

DELEGATED REPORT

Ward: Whitley

App No.: 211932

Address: 142 Whitley Wood Lane, Reading, RG2 8PP

Proposal: Outline application for the demolition of existing retail units and ancillary buildings and redevelopment to provide ground floor retail uses with ancillary office space, and 12 dwellings (Class C3) on the upper floors (Landscaping reserved for future consideration).

Applicant: Whitley Wood Properties Ltd

Deadline: 01/03/2022

1. INTRODUCTION

The site is located at the roundabout junction of Whitley Wood Road and Whitley Wood Lane within a residential area towards the southern edge of the Borough. The site is currently occupied by Victorian buildings with retail units at ground floor and residential accommodation above. A walled yard exists to the rear. Beyond the site to the north is a single storey commercial building currently occupied by a barber and beyond that is a staggered row of two-storey Victorian housing (interspersed with the occasional newer building). An area of mid-twentieth century housing lies to the south and west of the site with the contemporary block of flats at Engineers Court located across the roundabout to the east.

The site is not subject to any site-specific Development Plan designations.

PROPOSAL

Outline permission with all matters to be determined, except Landscaping, which is reserved, is sought for a mixed-use redevelopment comprising a three storey building extending the full width and length of the site (with the exception of an area of forecourt to the eastern end). The building is proposed to accommodate twelve flats, eight 1-bed and four 2-bed on the upper floors with 191 sqm retail floorspace to the ground floor.

Submitted Plans and Documentation:

- 2021/WWL 001 Location Plan - Block Plan dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 002 Existing Ground Floor dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 003 Existing First and Roof Plans dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 004 Existing Elevations dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 005 Ground Floor dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 006 First Floor dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 007 Second Floor dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 008 Elevations dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 009 Elevations dated 18 November 2021
- 2021/WWL 0010 Perspective dated 10 November 2021
- Planning, Design and Access Statement dated 29 November 2021
- Email from Glanville (Highways) 12 January 2021

PLANNING HISTORY (relevant)

190974 - Demolition of existing shop and workshop and the erection of seven 2-bedroom and two 1-bedroom flats with associated parking - withdrawn.

020171 - Construction of 8 two bedroom houses on a cleared site - Permitted (land west of current site).

1. CONSULTATIONS - Summarised as follows:

Highway Authority

Object on the basis of:

- insufficient parking to serve the residential and retail elements of the development.
- Inadequate servicing arrangements - delivery vehicles would avoid the undercroft and would be likely to load on street which would be a hazard.

Berkshire Archaeology

The proposed works would not have an archaeological implication. This is on account of the likely existing ground impacts from the structures currently on the site.

Thames Water

Surface water - no objection provided a sequential approach to sustainable drainage is taken.

The proposal is within 15 metres of a strategic sewer and water main - Piling method statement required - condition recommended.

Works near public sewers advice.

RBC Housing

No objection to a financial contribution towards Affordable Housing in lieu of on-site provision due to the nature of the proposal.

RBC Environmental Protection

No objection subject to conditions relating to

- Noise arising from development
- Noise transmission between dwellings
- Delivery hours/waste collections/opening hours
- Construction and Demolition phase

Public

Two objections have been received raising concerns summarised as follows:

- Insufficient parking for flats and shops - already on-street parking occurring on Whitely Wood Road causing problems.
- Traffic problems are getting worse.
- 2nd floor windows and balconies will overlook dwellings at Copenhagen Close.
- The glass recycling bins may need to be moved.

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) which states at Paragraph 11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

The development plan for this Local Planning Authority is the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019). The relevant policies are:

- CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
- CC4: Decentralised Energy
- CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
- CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
- CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- CC9: Securing Infrastructure
- EN2: Areas of Archaeological Significance
- EN7: Local Green Space and Public Open Space
- EN9: Provision of Open Space
- EN10: Access to Open Space
- EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
- EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
- EN15: Air Quality
- EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
- EN17: Noise Generating Equipment
- EN18: Flooding and Drainage
- H1: Provision of Housing
- H2: Density and Mix
- H3: Affordable Housing
- H5: Standards for New Housing
- H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
- TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
- TR2: Major Transport Projects
- TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
- TR4: Cycle Routes and Facilities
- TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
- RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres
- RL2: Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development
- RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres

Relevant Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) are:
Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document 2021
Employment Skills and Training SPD 2013
Planning Obligations under Section 106 SPD 2015
Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD 2011
Sustainable Design and Construction SPD 2019

APPRAISAL

Principle of development

The site is previously-developed and within the urban area of Reading. There are existing residential uses on the site and the site is within a predominantly residential area. The continued residential use of the site is appropriate in general terms.

The site is outside of any local or district centre. The proposed commercial uses would result in provision of a reduced amount of commercial floorspace which is acceptable in general terms in this location.

Policy H2 requires that “planning decisions will ensure that over 50% of dwellings will be 3 bedroom or more, having regard to all other material considerations”. The proposal is for eight 1-bed and four 2-bed dwellings which fails to provide any 3 bed dwellings and also does not have due regard to the policy aim of a mix of predominantly 2 and 3 bed dwellings as set out in Figure 4.6 in the supporting text to that policy. It is considered that the site is capable of accommodating a more appropriate mix and therefore the current proposal is considered to be contrary to Policy H2.

Character and Design

The existing character of surrounding streets is typically one of subdued two-storey scale buildings with traditional forms and a fine grain of plots predominating. That said, the roundabout is a distinctive feature and the openness provided by the highway at this point does offer some scope for an increased scale, as demonstrated to some degree by the Engineers Court site across the roundabout from the application site.

Whilst there is some scope for increased scale at this location, this would need carefully considered design to ensure that new development maintains and enhances the existing character. In contrast, this particular proposal would present a somewhat unrelenting three storey mass to the street and this would appear far too bulk, in marked contrast with the existing situation on the site and that of neighbouring buildings. In fact the proposed building has almost total plot coverage (even extending beyond the red line application site boundary at the east corner). The proposal would appear overly-dominant and the proposed scale and layout would also result in other concerns as set out below.

The proposed building would appear as a monolithic mass due to the scale, form and layout proposed. The building would project aggressively forward of the distinctive stepped building line on the Whitley Wood Lane frontage

and would extend the full depth of the site to the rear. The overall architectural approach does little to break up this mass and contrasts poorly with the characterful, if somewhat dilapidated, character of the existing building. It is unclear where the proposed building takes its design cues from - it does not appear to either reflect local character or successfully reinterpret it in a modern way. In terms of detailing, the north and west elevations present large expanses of blank walling which is unattractive and would have a poor appearance.

The horizontal decked garden on vertical supports lacks visual refinement and would have a particularly poor quality appearance. The prominent balconies perform an amenity function but their horizontal emphasis adds to the perceived mass of the building. The elevation drawings are a little difficult to interpret but the upper floors appear inconsistent the ground floor with upper floor elements projecting outwards independently of the ground floor without a clear rationale. The parking area and undercroft would present an unattractive frontage to the street at ground floor. The upper floors are perched awkwardly above this feature. The detailing, taken as a whole appears contrived and accentuates the over-large scale of the building.

Although Landscaping is a Reserved Matter, the proposed positioning of the building relative to the street leaves little space for meaningful landscaping. It would be reasonable to expect a formal layout of hedging and tree planting to the frontages and landscaped amenity space to the ground floor at the rear. The scale and layout of the building needs to provide sufficient space for this.

The shop unit servicing and undercroft parking area would dominate the rear of the building, pushing the amenity space to the second floor, a clear indication of the overdeveloped nature of the proposal.

The undercroft would be heavily enclosed, dark and uninviting and would offer opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour.

On the whole, the proposal appears overdeveloped with little regard to integration with existing character, or the need to provide appropriate landscaping and amenity space. It is considered that the overall architectural approach has little merit and should be completely re-thought. The proposal is not of sufficient design quality and would not respond positively to its context. The proposals are contrary to Policies CC7, H10, EN14, H2 on that basis.

Impact on residential amenity

The proposals would extend the full depth of the site. Whilst the immediate neighbour to the north is a commercial barbers shop, beyond that lies the residential garden of 136 Whitley Wood Lane. The proposed windows and balconies facing north at second floor would be clearly visible and would afford clear views down into that garden. Whilst the back-to-back distance

of 20m is met, this side-on relationship and the height of the proposed windows and balconies would result in a visually prominent and unrelenting built form running lengthways in relation to the neighbouring garden and offering little respite from actual and perceived overlooking. The proposed first floor garden area is shown with a screen however this is a somewhat contrived arrangement and is problematic in terms of its design and unattractiveness. Houses to the west would be separated by the neighbouring car park and the window facing west at second floor level would be approximately 33 metres from the flank of 1 Howard Villas which is considered a reasonable arrangement in amenity terms.

It is also considered that the bulky nature of the building would be overbearing on neighbours to the north.

The proposed layout raises concerns in terms of the amenity of future occupiers. Flats 4, 6, 10, and 12 would not have access to any amenity space in the form of either a garden or balcony. This would be contrary to Policy H10.

Flats 3 and 5, and 9 and 11 would have a cramped relationship with amenity areas of flats 3 and 9 directly adjacent to the only windows serving bedrooms in flats 5 and 11. This is likely to give rise to disturbance and a lack of privacy, certainly to flats 5 and 11.

Policy H5 requires the Nationally Described Space Standards to be applied. Flats 5, 6, 11 and 12 are shown as two person one bed flats (shown with double beds) but fall below the floor area of 50sqm required. This is contrary to Policy H5.

Transport

The proposals would have insufficient parking as per Highway Authority advice and the servicing arrangements would result in servicing from the adjacent highway which would cause an obstruction and be a hazard to road users, contrary to Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5.

Matters such as cycle parking, bin store layout and electric vehicle charging points could reasonably be secured by condition.

Ecology

The existing site is largely hardstanding and buildings and there is little to suggest that existing ecology would be harmed by the proposals. However the overdeveloped nature of the proposals do not offer suitable opportunities for a net gain in biodiversity which would be possible with a less densely-developed scheme. The proposals are contrary to Policy EN12 on this basis.

Affordable Housing

The proposals would be required to provide 30% of the total number of units on site as Affordable Housing in accordance with Policy H3. The applicant originally proposed 4 dwellings but has subsequently reduced this to 3 which equates to 25%. This would not comply with Policy H3 and no justification

has been provided for a lesser amount. Given the wide ranging concerns in respect of other aspects of the application it is not considered worthwhile pursuing this further at this stage.

S106

In addition to Affordable Housing requirements set out above, the scheme is in the 'Major' category and would be required to provide an Employment Skills and Training Plan for the 'Construction Phase', or equivalent financial contribution. Both options could be secured via S106 agreement at Outline stage, to include a mechanism to determine the exact amount sought at Reserved Matters stage (dependent on the final amount of floorspace proposed) based on the formula: $\text{£2,500} \times \text{Gross internal floor area of scheme (m}^2\text{)} / 1000\text{m}^2$

Policies CC9 and the Employment Skills and Training SPD (2013) apply.

Equalities Impact

When determining an application for planning permission the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this 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 proposed development.

CONCLUSION

Having had regard to the submitted details and all consultation responses and representations received, it is considered that the proposed development would represent an overdevelopment of the site, harmful to the character and appearance of the area, harmful to the amenity of neighbours and harmful to highway safety. In addition the proposals do not make appropriate provision in respect of Affordable Housing or employment skills and training requirements. Whilst benefits would arise from the provision of additional housing, this is a general benefit which can be realised elsewhere in the Borough and does not outweigh the harm identified.

Recommendation:

Refuse Outline Planning Permission for the following reasons:

- i. The proposed building, by reason of its excessive height, massing and plot coverage, and inappropriate architectural detailing, would result in an overly bulky, incongruous and visually dominant structure which would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area. As such the proposal would be contrary to Policies CC7 and H2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- ii. The proposed layout would not make suitable provision for tree planting and a net gain in biodiversity within the site with consequent harm to the character, appearance and ecological value of the site and surrounding area, contrary to Policies EN12 and EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- iii. The proposed building by reason of its bulk, height and massing, and the proposed second floor windows and balconies, would result in actual and perceived overlooking and an overbearing effect upon the private rear garden of the dwelling to the north at 136 Whitley Wood Lane, with consequent harm to the amenity of that dwelling. As such the proposal would be contrary to Policy CC8 and H2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- iv. The proposed layout would fail to provide sufficient outdoor amenity space for future occupiers of flat numbers 4, 6, 10, and 12 with consequent harm to the amenity of future occupiers of those dwellings and contrary to Policy H10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- v. The proposed layout would result in a cramped relationship between flats 3 and 5, and 9 and 11 with amenity areas directly adjacent to neighbouring bedroom windows with consequent harm to the amenity of future occupiers due to disturbance and a lack of privacy. As such the proposals are contrary to Policies CC8, H2 and H10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- vi. The proposed flats, numbers 5, 6, 11 and 12, would fail to comply with the Nationally Described Space Standards with consequent harm to the amenity of future occupiers and contrary to Policy H5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- vii. The proposed development fails to provide an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes and as such would fail to contribute adequately to the housing needs of Reading Borough and the objective of creating mixed and balanced communities. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy H2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- viii. The proposed layout would not provide appropriate facilities for vehicle parking and deliveries. This would result in parking and servicing on the highway in close proximity to the roundabout junction, with consequent harm to road safety and the flow of traffic and contrary to Policies TR3 and

TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

- ix. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure an acceptable contribution towards the provision of Affordable Housing, the proposal fails to contribute adequately to the housing needs of Reading Borough and the objective of creating mixed and balanced communities and as such is contrary to Policy H3 and adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (2021).
- x. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure an acceptable mitigation plan or equivalent contribution towards the provision of Employment, Skills and Training for the construction phase of the development, the proposal fails to contribute adequately to the employment, skills or training needs of local people with associated socioeconomic harm, contrary to Policies CC9 and the Employment Skills and Training SPD (2013).

INFORMATIVES

1. The Local Planning Authority has worked positively and proactively advising the applicant of relevant concerns at an early stage in the process. No pre-application advice was sought and an approval would not be possible within the prescribed target timescale and therefore the decision to proceed to refuse planning permission has been taken.

2. This decision relates to the following plans and documents:

102021/WWL 001 Location Plan - Block Plan dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 002 Existing Ground Floor dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 003 Existing First and Roof Plans dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 004 Existing Elevations dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 005 Ground Floor dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 006 First Floor dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 007 Second Floor dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 008 Elevations dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 009 Elevations dated 18 November 2021

2021/WWL 0010 Perspective dated 10 November 2021

Planning, Design and Access Statement dated 29 November 2021

Email from Glanville (Highways) 12 January 2021

3. This planning application was submitted without the benefit of first seeking pre-application advice from the Local Planning Authority, which can help avoid a refusal of planning permission. Please refer to the Council's website for details.

4. The applicant is advised that reason for refusal 9 (Affordable Housing contribution) may be able to be overcome through the submission of an appropriate Affordable Housing proposal.

5. The proposal extends beyond the application site boundary which raises issues relating to correct ownership certification etc.

Case Officer: Steve Vigar