Planning / Design & Access Statement

& Sustainability Statement

14 Beke Avenue | Shinfield | RG2 9UW

October 2026

Document

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Introduction

1.1 This Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application for the change of use of the first floor of the existing building at 14 Beke Avenue, Shinfield, from retail accommodation to a two-bedroom dwelling. The proposal includes the construction of an external access staircase and the installation of a new entrance door to serve the dwelling. Associated ground-floor works comprise the installation of a new shopfront and alterations to the existing forecourt to provide ramped access to the retained retail premises.

1.2 Construction of the existing retail building was completed to shell-and-core stage on 1st March 2024, and the premises have subsequently remained vacant. The ground-floor retail space is relatively small, with a substantial proportion of the available floor area occupied by an internal staircase serving the first floor. The first-floor accommodation is secondary in nature and offers limited benefit to prospective retail occupiers, who typically favour accommodation at ground-floor level. These factors, together with the limited retail draw of this small local centre and the challenging economic conditions affecting the retail sector, have contributed to the continued vacancy of the premises for approximately two and a half years since completion.

1.3 This application seeks to address these limitations by creating a larger and more commercially viable retail unit at ground-floor level through the removal of the existing internal staircase, while changing the use of the first-floor accommodation to residential and providing independent access via a new external staircase. The proposals would facilitate the occupation of the ground-floor retail premises, thereby contributing to the vitality and viability of the local centre, whilst bringing the currently unused first-floor accommodation into beneficial use. The residential element would also make a modest contribution to local housing supply at a time when the Borough is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites.

1.4 The purpose of this Statement is to explain the design principles and concepts underpinning the proposed development, having regard to an appraisal of the site's context and the manner in which this has informed the proposals. The Statement also addresses the following matters:

- The design principles and concepts informing the proposed development.
- The site's context and the response of the proposals to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- The relevant planning policies and their consideration in the formulation of the proposals.
- The proposed access arrangements, including the extent to which accessibility considerations have informed the design.
- The proposed use and amount of development.

Planning History

2.1 The existing retail building at 14 Beke Avenue forms part of the wider urban extension to Shinfield, which comprises approximately 1,200 dwellings, a new local centre and associated development.

2.2 Outline planning permission for the wider urban extension was first granted on 3rd June 2011 under application reference O/2010/1432. The permission was subsequently amended on 23rd October 2014 and 24th October 2014 under application references NMT/2014/1837 and VAR/2014/0624, respectively.

2.3 Reserved matters planning permission was granted on 14th October 2021 under application reference 211530 for the erection of 25 dwellings, retail floorspace within Use Classes A1–A5, and associated works. The retail premises to which this application relates form part of the development approved under that permission.

2.4 Condition 14 of the decision notice for application 211530 states:

'The retail premises hereby approved shall be used only for retail use and for no other purpose, including any other non retail purpose.'

The stated reason for the condition is:

'In granting this permission the local planning authority wishes to have the opportunity of exercising control over any subsequent alternative use in the interests of the character of the area.'

2.5 Condition 14 expressly restricts the use of the premises to retail purposes and therefore precludes reliance on the Class MA permitted development procedure to change the use of the first floor to residential accommodation, subject to the precise terms and legal effect of the condition. Furthermore, the proposed external alterations, including the provision of an external access staircase, installation of a new shopfront and ramped access, require consideration as part of a planning application. Accordingly, a full planning application is being submitted to seek permission for the proposed change of use and associated development.

Planning Policy

3.1 The principal national and local planning policy documents and policies relevant to the determination of the application are summarised below.

National Planning Policy

3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in August 2026, sets out the Government's planning policies for England and establishes how these should be applied in the determination of planning applications.

3.3 The NPPF identifies the purpose of the planning system as contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, by managing the use and development of land in the long-term public interest.

3.4 The NPPF identifies three overarching objectives for achieving sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. These objectives are interdependent and should be pursued in mutually supportive ways, enabling opportunities to be taken to secure gains across all three objectives:

a) Economic – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) Social – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible community facilities, public service infrastructure and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) Environmental – to support efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy; and to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment, including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, and minimising waste and pollution.

3.5 The NPPF establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, having regard to the relevant national planning policies.

3.6 The NPPF promotes the effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, whilst safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. In this regard, Policy L2, Making Effective Use of Land, states that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of making better use of vacant and underutilised land and buildings. The examples expressly identified include bringing suitable buildings back into residential use, converting space above shops and redeveloping underutilised retail sites.

Core Strategy

3.7 Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy Development Plan Document, adopted in January 2010, forms part of the statutory development plan for the Borough. The Core Strategy establishes the long-term vision for Wokingham and provides the strategic framework for future development and associated planning policies.

3.8 The following Core Strategy policies are of relevance to the proposal:

CP1 – Sustainable Development
CP3 – General Principles for Development

Managing Development Delivery Document

3.9 Wokingham Borough Council's Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Document, adopted on 21st February 2014, provides detailed development management policies to guide the assessment of planning applications and supports the implementation of the strategic objectives established by the Core Strategy.

3.10 The following MDD policies are of relevance to the proposal:

CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction
CC07 – Parking
CC09 – Development and Flood Risk
TB07 – Internal Space Standards
TB17 – Local Centres and Neighbourhood and Village Shops

Supplementary Planning Documents

3.11 Wokingham Borough Council's Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document, adopted on 31st May 2012, provides guidance on the design and layout of development within the Borough, and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Site Description

Site Location & Description

4.1 The application site is located at 14 Beke Avenue, Shinfield, within the Borough of Wokingham.

4.2 The site lies within the defined settlement boundary of Shinfield.

4.3 The application site is irregular in shape and comprises the existing building, a forecourt fronting Beke Avenue, a rear yard and an access path leading to an allocated parking space to the rear of the property.

4.4 The application site has a total area of approximately 244 sqm (0.024 hectares).

4.5 The existing building is two storeys in height and projects at an oblique angle from a larger, adjoining three-storey block of flats to the west.

4.6 The building is constructed in red brick at ground-floor level, with rendered elevations at first-floor level. The pitched roof is finished with interlocking concrete tiles. At ground-floor level, a shopfront opening faces onto the forecourt, although this is currently boarded up. Windows and doors are installed within the other openings. At first-floor level, the front elevation incorporates a projecting bay window with a Juliet balcony. The building's design and architectural composition broadly reflect the appearance of the adjoining flats.

4.7 The existing retail accommodation is arranged across the ground and first floors, with the principal retail floor space located towards the front of the building. A substantial internal staircase is positioned towards the rear and occupies approximately 23% of the floor plate at each level. The efficiency of the available floor space is further constrained by the building's irregular, splayed footprint and the limited space available to accommodate accessible sanitary facilities at ground-floor level without materially reducing the usable retail area. Collectively, these constraints restrict the efficient use of the premises and adversely affect its commercial viability.

4.8 A forecourt lies to the front of the building and is finished with buff-coloured block paving incorporating grey stripes. The paving extends across the frontage and continues along Beke Avenue in both directions, including across the front of neighbouring properties. The forecourt does not provide level access to the retail unit, with a step of approximately 150mm between the forecourt and the internal floor level. The difference in levels will necessitate the provision of a ramped access to improve accessibility to the premises.

Site Surroundings

4.9 A three-storey block of flats adjoins the application building to the west. As described above, the architectural appearance of the flats and the existing retail building is broadly similar.

4.10 The adjoining block comprises six flats, with two flats arranged on each floor. At each level, a single-aspect one-bedroom flat is positioned towards the front of the building, with its principal windows facing southwards towards Beke Avenue and the communal staircase located to the rear. A two-bedroom flat occupies the opposite side of the block, with windows facing southwards and westwards, away from the application site. Consequently, the principal habitable room windows within the adjoining block are predominantly oriented towards the south and west.

4.11 A Lidl food store adjoins the application site to the east. The store is a single-storey commercial building with metal-clad external elevations. Its shopfront faces southwards towards Beke Avenue, while the customer entrance is located on the eastern elevation, facing the associated car park. The western elevation, which faces the application site, is largely blank, with the exception of fire escape doors and a fixed external ladder providing access to the roof.

4.12 The wider area comprises a mix of local centre uses and residential development, including houses and flats of varying architectural styles. The recent residential development is generally characterised by red brickwork, with some rendered elevations. The flats at The Chapters incorporate prominent projecting balconies formed in black-painted steelwork.



Fig 1. Photograph of the existing shopfront.

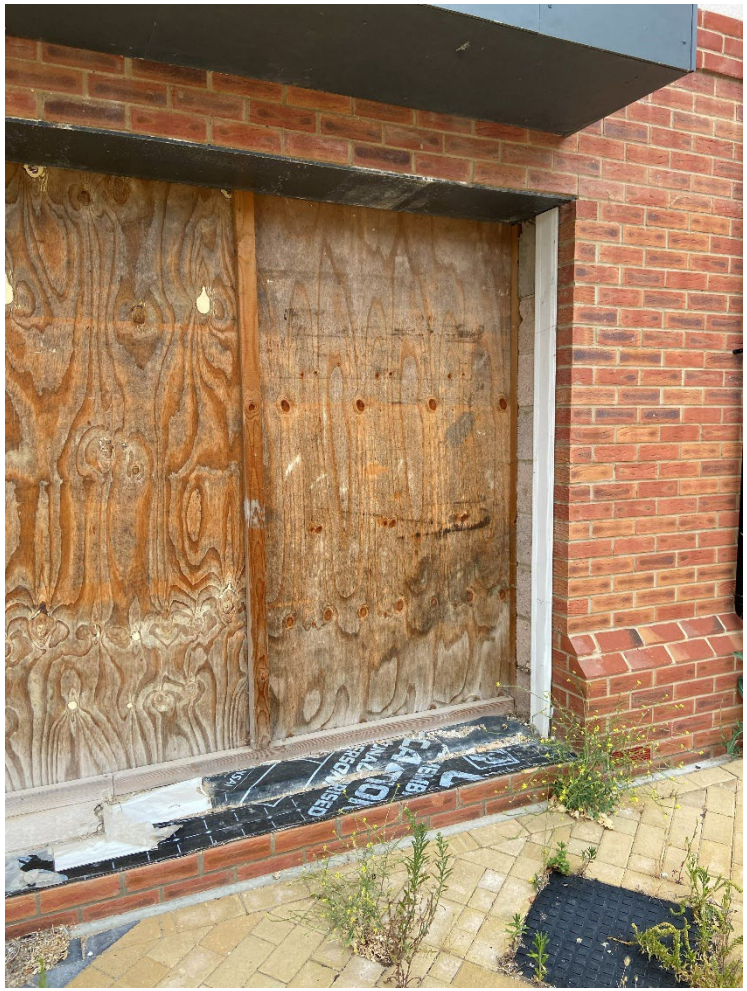

Fig 2. Photograph of the existing shopfront.



Fig 3. Photograph of the rear elevation.



Fig 4. Street view image of the building and forecourt.



Fig 5. Street view image of The Chapters.

Application Proposal

Proposal

5.1 This full planning application seeks permission for the change of use of the first floor of the existing building at 14 Beke Avenue, Shinfield, from retail accommodation to a two-bedroom dwelling. The proposal includes the construction of an external access staircase and the installation of a new entrance door to serve the dwelling. Associated ground-floor works comprise the installation of a new shopfront and alterations to the existing forecourt to provide ramped access to the retained retail premises.

5.2 The existing internal staircase will be removed, allowing the ground-floor retail accommodation to be reconfigured to provide a more efficient and usable retail space. This will increase the area available for retail use and help address the constraints imposed by the existing internal layout.

5.3 The proposed first-floor dwelling will provide a two-bedroom unit with a gross internal area of 69.5 sqm. The proposed accommodation will comply with the relevant minimum internal space standards set out in Wokingham Borough Council's Managing Development Delivery Document and Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document, including the requirements relating to overall floor area, living accommodation, individual bedroom sizes and storage provision.

Access, Parking & Servicing

5.4 Vehicular and pedestrian access to the site from the public highway will remain unchanged. No alterations to the highway itself are proposed as part of this application.

5.5 Pedestrian access to the ground-floor retail unit from Beke Avenue will be retained. Accessibility into the premises will be improved through the installation of a new external access ramp and shopfront designed to facilitate access for disabled people.

5.6 The existing allocated parking space to the rear of the property will be assigned to the proposed first-floor dwelling. Servicing and deliveries to the retained retail unit will take place kerbside from Beke Avenue. Given the small scale of the retail premises, deliveries are anticipated to be infrequent and limited in volume.

5.7 Customer parking for the retail unit is available on Beke Avenue and within the surrounding area. Dedicated customer parking was not required under the original planning permission(s) for the existing retail premises. The proposal will not alter the existing parking arrangements serving the retail unit.

5.8 Access to the first-floor dwelling will be provided by a new external staircase positioned to the rear of the building. A new entrance door serving the dwelling will be formed in the rear elevation, directly above the existing ground-floor rear door.

5.9 Secure cycle storage for the proposed dwelling will be provided to the eastern side of the existing building within a metal cycle storage locker.

5.10 Refuse storage for both the retail and residential uses will be provided to the eastern side of the existing building. Waste from the retail unit will be collected by a private contractor, while domestic refuse from the dwelling will be collected through the Local Authority's collection service, with collection from Beke Avenue.

Layout, Amenity & Appearance

5.11 The proposed access ramp serving the ground-floor retail unit has been designed to occupy the minimum practicable area, thereby retaining as much of the existing hard landscaping as possible. The ramp will be constructed using materials complementary to the existing forecourt,

ensuring that the alterations are appropriately integrated into the appearance of the site.

5.12 The proposed shopfront will incorporate aluminium framing, finished in dark grey to provide a contemporary appearance that complements the existing building materials and architectural character.

5.13 The proposed external staircase serving the first-floor dwelling will be positioned within the existing rear yard and constructed in black-painted steelwork. This will reflect the use of similar materials in the prominent projecting balconies at The Chapters and elsewhere within the wider Shinfield development. Its construction and material finish will complement the architectural features and external metalwork found within the surrounding area. The staircase will be largely screened from public views by the existing building and will not be visually prominent within the streetscene.

5.14 The external staircase will incorporate a 1.8m-high frosted-glass privacy screen adjacent to the upper landing to restrict direct views towards the adjoining block of flats. The windows in the rear elevation of the adjoining flats serve the communal staircase, while the principal windows serving the neighbouring flats' habitable rooms are located on the south and west facing elevations. Having regard to the position of the proposed staircase, the orientation of the neighbouring habitable room windows and the provision of the privacy screen, the proposal is not considered likely to result in unacceptable overlooking or loss of privacy. Furthermore, the location of the staircase within the existing rear yard is such that it is not anticipated to give rise to an unacceptable level of noise or disturbance to neighbouring occupiers.

5.15 With the exception of the new entrance door serving the first-floor dwelling, the existing window openings will remain unaltered. The proposal will therefore maintain the established relationship between the building and its surroundings in terms of outlook and privacy.

Sustainability

5.16 The existing building is sustainably located within Shinfield, with convenient access to a range of local amenities, including shops, healthcare facilities and schools. The location provides opportunities for future residents to access everyday services locally, helping to reduce reliance on private car journeys.

5.17 The proposed dwelling will incorporate water-efficiency measures, including dual-flush toilets, water-efficient taps and domestic appliances. The dwelling will be designed to achieve a maximum water consumption of 105 litres per person per day.

5.18 The existing building is located within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore at extremely low risk of fluvial flooding. The site is therefore considered suitable for residential development in terms of flood risk.

5.19 The proposed dwelling will provide a good standard of residential accommodation. All habitable rooms will benefit from one or more openable windows, providing opportunities for natural ventilation and daylight. The dwelling will also be dual-aspect, allowing for cross-ventilation and providing outlook in more than one direction. These characteristics will contribute to the quality of the internal living environment and the overall suitability of the proposed accommodation.

Policy Assessment

6.1 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development and requires planning decisions to support proposals that accord with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Framework also promotes a positive approach to decision-making and the delivery of sustainable development.

6.2 The application site lies within the defined settlement boundary and is centrally located within the urban extension of Shinfield. The site is therefore in a sustainable location for residential development, with access to local services and facilities. The proposal accords with the overarching objectives of the NPPF and the principles of sustainable development established by Core Strategy Policy CP1.

6.3 The NPPF places significant emphasis on boosting the supply of homes and ensuring that housing needs are met through the effective use of land in appropriate locations. It identifies economic, social and environmental objectives as interdependent elements of sustainable development, which should be pursued in a mutually supportive manner. The proposed conversion would contribute to housing provision whilst making effective use of existing building space and retaining the ground-floor retail use.

6.4 The NPPF also requires local planning authorities to maintain an adequate supply of deliverable housing sites. Wokingham Borough Council's Five-Year Housing Land Supply Statement, based on the position on 31st March 2025, identifies a deliverable supply equivalent to approximately 2.5 years against the applicable housing requirement. This represents a substantial shortfall against the five-year requirement and is a material consideration in the determination of the application. Although the proposal would deliver only one additional dwelling, it would make a positive contribution towards housing supply in a sustainable location.

6.5 The NPPF further promotes the effective use of land and buildings, particularly within existing settlements. Policy L2, Making Effective Use of Land, states that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of making better use of vacant and underutilised land and buildings. The examples expressly identified include bringing suitable buildings back into residential use, converting space above shops and redeveloping underutilised retail and business sites.

6.6 The proposed development accords with the objectives of NPPF Policy L2 by bringing the currently vacant first-floor accommodation into residential use. The proposal would provide an additional dwelling without requiring further land to be developed and would make more effective use of the existing building. It would also enable the retained ground-floor retail premises to benefit from a more functional internal layout, thereby supporting the continued provision of local retail facilities.

6.7 Policy TB17, Local Centres and Neighbourhood and Village Shops, of the Managing Development Delivery Document seeks to retain and enhance day-to-day shopping facilities within local centres and neighbourhood and village shops. The policy seeks to protect existing retail provision, subject to the circumstances and criteria set out within the policy. In this instance, the proposal would not result in the loss of the ground-floor retail unit. Instead, it would retain the retail use whilst converting the first-floor accommodation to residential use.

6.8 Construction of the existing retail building was completed to shell-and-core stage on 1st March 2024, and the premises have subsequently remained vacant. The ground-floor retail space is relatively small, with a substantial proportion of the available floor area occupied by an internal staircase serving the first floor. The first-floor accommodation is secondary in nature and offers limited benefit to prospective retail occupiers, who typically favour accommodation at ground-floor level. These limitations, together with the challenges facing the retail sector and the limited commercial draw of a small local centre, have contributed to the continued vacancy of the premises for approximately two and a half years since completion.

6.9 This application seeks to address these limitations by creating a larger and more commercially viable retail unit at ground-floor level through the removal of the existing internal staircase, while changing the use of the first-floor accommodation to residential and providing independent access via a new external staircase.

6.10 Overall, the proposal represents an efficient and sustainable use of an existing building within the defined settlement boundary. It would contribute towards housing supply, support the continued provision of local retail facilities and bring vacant accommodation into active use. The proposal is therefore consistent with the objectives of the NPPF and the relevant development plan policies.

Conclusion

7.1 This application seeks planning permission for the change of use of the first floor of the existing building at 14 Beke Avenue, Shinfield, from retail accommodation to a two-bedroom dwelling, together with the construction of an external access staircase and associated alterations to the ground-floor retail premises and forecourt.

7.2 The proposal represents an efficient and sustainable use of an existing building within the defined settlement boundary of Shinfield. It would bring the currently vacant first-floor accommodation into beneficial residential use, contribute towards local housing supply and make more effective use of land without requiring additional greenfield development. The proposed dwelling would provide accommodation that meets the relevant internal space standards and offers an appropriate standard of residential amenity.

7.3 Importantly, the proposal would retain the ground-floor retail unit and improve its functionality through the removal of the internal staircase, allowing a greater proportion of the ground-floor accommodation to be used for retail purposes. The provision of a new shopfront and ramped access would further improve the usability and accessibility of the premises. The development would therefore support the continued provision of local retail facilities and has the potential to assist in bringing the premises into active commercial use, contributing positively to the vitality and viability of the local centre.

7.4 The proposed external alterations have been designed to respond appropriately to the character and appearance of the existing building and surrounding development. The external staircase would be positioned to the rear, where its visual impact would be limited, and the proposed privacy screen would help safeguard the amenity of neighbouring occupiers. The proposal would not materially alter the established appearance of the building or give rise to unacceptable impacts on neighbouring residential amenity.

7.5 The application accords with the overarching objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, particularly in respect of sustainable development, the effective use of land and the delivery of additional housing. The proposal also supports the relevant objectives of Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Document, including the efficient use of existing buildings and the retention of local retail provision.

7.6 In conclusion, the proposed development would deliver a modest but beneficial addition to the housing supply whilst retaining and improving the functionality of the existing retail premises. It would make effective use of vacant accommodation, support the local centre and provide an appropriate standard of residential development. The proposal is therefore considered to represent sustainable development, and planning permission is respectfully sought.

Spires Architects

9 Monks Way | Reading | RG30 3DP