

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	243127
Site Address:	URS Building, Whiteknights Campus, Earley, RG6 6BW
Expiry Date:	17 March 2025
Site Visit Date:	26 April 2024
Proposal: 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.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Listed Building – Grade II
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Core Employment Areas
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Major Development Location
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone
Ground Water Zones
Local Historic Parks and Gardens
Nuclear Consultation Zone
Landscape Character Assessment Area
Complete PRow
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
PRow Within WB Consultation Zone
Listed Building Buffer Zone
L Historic Parks and Gardens Consultation Zone
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone Householder
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone Minor

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks

	CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB14 – Whiteknights Campus TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	The JMWP is not relevant to this site.
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
180220	Full Planning Application for internal and external alterations and extensions existing building and external works including new footpath, landscaping and external working area	Refused 19/12/2018
241743	Full application for proposed internal and external refurbishment, repairs and alterations consisting of replacement windows and doors; replacement roofs including new roof lights, cowls and lanterns and concrete repairs.	Approved 23/10/2024
241744	Listed Building Consent for proposed internal and external refurbishment, repairs and alterations consisting of replacement windows and doors; replacement roofs including new roof lights, cowls and lanterns and concrete repairs.	Approved 23/10/2024
243128	Application for 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	Pending Consideration
CONSULTATION RESPONSES		
Internal		

WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection, subject to condition WBC Public Rights Of Way – No objection WBC Built Heritage Officer – Objection due to loss of original fabric of the building (although conditions recommended in the event of an approval) WBC CIL – Not CIL Liable WBC Ecology – No comments received
External
Reading Borough Council – Objection/ further clarifications needed The Twentieth Century Society – Supportive of the work in general but is concerned about the design of the two proposed external stairs, particularly the proposed lift and stair addition to the east elevation Berkshire Gardens Trust – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS	
Parish/Town Council	No objection
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL
Site Description: The URS Building is a Grade II Listed building (designated listed status in 2016) with distinct post and lintel joints. As well as the building, the Listing includes the paved surface of Chancellors Way and raised edges of the ornamental pool. Surrounding the building are other academic buildings, including the newly refurbished Library. A public right of way (EARL6) runs underneath the overhang of the URS building. The majority of Whiteknights Campus is a designated local park and garden. Proposal: Planning permission is sought for internal and external refurbishment of the URS building, University of Reading. More specifically the proposal comprises of: <i>External works</i> • Concrete repairs • Roof replacement • HAVC works • New fenestration • Construction of new stair and lift towers • Undercroft brick slip paving • Soffit refurbishment • New bike and bin store • New solar panels <i>Internal works</i> • Alterations to staircase screens and room division • Works to lecture theatres • Improved third floor circulation through removal of corridors/ partitions

It should be noted that an associated application for Listed Building Consent is currently under consideration for the scheme.

This proposal constitutes as 'Phase 3' of the proposed refurbishment of the building. The 2 x applications approved in 2024 (see planning history) were 'Phase 2' and Phase 1 comprised of some internal works – albeit no Listed Building Consent or Certificate of Lawfulness for works to a Listed Building was submitted, and it was considered that Listed Building consent was not required for these.

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The site is located within settlement limits and as such the development should be acceptable providing that it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy.

Given the site's location on the Reading University Whiteknights campus, policy TB14 of the MDD is also relevant to the principle of development as this policy centres around development at the university campus. It notes the national and international importance of the university and acknowledges that development will be needed that supports staff, students, teaching, research, accommodation, infrastructure and services. Which sets out how development on the Whiteknights Campus should be approached. The policy goes on to state that development proposals should accord with the following criteria:

- a) They respect the historic landscape, open areas and listed buildings and their settings and the character of the area*
- b) Areas of wildlife significance (including Local Wildlife Sites) and current or potential green infrastructure networks will be retained and enhanced*
- c) The safety of those using the campus (including highway safety issues and designing out crime) will be maintained and enhanced;*
- d) There are no significant detrimental impacts on neighbouring residential properties from the development, including from noise or parking; and*
- e) The loss of undeveloped areas on the site will be weighed against the benefits of development to the wider community.*

Each of the above criteria relate to other material considerations that need to be considered. This report, in its conclusion, will summarise if the development complies with the above criteria. In this case, criteria a) will be of particular importance given the Listed status of the URS building.

The URS building has not been used for several years and its current state and layout is no longer fit for teaching at its full potential. This proposal would see this building brought back into its optimum use through external and internal refurbishment. The

benefits of this in heritage terms will be discussed, but in general terms, this will also help support the functions of the university which TB14 acknowledges are important.

In principle, the development, within settlement limits, is accepted, and it is acknowledged through policy TB14 that development on Whiteknights Campus will be required. This again is therefore accepted in principle, subject to other material considerations.

Heritage:

Policy TB24 states that designated heritage assets (Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Area) should be conserved, or where possible enhanced as a result of development. The site is a Grade II Listed Building and is within a locally designated Park and Garden.

Impact on the Listed Building

There are numerous works proposed to the listed building. Assessment will therefore be broken down to discuss these different components. Both the 20th Century Society and the WBC Built Heritage Officer were consulted on this proposal and comments were received from Reading Borough Council. These comments, where appropriate, will feed into the assessment:

External Works

External Structural Concrete Repairs

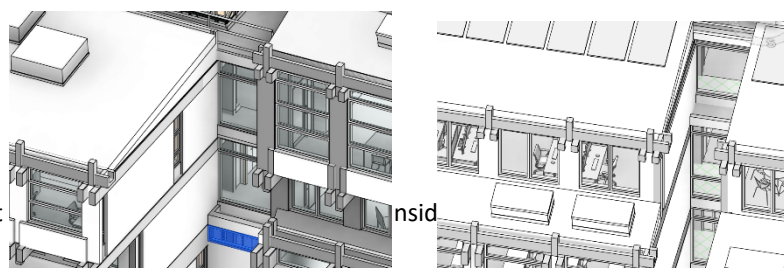
It is welcomed that the university has commissioned a survey identifying current issues with the concrete structure. The submitted report sets out the findings and offers guidance to inform future repair and maintenance works. As noted in the report, the URS building's use of concrete contributes much to its architectural significance. It is essential that future repairs are informed by a thorough understanding of the concrete's various material and aesthetic characteristics and seeks to conserve them. The initial package of repairs focusing on high priority defects in particular locations as part of the current proposals and to then carry out further repairs over the following years.

Roofs

The 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. However, it is noted that re-covering of the roof was already approved under Phase 2 works. It is understood the re-covering is to be done in an almost identical aluminium sheeting.

New Opening to Exterior Walling

There are to be three new openings; two on the northern elevation and a new opening for a set of doors:



These new opening being for intake/vent louvres for the intended HAVC system and for entrance/ exist doors. The Built Heritage Officer raised concern that there was no assessment given of the need for these new opening or as to their impact to the significance of this designated heritage asset. However, within the applicant's heritage assessment outlines the need for these elements of the proposal, noting the proposed new doors are necessary additions for the purposes of fire safety and emergency escape. The applicant is also of the view that they have been placed in areas where their visibility and impact on the wider aesthetic of the listed building is minimised. Planning Officers are minded to agree and accept this justification.

HAVC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning)

As mentioned above the proposed HAVC systems does require additional openings to formed on the principle north facing elevation and there would be the potential visibility of the plant on the top flat roof.

Reading Borough Council raised concern that the building would be read as an industrial building with mechanical ventilation.

However, Planning Officers consider that on the whole, visibility from ground level and public viewpoints would not be overly substantial. The mechanical system has an intended function to bring the building back into use. Whilst there would be some level of harm, this has to be weighed against the benefits which will be done so.

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)

From the perspective of the WBC Heritage Officer, this aspect of the proposed works would it is believed result in the single greatest overall change in the appearance of the URS Building. 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. The consultation from Reading Borough Council echoes the potential harm to the building as a result of this change – they believe that leaving no original fenestration should not be the only option.

It is acknowledged the existing unsympathetic replacement of a number of windows, (with ones of different fenestration arrangement, albeit whilst still utilising a similar looking slim profiled aluminium frames), has somewhat eroded the visual contribute the windows make to the appearance and form of this building as a starting point. 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. 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.

The 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 be a visual improvement, 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. As such, these changes would 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 is very much believed to have visually an impact on the overall form and appearance of the building. However, it is acknowledged that the principle of replacing fenestration was established by the granting of the phase 2 of the works and needs to be considered in the overall heritage balance.

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.

Stair/Lift Towers

Two new stair and lift towers are required in light of the building's existing arrangements owing to the internal staircases and restrictive size of the lift shafts. Both a rectangular and curved stair core are proposed

The location of the of the staircases and lift towers are deemed to be appropriate and having the least harmful impact to the historic fabric and appearance of the building (when compared against previous alternatives).

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 allows 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. A condition would be applied to secure further details of the aluminium external treatment.

Previous discussions were had about whether these stair cases could be glazed, however this was not possible from the applicant's perspective. It is acknowledged that the rear staircase would also protrude onto the roof, however this is required because the existing lift shaft is not adequate to provide disabled access to this floor. The staircase must also reach level 4, to allow the dry riser to serve all floors and to provide adequate fire fighting access.

It is acknowledged that the 20th Century Society are concerned about the design of the two proposed external stairs, particularly on the eastern elevation. They consider the scale, form and perforated aluminium finish of the lift and stair addition to the east end and do not feel that this addition has been convincingly justified. However, taking into account the comments from the WBC Heritage Officer, Officers consider that this element of the proposal is suitable and the design justified, albeit it is one that is subjective. The requirement for this element of the proposal is also justified and required to meet accessibility requirements which ultimately are required to ensure the building can be brought back to its optimum and viable use.

Under Croft Brick-Slip Paving

In the Design and Access Statement (page 59) it is proposed to introduce 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 a need to make the steps to the under croft area safer, there was concern from the WBC Heritage Officer over 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.

The applicant has responded to the above concerns and advise they remain convinced that contrasting edging tiles will strike a suitable balance between ensuring health and safety is improved on the footpaths beneath the under croft (while also avoiding a bright yellow paint being added in the future if a non-contrasting tile was used) and being sympathetic to the heritage value of the URS Building in general.

The above is noted and accepted, with a contrasting edging being more sympathetic and quality compared to painting safety lines on stepping, as noted. The precise tile colour to be agreed via a suitably worded planning condition.

Soffit Refurbishment

Originally, it was proposed to insulate the overhangs with an upgraded insulated soffit. However, the proposal now is to remove existing soffit boards to expose the original concrete deck and thermal improvements will instead be achieved by introducing concrete screed to internal flooring. This approach would allow for the beams to be fully expressed beneath the building which is positive as this is a key element and distinguishing architectural feature.

Bike & Bin Store

The bin and bike store will be located at the western end of the building. It's siting at the rear of the building may have been preferable in terms of impact on the setting of the Listed Building. Whilst it will have visibility from the front elevation, it would be set back from the main frontage so this will help elevate its prominence to some degree.

Solar Panels

Given the low profile of the solar panel would have on the slopping roofs would suggest that in those view 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.

Internal Works

Stair Case Screens & Room Divider

With respect to the internal alterations to the building, much of what is proposed is considered to result in either minor or no harm to what contributes to the significance the building, as advised by the WBC Heritage Officer. 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.

Lecture Theatres

It is positive that the raked seating is being retained. There is no objection to the timber panelling and woodwool between exposed beams.

Third Floor Circulation

Reading Borough Council raised concerns over the significance assessment on the floor plans where the portion walls are indicated. Losing some corridor partitions is unfortunate given it forms a distinct part of the layout of the Listed Building and these being elements of significance of the building. However, it is understood that the intention is to maximise the functionality of the building which the corridors currently prohibit.

Other

The gradient of the ramp at the eastern end of the building is inadequate to meet current regulations. It would be reprofiled in line with the existing forecourt and brick pavers (as discussed) will be used. Way finding information is also proposed. However, should any of this way finding information constitute as an advertisement, separate advertisement consent would be required.

Impact on Local Park and Garden

In terms of impact on the local park and garden, the proposal would not substantial impact on this asset, owing to the location, nature and scale of the development. The new development which will be introduced to the Local Park and Garden (construction of new staircases/ lifts and a bin/ bike store) would be concentrated around the Listed Building and would have minimal encroachment into undeveloped parts of the Local Park and Garden. The bin/ bike store would be located on an existing car park (so physically previously developed land) and the stair cores/ lifts would encroach minimally onto the grass surrounding the building.

Heritage Balance

The proposed works would lead to the loss of original fabric of the building and most notably from the above assessment there would be harm from the replacement of the fenestration with 'chunkier' frames.

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. It is considered that the level of harm that would arise from the proposal would be 'less than substantial'. However, in taking account of the earlier phase of internal strip-out works, and those previously approved under phase 2 works, when taken together cumulatively, the harm are believed overall to at a level quite high within that classification of harm.

Paragraph 208 of the NPPF states that *'where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'*

The benefits of bringing this building back into an optimum use for the continued success of the University are noted. However, there are benefits of securing the optimum use in relation to heritage also, as noted by the above paragraph of the NPPF. The building at present is in a poor state, having remained empty for many years. As well as having public benefits; notably for staff, students and the wider community attending the university and using its facilities it would also bring the Listed building into a functional building where the elements of the significance of the asset can be conserved rather than falling into further disrepair.

In summary, policy TB24 of the MDD seeks to conserve, and where possible enhanced as a result of development. The proposal on the whole conserves the Listed Building and setting of the Local Park and Garden, with the shortcomings (in terms of window replacements) outweighed by the public benefits when applying paragraph 208 of the

NPPF. The scheme will also result numerous enhancements/ restoration to the Listed Building both and so, on balance, complies with policy TB24. However, this is subject to conditions relating to the following:

- Details of windows/ glazed screens and external doors
- Details of rooflights
- Details of roof cowls
- Replacement aluminium sheet covering to roof and walling
- Details of roof lantern lights
- Matching external finishes
- In accordance with concrete repair

Character of the Area:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high-quality design.

The application site is fully contained within the Whiteknights Campus and so therefore would have no wider visual impact from the public realm outside of the university campus. Owing to this, the surrounding area comprises of educational facilities of varying design and scale. As such, the external elements of the refurbishment including the two 2 x staircases, bin and bike store, alterations to the roof, fenestration and new entrances will not be of detriment to the surrounding area.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy aims to protect neighbouring amenity.

The proposal would be situated well within the grounds of the university campus and away from the University's halls of residence and neighbours offsite. The proposed extension and refurbishment will not result in adverse impacts to neighbouring properties.

Highways, Parking and Cycle Provision:

Policy CC07 states that planning permission will only be granted where a development can meet parking provision, the standards of which are in Appendix 2 of the MDD. Development should also not adversely affect the Highway network. Policy CP6 states that sustainable modes of transport should be accommodated for.

Due to the nature of the proposal being contained within the Whiteknights Campus, it will not have an adverse impact on the wider Highway network. The proposal will see the loss of 10 parking spaces to make way for the proposed bin and cycle store. There would be space for 36 bicycles on Sheffield stands. Whilst this would see a loss of vehicle parking, it is considered that on balance, there is still a sufficient level of parking across the campus. Furthermore, the parking spaces would be replaced with provision for more sustainable transport modes which is encouraged and supported by policy CP6 of the Core Strategy.

Waste Storage:

Policy CC04 of the MDD states that all development should incorporate suitable waste management facilities, including on-site recycling.

At present, the existing building has no dedicated waste storage collection area, with bins often left on the road. The chosen location is close to the neighbouring building's bin space. Whilst the location of the bin store would see a loss of parking (as discussed above), the principle of higher quality waste storage areas is a benefit in isolation. The location of the bin store in terms of the setting of the Listed Building has been discussed earlier in this report.

Flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD states that all sources of flood risk, including historic flooding, must be taken into account at all stages and to the appropriate degree at all levels in the planning application process to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding.

Policy CC10 of the MDD states that all development proposals must ensure surface water arising from the proposed development including taking into account climate change is managed in a sustainable manner.

The application site is located in Flood Zone 1 and therefore there is a low probability of flooding. The proposal will see the creation of a larger area of impermeable surfaces, owing to the extension for the staircases and creation of new access ramp. However, this is not considered to be a materially harmful increase and the applicant advised that surface water run off will feed into the mains network. Drainage will also be connected as per the existing arrangements.

Landscape and Trees:

Policy CC03 of the MDD states that proposals should protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features. It also states that schemes should incorporate high quality, ideally native planting and landscaping, as an integral part of the scheme.

In terms of hard landscaping, the proposal involves steam cleaning existing paving, regrouting and covering with a clear coating to improve anti-slip resistance, to replace broken /non-viable paving blocks with reclaimed blocks and replace stair nosing with a replacement black ridged edging.

In terms of soft landscaping, an existing Beech hedge will be removed and replaced elsewhere on the site with a species rich hedge. An Indian Chestnut Tree will be removed as it has a pathogen and is not suitable for retention. Two further hedges would also be removed. No objection was raised by the WBC Tree & Landscaping Officer regarding this.

Overall, the impact of the scheme on the retained trees is minimal and the WBC Tree & Landscaping Officer have no objection to the details contained within the Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Method Statement and the Tree Protection Plan. In terms of proposed planting, an indication of this is shown on the Tree Protection Plan and Planting Plan with 19 new trees are proposed. A fully detailed planting plan will be secured via condition.

Ecology:

Policy TB23 states that states that development should provide opportunities to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing. Policy CP7 also states that development should not harm Local Wildlife Sites or harm habitats or species of principle importance.

The proposal is not located within, or within close enough proximity to result harm to sites designated of importance for nature conservation at an international or national level.

In terms of protected species:

Bats

A Bat Emergence Survey (Technical Note) was submitted and a total of 3 bat species were recorded during the survey. These are common and widespread species; Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle and Noctule. Bats were largely observed along the hedgerow to the north of the URS building. Activity was predominately foraging and commuting along the hedgerow line and within the trees of the urban greenspace parcel to the north of the Site boundary. No bats were recorded emerging from the URS building during the course of the survey.

The note concluded that the site does support commuting and foraging bat activity to multiple species. It will be possible to conduct the proposed renovation works as long as the following precautionary measures are implemented such as proposed works occurring outside of the bat active period and ensuring light levels are controlled. It will be conditioned that the mitigation measures outlined in the technical note are adhered to during the course of the development.

Birds

The preliminary ecological appraisal states that vegetation on site and immediately adjacent provides suitable nesting and foraging opportunities, particularly associated with trees and hedgerows. However given the size of the site and the habitats available, the proposals are unlikely to have an adverse effect on the conservation status of these species, therefore no further survey effort is required. Bird boxes can be secured via condition as a form of biodiversity enhancement.

However vegetation surrounding the site provides opportunities for nesting birds, which could be disturbed by the works. The works should therefore take place outside of nesting bird season (March-October inclusive). Should this not be possible, a nesting bird check should be conducted by a suitably experienced ecologist no more than 24 hours prior to the commencement of works. Should nesting birds be found, the ecologist will set up an appropriate exclusion zone around the nest which must not be entered until chicks have fledged. This will be secured via condition

Badgers

A pre-commencement walkover check should be conducted by a suitably experienced ecologist no more than 24 hours prior to the commencement of works. This has been suggested by the applicant and will be secured via condition (adherence to ecological recommendations condition).

Great Crested Newts (GCN)

The application site is part located within an amber and part with a red zone for GCN. An amber zone equates to suitable habitat for GCN and red one equates to highly suitable habitat for GCN. The applicant's preliminary ecological survey returned no records of GCN within 2km of the site, with the closest pond to the site, the onsite ornamental pond was assessed as poor quality and as such unlikely to support GCN.

Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are a Species of Principle Importance under S41 of the NERC Act 2006, and therefore sites with known hedgehog habitat nearby should provide enhancement measures for Hedgehogs. This can be achieved by providing hedgehog houses in the vegetation surrounding the site. This will be conditioned (adherence to ecological recommendations condition).

Biodiversity enhancements

It is noted that the biodiversity enhancements will be outside of the red line boundary, but within the blue line boundary (so is still land owned by the applicant). This would be preferable rather affixing the biodiversity enhancements to the Listed Building which may result in damage/ alterations to the original fabric and appearance.

As the biodiversity enhancements are still being carried out on land within the applicant's ownership, a S106 agreement is not considered necessary and a Grampian condition not appropriate as this only secures works on land outside of the applicant's control.

Section 72 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990) states

(1) Without prejudice to the generality of section 70(1), conditions may be imposed on the grant of planning permission under that section—

(a) for regulating the development or use of any land under the control of the applicant (whether or not it is land in respect of which the application was made) or requiring the carrying out of works on any such land, so far as appears to the local planning authority to be expedient for the purposes of or in connection with the development authorised by the permission;

Here, it states that conditions can be imposed on 'any land under the control of the applicant (whether or not it is land in respect of which the application was made)'. As such, it is appropriate to attach a condition for biodiversity enhancements that then can be made near the site, within the blue line.

Whilst comments were received by the WBC Ecologist, Officers consider that the above assessment, with appropriate conditions will result in biodiversity enhancements on site.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Since April 2024, a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain is mandatory on all planning applications, unless exempt. The application is not exempt and therefore this is

required. In light of the vast size of the Whiteknights Campus, BNG could be provided on the wider site. The standard/ mandatory BNG condition will be applied to the permission.

No comments were received from the WBC Ecologist. However, based on the Officer assessment above, and without information provided to the contrary, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to policy CP7 of the Core Strategy and TB23 of the MDD.

Public Rights of Way

Policy CP6(b) states that permission will be granted for schemes that 'Improve the existing infrastructure network, including road, rail and public transport, enhance facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, including provision for those with reduced mobility, and other users'. Paragraph 104 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users.

Public Right of Way EARL6 runs underneath the URS building and travels from Blandford lodge to South Lodge on Whiteknights Road.

The proposal involves steam cleaning the paving along with re-grouting. The surfaces will be treated with a clear coating to help improve anti-slip, but that does not alter the colour of the original tile. To improve grip and step visibility, it is proposed to remove the existing paving along the stair nosing and replacing with an 'Anthracite Black Quarry' step tread. The existing tiles removed from the step nosings will be used to repair and replace broken/damaged paving tiles in other areas of the undercroft and the pond perimeter wall.

The Public Rights of Way Officer raises no objection to the proposal and upgrades to the surfacing of the PRow. They also advised that a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) would not be required – at present the part of the PRow under the URS is not passable as it is fenced off as Phase 1 works are being carried out at the building. Should it transpire that the Council consider a TTRO is required then this will be a separate matter between the WBC PRow team and the applicant.

Sustainability

Policy CC04 of the MDD states that "all new non-residential proposals of more than 100 sqm gross non-residential floorspace shall at least:

a) Achieve the necessary mandatory Building Research Establishment Assessment Method (BREEAM) requirements or any future national equivalent

The Borough's Sustainable Design and Construction SPD outlines on-residential development should seek to be built to best practice standards which at the current time are the BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) 'very good' or 'excellent' standards. However, the SPD states that this is an aspirational (non-mandatory) target. The applicant, in their Design and Access Statement, states that meeting a BREEAM 'Very Good' standard is their target and contributes towards the University's overall sustainability targets.

However, given the majority of the proposal is for a retrofit of the building rather than new development, it is considered onerous to require the applicant to meet this BREEAM standard by condition. Furthermore, given the building is Listed, it may require more extensive works to the building to strictly meet this target, which could further erode original fabric. Furthermore, a driving factor behind the whole proposal is to create a more thermally efficient and sustainable building. As such, the proposal will inevitably have higher sustainability credentials compared to the current situation which is a benefit.

Summary

In summary, the principle of refurbishment of the URS building is supported and will see a heritage asset brought back into use. As referred to earlier within this report, policy TB14 is of importance for assessing this application as that policy refers specifically to Whiteknights Campus. Turning back to the criteria of TB14, with Officer comments in bold, following review of material considerations:

- a) They respect the historic landscape, open areas and listed buildings and their settings and the character of the area; ***The benefits of bringing the building into its optimum are noted. A level of less than substantial harm to the Listed Building has been identified but this harm outweighed by the public benefits and bringing the building back to its optimum and viable use.***
- b) Areas of wildlife significance (including Local Wildlife Sites) and current or potential green infrastructure networks will be retained and enhanced; ***The proposals are unlikely to affect areas of wildlife significance and green infrastructure networks.***
- c) The safety of those using the campus (including highway safety issues and designing out crime) will be maintained and enhanced; ***The proposal does not raise safety concerns or impact on the highway.***
- d) There are no significant detrimental impacts on neighbouring residential properties from the development, including from noise or parking; ***This is not anticipated given the nature of the proposal and the location of the URS building within the campus, away from neighbouring residential properties and***
- e) The loss of undeveloped areas on the site will be weighed against the benefits of development to the wider community; ***phase 3 will see the loss of small portions of undeveloped areas however these would not be extensive. Furthermore the benefits of the scheme for the wider community would outweigh this.***

Overall, the proposal complies with TB14 of the MDD and the public benefits of the scheme, are, on balance, considered to outweigh the harm identified to the heritage asset.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approve subject to the following conditions: 1. Time Limit 2. Approved Plans 3. Details of windows/ external glazing/ doors 4. Details of roof lights 5. Details of roof cowls 6. Replacement aluminium sheeting 7. Roof lanterns 8. Matching external finishes 9. Concrete repairs 10. Materials for external stair cores 11. New openings to external walling 12. Louvre details 13. Roof guttering 14. Brick slip pavers 15. Accordance with ecological recommendations 16. Biodiversity enhancements 17. Bird nesting season 18. Soft landscaping 19. Protection of trees
Date:	12 March 2025
Earliest date for decision:	23 January 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	12/03/25