

DELEGATED PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

Ward:

App Ref: 230286/FUL

Address: Rowdell Drive, Reading

Proposals: Change of use of south west meeting room (E(g)(i) to C3 residential 1 bedroom dwelling (amended description).

Case Officer: Marcie Rejwerska

Date received (valid from): 21 April 2023 **Target Decision date:** 16 June 2023

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site comprises a modest single storey property currently in use as a meeting room under Class E (g) (i). The property has a pitched roof. The surrounding area is residential with semi-detached properties and short terrace rows in similar character. The property is not listed nor in a conservation area. The property backs onto the Cowsey which is a Local Wildlife Site, protected under local planning policy.



Co-Op Meeting Room, as seen from Rowdell Drive. Image taken from Google Maps on 21 Sep. 23.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Planning permission is sought for the change of use from a meeting room to a residential (C3) use. This includes internal alterations to create bathroom and kitchen facilities, proposed new rooflights to increase the level of natural daylight in the proposed living space, and the addition of double French doors. The proposal includes cycle storage at the east side of the property and bin storage at the front of the property. A timber fence is proposed around the green area to the west of the property to create a private side garden.

Plans considered:

- Planning Statement, Delva Patman Redler, dated 20 April 2023, received 21 April 2023
- Sunlight and Daylight Assessment, Delva Patman Redler, dates 6 March 2023, 21 April 2023
- 22079 Block Plan, dated October 2022, received 7 March 2023
- 22079-T Existing Ground Floor, dated May 2022, received 7 March 2023
- 22079-S,E Existing Elevations and Sections, dated May 2022, received 7 March 2023
- 22079-101 Proposed Ground Floor, dated October 2022, received 7 March 2023
- 22079-102 Proposed Elevations, dated October 2022, received 7 March 2023

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

221788 - Change of use from Class E (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 1 dwelling. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015. - Application withdrawn as proposal did not meet the restrictions under permitted development (external alterations)

4. CONSULTATIONS

Non-statutory:

RBC Environmental Protection - No comments.

RBC Transport Development - Off road parking proposed not supported. 1 off road parking space required.

Public:

The following addresses were consulted by letter.

24 Rowdell Drive, Reading, RG2 8DW

23 Rowdell Drive, Reading, RG2 8DW

No letters of representation received.

5. 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 Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

CC3: ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

CC5: WASTE MINIMISATION AND STORAGE

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

EN12: BIODIVERSITY AND THE GREEN NETWORK

H1: PROVISION OF HOUSING

H2: DENSITY AND MIX

H3: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

H5: STANDARDS FOR NEW HOUSING

H10: PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL OUTDOOR SPACE

OU1: NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY USES

TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS

TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

SPD

Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

Affordable Housing (2021)

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.

APPRAISAL

Principle and housing mix

Policy OU1 states *“Proposals involving the redevelopment of existing community facilities for non-community uses will not be permitted, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there is no longer a need to retain that facility.”*

The submitted planning statement identified that the need for the meeting room locally has decreased since the Covid pandemic and therefore the need to provide housing outweighs the need to provide the community use. No further detailed evidence has been presented to justify the loss of a community facility nor to clearly demonstrate that the facility is no longer required for community use. Therefore, it has not been adequately demonstrated that the loss of the community facility for a residential use would accord with Policy OU1

Policy H5 outlines the standards for new residential development. The proposed total floor area of the dwelling would be 41.19m², including a double bedroom measuring 13.95m². This satisfies the minimum space standards as described nationally for a 1-bed, single occupier dwelling.

Policy H2, paragraph 4.4.10 places a particular onus on those sites outside centres to help to meet the needs for family homes. The surrounding area is characterised by family sized

homes and the proposal for a 1-bedroom dwelling has not been reasonably justified to meet a specific housing need in terms of local housing mix. The dwelling would respond poorly to the local context and is therefore not considered acceptable and contrary to Policy H2.

Design and character

Policy CC7 states *“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.”*

Minimal external changes are proposed, including double French doors at the side of the property, an obscure glazed window to the east elevation, and rear rooflights. This is considered acceptable and poses minimal risk to the wider character of the street.

A timber fence to enclose the private garden space has been proposed on the submitted drawings, but has not been drawn on the proposed elevations, and as such it is not possible to tell what kind of impact this would have on the character of the street. A timber fence however would likely not be considered acceptable. Rowdell Drive is characterised by front gardens with little to no property boundaries, and as such a timber fence would appear imposing and out of character, contrary to Policy CC7.

Impact on amenity

Policy CC8 states *“Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of:*

- *Privacy and overlooking;*
- *Access to sunlight and daylight;*
- *Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;*
- *Harm to outlook;*
- *Noise and disturbance.”*

As there are minimal external alterations proposed, there is minimal impact on amenity for the neighbouring properties. Similarly, there are no amenity concerns associated with the change of use.

Additionally, Policy H10 states *“Dwellings will be provided with functional private or communal open space, including green space wherever possible, that allows for suitable sitting-out areas, children’s play areas, home food production, green waste composting, refuse storage, general outdoor storage and drying space. Houses will be provided with private outdoor space whereas flats may be provided with communal outdoor space, balconies and/or roof gardens.*

The design of outdoor areas will respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity, clearly identify whether they are private or communal spaces, ensure that they are appropriately related to main entrances, enhance safety and the perception of safety for future residents and the general public, and not be compromised by the relationship of other buildings which may be detrimental in terms of overlooking, overbearing or overshadowing.”

For future occupiers of the property, the proposed garden would not sufficiently provide a private outdoor space as it would be directly overlooked by the front elevation windows of the neighbouring no. 24 Rowdell Drive. There does not appear to be enough space to provide a private outdoor space at the rear of the plot, as such it does not appear this plot could reasonably accommodate a private garden. This is contrary to Policies H10 and CC8.

Parking provision

Policy TR5 states “development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport.”

The site is located within Zone 3, Secondary Core Area, of the Council’s adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD. Typically, these areas are within 400m of a Reading Buses high frequency ‘Premier Route’, which provides high quality bus routes to and from Reading town centre and other local centre facilities.

In accordance with the Councils current standards the 1 bedroom unit would require 1 parking space. The existing office would have required 1 space per 50m².

The proposal includes 1 on-road parking space directly outside the front entrance to the property. However, there are double yellow lines along this stretch of the road and it is not considered that this would be possible. Additionally, in this area of Reading, as per the Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011), 1 off road parking space would be required. It is not considered that the plot could accommodate this, especially if it is proposed to make use of the green area west of the property as a private garden. Rowdell Drive has parking restrictions and it is evident that on street parking here is competitive; a proposal which increases pressure of on street parking is not considered acceptable.

Affordable housing

Policy H3 states *“on sites of 1 - 4 dwellings, a financial contribution will be made that will enable the equivalent of 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough.”*

The proposal, should it have been found to be acceptable, would be liable for an off-site affordable housing contribution. As the proposal is not considered acceptable, the case officer has not sought this.

Conclusion

The proposal has been assessed in line with policies as outlined above. The proposal poses a significant risk of harm to the character and parking on Rowdell Drive. The constraints of the plot make it unlikely that any amendments to the proposal could resolve the issues as discussed. As such, the proposal as a whole is not considered acceptable.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE PERMISSION

Reasons for refusal:

1. The proposal would involve the loss of an existing community facility, but no detailed evidence has been presented to justify the loss of the community use. Therefore, it has not been adequately demonstrated that the loss of the community use for a residential use would accord with Policy OU1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019
2. The proposed 1 bed dwelling would fail to provide a suitable sized family dwelling within an area outside of central Reading, where there is a particular onus on meeting the needs for family homes and would, therefore, be contrary to Policy H2 and supporting text in paragraphs 4.4.9 and 4.4.10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
3. Insufficient information has been provided to demonstrate that the proposed timber boundary fence would be acceptable in terms of design. This is contrary to Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

4. The garden space proposed would be significantly smaller in comparison to other properties on Rowdell Drive and would not provide adequate privacy for future occupiers due to overlooking from existing neighbouring properties. This is contrary to Policies CC8 and H10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
5. The proposal fails to demonstrate a policy compliant level of parking provision, which could put pressure on the highway network, contrary to policy TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
6. No affordable housing contribution (could be overcome at appeal)

Informatives:

- Pre-application advice
- Positive and Proactive - Refusal