

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No: 211008/FUL

Address: Attenborough House, 15 Bennet Road, Reading

Proposal: Change of use from use class E (offices) to use class F1 (place of worship)

Extended Target Date: 23/02/22

Case Officer: Connie Davis

Site Description and Surrounding Area:

The application site is a detached two-storey flat roofed office building. The building has a floor area of 808 sqm, consisting of 421 sqm on the ground floor and 387 sqm on the first floor. There are storage areas with a loading door on the ground floor and the first floor is mostly open plan with partitioned offices.

The building is functional in appearance, with floor to ceiling glazed panels on the front elevation. It is located in an industrial estate on the southern side of the town of Reading and it is surrounded by other functional, commercial buildings of similar appearance and dimensions.

The building is currently in use by a charity and is used for furniture sale and storage. However, this is only a temporary use and no official change of use from offices (class E) has been sought or granted.

The rear half of the building is divided up into 4 small industrial units, which are access via a driveway at the side of the building and a car parking area at the rear of the site.

The site is not Listed, nor in a Conservation Area. However it is located within a Core Employment Area (EM2d: Bennet Road).

Proposal:

Planning Permission is sought for the proposed change of use of the site from offices (use class E) to a place of worship (use class F1). Along with Church services, ancillary activities would be provided. A schedule of activities is as follows:

	Activity		Staff	Visitors/clients
Monday	Youth Empowerment 6pm to 8pm	Ancillary Creche	2 staff 1 minister	10-15 attendees
Tuesday	Debt Management Sessions 6pm to 9pm		2 staff	3 attendees
	Immigration Support 6pm to 9pm		2 staff 1 minister	5-8 attendees
Wednesday	Counselling sessions 6pm to 8pm		1 social worker	2 attendees
	Midweek service 7pm to 8.30pm		1 minister	18 attendees
Thursday	Zumba 3pm to 6pm		1 teacher 1 minister	Maximum of 10 attendees per session (approx. 30 over 3 hours)
Friday	Midweek service 7pm to 8.30pm		1 minister	12 attendees
Saturday	Meetings		1 minister	3-5 attendees
	Zumba 4pm to 6pm		1 teacher	Maximum of 10 attendees per session (approx. 20 over 2 hours)
Sunday	English service 10am to 12.30pm		1 minister	45 attendees
	Vernacular service 2pm to 5pm		1 minister	86 attendees

No external changes to the building are proposed.

Plans/ Documents considered:

P20-3141_02A - Block Plan

Received 16th February 2022

Application Form

CIL Form

P20-3141_04 - Existing Elevations

Lease Comps Details

Report on Marketing For Continued Business Use in the period from May 2019 to April 2021 prepared by Hicks Baker

P20-3141_01 0 Site Location Plan

Planning, Design and Access Statement

Transport Statement

Received 21st June 2021

Relevant Planning History:

Planning application 170094 -retrospective application for the temporary change of use (4 years) from B1/B8 commercial use to D1 community use (communal worship, education and training centre) - Application Refused

This planning application concerned only part of Attenborough House (126 sqm) and planning permission was refused on 3rd April 2017 for 2 reasons, as follows:

1. The use of the land and the building erected thereon as a place of worship, education and training (community use D1) results in the continued temporary loss of employment land/floor space within a defined Core Employment Area and results in a harmful risk in undermining the local economy by reducing employment generating opportunities and the range of sites and space available contrary to Policies CS11 (Use of Employment Land for Alternative Uses), CS12 (Maintaining a Variety of Premises) of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2008) (as amended) and Policy SA12 (Core Employment Areas) of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Sites and Detailed Policy Document (2012) (as amended).

2. The parking layout details submitted fail to demonstrate that it complies with the Local Planning Authority's standards in respect of vehicle parking. With the parking spaces for the other units not available to the community (D1) use, failure to comply with the parking standards could result in on-street parking on Bennet Road, adversely affecting road safety and the flow of traffic, and in conflict with Policy CS24 (Car/Cycle Parking) of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2008) (as amended) and Policy DM12 (Access, Traffic and Highway Related Matters) of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Sites and Detailed Policy Document (2012) (as amended).

Consultation Responses:

Internal Consultees

Transport: Objection due to an inadequate amount of parking spaces being provided on site. No response was received to the revised parking plan layout and Officer comments on this

Planning Policy: No response received

External consultation:

The following addresses were formally consulted via letter on 25/06/21:

11, 19 Bennet Road
7 Darwin Close

A site notice was also sent to the agent for display on 25/06/21.

1 representation was received from Unit 5 Attenborough House relating to the following matters:

- Concerns over parking arrangements - current occupiers use more spaces than allocated, children run between cars which is concerning due to lorries turning, and car spaces are rented out for the day to football fans

***Officer comment:** A condition will be secured ensuring that parking is provided in accordance with the approved plans. The opening hours of the Church will also be restricted through condition to avoid competition for spaces. The LPA do not give any further consent for cars to be parked outside of the designated spaces available, but cannot control this if there are no restrictions for parking. An informative will be included to remind the applicant not to take more spaces than allocated, but ultimately this is a civil matter between the applicant and the owner of the spaces in question. The LPA cannot control movements within the car park (ie. children running).*

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.

Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance

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'. However the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF 2021)

In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Development Framework (LDF) (Reading Borough Local Plan) according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CR1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CC7 Design and the Public Realm
CC8 Safeguarding Amenity
EM1 Provision of Employment
EM2 Location of New Employment Development
EM3 Loss of Employment Land
EM4 Maintaining a Variety of Premises
TR3 Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR5 Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
OU1 New and Existing Community Facilities

Appraisal

Principle of change of use

As mentioned earlier in the report, the application site is located within the Bennet Road Core Employment Area under Policy EM2d where the loss of employment uses is discouraged. However, policy EM3 states that:

Where, in exceptional circumstances, it can be demonstrated that a site in a Core Employment Area has no long-term prospect of employment use, a related alternative commercial use or a use which complements the employment use of the area may be considered that would not result in a significant reduction in jobs.

As part of the submission, the applicant has provided a Marketing Report carried out by Hicks Baker from May 2019 - May 2021 (the period which the site has been vacant). It concluded that over the two year period of vacancy there has been limited interest in the unit from prospective businesses for the following reasons:

1. The configuration, layout and location are not suited to office users, who prefer higher quality premises in the town centre, or on business parks.
2. The loading options and low eaves height are not suited to Industrial users, who prefer better loading options and much greater eaves height.

The report concluded that:

The building is not 'fit for purpose' for business users and therefore its change of use would not constitute a material loss of employment floor space, nor would an alternative use undermine the local economy by reducing employment generating opportunities.

Furthermore, the rear half of the building will remain in commercial use in the form of 4 small industrial units.

Paragraph 4.3.13 of the local plan (supporting text of Policy EM3) recognises that there will be some sites in the Core Employment Area, which may not have any long-term prospect of re-use for employment purposes and in these cases, it is preferable for these sites to be used for an alternative commercial use that complements the area, than for it to be vacant in the long-term. In this case, the property has been out of business use for 6

years, since it was first occupied by SARA charity in May 2015. Given the site has been marketed for 2 years with limited interest (only one other operator - a gym seeking to occupy half of the building), the only other interested party is the Church.

As noted in the planning statement, the church will employ a number of staff on the site, including a minister and several support workers and Zumba Classes which will generate further employment opportunities. 5 hours of Zumba classes are proposed per week, and as such Officer consider this would be an ancillary function rather than the use having a primary E(d) use (recreation and fitness).

Policy OU1 states that proposals for new and improved community facilities, such as places of worship, will be acceptable, particularly where a range of facilities can be located on one site, as in this case. New community facilities should be located where there is a choice of means of travel, including walking and cycling. The application site is highly accessible, by multiple travel modes, as explained in the Transport Statement and associated Travel Plan.

In light of the economic circumstances facing many town centres and the need for Councils to be more flexible, there is no reason to restrict this use as the proposal as it remains appropriate in the circumstances and compliant with the overall objectives of Policy EM2 as a form of employment use will be retained. The applicant is considered to have overcome the reason for refusal of the previous application relating to the principle of the change of use through the submission of a Market Report.

On balance, the proposed change of use is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policies EM2, EM3 and OU1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) in this specific instance. However, it is considered necessary to restrict the use of the building to F1(f) (Place of worship) only to prevent non-employment/ limited employment uses within the F1 use class appearing in the Core Employment Area without planning permission.

Impact on character of the surrounding area

The proposal does not seek any external alterations to the building and is not considered to result in any harm to the visual amenities of the surrounding area in accordance with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Separate advertisement consent will be required for any proposed signage. An informative will be attached to cover this matter.

Impact on neighbouring amenity

It is not considered that the proposed change of use would result in a harmful level of noise or disturbance to neighbouring properties given the surrounding area is commercial rather than residential. Vehicle numbers are restricted due to parking capacity (meaning that the noise from vehicle numbers should be managed). On street parking restrictions would prevent overspill. In addition, a condition would be attached to the permission restricting opening hours:

Monday to Thursday: 19:00 - 22:00
Friday: 19:00 - 00:00
Saturday: 12:00 - 00:00

Sunday: 10:00 - 18:00

As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019). A condition securing these hours of use will be included.

Transport

The Reading Borough Parking Standards and Design (2011) classes the application site as in Zone 3, a Secondary Core Area which has high frequency bus services within 400 metres. The proposed use as a place of worship requires a maximum parking provision of one space per eight fixed seats and/or one per 16sqm of open hall. The Highway Authority agrees that as no fixed seats are proposed within the Church, the parking requirement should be based on the open hall area. The floor area of the open hall equates to 404sqm and therefore this equates to a maximum of 25 car spaces.

Within the submitted documentation, it states that the applicant has identified a lease agreement with the nearby Reading Football Club for a further 10 parking spaces again for this parking to be taken into account the football club would need to be party to this application to ensure that this level of parking is secured.

Concern had initially been raised by Transport Officers over the proposed amount of parking provision. 8 parking spaces belong to the building, but additional spaces are included within the red line boundary of the site, albeit the remaining spaces are shared with other premises. Given the spaces are included within the red line boundary, these can be secured as part of the application and competition of spaces would be a separate and civil matter. However, in order to reduce competition for spaces, the Church's opening hours would be restricted to evening use only on weekdays. Given the other units are primarily in daytime operation, this is considered acceptable.

The site is located on Bennett Road which has double yellow lines preventing on street parking and therefore parking would not overspill onto the highway.

It is noted within the Travel Plan that the church will provide mini bus services to and from the site and this will be in addition site but this addition to the required parking number.

The proposed layout shows the site accommodating 25 parking spaces. As such, the proposal is considered to meet the required level of parking and is considered to overcome the previous reason for refusal on this matter. Whilst it is positive that a separate lease has been agreed with Reading Football Club for an additional 10 spaces, these are not required to be secured via S106 agreement in this case; only if a shortfall of onsite parking proposed would this have been necessary.

Cycle parking has been proposed to the frontage of the site in the form of 8 Sheffield stand which would be in accordance with the Reading Borough Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011), however these spaces are not covered. As such, a condition will be applied ensuring details of lockable and covered cycle storage is provided.

As such, the proposal now demonstrates that the site will accommodate a policy complaint number of parking spaces in addition to a travel plan. Cycle storage will be secured via

condition. The proposal is therefore considered in accordance with Policies TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Conclusion

It is considered that the proposal is acceptable for the reasons set out in this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

GRANT Planning Permission subject to conditions.

- 1) TL1
- 2) Approved Plans
- 3) Hours of operation
- 4) Vehicle parking as specified
- 5) Travel Plan - compliance
- 6) Travel Plan - Monitoring
- 7) Cycle parking details to be submitted
- 8) F1(f) use only

Informatives

- 1) Terms
- 2) Building Control
- 3) Complaints about Construction
- 4) Encroachment
- 5) Separate advertisement consent is required
- 6) Positive and Proactive