

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	243127 + 243128
Address:	URS Building, Whiteknights Campus, Earley, RG6 6BW.		
Proposal:	243127: Full application for proposed 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. 243128: Listed Building consent for proposed 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.		
Heritage Asset:	URS Building – grade II listed building status since 2016. Whiteknights Park – Local Historic Park & Garden classification made by the LPA. Listed buildings are classed as designated heritage assets under the NPPF (2024) and in the Council’s Local Plan policies.		
Site Visit Made:	Previously		

Summary Of Recommendations

It is acknowledged that through the works of repair to the concrete beams and panels considered key elements of the URS Building, and in the alterations to it in order to repurpose the building for a new role for the University of Reading would secure the future and maintenance of this 1970s era designated heritage asset. That said, elements of the proposed works required in the repurposing of the URS Building do however require the loss and/or alteration of originally built fabric and features which collectively impact to the appearance and internal order, eroding the original design and form of the building.

What harm caused by the proposed works amounts to less than substantial harm to the URS Building as a designated heritage asset. As such, in accordance with national guidance contained in the NPPF (Dec.2024) under paragraph 208, it

therefore falls to the case officer, in determining the applications, to weigh the harm up 'against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'

The Built Heritage Officer would wish to raise objection to the extent of loss of those historic elements and features of the building, both externally and internally, contributory to its design, appearance and significance, as those changes are considered to lead to the erosion of its overall significance, as a distinctive early 1970s era building that encapsulates the materials and design ethos of the time it was built. And whilst acknowledging a level of less than substantial harm, however in taking stock of the earlier phase of internal strip-out works, and those previously approved under phase 2 works, when taken together collectively, the harm are believed overall to at a level quite high within that classification of harm.

Should the case officer, in their determination of the applications, conclude that the public benefits of the proposals outweigh the level of harm that would be caused, the Built Heritage Officer would ask that the conditions laid out below form part of any permission and or consent given.

Comments On Proposal

This pair of applications follows on from an earlier pair of applications (241743 & 241744) approved in 2024 for works to the exterior of URS Building and which covered repairs to the concrete structure, roof as well as the replacement of all existing windows. Those as understood yet to be implemented works for the applicant's second phase in their three phased programme of works to repair, alter and re-purpose the building for the University. The first phase of works having already been implemented with the removal of internal room and corridor walling divisions and redundant services.

This current pair of applications (243127 & 243128) had been understood to cover the third phase of works to re-purpose the URS Building and includes the provision of two additional tower structures that are to house additional staircases and lifts, along with measures to improve the building's thermal efficiency, and install a new HVAC (heating, ventilation & air condition) system, as well as a reordering of internal spaces. At the same time it is being proposed to site SV panels on the south facing roof of the building and to erect a detached bike and bin store western end of the site.

It is somewhat unclear, as to why, with this current pair of applications, it appears to be a number of drawings included that cover works of phase 1 (internal strip-out) and those works for phase 2 and already given approval (241743 and 241744). Furthermore, seemingly this situation is made more complicated as the result of the inclusion with this current pair of applications of a number of these previously approved drawings for the phase 2 works, are submitted with changes to the drawings and/or with later revision issue status to them.

An added complication, which has come to light, is with respect to drawings listed on submitted issue sheet as it would appear a couple have been received, whilst there are also a couple of drawings found to be submitted but not apparently on the issue sheet. In that respect the case officer has been made aware of the drawings

in question.

It is also noted that along with the resubmission of the previously approved Purcell produced documents (URS Building Refurbishment: External Concrete Repair and the Addendum (Sept 2024)) scheduling the repairs to the building's concrete structure under the phase 2, there is an additional document by the firm Curtins that is called 'Structural Repair Strategy Report' is also included with these current applications.

External Structural Concrete Repairs

In professing to having only a rudimentary understanding of concrete construction of buildings and as to the appropriate means for repair, the Council's Built Heritage Officer as such here readily acknowledges and accepts the proposed programme of repair works to these element as set out in the Purcell and Curtins documents.

Demolition Works

- Roofs

Previous discussion at the pre-application stages the Council's Built Heritage Officer had understood that there was only the need to replace the degraded and patched aluminium sheeting covering of the mono-pitched roofs and that of the water tower roof with a comparable aluminium sheeting. That said it however with this current applications the intention is for the wholesale of these sloping roof structures, including the boxed rainwater channels, and back upstand elements to the flat roofed area.

These roofs are understood to be original elements of the building, as built, and as such are believed to hold a degree of significance as a consequence. The apparent requirement to replace this aluminium sheet covered roof appears to be driven by a need to upgrade the thermal efficiency of the building. From a heritage stance the loss of these original roof structures and their covering is disappointing to see being proposed rather than measures to make repairs to the existing covering material and retro fit thermal improvements measures to the roof structures.

- New Opening to Exterior Walling

It is only now with the phase 3 works that additional demolition works are required in the form of new holes to the exterior walling (2no. to the northern elevation towards its western end) and along the inner facing aspect of side walls, on each side of the building, to the sloping roofs upstands. These new opens being for intake/vent louvres for the intended HAVC system. There appears to be no assessment given of the need for these new opening or as to their impact to the significance of this designated heritage asset.

HAVC

As mentioned above the proposed HAVC systems does require additional openings to formed on the principle north facing elevation, and as such is considered to be a detrimental change, as would be the potential visibility of the plant on the top flat roof. In terms of the placement between the concrete structural cross beams of the HAVC units with the room spaces, this would appear to avoid any need to alter the cross beams and avoids pipework being routed along the axel corridors/spaces.

New Fenestration (Windows, External Glazed Screen, Glazed Exterior Doors, Roof Lanterns & Roof Lights)

This aspect of the proposed works would it is believed result in the single greatest overall change in the appearance of the URS Building, more so than it is thought the addition of the two new stairs/lift towers would have. The use of uncoated aluminium and the slim profiled frames of the windows, exterior glazed doors and glazed external screens is considered to greatly contribute stylistically to the building's distinctive original appearance, being reflective of the technology and styles indicative at the time of the building's construction. Whilst it is acknowledged the unsympathetic replacement of a number of windows, with ones of different fenestration arrangement, albeit whilst still utilizing a similar looking slim profiled aluminium frames, has somewhat eroded the visual contribute the windows make to the appearance and form of this building however the great majority of the building's windows, exterior glazed doors and external glazed screens are contemporaneous with the construction of the building and as such are considered to be original features that are very much of important visual component to the appearance of this particular building. Much like timber framed multi-pane vertical sash windows are to a Georgian era dwelling. From a heritage stance the expectation should be for these original elements of the building to be retained, and the unsympathetic windows replaced for ones to match with the originals.

In light of the recent experience at St Crispins School in Wokingham (see images below), an early 1950s school building that holds listed building status and which the introduction of new glazed doors to replace a metal framed glazed screen is believed to be detrimentally out of keeping with the original early 1950s glazing system used for the school. As voiced during the pre-application stages, and with the last pair of application made for the phase 2 works, from a heritage stance the Built Heritage Officer bemoans the need for the replacement of these original fenestration elements of the building, which are so contributory to the building's appearance and form. The apparent justification being given is the need to improve the thermal efficiency of the building but also now, with respect to a number of the horizontal narrow single windows (predominately on the southern elevation), to provide a series of louvred vents for the HAVC system.

Whilst it is acknowledged that re-establishing an order and commonality to the design of the windows across the building would it is conceded visually be an improvement, however the replacement windows are to be triple glazed, with more substantial aluminium framing to them, which is to be have a silver powder coated finish it is considered given the further revisions made the previously submitted and approved cross-sectional drawings, these changes would only lead to the frames and surrounds for the new windows being noticeably 'heavier' in appearance and potential a marked difference in their frame finish, compared to the existing original features. These changes to the fenestration of this building is very much believed to have visually an impact on the overall form and appearance of the building, not necessarily thought to be a positive one here from a heritage stance.

With respect to details that have been submitted and notably with respect to the replacement windows, but as well for the roof-lanterns, external glazed screens and external doors the details are thought deficient to give approval for these element

without further details being provided, which could be dealt with by means of a condition. The drawings for the windows do not seem to account for all the window forms of the building (attached below are photographs of various windows taken from the insufficient to understand what actual form and details for these elements, or the case of the windows as not all the variations in their design are not believed to be sufficiently detailed.

Aluminium Roof Covering & External Elevation Panels

Whilst the proposed works calls for the replacement of the slopping roofs to the building and in some cases the aluminium sheeting of the external elevation, it understood this is to be done in an almost identical aluminium sheeting. There being the expectation for the jointing of the sheeting to the slopping roof to replicate the existing. And with respect to the replacement of theses slopping roofs that it is understood are to match the profiles and rainwater channel details, it is however noted that there appears to be no details given to confirm the end of these rainwater channels are to replicate the detailing of the existing.

With respect to the aluminium sheeting used on the exterior walling and as used as part of a number of the windows, here the details submitted are not thought clear as to actually where these are to be retained or replaced across the building. It is believed further clarification is required here.

Stair/Lift Towers

The requirement location and form for two new stair/lift towers for the repurposed building, required in light of the existing arrangements of internal staircases and restrictive size of the lift shafts have been previously the subject of pre-application discussions, in which the location for the two combined staircase/lift towers were judged to be the most appropriate in having the least harmful impact to the historic fabric and appearance of the building, given the northern elevation and that of the western end elevation, these being the important elevations to the building seen in context of its surroundings.

As shown in the Design & Access Statement there were two different forms proposed for the new tower structures, one of rectangular form and the other with a curved end walling to it. In commenting to the two proposed forms, each were recognised to have merits in their form. The rectangular form seen to reflect the angular form of the building, whilst the curved one is clearly statement that these structures are contemporary additions to the building. The curved form also allow for better visibility of the detective oriel window on the side of the adjacent lecture room. In both forms the shown intention is for a pattern perforated aluminium external treatment, which is believed to add visual interest to the new towers, especially during the hours of darkness when the internal light will show through. And whilst at the pre-application stage the Council showed preference to the rectangular shaped tower form over the covered one, it is however recognised that the curved form although somewhat going against the strong angular built form of the building is otherwise believed to be an otherwise equally appropriate design.

Under Croft Brick-Slip Paving

In the Design and Access Statement (see page 59) it is proposed to introduction a black coloured step tread edging tiling to replace the existing brick slip paving to the

edge of the steps of the north side under croft pavement as part of repairs and upgrading to this paved thoroughfare, which is to include an anti-slip treatment to the brick slip pavers. Whilst it is appreciated that there is a need to make the steps to the under croft area safer it is however believed the choice of colour for edging tread tiles for the leading edge of the lengths of the stepped areas is considered to be somewhat detracting in its stark contrast and at odds visually with the palate of colours used for the exterior of the building. As such it would seem a tonal contrasting colour of the brick slip paver for the edging tread tiles would be more visually harmonious than those proposed in black.

Internal Works: Stair Case Screens & Room Divider

With respect to the internal revision to the building much of what is proposed is considered to result in either minor or no harm to what contributes to the significance of the building. That said the covering up of the cinder block walling which are thought to be somewhat of a ubiquitous for institutional buildings of the era. As such the visual loss of the painted cinder block walling is another visual loss under the works being proposed. It is also somewhat regrettable to see from a visual stance, the proposed room divider in the large Teaching Room/Workshop space which would lead to a visual break in what is presently thought to be an impressive large space with its series of the vertical concrete side columns and the horizontal structural beams.

Solar Panels

It is believed given the low profile of the solar panel would have on the slopping roofs would suggest that in those views adjacent to the building the solar panels would not be visible. This is not to say that in those views from further away or from elevated positions within the adjacent buildings that the panels would be visible in view of the building.

Bike & Bin Store

Not necessarily any objection raised to the proposed standalone bike and bin storage being provided for the building, although its location to the rear of the building would it is thought have been more appropriate in terms of setting.

In summary, it is acknowledged that through the works of repair to the significant concrete beams and panels considered key elements of the URS Building and in the alterations to it in order to repurpose the building for a new role for the University of Reading would secure the future and maintenance of this 1970s era designated heritage asset. That said, there are elements of the proposed works, required in repurposing the URS Building, which will result in the loss and/or alteration of originally built fabric and features, with the external appearance of the building being also impacted and collectively would erode and harm to original design and form of the building. What harm there would be is however recognised to amount to less than substantial level of harm. And with respect to the advised conditions those especially with respect to the roof-lanterns, windows, external glazed screens and doors are believed necessary as the submitted details for these elements either are insufficient to understand what actual form and details for these elements, or the case of the windows as not all the variations in their design are not believed to be sufficiently detailed.

Conditions

Windows/External Glazed Screen & External Doors

Notwithstanding the details submitted no works shall be undertaken to have installed new and replacement windows, glazed exterior screens and exterior doors hereby part of works approved until full details for the windows, glazed screens and exterior doors have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Details required include the following:

- External elevation scaled drawings for each of the different window forms, external glazed screens, and external doors at either 1:10 or 1:20 scale, with cross-sectional horizontal and vertical sections shown in context of the surrounding fabric (to show their installed position with respect to the external face of the building).
- Cross-sectional drawings of the window, screen, and external door frames, (including outer frames, sills, and thresholds where applicable) shown at 1:1 or 1:2 scale.
- External colour and finish to window, screen, and external door frames (including outer frames, sills, and thresholds where applicable). Along with a physical sample of the finishes for the frames.

The new windows, external glazed screens and exterior doors shall then be installed in accordance with the details as approved.

New Openings to External Walling For Louvred Vents/Intakes

Notwithstanding the details submitted no works shall be undertaken to form the new openings through the external walling for the new louvred extraction/intakes, until details setting out how the new openings in the external walling are to be formed have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Details shall also set out the external materials/finish surrounding the new openings are repaired and/or replaced.

The new openings in the external walling for the louvres shall be formed in accordance with the details as approved.

Louvred Openings

Notwithstanding the details submitted no works shall be undertaken to have installed the external louvres, including those to the new windows, until full details for the louvres, including scaled cross sectional drawings, details of material and finish have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

The new louvres shall then be installed in accordance with the details as approved.

Roof-Lights

Notwithstanding the details submitted no works shall be undertaken to have installed the new roof-lights until details for the roof-lights have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Details required include the following:

- Dimensions of the roof-light units
- Colour and finish of frames.

The roof-light shall then be installed in accordance with the details as approved.

Ventilation Cowls mounted onto Sloping Roofs

Notwithstanding the details submitted no works shall be undertaken to have installed the new roof-lights until details for the roof-lights have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Details required include the following:

- Dimensions of the roof cowl units
- Colour and finish of the units.

The roof cowl units shall then be installed in accordance with the details as approved.

Replacement Aluminium Sheet Covering to the Roof and Walling

Notwithstanding the details submitted no works are to be undertaken to replace the aluminium sheet covering of the roof and walling until details of the replacement material, and the form of the upstand seams have along with a physical sample of the materials has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Works to install the new aluminium sheet roof and wall covering shall then be undertaken in accordance with the details as approved.

Roof Guttering Chancel End Detailing

Notwithstanding the details submitted, no works to form the new roof covering until details confirm the form of the ends to the new replacement rainwater channels to the sloping roofs would accurately replicate the existing detailing, in all meaningful characteristic (dimensions, profiles and materials), unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority prior to undertaking the works in question. Works to form the rainwater channels shall then be undertaken in accordance with the details as approved.

Roof Lantern Lights

Notwithstanding the details submitted no works shall be undertaken to have installed the replacement glazed roof lantern lights windows, until further details for the roof lantern lights have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Details required include the following:

- External scaled drawings for each of the different window forms, external glazed screens, and external doors at either 1:20 or 1:50 scale,
- Frame cross-sections at 1:1 or 1:2 scale.
- Frame colour and finish to be confirmed.

Works to install the roof lantern lights shall then be undertaken in accordance with the details as approved.

Matching External Finishes

All works of repair and making good to the external fabric of the URS Building shall be finished to match the adjacent retained existing, with regard to the methods used and to material, colour, texture, and profile, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority prior to works being undertaken.

Repairs to Concrete Structure/Elements

Works of repair to the concrete fabric of the URS Building shall be undertaken in accordance with the URS Building Refurbishment: External Concrete Repair – Heritage Offer (June 2024) and the Addendum (Sept 2024) produced by Purcel,

unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority prior to any changes being implemented.

Brick Slip Pavers

Notwithstanding the details submitted no works shall place to take-up, repair and/or refurbish the brick paver ground treatment to the under croft area of the URS Building or those other location around and in the building where used, until details have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Details shall set out the methodology for the repairs and refurbishment of the brick pavers (including the grouting medium to be used), anti-slip measures (to include the extent/location of where the black rubberised edging brick to the steps are to be used). Works to the brick pavers shall the be undertaken in accordance with the details as approved.

Reason: In order to safeguard the special architectural or historic interest of the building. Relevant policy: National Planning Policy Framework Section 16 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy TB24.

Date:

19/02/2025

Signed:

Keith Frost
Built Heritage Officer



New Glazed Doors at St Crispin's School, Wokingham



St Crispens School - original glazed screen.
From pre-app 241129

Private: Information that contains a small amount of sensitive data which is essential to communicate with an individual but doesn't require to be sent via secure methods.

Public: Information that can be seen and used by everyone inside and outside the Council.

The photographic images below come from the document titled 'The URS Building External Concrete Repair: Appendix J – Photographic record (July 2024) submitted under applications 241743 and 241744.



IMG_2271



IMG_1502



IMG_1585

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IMG_1559



IMG_2441



IMG_1578

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IMG_1718



IMG_1554



IMG_1723

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IMG_1650



IMG_1651

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IMG_1757



IMG_1647



IMG_1648

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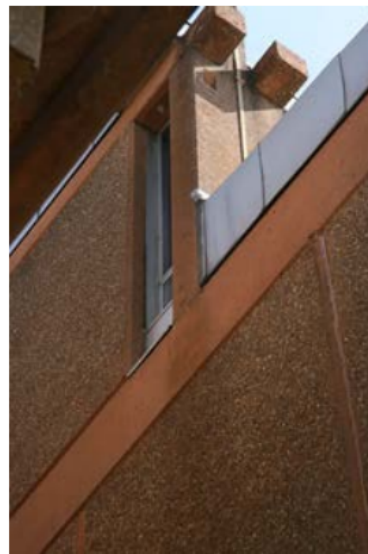
IMG_1761



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IMG_2023

Private: Information that contains a small amount of sensitive data which is essential to communicate with an individual but doesn't require to be sent via secure methods.

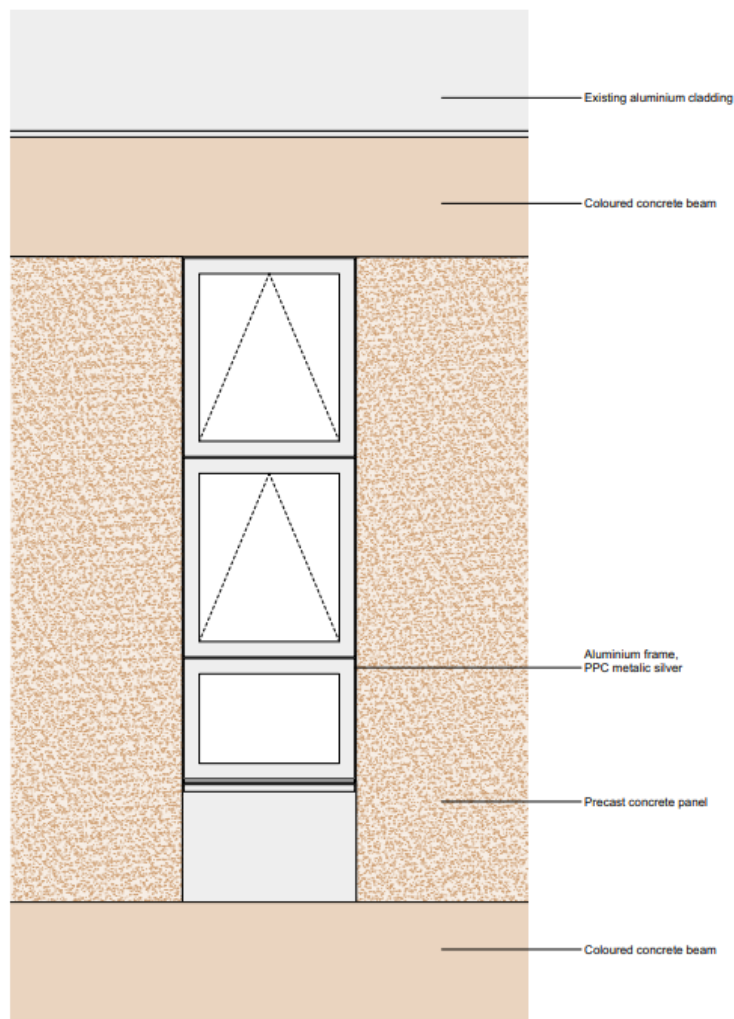
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Below are extracts from proposed drawings submitted under 243127 & 243128.

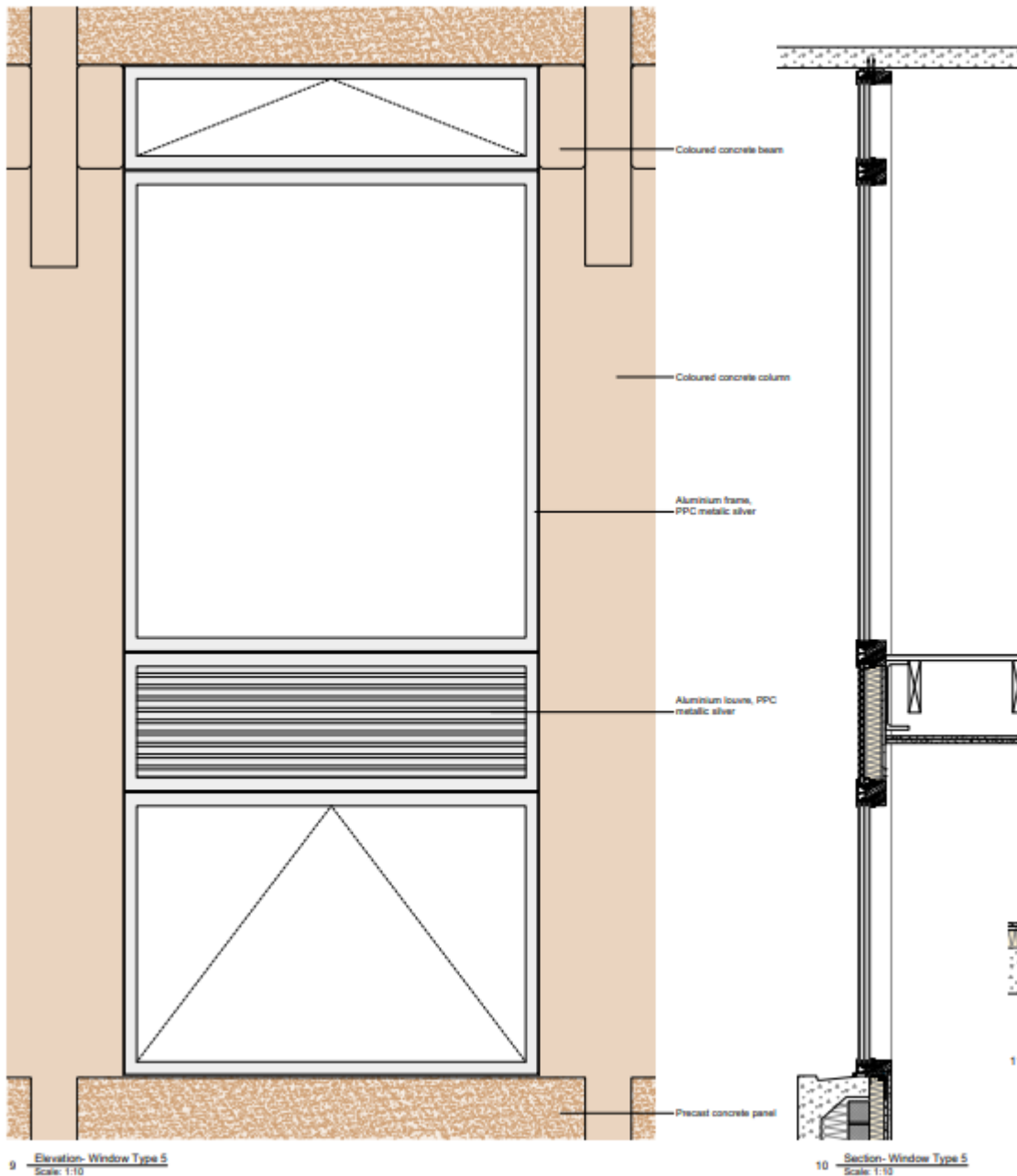


9 Elevation- Window Type 6
Scale: 1:10



10 Section- Window Type 1
Scale: 1:10

2360383-ACG-W033-ZZ-DR-A-42296 Rev.P



2360383-ACG-W033-ZZ-DR-A-42295 Rev.P1

2360383-ACG-W033-ZZ-DR-A-42296 – here the cross-section drawing is stated to be Window Type 1, and the lower panel does not seem to relate to that shown elevation view.

2360383-ACG-W033-ZZ-DR-A-42296 Rev P this drawing does not make clear whether the solid panels of the window are to be new powder coated ones to match with the material and finish of frames.