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BLUE COLLAR CORNER, HOSIER STREET, READING

PLANNING STATEMENT

REPORT CONTROL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of Blue Collar Group Ltd in support of a Section 73 application to vary Condition 2 of planning permission ref. PL/21/0540. The approved development comprises a food and drink destination constructed from shipping containers, including restaurants, cafés, a bar, and associated external uses.

Condition 2 currently imposes a temporary permission requiring the cessation of use and removal of structures after five years. This application seeks either to extend this time limit to ten years from the date of the original permission, i.e. extending the current permission by five years, or to remove the condition entirely, allowing the continued operation of the development on a permanent basis.

Since opening in 2022, Blue Collar Corner has become a well-established and valued part of Reading Town Centre, delivering economic, social, and placemaking benefits. It has the support of Reading Borough Council and has been positively recognised within wider regeneration proposals, including the Broad Street Mall redevelopment and the emerging Minster Quarter scheme.

The development provides a high-quality food and beverage offer, supports local employment and contributes to the vitality and attractiveness of the town centre. It is well positioned to serve increased footfall associated with forthcoming major developments in the surrounding area.

A review of planning history confirms that the development has been implemented and is compliant with planning conditions. Where technical conditions were not formally discharged prior to commencement, the Local Planning Authority has indicated that submitted details would have been acceptable.

Since the original consent in 2021, national planning policy has been updated through the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). While the overarching support for sustainable development and town centre vitality remains unchanged, there is greater emphasis on heritage protection and enhancement. Local Plan policy remains broadly consistent, with only minor wording changes.

The updated assessment concludes that the continued presence of Blue Collar Corner results in no harm to the significance of these assets. Instead, it enhances the setting of the Conservation Area by replacing a previously low-quality and underutilised site with an active and visually improved environment.

Given that no heritage harm has been identified, there is no requirement for a balancing exercise under national policy. Notwithstanding this, the proposal delivers clear public benefits, including townscape improvements, economic activity, and support for wider regeneration objectives.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be consistent with national and local planning policy. The principle of retaining and extending (or making permanent) the development is strongly supported, representing a sustainable and beneficial use of the site.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of Blue Collar Corner Ltd (“the Applicant”) in support of a s73 Planning Application to vary Condition 2 of the consented scheme, ref: PL/21/0540, relating to the *“Construction of new food and drink quarter (constructed using shipping containers) including restaurants and cafes (Class E) and Bar (Sui Generis) and use of external spaces for erection of beach huts, seating, new terrace, refuse store, customer toilets, pergola, landscaping, boundary treatment and associated works.”*

- 1.2. Whilst the decision notice identifies that the scheme benefits from the grant of full planning permission, Condition 2 limits the timeframe to which the consent applies, noting:

“2. The use of the land hereby approved shall cease, all structures, buildings, plant, materials and all other equipment related to the use hereby permitted shall be removed from the land and the site shall be restored to its former condition on or before five years from the date of this planning permission in accordance with a scheme of works which shall first have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.”

REASON: The proposed uses and type of buildings are not ones that the Local Planning Authority is prepared to approve in this location other than for a limited period, having regard to the materials and type of structure proposed. Permission is only given because of the appearance of the buildings proposed in accordance with Policy CC7 and CR2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.”

- 1.3. Notwithstanding this, the Blue Collar Corner has become well-established since its opening in 2022 and is a welcome and beneficial addition to the streetscene, which has Reading Borough Council’s (the Council) support and the ongoing existence of which has been accounted for in planning applications at Broad Street Mall and the wider Minster Quarter bid.

- 1.4. On this basis, the Applicant seeks permission from the Council to either:

1. Vary the time limit on the existing consent to ten years, i.e. extending the current time limit on the permission by five years, by varying the wording in Condition 2; or
2. To delete Condition 2 and remove the time limit on the consent

- 1.5. It is noted that the Council has lease provisions in place that can be invoked at relatively short notice and therefore control of the planning consent via a time limit is not considered strictly necessary, hence the option identified to remove Condition 2 should this now be considered appropriate.

- 1.6. The planning application has been submitted further to pre-application discussions with the Council, which have identified the extent of supporting documentation required and the correct application procedure, in this instance, via a s73 submission. In this regard, as the development is implemented and has been operating for over 4 years, only limited information is provided, this to identify and assess changes in planning policy since the date of the original consent in late 2021 and to take account of the Council’s advice that waste management is carried out on site is provided. The planning application therefore comprises the following:

- Planning Application Forms and Certificates
- Planning Statement
- Waste Management Plan

- 1.7. Given the substantial planning assessment work undertaken to support the original consent, it is not the intention to repeat this work and therefore a copy of the original Planning Statement, prepared by Pegasus Group, is appended for information purposes.
- 1.8. The structure of this planning application is therefore as follows:
- Section 2 – Planning History and Pre-Application Consultation
 - Section 3 – Updates to Planning Policy
 - Section 4 – Planning Assessment
 - Section 5 – Conclusions

2. PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1. Further to the grant of the original consent in December 2021, the following planning applications are pertinent to this application:

Reference	Site Address	Application Type	Description	Decision
PL/21/1307	Reading Market, Hosier Street, Reading	Consent to display an advertisement	1 x Entrance Fascia Sign, 1 x Roundel Sign on stair unit, 1 x Text sign on stair unit, 1 x Letter Sign	Approved, 20/01/2022
PL/22/0254	Hosier Street, Reading, RG1 7JL	Approval of details reserved by a condition	Application for approval of details reserved by conditions 9 (Management Strategy), 11 (Noise Assessment), 12 (Odour Assessment), 13 (Refuse and Recycling Stores), 14 (Biodiversity Enhancements), 18 (Security Strategy), 21 (Hard and Soft Landscaping), 22 (Delivery and Servicing Plan) of planning permission ref: 210540	Part Approved, 17/08/2022
PL/22/1367	Reading Market, Hosier Street, Reading	Approval of details reserved by a condition	Application for approval of details reserved by conditions 12 (Odour Assessment) and 15 (Lighting Scheme) of planning permission ref. 210540	Conditions Not Discharged, 23/01/2023
PL/22/1401	Land at Hosier Street, Reading	Approval of details reserved by a condition	Application for approval of details reserved by condition 21 (Hard and Soft Landscaping) of planning permission ref. 210540	Conditions Not Discharged, 06/03/2023

- 2.2. In relation to the discharge of conditions applications, conditions 9, 11, 13, 18 and 22 were discharged through ref: PL/22/0254. Later submissions for conditions 12, 15 and 21 were made post commencement of development and as “prior to” conditions were not capable of being discharged. Notwithstanding this, in the relevant decision notices the Case Officer noted that had these details been received at the relevant time they would have been considered acceptable.
- 2.3. It is contended that further information was submitted to clarify the location of bat and bird boxes on site in accordance with requirements of Condition 14, but this information is not recorded online and therefore the requisite detail is provided in Appendix 1 to identify how these have been implemented in accordance with the consented Hard and Soft Landscaping scheme (Condition 21).
- 2.4. All other necessary planning conditions have been discharged in relation to the consented development.
- 2.5. Prior to submission of this application, discussions were held with Reading Borough Council Officers to determine the nature and extent of the submission required. It was agreed that a s73 application could be progressed with this in turn requiring only limited information to support the latest proposals.
- 2.6. Further to correspondence with the Council’s Environmental Health Officer, it was discussed and agreed that Blue Collar Corner would take waste management back on site and that this would need to be assessed via submission of a Waste Management Plan to set out management and maintenance of waste provision. This document forms part of this submission and is assessed in more detail in Section 4.

3. PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION

- 3.1. A summary of the formal pre-application advice from the Council is set out below. It is noted that this was provided ahead of a meeting with Officers, where a number of the key issues raised were able to be discussed in further details.
- 3.2. To summarise that set out in the Officer's pre-application advice:
- A further temporary extension may be acceptable, but normally second temporary permissions are discouraged. An exception can be made if there is a clear justification, which in the case of Blue Collar Corner is pertinent as the site is part of a future development area, but redevelopment is unlikely before 2029 and the current use is considered a "meanwhile use" (temporary use pending redevelopment). Therefore, an extension could be supported in principle.
 - A strong justification for retaining the site is required, including: benefits of keeping the site in use; evidence/timeline from the developer showing when redevelopment will happen.
 - The council indicates a likely acceptable extension of 3 years and not the full 5 years requested.
 - A Section 73 application is considered the appropriate route
 - Details are required to deal with breach of planning condition 13, relating to waste storage, which should be brought on-site.

4. UPDATES TO PLANNING POLICY

- 4.1. The Planning Statement for the consented development covers salient policy in significant detail and it is therefore not the intent to repeat it here. This section instead concentrates on changes to national and local policy since the development was consented in December 2021, with this being assessed as appropriate in Section 4.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 4.2. The NPPF has been revised since determination was made in relation to the original consent in December 2021. The current version of the NPPF for the purposes of decision-making is the NPPF 2024.
- 4.3. Whilst the NPPF retains the presumption in favour of sustainable development (Para 11) and the in-principle support for developments that ensure the vitality of town centres (Para 90) and promote healthy and safe communities (Paras 96, 98 and 99), the wording relating to heritage assets and assessment of these has been subject to tightening and clarification.
- 4.4. A summary of the key changes to relevant policy is provided below, but in essence the enhanced wording places higher expectations on evidence, greater weight on conservation, more emphasis on enhancement and reuse and better integration with design and sustainability.

NPPF 2019 Paragraph	NPPF 2024 Paragraph	Key Changes
189	203	Still requires applicants to describe significance, but 2024 strengthens expectation for proportionate yet robust evidence.
190	204	Greater clarity on using available evidence and expertise, for instance through Historic Environment Records (HERs) and consultation).
191	205	Similar principle in terms of requirement to avoid loss of significance, but new policy reinforces wholly exceptional justification more clearly.
192	206	Same core message, but wording tightened and more directive to take account of desirability of sustaining significance
193	207	“Great weight” to conservation retained, but stronger emphasis on consistency regardless of harm level.
196	210	“Less than substantial harm” balancing test retained, but clearer that all harm needs justification.
199	213	Opportunities to enhance significance more clearly emphasised.
200	214	Clearer encouragement of positive contribution and enhancement to Conservation Areas.
201	215	Same principle on significance of assets affected by development but wording simplified.

- 4.5. At present the draft 2025 NPPF is being consulted upon. The proposed changes do not alter the current NPPF 2024 paragraph structure and the predominant amount of policy wording and emphasis remains unchanged. Nevertheless, minor amendments have been made to paragraphs 206, 207, 210, 213 and 214 to reinforce the enhancement and contribution to heritage assets and Conservation Areas and to require clear definition of public benefits.
- 4.6. Our planning assessment in Section 4 recognises the change of wording and emphasis set out in the NPPF and draft NPPF in terms of heritage policy, as well as the effect of subsequent major change to the immediate locality as a consequence of planning consents

at Broad Street Mall and the Hexagon and the emerging Minster Quarter development, the sale of which to McLaren has been recently approved by Councillors.

Local Plan Partial Update (LPPU)

- 4.7. The LPPU revises the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) to ensure it remains up to date with national policy and local circumstances. It is not a full rewrite and seeks to revise around half of the policies within the current Local Plan whilst retaining the overall strategy set out in the 2019 version. The LPPU when adopted will cover development within the Borough to 2041.
- 4.8. In relation to heritage, there is little change to existing policy, save for amendments to text to cite 'harm' rather than 'detrimental effect' to heritage assets, this being to bring the policy wording in line with that set out in the current NPPF.

5. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

- 5.1 The planning application is to enable the continuance of a now-established retail and leisure entity which provides a positive benefit to the area in which it is set.
- 5.2. Currently, the area is in a state of planning flux, but recently approved schemes at the Hexagon (ref: 24/0063) and Broad Street Mall (ref: 24/0173) will transform the area through provision of:
 - At the Hexagon - new studio auditorium, flexible rehearsal space, a community studio, workshop and back of house space and a new podium connection between the new proposed extension and Queens Walk
 - At Broad Street Mall – up to 643 residential units, new Class E floorspace fronting onto Queens Walk and Dusseldorf Way and improvements to existing public realm and rooftop car park spaces.
- 5.3. In addition, to the above, land to the south of Broad Street Mall, including where Blue Collar is currently positioned, sits within the Minster Quarter area, which has been earmarked for redevelopment and for which agreement between the Council and McLaren Group exists to allow progression of initial pre-application discussions further to the successful completion of a bid process in 2025.
- 5.4. The area is subject to the Minster Quarter Outline Area Development Framework (MQAODF), which has set out potential land uses as follows:



- 5.5. The successful bid largely aligns with the core principles of the MQAODF, but it is also expected that there will be changes to layout as more detailed technical work is undertaken by the team, which will also be subject to consultation with relevant stakeholder groups at the appropriate time. Within this work, discussions have been held with the Council and McLaren Group regarding retention of the Blue Collar. McLaren Group remain supportive of Blue Collar, as an email between parties evidences in Appendix 2.
- 5.6. Further, the Minster Quarter pre-application process has not yet started, but it likely to do so further to a Council decision to sell the land to McLaren Group in April 2026. It is considered that there will be a c. 3 year planning process prior to any construction starting, with current phasing identifying work commencing from west to east. As part of the current design and layout process, potential relocation of the Blue Collar Corner is being considered. In this regard, and given that lease provisions exist with the Council to require removal of the Blue Collar Bar, it is considered appropriate to either allow a further 5 year consent or to remove the time limit on the consent – controls over the development exist and it is therefore inappropriate to apply further restrictions that impact on the applicant's ability to plan properly in relation to ongoing operations.
- 5.7. It is clear that there is support for Blue Collar and its retention is in-built into future plans for the transformation of the wider area in line with the MQAODF and Policies CR12d Broad Street Mall and CR12e Hosier Street of the Local Plan, which identify continued use for retail and leisure provision, including improved frontages to Hosier Street and Dusseldorf Way, which the presence of the Blue Collar Corner has helped to create since its inception. In this regard, the principle of development continues to be supported.

Employment and Town Centre Uses

- 5.8. The Blue Collar Corner not only provides a welcome, high-quality addition to the food and beverage offer available within Reading Town Centre, it acts as an attractor to the area, which in turn provides meaningful employment for 8 full time and 14 part time workers, this figure not including contractors or security staff. Blue Collar Corner is also one of the largest trade customers of the Reading-based Double-Barrelled Brewery, as well as other local suppliers, therefore providing a range of secondary economic benefits.
- 5.9. As the area starts to evolve with the opening of the extended Hexagon and then the residential-led Broad Street Mall development, the Blue Collar Corner will offer a unique and positive addition to service the increased footfall anticipated between the Minster and Hexagon, which in turn will increase further as the Minster Quarter starts to emerge. The Blue Collar Corner is therefore well positioned to service an anticipated higher need for retail and leisure uses within the town centre, this being in line with NPPF Para 90 and Local Plan Policy CR4.

Waste Management

- 5.10. The submitted Waste Management Plan demonstrates that Blue Collar Corner operates a robust and comprehensive approach to waste management, with a clear commitment to minimising environmental impact, promoting recycling and ensuring full compliance with relevant environmental legislation.

- 5.11. A purpose-built, enclosed bin store will be provided to the rear of the site, designed with durable, washable materials and secure access to maintain high standards of hygiene and to prevent pest intrusion.
- 5.12. Waste will be appropriately segregated into general waste, recycling, food waste and glass, with additional provision for specialist waste such as cooking oils, which is to be collected by licensed contractors.
- 5.13. The premises already benefits from a regular and reliable collection regime, with general waste and glass collected weekly, alongside recycling and food waste. There is also the ability to increase collection frequency during busier periods.
- 5.14. Operationally, trained staff are responsible for maintaining site cleanliness, supported by a cleaning log and regular deep cleaning of the bin store. Customers are encouraged to dispose of waste responsibly through clearly signed and accessible bins, while food traders are required to separate waste streams correctly. A dedicated pest control contract is also in place.
- 5.15. Overall, the measures proposed ensure that waste is managed efficiently, safely and sustainably, with no adverse impact on the surrounding environment or amenity in line with Policy CC8 of the Local Plan.

Heritage Considerations

- 5.16. The application site does not contain any designated heritage assets. However, it is located immediately adjacent to the St Mary's Butts and Castle Street Conservation Area and in close proximity to the Grade II Listed Church of St Mary, located to the south on Castle Street. The proposals therefore have the potential to affect the significance of these designated heritage assets through changes to their setting, for which it is necessary to review the scheme given the changes to planning policy since the initial determination.

Significance and Setting

- 5.17. Paragraph 203 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) requires applicants to describe the significance of heritage assets affected, including the contribution made by their setting. The submitted information is considered proportionate and sufficient to understand the significance of the relevant assets.
- 5.18. The Conservation Area derives its significance from its historic townscape, landmark buildings, and key views, particularly towards Reading Minster. The application site lies outside but adjacent to the Conservation Area and contributes to its significance only through setting.
- 5.19. The site was historically a storage area of limited visual quality, which was largely enclosed, with only glimpsed intervisibility from within the Conservation Area. Were the application to be refused and the Blue Collar Corner removed, this would form the relevant baseline for assessment which is considered to make a neutral to negative contribution to the Conservation Area's setting.

- 5.20. In respect of the Grade II* Listed Church of St Mary, the site does not form part of its principal setting and does not contribute meaningfully to its significance.

Conservation Area

- 5.21. Paragraph 206 of the NPPF (2024) requires decision-makers to have regard to the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.
- 5.22. The proposals would retain the Blue Collar Corner in-situ and in doing so guard against a return to a visually poor and underutilised site, through retention of built form, alongside planting and active uses. As evidenced on site, the creation of the Blue Collar Corner has resulted in an improved visual appearance and alongside this a more positive contribution to the townscape.
- 5.23. The development would remain visible primarily from Hosier Street and would form part of the foreground in some views towards the Conservation Area. However, as evidenced in the earlier Planning and Heritage Statement supporting the original application, these are not identified as key views contributing to its significance. From within the Conservation Area, visibility of the site is limited to glimpsed views and the retention of the Blue Collar Corner would not materially affect the ability to appreciate its significance.
- 5.24. Paragraph 207 requires that great weight be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. In this case, the proposal would not result in harm to the Conservation Area. Instead, through retention of the Blue Collar Corner it would ensure a more appropriate and active use than that associated with the storage area the land would otherwise have to be returned to.
- 5.25. Overall, it is considered that the proposals would enhance the setting of the Conservation Area, representing a heritage benefit.

Grade II* Listed Church of St Mary

- 5.26. In accordance with paragraph 207, great weight is also given to the conservation of the listed building and its setting.
- 5.27. The proposals would not result in any changes to the current baseline, with the Blue Collar Corner representing only minor changes to incidental views of the church's rear elevation when compared to the original baseline. These views are not identified as contributing to its significance, and the principal views of the church from Castle Street would remain unaffected.
- 5.28. The site does not contribute meaningfully to the setting of the listed building, and the proposals would therefore preserve its significance, resulting in no harm.

Assessment of Harm

- 5.29. Paragraphs 208–210 of the NPPF set out the framework for assessing harm to designated heritage assets.

- 5.30. No harm to the significance of the Conservation Area has been identified; rather, the proposals would result in continued enhancement to its setting. Equally, no harm to the significance of the Grade II* listed building has been identified, with its setting preserved. Accordingly, the proposals do not give rise to substantial harm, as identified by NPPF paras 208–209, nor do they give rise to less than substantial harm, as set out in NPPF para 210.

Planning Balance

- 5.31. Paragraph 207 confirms that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets. This requirement has been applied in the assessment above. As no harm to the significance of designated heritage assets has been identified, there is no requirement to undertake the balancing exercise under paragraph 210.
- 5.32. Notwithstanding this, the proposals would continue to deliver heritage benefits through the enhancement of the Conservation Area's setting, alongside the wider townscape, economic and regeneration benefits set out earlier in this document.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1. The proposed development supports the continued operation of an established and successful retail and leisure use, which delivers clear economic and social benefits to the area. Its retention aligns with the ongoing regeneration of the surrounding area, including approved developments at the Hexagon and Broad Street Mall, as well as emerging proposals within the Minster Quarter.
- 6.2. There is strong policy and stakeholder support for the continued presence of the Blue Collar Corner, with its role recognised in enhancing town centre vitality, increasing footfall, and contributing to local employment. The proposal is consistent with both national and local planning policies relating to town centre uses and regeneration.
- 6.3. From a heritage perspective, the site is located adjacent to, but not within, designated heritage assets. The assessment of updated policy confirms that the development would result in no harm to the significance of the nearby Conservation Area or the Grade II* Listed Church of St Mary. Instead, the retention of the existing use would enhance the setting of the Conservation Area by maintaining an active, visually improved environment compared to the previous low-quality storage use.
- 6.4. As no harm has been identified, there is no requirement for a planning balance in heritage terms. Notwithstanding this, the proposal delivers a number of tangible benefits, including improvements to townscape character, support for economic activity and contribution to the wider regeneration strategy for that locality.
- 6.5. Overall, the principle of development is strongly supported and the proposal represents a sustainable and beneficial use of the site in accordance with the NPPF and Local Plan policy.

APPENDIX 1 – DETAILS OF BAT AND BIRD BOXES ON SITE

APPENDIX 2 – LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM MCLAREN GROUP

