BB
PARTNERSHIP
CHARTERED ARCHITECTS

HERITAGE STATEMENT

Site Address: Sonning Court, Thames Street, Sonning, Reading RG4 6UR
Proposal: Demolition of existing ancillary structures and construction of a new gym building
Application Type: Householder Planning Application
Date: October 2025

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1. Introduction

This Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of a householder planning application for the demolition of three existing ancillary leisure structures and the construction of a new gym building within the curtilage of Sonning Court.

The application site lies within the Sonning Conservation Area, as designated by Wokingham Borough Council. Sonning Court is not statutorily listed. The purpose of this statement is to assess the significance of the heritage asset and to consider whether the proposed development preserves the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, in accordance with Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

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2. Site and Conservation Area Context

Sonning Court is a substantial detached dwelling set within extensive landscaped grounds with river frontage to the Thames. The Conservation Area is characterised by:

- A strong riverside setting
- Large detached dwellings within generous plots
- A predominantly green and landscaped character, reinforced by boundary walls, planting and changes in level.

The Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal (2017) identifies that in riverside plots, buildings are often experienced indirectly, with landscape, boundary treatments and spacing playing a greater role in defining character than individual ancillary structures.

Within the garden area to the south of the main house are several existing leisure-related structures associated with a swimming pool. These structures are largely screened from public views by boundary walls and planting and are not prominent features within the wider Conservation Area.

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3. Significance of the Heritage Asset

The heritage significance of Sonning Court derives from:

- Its contribution to the established pattern of large detached dwellings within landscaped plots
- Its relationship with the River Thames and the surrounding green setting
- The retention of a spacious and enclosed character, reinforced by boundary walls and mature landscaping.

The existing ancillary structures within the garden, including the pyramid building, the enclosed pool structure and the pool house, do not contribute positively to the significance of the Conservation Area. They are of limited architectural quality, have evolved incrementally over time, and are experienced as subordinate elements within the wider garden setting.

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4. Description of the Proposals

The proposals comprise:

- Demolition of three existing ancillary structures:
    - Pyramid building (145.2m^3),
    - Existing pool structure (411.8m^3), and
    - Existing pool house (112.55m^3);
- Construction of a new L-shaped gym building with a total volume of 638.7m^3;
- Reconfiguration of the existing L-shaped pool to become an outdoor pool; and
- Retention of existing boundary walls and landscaped features.

The proposed gym building would:

- Be set further back from the River Thames than the existing pyramid building
- Sit at a similar distance to the river as the existing pool structure
- Have a flat roof and be lower in height than both the existing pool structure and the roof of the existing pool house; and
- Be located on the garden side of an existing boundary wall to the south of the site, with a height comparable to the wall.

5. Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

In assessing the proposals, regard has been had to the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal (2017), particularly its emphasis on landscape setting, riverside character and the limited contribution of ancillary buildings to significance.

Demolition of Existing Structures

The demolition of the pyramid building, pool structure and pool house would result in the removal of a collection of visually disparate and architecturally limited structures. These buildings do not make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, and their removal would not result in heritage harm.

Proposed Gym Building

The proposed gym building would preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area for the following reasons:

- Although the building replaces three existing structures, it results in a **net reduction in built volume** of approximately **30.85m³**;
- The building is **lower in height** than the existing pool structure and pool house, reducing visual mass
- Its **set-back position from the River Thames**, comparable to the existing pool structure and further back than the pyramid building, ensures no increased impact on the riverside setting
- The existing boundary wall provides effective screening, with the gym building located on the garden side and of a similar height; and
- The L-shaped form reflects the arrangement of the outdoor pool and sits comfortably within the garden layout without encroaching into the wider landscape.

The proposals do not affect key views, spatial characteristics or landscape features identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal. As such, the development would result in **no harm** to the character or appearance of the Sonning Conservation Area.

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6. Policy Context

The proposals have been assessed against:

- **Section 72** of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- **Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework**, which requires great weight to be given to the conservation of heritage assets
- **Policy TB24 (Designated Heritage Assets)** of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

In NPPF terms (paragraphs 212–215), the proposals would result in no harm to the significance of the Conservation Area and therefore no heritage planning balance is required.

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7. Conclusion

The proposed demolition of existing ancillary structures and construction of a new gym building at Sonning Court have been carefully designed with regard to the site's heritage context and riverside setting.

The proposals rationalise existing development within the garden, reduce overall built volume, lower building height, maintain appropriate set-backs from the River Thames, and utilise existing boundary walls and landscaping to limit visibility. The development therefore preserves the character and appearance of the Sonning Conservation Area, in accordance with statutory duties, national policy and local guidance.

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8. Heritage Summary

The application site lies within the Sonning Conservation Area. The proposal comprises the demolition of three existing ancillary leisure structures and their replacement with a single gym building within the curtilage of Sonning Court. The proposed building would be lower in height than the existing pool structure and pool house, set further back from the River Thames than the pyramid building, and effectively screened by existing boundary walls and landscaping.

Although the development consolidates built form into a single structure, it results in a net reduction in built volume and does not affect the attributes of the site that contribute to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. The proposal therefore preserves the character and appearance of the Sonning Conservation Area, in accordance with Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Policy TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan and Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.