

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Security Hoarding and Screens

Incorporating Heritage and Flooding Notes

Project: Central Library, Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BQ

Client: Reading Borough Council

Prepared by: Colony Architects

Issue: Planning

Date: 8 June 2026

Revision: 1

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Colony Architects in support of a planning application to Reading Borough Council. It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

1. Introduction

This Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been prepared by Colony Architects in support of a planning application for the installation of security hoarding and screens to the Central Library, Abbey Square, Reading (the 'site'). The statement has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) and is proportionate to the scale of the proposals as required by paragraph 41 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023).

The Central Library was constructed in 1985 and is not listed. It occupies a prominent position in central Reading, with its principal public elevation facing King Street to the south and the main entrance located at the south-west corner. The west elevation faces towards the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area, the boundary of which runs along Buttermarket to the west of the site, and the north elevation faces Abbey Square. The Holy Brook — a historically significant watercourse — runs beneath the building and is visible at the south-west undercroft and at the rear of the building to the north.

The site sits within an area of exceptional heritage sensitivity. Reading Abbey, founded by Henry I in 1121 and one of the wealthiest Benedictine houses in medieval England, is designated as a Scheduled Monument (list entry 1007932). The scheduling explicitly excludes modern buildings and roads but includes the ground beneath them; the library building accordingly sits above scheduled ground. The Abbey Mill Ruins (Grade II listed building, list entry 1113390), a late twelfth to early thirteenth century structure of quarry flint and Caen stone spanning the Holy Brook, stands within Abbey Square approximately 50 metres to the north-east of the site.

The proposals comprise the installation of temporary security hoarding and screens to all four elevations of the building. The library has ceased operation and will remain vacant pending the determination of its future use. The hoarding and screens are required to secure the building against unauthorised entry, vandalism, and the safety risks associated with an unsecured vacant structure. The design approach has been carefully differentiated by elevation to respond to the varying degrees of public visibility, heritage sensitivity, and operational security requirement. There is no change of use proposed and no alteration to the fabric of any designated heritage asset.

2. Design

Design rationale and approach

The design of the security hoarding and screens has been guided by two overriding principles: first, to provide effective and robust security to the building and its perimeter; and second, to ensure that the measures are as visually unobtrusive as possible in those areas where the building is most publicly visible and where heritage sensitivity is greatest. Chapter 12 of the NPPF (Well-designed places) establishes that development should respond positively to local character and history. Whilst the proposals are temporary in nature, this principle has informed a carefully differentiated approach to each elevation.

The design strategy distinguishes between the south and west elevations, which are the most publicly visible and heritage-sensitive faces of the building, and the north elevation, where the primary concern is the prevention of vandalism and anti-social behaviour in a less publicly visible location.

South elevation — King Street frontage

The King Street frontage is the principal public face of the building and the elevation most visible from the surrounding townscape. In this location the security strategy is to install internal mesh screens set behind the existing glazing and openings, ensuring that the external appearance of the building is maintained entirely in its current state. No new external elements are introduced on this elevation. The visual character of the King Street frontage is therefore preserved, and the security function is achieved without any external alteration to the building's appearance.

South-west corner — principal entrance and undercroft

The principal entrance is located at the south-west corner of the building, where the undercroft is open and the Holy Brook is currently visible as it passes beneath the building. A new OSB hoarding panel is proposed at this location to secure the entrance. The hoarding has been set back from the faces of the existing columns so that it reads as recessed within the structural frame of the building, rather than projecting forward into the public realm. This positively reduces the visual impact of the hoarding as experienced from the street and from the conservation area. The hoarding has further been carefully positioned and detailed so as to maintain the current openness of the undercroft and to preserve the existing visibility of the Holy Brook. The retention of this visibility is an important design objective, as the brook is a significant heritage asset and its accessibility to public view is considered to be of heritage and amenity value. The face of the hoarding panel at the undercroft is proposed for artwork directing the public to the new library, the details of which will be agreed in due course.

West elevation — Market Place/London Street Conservation Area frontage

The west elevation faces towards the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. This elevation receives the same treatment as the King Street frontage: internal mesh screens are installed behind the existing glazing and openings, so that the external appearance of the building is wholly unchanged. No new external elements are introduced on this elevation. Together, the south and west elevations — the two most publicly visible and heritage-sensitive faces of the building — are treated consistently, with security achieved entirely through internal means and no alteration to the building's outward appearance from either the street or the conservation area.

North elevation — Abbey Square

The north elevation faces Abbey Square and is the rear face of the building. Security requirements on this elevation are driven primarily by the need to prevent vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Security mesh cages, screens, and perforated steel sheeting are therefore proposed, the materials, finishes and colours of which are shown on the accompanying drawings. Whilst this elevation is less publicly visible than the south and west faces, the proposals have been designed as a demountable and temporary installation with no fixings to the scheduled ground beneath the building.

Design standards and conditions

The proposals respond to the design requirements of policies CC7 and CR2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

3. Heritage

Policy framework

The relevant policy framework is established by Chapter 16 of the NPPF (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment). Paragraph 205 of the NPPF requires that great weight be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets when considering the impact of development on their significance. Significance derives not only from physical fabric but also from setting. Historic England's guidance, 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (Historic England, 2017), defines setting as the surroundings in which an asset is experienced and identifies how changes within the setting of an asset can affect its significance. At the local level, Policy EN1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan requires proposals to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings. Policy CR15 (The Reading Abbey Quarter) requires development in the vicinity of the Abbey to promote its architectural, archaeological and historic interest and to protect and enhance its historic setting. The proposals are consistent with both policies. The following assessment addresses each relevant designated asset in turn.

Reading Abbey Scheduled Monument (list entry 1007932)

Reading Abbey is designated as a Scheduled Monument. The scheduling documentation confirms that the monument includes the ground beneath modern buildings and roads, whilst explicitly excluding the buildings and roads themselves. The library building therefore sits above scheduled ground, but is not itself a scheduled structure. The proposed hoarding and screens are surface installations. No ground anchor, pile, or foundation works are proposed in connection with this application. The proposals therefore cause no physical intervention to the scheduled ground and no harm to the significance of the monument.

Abbey Mill Ruins (Grade II listed building, list entry 1113390)

The Abbey Mill Ruins are a Grade II listed building comprising a late twelfth to early thirteenth century three-arch structure of quarry flint with Caen stone ashlar dressings, spanning the Holy Brook within Abbey Square. The ruins are located approximately 50 metres to the north-east of the library building. There is no direct visual connection between the library's proposed security installations and the listed structure. The proposals cause no physical harm to the listed building and no appreciable change to its setting as experienced from the public realm.

The Holy Brook

The Holy Brook is a heritage asset of local significance that passes beneath the library building and is visible as an open channel at the south-west undercroft and at the rear of the building to the north. A section of the brook is listed at Grade II* elsewhere in Reading; that listed section does not extend to this location. The brook at the library nonetheless retains considerable historic and amenity value and its significance is a material consideration in the determination of this application.

The design of the security installations at both the south-west undercroft and the north elevation has specifically sought to preserve the existing visibility of the Holy Brook. At the undercroft, the new OSB hoarding panel has been carefully positioned to maintain the openness of the channel and to retain the current view of the brook from the public realm. At the north elevation, the security screens are designed to retain the existing openness of the culvert in the same manner. The applicant considers that this approach actively protects a heritage asset of local significance and reflects the positive approach to the historic environment expected by NPPF paragraph 203.

Market Place/London Street Conservation Area

The Market Place/London Street Conservation Area lies to the west of the library site, its boundary running along Buttermarket. The library building forms part of the setting of the conservation area, with

the west elevation visible from Buttermarket and the wider area across the road. The proposals affect the setting of the conservation area and appropriate sensitivity is therefore required. Under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the LPA has a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

The special interest of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area, as identified in Reading Borough Council's Conservation Area Appraisal (The Conservation Studio, 2007), derives from its medieval street pattern and market place, its collection of Georgian and Victorian civic and commercial buildings including Waterhouse's Town Hall complex, and its two medieval churches of St Laurence and St Giles. The part of the conservation area most relevant to this application is Character Area 3 — the Jackson's Corner and King Street area — which lies across the road from the library to the west. The appraisal specifically identifies the Holy Brook as a positive feature of the conservation area, noting its presence flowing largely underground through the area and its visibility from the Kings Walk arcade. The design strategy for the hoarding, which maintains the visibility of the Holy Brook at the undercroft, is directly responsive to this identified significance.

The design strategy for the west elevation directly addresses the need for sensitivity. By installing internal mesh screens behind the existing glazing and openings — identical in approach to the south elevation treatment — the proposals introduce no external alteration whatsoever to the appearance of the west elevation as seen from Buttermarket and the wider area. The character and appearance of the conservation area is not adversely affected by the proposals.

Applying the setting assessment methodology set out in Historic England's 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' guidance, it is considered that the proposals do not harm the significance of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. The temporary and reversible nature of all elements further supports this conclusion. In the event that the LPA considers there to be any residual harm, it is submitted that this would be less than substantial and would be clearly outweighed by the public benefits of securing the building against unauthorised entry, vandalism, and the safety risks associated with a vacant structure, in accordance with NPPF paragraph 208.

4. Flood Risk

Chapter 14 of the NPPF (Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change) establishes the sequential approach to the location of development in areas at risk of flooding. The Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning confirms that the site falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3, reflecting the proximity of the Holy Brook and the River Kennet. Zone 3 applies to the area of the site closest to the Holy Brook watercourse; the remainder of the site falls within Zone 2.

The Sequential Test applies to vulnerable development in areas at flood risk. The proposed security hoarding and screens constitute 'less vulnerable' development in the classification set out in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Flood Risk and Coastal Change, Table 2. In practical terms, the overwhelming majority of the proposals consist of internal mesh screens placed behind existing glazing and window openings — measures that are entirely internal in character and have no conceivable effect on flood waters. The external hoarding at the south-west undercroft has been specifically positioned to maintain the openness of the Holy Brook channel, ensuring that no new obstruction is placed in the path of the watercourse. No new floor space is created, no impermeable surfacing is introduced, and the drainage characteristics of the site are wholly unchanged. The sequential and exception tests are therefore not engaged.

The hoarding and screen elements are demountable structures. In the event of a flood event, they do not create a barrier to flood flow and do not alter the drainage characteristics of the site. No new impermeable surfacing is proposed. The LPA can be satisfied that the proposals raise no material flood risk concern and that no flood risk assessment is required in connection with this application.

5. Access

The library has ceased operation and is closed to the public. There is therefore no requirement to maintain public access to the building, and no existing accessible entrances or library services are

affected by the proposals. The hoarding and screens do not obstruct any public right of way. The sole element that affects the public realm is the new OSB hoarding panel at the south-west undercroft, which secures the principal entrance. This panel has been positioned to allow pedestrians to pass freely around the building perimeter without obstruction, as shown on the accompanying drawings.

A public right of way exists over the footbridge to the rear of the building on the north side. This route remains clear and is wholly unaffected by the proposals.

6. Conclusion

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the installation of temporary security hoarding and screens to Central Library, Abbey Square, Reading. The proposals are a proportionate and considered response to the operational requirement to secure a vacant civic building, and the design has been carefully differentiated by elevation to respect the varying degrees of heritage sensitivity and public visibility around the site.

On the principal south and west elevations — the two most publicly visible faces of the building — the design strategy is identical: internal mesh screens installed behind existing glazing and openings, with no external alteration to the building's appearance whatsoever. At the south-west undercroft, the new hoarding has been set back from the column fronts so as to appear recessed, and has been positioned to preserve the visibility of the Holy Brook, a heritage asset and a positive feature of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area identified in Reading Borough Council's Conservation Area Appraisal. The proposals affect the setting of that conservation area; the design approach responds to this with appropriate sensitivity, and the proposals are considered to cause no harm to its character or appearance. Any residual visual effect is temporary, reversible, and in the case of less than substantial harm clearly outweighed by the public benefits of securing the vacant building, in accordance with NPPF paragraph 208. The proposals raise no material flood risk concerns. No public rights of way are affected.

It is submitted that the proposals comply with the relevant provisions of the NPPF, including Chapters 12, 14 and 16, and with policies CC7, EN1, EN2, EN3, EN6, EN18, CR2 and CR15 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted November 2019). The application is commended to the LPA for approval.

Appendix: Policy Reference Note

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023): paragraph 41 (proportionality of DAS); Chapter 12 (well-designed places); Chapter 14 (flood risk and climate change), including the Sequential and Exceptions Tests; Chapter 16 (conserving and enhancing the historic environment), in particular paragraphs 203 (non-designated heritage assets), 205 (great weight to conservation of designated assets), and 208 (less than substantial harm balanced against public benefits).

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) — Flood Risk and Coastal Change: Table 2 (vulnerability classification). The site falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3 as confirmed by the EA Flood Map for Planning. The proposals are 'less vulnerable' development; the sequential and exception tests are not engaged.

Historic England, 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (2017): five-step setting assessment methodology applied in Section 3.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990: section 72 (special attention to character and appearance of conservation areas). No listed building consent is required as no works are proposed to listed fabric.

Local Policy — Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted November 2019)

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm): requires all development to be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area, responds positively to local context and the historic environment, and creates safe and accessible environments.

Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment): requires proposals to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, including listed buildings, scheduled monuments, and conservation areas.

Policy EN2 (Areas of Archaeological Significance): requires that development proposals affecting scheduled monuments and nationally important archaeological remains provide clear and convincing justification in the form of overriding public benefits where adverse effects cannot be avoided.

Policy EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas): requires development proposals within conservation areas to make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. The adopted Conservation Area Appraisal is a material consideration.

Policy EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context): requires new development in areas characterised by heritage assets to respect and enhance architectural and visual qualities and to be sensitive to historic context.

Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems): requires development to follow the Sequential and Exceptions Tests and not to reduce floodplain capacity, impede flood flow, or increase flood risk.

Policy CR2 (Design in Central Reading): requires development within Central Reading to use high quality architectural detail and materials that respect the form and quality of the local area.

Policy CR15 (The Reading Abbey Quarter): requires development in the vicinity of the Abbey Quarter to promote its architectural, archaeological and historic interest and to protect and enhance the historic setting.

Local Guidance

Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal (The Conservation Studio, prepared for Reading Borough Council, 2007): referenced in Section 3. Confirm with Reading BC whether this appraisal remains the current adopted version.