

Planning Department
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

Reference: 216001

1 March 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

Thames House, 42 Portman Street, Reading, RG30 1EA
Planning application for extra storey

Verve Planning
info@verveplanning.com
www.verveplanning.com

Reg no. 11491335

On behalf of our client, Soni.me Ltd, we are pleased to submit a planning application for an additional storey to the existing building to provide office accommodation along with minor alterations to the building and the provision of parking and other ancillary facilities.

This application follows pre-application advice (Ref: 210187) received on 4 May 2021 regarding a residential option. Whilst this advice was not supportive of the principle of residential, the advice did confirm that proposed design of the roof addition would be acceptable in terms of the character of the area.

The following information is included with this planning application:

- Completed pre-application form;
- Drawings prepared by Hollman Newman Architects include:
 - Location Plan (existing and proposed)- 2205-P104;
 - Existing ground and first floor plans (as per Prior Approval scheme 200693) - 2009 200 P1;
 - Proposed second floor plans - 2205-P100;
 - Existing and proposed front elevations - 2205-P101;
 - Existing and proposed rear elevations - 2205-P102
 - Existing and proposed side elevations – 2205-P103;
 - Photograph of Existing site (2205-P105) and 3D visualisation of proposal (2205-P106).
- CIL form; and
- Application fee including service charge £2,338

Site Description and Background

The application site measures approximately 0.22ha and contains a two storey 1970s former office building (currently being converted to 16 dwellings) located on the north side Portman Road, Reading. Five additional parking spaces are also being constructed under permission 181934.

The site shares a vehicle access with 44 Portman Road which is accessed from Albany Close to the northeast of the site. Pedestrian access is directly from Portman Road. The surrounding area comprises commercial uses to the north, east and west and residential on the south side of Portman Road.

Photographs of the site (Source: Streetview)



Looking east towards the site

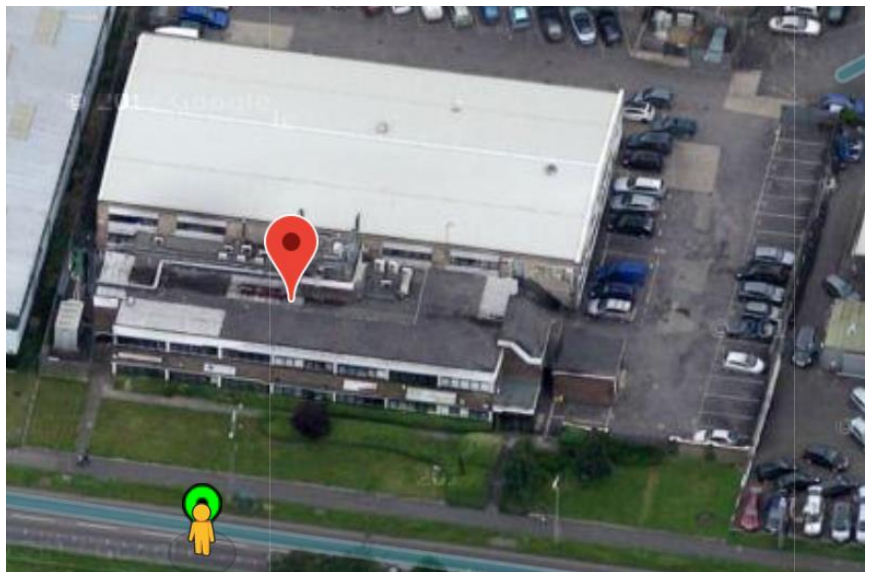


View of site frontage



Looking west towards the site

Aerial view of the site (Source: Streetview)



Planning History

The council's on-line planning records indicate the following decisions at the site:

- 01-01308-FUL (010718) - External: private car park extension. Refused.
- 06-01334-FUL (060028) - New entrance area and first floor extension to existing office building. Granted 22 December 2006.
- 08-01546-FUL (081489) - Extension of existing on-site parking to office building. Refused.
- 150391 - Proposed Car Park Extension. Approved 8 June 2015.
- 181934 - Proposed Extension to Existing External Car Park Area (Renewal of original Planning Approval Ref: 150391 dated 8th June 2015). Approved 19 February 2019.
- 200693 - Prior Approval granted to change use from office to 16 residential units (Notification under Class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of GPDO). Decision issued on 6 August 2020. The drawings submitted in connection with this application enquiry show the permitted development residential scheme on the ground and first floors.

The change of use to residential and the creation of the additional five parking spaces are currently underway.

Planning Assessment

Principle of development

Policy EM1 Provision of Employment Development supports the provision of 53,000-112,000sqm of office floorspace in Reading Borough. The site falls within Portman Road Core Employment Area (CEA), listed as EM2H in Policy EM2.

Major office developments are directed into the centre of Reading and the A33 corridor and major industrial and storage and distribution into the CEAs. As the proposed office is 370sqm, it would not fall within the 'major' office category and should therefore be considered an appropriate and complementary use in the CEA that would support its economic function. The proposal would not result in any loss of employment space. It is also of note that the site previously contained offices.

Another Policy EM4 Maintaining a Variety of Premises supports a range of types and sizes of units which this proposal would help to support. It would provide modern and flexible employment accommodation that could be subdivided to provide spaces for small and growing businesses.

Furthermore, an office is considered a suitable use adjacent to (or above or below) a residential use and therefore the resultant mix would be considered acceptable in planning terms.

Overall, therefore we consider that the principle of the use should be considered acceptable and in accordance with policies EM1, EM2 and EM4 of the local plan.

Design and Character of the Area

The pre-application advice received in respect of a previous scheme stated that

'the proposed extension would sit directly above the existing building, and the plant room on the roof would be removed. The materials would consist of a rain screen cladding system and it is considered that there would be an improvement to the existing appearance of the building. However, the building is a purpose-built office block and even with the improvement in design at

second floor level it retains its office block appearance and in this regard the proposed design is in keeping with the character and appearance of the industrial/commercial area in which it is located’.

In view of this feedback, the proposed office follows the same design rationale as the previous scheme, albeit with the balconies removed and with modified fenestration. The overall bulk and massing of the extension is in proportion to the existing building. The external design would improve the appearance of the building and the recessed element at the front would provide visual interest. The attached 3D visualisation provides an indication of how the proposal would appear.

Overall, therefore we consider the proposal sits comfortably in the streetscene and would be an improvement to the visual amenity of the area, in accordance with Policy CC7.

Residential Amenity

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) of the Local Plan requires development to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

The proposed office use is regarded as an appropriate use next to residential uses (in this case below) and would not cause any harm to their amenity in terms of privacy, overlooking, outlook or noise and disturbance. Similarly, it is some distance from the housing area to the south of Portman Road, beyond the park, and therefore unlikely to have any effects on their outlook or privacy. We therefore consider the scheme would comply with Policy CC8.

Transport and highways

The site is close to walking and cycling facilities, including the provision of an off-road cycling connection between the centre of Reading to the east and Tilehurst Station to the west. The site is located within the Zone 3, the Secondary Core Area but on the periphery of Zone 2, Primary Core. In accordance with the adopted Parking SPD, the development would be required to provide parking provision of between 4 and 7 spaces. The proposed Site Plan shows a total of 32 car parking spaces (including two disabled spaces) for the mixed-use site (ie 28 for the 16 flats in the converted office building under permitted development plus 4 for the offices. This provision is considered appropriate for the location of the site, bearing in mind it is on the periphery of Zone 2 (Primary Core Area).

Secure cycle parking (4 spaces) is provided in an existing detached building immediately to the east of the building. The level of cycle parking is in accordance with minimum standards that require 1 space per 100sqm. This is in addition to the eight spaces provided for under the permitted development scheme for the 16 flats. The store is large enough to accommodate 12 spaces for the whole development and accords with Policies TR4 and TR5. Details can be secured through condition.

It is anticipated that the modest office accommodation would not have an unacceptable impact on highway safety, nor will the residual cumulative impacts on the road network be severe (in accordance with the NPPF).

Space for refuse and recycling can be provided inside the office and in the detached store.

Conclusion

As demonstrated above, the site offers an opportunity to provide additional office accommodation within the employment area which should be regarded as an appropriate use in terms of the surrounding employment uses and the residential accommodation beneath. The proposal complies with planning policy at all levels.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding validation.

Yours faithfully



Helen Greenhalgh

Enc: Listed on page 1

cc: Amit Mehta, Soni.me Ltd