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DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

in respect of constructing a new maisonette above a new shop at

Rear of 92 Whitley Street, Reading, Berkshire RG2 0EQ

1. ENVIRONS

The site is located in south Reading on Whitley Street, a continuation of Basingstoke Road and one of the main routes from the town centre southwards towards Acre Road and other industrial estates, to the Madejski Stadium and to Hampshire beyond. Christchurch Road links it to Reading University and the health centre in Northcourt Road.

The site lies behind commercial premises at Nos.90 and 92 Whitley Street and at the end of a terrace of two-storey residential dwellings on the south side of Essex Street. Whitley Street itself comprises a bustling commercial centre supported by Essex Street and the many similarly residential streets surrounding it. There are also schools, places of worship, educational and health establishments close by, many within walking distance, including sports facilities at Cintra Park.

2. THE SITE

The rear of No.92 currently contains a two-storey building, its ground floor having been previously used as a plant room to the existing laundrette at the front of No.92 but now redundant as such, and its first floor currently being used as a residential flat. This building directly abuts and is set forward of the end-of-terrace house at No.1 Essex Street and, along with the other houses in the terrace, is generally of traditional construction with loadbearing brickwork surmounted by a pitched slated roof. This two-storey building at the rear of 92 Whitley Street is conjoined to the single-storey neighbouring commercial premises at No.90.

Along the western boundary of the site is a nom.2.0m wide right of way enabling the occupiers of No.94 Whitley Street access to Essex Road. The ground floor of No.90, which is under separate ownership, projects nom.1.0m beneath the upper storey of the building on site, in effect making the latter partly a 'flying freehold'

The entrance to the two-storey building on site is located at the back of the pavement in Essex Street, and there is a small open area between the single-storey front laundrette and two-storey rear residential part of No.92. The ground floor of the latter has a low ceiling which renders it impractical for most uses other than as a plant room but, as it is no longer needed as such, it has become redundant.

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3. PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

3.1. Pre-Application Submission

In 2020 formal pre- application advice was obtained from the local planning authority, ref: 200698/PREAPP, for the construction of a 2 bedroom maisonette above a single-storey studio flat. It concluded that the principle of development was accepted, but raised concerns about overdevelopment and the impact of that design upon the character of the surrounding area. It was suggested that a scheme proposing a two-storey dwelling may have some potential, but went on to recommend that the one-and-a-half storey height to match the existing building *'unless a more appropriate design approach is adopted which does not cause any significant harm to the adjoining terrace.'* It went on to recommend that a full planning application should be *'limited to a single dwelling ...'* and that *'The number of bedrooms proposed should comply (as a minimum) with the Nationally Described Space Standards.'*

The site is considered too small to provide on-site car parking but, as described above, it is well served by public transport routes and is within walking or cycling distance of a number of commercial, educational, religious and health facilities.

3.2. Full Planning Application 1

Therefore an application was submitted to demolish and replace the existing one-and-a-half storey building with a new dwellinghouse to provide an improved standard of residential use.

This application (LPA ref:210707) was refused on the grounds that:-

1. The proposals would overly dominate and be discordant with the character of Essex Street and its surrounding area, and would provide insufficient private amenity space; and
2. The proposed windows would result in overlooking and loss of privacy to future occupiers and to those in the existing first floor flat at No.94 Whitley Street.
3. Due to the above reasons the applicants were not invited to enter into a legal agreement for them to pay contributions towards affordable housing.

3.3. Full Planning Application 2

These reasons were addressed in revised proposals for the ground floor to become a commercial unit below a two-storey two-bedroom four person maisonette. It was proposed to leave a 2.0m gap from the end-of-terrace No.1 Essex Street to recognise the existing right-of-way to No.94 Whitley Street, but which would also give access to the residential maisonette and storage for bicycles and bins. The side gap provided a modicum of amenity space for the new development.

This application (LPA ref:220016) was refused on the summarised grounds that:-

1. Due to the 3-storey scale the proposals and its forward siting it would overly dominate and be discordant with the character of Essex Street and its surrounding area, and would provide insufficient private amenity space;

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2. Daylight to the maisonette was not demonstrated as to acceptable standards;
3. The close proximity of the proposed three storey building would dominate and overbear the upper floor to No.94 Whitley Street.
4. Due to the above reasons the applicants were not invited to enter into a legal agreement for them to pay contributions towards affordable housing.

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4. CURRENT PROPOSALS

These reasons were addressed in the current proposals by:-

1. Reducing the height to that of a two-storey building slightly lower than the neighbouring No.1 Essex Street;
2. All windows to habitable rooms would receive daylight only from Essex Street and are located above the height of the existing rear building to No.84 Whitley Street. This relationship is now shown on the submitted drawing.
3. The height of the proposed building now closely matches that of the upper storey to No.94 Whitley Street and therefore no longer dominates it.
4. The applicants agree to enter into a legal agreement for them to pay contributions towards affordable housing.

The ground floor would again be a commercial unit, but now below a single-storey one-bedroom two person first floor flat. It is again proposed to leave a nom.2.0m gap from the end-of-terrace No.1 Essex Street to recognise the existing right-of-way to No.94 Whitley Street, but which would also give access to the residential flat and a modicum of amenity space with storage for bicycles and bins.

The requirements of the Technical Standards have again been satisfied, with a gross floor area of 50m², the minimum for a 1B2P unit on one storey, and the bedroom would have an area of nom.12m², exceeding the min.11.5m², with a width exceeding the required min.2.75m.

5. ACCESS

5.1 Specific Access Issues

The proposed development is situated on a broadly level site that is unlikely to provide unusual difficulties for those with mobility problems.

The pre-application advice specifically required clarification as to how the retail units at No.90 and 92 Whitley Street are currently serviced. However, neither No.90 or No.92 have significant servicing requirements likely to affect transport matters, No.90 being a hairdressing salon with no existing rear access anyway, and No.92 being a launderette which has no over-riding need for the existing rear access that would be removed by the proposals.

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5.2 Access from Existing Transport Network

The site is very close to public transport links to commercial facilities in Reading town centre and all destinations in all directions, and to southerly destinations along Basingstoke Road and Shinfield Road. It is within walking and cycling distance of local commercial, religious, health, educational and social establishments.

5.3 Access Points and Layout

The new flat would only be accessed from Essex Street using the gap between its adjoining neighbour at No.1 Essex Street.

5.4 Maintenance of Access

The access point would be paved with robust materials requiring minimal maintenance.

6. DESIGN

The aims of the design are:-

6.1 To provide good quality self-contained residential accommodation in accordance with the Council's policies and the nationally adopted Technical Standards that seek to maintain standards while restricting impact upon public resources;

6.2 To provide good quality accommodation that is affordable for key workers in the borough in accordance with its Core Plan.

6.3 To maintain the prevailing relative residential density in the immediately surrounding area;

6.4 To respond to government policy seeking to better utilise underused urban sites by introducing commercial use in a viable position and upgrading existing residential provision;

6.5 To bring an existing site into improved economic use without undue detriment to its surroundings, thereby maintaining the quality of the surrounding area in a sustainable way and in the long-term public interest.

March 2023