



**BNP PARIBAS  
REAL ESTATE**



## **PLANNING STATEMENT**

**URS BUILDING, UNIVERSITY OF  
READING – PHASE 3 FULL  
REFURBISHMENT WORKS**

**NOVEMBER 2024**



**University of  
Reading**



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# **PLANNING STATEMENT**

## **URS REFURBISHMENT – PHASE 3**

### **FULL REFURBISHMENT**

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**Prepared on behalf of:**  
**The University of Reading**

November 2024 – V4

Report prepared and approved by:



Simon Handy BA (Hons) MPlan MRTPI

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## Contents

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|            |                                              |           |
|------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Introduction</b>                          | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Site Context &amp; Planning History</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Pre-Application Advice and Engagement</b> | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>4.0</b> | <b>Proposed Development and Phasing</b>      | <b>10</b> |
| <b>5.0</b> | <b>Planning Policy</b>                       | <b>12</b> |
| <b>6.0</b> | <b>Planning Assessment</b>                   | <b>18</b> |
| <b>7.0</b> | <b>Conclusion</b>                            | <b>27</b> |

### Appendices

|            |                                                                                                                                        |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Appendix A | Written pre-application advice from the Twentieth Century Society dated 2 <sup>nd</sup> October 2024 and 10 <sup>th</sup> October 2024 |
| Appendix B | Written pre-application advice from Wokingham Borough Council dated 10 <sup>th</sup> October 2024                                      |

## 1.0 Introduction

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- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared on behalf of The University of Reading (hereafter referred to as “the Applicant” or “the University”) in support of a planning application submitted to Wokingham Borough Council (“the Council”) relating to the URS Building (“the site”) situated at the heart of the University’s Whiteknights campus.
- 1.2 This application seeks full planning permission and listed building consent for the full refurbishment of the URS Building, which will consist of internal and external refurbishment works (“the proposed development” or “the proposal”). The full description of development is as follows:
- “External and internal refurbishment, repairs and alterations consisting of replacement windows and doors; replacement roofs, including new roof lights, cowls and lanterns; installation of solar panels; concrete repairs; full mechanical and electrical services upgrade; erection of two external staircases; new detached bin and bike store; and hard and soft landscape and accessibility improvements.”***
- 1.3 This Statement provides details of the proposed development and assesses the proposal in the context of the relevant national and local planning policies together with other material considerations.
- 1.4 This Statement is structured as follows:
- **Section 2.0** discusses the site context and planning history.
  - **Section 3.0** describes the pre-application feedback that has been obtained.
  - **Section 4.0** describes the proposal in detail.
  - **Section 5.0** sets out the planning policy context.
  - **Section 6.0** provides an assessment of the proposal against relevant planning policies, and other material considerations.
  - **Section 7.0** provides an overall conclusion.
- 1.5 This Statement should be read in conjunction with the documents and plans listed in the covering letter prepared by BNP Paribas Real Estate accompanying this application.

## 2.0 Site Context & Planning History

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### **The Site and Surroundings**

- 2.1 The Urban and Regional Studies Building (or “URS”) is the subject of this planning application. The building is located in the western portion of the Whiteknights Campus of the University of Reading, which is located to the south-east of Reading town centre and north-west of Earley, a suburb of Reading.
- 2.2 The URS Building is Grade II listed but is not located within a particularly sensitive heritage context with no other heritage designations applying. URS was designed by one of the leading practices of the post-war period, HKPA, and has been listed for its impressive structural and architectural qualities, among other reasons. The overall architectural structure draws inspiration from both brutalism and traditional Japanese construction.
- 2.3 The URS Building’s layout is anchored by a prominent circulation spine running along its east-west axis, featuring a substantial overhang to the north and expansive glazing to the south. The building is accessed by vehicles from the south on Fountain Street, while a public right of way (“PRoW”) known as Chancellors Way passes beneath the overhang to the north. This PRoW will not be altered or repositioned by the proposed works, beyond the hard landscape improvements which are proposed as part of the application..
- 2.4 The surrounding area comprises a series of modern university buildings, including the library, Edith Morley Building, and Whiteknights House to the north, with the Allen Laboratory, Wager Building, and Miller Building to the south.
- 2.5 Whiteknights Park is designated as a ‘Local Historic Park and Garden’ according to the Council’s Planning Policies and Constraints Map.
- 2.6 The site is located within the jurisdiction of Wokingham Borough Council, but the boundary with Reading Borough Council is relatively close to the north, west and south.

- 2.7 Further details relating to the architecture and heritage value of the URS Building can be found in the Design and Access Statement and Heritage Impact Assessments that accompany this application.

### **Planning History**

- 2.8 The following recent planning history for the site is set out below:

- **Application 182220**

Full Planning Application for internal and external alterations and extensions to existing building and external works including new footpath, landscaping and external working area.

*Refused 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018*

- **Application 182221**

Listed Building Consent for internal and external alterations and extensions to existing building and external works including new footpath, landscaping and external working area.

*Refused 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018*

- **Application 211953**

Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed addition of side stream filter, to add BMS controlled 2-port valves, control and monitoring, partial asbestos removal and replace fan convectors with radiators, replace finned convectors, add/replace traditional TRV's to all radiators and to change all radiator CT circuits to VT.

*Certificate of lawfulness for proposed works to listed building granted 19th July 2021*

- **Application 241743**

Full planning application for proposed internal and external refurbishment, repairs and alterations consisting of replacement windows and doors; replacement roofs including new roof lights, cowls and lanterns; and concrete repairs.

*Approved on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2024*

- **Application 241744**

Listed Building consent for proposed internal and external refurbishment, repairs and alterations consisting of replacement windows and doors; replacement roofs including new roof lights, cowls and lanterns; and concrete repairs.

Approved on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2024

## 3.0 Pre-Application Advice and Engagement

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- 3.1 The University and its consultant team have engaged with both Wokingham Borough Council and the Twentieth Century Society (“C20”) prior to the submission of this planning application.

### **The Twentieth Century Society**

- 3.2 C20’s Casework Committee previously advised that the Society welcomed the project team’s approach to the proposed refurbishment overall. The latest pre-application advice (provided in two parts and included here as **Appendix A**) does not raise any fundamental objections but does query the need for the proposed lifts from a capacity perspective and requested further information or justification in relation to the scale and design of the proposed stair and lift additions. Comprehensive information has been submitted as part of this application to address these requests.

### **Wokingham Borough Council**

- 3.3 The University and its consultant team have engaged with Wokingham Borough Council since the inception of the project. Initially, this involved discussions around the enabling and strip out works to the URS Building (known as Phase 1 of the project – further details in the following section), actual refurbishment, repair and alterations stage of the URS Building (known as Phase 2 of the project - further details in the following section) and agreement on the approach to be taken towards the submission of planning applications.
- 3.4 In terms of discussions regarding the external refurbishment proposals, a pack of information was submitted to the Council for comment, with the Council’s written pre-application advice (included here as **Appendix B**) being received on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024.
- 3.5 In terms of the external and internal works proposed as part of this current application and presented, in part, during the pre-application stage, the Council confirms that the principle of refurbishing URS is supported and it welcomes this heritage asset being brought back into use. While a level of less than substantial harm to the listed building

is anticipated by the Council, this has to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals, as acknowledged by the Council.

- 3.6 The University's consultant team has taken the Council's heritage and design feedback into account and provided responses or justification within the application documents for the design decisions that have been made.
- 3.7 Aside from the heritage and landscape design matters, the Council's pre-app feedback confirms that the current proposals are unlikely to affect areas of wildlife significance and green infrastructure networks, nor does the proposal raise highway safety concerns.
- 3.8 The Council provided a list of application validation requirements, which the submitted application fully adheres to.

### **Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement**

- 3.9 While it is common for applicants to carry out some public consultation ahead of a planning application being submitted, given the small scale of the proposals, the scope of works, and the limited surrounding properties, we are of the opinion that public consultation was unnecessary in this instance.
- 3.10 Notwithstanding the above, the consultant team has undertaken considerable engagement with key University stakeholders and users ahead of the proposals being finalised to ensure that the needs and aspirations of end-users of the building have been taken into account prior to this application being submitted.

## 4.0 Proposed Development and Phasing

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- 4.1 Full planning permission and listed building consent is sought for:

***“External and internal refurbishment, repairs and alterations consisting of replacement windows and doors; replacement roofs, including new roof lights, cowl and lanterns; installation of solar panels; concrete repairs; full mechanical and electrical services upgrade; erection of two external staircases; new detached bin and bike store; and hard and soft landscape and accessibility improvements.”***

- 4.2 The University of Reading’s Estates Strategy places great importance on the refurbishment and repurposing of the URS Building as an integral part of the Whiteknights Campus redevelopment initiative. Previously housing the School of Built Environment’s (“SBE”) Construction Management & Estates (“CME”) department, the URS Building’s occupants have been relocated to a temporary facility in the Chancellor’s Building. The intention of the full Estates Strategy is to reintegrate the CME back into the refurbished building.

- 4.3 The existing structure exhibits notable deficiencies in environmental control, fabric efficiency, disabled access, and fire escape provisions. The overall refurbishment plans for URS will seek to overcome these deficiencies and to bring this important University building, which has significant heritage value, back into functional use for the long-term.

- 4.4 The refurbishment proposals for URS have been broken down into the following three phases:

***Phase 1: Enabling works package, consisting of removal of asbestos and redundant mechanical, electrical, and public health installations; removal of selected internal blockwork walls and internal joinery; structural investigations; and provision of temporary power, lighting, and fire alarm to facilitate future refurbishment phases.***

**Phase 2:** *External refurbishment, repairs and alterations consisting of replacement windows and doors, replacement roofs and concrete repairs. This phase represents the first substantive stage of the actual refurbishment proposals.*

**Phase 3:** *Internal fit out and remaining external refurbishment works (the proposals the subject of this application), consisting of the Phase 2 works alongside full mechanical and electrical services upgrades, erection of two external staircases, a new detached bin and bike store, and landscape improvements. This phase represents the last substantive stage of the refurbishment proposals.*

- 4.5 Both Wokingham Borough Council and the C20 Society are supportive of this phased approach. The phased approach was discussed with WBC and C20 during the on-site meetings with each party on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2024 and 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 respectively.
- 4.6 Further details relating to the proposals are contained in the submitted Design and Access Statement.

## 5.0 Planning Policy

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5.1 This section of the Statement provides an overview of the planning policies contained within the Development Plan relevant to this application alongside any other material considerations. Section 6.0 provides a fuller explanation of the requirements of the relevant policies and assesses them in the context of the proposed development.

5.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) states that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

### **The Development Plan**

5.3 The Development Plan for Wokingham comprises the following documents:

- Wokingham Core Strategy (adopted January 2010); and
- Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted February 2014).

### **Other Material Considerations**

5.4 Other material considerations comprise the following:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2023) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG); and
- Relevant supplementary planning documents and guidance, including the Wokingham Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (adopted May 2010).

### **Wokingham Core Strategy**

5.5 Policy CP1 sets out the overall aims in relation to sustainable development, confirming that planning permission will be granted for proposals that embrace sustainable principles in so far as they maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment, minimise emission of pollutants, limit adverse impact on water quality, ensure

adequate drainage, provide for recycling/minimise use of resources, minimise risk from flooding, secure safe and attractive access, reduce the need to travel and contribute towards the goal of reaching zero-carbon developments (through inclusion of appropriate on-site renewable energy), and minimisation of resources using appropriate layout and orientation, form and design.

- 5.6 Policy CP2 – Inclusive Communities requires development to contribute towards the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities.
- 5.7 Policy CP3 – General Principles for Development is the Council's primary policy relating to design principles. CP3 confirms that permission will be granted for proposals which are of an appropriate scale, activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area as well as providing safe and secure access, have no detrimental impact upon ecological/heritage/landscape features, use the full potential of the site and contribute to a sense of place.
- 5.8 Policy CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements. This policy provides a platform to use planning obligations and conditions to secure appropriate arrangements for the provision of infrastructure necessary to mitigate the impact from development.
- 5.9 Policy CP6 – Managing Travel Demand seeks to ensure that schemes promote sustainable forms of travel and are located so as to not cause highway problems.
- 5.10 Policy CP7 – Biodiversity seeks to safeguard nature conservation importance.
- 5.11 Policy CP9 – Requires that the scale and location of development proposals should be appropriate to its location.
- 5.12 Policy CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits. The Whiteknights Campus, in planning terms, is outside of the primary development limits of any defined settlement. This policy is however more framed towards managing isolated sites, as opposed to the University campus. Nevertheless, we recognise the need to demonstrate that the proposals are appropriate to the site and its surroundings and consider that this is achieved, as set out within Section 6.0.

- 5.13 Policy CP15 – States that within development limits the redevelopment, refurbishment or minor extension of buildings in employment use will be acceptable in principle.
- 5.14 There are no policies specifically relating to heritage assets within the Core Strategy, however, a number of policies promote high quality design, including responding to context, which could tangentially relate to heritage assets i.e. CP1 and CP3.

### **Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan**

- 5.15 Policy CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development confirms that the Council will approve development that accords with the Development Plan without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.16 Policy CC04 - Sustainable Design and Construction states that planning permission will only be granted for proposals that seek to deliver high quality sustainably designed and constructed developments. For non-residential proposals, this requires proposals of more than 100 square metres of floorspace to at least achieve the necessary mandatory BREEAM requirements and meet or exceed statutory requirements for water resource management.
- 5.17 Policy CC05 - Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks requires all non-residential proposals of more than 1,000 square metres to provide 10% reduction in carbon emissions through either renewable energy or low carbon technology. This application does not propose to create more than 1,000 square metres of additional floor area. Therefore, Policy CC05 does not need to be considered further.
- 5.18 Policy CC06 - Noise requires proposals to demonstrate how they have addressed noise impacts.
- 5.19 Policy CC07 - Parking requires development to comply with the Council's standards. Given that this application only relates to external alterations and repairs, it is unnecessary to consider parking requirements further.
- 5.20 Policy CC10 - Sustainable Drainage requires all proposals to ensure that surface water is taken into account. As the proposed external works will not have a substantive impact on drainage (with drainage arrangements remaining unaltered), no technical drainage material has been submitted as part of this application.

- 5.21 Policy TB14 - Whiteknights Campus relates specifically to development on the campus. The policy recognises the national and international importance of the University and the need to adapt and expand over the plan period by providing additional student, staff, teaching, and research and enterprise accommodation.
- 5.22 Policy TB14 requires development proposals to accord with the following:
- Respect the historic landscape, open areas and listed buildings and their settings and the character of the area.
  - Areas of wildlife significance and current or potential green infrastructure networks will be retained and enhanced.
  - Ensure there are no significant detrimental impacts on neighbouring residential properties from the development, including noise or parking.
  - The loss of undeveloped areas on the site will be weighed up against the benefits of development to the wider community.
- 5.23 Policy TB24 - Heritage Assets relates to the Council's framework for assessing applications that affect designated heritage assets, which includes listed buildings. Policy TB24 requires proposals to as a minimum conserve, but where possible also enhance, designated assets. In particular, TB24 requires proposals for building works to retain or incorporate existing features or detail of historic or architectural significance or design quality into the scheme.
- 5.24 It is noted that this policy makes no provision for considering proposals, which may give rise to a degree of harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset. Accordingly, there is a degree of conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework. In those instances where proposals cause a degree of perceived harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset the Framework would therefore take primacy, specifically Section 16.

### **National Planning Policy Framework**

- 5.25 At the time of writing, the latest version of the NPPF was adopted as national policy in December 2023, superseding the previous version published in 2021. It sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable

development and a presumption in favour of sustainable development is at the heart of the Framework. This includes approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date plan without delay, or where the policies which are out of date, granting permission unless the area is protected by applying the policies of the NPPF or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

- 5.26 Given that this application is only seeking consent for relatively modest alterations and the final substantive phase of refurbishment to URS, large parts of the NPPF do not apply in this instance. Nevertheless, there are parts that will be used to assess this application.
- 5.27 Section 12 relates to achieving well-designed and beautiful places. Paragraph 131 makes clear that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.
- 5.28 Paragraph 135 states that planning decisions should, among other criteria, ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area; are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping; and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.
- 5.29 Section 16 relates to conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 200 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 5.30 Paragraph 203 goes on to add that local planning authorities should take account of:
- a) The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;

- b) The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

5.31 Paragraph 205 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.

5.32 Paragraph 208 states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

### **Emerging Plan**

5.33 Wokingham Borough Council has begun work on a new Local Plan – to be known as the Local Plan Update – which will put in place a new planning strategy for the Borough up to 2040. Once adopted, it will replace the current Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

5.34 The Council produced its last timetable for the preparation of new Local Plans (known as the Local Development Scheme 2024-2027) in September 2024. It anticipates the adoption of a new Local Plan by May 2026. The most recent stage of engagement was completed on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and consisted of a public consultation into the Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19 consultation).

5.35 While the emerging Local Plan has progressed since the 'Phase 2' URS planning applications were determined, as the Plan has not been submitted for examination in public, it is clear that the Plan carries no weight at this stage.

## 6.0 Planning Assessment

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- 6.1 This section sets out the justification for the proposal in the context of relevant local and national planning policies and guidance.
- 6.2 We believe that the key material planning considerations are as follows:
1. Principle of Development
  2. Heritage
  3. Design
  4. Residential Amenity
  5. Ecology and Biodiversity
  6. Other Technical Considerations

### **Principle of Development**

- 6.3 The URS Building is a key part of the University's Whiteknights Campus and the applicant's Estates Strategy, as well as being an important Grade II listed building. For all of these reasons, it is essential for the building to be brought back into a functional and viable long-term use. For the building to be brought back into its intended teaching use and for the heart of the Whiteknights Campus to continue being a thriving and active area, the full refurbishment of URS must come forward and be delivered swiftly.
- 6.4 The enabling and strip-out works are underway at the time of writing (Phase 1 of the building's refurbishment), the first stage of external alterations have recently been approved (Phase 2) and the remaining full refurbishment works proposed under this application (Phase 3) represent the last important step in bringing URS back into use. Once the external refurbishment is complete, the wider internal refurbishment and rearrangement of the building (alongside the remaining external alterations) can commence. This approach allows the University to spread the cost of the project and to bring the building upgrade work to a conclusion.
- 6.5 The proposed internal and external repairs and refurbishments have been designed to a high standard, with appropriate materials and fenestration solutions presented. High quality and much-needed upgrades to mechanical and electrical services also

form part of the proposals and the two external staircases will facilitate an increase in the building's capacity, coupled with compliance with the current fire escape requirements. Design considerations relating to the proposals and, specifically, the external staircases are considered later in this section.

- 6.6 The refurbishment proposals will ensure the University can meet the increasing demand for high-quality educational facilities, taking into account and respecting the heritage significance of the building. The Council recognises the important contribution the University makes to the local economy and the community more generally and also the need for the Whiteknights Campus to adapt over time. This application seeks to ensure that URS is given a new lease of life and that both the existing building and the wider campus are able to adapt and retain their vitality into the future. Without the proposed works and the investment into the URS Building, this important listed asset will deteriorate and a vital teaching space will remain unused.
- 6.7 The existing URS building has no dedicated waste storage and collection area, with bins often left on the road. Furthermore, the project BREEAM assessment identifies that a dedicated and secure bin area is required. Therefore, the proposed bin store has been brought forward to meet an operational need and to improve the building's BREEAM credentials, with the bin store being no larger than is necessary. The adjoining bike store is required to improve the sustainability credentials of the site and to encourage staff, students, and visitors to the URS building to travel by bicycle. Policy TB14 of the MDD recognises the need for facilities within the Whiteknights Campus to adapt and expand over time and the proposed bin and bike storage are brought forward within this context.
- 6.8 Overall, the principle of development is considered acceptable and the proposals accord with the most relevant Development Plan policies, namely CP3 of the Core Strategy and Policies CC04, TB14, and TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

## **Heritage**

- 6.9 Firstly, it is worth emphasising that the refurbishment of URS and the proposed phased approach have been conservation-led from the outset, with all of the applicant's consultant team, but in particular the architects at ACG and the heritage team at

Purcell, placing the conservation and enhancement of this important listed building at the forefront of all design decisions. This has ensured that all technical and project-team decisions have been driven by heritage considerations.

- 6.10 The process of preparing a refurbishment strategy for the URS Building began with Purcell preparing a draft Heritage Impact Assessment for the building, including a Statement of Significance that established the key elements of significance before any development proposals were formulated. This Statement of Significance was presented to both Keith Frost in the Council's Heritage department and the Twentieth Century Society to ensure that all parties were aligned on the building's key areas of heritage value and significance and to ensure that the design team were able to approach the refurbishment of the building fully informed. This approach adheres with paragraph 200 of the NPPF which requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.
- 6.11 In Phase 2, the design team adopted a heritage-led approach to identifying the most sensitive and appropriate solutions to upgrading. Furthermore, Purcell was appointed to prepare a Heritage Offer – Concrete Repair Strategy (June 2024), which aligns with the recommendations set out by the Getty Conservation Institute in their publication, and which will deliver highly beneficial improvements to the listed building and its setting as acknowledged during the previous planning applications.
- 6.12 In terms of the replacement windows, the design team has chosen that composite timber and aluminium windows present the best option. The new windows, which are triple glazed, will significantly enhance the environmental performance of the building.
- 6.13 Similarly, the proposed replacement external doors and new roofing solutions will improve the thermal performance of the building while introducing modern, more resilient materials.
- 6.14 The main pitched roofs of the building will be replaced with a like-for-like aluminium standing seam with a mill finish, ensuring the external appearance and character of the building is maintained.
- 6.15 All of the above features were fully assessed under the previous Phase 2 planning applications and deemed to be acceptable.

- 6.16 The two proposed staircases have been carefully positioned to avoid impacting the building's key northern and western elevations and views towards these elevations from close, medium and long-distance views within the wider campus.
- 6.17 The design of the stairs is dictated in part by regulation and accessibility, but with the scale, form and materiality of the staircases being deliberately distinct from the expressive language of the wider URS building. The curved or rounded form of the stairs seeks to avoid blending or mimicking the powerful trabeated style of URS. The material qualities of the structures are equally important in this regard and are designed to contrast, but not detract.
- 6.18 It is acknowledged that the southern and eastern staircases will have a medium adverse and low adverse impact respectively on the URS building, but that these impacts are strongly mitigated for the design reasons set out above and expanded upon in the Design and Access Statement and Heritage Impact Assessment. This impact also has to be viewed as part of the planning balance, including the host of environmental, social, and heritage benefits.
- 6.19 Due to its low height, composition, and positioning, the proposed bin and bike store will not interfere with the important views of the west elevation of the URS building or Chancellor's Way beneath the building's northern overhang. Purcell believe that there would be a low adverse impact from this ancillary outbuilding being constructed, but this has been mitigated by the thoughtful design and siting and by the functional ancillary support it would offer to the listed building.
- 6.20 The proposed landscape works will have heritage benefits – ranging from 'low' to 'medium' – to the URS building and its setting.
- 6.21 All of the proposed internal alterations, except for the opening up of spaces at third floor level, are deemed to have a beneficial effect on the listed building, with varying degrees of value. While the changes at third floor will have a degree of harm through the partial loss of fabric and plan form, the resulting spaces will play an important role in the social aspect of the building and any harm needs to be balanced against all of the wider interior benefits, including the screens to the light wells being restored.

- 6.22 Taken collectively, the proposed works constitute a comprehensive package that will address some of the fundamental challenges the current building presents. The various elements of the proposals have a range of impacts individually, but collectively represent a net benefit to the heritage asset. We submit that the combined impact of the scheme is at the lesser end of 'less than substantial harm' as per the NPPF, with the public benefits of bringing the building back into its intended academic use alongside the environmental and fabric repair benefits weighing significantly in favour of approving the development from a heritage perspective. The application is therefore in accordance with paragraph 208 of the NPPF and Policy TB24 of the MDD.
- 6.23 Further detail regarding the potential impacts (both positive and negative) of the proposals from a heritage perspective can be found in the Heritage Impact Assessment accompanying this application. Reference should also be made to the Heritage Offer – Concrete Repair Strategy (June 2024), also prepared by Purcell.

### **Design**

- 6.24 The Design and Access Statement prepared by the project architects, ACG, alongside the suite of application drawings set out the proposals in greater detail and the design choices that have been made.
- 6.25 The elements brought forward and consented as part of Phase 2 of the project, but included within this latest application for completeness, have already been assessed as acceptable and, therefore, are not considered further here.
- 6.26 One of the main issues raised at the pre-application stage related to the design and form of the two new external staircases. Both cores will include a lift and fire escape stair. The location of the staircases on the southern and eastern elevations of the building has been supported by the Council and C20. While a preference for a rectangular pair of staircases has been provided by both parties, the University and its consultant team has chosen to retain a curved stair design because the curved form reduces the visual mass of the extensions and, in particular, gives breathing space to the adjacent oriel window to the west of the southern staircase extension. In other words, this arrangement has less of an impact on one of the valued aspects of the listed building's external design.

- 6.27 Furthermore, the curved staircases add visual contrast to the existing building, creating a clear delineation between the two. While the alternative rectangular form may be considered more in keeping with the architectural aesthetics of the existing design, there is no doubt that it would have a significantly greater and more harmful impact on the south elevation oriel window. Consistency is created by having a curved design for both staircases, rather than rectangular for one and curved for the other. For these reasons, we respectfully submit that the team's decision to stick with curved external staircases is justified and that the design of these additions will still be delivered to a high standard, ensuring the heritage value of the building is conserved.
- 6.28 The proposed bin and bike store will consist of a steel post structure with a laminated glass and timber slat façade. It has been designed to be as small scale as possible and with a deliberately low roof to avoid competing with views towards the URS building. It is considered that the design of the store is appropriate for its ancillary function and appropriate to its heritage setting.
- 6.29 The design of the internal alterations and spaces will provide a renewed and revitalised set of teaching, social, circulation, and work spaces, all finished to a high standard with high specification materials. These works will not only deliver much-needed refurbishment to the URS building, but will also create modern, attractive spaces that benefit the teaching and user experience.
- 6.30 For all design decisions, heritage input has been provided by Purcell and a heritage justification has been made with the conclusion being that any identified harm to the listed building is less than substantial and always outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal, namely securing the optimum viable use for the URS Building and delivering environmental improvements to the building's performance and functionality.
- 6.31 The social benefits of ensuring the building is returned to its intended teaching use and the associated benefit this has to the operation of the Whiteknights Campus should also be taken into account in this balancing exercise.
- 6.32 Overall, the proposals are of an appropriate form and design, using suitable materials (taking into account modern Building Regulations and environmental standards when

balanced against heritage conservation). The character of the building and the surrounding area will be preserved and, in fact, will be further enhanced by this latest phase of the refurbishment, which extends into making landscape improvements as well as focusing on the building itself. The proposals are therefore in accordance with Policies CP3 and CP9 of the Core Strategy.

- 6.33 Further details regarding the proposed works and their design justification can be found in the Design and Access Statement accompanying this application.

### **Residential Amenity**

- 6.34 The URS Building is located at the heart of the University's Whiteknights Campus which is characterised by academic buildings and areas of open space. There are no nearby residential properties and, as a result, the proposed works will not have an impact on residential amenities in the wider area.
- 6.35 Beyond some modest noise associated with the construction phase of the project, which is an inevitable consequence of building works being carried out, the works proposed under this application will not give rise to any long-term noise impacts.
- 6.36 The application therefore complies with Policies CC06 and TB14 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

### **Ecology and Biodiversity**

- 6.37 The site consists predominantly of the URS building and surrounding hardstanding, with areas of modified grassland in moderate condition along the northern, eastern and southern boundaries. There is an ornamental pond at the western end of the URS building and areas of introduced scrub to the north-west, south and east of the site. Native hedgerows run along the western and northern boundaries.
- 6.38 The proposals have been designed with environmental input at an early stage and due consideration has been given.
- 6.39 Due to the existing roofs of the building being replaced as part of this application, a Bat Emergence Survey has been undertaken by EPR. This latest survey work confirms

that there is no evidence of bats using or emerging from the building, with only three bat species recorded to the north and south of the building (using these routes for commuting and foraging only). Therefore, the proposed works will not cause harm or disturbance to this protected species, subject to precautionary measures being adopted by the applicant and the installation of new bat boxes somewhere within the campus (set out in the submitted ecology report). The application therefore complies with Policy CP7 of the Core Strategy.

- 6.40 Further details can be found in the Bat Emergence Survey that accompanies this application.
- 6.41 Due to the proposed addition of the external staircases and the removal of the hedgerow to the north of the URS building, a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain ('BNG') will need to be delivered. The applicant's ecologists at EPR have provided support in devising the BNG proposals, which will consist of the planting of 15 urban trees and other soft landscape improvements as shown on drawing 2360383-ACG-W033-00-DR-A-18310 rev. P5, submitted as part of the application. Furthermore, additional off-site hedgerow enhancements (planting of 60 metres of species rich native hedging) will be delivered – within the University's ownership and the Whiteknights campus – to satisfy biodiversity trading rules. This new species-rich native hedgerow and the additional urban trees will deliver a +50.18% hedgerow enhancement and a +20.24% habitat enhancement respectively, ensuring the development will not only deliver but significantly exceed the minimum 10% BNG requirement.

### **Other Technical Considerations**

- 6.42 The application does not propose any changes to the foul or surface water drainage arrangements associated with the URS Building and the replacement roofs will allow surface water to drain in the same way as existing.
- 6.43 While the internal capacity of the URS Building will be increased as a result of the internal rearrangement, ample off-street car parking is provided within the Whiteknights Campus and additional bicycle storage will be provided within the proposed bike store, promoting travel by sustainable modes. Public transport in the

form of buses also travel to and from the campus at regular intervals throughout the day.

- 6.44 The proposed hard and soft landscape changes will not affect or divert the existing public right of way along Chancellor's Way (immediately beneath the building's northern overhang) and therefore public access underneath and surrounding the building will not be altered following completion of the development.

### **Sustainable Development Conclusion**

- 6.45 Overall, it is submitted that the proposals constitute sustainable development as defined by local and national planning policies, delivering economic and social benefits to the University, its students and staff, as a result of this key building at the heart of the Whiteknights Campus being returned to a viable and much-needed teaching use. Furthermore, the proposed external works will deliver significant environmental improvements to the performance and user-experience of the URS Building, which is one of the key drivers of this phase of the refurbishment project. The hard and soft landscape works will also enhance the landscape immediately surrounding the building, including a net gain in biodiversity, resulting in further environmental benefits associated with the development. All three objectives of the NPPF's definition of sustainable development are therefore met in this instance.

## 7.0 Conclusion

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- 7.1 The starting point is s.38(6) of the 2004 Act<sup>1</sup>, requiring the application to be determined in accordance with the statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 7.2 This Planning Statement demonstrates that the proposals comply with all relevant local and national planning policies and constitutes sustainable development. The proposals presented as part of this application have been the subject of broadly positive pre-application engagement with key stakeholders, namely Wokingham Borough Council and the Twentieth Century Society, and have been heritage-led from the outset.
- 7.3 The 'Phase 3' works are the next key milestone in the overall refurbishment of the URS Building following the ongoing Phase 1 enabling works (at the time of writing) and the recent approval of the Phase 2 external alterations. It is of paramount importance that this valued academic building is brought back into long-term viable use, both to help deliver the University's Estates Strategy and to ensure the urgent works required to this important listed building can begin without delay.
- 7.4 The proposed works collectively represent a net benefit to the heritage asset and the combined impact of this scheme is at the lesser end of 'less than substantial harm' to the listed building. The public benefits of the application, namely the long-term re-use of the building for academic purposes and the environmental and fabric repairs proposed, outweigh any harm and are proportionate to the significance of URS, its setting and the surrounding heritage context in which it sits.
- 7.5 On the basis of the above, we believe that a high-quality design has been presented that balances the competing objectives and constraints relevant to this site. It is therefore respectfully requested that Wokingham Borough Council grants full planning permission and listed building consent for the works without delay.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/contents>

**Appendix A: Written pre-application advice from the Twentieth Century Society  
dated 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2024 and 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024**



Email: [Simon.Handy@struttandparker.com](mailto:Simon.Handy@struttandparker.com)

02 October 2024

Dear Simon and team,

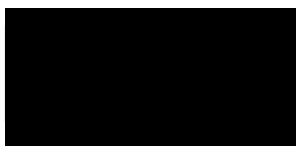
**SITE: Former College of Estate Management and Urban and Regional Studies Building, Whiteknights, University of Reading, RG6 6AE**

Thank you for your email on 01 October responding to the questions raised in our letter of 27 September. I am content with your response and have no follow up questions.

In regards to the stair design, I met with our Director and Chair of our Casework Committee yesterday to review the proposals. Our casework team have concerns about the proposed stairs, particularly the stair and lift to the east end. While not the 'main end', the east elevation is nonetheless strong architecturally. As noted in the list entry, the end elevations "give the appearance that the building has been sliced like a stick of rock, to reveal the cross-section of the structure". They are expressive and animated by projections – at the east end this takes the form of a service tower. We are concerned about the scale and bulkiness of the proposed new addition here which would obscure part of the façade, alter its appearance and reduce its impact architecturally. Our Director questioned the need for not only a stair but also a lift here. Is an addition of this size necessary? The proposals needs to be robustly justified, and the design approach requires careful consideration.

I have been asked to present the proposals for the two stairs to our Casework Committee which next meets on Monday 7 October at 6.00pm. We would be grateful if you could send further justification for the proposed stairs for our committee to review on Monday, if possible.

Yours sincerely,



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Registered office: 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ  
Registered Charity no 1110244

Coco Whittaker

**Head of Casework**

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[coco@c20society.org.uk](mailto:coco@c20society.org.uk)

**Remit:** The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979 and is the national amenity society concerned with the protection, appreciation, and study of post-1914 architecture, townscape and design. The Society is acknowledged in national planning guidance as the key organisation concerned with the modern period and is a constituent member of the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. Under the procedures set out in the *Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications – Notification to Historic England and National Amenity Societies and the Secretary of State (England) Direction 2021*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.

The Twentieth Century Society, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ – Tel 020 7250 3857

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[www.c20society.org.uk](http://www.c20society.org.uk)



Email: [Simon.Handy@struttandparker.com](mailto:Simon.Handy@struttandparker.com)

10 October 2024

Dear Simon and team,

**SITE: Former College of Estate Management and Urban and Regional Studies Building, Whiteknights, University of Reading, RG6 6AE**

Thank you for your email on 4 October providing further justification for the two proposed new stair and lift additions. The proposals and submitted justification were reviewed by the Society's advisory Casework Committee at a meeting on Monday 7 October and the committee's response is summarised below.

The Casework Committee accepted the need for two new external stairs to provide fire escape routes. The committee also felt that the chosen two locations—the south elevation and east end—were the most appropriate positions for these stairs. However, the committee had concerns about the scale of the proposed stair and lift addition to the east end and challenged the need for a lift in this location.

In your email on the 4 October, you wrote that “The team’s vertical transport/movement consultant did their calculation based on one lift being created and there was a 20min+ wait to get in the lift at rush hour / during teaching changeovers, with queues out the door. This would create an unacceptable and frustrating situation for building users and adversely affect the primary teaching purpose of the building [...] it is critical for future operations and use of the building that two new modern lifts are delivered as part of the scheme within the new cores.”

Committee members questioned what building occupancy these calculations were based on, and whether there was an assumption in them that everyone would use the lift? It was felt that the project team might have over-specified the lift requirements.

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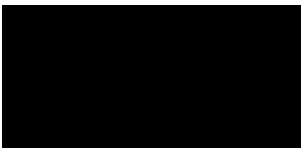
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Registered Charity no 1110244

One committee member also questioned if there was another way to reduce the demand on the lifts. An example at another recent university project was managing demand by staggering lecture times by 10-15 minutes, for instance.

Committee members were also not convinced by the design of the proposed new stair and lift additions. While committee members appreciated and supported in principle the efforts that the project team had taken to ensure that the stairs would be legible as new additions, they ultimately felt that the proposed design was not sympathetic to the architectural character and appearance of the listed host building. Members took particular issue with the curved form which was considered to be too much at odds with the tectonic, structurally expressive and rectilinear character of the existing building. When reviewed at committee, it was suggested that Niall McLaughlin's work at Somerville College, which draws inspiration from Arup Associate's Grade II listed Wolfson Building, might be a possible exemplar for you to look at.

I hope that these comments are of use to you. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,



Coco Whittaker

**Head of Casework**

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[www.c20society.org.uk](http://www.c20society.org.uk)

*Direction 2021*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.

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[www.c20society.org.uk](http://www.c20society.org.uk)

**Appendix B: Written pre-application advice from Wokingham Borough Council  
dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024**































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