

PLANNING STATEMENT

Change of Use
2 - 4 Alexandra Road
Reading, RG1 5PE

Prepared by
Sustainable Design and Energy
Consultants Ltd

September 2021

Contents	Page
1. Introduction	3
2. The Application Site and Surrounding Area	3
3. Planning History and Pre-Application Advice	4
4. The Proposed Scheme	4
5. National and Local Planning Policy Context	6
6. Planning Appraisal	9
7. Conclusion	10

1. Introduction

1.1 The Planning Statement is in support of a planning application of the change of use of no. 2-4 Alexandra Road RG1 5PE. The planning application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of the existing buildings from day care for Adults with learning difficulties and autism and 1x4 bed flat for respite accommodation to children's care home

1.2 In order to establish a clear understanding of the proposed change of use and its relationship with the surrounding area, the following are included in the Planning Statement.

- A description of the site and surrounding areas
- The site's planning history
- Overview of the proposed change of use
- A review of the relevant national and local planning policy guidance
- An appraisal of the proposed change of use against its planning context

2. The application Site and Surrounding Areas

2.1 The site is 2-4 Alexandra Road RG1 5PE located on the western side of Alexandra Road near the junction of London Road to the north. The properties are two semidetached buildings connected internally by a door size opening located midway along the party wall. The buildings were built in the 1980s. The properties have been let or owned by several companies in the past. The current Owners Lakeland Heights Ltd previously trading as Quality Care Providers acquired the properties in 2009.

The properties were used as Day Care Centre for adults with learning difficulties and autism and a respite home including office for staff. The properties have been vacant since 2019. The site adjoins Alexandra Road Conservation Area, but is not part of it and the area is predominantly residential. Some of the houses on Alexandra Road are converted multi-occupation including flats (nos 6, 8, 16, 34, 53, 55 for example) while some remain as family homes. There are also other buildings within the area that have been converted to professional use such as dentistry and there are also others that have been converted to nurses' quarters and a Nursery. To the north of the site is no. 74 London Road a dental and implant clinic and to the south and south east is predominantly residential area.

The site and the surrounding area are well served by public transport. There are very good bus services along King's Road to the north and Erleigh Road to the south of Alexandra Road all within five minutes walking distance. The bus routes have direct link to Reading Station and are frequent

The site has a good access to facilities such as convenience shops, local surgery, schools, café, churches and a pharmacy. The facilities are within walking distance from the site on the south east of Erleigh Road. To the northwest along Eleigh Road are Reading University and a library and a Orthodontics on Craven Road
There are car parking spaces on Alexandra Road most of which are managed by the NCP.

3. Relevant Planning History and Pre-application Advice

- 3.1 Number 2 Alexandra Road was granted planning permission for a change of use from B1(A) office to D1 day care for adults with learning difficulties and autism (ref. 090081/FUL) .
- 3.2 Number 4 Alexandra Road was granted planning permission for a change of use of the ground, first and second floors from office to 1 x 4 bed flat for use as respite accommodation (ref. 110664/FUL)
- 3.3 The properties have been in Lawful use as day care centre and respite accommodation run and managed by the same owner since 2009 as confirmed by these two planning permissions. When the property was purchased in 2009 by the current Owner there was already an existing access between the two properties via a door size opening halfway the party wall shared by the two buildings. This opening was used by the owner and staff as access between the two buildings to facilitate the day to day management of the buildings. However, post granting of the planning permission in 2011 there were additions to the ground floor of no.4 which included a sensory room, utility, a kitchen and two shower and WC which altered the layout of the ground floor from being an open plan 2 bedroom residential units, and still provided the two bedrooms as individually enclosed bedrooms.
- 3.4 A pre-application advice was sought for in January 2021 and the pre application advice was received in March 2021. The pre app advice was considered within the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019, RBC Supplementary Planning Document and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

4. The Proposed Scheme

- 4.1 The proposal is for the change of use of the existing day care for adults with learning difficulties and autism and change of use of the existing 1 x 4 bed flats respite accommodation to Children's care home.
- 4.2 The scheme involves internal alterations, erection of a single storey side extension at the front, a reception, and kitchen and activity space on the ground floor and bedrooms on the upper floors. The elevations remain largely unchanged except for the proposed side extension at the front, the replacement of existing roof lights with two dormer windows to the south, removal of some existing windows and rear door to facilitate conversion into bedrooms and to provide a disable access door to the amenity space at the rear. The proposal also includes bicycle stands, motorcycle/moped parking and associated car parking

at the forecourt and rear and an amenity space at the rear of the buildings. The proposed parking facilities are in accordance with the Reading Revised Parking Standards and Design (SPD October 2011) Electric vehicle floor and wall mounted charging points are included in the proposed parking spaces

It is expected that up to 12 staff will be employed. This staffing level is for when the home is operating in full capacity otherwise this level could be low in ratio to number of children in the home

They will work in shifts at different times of the day as follows:

Monday to Friday

- 8-10 staff 7am - 9am
- 3-4 staff..... 9am - 3pm
- 6-8 staff..... 3pm - 9pm
- 4 staff 9pm - 7am

Saturday and Sunday..... 6-8 staff

There could be up to 4 additional visiting professional/agency staff on appointments.

Waste and Recycling Bins are located at the forecourt adjacent to the existing boundary wall to allow for easy access during use and collections.

4.3 The proposed single storey side extension and dormer windows have been designed to be sympathetic to the scale and style of the property. The existing arch element at the side have been retained and incorporated into the proposed single storey side extension. The proposed dormers are similar in size and style to those of the adjacent property. The Staff car parking area will be formed using grasspave2 system. This is a porous grass paving system that allows rainwater to percolate through the permeable surface of the paving and back into the ground.

The system provides a long term green paving alternative that can reduce CO2 emissions and filter out environmental toxins through bioremediation.

The amenity space has many interesting features and it is primarily designed for play and social interaction involving children and young adults. The notion of play includes visual and sensorial experiences together with physical activities.

The key features such as the flooring, the planting, the wall climbing, the outdoor chessboard and basket ball court were specifically chosen in support of the design principle.

The materials used and the planting are also chosen to address the issue of climate changes and reduction of carbon dioxide emission. The materials chosen are reclaimed and sustainable. The flooring material is a 3D printed permeable Polypropylene tiles and the colours are very vibrant specifically chosen to stimulate the children. The flooring provides greater traction while reducing stress on the knee and ankle joints

Planters and retaining walls are made of Gabion stones wire mesh baskets and so are the proposed seating furniture.

5. Relevant National and Local Plan Policy Context

5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published March 2012 updated July 2021 sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The document states that the purposes of the planning system are to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The Government also published several guidance notes to supplement the policies of the NPPF and the notes expand upon matters set out on the Framework and explained, for instance, the importance of high quality design, how land availability assessment should be undertaken, how noise can impact on development, the importance of the natural environment and sustainability

5.2 In order to achieve these objectives the NPPF requires,

- Planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise (paragraph 11)
- Local Planning Authorities to approve development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay (paragraph 14)
- Local Planning Authorities to approach decision-taking in a positive way to encourage the delivery of sustainable development (paragraph 186)
- Local Planning Authorities to look for solutions rather than problems, with decision-takers at every level seeking to approve applications for sustainable development where possible and that Local Planning Authority should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve economic, social and environmental conditions of the area (paragraph 187)

5.3 The Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

5.4 The relevant policies of the Local plan that affect the proposed change of use are:

- Policy H6 – Accommodation for Vulnerable People

Policy H6 has a set of criteria to be met and the relevant criteria in this case states that "Where development would result in a loss of general housing, it must meet identified needs in the most up-to-date Housing Strategy and be able to accommodate at least an equivalent number of people". The proposed change of use provides ten accommodation units as compared to the existing four accommodation units.

The proposed Children's Care Home is a response to the great demand for child care facility in Reading. The number of children looked after in care has increased since 2015 reflecting a growth in demand for services nationally. In Reading, there

were 209 looked after children in 2015 and 273 in 2019. Figures revealed from the Department of Education and Newsquest Data Investigations Unit indicated this. Furthermore, the spending figure by Reading children services Brighter Future for Children showed the increased demand spent on looked after children to be from £16266000 in 2015 to £22936000 in 2019. (See enclosed report by The READING CHRONICLE. 24 January 2020).

In light of this information Lakeland Heights Ltd the current owner of the properties who are provider of children's care services decided to convert the properties into children's care home for children with learning difficulties and autism. The owner also wrote a letter to Reading Brighter Futures for Children in April 2021 expressing their intention to provide this service. Reading Brighter Future for Children did not reply to this letter (See enclosed letter)

- Policy H7 – Protecting the Existing House Stock.

The policy states that "Planning permission will not be granted for any loss of residential accommodation or land unless there are exceptional circumstances".

The policy also states that "there may be exceptional circumstances where a loss of a limited amount of general residential would help to meet other key identified needs, for instance for a specific identified need for accommodation for vulnerable groups". (para 4.4.56). The proposed change of use is for the provision of accommodation and facility for children with learning difficulties and autism some of who have physical disabilities. These children are a vulnerable group

- Policy CC7- Design And The Public Realm

"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"

The proposed Scheme has been fully described in section 4 above and it has been well demonstrated that the various components of development form set out in Policy CC7 have been met and further established in the Design and Access Statement accompanying the planning application.

- Policy CC8 – Safeguarding Amenity

The properties are existing buildings with established use almost similar to the proposed. The proposed scheme has several aspects designed into it that have enhanced the buildings and the site. The elevations remain largely unchanged externally except at the front on the ground floor with the

addition of a single storey side extension, the replacement of existing roof lights with two dormer windows to the south, removal of some existing windows and the enlargement of the existing external rear door to provide a disabled access to the amenity space at the rear. The proposed side extension will be built in the same material as the existing buildings. The proposed dormers are similar in style and shape to those of adjacent buildings and will be built with materials to match the host building.

The location of the dormer and their orientation are such as will not cause loss of light or privacy to the neighbouring buildings. The dormers are significantly set back and will not have any negative impact on the adjacent buildings.

Adequate parking facility for cars, motorcycle/moped have been provided and also bicycle stands for staff and visitors.

The safety and privacy of the occupants especially at the rear where the amenity space is have been provided. A specially designed privacy screen/fence have been provided along the perimeter of the boundary walls to provide privacy and security.

A noise impact assessment survey was carried in July 2021 and the results predicted the ambient noise level to be negligible/moderate. The maximum noise level is predicted to be negligible noise impact. (see enclosed Noise Impact Assessment Report by Auricle Acoustic Consulting)

- Policy EN3 – Enhancement Of Conservation Areas

“The special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and enhanced”

The site and buildings are immediately adjacent to the Alexandra Road Conservation Area but not within it. However, the staff car parking at the rear is within the Conservation Area and is adjacent to the existing dilapidated boundary wall between the car park and the proposed amenity. The wall will be moved and rebuilt to allow for the enlargement of the existing rear garden at no. 2-4 Alexandra Road to create the proposed amenity space.

A Heritage statement was provided in July 2021 by artichoke architectural consultancy for the site and proposed scheme. The statement concluded that the proposal do not result in material harm to the buildings or to the adjacent Conservation Area. The proposal has no impact upon the scale and massing of the townscape and upon the streetscape. Furthermore, it concluded that the proposal act in accordance with the requirements of the local authority as well as that of Historical

England development guidelines and policies. (see enclosed Heritage Statement).

6. Planning Appraisal

6.1 Alexandra Road is located in zone 2. Primary Core Area. This zone directly surrounds the Central Core and it is about a distance of 2 kilometers from the center of Reading.

The zone and the surrounding area are well served by public transport. There are very good bus services along King's Road to the north and Erleigh Road to the south of Alexandra Road all within five minutes walking distance. The buses are regular and have direct link to Reading Station.

6.2 The proposal is largely one of reuse with minor external changes to the existing buildings. The changes will not have negative impact on the host buildings or the adjacent buildings. The buildings are not within the Alexandra Road Conservation Area but are adjacent to it and the changes will not have any significant impact on the Conservation Area

6.3 In terms of scale and impact on the properties in the Alexandra Road Conservation Area, the change of use will have no significant impact. A large proportion of the proposed development is internal and the additional dormer windows are in keeping with others in the area. The proposed single storey side extension is complementary to the host buildings and also incorporates the existing arch at the front. The materials will match the existing and the external appearance will enhance the area and provide an active use to an otherwise vacant buildings

6.4 The site is within a sustainable location in terms of transport as the area is well served by public transport.

The applicant is also aware of the Council's concern regarding parking on Alexandra Road and adequate parking and bicycle stands have been proposed to avoid any impact on Alexandra Road Residential Permit Parking Scheme. The proposal will not generate additional pressure for parking in the area. The proposal, with the level of the car parking and bicycle stands provided will encourage visitors and staff to use public transport, bicycles or motorcycles to the site and to work. The client is also aware of the Council's parking permit provision for Health Care professionals and the applicant may apply for these permits in accordance with their eligibility criteria.

7 Conclusion

The Planning Statement has established the merits and acceptability of the proposed change of use.

The site is in a sustainable location that is well served by public transport and within a short walking distance to local shops, professional services and amenities.

Whilst the site is in close proximity to the Alexandra Conservation Area, The proposed change of use will not have any harmful impact on the Conservation Area.

The site and the proposed scheme will provide accommodation for an identified need for a vulnerable group.

The NPPF states that local planning authorities should approach decision-taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development (para 186}. It also requires that they seek solutions rather than problems and approve applications that are sustainable development. (para 187).

The proposed change of use is a sustainable development and has been established as such in light of this planning statement