

PLANNING SUPPORT STATEMENT

1a Stanley Grove, Reading

Prepared For
Mr Philip Portch

9094
August 2021



bell cornwell

CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

Bell Cornwell LLP, Unit 2, Meridian Office Park, Osborn Way,
Hook, Hampshire RG27 9HY

01256 766673 | info@bell-cornwell.co.uk | bell-cornwell.co.uk



CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
2	INTERNAL AMENITY SPACE	5
3	CONDITIONS	9
4	CONCLUSION	11



1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 This statement is submitted in support of an application for the conversion of an existing storage (B8) building into a residential use as a one bedroom dwelling.

1.2 This is a follow up of a recent application which was refused by the Borough Council (reference 200429) on 26th June 2020 for the following reasons:

1. By virtue of the primarily blank north/front elevation, and notwithstanding the addition of obscure glass, the proposal would result in an inactive frontage to the principal elevation of the building. The proposed 'terrace' (internal courtyard) will provide unacceptably limited outlook to habitable rooms, to the detriment of the residential amenity the future occupiers. There is also the potential for habitable rooms at 2 George Street to overlook habitable rooms and the outside terrace. The terrace is not a suitable amenity space as it does not provide a suitable opportunity for the range of functions reflective of the prevailing pattern of other amenity spaces in the area. The proposed residential dwelling would represent an incongruous form of backland development which would be out of keeping with the layout and pattern of residential development in the area and does not respond positively to its local context. It would therefore result in a materially harmful effect on the character of this residential area, contrary to Policies CC7, CC8, H8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

2. The proposed development has failed to demonstrate that it would not cause an unacceptable adverse impact to residents of the scheme and surrounding properties arising from noise and disturbance from accessing the property and due to the proximity of the external terrace with the outdoor amenity space, negatively affecting the garden of No. 2 George Street. The proposal will have a significant detrimental impact on the living environment of existing neighbouring residents, over and above the current domestic storage use of the existing building, contrary to Policies CC8 and H10 of the Reading Borough Council Local Plan (2019).

3. The resulting dwelling with its cut-in courtyard, would produce a contrived and cramped design with inadequate internal floorspace for residents which would fail to meet the National Minimum Space Standards, contrary to policies H5, H8, H10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

4. The application has failed to demonstrate that the conversion of the building to residential accommodation will incorporate measures to adapt to climate change and incorporate water conversion measures so that the predicted per capita consumption does not exceed the appropriate



levels set out in the applicable BREEAM standard. This is contrary to Policy CC2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

1.3 Whilst refusing, in the LPA's determination of the application, The following elements of the proposal were deemed to be acceptable and were ultimately endorsed by the Planning Inspector on appeal (more on this below):

- The loss of employment use
- The prevailing lack of parking provision
- No requirement for affordable housing presumably on the basis of the Vacant Building Credit set out in paragraph 63 of the NPPF which states that "to support the re-use of brownfield land, where vacant buildings are being reused or redeveloped, any affordable housing contribution due should be reduced by a proportionate amount".
- No requirement for any other financial contributions

1.4 On appeal, the Secretary of State took a more pragmatic view to the proposed conversion and made some helpful conclusions which now become material considerations of weight in the consideration moving forward. The important difference between the Inspector's assessment and the LPA's assessment was that the former accepted that there is an existing building on the site, and whilst not ideally located, its presence was the starting point for consideration. Conversely, the LPA considered the previous application as though there was no existing building on the site. The Inspector's conclusions are detailed below:

- *The Council indicate that the building has been used for light industrial and storage purposes, but do not object to the loss of employment floorspace;*
- *A residential use would better reflect surrounding uses*
- *The backland location of the building is at variance with the predominant pattern of houses fronting a road, but as the proposal is for a conversion of an existing building it would not change the area's established pattern of development.*
- *CC7 of the RBLP relates mainly to new buildings.*



- *a one bedroom unit would not result in an intensification of activity that would be harmful to the character of the area.*
- *The physical changes to the building would make a positive response to the site's immediate context and circumstances.*
- *The physical changes to the building would make a positive response to the site's immediate context and circumstances.*
- *The residential use of the building should not therefore result in undue noise nuisance for the nearest neighbours.*
- *The proposal would not have an adverse impact on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers.*
- *Provision of the courtyard would enable habitable areas to benefit from adequate natural lighting and an acceptable outlook given the site's constraints.*
- *The courtyard would provide a useable outside amenity, larger in size than a balcony to many flats. It would allow daylight into the living areas and also outlook from them. Outlook could not be through conventional flank windows, given constraints imposed by the building's location, but would be similar to that provided by rooflights to some flats.*
- *The proposal would not be contrary to Policy H10 which requires dwellings to be provided with functional private or communal open space not compromised by the relationship with other buildings.*
- *If the proposal was otherwise acceptable a planning condition could have been used to address security and lighting concerns.*
- *If the internal floorspace layout had been acceptable it would have been possible to utilise a planning condition to address the Council's concerns relating to sustainable design and construction.*

1.5 So far so good. All these factors were found by the Inspector in favour of allowing the appeal. Ultimately, concerns about the living conditions resulted in the dismissal of the appeal. The concerns are summarised below:



- courtyard's size and position would limit the floor area available for the bedroom, bathroom and corridor kitchen making these areas unduly tight.
- The internal store for bikes and bins would also limit the overall living space
- It may be possible to adjust the layout in these respects

1.6 The last bullet point leaves the door ajar to amend the plans and get a consent from the LPA. The issue identified by the Inspector is not a failing to satisfy the Nationally Described Space Standard but more a more holistic look at the living conditions on offer.

1.7 For the sake of this Planning Statement we will therefore proceed on the basis that all of the conclusions detailed in paragraph 1.4 above are now fully determined and are not open for further consideration unless there is a material change in circumstances since the decision was made. Such a change would come from a change in the Development Plan, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) or as a result of the changes to the proposed dwelling to address the Inspector's concerns. The latter are assessed in Section 2 below.

1.8 There has been no change in the Development Plan, the main document remaining the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019). The policy position has not changed.

1.9 In terms of the NPPF, this was updated in July 2021. Having considered the relevant advice, we are content that the changes are not material to change the consideration of this application from the position established by the Inspector.



2 INTERNAL AMENITY SPACE

- 2.1 The acceptability of this current scheme therefore solely depends on addressing the Inspector's concern about the quality of internal amenity space for the future occupiers of the dwelling.
- 2.2 Whilst the Inspector effectively moved the assessment away from the more specific policy requirements (as it is an application for the conversion of an existing building) the development plan remains the starting point for consideration¹. In terms of internal space, policy H5 of the Local Plan clearly refers to "new build" housing, specifically differentiated from conversions. It refers to "new build" at the start of the policy and for all the sub points a) to e) whilst point f) is not relevant. The Inspector confirmed that whilst a policy referring to internal space, it is not directly relevant to applications for conversion of existing buildings.
- 2.3 Likewise, policy H8 doesn't make any reference to the conversion of a building to a house. The only reference to internal floor space in policy H8 is in context of proposals to convert properties into self-contained flats or for multiple occupation which is not relevant to this application.
- 2.4 Policy H10 then refers specifically to outdoor space but the Inspector provides a positive answer to the provision of the external space. Therefore, moving forward following the Inspector's judgement, none of policies H5, H8 and H10 are directly relevant to the proposal.
- 2.5 The Space Standards demand that a 1-bedroom single storey house/flat for one person² should have a minimum floor space of 37m². The Inspector did not say that the failure to provide 37m² was fatal to the appeal scheme. In fact, the contrary. He accepted that some flexibility could be applied given the constraints of the existing building. This remains the starting point – there is an existing building which is tightly constrained.
- 2.6 The Inspector's concerns were specifically based on the perceived "cramped" living space provided by the then proposed development. The conclusion in paragraph 13 of the Inspector's decision that the courtyard "would provide a useable outside amenity, larger in size than a balcony to many flats" suggests that it could be reduced in size yet still fulfil its function as

¹ S70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and S38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

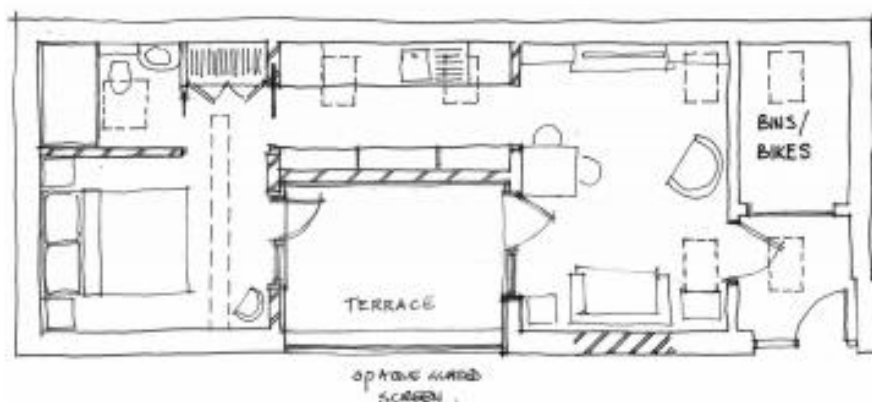
² We note that the proposed plans show a double bed in the bedroom but actually, a bedroom area of 9m² is only suitable for a single bed under the Technical Requirements of Paragraph 10 of the Space Standards.



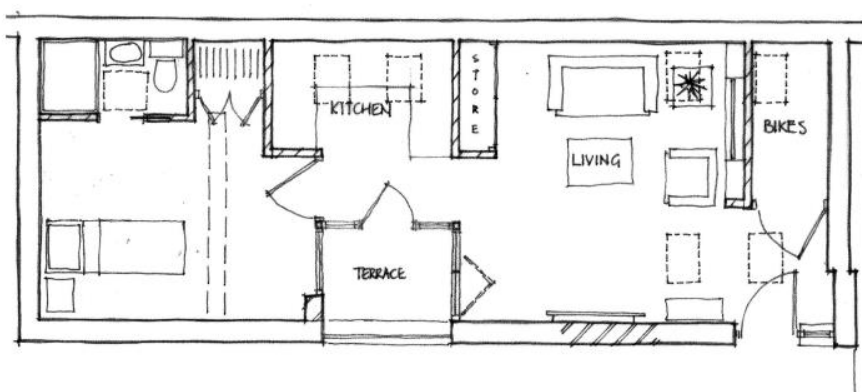
outdoor amenity space. Furthermore, there is external space to provide storage or the bins. These do not need to be within the building.

- 2.7 The proposed plans therefore use these two areas of flexibility to reconsider the floor space and to make it less cramped. The results of the changes are shown below in a before/after comparison:

Dismissed layout:



Proposed layout:



- 2.8 The changes are clear. By reducing the size of the terrace/courtyard this enables the kitchen to become a separate area rather than what was, previously, a corridor through from the living room to the bedroom. The bedroom increases in size, as does the living area.
- 2.9 The terrace is reduced in size and now measures 1.25m by 1.75m resulting a total area of 2.2m². This leaves a total internal area of the dwelling of 37.8m². This fulfils the Nationally Described



Space Standard for a 1 person 1 bedroom property with a shower room (noting that the bath has been removed and replaced with a shower).

- 2.10 All these changes fulfil the brief of making the living conditions less cramped. The only consequence of the changes is the reduction in the size of the courtyard both in terms of the usable external space and whether there remains sufficient light and ventilation to the proposed dwelling.
- 2.11 In terms of the former, the Inspector clearly accepted that the courtyard (then proposed) was acceptable but specifically noted that it was larger than it had to be. The LPA has no adopted policy for balconies (which is what the Inspector compared the courtyard to). 2.2m² remains a usable area for a single person to sit outside in or to put a drying rack (in fact there would be room for both simultaneously). On this basis, the proposed courtyard satisfies the requirements of policy H10 of the Reading Local Plan.
- 2.12 In terms of natural light and ventilation, all three rooms (bedroom, kitchen and living room) have a door or window out into the courtyard. Cumulatively, natural light will be provided on three sides giving a good amount of light to the property. Open doors and windows will provide through flow of air irrespective if they open onto a small courtyard or onto a wider area of open space.
- 2.13 All in all, the changes respond to the Inspector's concerns without introducing any additional planning issues that would weigh against the proposed development. The use as a dwellinghouse wouldn't work without the terrace courtyard and this is a clever and well-conceived design solution to the constrained site and the inability to add any new windows on the flank elevations. If the building is to be reused, which the Government encourages to help deliver more housing in a sustainable way (endorsed by the Inspector who sought the positives rather than the negatives and left the route clear for a planning approval) and a more characteristic use is to be introduced to the building, there needs to be some flexibility in the approach. The Inspector has quite rightly guided the LPA away from applying policies which are clearly not intended for this type of conversion and which merely raise obstacles rather than solutions.
- 2.14 The application refers to an existing building which has a use which is out of keeping with the residential character of the area. The proposed use is in keeping with this character. The



proposed changes are minor but essential to make it a liveable dwelling. The result is a positive solution to a challenging site and, ultimately, the provision of an attractive little unit of accommodation which is likely to be well sought after.



3 CONDITIONS

3.1 The Inspector left two issues which he concluded could be dealt with by a planning condition. Firstly concerns over the lighting of the footpath linking Stanley Grove to the front door of the property and secondly to address the sustainability credentials of the proposed dwelling.

3.2 The applicant is willing to accept such condition when planning permission is granted. We have drafted the following condition which we believe fulfil the 6 tests of Planning conditions set out in paragraph 56 of the NPPF. This requires that they are:

- i) necessary;
- ii) relevant to planning;
- iii) relevant to the development to be permitted;
- iv) enforceable;
- v) precise; and
- vi) reasonable in all other respects.

3.3 Suggested conditions:

1. *Prior to the occupation of the dwelling it shall be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority that the conversion of the building to residential accommodation incorporates suitable measures to adapt to climate change and incorporate water conversion measures so that the predicted per capita consumption does not exceed the appropriate levels set out in the applicable BREEAM standard.*

Reason: To comply with Policy CC2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

2. *Prior to the occupation of the dwelling, details of external lighting along the footpath between Stanley Grove and the property shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The lighting shall be implemented in accordance with the approved strategy and retained in perpetuity.*



Reason: In the interest of public safety on the footpath but to ensure that any external lighting does not have a detrimental impact on neighbouring amenities.



4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The application proposes the reuse of an existing, poorly located B8 use and the Secretary of State, in assessing the previous appeal acknowledged that the reuse of the existing building was fundamental to the considerations of the application. The building forms part of the established character of the area and a residential use is more in keeping with the character of the area than the existing use. The existing use has the potential to be far noisier than the use of the building as small dwelling.
- 4.2 The changes to the building are limited to the provision of the terrace courtyard. This as an inventive design solution to adapt the property to a residential use. The courtyard has been reduced in area since the previous proposal to increase the internal size of the dwelling (further aided by a removal of bin storage) but the courtyard remains usable as amenity and will continue to provide light and ventilation for all three sides of it. Any overlooking or other amenity constraints for future occupiers would not make the property appear either unattractive or unliveable.
- 4.3 All other issues have been fully considered by the LPA and the Inspector and have been found in favour of the development. These include the loss of employment use, the lack of parking, the visual impact, the impact on neighbours, the noise implications etc.
- 4.4 The proposal is entirely consistent with the requirements of the Local Plan to deliver new housing. We conclude, therefore, with the wording under policy H1³ of the Local Plan which states that “There is a pressing need for additional housing in Reading and the surrounding area” and continues that “The undeveloped land that does exist is mainly either in the functional floodplain or is important public open space. Provision of new housing therefore involves a heavy reliance on previously developed land, and the supply of such sites constrains the amount of housing that can be delivered in the Borough”. In this context, this proposal results in a small, yet nonetheless important, contribution towards the LPA’s housing targets.

³ Paragraphs 4.4.1 and 4.4.3