

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Site Address: Sonning Court, Thames Street, Sonning, Reading RG4 6UR

Proposal: Demolition of existing ancillary buildings and construction of a new gym building

Application Type: Householder Planning Application

Date: October 2025



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1. Introduction

This Design & Access 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 site lies within the Sonning Conservation Area and benefits from a riverside setting adjacent to the River Thames. This statement explains the design rationale for the proposal and demonstrates how the development responds appropriately to the site, its context and relevant planning policy.

2. Site Context

Sonning Court is a substantial detached dwelling set within extensive landscaped grounds to the west of Thames Street. The southern part of the garden contains a number of existing leisure-related structures associated with a swimming pool.

An existing wall along the southern boundary screens views of the garden and the existing ancillary buildings. The River Thames lies to the north-east of the site, with the garden sloping gently away from the main house towards the river.

3. Design

3.1 Existing Buildings to be Demolished

The proposal includes the demolition of the following structures:

- Pyramid building: 145.2m³



- Existing pool structure: 411.8m³



- Existing pool house: 112.55m³



Total existing volume to be removed: 669.55m³

These buildings have evolved incrementally over time and are visually disparate in form and appearance. They sit as a collection of separate elements within the garden and do not form a coherent group.

3.2 Proposed Gym Building

The proposal is for a new L-shaped gym building with a total volume of:

- Proposed gym building: 638.7m³

The new building would:

- Replace three separate ancillary structures with a single, consolidated building
- Be set further back from the River Thames than the existing pyramid building
- Be located 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
- Be positioned on the garden side of the existing southern boundary wall, with a height comparable to the wall, ensuring effective visual screening.

The existing L-shaped swimming pool would be retained and become an outdoor pool, with the proposed gym arranged to relate logically to it.

3.3 Scale and Amount of Development

Although the proposal introduces a new gym building, it results in an overall reduction in built volume across the site:

- Existing buildings removed: 669.55m³
- Proposed gym building: 638.7m³

Net reduction in built volume: 30.85m³

In addition to the reduction in volume, the proposed building is lower in height than the existing pool structure and pool house, and its siting improves set-back from the river when compared with the pyramid building.

3.4 Appearance

The gym building is designed with a simple and contemporary architectural approach, appropriate for a private ancillary leisure structure within a landscaped garden.

The flat roof and restrained massing ensure the building remains visually subordinate to the main dwelling. The design avoids unnecessary articulation, allowing the building to sit quietly within its setting.

3.5 Layout

The layout:

- Rationalises existing leisure facilities into a single, efficient building
 - Maintains generous areas of garden and landscaping
 - Respects the existing boundary wall and established site hierarchy
 - Provides a clear and functional relationship between the gym and the outdoor pool.
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4. Access

No changes are proposed to existing vehicular or pedestrian access arrangements.

Access to the gym building would be via established garden circulation routes serving the pool area. There would be no impact on access from Thames Street or on parking provision within the site.

5. Use

The proposed gym would be used for private leisure purposes ancillary to the main dwelling. This use is consistent with the existing pool and leisure facilities on the site and does not represent an intensification beyond the established residential use.

6. Impact on the Character of the Area

The proposal consolidates existing development within the garden, reduces overall built volume, lowers building height, and improves the spatial arrangement of ancillary structures.

The building's siting, combined with screening provided by the existing boundary wall and surrounding landscaping, ensures that it would not be visually prominent within the Conservation Area or the riverside setting.

7. Conclusion

The proposed development comprises the demolition of three existing ancillary leisure structures and their replacement with a single gym building within the curtilage of Sonning Court.

Although the proposal consolidates built form into one structure, it results in a net reduction in built volume of approximately 30.85m³, together with a reduction in building height when compared with the existing pool structure and pool house. The gym building would be set further back from the River Thames than the existing pyramid structure and would be effectively screened by the existing boundary wall and surrounding landscaping.

The scale, form and siting of the development are considered appropriate to the site and its setting within the Sonning Conservation Area, and the proposal would not result in harm to the character or appearance of the area.

Appendix A: Policy Compliance Matrix

Policy / Guidance	Requirement	Response
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 – s72	Preserve or enhance Conservation Areas	Development is screened, lower in height, results in net volume reduction and preserves character
NPPF Section 16 (Paras 212–215)	Conserve heritage assets	No harm identified; no heritage balance required
Core Strategy CP1	Sustainable development	Consolidates and rationalises development
Core Strategy CP3	High quality design	Subordinate, well-sited ancillary building
MDD Policy TB24	Protect heritage assets	Conservation Area preserved
MDD Policy TB21	Design quality	Scale, layout and form appropriate
Sonning CA Appraisal (2017)	Respect landscape & spacing	Set-back, screened, reduced visual impact

Policy / Guidance	Requirement	Response
Borough Design Guide SPD	Ancillary buildings subordinate	Gym remains secondary to main house

Appendix B: Biodiversity / Ecology Statement

1. Biodiversity Net Gain

The proposal constitutes a householder development as defined by Article 2(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 and is therefore exempt from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.