

Design and Access Statement

This document has been prepared by Architectural Visions to aid in the planning application for the:
4-5 West St, Reading RG1 1TT



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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. Supporting information	1
3. Site and Context Description	2
4. Proposed Development	3
5. Design & Access	4
6. Highways and Parking	5
7. Sustainability	6
8. Planning Policy	7
9. Conclusion	9
10. Appendix	10

Introduction

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the redevelopment and change of use of the property at **4–5 West Street, Reading, RG1 1TT**.

The proposal seeks to retain the commercial use at ground floor level whilst providing three self-contained residential apartments on the upper floors. The development has been carefully designed to make efficient use of this sustainable town centre site while respecting the character of the surrounding area.

The statement explains the design principles behind the proposal and demonstrates how the development responds positively to its context, planning policy and accessibility requirements.

Supporting Information

The following documents have been submitted in support of the application:

- Completed Application Form
- Design and Access Statement
- 488-EX-EL-01-EXISTING ELEVATIONS 1 OF 2-P01
- 488-EX-EL-02-EXISTING ELEVATIONS 2 OF 2-P01
- 488-EX-FP-01-EXISTING GROUND & FIRST FLOOR PLANS-P01
- 488-EX-RF-01-EXISTING SECOND FLOOR & ROOF PLAN-P01
- 488-PR-EL-01-PROPOSED ELEVATIONS 1 OF 2-P01
- 488-PR-EL-02-PROPOSED ELEVATIONS 2 OF 2-P01
- 488-PR-FP-01-PROPOSED GROUND & FIRST FLOOR PLANS-P01
- 488-PR-RF-01-PROPOSED SECOND FLOOR & ROOF PLAN-P01
- 488-ST-01-SITE & LOCATION PLAN-P01

Site and Context Description

The application site comprises a three-storey building located on West Street within Reading Town Centre. The property forms part of an established urban street characterised by a mixture of commercial premises at ground floor level with residential and commercial accommodation on upper floors.

The surrounding area benefits from excellent access to local services, shops, restaurants, employment opportunities and public transport. Reading Railway Station is located within comfortable walking distance, providing local, regional and national rail connections. (Appendix)

The site lies within a highly sustainable location where walking, cycling and public transport are the primary modes of travel.

The existing building currently accommodates commercial space at ground floor level with upper floor accommodation capable of conversion into residential use.

The proposal retains the established street frontage and existing building envelope with alterations taking place primarily internally.

Proposed Development

The proposal comprises the retention of the existing commercial units at ground floor level, together with the conversion of the first and second floors to provide three self-contained residential flats. The development includes internal alterations to facilitate the provision of modern residential accommodation, whilst retaining the existing principal building access from West Street. Secure internal cycle storage is also proposed adjacent to the entrance lobby, providing dedicated cycle parking facilities for future residents. The proposal does not involve any alterations to the external appearance of the building and therefore maintains the established character and appearance of the existing property and surrounding streetscape.

The residential accommodation comprises:

Flat 1 (First Floor) comprises a one-bedroom self-contained apartment providing a well-planned layout suitable for modern residential living. The accommodation includes an open plan kitchen/living/dining room, a double bedroom, bathroom, and hallway. The flat provides an approximate Gross Internal Area (GIA) of 39.58 m².

Flat 2 (First Floor) comprises a one-bedroom self-contained apartment designed to provide practical and well-proportioned residential accommodation. The flat includes an open plan kitchen/living/dining room, a double bedroom, a bathroom, and hallway. The apartment provides an approximate Gross Internal Area (GIA) of 43.09 m².

Flat 3 (Second Floor) comprises a two-bedroom self-contained apartment with an additional dedicated office space, providing flexible and well-proportioned residential accommodation. The flat includes an open plan kitchen/living/dining room, two bedrooms, an office, bathroom, and hallway. The apartment provides an approximate Gross Internal Area (GIA) of 69.64 m².

The proposal also includes a secure internal bicycle store located at ground floor level providing dedicated cycle parking for future residents.

Design and Access

Design Principles

The proposal has been designed to maximise the efficient use of an existing town centre building without materially altering its external appearance.

The development makes effective use of previously developed land and contributes towards the delivery of additional housing within Reading town centre.

The internal layouts have been arranged to provide functional, well-proportioned living accommodation with good circulation and natural light.

The scheme retains the established commercial frontage, preserving the character and vitality of West Street while introducing residential accommodation above in accordance with common town centre development patterns.

The proposed cycle storage has been integrated within the ground floor layout to encourage sustainable transport choices.

Appearance

The external appearance of the building remains unchanged.

As the proposals are internal, the existing architectural character of the building and surrounding streetscape will be preserved.

Access

Pedestrian access will continue to be provided via the existing entrance from West Street.

Separate residential access is maintained, providing secure entry to the upper floor apartments.

Internal circulation has been designed to provide clear and direct access to all residential units.

The proposal utilises the existing stairway serving the upper floors.

Emergency access arrangements remain unchanged.

Highways and Parking

The site is located within a highly sustainable town centre location with excellent access to a range of public transport services, pedestrian routes, and local amenities. Given its central location and proximity to sustainable transport connections, the proposal does not include any on-site car parking provision. Instead, the development seeks to encourage sustainable travel patterns through the provision of secure cycle storage at ground floor level for future residents.

The proposed cycle store has been carefully designed to incorporate wall-mounted bicycle racks, providing appropriate spacing and sufficient manoeuvring areas to allow convenient, safe, and secure cycle storage. The surrounding area benefits from a range of sustainable transport opportunities, including frequent bus services, convenient walking access to Reading Town Centre, Reading Railway Station within walking distance, established pedestrian infrastructure, and connections to the wider cycle network.

The proposal is therefore considered to accord with national and local planning objectives that seek to promote sustainable transport choices, reduce reliance on private vehicles, and support the delivery of development in accessible and well-connected locations.

Sustainability

The proposal represents a sustainable form of development through the effective reuse and refurbishment of an existing building within Reading Town Centre. By converting the upper floors to provide additional residential accommodation whilst retaining the existing commercial uses at ground floor level, the development makes efficient use of previously developed urban land and supports the sustainable growth of the town centre.

The retention and adaptation of the existing building fabric reduces the need for new construction and helps minimise construction waste associated with redevelopment. The proposal also promotes sustainable travel patterns through the provision of secure cycle storage for future residents and benefits from the site's excellent accessibility to public transport services, pedestrian routes, and local amenities, reducing reliance on private vehicles.

Where practical, the refurbishment works will seek to improve the thermal performance and energy efficiency of the building, subject to the constraints of adapting an existing structure. Overall, the proposal contributes towards the delivery of additional housing within a sustainable town centre location and supports the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework by promoting the efficient use of land, sustainable transport choices, and environmentally responsible development.

Planning Policy

The proposed development has been prepared having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024), the National Design Guide, the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019), and relevant Supplementary Planning Documents adopted by Reading Borough Council, including the Residential Conversions guidance and the Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD, where applicable.

The proposal represents sustainable development through the effective reuse of an existing building within Reading Town Centre. The development involves the conversion of the upper floors to provide three high-quality, self-contained residential apartments, whilst retaining the established commercial uses at ground floor level. The proposal therefore makes efficient use of previously developed land, contributes towards the delivery of additional housing within a highly sustainable location, and supports sustainable travel patterns through the provision of secure cycle storage.

The development accords with the overarching objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework by promoting the effective use of land, supporting the delivery of new homes, encouraging sustainable transport choices, and achieving well-designed places that respond positively to their surrounding context.

At the local level, the proposal supports the strategic objectives of the Reading Borough Local Plan by introducing additional residential accommodation within a well-connected town centre location. The retention of active commercial uses at ground floor level maintains the mixed-use character and function of the area and supports the continued vitality and viability of Reading Town Centre. The proposal is therefore consistent with the aims of Policies RL1 (Network and Hierarchy of Centres) and RL2 (Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development), which seek to maintain and enhance the role of Reading's centres and support appropriate town centre uses.

The proposed residential units have been designed as high-quality, self-contained accommodation with appropriate internal layouts and living conditions. The development has given regard to the relevant housing standards and design considerations set out within Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing), where applicable to a conversion scheme, ensuring that the proposed homes provide an appropriate standard of accommodation.

The provision of secure cycle storage supports sustainable transport choices and reflects the objectives of Policies TR4 (Cycle Routes and Facilities) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging), together with the Council's adopted parking guidance. The development is located within a highly accessible town centre location, where opportunities to travel by walking, cycling and public transport are readily available.

The proposal involves the conversion of an existing building and does not require external alterations. As such, the development retains the established appearance of the building and its contribution to the surrounding streetscape. The design approach responds positively to the existing urban context and is consistent with the objectives of Policy CR2 (Design in Central Reading), which seeks to ensure that development within Central Reading contributes positively to the character, appearance and quality of the area. Where relevant, consideration has also been given to the protection and enhancement of the historic environment in accordance with the wider objectives of the Local Plan.

Overall, the proposal represents an efficient and sustainable reuse of an existing town centre building, delivering additional residential accommodation whilst retaining active commercial uses at ground floor level. The development supports the vitality of Reading Town Centre, promotes sustainable travel, and accords with the relevant principles and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, the Reading Borough Local Plan and associated supplementary guidance.

Conclusion

The proposed development provides an opportunity to make efficient and sustainable use of an existing town centre building through the introduction of three additional residential units whilst retaining the established commercial uses at ground floor level.

The scheme delivers a number of benefits, including the provision of additional housing within a highly sustainable location, the reuse of previously developed land, and the continued activation of an existing building within Reading Town Centre. The retention of the commercial units ensures that the mixed-use character of the building is maintained, supporting the vitality and function of the wider town centre.

The development has been carefully designed to work within the constraints of the existing building, providing high-quality self-contained accommodation without requiring external alterations. The proposal respects the character and appearance of the surrounding area, provides appropriate residential amenity, and incorporates measures to encourage sustainable travel through the provision of secure cycle storage.

Having regard to the relevant policies of the Reading Borough Local Plan, associated supplementary guidance, and the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, the proposal represents an appropriate form of sustainable development. The benefits of bringing an underused part of an existing town centre building into residential use, whilst maintaining active commercial activity at ground floor level, are considered to outweigh any limited impacts arising from the conversion.

The development is therefore considered to represent a positive contribution to the continued regeneration and sustainable growth of Reading Town Centre and provides an appropriate balance between the delivery of new homes, the protection of the existing urban character, and the promotion of sustainable development.

Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that planning permission be granted.

Appendix



