



81 Hamilton Road, Reading, RG1 5RB

Proposed change of use from HMO to residential use (C3), part two storey part single storey rear extension and conversion of outbuilding to residential use.

Biodiversity and Landscaping Statement rev. A

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This Biodiversity and Landscaping Statement has been prepared in support of the full planning application for the change of use of 81 Hamilton Road, Reading from a house in multiple occupation to a single residential dwelling (Use Class C3), the erection of a part two storey part single storey rear extension, and the conversion of the outbuilding to the rear to incidental residential use. It sets out the statutory biodiversity net gain position for the development, the retention, protection and enhancement of the existing landscaping and boundary vegetation, and the arrangements for its long-term management.

The existing landscaping of the site is well established and makes a positive contribution to the character of the area, and the strategy underpinning this application is accordingly one of retention, protection and enhancement of that existing resource rather than its replacement or supplementation.

The application site lies within the South Park Conservation Area. This statement should therefore be read alongside the submitted Heritage Statement, the Design and Access Statement and the submitted drawings. It has been prepared with reference to current UK standards and guidance for trees, landscaping and biodiversity in the planning process, principally BS 5837:2012 (Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction), BS 42020:2013 (Biodiversity - Code of practice for planning and development), and the National Planning Policy Framework.

1.2 Site context

The application site is located at the south-eastern end of Hamilton Road, between Crescent Road and Whiteknights Road, approximately 1.3km east of Reading town centre. The site extends to approximately 900.0m² and is occupied by a two storey detached Victorian villa of approximately 191.0m² internal floor area, a two storey outbuilding to the rear, and a greenhouse within the rear garden.

The plot is generous and well planted. A garden wraps around the property, with a driveway to the southern side of the house leading to the outbuilding and parking area at the rear. The front boundary is enclosed by a low railing with mature hedge and shrub planting behind it, and further established hedge and shrub planting runs along the north-western and south-western boundaries of the rear garden. The verdant, well-planted character of the plot is identified in the South Park Conservation Area Appraisal as a positive feature of the area, and its retention has been the starting point for the design of the scheme.

2. Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain Position

Biodiversity net gain is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021), subject to the exemptions set out in the accompanying regulations. It is considered that the proposed development would fall within the de minimis exemption, and that no Biodiversity Gain Plan or biodiversity metric calculation would therefore be required. The reasons are as follows:

- No priority habitat is present within the application site. The site comprises domestic garden, ornamental and boundary planting, hardstanding and existing built form, in a fully built up urban context.
- The proposed rear extension would be erected in the position of the existing single storey rear additions and the adjoining hardstanding, rather than extending into the garden. It would not therefore result in the loss of habitat of more than negligible biodiversity value.
- The repair of the storage outbuilding and its conversion to incidental residential use would take place entirely within the existing building envelope and would involve no loss of habitat.
- The three off-street parking spaces and the bin store would be provided within the existing driveway and hardstanding to the rear, with no additional loss of vegetated garden.
- No trees would be removed and no length of boundary hedge or shrub planting would be lost.

On that basis the area of on-site habitat with a biodiversity value greater than zero that would be affected by the development would be well below 25m², and no on-site linear habitat would be lost. The de minimis exemption would accordingly be engaged and the mandatory biodiversity gain condition would not apply. Should the Local Planning Authority take a different view on any part of the above, the position can be confirmed by way of a Small Sites Metric calculation at determination stage.

Notwithstanding the exemption, the scheme has been designed to deliver a positive biodiversity outcome on the site, through the retention and protection of all existing landscaping in its entirety, an improved management regime for the retained boundary planting and garden areas, and the built-in habitat features set out in Section 5 below. The proposal would therefore accord with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Reading Borough Local Plan in relation to biodiversity, whether or not the statutory metric applies.

3. Existing Trees and Boundary Vegetation

3.1 Impact upon existing trees

There are no trees within the application site that would be affected by the proposed development. All existing landscaping, including the mature hedge and shrub planting to the front boundary and the established boundary planting to the north-western and south-western boundaries of the rear garden, would be retained in its entirety. No trees or vegetation are proposed for removal, in whole or in part, and the scheme has been designed so that no incursion into the rooting area of any tree, whether within or beyond the site, would be required.

The proposed extension would be erected against the rear elevation of the villa, in the position presently occupied by the existing single storey rear additions and the adjoining hardstanding. It would not extend into any part of the garden that is presently vegetated, and would be separated from every site boundary by the existing garden and hardstanding. The repair and conversion of the outbuilding would take place wholly within the existing building envelope, and the parking spaces and bin store would occupy the existing driveway and hardstanding to the rear. No change of level, excavation, new drainage run or new access would be required in the vicinity of any tree or boundary planting.

It follows that no unacceptable impact would occur upon any existing tree or upon the retained boundary vegetation, either directly through the loss of or damage to root systems, stems or crowns, or indirectly through construction activity, changes in ground level, soil compaction or altered drainage. Subject to the protection measures set out in Section 6 below, the existing landscape resource of the site would be preserved intact and would continue to contribute to the verdant character of the conservation area exactly as it does at present.

3.2 Tree survey

It is not considered that a tree survey or arboricultural impact assessment prepared in accordance with BS 5837:2012 would be necessary in support of this application. The only tree of any consequence in the vicinity of the proposed works is a fruit tree situated beyond the side boundary of the application site, within the adjoining property. That tree stands outside the red line boundary, is not within the ownership or control of the applicant, and is not proposed to be removed, pruned or otherwise affected in any way by the development. Given the position of the proposed extension against the rear elevation of the villa, on land already occupied by the existing single storey additions and hardstanding, the works would fall well outside any Root Protection Area that would be calculated for that tree under BS 5837:2012, and no construction activity, storage or excavation would take place in proximity to it.

In the absence of any tree within the application site that would be affected by the proposal, and in the absence of any physical or spatial relationship between the works and the neighbouring fruit tree capable of giving rise to arboricultural harm, a formal tree survey would serve no useful purpose in the determination of this application and would place a disproportionate burden on the applicant relative

to the scale and nature of the development. Should the Local Planning Authority nevertheless consider that further arboricultural information would assist, this could be addressed by an appropriately worded condition.

It is noted for completeness that trees within a conservation area are afforded statutory protection under section 211 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and that six weeks' written notice would be required to be given to Reading Borough Council before any works to, or removal of, such a tree. No such works form part of this application.

3.3 Buildings and protected species

The detached two storey outbuilding to the rear of the garden is presently used as storage and in poor structural condition. It is proposed for repair and for conversion, within its existing envelope, to a use incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse, as shown on Drawing No. 13 Rev B (Proposed Floorplans Outbuilding) and described in Section 2.2 of the accompanying Sustainability Statement. Older buildings of this type have the potential to support roosting bats and nesting birds. It is recommended that a precautionary approach be taken to the roof works, with the slate covering stripped by hand under supervision and works ceasing immediately if any bat or evidence of a bat roost is found, at which point advice should be sought from a licensed ecologist and Natural England. This can be secured by condition. All bats and their roosts are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Any cutting back of boundary vegetation required to facilitate construction access should, where practicable, be carried out outside the bird nesting season (March to August inclusive), in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Where works cannot avoid that period, the vegetation should be checked immediately beforehand by a suitably experienced person, and works should not proceed if an active nest is present until the young have fledged.

4. Landscape and Biodiversity Objectives

The landscaping strategy for the site is one of retention and enhancement of the existing resource. It has been developed around the following objectives:

- Retain in full all existing trees, hedges, shrub planting and garden areas, and ensure that no unacceptable impact would occur upon them as a result of the development.
- Protect the retained vegetation throughout the construction period, so that the existing landscape structure would be handed on intact.

- Enhance the biodiversity value of the existing planting through an improved long-term management regime, rather than through its replacement or supplementation.
- Preserve and reinforce the verdant, well-planted suburban setting identified in the South Park Conservation Area Appraisal as a positive feature of the area.
- Retain permeable, vegetated garden area and keep hard surfacing to its existing extent, supporting surface water infiltration.
- Introduce low-impact habitat features, namely bird and bat boxes, integrated bird or bat bricks, hedgehog gaps and a log pile, which would be fixed to buildings, fences or mature boundary vegetation, or placed on the ground, and would add biodiversity value without the removal, replacement or disturbance of any established planting (Section 5.3).
- Ensure that the management regime would be straightforward, proportionate and capable of being sustained in the long term by the occupiers.

These measures are shown on the accompanying Landscape and Biodiversity Principles Plan, which identifies the retained trees, hedges, shrub planting and garden areas, the line of the construction-stage protective fencing (Section 6), the areas subject to the management regime (Sections 5.1 and 5.2) and the locations of the habitat features (Section 5.3), so that the proposals would be clear and capable of being secured by condition.

5. Enhancement of the Existing Landscaping

5.1 Management of the retained boundary planting

The existing boundary hedges and shrub planting are well established and, with an appropriate management regime, would deliver a greater biodiversity value than they do at present. The following measures are proposed and could be secured by condition:

- Cutting of the boundary hedges on a rotational basis and no more than once a year, outside the bird nesting season, so as to allow flowering and fruiting growth to develop and to provide a food source over the winter.
- Allowing the retained hedges to thicken and to increase modestly in height and width where they adjoin neighbouring gardens, improving their structure, nesting value and screening function.
- Retention of established ivy and other climbing growth on boundary walls and fences where it is not causing structural harm, given its value for nesting birds and invertebrates and as a late-season nectar source.
- Removal of any non-native invasive species encountered, and control of rank weed growth at the base of the hedges without the routine use of herbicides.

- Retention of leaf litter and deadwood within the base of the boundary planting, rather than its removal, to support invertebrates and small mammals.

5.2 Management of the garden areas

The retained garden areas would be managed to maintain and improve plant diversity. Areas of lawn away from the immediate curtilage of the dwelling would be mown on a reduced frequency during the spring and summer, allowing flowering plants to complete their cycle and providing a nectar source across an extended season. Existing ornamental and shrub planting would be retained and managed by selective pruning rather than by clearance and replacement. Existing topsoil would be retained on site, and hard surfacing would be kept to its existing extent, with any localised making good carried out in permeable materials, consistent with sustainable drainage principles.

5.3 Habitat enhancement features

The following low-impact habitat features are proposed. They are described as low-impact because each would be a small, self-contained feature fixed to the outbuilding, the proposed extension, boundary fencing or mature boundary vegetation, or placed at ground level, requiring no excavation and no removal, replacement or disturbance of existing planting. Their locations are shown on the Landscape and Biodiversity Principles Plan, and all could be secured by condition:

- 2 no. bird boxes of appropriate design, mounted on the rear elevation of the outbuilding or on mature boundary vegetation at a height of 2-4m, away from prevailing weather and direct sunlight.
- 2 no. bat boxes mounted on the outbuilding or on mature boundary vegetation, at a height of not less than 4m, with a clear flight line.
- Hedgehog gaps of 13cm x 13cm at the base of rear garden boundary fencing, to maintain connectivity between neighbouring gardens.
- A log or brash pile in an undisturbed part of the rear garden, providing invertebrate and amphibian habitat.
- Integrated bird or bat bricks within the rear elevation of the proposed extension, which can be installed at construction stage at negligible cost.

6. Protection of Retained Vegetation During Construction

Although no arboricultural works are proposed, the retained hedges and shrub planting would require protection during the construction period if their contribution to the character of the conservation area is to be preserved. Protective fencing, typically Heras-style fencing on driven scaffold poles,

should be erected along the inner face of the retained boundary planting prior to the commencement of any demolition, site clearance or construction activity, and retained for the full duration of the works.

No storage of materials, plant, fuel or waste, no mixing or washing out of materials, and no siting of site cabins or parking should occur within the fenced protection areas or against the retained vegetation. Where any incursion into the fenced area proves unavoidable, it should be carried out by hand and reinstated on completion. In the unlikely event that works were to be required within the Root Protection Area of any tree, whether within or beyond the site, those works should be undertaken in accordance with an Arboricultural Method Statement, using hand digging or no-dig construction techniques as appropriate and supervised by a suitably qualified arboriculturist.

Given that the site lies within the South Park Conservation Area, and that the retained boundary planting makes a material contribution to its character, it is recommended that these protection measures be secured by planning condition.

7. Long-Term Management

The following regime is proposed for the retained landscaping, to be carried out by the occupiers as part of the ordinary management of the garden.

Table 1: Indicative Management Schedule for Retained Landscaping

Task	Frequency	Notes
Hedge cutting	Annually at most, outside the bird nesting season (Sep-Feb)	Rotational cutting to allow flowering and fruiting growth to develop
Lawn management	Reduced mowing frequency (Apr-Aug) away from the dwelling	Allows flowering plants to complete their cycle
Selective pruning of shrubs	As required, typically winter or after flowering	Retention and management in preference to clearance and replacement
Weed and invasive species control	Annually (spring)	Non-native invasive species removed; routine herbicide use avoided
Leaf litter and deadwood	Retained in situ at the base of boundary planting	Supports invertebrates and small mammals

Task	Frequency	Notes
Habitat feature checks	Annually (autumn/winter)	Bird boxes cleaned out; bat boxes not to be opened or disturbed
Condition monitoring of retained planting	Annually	Any losses through natural causes made good with equivalent stock

Should any part of the retained boundary planting be lost through natural causes, it should be made good with stock of an equivalent species and size in the next available planting season, so that the continuity and screening value of the boundary vegetation would be maintained.

8. Policy and Guidance Context

This statement has been prepared with regard to the following policy and guidance:

- National Planning Policy Framework - policies relating to biodiversity, green infrastructure, trees and the character and quality of places.
- Reading Borough Local Plan - Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) and Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland), together with Policies EN1 and EN3 in relation to the historic environment and conservation areas, and Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm).
- South Park Conservation Area Appraisal, which identifies mature tree cover within property grounds as a positive feature of the area.
- Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) and the associated biodiversity gain exemptions.
- Section 211 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 - trees in conservation areas.
- BS 5837:2012 - Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations.
- BS 42020:2013 - Biodiversity - Code of practice for planning and development.
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

9. Conclusion

The proposed development would be accommodated entirely within the existing built footprint and hardstanding of the site. All existing trees, hedges and shrub planting would be retained in full, and no unacceptable impact would occur upon them, either directly or through construction activity. There is no tree within the application site that would be affected by the proposal, and the only tree of any consequence in the vicinity is a fruit tree standing beyond the side boundary within the adjoining

property, which would remain wholly unaffected. A tree survey is not therefore considered necessary in support of this application.

No loss of habitat of more than negligible biodiversity value would arise, and the development would accordingly fall within the de minimis exemption from the mandatory biodiversity net gain requirement, such that no Biodiversity Gain Plan or metric calculation would be required. Notwithstanding that exemption, the scheme would deliver a positive biodiversity outcome through the protection of the existing landscape resource, an improved long-term management regime for the retained boundary planting and garden areas, and a set of low-impact habitat features comprising bird and bat boxes, integrated bird or bat bricks, hedgehog gaps and a log pile. The proposal would preserve and reinforce the verdant, well-planted setting that the South Park Conservation Area Appraisal identifies as a positive feature of the area, and would comply with the relevant policies of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Reading Borough Local Plan.

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