

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No: 220086/FUL

Address: Land adjacent to 114-116 School Road

Proposal: Erection of building to provide ground floor retail unit with 4 no. residential flats above

Extended Target Date: 26/05/22

Case Officer: Connie Davis

INTRODUCTION

The application site lies on the corner of School Road and Downing Road, Tilehurst. The area is currently fenced off from the highway and is currently used for the display of large billboards. A private footpath runs through the site, which previously had been used by members of the public before it was sectioned off. The surrounding area is a mixture of uses, mainly commercial/ retail, residential (in Downing Road), with Park Lane Primary School on the opposite side (to the south) of Downing Road and the Prince of Wales pub on the opposite side (to the east) of School Road. The site is within the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre, as defined in Policy RL1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, but not on a key frontage of the District Centre.

Downing Road is a designated 'School Street' which means the road closes at certain times of the day for the benefit of the users of Park Lane Primary School.



The application site

The property is not Listed, nor in a Conservation Area.

PROPOSAL

Full planning permission is sought for the erection of a two storey building with accommodation in the roof slope comprising of a retail unit at ground floor (Use Class E with an unknown occupier), along with 4 residential flats above; 2 x 1 bed flats and 2 x 2 bed flats. A small communal garden would be provided at the rear of the site, with undercroft parking for 2 vehicles.

DOCUMENTS/ INFORMATION SUBMITTED

21-J3733-01 Rev F - Proposed Site Layout
21-J3733-02 Rev D - Proposed Floorplans
21-J3733-03 Rev D - Proposed Elevations
21-J3733-04 Rev D - Proposed Street Scenes

Received 17th May 2022

Transport Statement prepared by Highway Planning Ltd dated January 2022

Received 31st January 2022

Design, Access and Sustainability Statement Ref: 21-J3733/2/DAS dated January 2022

Received 25th January 2022

Daylight & Sunlight letter ref. 1854/JN dated 21 January 2022
Daylight and Sunlight Report dated 26 July 2021, Job Reference: 1805/JN
Affordable Housing and Energy/ Sustainability Statement
Application Form
CIL Form
Planning Statement
21-J3733-LP01 - Location Plan

Received 24th January 2022

PLANNING HISTORY

211276/FUL - Erection of building to provide ground floor retail unit (Class E) with 4 residential flats above (Class C3) - Application Refused and appeal lodged. The application was refused for the following reasons:

- Siting of the building resulting in inadequate landscaping provision being proposed
- Poor design - length of undercroft on the Downing Road frontage was considered excessive
- Lack of a S106 agreement to secure an off-site affordable housing contribution

CONSULTATIONS

Internal Consultees

Transport - Objection due to an inadequate number of parking spaces being provided

Natural Environment - Further landscaping, biodiversity and greening details required. If not received then this would form a objection

Environmental Health - No objections subject to conditions

Ecology - No objection subject to condition

Waste Operations - No response received

External Consultation

Adjoining premises were notified of the application in writing. A site notice was also displayed at the site.

68 representations were received; 48 objections and 20 observations (although these all expressed an objection to the proposal).

Matters raised in the letters of objection and observation:

- Loss of footpath which has been well used by school children and local residents. This should be reinstated
- Do not have infrastructure to support the development
- Plenty of office blocks which could be turned to flats
- Disruption for local residents
- Downing Road is already full of congestion
- Safety of pedestrians is already an issue along with high levels of noise and pollution
- More retail units are not needed and there are empty ones around the village
- Where will additional cars go for residents, visitors and shop staff
- Downing Road is a School Street as it recognises the safety concerns for children, This would add more chaos
- The average household has more than 1.4 cars - census data is outdated
- Disruption to school children from construction
- Construction will make it dangerous for children walking to school
- Development is not in keeping with the road and would be taller than those in the vicinity and the undercroft out of keeping
- Too many dwellings are proposed for this development
- Proposed development would not be set back like others in the vicinity. It would be at the pavement
- Erroneous statements in the Design & Access Statement
- Should have more green spaces rather than flats being built
- Land would be better used for the school or for seating/ communal gardens
- The immediate area cannot provide parking for workmen
- The retail unit cannot be for fast food as it would create an unsightly corner for youths to meet up
- Mad Hatters Café will suffer as with all the building people will stay away
- The proposed development will undo the good work the School has put in by setting up the School Streets Scheme
- Where is the bus station mentioned in the Design & Access Statement
- Cannot see how the building will physically fit in
- Overdevelopment of the plot
- The statement in the Planning Statement document that the Primary School annex is allocated for residential development under policy WR2 of the Local Plan which is not the case

- Length of dropped kerb and proximity to junction is not safe
- Would lead to a loss of open space
- Communal outdoor space for residents would be too small and no landscaping opportunities on site
- Not acceptable to allow a food takeaway next to a school
- Residents have been alerted to an application by Greggs to occupy the unit
- Fencing off the land has narrowed the pavement which means people are crowded together
- Sight lines for crossing the road will be compromised. Cars will need access/ egress at the point where children cross the road
- Any permission should have a condition preventing the unit being a catering establishment as these cause more vermin in the local area
- Any permission should have a condition that the development is required to be set back from the pavement in line with other buildings, to keep the aesthetic of the road
- Year 6 children regularly cross the road from the annex to the main building. The development could increase the risk to children and staff through the day
- There is inadequate space for any waste for the retail unit, especially if used as a food outlet
- Foxes are regularly seen in Downing Road and this application would increase the numbers of them
- Number of residents work night shifts and therefore construction during the day will impact their sleep
- Land has been dug up before the planning notice was put up
- Increase in litter is concerning
- No provision for deliveries to the retail unit
- Unsafe if cars reverse out
- Removal of footpath and erection of fence constitutes development
- Design would not be in keeping with the Victorian Road
- Insufficient landscaping proposed
- Forward of the established building line on Downing Road
- Site notice not prominently displayed
- Loss of green space
- Class E covers a broad range of activities
- Incorrect statements within the submitted planning statement
- Overdevelopment of the site
- Reading has enough 1 and 2 bedroom dwellings
- Impact the construction would have on the neighbouring primary school
- The new plans show two parking spaces to the rear of this development by Mad Hatters pottery cafe, they do not support this or provide permission of access
- Proposed flats are too small to be a home
- The new proposal would take away parking to a very busy coffee shop
- The positioning of the building on the corner would make the area darker and therefore decrease visibility for cars
- The site is not large enough for the proposal

- It is not clear if the communal area is covered. If it is, I would have a safety concern for residents. This is a very hidden area
- Bins and bikes have to be brought past parked vehicles which will open up liability claims and potential disputes between residents
- Has the developer put forward a business case stating what commercial unit would be sought? What retail unit will be beneficial to the village? Or is this left blank and the developer just hopes someone will come along and rent it? High risk this unit will remain empty for a while
- There have not been substantial changes to the scheme since the previous refusal

Officer comment: The above topics and concerns will be discussed within the report

LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, among them the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’.

The application has been assessed against the following policies:

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
 CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
 CC3: Adaption to Climate Change
 CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
 CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
 CC7: Design and the Public Realm
 CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
 CC9: Securing Infrastructure
 H1: Provision of Housing
 H2: Density and Mix
 H3: Affordable Housing
 H5: Standards for New Housing
 H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
 TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
 TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
 EN8: Undesignated Open Space
 EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
 EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
 RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres
 RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres
 WR2: Park Lane Primary School, The Laurels and Downing Road
 OU5: Shopfronts and Cash Machines

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

- Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
- Revised Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)
- Planning Obligations Under S106, April (2015)
- Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (2021)
- Reading Borough Council Tree Strategy (2020)
- Design Guide For Shopfronts SPD (2022)

APPRAISAL

The main issues for consideration are:

- Principle of Development
- Design and impact on the character of the area
- Housing Mix
- Impact on Existing and Future occupiers
- Amenity Space
- Transport Matters
- The Natural Environment
- Sustainability
- Affordable Housing, S106 and CIL obligations

a) Principle of Development

The NPPF states that LPAs should *“encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value”*.

Therefore, it is clear that the priority for development should be on previously developed land, in particular vacant and derelict sites and buildings. The site is currently vacant with limited interest in the street scene having been used for many years for the display of advertisement hoardings. It has been sectioned off with a wooden fence. The site itself mainly comprises low quality vegetation. As such, the principle of re-developing this piece of land is supported as in its current state it is not providing a meaningful or attractive addition to the District Centre, nor is it considered a quality or functional piece of open space to be protected under Policy EN8.

The District Centre comprises commercial uses many with residential units above. As such, a further commercial (Class E) / residential building (C3) as proposed would be a complementary and well-integrated addition in pure land use terms. The development of the land also accords with Policy RL1 which states that the ‘vitality and viability of these centres should be maintained and enhanced’. The new building would contribute to the enhancement and development of the district centre. The provision of 4 new dwellings would also contribute to the provision of housing in accordance with Policy H1 which seeks an additional 689 new homes per year between 2013 - 2036.

The LPA are not aware of what use the retail unit would be; only that it would fall within the Use Class E category. As such, this would mean the unit could be used as one of the following:

- **E(a)** Display or retail sale of goods, other than hot food
- **E(b)** Sale of food and drink for consumption (mostly) on the premises
- **E(c)** Provision of:
 - **E(c)(i)** Financial services,
 - **E(c)(ii)** Professional services (other than health or medical services), or
 - **E(c)(iii)** Other appropriate services in a commercial, business or service locality
- **E(d)** Indoor sport, recreation or fitness (not involving motorised vehicles or firearms or use as a swimming pool or skating rink,)
- **E(e)** Provision of medical or health services (except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner)
- **E(f)** Creche, day nursery or day centre (not including a residential use)
- **E(g)** Uses which can be carried out in a residential area without detriment to its amenity:
 - **E(g)(i)** Offices to carry out any operational or administrative functions,
 - **E(g)(ii)** Research and development of products or processes
 - **E(g)(iii)** Industrial processes

Whilst the principle of the proposed use and type of development is accepted, this is subject to other material planning considerations being satisfied, such as matters relating to design, residential amenity, transport and landscaping which will be discussed further in this report.

b) Design and impact on the character of the area

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) 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.

When considering the components of good design, it is important that the development relates to its surrounding context and identity of the locality, as noted in the National Design Guide. Furthermore, the NPPF (para 126) sets out that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. The National Design Guide identifies 10 key components for good design and of particular note is the characteristic of ‘Context’ and it states that “*well-designed new development responds positively to the features of the site itself and the surrounding context beyond the site boundary. It should enhance positive qualities and improve negative ones.*”

The proposed building would have a frontage to both School Road and Downing Road. The surrounding area on School Road has a variety of building styles and finishes. The buildings immediately adjacent to the north-east have hipped roofs and comprise of brick and render. Further down, separated by an access track, is 104-108 School Road. This site shares some architectural cues with the proposed scheme given that site is also on a corner plot. Namely, the scheme proposes a similar roof form and scale and there is no objection to design in that respect. On both School Road and Downing Road, the building would follow the building line of neighbouring buildings which is considered acceptable and responds to the previous

reason for refusal. The design of the building from the perspective of School Road has had minor modification during the course of this application. These comprise of changes to the dormer fenestration and a gable roof design (changed from a half-hip on Downing Road and full hip on School Road), which are considered acceptable and without detriment to the surrounding area. Stall risers have also been included given the proposed building's Victorian-like appearance and is considered a positive element of the design in line with the Council's Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD (2022).

Dormers are considered suitably positioned in the roof slope and of an acceptable scale. The height of the building would largely be in keeping with the height of those to the north.

Whilst 0.4m higher in height than the direct adjacent neighbour (114-116 School Road) the buildings are separated by the gap of the rear access drive and most of the proposed building would be the same height as 104-108 School Road, with the exception of the corner element. However, given the variation in roof heights in the street officers conclude that the scale of development would be in keeping with existing buildings on School Road.

In terms of materials, brick and stone have been proposed along with tiles, which are acceptable and positive in helping the building to fit in, securing these materials and details will be secured via condition. As part of negotiations, a small area of brick detailing has been proposed above the path that would lead to the entrance to the residential apartments. Given the proposed entrance door to the flats would not be highly visible from the street, this detailing is considered positive to increase the legibility of the residential development in the street, in accordance with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Following on from the previous refusal, the scheme has been amended to reduce the width of the proposed undercroft and the building also been set back from the frontage of Downing Road, particularly towards the corner with School Road. This is considered to more positively respect the building line on Downing Road which shows buildings set-back, although the depth is varied. It also allows for some additional landscaping opportunities to be provided on the Downing Road frontage. The reduction in the proposed width of the undercroft is also considered a positive enhancement of the scheme in design terms as it avoids an overly expansive blank façade to the street which was raised as a concern previously.



Refused scheme (above)



Proposed scheme (above)

As such, the proposed design is considered to be acceptable in relation to Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

c) Housing Mix

Policy H2 states that all developments should provide an appropriate range of housing opportunities in terms of a mix of housing types, sizes and tenures. The range of units proposed with 2 x 1 bed flats and 2 x 2 bedroom flats is considered an acceptable mix given the modest number of units proposed.

d) Impact on Existing and Future Occupiers

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) is concerned with preventing significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing or new residential properties, including in terms of privacy and overlooking, loss of daylight and visual dominance, amongst other impacts.

Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) states that development will only be permitted where it would not be damaging to the environment and sensitive receptors through land, noise or light pollution

Existing Occupiers

114-116 sits adjacent to the site, behind is the Park Lane Primary School Annex and across Downing Road is the Primary School's main building.

114-116 School Road - Retail with residential above

To the north-east is 114-116 School Road which is occupied by the Mad Hatter Tea Room, with residential accommodation at the first floor. The residential accommodation has a number of side windows that would face the application site.

The ground floor level commercial premise has no windows that face the site. At first floor level, there are 4 no. windows that face the site. According to the submitted light

assessment, these windows serve a bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and living room. The latter is served by another window at the front of the property.

The light assessment concluded that:

‘we have noted some isolated transgressions of the BRE guidelines to the windows of the immediately adjacent property at 114 to 116 School Road. Sunlight and daylight distribution within the rooms themselves will, however, remain fine. This is unsurprising for an under developed site such as this, and particularly where the proposed development matches the height and proportions of the surrounding properties.’

Given the living room is served by a front facing window, kitchens and bathrooms not being habitable rooms and the bedroom still receiving adequate light, as confirmed by the report, it is considered that on balance, the application is acceptable in relation to amenities for this neighbour. No windows from the new building will face onto the existing windows so privacy would be retained. Whilst the occupiers of the existing flat would notice an increase in bulk of development, it is considered that the existing advertisement hoardings already dominate views and therefore compared to the existing situation, there would be insufficient grounds to warrant refusal of the application based on overbearing/ visual dominance grounds.

Park Lane Junior School

This is an educational facility. The new dwellings would be set a suitable distance from the school building (19.3m) on the north of Downing Road, for privacy to be maintained and for existing windows to retain daylight.

Park Lane Primary School Annex

Policy WR2 states that: *The Park Lane School Annex will be reused/redeveloped for community or residential purposes, subject to safeguarding the amenity of occupiers of adjacent properties*

Whilst the potential for redevelopment for residential purposes is outlined in the policy, the building is still in use as an educational facility. The glazed door and two small windows to the main building serve a large dual aspect room with their main windows fronting Downing Street. The adjacent window to what looks like a storage room possibly an office would also continue to enjoy light from over Downing Road.

No windows from the proposed flats would face onto the annex and therefore there is no concern regarding overlooking or loss of privacy.

As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to the amenities of nearby residential development as well as the educational and retail uses in the vicinity in accordance with Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Future Occupiers

As per Policy H5 of the Local Plan, 1 bedroom dwellings are required to have a minimum floor area of 37 sqm and 2 bedroom dwellings 61/70 sqm (depending on if there are 3 or 4 occupiers, respectively). The proposed 1 bedroom dwellings would have a floor area of 54 and 57 sqm and the 2 bedroom dwellings 67 and 80 sqm. The proposed dwellings therefore exceed the minimum standard as prescribed at the national and local level. The good size dwellings are considered a positive element of the scheme. All dwellings would meet internal space standards and habitable rooms would be served with windows for sufficient natural light and outlook.

Officers consider the relationship between the retail unit and residential units above would be acceptable as Class E is generally considered compatible with residential development and is a common relationship in district/ town centres, including the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre. However, a condition restricting the hours of operation and hours of deliveries/ waste collection for the retail use will be included to prevent future occupiers being subject to an overly harmful level of noise and disturbance from the retail use. Opening hours have been agreed with Environmental Health Officers. Environmental Health Officers have also suggested a condition requiring a noise assessment to be carried out so that the future occupiers of the residential dwellings would not be exposed to an overly harmful level of noise from the traffic on School Road and the retail unit below. No extraction equipment has been proposed for the development and therefore no reason to suggest occupiers would be exposed to a harmful level of noise from mechanical equipment or odour from the retail use. Any installation of extraction, ducting or air conditioning units (that are installed externally) would require separate planning permission.

As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of impacts on existing and future occupiers as required by Policies CC8, H5 and EN16 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

e) Amenity Space

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.'*

A small communal area is proposed which is approximately 38 sqm. Paragraph 4.4.87 of Policy H10 provides the minimum provisions of amenity space that have been sought for in the past and these provide a useful guide to current proposals. For flats outside central Reading which have 1-2 bedrooms, 25 sqm per flat should be provided as a guide. As there are 4 units, an amenity space of 100 sqm would be considered in line with policy. The proposal falls somewhat short of this.

However, paragraph 4.486 of Policy H10 states *'in determining the appropriate level of private and communal open space for the new development, the constraints of the site and the extent of deprivation of public open space within the proposed scheme will be taken into consideration'*. The site is within walking distance of outdoor recreational

spaces, including Blagrove Recreation Ground, Victoria Recreation Ground and Blundell's Copse.

Therefore, on balance, the small communal space is considered sufficient for the purposes of basic everyday functions, and the site's close proximity to public open spaces is considered to contribute to the acceptability of the scheme in this instance in line with Policy H10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

f) Transport Matters

The site is located on the corner of Downing Road and School Road which is classified as the C402, there are good public transport links to and from the town centre. School Road is also part of the red route and therefore on street parking is restricted and monitored.

The site is located in Zone 3, Secondary Core Area and the required parking provision for the proposal is 3 spaces (with the one beds requiring 0.5 spaces per unit and the 2 beds 1 space per unit). It should be noted that the original Transport consultation response highlighted a need for 4 spaces, however this number has been reviewed and reduced by the Transport department upon review of car ownership within the ward. However, only 2 are provided under this proposal which has formed an objection from RBC Transport Officers due to the under provision of 1 parking space.

Parking/ access for residential units

Under the previously refused application, 4 parking spaces were provided and this was, deemed acceptable by Transport officers. However, following on from the previous refusal, and in an attempt to overcome design concerns regarding the expansive undercroft on Downing Road, the undercroft was reduced in width and consequently the number of parking spaces has been decreased to 2 spaces. Parking is not proposed within the Mad Hatter's Café site, as indicated in some neighbouring objections.

The proposal has been deemed acceptable from a Highways perspective in terms of safety (ie vehicle manoeuvres). However, concern was raised over competition for parking given Downing Road is not restricted. It is acknowledged that members of the public were concerned that the proposal could lead to additional on street parking given Downing Road is mainly unrestricted although there are double lines in front of the site. However, Officers have applied a critical planning balance and consider that the shortfall of one parking space is outweighed by the improvements in the overall design of the scheme; namely the reduction in width of the undercroft. Officers have also given weight to the location of the site close to bus stops, along with adequate bike storage provision to encourage sustainable transport methods.

Dropped kerbs and visibility splays are shown on the plans and RBC Transport confirms that proposed access would meet highway standards. A condition will be applied to ensure visibility splays are maintained.

Any cost associated with alterations to the street infrastructure (Downing Road street sign and lamp column) will need to be met by the applicant. The Council's Highways Team should be contacted about this. This will be reminded to the applicant via an informative.

Retail unit parking/ deliveries

The retail unit would not be provided with designated parking. However, the site is within the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre, as defined in Policy RL1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, with a good level of public bus services, access to public car parks as well as time limited and loading on street bays within the area that can accommodate staff and customer parking. The applicant has also provided justification with their submitted Transport Statement which has been deemed acceptable by the Transport Officer.

With regards to deliveries to the retail unit, the commercial unit will be served in the same manner as the adjoining retail & commercial units. As it is a district centre and very few (if any) units have dedicated servicing arrangements. This was deemed acceptable by Transport Officers.

Loss of footpath

Plans indicate the removal of a footpath. The Transport team have confirmed that this footpath is within private ownership and is not Council land. Given there is an alternative footway provision in place the loss of this would not be have a detrimental impact on pedestrians, nor could the Council insist on its retention as is privately owned. Planning Officers note the request from neighbours to reinstate the path or provide a new path, however given the proposal does not result in the loss of a public footpath, it was not considered reasonable to require the developer to undertake this. A Construction Methods Statement will be needed to explain how pedestrian safety and convenience can be protected during construction works.

Cycle Parking and bin storage

In accordance with the Council's adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD, cycle parking should be provided at a ratio of 0.5 spaces per unit in the form of Sheffield type stands. This has been illustrated on the plans and it has been demonstrated that cycle storage would be fully covered in accordance with policy.

Submitted plans illustrate bin storage at the rear of the site which can be taken to the frontage of the site for collection from both the retail and residential units. These will be wheeled down the external entrance to the rear garden space. A condition will be included to secure the refuse details.

'School Street'

In response to neighbourng comments, there was concern over how the proposal would relate to the 'School Street' initiative that has been adopted on Downing Road. This involves Downing Road being closed to traffic at certain times of the day for the benefit of the primary school. Further traffic on the School Street, given its designation, was considered to undermine the initiative.

It was also confirmed by the Transport Officer that due to the size of the scheme, there would be a limited amount of traffic movement within the school peak periods and the

numbers would not be so significant that would warrant a refusal. With regards to movements of vehicles entering and exiting the undercroft (particularly when reversing) and proximity to junction with children crossing where the undercroft would be, there is a gap between the vehicle access point and the crossing point. Pedestrian visibility has been provided and therefore there would be no conflict between vehicles accessing and egressing the parking spaces with pedestrians crossing at the “build out”, this is coupled with the low level of movements generated by the development. Pedestrian visibility splays have also been provided at the crossing and been deemed acceptable and safe by the Transport Officer.

Therefore, while acknowledging the Transport objections and concern, Officers consider that on balance and subject to the following conditions, that the proposal is acceptable and in line with Policies TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan:

- Construction Method Statement (to be submitted) - this control with how deliveries and construction will be carried out (ie where builders will park, where goods/ materials will be stored etc). This was a concern raised by neighbours however Officers are confident that disturbance during construction (for residents and school children) will be minimised as a result of this condition
- Vehicle Parking (as specified)
- Vehicular Access (as specified)
- Cycle parking (as specified)
- Refuse and Recycling (as specified)
- Electric Vehicle Charging Points
- Visibility splays maintained
- Construction Hours - these are restricted to protect neighbouring amenity

g) The Natural Environment

i) *Trees*

Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) states that: *New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. Measures must be in place to ensure that these trees are adequately maintained.*

The Council’s Natural Environment Officer noted that there is no objection to the removal of the low-quality vegetation on the site, and this is not worthy of protection through a Tree Protection Order. Therefore, the concentration turns to tree/ landscaping provision on site as part of the proposed development. Under the previous application, the Natural Environment Officer has raised objection to the application due to the proposal failing to demonstrate an appropriate layout to allow suitable landscaping, a failure to provide planting in principle, and their view that the design is unlikely to be able to accommodate any significant planting. The basis for this objection is informed by an assessment of the

immediate surroundings to the site. The School site to the south west is lined with Lime trees, giving a green frontage. On the opposite side of School Road, the frontage of the Prince of Wales Public House has a hedge and to the south, a line of mature trees in front of 113-115 School Road.

Officers recognise that the site is in an urban location, however its position on the corner of School Road/ Downing Road is considered to act as a transition between the more vegetated residential sites in the vicinity to those developed frontage plots along School Road to the north-east. As noted above within Policy EN14, *'New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, or off-site in appropriate situations, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough'*. Therefore, whilst the site acts as a transitional one, policy leans towards vegetation being provided on site and so it is the view of Officers that this site should incorporate meaningful landscaping in line with that shown at the primary school and Prince of Wales Public House. The previously refused application proposed no landscaping to either the School Road or Downing Road elevations with only a small communal garden proposed. Also, the communal space indicated was poorly designed in terms of landscaping opportunities. It was heavily shaded by the building itself and shared a boundary with the 114-116 rear yard access road. The space was too small for any significant tree planting and the heavy shade will further restrict the species choice.

Under this current application, concern over planting in the rear amenity space remains the same. However, Officers note that an attempt to provide more landscaping to the frontage of the site has been made. This has been achieved by setting the building back from the perimeter of the site. Whilst landscaping is not extensive, it is considered a positive improvement in this urban location where the presence of landscaping is varied. Therefore, on balance, it is no longer considered that insufficient landscaping would warrant a refusal of the application given the site constraints and location. A condition will be applied ensuring that full details of landscaping and biodiversity enhancements are proposed, as requested by Natural Environment Officers, and ensure that this landscaping is maintained in accordance with Policy EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the Council's adopted Tree Strategy (2020).

ii) Ecology/Biodiversity

Policy EN12 states that: *'on all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible'*. The Reading Borough Council's Ecologist was consulted on the application.

The site has now been cleared and therefore it is unlikely that further works will affect bats (or other protected species) or priority habitats. However, in order to result in a biodiversity enhancement and gain, a condition is recommended requiring bird/bat boxes, tiles or bricks to be included as part of the scheme. Subject to this condition, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

h) Sustainability

The sustainability credentials of the scheme are noted in the Design and Access Statement which are positive and include energy efficient appliances and water resource management devices. In line with Policies H5, CC2 and CC3, the following sustainability measures would be secured via condition to comply with sustainability policies:

- Higher water efficiency standards of 110 litres per person per day; and
- A 19% improvement over building regulations energy requirements

i) Affordable Housing, S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

In accordance with Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) the proposed development, being for 4 additional dwellings units, would be liable for an off-site affordable housing contribution.

As outlined within the policy: *“In all cases where proposals fall short of the policy target as a result of viability considerations, an open-book approach will be taken and the onus will be on the developer/landowner to clearly demonstrate the circumstances justifying a lower affordable housing contribution.”*

The applicant stated they agreed in principle to enter into a legal agreement to secure a financial contribution. A contribution of £42,062.00 has been agreed based on 4 independent valuations of the proposed scheme.

As such, the proposal would provide a policy compliant affordable housing contribution in line with Policy H3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

A Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contribution is applicable.

Other Matters raised in representations

- Do not have infrastructure to support the development

Officer Comment: The scheme was considered to provide adequate parking facilities and would not cause a harmful level of additional pressure on the highway system. The scheme is not considered a large enough scale to put pressure on local facilities to a point where the scheme could be refused. Furthermore, the scheme would be eligible to pay a contribution towards the Community Infrastructure Levy which funds improving infrastructure within the ward and around the borough

- Plenty of office blocks which could be turned to flats

Officer Comment: Each application is assessed on its own merits based on the scheme that is put forward

- Disruption for local residents

Officer Comment: A Construction Method Statement will be conditioned to ensure disruption during the construction phase is minimised, as discussed earlier in the report

- Safety of pedestrians is already an issue along with high levels of noise and pollution

Officer Comment: The proposal has been reviewed and deemed acceptable by the Reading Borough Council Transport Officer from a safety perspective, as outlined earlier in the report. It is not considered the development would result in a harmful level of noise dissimilar to other uses within and around the district centre

- More retail units are not needed and there are empty ones around the village

Officer Comment: Each application is assessed on its own merits. The principle of the proposed use was discussed in the report and despite empty units in the centre, there was not considered resistance to the retail/ residential use in land use terms when assessed against policy

- The average household has more than 1.4 cars - census data is outdated

Officer Comment: An assessment on the level of parking was provided in the report

- Disruption to school children from construction

Officer Comment: This matter will be considered within the Construction Method Statement and the hours of construction are limited by condition.

- Construction will make it dangerous for children walking to school

Officer Comment: This matter would be considered within the Construction Method Statement

- Erroneous statements in the Design & Access Statement

Officer Comment: Design & Access Statements are subjective documents produced by the applicant. Officers are aware of this when reviewing

- Should have more green spaces rather than flats being built

Officer Comment: Each application is assessed on its own merits. As discussed in the report, the site in pure land use terms does not have a particular designated function and therefore the principle of its development was accepted

- Land would be better used for the school or for seating/ communal gardens

Officer Comment: The land is in private ownership and the LPA cannot control what type of scheme gets put forward for the use of the land

- The immediate area cannot provide parking for workmen

Officer Comment: This matter will be considered within the Construction Method Statement with details of how construction vehicles will be parked to be approved.

- The retail unit cannot be for fast food as it would create an unsightly corner for youths to meet up

Officer Comment: This application would not allow the unit to be a takeaway only facility - most food would need to be consumed on site in order to fall within use class E(b), should the proposed unit be one that sells food. The LPA cannot control the congregation of individuals but rather assess the proposed use against policy

- Mad Hatters Café will suffer as with all the building people will stay away

Officer Comment: The LPA have no information to confirm this would be the case nor is it considered a material planning consideration

- Where is the bus station mentioned in the Design & Access Statement

Officer Comment: We agree reference to a bus station was an error within the statement. However, several Bus routes are found in the vicinity

- Cannot see how the building will physically fit in

Officer Comment: The LPA are provided with scaled plans of the site. If there is discrepancy between plans and a site's real size, the development will not be able to be built as approved which could lead to enforcement action

- Not acceptable to allow a food takeaway next to a school

Officer Comment: In policy terms, there is not resistance to a retail unit class E in this location. The application would not allow a fast food takeaway as this would fall within use class Sui Generis rather than Class E

- Residents have been alerted to an application by Greggs to occupy the unit

Officer Comment: The LPA have no information on the proposed occupier of the retail unit

- Fencing off the land has narrowed the pavement which means people are crowded together

Officer Comment: Fencing off the land qualifies as Permitted Development (ie. not requiring planning permission) should then fence be a maximum height of 1m. It is still considered that an acceptable level of pavement is provided for pedestrians, given

that the land in question was in private ownership and was not part of the public highway

- Year 6 children regularly cross the road from the annex to the main building. The development could increase the risk to children and staff through the day

Officer Comment: This concern was not raised by Transport Officers due to the low vehicle movements. Further detail is within the Transport section of the report

- Foxes are regularly seen in Downing Road and this application would increase the numbers of them

Officer Comment: Adequate refuse storage is proposed on site which should help discourage animals. This is secured via condition

- Number of residents work night shifts and therefore construction during the day will impact their sleep

Officer comment: Construction would be temporary with a Construction Method statement in place. The LPA could not prevent development based on individual lifestyles

- Increase in litter is concerning

Officer comment: A litter management strategy will be secured by condition should the unit be used for the purposes of Class E(b) (sale of food and drink for consumption (mostly) on the premises)

- Removal of footpath and erection of fence constitutes development

Officer comment: The fence qualifies as permitted development (ie not requiring planning permission), as confirmed by the Council's Planning Enforcement Officer. The footpath was not part of the highway, but in private ownership and so the removal of the path could not be stopped by the planning system

- It is not clear if the communal area is covered. If it is, I would have a safety concern for residents. This is a very hidden area

Officer comment: The plans show the rear communal space would be uncovered. The communal area will comprise of a small lawn

- Bins and bikes have to be brought past parked vehicles which will open up liability claims and potential disputes between residents

Officer comment: This is not a material planning consideration

- There have not been substantial changes to the scheme since the previous refusal

Officer comment: As discussed in the report, the proposal is considered to have been modified to overcome the previous reasons for refusal, specifically relating to design of the undercroft and increasing landscaping opportunities

CONCLUSION

The social and economic benefits of the scheme are noted. The shortcomings of the previous scheme, on balance, are considered to have been overcome for the reasons outlined in the report.

Recommendation: **GRANT** subject to the following conditions and informatives:

All pre-commencement conditions have been agreed by the applicant

- 1) Time Limit
- 2) Plans
- 3) Materials to be approved
- 4) Construction Method Statement (to be submitted)
- 5) Vehicle Parking (as specified)
- 6) Vehicular Access (as specified)
- 7) Cycle parking (as specified)
- 8) Refuse and Recycling (as specified)
- 9) Electric Vehicle Charging Points
- 10) Landscaping details to be provided to be implemented and maintained (to be submitted)
- 11) Biodiversity enhancements - bat and bird boxes (to be submitted)
- 12) Noise Assessment (to be submitted)
- 13) Hours of opening/ operation
- 14) Hours of delivery/ waste collection
- 15) Hours of construction
- 16) No bonfires
- 17) Litter strategy for use class E(b)
- 18) SAP - Design (to be submitted)
- 19) SAP - As built (to be submitted)
- 20) Visibility splays to be maintained

Informatives

- 1) Terms
- 2) Complaints about construction
- 3) Building Control
- 4) Encroachment
- 5) S106
- 6) Pre-commencement conditions
- 7) CIL
- 8) Sound insulation between dwellings
- 9) Cost of moving street infrastructure
- 10) Positive and Proactive