

Advice to the local planning authority

Advice to the local planning authority (LPA) from the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) as a statutory consultee for developments that include a relevant building.

To LPA	Reading Borough Council
LPA planning ref no	PL/26/0763
Our ref	26-0858
Site address	12 Friars Walk, Reading, RG1 1DX
Proposal description	Erection of an external secondary escape staircase to existing residential building (Block F), and the associated works.
Date on fire statement	12/05/2026
Date consultation received	30/07/2026
Date response sent	06/08/2026

1. Substantive response for the local planning authority

Thank you for consulting the BSR about this application.

Headline response from the BSR
Headline Response 'Content'

Scope of consultation

- 1.1 The above consultation relates to the erection of a secondary external escape staircase including associated works, for '12 Friars Walk' (Block F), an existing 13 story (Ground + 12) (37.3m) mixed use building, comprising, residential flats on levels GF-L12, flexible use at LG, GF and L12, Shop / Restaurant, café, hot food takeaway, drinking establishment at LG and GF and car parking at basement (BM1), LG and GF.
- 1.2 It is understood that 'Block F' is currently served by a single firefighting shaft, containing, firefighting stair, firefighting lift and rising fire main. The proposal seeks to improve the existing means of escape by adding a second external escape staircase.

- 1.3 Section 7 of the fire statement states: *“The external stair proposal has been designed to improve current means of escape provisions provided in Block F (originally designed to BS9991:2015). Where reasonably possible BS9991:2024 guidance has been followed to further enhance the strategy, where BS9991:2024 compliance cannot be provided it has been ensured that the BS9991:2015 design has been improved on or has remained as the original existing design.”*. This is noted.
- 1.4 Section 6(e) of the fire statement confirms that the building has been designed using British Standard 9991 (‘BS9991:2024’) for the residential parts of the building and British Standard 9999 (‘BS9999:2017’) for the commercial parts. The BSR has assessed the application accordingly.

Consultation

- 1.5 Following a review of the information provided in the planning application, the BSR is content with the fire safety design as set out in the project description, to the extent it affects land use planning considerations.

2. Supplementary information

The following information does not contribute to the BSR’s substantive response and should not be used for the purposes of decision making by the local planning authority.

Basement ventilation exhaust

- 2.1 It is noted that, there is an existing ventilation exhaust from the basement below the proposed staircase.
- 2.2 Section 7 of the fire statement states: *“The proposed external stair is positioned above the basement smoke ventilation exhaust. To mitigate the risk of smoke inhibiting the stair as an escape route, compartmentation has been provided, fully enclosing the stair up to 9m. Perforation above 9m will allow dissipation for trapped smoke. The final exit point for the stair has been extended away from the basement vent (4.3m) to ensure that occupants are not at risk of smoke exposure.”*
- 2.3 Section 7 also states: *“A key principle of the proposal is to ensure that smoke can be removed from the staircase. It is proposed that a 1m² AOV will be provided at the head of the staircase to align with guidance. The stair enclosure will also be perforated (not within fire resistant locations) to a minimum of 25% (BR186, 1990) of east stair elevation area above 9m to allow dissipation of smoke and ensure smoke logging does not occur. It should be noted that the existing common corridor smoke ventilation system will also act to protect the proposed external staircase, preventing smoke ingress.”*
- 2.4 This is noted, at later regulatory stages, it will be for the applicant to demonstrate that suitable separation is provided and that smoke being exhausted from the basement vents will not negatively impact the means of escape for occupants using the stair. Any design changes necessary may affect land use planning considerations, the applicant may need to seek advice from the LPA about the materiality of any consequential changes.

Means of escape

- 2.5 Section 8 of the fire statement states: *“CFD – In order to satisfy the functional requirements of the Building Regulations 2010, as agreed with third party prior to the study, only the means of escape has been assessed for the external staircase. Apartment F-02.12 with access door closest to the external stair on level 02 has been modelled as the worst case. The access door closest to that of the external stair door will be the proposed worst case flat in question for smoke ingress to the external stair. Due to the short distance between apartment and stair door it would be expected that smoke ingress would be most onerous here. The results of the simulations indicate that the tenability criteria (SCA guide) are not exceeded in the MOE models and that persons would be able to safely use the common corridor and external staircase for escape. This analysis has been reviewed by a third party and accepted.”*
- 2.6 This is noted, and it will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages.

Building Safety Regulator

- 2.7 All higher risk buildings are now required to be registered with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR). Further information can be found at [Applying to register a high-rise residential building - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/applying-to-register-a-high-rise-residential-building). From April 2024 the BSR started the process of inviting accountable persons to submit a safety case for their registered buildings.
- 2.8 The BSR notes that ‘12 Friars Walk’ (Block F) is an existing building. Accordingly, it will be for the Accountable Person (AP) or Principal Accountable Person (PAP) to demonstrate how building safety risks, such as risks arising from spread of fire, are being managed as part of the safety case regime.

Yours sincerely

M. Bottomley

Martin Bottomley
Fire Safety Information Assessor

Guidance on Planning Gateway One is available on the Planning Portal: [Planning and fire safety - Planning Portal](https://www.planningportal.co.uk/guidance/planning-gateway-one).

The scope of this substantive response is limited to fire safety matters that are material to land use planning considerations. This does not include matters relating to the determination of an application for:

- building control approval,
- a completion certificate, and

- a building assessment certificate.

This response does not provide advice about compliance with London Plan or local plan policy.