

DELEGATED PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Battle

App Ref: 231051/FUL

Address: 308 Oxford Road, Reading, RG30 1AD

Proposals: Extending the coffee shop use to forecourt for outdoor seating and erection of a canopy

Case Officer: Nathalie Weekes

Date received (valid from): 21 September 2023

Target Decision date: 16 November 2023

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The development site relates to a restaurant on the ground floor of a two-storey terraced building on the Oxford Road. The unit is occupied by 'Freshop Reading', formerly a Mind charity shop and has glass shopfront windows and fascia signage without advertising consent. The site is located within the Oxford Road West local centre, is on a key frontage in district and local centres policy RL3, situated on a classified road and in an AQMA. The layout of shops within the vicinity are set back along the shop frontages. It is situated 358m outside the Reading High Streets Heritage Action Zone.

The adjacent shop at 306 Oxford road has a retractable canopy.

308 Oxford Road Proposals map



Site visit date: 15 November 2023

Site visit photo:



Photo on Google Maps November 2022



2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Extending the coffee shop use to forecourt for outdoor seating and erection of a canopy

The application seeks permission for an extension of the coffee shop to forecourt use for outdoor seating and erection of a canopy comprising a non retractable front extension and front fascia. The proposed plans submitted are for is for a shopfront extension approximately 3.7m in width, 3.9m in depth and 2.8m to the lowest front eaves with a fascia extending the width of the premises. A new front fascia is illustrated. No postal address is marked on the fascia.

The plans submitted show a flat roof extension however a site visit confirmed that unauthorised works have been completed at the site before a decision has been issued, comprising a hipped roof at the shop frontage and an enclosed side panel, with interior lighting.

3. CONSULTEES

Neighbours

A site notice was emailed to the agent to be displayed at the site. Letters were sent to 306, 310-312, 308 and 312 Oxford Road. No comments have been received in relation to the application.

Correspondence with agent

The agent was asked to amend plans to comply with the Local Plan or to withdraw. No response was provided.

RBC Transport

No objections were raised by the officer. There are no Transport objections to this application as the proposed seating is within land in the ownership of the applicant and is not part of the public highway; however the proposed canopy should not over sail any part of the public highway, unless the applicant applies for an over sail license; the canopy should be a minimum of 2.4m high.

Seating or proposed planters must not encroach/overhang onto any part of the public highway.

CCTV & Community Safety

No response was received at the time of writing the recommendation.

RBC Environmental health

There is a concern for noise arising from the development to impact the amenity of residents above. Additional information such as the proposed hours of use of the outside space would be required in addition to a condition preventing the use of speakers for relaying of music or speech in the outdoor space.

Licensing

No objections were raised

Communications with the agent

The agent was informed by email that the structure does not comply with Reading policy and was given the opportunity to amend the application or it would be refused. No response has been received and the application is therefore recommended for refusal.

4. PLANS/DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED

The agent supplied the following:

23051-7 Site Plan

~~23051-3 Proposed floor plan~~

~~230102-2 Elevation Plan~~

~~Planning statement 19 July 2023~~

Location Plan

Block plan

23051-5 Existing floor plan

230102-2 Existing Elevation

CIL

Received on 26 July 2023

23051-3 Proposed floor plan

230102-2 Elevation Plan

Planning statement 19 September 2023

Received 21 September 2023

5. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Alteration to shop front to create new flat above. Closed 08/06/2023

6. EQUALITY ACT 2010

In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

7. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019):

CC1: Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development

CC7: Design and the Public Realm

CC8: Safeguarding amenity

OU4 Advertisements

OU5: Shopfronts and Cash Machines

RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

SPD

Design Guide to Shopfronts Supplementary Planning Document (Jan 2022)

Other

Street naming and property numbering protocol

8. APPRAISAL

8.1 Principle of development

The application seeks permission for a front extension across the frontage of the shop. Such works are in contravention to policies of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the Design Guide to Shopfronts Supplementary Planning Document (Jan 2022). The resultant harm of the enclosed canopy structure by virtue of its frontal projection, width, length and height of the retrospective development produces a prominent structure which fails to maintain or enhance the character of the area and appearance of the Oxford Road and does not overcome or outweigh the principle of development. The proposal is unacceptable in principle as the development is considered to significantly alter the ‘key’ frontage along the Oxford Road, contrary to policy RL3, whilst the Shopfront states that retractable or demountable canvas canopies are the preferred option. The fixed structure fails to retain the open character of the frontage and results in a closed space.

8.2 Design and Character

Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) requires development to be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area in Reading in which it is located. Policy OU5 provides further clarity to high design quality as it relates to shopfronts and cash machines; specifically that they must respect the character of the building and surroundings in terms of design, materials, lighting and location.

Policy OU5 Shopfronts and cash machines and Design Guide to Shopfronts Supplementary Planning Document (Jan 2022) state that shopfronts should remain “active”, by providing visibility into the space, rather than presenting a blank wall during both the day and night.

The Design Guide to Shopfronts Supplementary Planning Document (Jan 2022) states 4.30, “Shopfronts may wish to make use of forecourts for displaying goods or providing additional space for dining. In many cases, it is considered that this can add vibrancy to the street scene and offer outdoor covered space during inclement weather. However, such extensions, if not carefully designed, may harm the amenity of the area, detract from the shopfront itself or obstruct footpaths.” Furthermore 4.31 states, “Many premises, particularly traditional shopfronts, employ retractable or demountable canvas canopies. This is the preferred option. Shopfronts seeking to create covered forecourt space should reinstate or provide high-quality retractable canopies according to the guidelines in this SPD” and 4.33 “Opaque or solid security shutters should be avoided.”

The fascia proposed would require advertising consent and should clearly incorporate the house number according to the Council’s Street Naming and Property Numbering Protocol.

The active frontages in the row of shops are obscured by the front canopy extension, which has already been constructed. It has a solid side, creating an obstruction that is detrimental to the character of the shopping parade. The extension would project into the street,

presenting as an intrusion into the street scene. It is highly visible from the surrounding area, and would not be in keeping with the character and appearance of the area. The retrospective proposal reduces the active nature of the shop frontage, blocking views into the shop, and along the street.

The appearance and scale of the retrospective front extension is out of keeping with the surrounding shops along the Oxford Road. Its poor design and the alteration to the building line results in material harm to the immediate character or appearance of the shop and the wider terrace of properties in which it is located. The works obscure the shop frontage features such as corbels and pilasters and other detailing. The loss of these important shopfront details is harmful to the character and appearance of the host building and wider area. As such, the proposal is considered contrary to Policies CC7 and OU5 of the Local plan 2019.

8.3 Transport

The position of the front extension does not cause a physical obstruction to or distraction of members of the public using the highway. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in terms of Policy TR3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

8.4 Other issues

Advertisement consent is required.

It is not clear whether any other external development works have been required to transfer the shop into a restaurant such as a flue or vent which are likely to require additional planning permission.

9. CONCLUSION

In light of the above assessment the proposal is not considered to accord with the requirements of the development plan or Design Guide to Shopfronts Supplementary Planning Document (Jan 2022) and is therefore recommended for refusal.

10. RECOMMENDATION

Refuse

Reasons:

1) The proposal, by virtue of its excessive forward projection, substantial width and height, together with its poor design, results in an overly prominent and visually dominant development which fails to respect the existing streetscene. The structure would be detrimental to the activity of the street frontage and would have a harmful impact on the character of the street scene. The fascia are overlarge and extend across shop units, obscuring corbels and pilasters and other detailing, harmful to the character and appearance of the host building.

As a consequence the development is visually harmful and fails to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area within which it is located, contrary to Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) and Policy OU5 (Shopfronts and Cash Machines) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and guidance contained within the Design Guide for Shopfronts (2022).

2) A development has already been built at the site. The proposal fails to provide accurate plans or drawings. The plans illustrate a flat roof and do not accurately demonstrate the current shape of hipped roof above the enclosure or external LED lighting around and within the structure. As such the proposal would be contrary to policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Informatives

Refused plans

1) For the avoidance of doubt, this application has been considered on the basis of the following plans:

23051-7 Site Plan

Location Plan

Block plan

Received on 26 July 2023

23051-3 Proposed floor plan

230102-2 Elevation Plan

Planning statement 19 September 2023

Received 21 September 2023

Pre-app advice

Advert consent is needed

Positive and Proactive