
- Chapter 2 – Achieving sustainable development
 - Chapter 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities



- Chapter 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
- Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed places
- Chapter 14 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Chapter 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Chapter 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

4.2.3 The key paragraphs of the NPPF relevant to the proposals are listed below.

Chapter 2 – Achieving sustainable development

4.2.4 The presumption in favour of sustainable development at the heart of the NPPF is outlined in paragraph 11 (within chapter 2). This states that for the purposes of decision-taking this means:

“c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date⁸, granting permission unless:

i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.”

Chapter 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities

4.2.5 Paragraph 96 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction, enable and support healthy lives and are safe and accessible.

Chapter 9 – Promoting sustainable transport

4.2.6 Paragraph 109 seeks to ensure that potential impacts of development on transport networks are addressed, opportunities from existing or proposed transport infrastructure and changing transport technology and usage are realised, appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes are identified, the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure can be identified, assessed and taken into account and patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations are integrated into the design of schemes.

4.2.7 Paragraph 116 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

4.2.8 Paragraph 117 states that applications for development should give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, and second, to facilitating access to high quality public transport. The needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility should be addressed and places should be created that are safe, secure and attractive, minimising the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles and responding to local character and design standards. Application should also allow for the efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles and be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.



Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed places

- 4.2.9 Paragraph 131 states that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve, and outlines the importance of good design as a key aspect of sustainable development, creating better places in which to live and work.
- 4.2.10 Paragraph 135 emphasises that planning decisions should ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive, are sympathetic to local character and history, establish or maintain a strong sense of place, optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks, and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible.
- 4.2.11 Paragraph 136 emphasises the important contribution trees make to the character and quality of urban environments, and can help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible.

Chapter 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

- 4.2.12 Paragraph 187 states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, including minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.

Chapter 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

- 4.2.13 Paragraph 202 relates to heritage assets and recognises that they are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.
- 4.2.14 Paragraph 207 states that when determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 4.2.15 Paragraph 208 states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.
- 4.2.16 Paragraph 210 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:
 - a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
 - b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
 - c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- 4.2.17 Paragraph 212 states when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is



irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

- 4.2.18 Paragraph 213 sets out any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of: a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional.
- 4.2.19 Paragraph 215 states where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

- 4.2.20 The PPG was first published in March 2014 and, alongside the Framework, provides guidance notes on various matters including design, natural environment, biodiversity net gain, and sports and recreation facilities.

National Design Guide

- 4.2.21 The National Design Guide sets out the fundamental principles for good design and demonstrates what good design means in practice, covering ten characteristics including context, identity, built form, movement, nature, public spaces, uses, homes and buildings, resources, and lifespan.

Reading Borough Local Plan

- 4.2.22 RBC's Local Plan was adopted in November 2019 and contains the policies for how Reading will develop up to 2036, which is the end date of the Plan.
- 4.2.23 The planning policies contained in the Local Plan that are most relevant to the proposed development are provided in full below.
- 4.2.24 Policy CC1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development) applies the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development and confirms that the Council will work proactively with applicants to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and planning applications that accord with the policies in the development plan will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2.25 Policy CC6 (Accessibility and the Intensity of Development) states that the scale and density of development will be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities, with the densest and largest scale development taking place in the most accessible locations. Unless it can be demonstrated that the accessibility of a site is to be significantly upgraded, for example, by providing high quality pedestrian routes or providing access to good public transport services, any new development must be at a scale, density and intensity appropriate to that level of accessibility.
- 4.2.26 Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) sets out that all development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located.
- 4.2.27 Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) seeks to ensure development does not cause harm to the living environment of existing properties, in terms of loss of privacy, overlooking and visual dominance, amongst other things.
- 4.2.28 Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) supports that all proposals will be expected to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. Proposals should seek to avoid



- 4.2.29 Policy EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) states that development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Positive consideration will be given to proposals which take opportunities to enhance the character of conservation areas.
- 4.2.30 Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) relates to the maintenance, protection, consolidation, extension and enhancement of the Green Network including sites with identified or potential biodiversity interest. It states that development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible.
- 4.2.31 Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) seeks to protect trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands from damage or removal where they are of importance and seeks the provision of new tree planting within new developments.
- 4.2.32 Policy EN15 (Air Quality) emphasises that development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality. Development that would detrimentally affect air quality will not be permitted unless the effect is to be mitigated.
- 4.2.33 Policy TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy) requires that new development should make appropriate provision for works and contributions to ensure an adequate level of accessibility and safety by all modes of transport from all parts of a development, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling, in accordance with any agreed transport assessment submitted as part of the application.
- 4.2.34 Policy TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway-related Matters) sets out that when determining proposals involving a new or altered access onto the transport network, improvement works to the transport network, the creation of new transport infrastructure or the generation of additional trips on the transport network, consideration will be given to the effect on safety, congestion and the environment. Development must not be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network, including pedestrians and cyclists.
- 4.2.35 Policy TR4 (Cycle Routes and Facilities) states that developments will be expected to make full use of opportunities to improve access for cyclists to, from and within the development and to integrate cycling through the provision of new facilities.
- 4.2.36 Policy TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) emphasises that development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport.

The Central and Eastern Berkshire Minerals and Waste Plan (2023)

- 4.2.37 The Joint Minerals and Waste Plan was adopted by Reading Borough Council on 31st January 2023.
- 4.2.38 Bracknell Forest Council, RBC, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham Borough Council (collectively referred to as the Central and Eastern Berkshire Authorities) have worked in partnership to produce a Joint Minerals and Waste Plan to guide minerals and waste decision making in the Plan area.
- 4.2.39 The Joint Minerals and Waste Plan establishes the future levels of provision of minerals and waste development to meet national and regional policy targets and objectives. It sets out a vision of how this will be achieved and provides details of strategic sites that will deliver the vision.

Supplementary Planning Documents

- 4.2.40 The Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019) is intended to guide developers and decision-makers on the implementation of key sustainability policies set out in the Reading Local Plan. It provides practical advice on forms of sustainable design and construction, as well as waste minimisation that will meet these policy requirements.



- 4.2.41 The Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011) provides guidance for public and private car parking within the town centre and reflects some of the Council's Core Strategy Policies.

Emerging Local Plan

- 4.2.42 RBC is preparing a Local Plan Partial Update. It consulted on the Pre-Submission Draft of the Partial Update to the Local Plan through a Regulation 19 consultation which concluded in December 2024. The Local Plan Partial Update was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination on 15th May 2025. Stage 1 hearings were held in November, followed by Stage 2 hearings in February 2026. It therefore has limited weight in decision making.
- 4.2.43 It is anticipated that RBC will publish their proposed modifications in late spring following with adoption of the plan by autumn of 2026.
- 4.2.44 Emerging Policy 'EN12 Biodiversity' requires development proposals to achieve a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), except where exemptions apply as set out in The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024. The proposed development qualifies for an exemption from the mandatory BNG requirement. Nevertheless, the principles of biodiversity enhancement have been considered as part of the scheme, and opportunities to support ecological value have been explored where practicable.
- 4.2.45 The list of relevant emerging policies are:
- CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
 - CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
 - CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
 - CC7: Design and the Public Realm
 - CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
 - EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
 - EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
 - EN4: Locally Important Heritage Assets
 - EN12: Biodiversity
 - EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
 - EN15: Air Quality
 - TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
 - TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
 - TR4: Cycle Routes and Facilities
 - TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
- 4.2.46 The extant policies relevant to this development proposal appears to be retained within the partial update.



5 Planning Assessment

5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 This section assesses the proposals against relevant national and local planning policy to establish the principle of development of the proposal.

5.2 Principle of Development

- 5.2.1 The Site sits within the South Reading area, just outside the Central Reading Area and Town Centre, and makes up part of the University of Reading's London Road Campus. The proposed works are ancillary to the MERL, which is a longstanding cultural and educational facility, and represent targeted improvements to the existing access, improving accessibility, inclusivity and on-site safety for all users.
- 5.2.2 The proposals support the Council's vision at paragraph 2.1.8 of the Local Plan, which states that: "[Reading] will be a clean, green, healthy, safe and desirable place in which to live, work, study and visit". The proposals also accord with paragraph 135 of the NPPF, which states that planning decisions should ensure that developments will optimise the potential of the site to support local facilities and transport networks, and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible.
- 5.2.3 The proposed works will deliver several layout and safety improvements, including clearer pedestrian routing, improved visibility, and more coherent vehicle management. These enhancements will create a safer and more legible environment for visitors, staff, and service vehicles. It will rationalise circulation and support operational efficiency, reducing conflict points and enhancing the overall arrival experience.
- 5.2.4 The proposed works include improvements to existing site arrangements and accessibility such as segregated pavements which will be proposed at the Acacia Road junction to join key gateways for MERL and The Dairy. A marked segregated walkway will be provided along the north side of Acacia Road from the new pavements to the footpath link at its western end. A new pedestrian crossing, provision of tactile paving with the reduction of junction width to improve safety of pedestrians using the western Redlands Road pavement are the other improvements to pedestrian access and safety.
- 5.2.5 In relation to parking provision, the proposal will result in a net loss of 26 spaces on Acacia Road. This comprises the removal of 27 spaces (25 standard bays, 1 accessible bay, and 1 EV-accessible bay), offset by the addition of 1 standard EV bay. The proposal will also formalise EV charging infrastructure, including relocation where required. One additional accessible parking will be provided in front of The MERL with 2 existing accessible parking (blue badge) spaces being formalised. The overall site will have a total reduction of 28 standard parking bays from the MERL building car park and Acacia Road.
- 5.2.6 Proposals also include a formal loading bay on the south side of Acacia Road. This will address in enhancing operational requirements of the Site.
- 5.2.7 At the frontage of MERL, entrance/exit to Redlands Road will be widened with the limited removal of the curtilage listed wall. This will improve accessibility and safety for pedestrians and disabled users. The entrance/exit at the junction of Acacia Road and Redlands Road will be limited with bollards to make the accesses more accessible and safe.
- 5.2.8 When viewed in the context of total parking provision across the campus, the proportional loss of spaces is negligible. Permit holders are able to use any designated campus parking area, and parking demand is spread interchangeably across the various car parks rather than being tied to specific individual bays, ensuring capacity can be balanced effectively across the Campus. Redlands Road, adjacent to the Site, is controlled by double yellow lines and a limited



number of on street spaces exist. As such, any minimal redistribution of parking demand will be contained within the Campus rather than displacing of parking on public highway network.

- 5.2.9 Parking surveys were undertaken by the University between the end of 27th January 2026 and 6th March 2026. At this time a total of 219 parking spaces were identified at the London Road campus. In-use data during the survey period recorded a maximum of 81 cars (36.99% of capacity) and a minimum of 15 cars (6.85% of capacity) parked at the campus. The mean average number of cars parked at the campus during the survey period was 41.38 (18.90% of the total capacity).
- 5.2.10 This monitoring data shows that over the past few months, the parking spaces have not been fully utilised, with occupancy levels regularly well below capacity. The overall parking provision within the London Road campus greatly exceeds current levels of use and as mentioned above, will not lead to displacement of parking on public highway. This evidence confirms that the removal of the spaces will not materially affect operational requirements and functioning of the Museum or the wider campus.
- 5.2.11 The proposal will rationalise parking to prioritise safety, improved pedestrian and cyclist routes, with reductions focused on underutilised standard bays. Accessible and EV parking provision will be maintained and enhanced. Loading bays will be maintained and enhanced. These improvements will encourage to prioritise active travel and limited car use whilst additionally support in maintaining the overall air quality of the area.
- 5.2.12 The existing cycle shelter will be retained, having historically been appropriate for demand. The retention and relocation of the existing EV and accessible parking spaces will support for low emission travel and ensure that visitors with additional mobility needs are adequately catered for.
- 5.2.13 The proposal will improve the visual appearance of the MERL entrance space by providing new planting bed with new resilient, low maintenance, wildlife friendly planting species and avoid blocking views and light to windows.
- 5.2.14 Taken together, the access, safety, and landscaping improvements will deliver clear public and operational benefits without creating adverse transport or environmental impacts. The low utilisation of the affected parking spaces, the flexibility of campus wide permit arrangements, and the sustainable location of the Site ensure that the limited loss of parking is acceptable. The proposal is a sustainable form of development and is compliant with local plan policy CC1 and paragraph 11 of the NPPF.
- 5.2.15 The proposal will provide high quality pedestrian routes appropriate to the level of accessibility on Site and will be compliant with local plan policy CC6. The proposal will be of high-quality design, maintain and enhance the historic character and appearance of the area. It will also respond positively to the local context by providing appropriate safe and accessible access and parking for all potential users, including disabled people and is therefore compliant with local plan policy CC7. As the development will be of limited scale and not include any major construction works, the proposal will not have any adverse impact on existing nearby amenity in terms of noise, dust, light and air and is therefore compliant with policy CC8 and EN15. The proposal will not include removal of trees and enhance existing landscaping and trees and therefore will be in compliance with local plan policy EN14. The proposal will therefore be a high quality development and will be in compliance with paragraphs 96, 109, 116, 117, 131, 135 and 187 of the NPPF.
- 5.2.16 The MERL grade II listed building will be protected and enhanced with proposed enhancement to the curtilage listed wall. The proposal will result in no harm to Kendrick Road Conservation Area. It will reinforce and contribute to historic character of the area. Therefore, the proposal will be in compliance with policy EN1, EN3 and EN6 and paragraphs 208 and 210 of the NPPF.
- 5.2.17 The proposal will not have a materially detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network, will not be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network, including pedestrians and cyclists and will comply with the adopted standards of the Transport Authority.



The proposal will provide electric vehicle charging and will also improve opportunities for active travel within the site. Therefore, the proposal will be in compliance with local plan policies TR3, TR4 and TR5 and paragraphs 109, 116 and 117 of the NPPF.

5.3 Design and Landscaping

- 5.3.1 The proposed development is supported by submitted DAS (ref: 30013 NPA XX XX RP L 1030 P01) and associated plans referred above.
- 5.3.2 Design proposals will include improvements to Acacia Road. This includes rationalisation of informal parking spaces with the removal of 26 parking spaces in total to facilitate a new safe, segregated pedestrian route. This also includes reduction of width of the existing bellmouth at Redlands Road to shorten crossing distance and speed of entry vehicles. A pedestrian crossing will be provided here to enhance the safety for vulnerable users as well as the Dairy outdoor seating will be enhanced at this pedestrian crossing interface. Proposals also include formalisation of a loading bay to support and enhance circulation and operational efficiency.
- 5.3.3 Design proposals will include improvements to MERL frontage. This includes to pedestrianise the main museum entrance space, make it more accessible by removing vehicle conflict and establishing a safer, more welcoming forecourt. This will be maintained by the provision of removable bollards for ad hoc access. This also includes widening of entry/exit to Redlands Road at the southern end of the MERL frontage to improve safety, reconfigure parking to create a clear turning head. Locally widening the carriageway at the frontage to 3m.
- 5.3.4 Landscape proposals will include the provision of one new planting bed (Planting bed B of approximate 3.69 sqm) to soften and enhance the approach to MERL, enhancing the planting adjacent to the entrance from Acacia Road and providing new raised planters to frame the entrance forecourt. The new planting species will be resilient, low maintenance, wildlife friendly. Apart from enhancing the 'welcome' appeal, the new planting bed will help to direct pedestrian movements.
- 5.3.5 Design proposals will collectively respond to identified site issues and cater to enhance safety concerns, address widespread pedestrian vehicle conflicts, poor legibility, and a visually weak entrance to MERL. The design aims to create a coherent, heritage sensitive and accessible arrival space befitting the campus and museum.
- 5.3.6 The proposal will provide high quality pedestrian routes appropriate to the level of accessibility on Site and is compliant with local plan policy CC6. The proposal will be of high-quality design and maintain and enhance the historic character and appearance of the area. It will also respond positively to the local context by providing appropriate safe and accessible access and parking for all potential users, including disabled people and is therefore compliant with local plan policy CC7. The proposal will not have any adverse impact on existing nearby amenity in terms of noise, dust, light as the development will be of limited scale and not include any major construction works. It is therefore compliant with policy CC8 and EN15. The proposal will be in compliance with paragraphs 96, 109, 116, 117, 131, 135 and 187 of the NPPF by providing a high-quality design that integrates well with the surrounding built development.

5.4 Transport

- 5.4.1 The application is supported by a transport technical note.
- 5.4.2 The proposal responds directly to existing issues associated with pedestrian–vehicle conflict, poor legibility, and informal parking arrangements. Through the rationalisation of on-street parking along Acacia Road, the proposals facilitate the introduction of a safe, segregated pedestrian route, improved crossing infrastructure, and enhanced visibility. The reduction in the width of the Redlands Road bellmouth will further moderate vehicle speeds and reduce pedestrian crossing distances, contributing to a safer environment for all users.



- 5.4.3 While the proposals result in a net loss of 26 parking spaces, robust survey data confirms that parking across the wider campus is significantly underutilised, with substantial spare capacity available. Parking spaces at the front of MERL will be reconfigured and one EV parking space will be additionally provided. The cycle parking will be retained. These proposals will continue support for sustainable active travel choices. In addition, the provision of a formalised loading bay will improve operational arrangements, strengthening overall site management.
- 5.4.4 A 2m widening of the MERL entrance/exit at Redlands Road will be provided. This will improve safety and accessibility while maintaining necessary operational flexibility.
- 5.4.5 The proposal will not have a material detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network, will not be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network, including pedestrians and cyclists and will comply with the adopted standards of the Transport Authority. The proposal will provide electric vehicle charging and will also improve opportunities for active travel to and from the development. Therefore, the proposal will be in compliance with local plan policies TR1, TR3, TR4 and TR5 and paragraphs 109, 116 and 117 of the NPPF.

5.5 Ecology and Biodiversity

- 5.5.1 The application is supported by an Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) (ref: NPA 30013 0400 P02). The EIA is based on desk study and an extended habitat survey.
- 5.5.2 Records of biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) within 1km of the Site and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar Sites within a 2km the Site were retrieved from Natural England's MAGIC website. The proposals do not fall within any of the descriptions of development for the SSSI Impact Risk Zones which overlay the Site. The Site is not within an area of identified biodiversity interest.

Habitat

- 5.5.3 An extended habitat survey was carried out on the 17th of February 2026. Figure 1 of the EIA shows the habitats present at the Site. Photographs showing an overview of the Site are shown in Appendix 1 of the EIA.
- 5.5.4 The Site is divided into the following habitat types:
- Developed Land, Sealed Surface;
 - Other Neutral Grassland;
 - Introduced Shrub;
 - Tall forbs;
 - Individual Trees;

Species

- 5.5.5 None of the trees on Site were considered suitable to support roosting bats. Shrubs and trees provided suitable habitat for nesting birds.

Other Protected Species

- 5.5.6 There has been no evidence of Badger on or adjacent to the Site. Due to the very limited habitat present on Site and the poor habitat connectivity it is highly unlikely that protected amphibians or other protected species would be present.

BNG



- 5.5.7 The Site has no priority habitats and no irreplaceable habitats present. As only 13sqm of the habitat is being impacted by works, the Site is exempt from statutory Biodiversity Net Gain. As such no metric calculation is provided with the application.

Mitigation

- 5.5.8 A new mixed planting bed will be provided as part of the proposals to mitigate for the lost area of vegetation/provide no net loss. New planters will also be provided. The new areas of planting will be more diverse than the baseline areas and will provide a mixture of species with wildlife value, including an aim to provide pollinators an extended period of resources. Removal of shrubs in the area to be replanted will either be avoided during the nesting bird season (March-August) or be checked for nesting birds immediately prior to clearance works. If a nesting bird is found to be present then the nest would be protected until nesting is complete/chicks have fledged.
- 5.5.9 The proposed development will be in compliance with local plan policies EN12 and EN14 and paragraph 187 of the NPPF.

5.6 Heritage

- 5.6.1 The application is supported by a Heritage Statement (ref: 333103062 A5 ET 2026 Acacia Rd HS_V2.0).
- 5.6.2 The St Andrew's Hall which houses MERL is a Grade II Listed Building located on Redlands Road. The boundary wall at MERL is considered to be curtilage-listed by virtue of its functional, historical and spatial relationship with MERL. The wall served, and continues to serve, an ancillary function, defining the extent of the grounds in the east and formal access arrangements.
- 5.6.3 A review of historic material and the current fabric demonstrates that the overall height of the wall to Acacia Road and Redlands Road has altered historically to create the extent stepping appearance. Although the wall demonstrates evidence of alteration and repair, it forms a clearly defined edge between the public realm and MERL grounds. Constructed in brick consistent with the surrounding late 19th buildings, the wall reflects the historic material palette of the area and contributes positively to the character of the streetscape.
- 5.6.4 The Site is located within part of Kendrick Road Conservation Area. Within the Conservation Area four-character areas have been identified; the Site lies within Area 3: Redlands Road. MERL is identified as a 'notable building' which contributes to this area through its historic and architectural interests and the physical fabric which forms an 'interesting frontage to Redlands Road'.
- 5.6.5 As noted above, boundary walls are identified as a key characteristic of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. In the context of the site, the red brick boundary walls along Redland Road which enclose both MERL and continue northward beyond the junction with Acacia Road and The Dairy are considered to be a positive feature within the streetscene that contribute to the significance of the asset.
- 5.6.6 The proposed applications will result in no direct impact on the principal building, MERL. The proposed applications will result in a minimal direct impact to the curtilage-listed wall. The proposed removal of a limited section of the curtilage-listed boundary wall has been carefully assessed in terms of its impact on the heritage significance of MERL. While the wall forms part of the curtilage and contributes to the setting and historic character of the Listed Building, the proposals relate to sections of the wall and associated entrances that have been subject to historic alteration. The alterations would be localised in extent and would not materially affect the overall form, legibility, or historic relationship between the wall and the building. Although vehicular access to and from the Acacia Road junction of MERL would be restricted through the installation of bollards, the opening would be retained and the bollards removable, allowing access to be reinstated if required. There would be no direct impact on the fabric of the boundary wall, and the legibility of the opening would remain appreciable. Its contribution to the setting of



MERL, and to the understanding of historic and current access arrangements to the grounds from Redlands Road, would therefore be preserved.

- 5.6.7 Notwithstanding the proposed alterations to a limited section of the curtilage listed boundary wall, the significance of the Grade II Listed MERL would be preserved. The works do not affect the principal Listed Building directly and would not alter its architectural or historic interest. While the boundary wall forms part of the setting of MERL, it makes a limited contribution to the overall significance of the Listed Building when considered as a whole. The proposed changes are localised, relate to areas that have already undergone historic alteration, and would retain the legibility of historic access arrangements. As such, the proposals would result in no harm to the significance of MERL, and its setting would continue to be experienced and understood in a manner consistent with its historic development and significance. Regarding Kendrick Road Conservation Area, this assessment has concluded no harm.
- 5.6.8 The proposed development will therefore preserve the significance of MERL and its settings. The proposed development will make an positive contribution to the Conservation Area. The proposed development will therefore be in compliance with local plan policies EN1 and EN3 and relevant paragraphs 208 and 210 of the NPPF.



6 Conclusion

- 6.1.1 The proposed description of development for which planning permission is sought as follows:

“Full planning application and Listed Building Consent for proposed public realm and highway improvements to Acacia Road and its junction with Redlands Road, to include the partial demolition of one section of existing wall to enable wider access to MERL, the reconfiguration of parking areas, enhancement of pedestrian routes and associated landscaping.”

- 6.1.2 The proposals adopt a proportionate and sustainable approach that meets the objectives of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019). The application is supported by a full suite of technical documents which demonstrate that there are no technical or environmental reasons why the planning application should not be approved.
- 6.1.3 The proposals do not alter the fundamental character or use of the site but instead deliver targeted improvements that support its continued successful operation. While the proposals result in a limited loss of parking, recent survey evidence demonstrates that existing parking provision across the campus is underutilised. The flexible, campus-wide parking arrangements ensure that this reduction will not negatively impacts on parking capacity on the Site as well as on the surrounding highway network. Instead, the rationalisation of parking supports a shift towards safer, more sustainable travel patterns, whilst maintaining appropriate provision for accessible and electric vehicle spaces. It therefore enhances and encourages active travel and provides better accessibility for pedestrian and disabled users in a highly sustainable location.
- 6.1.4 In addition, the introduction of formalised loading bay, enhanced landscaping, and improved site legibility will deliver tangible operational, environmental, and visual benefits. These enhancements will contribute positively to the setting of the Museum of English Rural Life and the wider campus environment.
- 6.1.5 Taking all matters into account, the development complies with the relevant policies of the local plan and the NPPF and therefore the proposals should be supported.