

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Abbey

App Ref: PL/26/0387 Full planning permission

Address: THE SALVATION ARMY HOSTEL, WILLOW STREET, READING, RG1 6AB

Proposal: Provision of a new modular building to provide safe refuge and sleeping accommodation for homeless people.

Applicant: Mr Michael Coyne

Received date: 23/03/2026

Target Decision date: 19/05/2026

Case Officer: Ethne Humphreys

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The site relates to Willow House, located to the west and south of Castle Street. To the north of the site is the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. To the west is the IDR.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The application seeks planning permission of the provision of a new modular building to provide safe refuge and sleeping accommodation for homeless people. The building would provide temporary accommodation and would serve maximum 4 people at a time. It is proposed that occupants remain for a period of less than 4 weeks at a time. Staffing will comprise staff from the existing staff of Willow House.

It is a resubmission of application 24/0790, which was approved but not implemented, and it is proposed to re-site the building. The building would be sited to east of the main building of Willow House. The building would be coloured 'Juniper Green' and would measure approx. 23m².

Plans considered:

Location Plan 2306/12/03 01 Rev B

Proposed Site Plan 2306/12/03 02 Rev C

Existing Site Plan and Elevations 2306/12/03 04

Proposed Elevations 2306/12/03 03 Rev B

Biodiversity Statement dated March 2026 Ref. PR-26-0027

Design and Access Statement prepared by JYM Partnership dated 16th March 2026

Received 23rd March 2026

3. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted:

Natural Environment: Concern over reduction in landscaping due to re-siting. Discussed further below.

Environmental Protection: No comments received. No objection received under 24/0790.

Two site notices were displayed. One neighbour letter received, not objecting but raising concern over noise and insufficient sound insulation.

4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

24/0790 Provision of a new modular building to provide safe refuge and sleeping accommodation for homeless people. Permitted 13/08/24.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'.

The application has been assessed against the following policies:

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

National Planning Policy Guidance 2014 onwards

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction

CC3: Adaption to Climate Change

CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage

CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development

CC7: Design and the Public Realm

CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

CC9: Securing Infrastructure

H1: Provision of Housing

H2: Density and Mix

H3: Affordable Housing

H5: Standards for New Housing

H6: Accommodation for Vulnerable People

TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging

EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network

EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland

OU1: New and Existing Community Facilities

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

- Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping: A Strategy for Reading 2026-2031
- Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping – An action Plan for Reading 2026-2031

- National Plan to End Homelessness 2025
- Revised Sustainable Design and Construction 2019

Local Plan Partial Update

The current version of the Local Plan turned five years old on 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up-to-date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A consultation version of the draft updated version of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024 and the submission draft submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 9th May 2025 and is currently at examination.

Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become out of date when they are five years old. It is a matter of planning judgement rather than legal fact whether a plan or policies within it are out-of-date. This will depend on whether they have been overtaken by things that have happened since the plan was adopted, either on the ground or through changes in national policy, for example.

Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to this application is that they remain in accordance with national policy. The objectives of the policies listed above remain very similar in the draft updated Local Plan, and although at present they have some weight in the decision - making process the current policies can continue to be afforded weight in the appraisal below and are not considered to be 'out of date'.

6. APPRAISAL

Land use considerations

It is considered that there is general support for the proposed use under Policy H6 (Accommodation for Vulnerable People) which considers specialist accommodation for vulnerable people, including homeless people. Furthermore, a new five-year strategy and action plan to help prevent homelessness and rough sleeping has been adopted. Homelessness and rough sleeping is among the most urgent and complex challenges within Reading Borough. Rough sleeping is one of the most visible forms of homelessness and it affects some of the most vulnerable in society. The existing Willow House building currently supports homeless people and the proposals would assist with the aims of the adopted strategy and Policy H6.

The proposal is considered acceptable, provided that the proposals meet other local planning policy requirements discussed below.

Impact on Neighbouring Amenity

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) requires that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

The site is in close proximity to residential properties, the closest being Talbot Court to the north east. Given that the building would be sited in the enclosed garden of Willow House hostel, combined with the distance, no loss of privacy or overbearing effects are considered to arise due to its siting and the relatively small-scale nature of the building.

Concern has been raised by a resident of Talbot Court that the proposal would result in increased noise, over and above that which already arises from the Salvation Army building.

The Council's Environmental Protection Officer has not provided comment on this application. However, no concern was raised in respect of noise/disturbance under application 240790. The building would comprise a maximum 4 people at a time and on a temporary period and access to the building would be controlled via Willow House. There would be no increase in staffing numbers and no increase in vehicle parking spaces/negligible impact in highway movements (no Transport Officer objection received under application 240790).

The applicant advised that the building would be highly insulated, primarily to support heat retention and energy efficient but that the level of insulation would also provide inherent benefits helping to contain noise within the unit. The unit would be fitted with double-glazed windows and steel doors which would also likely enhance sound insulation and reduce the potential for noise escape.

The existing Willow House is a 24/7 staffed supported accommodation that is well-established and intensively managed. Continuous staff presence should enable immediate response to any issues/

It is not considered that there would be any significantly harmful impacts in terms of noise and disturbance to nearby occupiers and any anti-social behaviour would be dealt with through other measures.

Design considerations

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) requires 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 and Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) seeks to extend the Borough's vegetation cover and include appropriate landscaping.

The scale and design of the building would be the same as that approved under 240790. It remains that it would appear somewhat utilitarian in appearance and whilst the unit would be sited closer to the north east boundary, its relatively low height and green colour would assist in minimising the impact.

The submission notes that climbing plants and vegetation upon fencing would be maintained to provide a visual barrier from the neighbouring sites. The current fence vegetation appears poor and sporadic and better screening is required. Furthermore, the re-siting of the unit closer to the boundary on existing soft landscaping (garden) results in a loss of soft landscaping over and above that previously approved. The loss of soft landscaping is not desirable in a low canopy cover ward. Given this, further details of landscaping will be secured by way of condition. Given the additional loss of landscaping, details will include the provision of two new trees which will also assist with the wider ecology of the site. The applicant has agreed to this.

The application notes that as the development would be less than 25m² in size, it would be exempt from mandatory BNG. Whilst there would be some loss of landscaping as above, it is considered that this would be suitably mitigated through the inclusion of two new trees.

As was considered the case under 240790, given its appearance, similar to that of a storage unit, it would not be suitable for permanent retention. Advice previously given was that the length of planning permission should be guided by the 'design life' of the building but that if none was stipulated at application stage, that a maximum of 10 years would likely be appropriate. The submission remains silent in this respect and a condition requiring its removal within 10 years will be imposed.

Archaeology

Policy EN2 (Areas of Archaeological Significance) requires that applications adequately assess and investigate sites of archaeological significance.

Whilst comments have not been received under this application, Berkshire Archaeology have previously advised in respect of this site and similar proposal that it's unlikely the works would have any archaeological impact. Whilst the wider area is of interest, nothing specific is expected within the site itself and observation at the adjacent site to the north showed a lot of made ground, likely from the construction of the IDR. Previous advice was that the only circumstance that would warrant a WDI would be if the entire footprint were to be sunk into the ground. This is not the case. No concerns are considered to arise in this respect.

Conclusion

The proposal would assist with the aims of Policy H6 and adopted homeless strategy and action plan and would assist in providing off-street options for homeless and vulnerable people. Whilst the design would result in a degree of harm, it is not considered to result in such an intensive use on the site on a temporary basis to result in material harm to neighbouring properties nor harm to the character and appearance of the area. A temporary permission of 10 years is appropriate.

Recommendation **GRANT** Temporary Planning Permission

7. RECOMMENDATION