



Planning Department
Reading Borough Council
Civic Street, Bridge Street,
Reading
RG1 2LU

12 May 2026

Dear Mr Markwell

ABBEY GARDENS - FAÇADE ALTERATIONS (REF: PL/26/0091)

Further to the submission of the above planning application on 26 January 2026 at Abbey Gardens, Abbey Street, Reading, RG1 3BA, comprising:

External works to partial areas of all elevations at ground floor level and all areas of each elevation from 1st to 7th floor level, including replacement windows and doors, installation of brickwork following removal of existing glazing, the provision of Juliet balconies on all elevations and protruding balconies on the east and south elevations at 2nd floor level and above, and other associated works.

We are conscious that the application is due for determination shortly, subject to resolving any outstanding queries in terms of internal daylight.

To assist with your assessment of the planning balance, we have set out below the key benefits arising from the proposed development. These are summarised as follows:

1. Architectural Improvements

The primary objective is to replace the existing "utilitarian" and "dated" commercial curtain wall with a high-quality residential façade.

- **Residential Character:** The new design uses a "punched" window rhythm and high-quality brickwork to better reflect its new function as a home rather than an office. This will improve the perceived quality of space, sense of belonging and security; leading to a greater emotional attachment to the building and contributing to its long term success.
- **Visual Interest:** The façade composition introduces variation in material tone and depth, assisting in breaking down the perceived scale of the building and reducing its visual massing at street level. This contributes to a more human-scaled appearance appropriate to its residential use. The addition of depth and detail to the façade will also provide additional articulation.
- **Heritage Sensitivity:** The proposal replaces a "negative contributor" with a design that provides a sympathetic contrast to nearby Grade I and II listed assets, such as the Reading Abbey Ruins and Reading Gaol. The Conservation Officer supports this view and has no objection to the proposed scheme.



2. Sustainability and Environmental Performance

Upgrading the building's envelope provides significant environmental benefits:

- **Carbon Reduction:** By retaining the primary structure and upgrading the exterior, the new façade is expected to significantly reduce operational energy demand over the building's lifespan.
- **Thermal Efficiency:** The new façade and high-performance glazing will deliver a major upgrade to the building's thermal performance.
- **Overheating:** The reduction of glazing will reduce overheating / solar gain, lowering internal temperatures during the summer and reduce reliance on active cooling.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain:** Although exempt from formal requirements, the project will deliver a net gain in biodiversity through the installation of bird and bat boxes.

3. Improved Occupant Amenity

The redesign focuses heavily on the quality of life for future residents:

- **Private Amenity Space:** The introduction of Juliette and projecting balconies provides much-needed private outdoor space for residents.
- **Natural Light:** Anstey Horne's assessment confirms that the development achieves high levels of daylight (80% compliance) and sunlight (92% compliance), ensuring future occupants have good access to natural light amenity.
- **Privacy:** Reducing the amount of glazing will serve to mitigate issues with overlooking / over exposure and provide a better sense of privacy and security. This is particularly the case for inward facing units at the internal corners of the building. A reduction in the use of blinds to constantly be drawn could lead to a net increase in internal daylight provision.
- **Acoustics:** The installation of new glazing will meet internal noise level standards (BS8233:2014) which is consistent with that achieved as part of the conversions approved as part of the prior approval applications.

4. Strategic Urban Development

- **Housing Delivery:** Whilst subject to a separate application, the project supports the conversion of the building into over 200 residential units in a highly sustainable town centre location.
- **Public Transport Links:** The site benefits from being in a highly sustainable location, less than a 10-minute walk from Reading Train Station and local bus routes.

As above, we strongly feel that the benefits outlined above support the means that the positive planning balance therefore weighs in favour of approval.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.



Yours sincerely

Sian Thomas
Principal Planner