

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

18 September 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

ABBAY GARDENS, ABBAY STREET, READING, RG1 3BA

Full Planning Permission - Proposed Infill Extension within the South Block at Abbey Gardens

We write on behalf of our client, McGrath Group, to submit an application for full planning permission involving an infill extension of the existing void beneath the eastern projecting wing of the south block at Abbey Gardens, Abbey Street, Reading, RG1 3BA. The extension will provide an additional 373 sqm of office floor space.

The description of proposed development is as follows:

“Infilling of the existing undercroft/void beneath the eastern projecting wing of the southern block at ground and lower ground level, associated with the existing office use (Class E).”

Submitted Information

The application submission comprises of the following documents and architectural plans:

- Application forms duly completed and signed;
- Additional Information CIL Form (CIL Form 1);
- Area Schedule;
- Site Location Plan;
- Block Plan;
- Existing Lower Ground Floor Plan;
- Existing Ground Floor Plan;
- Existing Roof Plan;
- Existing Section;

- Existing East and West Elevation;
- Existing North and South Elevation;
- Existing South Streetscene Elevation;
- Proposed Lower Ground Floor Plan;
- Proposed Ground Floor Plan;
- Proposed Roof Plan;
- Proposed Section;
- Proposed East and West Elevation;
- Proposed North and South Elevation;
- Proposed South Streetscene Elevation;
- Phase 2 Contamination Report;
- Foul Drainage and Utilities Assessment;
- BREEAM Note; and
- Flood Risk Assessment.

The requisite planning fee of £3,141.00 incl VAT will follow under separate cover.

The Site

Abbey Gardens is located in the centre of Reading, close to key amenities, services and excellent public transport links, including less than a 10-minute walk to Reading Train Station and local bus routes.

The site area is 0.5 hectares. The area surrounding the property is largely in commercial use but there are residential uses above ground floor in the vicinity. The site is located adjacent to Abbey Ruins and the River Kennet. The property is not statutorily listed nor located within a Conservation Area or a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Abbey Gardens comprises a 1980s purpose built office building that has been in its entirety within Class E (formerly B1(a)) since first occupation. The building extends up to seven seven-stores with a mansard roof and two car parking levels below. It has a mostly glass window exterior, supported by concrete slabs. It is a multi-tenanted building with main entrances to the 'South Block' from Kings Road, to the 'Middle Block' from the west via Abbey Street and to the 'North Block' opposite Abbots House. Chestnut Walk continues under the building to connect to Abbey Street.

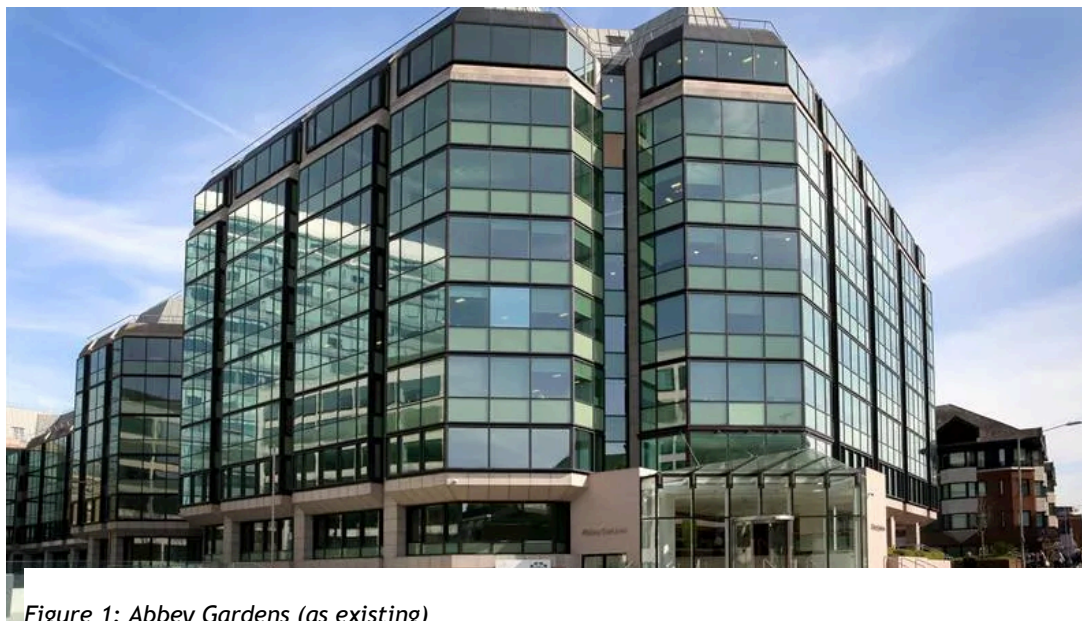


Figure 1: Abbey Gardens (as existing)

It is acknowledged that the area has historically been publicly accessible and provides a pedestrian link between Kings Road, the Abbey Ruins and Chestnut Walk, and that it is identified as part of the St James' Way (Camino de Santiago) route between Reading and Southampton.

However, it is important to clarify that the area subject to this application does not form part of the recorded Public Right of Way (PROW) network and the proposal therefore does not result in the diversion, obstruction or removal of a recorded public right of way. This position has previously been confirmed with the relevant transport colleagues. Signage has also historically been installed on the site making clear that the route does not constitute a PROW.

Planning History

A desktop search for the planning history has been undertaken on Reading BC website and is summarised at **Appendix 1**.

In short, through various permissions prior approval for the change of use of the building to residential have been granted.

A further planning permission was granted in June 2026 for the replacement of the existing curtain walling façade of the building to suit the upcoming residential use (ref: PL/26/0091).

Proposed Development



The description of proposed development is as follows:

“Infilling of the existing undercroft/void beneath the eastern projecting wing of the southern block at ground and lower ground level, associated with the existing office use (Class E).”

The proposals involve infilling the existing void beneath the eastern projecting wing at the southern end of the south block. Whilst this application is for office use, the intention is for this additional space to be changed to residential use, consistent with the majority of the remainder of the building.

The upper floors are currently supported on columns, with open space below providing stepped and ramped access between Kings Road and the riverside walk. Part of this area is already enclosed, comprising glazed elevations to the west and a glazed staircase to the east.

New walls will be constructed between the existing stone columns, aligning with the existing glazed elements to the west and following the building's chamfered form to the east. The existing glazed staircase will be retained and incorporated into the new accommodation.

Once the conversion of the building to residential use has taken plan, the infill will create a new residential frontage beneath the building. The new windows will match the approved upper-floor design, with the same arrangement, vertical alignment, and dark grey powder-coated aluminium frames.

A similar application has also been submitted in tandem to this application for a modest extension to the central block.

Planning Assessment

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The adopted development plan comprises of the Reading Borough Local Plan adopted November 2019. Other material considerations include the NPPF (2024) and the Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 2019.

Principle of Development

The addition of office floorspace in this location is supported by policy EM1 and CR1, given the location of the site within the office core/central core location.

Historic Environment

Policy EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment requires developments located within a historic context to respect and where possible enhance the architectural and visual qualities. Whilst the site is not statutorily listed nor located within a Conservation Area or a Scheduled Ancient Monument, it is located adjacent to Abbey Ruins, a scheduled ancient monument and the Grade II listed Reading Gaol.



Policy CR15 states that development in the vicinity of the Abbey should promote the architectural, archaeological or historic interest of the Abbey and its setting.

The application is accompanied by a Heritage Assessment prepared by The Heritage Practice.

The proposed extension will be located at low level and will continue existing building lines, as well as the setback nature of existing ground and lower ground floor infill to the building, allowing the supporting stone framework to remain a legible feature.

It is concluded that the proposal will not detract from the character or appearance of the setting of the nearby Abbey Ruins or Reading Gaol and there will be a neutral/ minor positive impact upon the setting of surrounding designated heritage assets and the historic townscape. As such, it is considered that the proposals are compliant with Policy EN1.

Design

Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm requires all development to be of a high quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located.

The proposal is small in scale and modest in terms of its impact, restricted to the internalisation of existing open space beneath the upper floors of the building. Thus, there will be no harmful impact upon its overall form, shape or profile of the building.

The materiality and design of the proposed extension will blend with the approved treatment to adjacent areas at ground floor level as well as over the upper floors, and will sit seamlessly in relation to the new residential aesthetic of the building.

The above demonstrates that the proposal is compliant with Policy CC7.

Flood Risk

Whilst the site is located within flood zones 2 and 3, and the proposals are not considered to raise any issues from a flood risk perspective, as confirmed by the submitted Flood Risk Assessment prepared by EAS and the response from the Environment Agency on previous applications.

Sustainability

The application is accompanied by a BREEAM note prepared by Love Design Studio. The assessment concludes that the highest realistically achievable rating for the proposed development is **BREEAM 'Pass'**, with a maximum potential score of **42.75%**, which falls below the **55% threshold** required to achieve a **'Very Good'** rating. A number of BREEAM credits have been identified as not being technically applicable to the nature and scope of the proposal and, as such, cannot reasonably be achieved.

A key constraint in pursuing BREEAM certification is that, although the current application relates only to a small extension to the southern block of the existing office building, planning permission has already been granted for the conversion of the wider building to residential use, as outlined in Section 2.2.

Obtaining BREEAM certification would therefore involve a lengthy and costly process, requiring assessment and certification at both the Design Stage and Post-Construction Stage. Furthermore, any BREEAM certification achieved for the current office use would ultimately become redundant once the approved residential conversion is implemented, as residential developments cannot be assessed or certified under the BREEAM Non-Domestic assessment methodology.

While full BREEAM certification is therefore considered neither proportionate nor practical in this instance, there are several sustainability measures that could be undertaken independently of the formal assessment process. Preparing targeted assessments in accordance with relevant BREEAM technical criteria would provide robust evidence of the development's sustainability credentials while avoiding the significant cost and programme implications associated with full certification. This approach would also have a lesser impact on the financial viability of the proposal.

The BREEAM note suggests that the following reports are prepared outside the formal BREEAM assessment process, using the relevant BREEAM technical standards as guidance:

- **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA):** An assessment of the environmental impacts associated with the materials and products used in the construction of the development over their lifecycle.
- **Sustainable Procurement Plan:** A policy document setting out how sustainability considerations will be integrated into the procurement of materials, products and services throughout the construction process.

Conclusion

The proposed development involves a modest infilling of the existing void beneath the eastern projecting wing to the southern block of Abbey Gardens to create additional office floor space. The proposal is small in scale and modest in terms of its impact, and have been designed to sit seamlessly in relation to the new residential aesthetic of the building.

I trust the enclosed information is sufficient to allow the prompt registration of the application and its determination within the statutory period. However, should you have any queries or require additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Sian Thomas

Appendix 1: Planning History

Decision Date	Description of Development and Reference	Decision
11 June 2026	External works to all elevations from ground to 7 th 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 2 nd floor level and above, and other associated works. (PL/26/0091)	Approved
03 March 2026	Change of use of part of building from Class E (offices) to Class C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 12 new flats. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (ref: PL/26/0012)	Approved
18 February 2026	Installation of roof space windows within the north, east, south and west elevations of the of the south block at Abbey Gardens (ref: PL/25/1729)	Approved
13 December 2025	Installation of roof space windows on the north, east and west elevations of the north block and north, south and west elevations of the central block and construction of a roof to enclose the plant area within part of the central block (ref: PL/25/1175)	Approved
19 September 2025	Change of use of part of the 5th (north block) and 6th (middle block) floors from Class E (offices) to Class C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 14 (1x1, 11x2 & 2x3-bedroom) residential units. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended).	Withdrawn
21 August 2025	Change of use of part of the ground floor to seventh floor from Class E (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 53 1x bed and 54 2x bed flats. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.	Approved

23 May 2025	Change of use of part of ground, first, second, third, fourth and fifth floors from Class E (offices) to C3 (dwellinghouses) to comprise 84x1 bed and 8x2 bed flats. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.	Approved
19/04/2023	New glazed entrance and external step platform lift (ref PL/23/0211)	Approved
01/03/2021	Removal of 1No. glazed panel and the installation of a new air intake/outlet to match existing (part retrospective)	Approved
27/05/2020	Remove existing glazed panel and replace with new entrance door to terrace area (ref: PL/20/0477)	Approved
10/01/2020	Removal of 2no glazed panels and installation of new Air Intake Louvres to match existing (ref: PL/19/1777)	Approved
10/05/2018	External terrace and decked area (ref: PL/17/2261)	Refused
04/10/2012	Non-material change to planning permission 11/01726/FUL for modifying and raising the levels of the planters to the south elevation along Kings Road to include for the existing floor structure below (ref: PL/12/1582)	Approved
04/10/2012	3 Maples - crown reduced by 2-2.5m, crown clean and crown lift to 4m (ref: PL/12/1851)	Split
22/08/2012	Hoarding marketing wrap and 2 halo illuminated entrance signs (ref: PL/12/0497)	Approved
15/08/2012	Certificate of Lawfulness for proposed new door (ref: PL/12/1616)	Approved (Permitted Development)
28/06/2012	Discharge of condition 4 of planning permission 11/01726/FUL (ref: PL/12/1139)	Approved

11/02/2012	Non-Material Amendment to permitted application 200477 - revise the design from a single door to a single door with side and overhead glazed panels.	Approved
07/02/2012	Installation of new plant and alterations to the roof to create associated louvre openings (PL/11/1790)	Approved
04/01/2012	Remodelling of existing office entrance area and alterations to access to include disabled entrance and lift (PL/11/0658)	Approved