

PLANNING STATEMENT

Change of Use -within Class E
(Day Care Centre to GP Surgery)

2 - 4 Alexandra Road
Reading
RG1 5PE

1. Introduction

This Planning Statement accompanies the planning application for the change of use of 2-4 Alexandra Road Reading. The application seeks the change of use of the existing buildings from day care for Adults with learning difficulties and 1x4 bed flat for respite accommodation to a GP surgery.

The current GP surgery at Eldon Road needs rehousing due to lack of car parking spaces and absence of a lift for accessibility. The application site has been lying vacant since 2019. **A marketing evidence has been provided by the Estate Agent to indicate this.** (Please see attached).

The vacant premises have a good potential to be used as a GP surgery, subject to approval by the Council.

A pre-app submitted earlier this year (Ref 230084) gave a favourable response as follows:

The proposal would likely be acceptable in principle if it can be demonstrated that the existing use is no longer required. Further information would be required with regards the nature and intensity of the use, parking, layout, waste and recycling storage and air quality. Providing that the full application addresses these issues, the proposal should be considered acceptable.

The following details out an assessment of the proposal with relation to current planning policies.

2. The application Site and Surrounding Areas

- 2.1 The site is 2-4 Alexandra Road in Reading located on Alexandra Road near the junction of London Road. The properties are two semi-detached buildings connected internally by a 1M wide opening located midway along the party wall. The buildings were built in the 1980s. The properties have been let or owned by several companies in the past.

The properties were used as Day Care Centre for adults with learning difficulties and autism and a respite home including office for staff. The properties have been vacant since 2019. The site adjoins Alexandra Road Conservation Area, but is not part of it and the area is predominantly residential. Some of the houses on Alexandra Road are converted HMOs including flats (nos 6, 8, 16, 34, 53, 55 etc.) Others are family homes. There are also other buildings within the area that have been converted to professional use such as **dentistry** and there are also others that have been converted to nurses' quarters and a Nursery. Adjacent to the site is 74 London Road a **dental and implant clinic** and to the south and south east is predominantly residential area.

The site and the surrounding area are well connected to public transport. There are very good bus services along King's Road to the north and Erleigh Road to the south of Alexandra Road all within five minutes walking distance. The bus routes have direct link to Reading Station and are frequent.

The site has a good access to facilities such as convenience shops, local surgery, schools, café, churches and a pharmacy. The facilities are within walking distance from the site on the south east of Erleigh Road. To the northwest along Erleigh Road are Reading University and a library and an Orthodontics on Craven Road

There are car parking spaces on Alexandra Road most of which are managed by the NCP.

3. Relevant Planning History

- 3.1 Number 2 Alexandra Road was granted planning permission for a change of use from B1(A) office to D1 day care for adults with learning difficulties and autism (ref. 090081/FUL) .
- 3.2 Number 4 Alexandra Road was granted planning permission for a change of use of the ground, first and second floors from office to 1 x 4 bed flat for use as respite accommodation (ref. 110664/FUL)
- 3.3 The properties have been in Lawful use as day care centre and respite accommodation run and managed by the same owner since 2009 as confirmed by these two planning permissions. When the property was purchased in 2009 by the current Owner there was already an existing access between the two properties via a door size opening halfway the party wall shared by the two buildings. This opening was used by the owner and staff as access between the two buildings to facilitate the day to day management of the buildings.

4. The Proposal

4.1 The proposal is for the change of use of the existing day care for adults with learning difficulties and autism and change of use of the existing 1 x 4 bed flats respite accommodation to a GP surgery.

4.2 The scheme involves internal alterations, reception and waiting area and consulting rooms on the ground floor. Further ancillary rooms like storage, minor surgery, sluice room, conference room and admin staff rooms on the first and second floors, with installation of a lift and demolition of a staircase. The elevations remain largely unchanged apart from providing a disabled access door to the amenity space at the rear. The proposal also includes bicycle stands parking and associated car parking at the front and to the rear of the property.

The proposed parking facilities are in accordance with the Reading Revised Parking Standards and Design (SPD October 2011) Electric vehicle floor and wall mounted charging points are included in the proposed parking spaces.

It is anticipated that around 15 numbers staff would be employed. The hours of operation would be from 8am to 5:30pm from Monday to Friday.

Out of the 15 staff members there are 4 doctors, 1 pharmacist, 2 GP assistant, 1 nurse, 1 Practice Manager, 2 receptionists, 3 admin staff and 1 PCN staff.

The additional car parking area can be formed using Core Grass HD or similar system. This is a porous grass paving system that allows rainwater to percolate through the permeable surface of the paving and back into the ground.

The system provides a long term green paving alternative that can reduce CO2 emission.

Waste and Recycling Bins are located adjacent to the existing boundary wall to allow for easy access during use and collections. Please see Dwg No, AR-06 -Proposed Site Plan.

Air Quality will not deteriorate due to the change of use. The proposed GP surgery does not carry out any services which would have an impact on the air quality. A specialist report has been submitted along with this application.

5. Relevant National and Local Plan Policy Context

5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published March 2012 updated July 2021 sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The document states that the purposes of the planning system are to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The Government also published several guidance notes to supplement the policies of the NPPF and the notes expand upon matters set out on the Framework and explained, for instance, the importance of high quality design, how land availability assessment should be undertaken, how noise can impact on development, the importance of the natural environment and sustainability

5.2 In order to achieve these objectives the NPPF requires,

- Planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise (paragraph 11)
- Local Planning Authorities to approve development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay (paragraph 14)
- Local Planning Authorities to approach decision-taking in a positive way to encourage the delivery of sustainable development (paragraph 186)
- Local Planning Authorities to look for solutions rather than problems, with decision-takers at every level seeking to approve applications for sustainable development where possible and that Local Planning Authority should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve economic, social and environmental conditions of the area (paragraph 187)

5.3 The Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

5.4 The relevant policies of the Local plan that affect the proposed change of use are:

- Policy OU1 – New and existing community facilities

"Proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site. Proposals for on-site intensification of important facilities, such as schools and healthcare uses, will be supported"

Given that the property has been lying vacant since 2019, there doesn't seem to be a demand for a adult day care centre and its related respite accommodation. The population density in Reading is increasing and requires healthcare infrastructure. A GP Surgery in this location would be more useful than a vacant property.

- Policy CC7- Design And The Public Realm

“All development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located” The proposed Scheme has been fully described in section 4 above and it has been well demonstrated that the various components of development form set out in Policy CC7 have been met.

Policy CC8 – Safeguarding Amenity

The properties are existing buildings with established use almost similar to the proposed. The proposed scheme has several aspects designed into it that have enhanced the buildings and the site. The elevations remain largely unchanged externally. Adequate parking facility for cars, motorcycle/moped have been provided and also bicycle stands for staff and visitors

- Policy EN3 – Enhancement of Conservation Areas

“The special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and enhanced”

The site and buildings are immediately adjacent to the Alexandra Road Conservation Area but not within it. However, the staff car parking at the rear is within the Conservation Area and is adjacent to the existing dilapidated boundary wall between the car park and the proposed amenity. The wall and the shed will be moved and rebuilt to allow for additional car parking spaces at no. 2-4 Alexandra Road..

6. Planning Appraisal

6.1 Alexandra Road is located in zone 2. Primary Core Area. This zone directly surrounds the Central Core and it is about a distance of 2 kilometers from the center of Reading.

The zone and the surrounding area are well served by public transport. There are very good bus services along King’s Road to the north and Erleigh Road to the south of Alexandra Road all within five minutes walking distance. The buses are regular and have direct link to Reading Station.

6.2 The proposal is largely one of change of use with negligible external changes to the existing buildings. The changes will not have negative impact on the host buildings or the adjacent buildings. The buildings are not within the Alexandra Road Conservation Area but are adjacent to it and the changes will not have any significant impact on the Conservation Area

6.3 In terms of scale and impact on the properties in the Alexandra Road Conservation Area, the change of use will have no significant impact. A

large proportion of the proposed development is internal. It will provide an active use to an otherwise vacant building.

- 6.4 The site is within a sustainable location in terms of transport as the area is well served by public transport.

The applicant is also aware of the Council's concern regarding parking on Alexandra Road and adequate parking and bicycle stands have been proposed to avoid any impact on Alexandra Road Residential Permit Parking Scheme. The proposal will not generate additional pressure for parking in the area. The proposal, with the level of the car parking and bicycle stands provided will encourage visitors and staff to use public transport or bicycles to the site and to work.

The client is also aware of the Council's parking permit provision for Health Care professionals and the applicant may apply for these permits in accordance with their eligibility criteria.

There are 4GPs and 4 Consulting Rooms. As per the SPD this would require 10 car park spaces. There are 16 car park spaces shown on the Proposed Site Plan and 16 cycle spaces (14 at the front and 2 at the rear).

4 members of the current staff walk to work and few more car- pool. They will continue to use existing staff car park spaces at Melrose Surgery which is a 5 minutes walking distance. Also, there are 2 -hour parking bays on the road for use of patients. The hours of operation are until 5:30 pm when current parking restrictions for non- residents start.

7. Conclusion

The Planning Statement has established the merits and acceptability of the proposed change of use.

The site is in a sustainable location that is well served by public transport and within a short walking distance to local shops, professional services and amenities.

Whilst the site is in close proximity to the Alexandra Conservation Area, the proposed change of use will not have any harmful impact on the Conservation Area.

The site and the proposed scheme will provide accommodation for an important healthcare requirement of a GP surgery, due to the increase in population. As the site has been lying vacant since 2019, it would be put to active use as a GP surgery.

Post Covid, more and more office and commercial buildings are being converted to flats/housing, so there should not be any reduction in the housing stock in the Borough, if 4 -1bed flats are used as part of a GP surgery. The Day care Centre and GP surgery fall under the same class use and this change of use could have been implemented within PD rights.

The functioning of the GP surgery would not cause any disturbance to the adjoining properties nor would it cause stress on the parking levels on the street. There is no external changes to the elevations. There are already healthcare related professional uses on the street like the Dentist and Implant Centre and the Nurses quarters.

Thus, the Council is requested to support this application.