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**PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT AND
HERITAGE STATEMENT**

**HARRIS WALLED GARDEN, WHITEKNIGHTS CAMPUS,
UNIVERSITY OF READING, RG6 6LA**

FEBRUARY 2026

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Neagle Planning is instructed by the University of Reading to submit a planning application at Harris Walled Garden, Whiteknights Campus, University of Reading (the ‘site’).
- 1.2 This Planning, Design & Access Statement and Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of a retrospective planning application for the Harris Walled Garden, located on the south-east side of the University of Reading’s Whiteknights Campus. The proposal seeks to regularise works already undertaken at the site, which has been re-purposed for educational use, including the installation of a timber teaching shelter, an accessible WC, and associated landscaping improvements.
- 1.3 The University has undertaken work to restore and improve the garden to facilitate outdoor educational activities, with a focus on sustainability, biodiversity, and environmental engagement.
- 1.4 This statement sets out the planning context, the scope of the works undertaken, and the justification for the proposals, which are in accordance with local planning policies and have been informed by pre-application advice from Wokingham Borough Council (‘WBC’).

- 1.5 The application documentation comprises the following:

Plans	Ref
Site Location Plan	08000
Block Plan	08100

Site Existing Plan	08200
Site Layout Plan	08300
Site Sections	08400
Landscape Planting Design 1 of 2	08500
Landscape Planting Design 2 of 2	08510
Reports	
Planning, Design & Access Statement and Heritage Statement	Neagle Planning
Arboricultural Impact Assessment	Chalice Consulting
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal	EcoConsult
BNG Statutory Metric	EcoConsult
Flood Risk & Drainage Statement	SFK Consulting

2.0 SITE & SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 This 0.3-hectare site is located on the south-east side of the University of Reading's Whiteknights Campus, with access onto Wilderness Road. It is part of the larger Harris Garden, a Local Historic Park and Garden. To the north lies the Whiteknights Local Wildlife Site (LWS), which is home to mature mixed woodland extending to the northeast and northwest.
- 2.2 The site, which previously featured an ornamental walled garden with flower beds, fruit and vegetable plots, and polytunnels, has been neglected for several years and required significant maintenance. The University has already undertaken work to restore the area and make it suitable for educational use once again, utilising permitted development rights. More detail is set out below.
- 2.3 The site is bordered to the south by Wilderness Road, beyond which are residential properties. To the north and southwest, the site adjoins the wider Harris Garden. To the immediate east is an area used for composting and the storage of garden waste. The site is at risk from surface water flooding, though it is not located within a fluvial flood risk zone.

Planning History

- 2.4 There is no planning history for the site itself.
- 2.5 However, pre-application advice was received on 25 November 2025 (Application No. 252327), confirming that the principle of the proposed educational use of the

Harris Walled Garden is acceptable and aligns with national and local planning policy, given the site's location within settlement limits and its historic association with the University. The re-introduction of planting and natural landscaping is supported in principle and is considered an appropriate and effective use of the site.

- 2.6 The Council advised that some elements of the development may benefit from permitted development rights, subject to the site being demonstrated as falling within the curtilage of the University and compliance with the relevant limitations. These include certain enclosure works and teaching structures. However, it was confirmed that other elements would require planning permission, notably the extent of hardstanding proposed and the construction of the central pond, which is considered operational development and does not benefit from permitted development rights.
- 2.7 Given the mix of permitted and non-permitted development elements, the Council advised that all works should be regularised through a single planning application for completeness, with any potential permitted development fallback positions acknowledged in the officer report.
- 2.8 The site is a non-designated heritage asset, and the Council advised that a proportionate Heritage Statement should accompany any application. Subject to the submission of appropriate supporting information, including ecology, drainage, and arboricultural assessments, officers indicated that the proposals are likely to receive support.

3.0 DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

- 3.1 The below sets out the proposals along with clarification on what elements require planning permission and are therefore subject of this application. Much of the overall proposals either benefit from permitted development rights or do not constitute ‘development’ under Section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Context

- 3.2 The proposal seeks to improve this outdoor asset and make the area suitable for educational use once again. The site is part of a Local Historic Park and Garden, surrounded by the Whiteknights Local Wildlife Site to the north and the wider Harris Garden to the southwest. The development aims to enhance the site’s biodiversity and promote sustainability, providing an outdoor educational space for university use.

Access

- 3.3 Access to the site remains unaltered, from Wilderness Road to the south and from within the wider Whiteknights Campus from the north.

Amount

- 3.4 The development includes the erection of a timber teaching shelter, an accessible WC, and associated landscaping works, including the introduction of allotment-style planters, fruit trees, and wetland planting. Additionally, a large pond will be constructed at the centre of the site as a focal point for environmental education.

Layout

- 3.5 The proposed layout incorporates functional educational spaces integrated with ecological zones and biodiversity enhancement. The teaching shelter and WC are located centrally, surrounded by thematic planting and a boardwalk at water level. The site also includes pathways made from self-binding gravel, which connect the functional areas and ecological zones.

Scale

- 3.6 The scale of the development is modest and in keeping with the character of the surrounding site. The teaching shelter and WC structures are designed to be low-rise, with the height of the timber structures not exceeding the permitted development limitations. The pond, which does require planning permission, is centrally located to enhance the site's ecological function without overwhelming the space.

Landscaping

- 3.7 Landscaping plays a key role in the proposal, with a strong focus on sustainability and biodiversity. The landscape is organised into distinct character areas; each linked to themes of sustainability and ecology:
- Food Production & Security: Incorporating allotment-style planters with low timber edges for food growing, alongside fruit trees.
 - Taking Action: Defined areas encouraging active engagement with climate and environmental issues around a pond.
 - Changing Hydrology: Featuring wetland planting with riparian grass seeding, a timber boardwalk at water level, and a wet heathland bund to the wetland edge.
 - Climate Change: Planted zones that highlight resilience and adaptation to changing conditions, incorporating Mediterranean style planting.

- Value of Nature: Spaces enriched with ornamental shrub planting, rubble garden planting, and dry heathland planting to showcase biodiversity.

Appearance

- 3.8 The appearance of the proposed structures reflects the natural, sustainable ethos of the development. The timber teaching shelter and WC will have a rustic, functional design, blending with the garden's educational purpose. The landscaping complements the site's existing character, using materials such as timber, self-binding gravel, and planting to ensure the development enhances the site's ecological value. The transparent Perspex wall in front of the pond and the timber sleeper edges will integrate seamlessly with the natural surroundings.

Scope of this Planning application

- 3.9 Some aspects of the proposal benefit from permitted development rights under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order, specifically:
- 3.10 **Part 2, Class A:** The installation of timber sleeper edges, the transparent Perspex wall in front of the pond, raised timber sleeper beds, and allotment-style planters could reasonably be carried out under permitted development rights, provided the height of any structure does not exceed 2 metres above ground level.
- 3.11 **Part 7, Class M:** The main timber teaching shelter, compostable toilets, and secondary teaching spaces with timber sleeper walls are considered eligible for permitted development, contingent on the site being demonstrated as falling within the curtilage of the University of Reading. This matter is discussed in Section 5 of this Planning Statement.

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- 3.12 The soft landscape planting would not constitute ‘development’ under Section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and therefore does not require planning permission.
- 3.13 However, certain elements of the development will require planning permission:
- 3.14 **Hardstanding:** The extent of proposed hardstanding exceeds the limit of 50 square metres under Part 7, Class N for permeable surfaces, and therefore requires planning permission.
- 3.15 **Pond Construction:** The construction of the pond in the centre of the site constitutes an ‘engineering operation’ and does not benefit from permitted development rights, requiring planning permission.
- 3.16 As such, this planning application is seeking retrospective planning permission for:

“The construction of a pond and hard landscaping (Retrospective)”

4.0 PLANNING POLICY

- 4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires planning applications and appeals to be determined in accordance with the policies of the Development Plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise.

The Development Plan

- 4.2 The Development Plan for WBC comprises the following documents:
- Wokingham Core Strategy (adopted January 2010) ('CS'); and
 - Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted February 2014) ('MDD')

Material considerations

- 4.3 Other material considerations comprise the following:
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024) 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).

Emerging Local Plan

- 4.4 WBC 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.
- 4.5 The Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040: Proposed Submission Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by an independent Planning

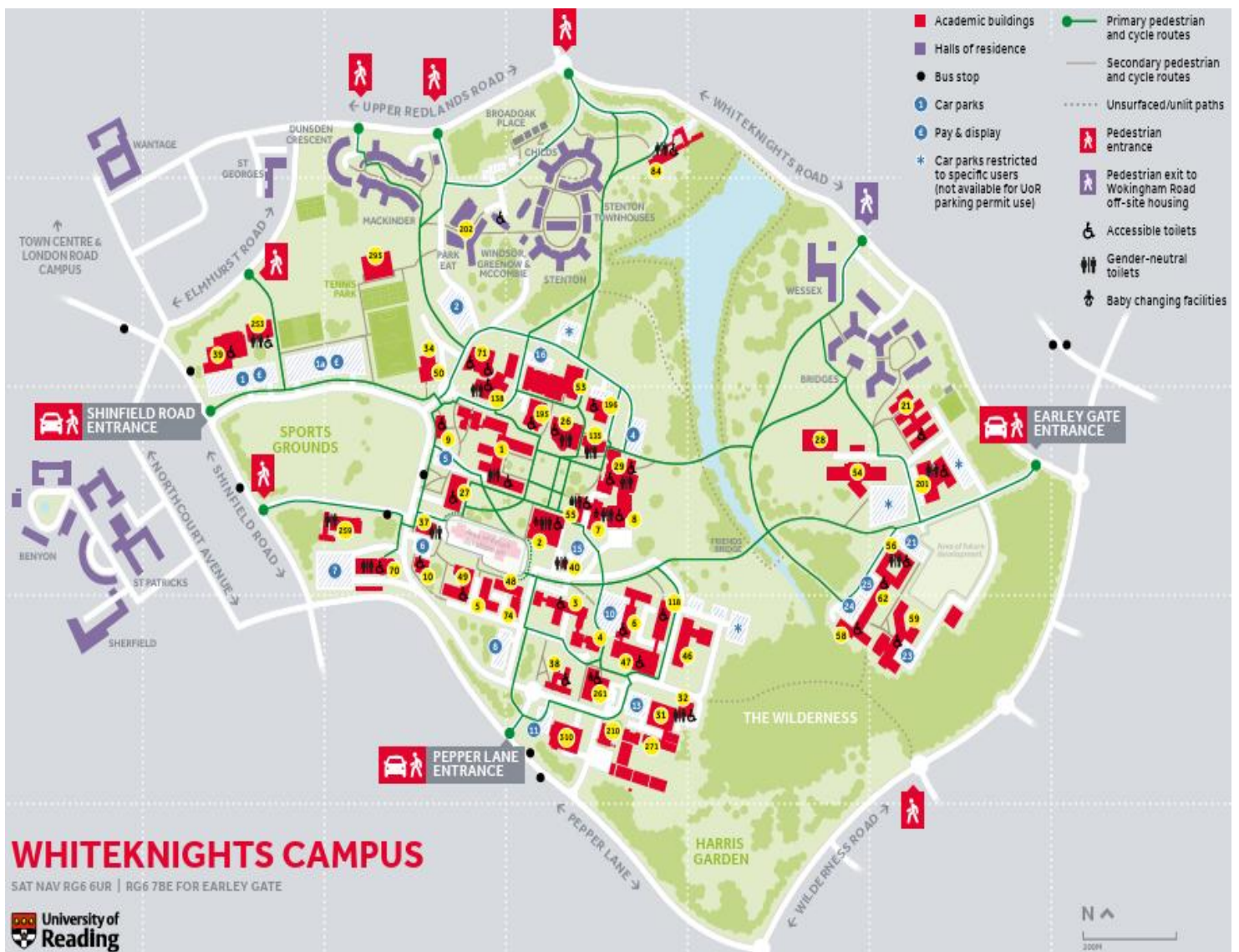
Inspector on Friday 28 February 2025. Two independent Inspectors were appointed, with Part 1 examination hearings held in November 2025. The Inspectors have now written to confirm the examination can progress to Part 2 hearings, which are due to commence in March 2026.

- 4.6 Given its current stage of preparation and examination, it is considered the emerging Plan holds limited weight.

5.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

5.1 As set out above, some elements of the whole development benefit from permitted rights.

Figure 1: Extract of Whiteknights Campus map



- 5.2 As can be seen in Figure 1, The Walled Garden and the wider Whiteknights Park, referred to as ‘The Wilderness’ and ‘Harris Garden’, lie firmly within the curtilage of the Whiteknights Campus.
- 5.3 The Walled Garden has previously been used for educational purposes for students at the University. Furthermore, the ‘The Wilderness’ and ‘Harris Garden’ are all accessible by staff and students at the University. One pedestrian entrance into the Whiteknights Campus is also located on Wilderness Road, adjacent to the northeastern boundary of the site.
- 5.4 As such, the teaching shelter, WC and secondary teaching spaces all benefit from permitted development rights and do not therefore require planning permission.
- 5.5 This section will now assess the elements of the development that require planning permission, namely the hardstanding and creation of the pond.

Principle of Development

- 5.6 The proposed development at Harris Walled Garden, Whiteknights Campus, University of Reading, seeks to enhance the site’s educational and ecological value while respecting its historical significance. The site is located within settlement limits and is historically linked to the University of Reading, making the principle of its development for educational use acceptable under both national and local planning policies.
- 5.7 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which is reflected in MDD Policy CC01, which supports development that aligns with local policies. The development is consistent with the

principles set out in Policy CP3 of the CS, ensuring that the scale, mass, layout, built form, height, materials, and character of the proposals are appropriate to the area, maintaining high-quality design that does not harm neighbouring land uses or amenities.

- 5.8 Pre-application advice from WBC (dated 25 November 2025, Application No. 252327) confirmed that the principle of the educational use of the site is in line with planning policy. The proposals, including the introduction of landscaping and teaching facilities, have been designed to respect the historic character of the garden and its setting. While some elements of the development benefit from permitted development rights, others, such as the creation of hardstanding and the pond, require planning permission.
- 5.9 Overall, the proposed development aligns with the principles of sustainable development outlined in the NPPF, the CS, and the MDD. The site's development will not only preserve its historical value but will also provide a functional and sustainable educational space, enhancing the environmental and educational engagement opportunities for the University.

Ecology & Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.10 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was conducted for the Harris Walled Garden, assessing both the existing ecological conditions and the potential impacts of the proposed development.
- 5.11 The appraisal identified several key ecological considerations that were addressed through the development's design and mitigation strategies. Bats were noted as having moderate to low potential to roost in the garden's walls, particularly in gaps

and crevices present in the northern and western walls. Two potential bat roosting features associated with the northern wall (north elevation) had been blocked during wall repair work. To mitigate the loss of potential roosting features, it is recommended that at least eight bat boxes be installed on the existing brick wall, which will further enhance the site for local bat populations.

- 5.12 Hedgehogs, while not previously present within the garden, will be supported through the installation of a dedicated access point beneath the main door on the western wall, allowing them to move freely in and out of the site. This will be coupled with the use of a 'Hedgehog Highway' sign to prevent the access point from being blocked.
- 5.13 The site is also situated within a 'Red Zone' for Great Crested Newts, a species that could potentially be present in nearby waterbodies. However, the brick wall surrounding the site acts as a significant barrier to their movement, meaning it is highly unlikely that they accessed the site itself. The creation of a new pond and the inclusion of a hedgehog access point will enhance the site for other amphibians, such as smooth newts and common toads, which were recorded nearby.
- 5.14 Nesting birds, including those listed on the Amber List of Conservation Concern, were noted on the site during surveys. As the vegetation clearance works were carried out outside the nesting season, no disturbance occurred. However, to further enhance the site for birds, six swift boxes will be installed on the northern wall of the garden.
- 5.15 Invertebrates will also benefit from the proposed landscaping, as the garden will include a high proportion of native and pollinator-friendly plants. The adjacent

Whiteknights Local Wildlife Site, which is a known area of importance for invertebrates, will further support the site's biodiversity.

- 5.16 Finally, the development will result in a 14.77% biodiversity net gain, as calculated using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. This increase in biodiversity will be achieved through habitat improvements, including the creation of new pond areas, the introduction of native trees, and the use of pollinator-friendly planting.
- 5.17 In conclusion, the ecological survey demonstrates that the development, while introducing changes to the site, will enhance its ecological value and contribute positively to local biodiversity. Through a combination of habitat creation, mitigation, and enhancement measures, the proposed works will support a variety of species, ensuring that the site remains a valuable ecological asset.

Flood Risk & Drainage

- 5.18 A Flood Risk Statement and Drainage Strategy have been prepared for the proposed development at Harris Walled Garden. The site is situated within Flood Zone 1, indicating a very low risk of fluvial flooding, and is not located within a groundwater flood alert area. According to the Environment Agency's flood risk maps, surface water flooding is identified as a moderate to high risk in the northern part of the site. However, it is important to note that the perimeter brick walls of the garden would prevent surface water from overflowing into the site, making the actual risk lower than indicated.
- 5.19 The proposals for the site include the creation of a new pond, a canopy teaching area (which does not need planning permission), and accessible footpaths, which will increase the impermeable area within the walled garden to approximately 41%. To

address the potential increase in surface water runoff due to these changes, a comprehensive drainage strategy has been developed.

- 5.20 The strategy follows the principles of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), aiming to manage surface water runoff in an environmentally sensitive manner. The pond is a central feature of the strategy, designed to retain water while allowing for partial infiltration at its upper and middle levels. The pond's base will be lined to ensure water retention, while the surrounding areas will allow for infiltration into the underlying strata, particularly in the areas closest to the pond. For paths further from the pond, surface water runoff will be directed to infiltration trenches, which have been sized to manage runoff from storm events, including those with a 20% climate change allowance.
- 5.21 In conclusion, while the site is at risk of surface water flooding, the proposed development incorporates effective mitigation measures. The drainage strategy ensures that surface water runoff is managed on-site, with no risk of downstream flooding due to the site's perimeter walls. The drainage design will effectively handle increased runoff while supporting the development's ecological and educational functions and not increasing flood risk elsewhere.

Trees

- 5.22 The Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) for the Harris Walled Garden outlines the current status of the trees within and adjacent to the site, assessing both their condition and the potential impact of the proposed development. The tree survey identified 10 tree records in total, including 6 B-grade trees and 4 C-grade Bay trees. The 4 C-grade Bay trees have already been removed.

- 5.23 No further trees are proposed to be removed. Minor pruning works are recommended to facilitate construction, primarily to ensure appropriate clearance from the proposed development. These works, as outlined in the tree survey schedule, will be in accordance with British Standard (BS) 3998 and BS 5837 guidelines, ensuring minimal impact on tree vitality and the contribution of these trees to the local landscape.
- 5.24 Importantly, there are no incursions into the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of the surveyed trees.
- 5.25 The AIA concludes that the proposed development will have a minimal arboricultural impact, and the measures outlined in the Arboricultural Method Statement will ensure that tree protection is maintained throughout the project. This will allow for the successful integration of the new development while preserving the ecological and aesthetic value of the existing trees.

Heritage

- 5.26 Section 6 below provides a Heritage Statement. It is considered that the proposed development (as a whole, including the elements that do not require planning permission), constitute a benefit in heritage terms.

6.0 HERITAGE STATEMENT

6.1 Paragraph 207 of NPPF states:

“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 settings. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposals on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary.”

6.2 Paragraph 216 of NPPF states:

“The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.”

6.3 Significance can be defined as the sum of the cultural values which make a building or site important to society. When assessing significance, numerous aspects are considered including architectural interest, historic interest, group value, social value, former uses and local distinctiveness.

6.4 The site of the Harris Walled Garden is located within the Whiteknights Park Local Historic Park and Garden, a non-designated area of historical and social significance.

The garden itself is considered a non-designated heritage asset, with historical maps indicating its origins as a kitchen and ornamental garden, historically associated with the nearby Wilderness Lodge and later, the University of Reading.

- 6.5 The proposed development seeks to enhance the site for educational purposes while preserving the character of the existing garden. The historic brick walls surrounding the site, which define its character, will be retained and any necessary repairs or repointing will use traditional materials such as lime mortar, as recommended by the Built Heritage Officer. Albeit repairs and re-pointing would not need planning permission.
- 6.6 The development proposals, including the timber teaching shelter, WC, and associated landscaping, are designed to respect the site's historic context. These structures will be modest in scale and in keeping with the garden's educational and ecological objectives. The proposed works will not alter the historical fabric of the site significantly, and the retention of the walled garden will preserve its defining feature.
- 6.7 In conclusion, the proposed development (including elements not requiring planning permission) has been carefully designed to respect and enhance the historic character of the site. It also meets the educational and ecological objectives of the University.
- 6.8 The retention of the historic brick walls, along with the use of traditional materials for any necessary repairs, ensures that the site's cultural and historical value is preserved. The development's modest scale, including the timber teaching shelter, WC, and landscaping, will not detract from the site's significance, and the overall

impact on the heritage asset is considered to be beneficial. The proposals strike an appropriate balance between preserving the historic integrity of the garden and enhancing its existing use, by providing a sustainable, educational space for the University in an enriched landscaped setting.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 This Planning Statement has demonstrated that the proposed development at the Harris Walled Garden, University of Reading, is in line with both national and local planning policies, and it aligns with the overarching principles of sustainable development. The proposal, which aims to regularise the works requiring planning permission that have been implemented, will enhance its ecological and historical value, reflecting the University's commitment to promoting sustainability and biodiversity.
- 7.2 Through the retention of the site's historic brick walls and careful consideration of its historical context, the development ensures that the non-designated heritage asset is preserved. The integration of ecological enhancements, including biodiversity net gain, demonstrates the University's dedication to protecting and improving the local environment. The introduction of educational structures and landscaping respects the site's character and reinforces its existing educational role.
- 7.3 Given the minimal impact on the site's heritage and trees, alongside comprehensive flood risk and drainage management, the proposal presents a balanced approach that respects the site's significance while providing a functional and sustainable educational space for future generations. The project, therefore, aligns with the strategic goals set out in local planning policies and the NPPF.
- 7.4 We trust that the information provided in this statement, alongside the supporting documentation, will enable a favourable assessment and approval of the planning application.



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