

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No: 200373/FUL

Address: 20a Norcot Road, Tilehurst, Reading

Proposal: Erection of part 1.5 storey, part 2.5 storey apartment block comprising 1 x 1-bed flat and 2 x 2-bed flats following demolition of existing car sales building

Case officer: Ethne Humphreys

Target Date: Originally 5/5/2020; Extension of Time Agreed until 26/04/2021

Site Description and Surrounding Area:

The application site relates to land to the east and rear of 20 Norcot Road, a recently vacant bookmakers located on the southern side of Norcot Road. The site comprises a hardstanding area with a large garage structure at the rear of the site and car showroom to the rear of No.20 itself.

The surrounding properties comprise two storey buildings with a mix of terrace properties, linked detached houses and maisonettes/ flats, some of which have been extended. The application site is currently a mixture of retail/ residential units which includes a car sales/ repair and a car wash.

The site is within the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre and is also within an area of potential contaminated land.

Proposal:

This is an application for the erection of part 1.5 storey, part 2.5 storey apartment block comprising 1 x 1-bed flat and 2 x 2-bed flats following demolition of existing car sales building

The materials used in the construction of the building will include:

- Red brick, slate tile and white upvc doors and windows

3 car parking spaces are proposed and it is proposed to utilise the existing access from Lemart Close. Soft landscaping is also indicated on the plans.

Plans Considered:

Drawing No: Location Plan PL-01

Drawing No: Topographic Survey PL-02

Drawing No: Existing and Proposed Block Plan PL-03

Drawing No: Existing Elevations PL-04

Drawing No: Existing Side Elevations PL-05

Drawing No: Existing Plans PL-15

Received 10th March 2020

Planning, Design and Access Statement

Received 10th March 2020

Drawing No: Swept Path Analysis Car Parking 01

Received 10th September 2020

Drawing No: Proposed Site Plan PL-06

Drawing No: Proposed Plans PL-07

Drawing No: Proposed Ground Floor Plan PL-08

Drawing No: Proposed Elevations PL-09

Drawing No: Proposed Side Elevations PL-10

Drawing No: 3D Image of Private Garden

Drawing No: 3D Images

Received 15th September 2020

Relevant Planning History:

200766 Change of use of bookmakers (sui generis) to B1(a) use (offices). Prior Notification under Class JA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended). Prior Approval Notification - Approval

190849 Application for a Lawful Development Certificate for a Proposed change of use from B2 to B1. Withdrawn

Adjacent site:

181302 Erection of 3 semi-detached dwellings following demolition of the existing garages. Permitted subject to legal agreement

1820102 Enforcement Expediency

Other Nearby sites

14a Lemart Close

172194 Change of use of 14a Lemart Close from Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 2 x 1-bed flats. Prior Notification under Class PA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England)(Amendment) Order 2016. Prior Approval 22/01/2018

22 Norcot Road

141366 Demolition of part of existing shop and erection of a single storey rear extension to create three one-bedroom apartments with associated private gardens, parking and refuse store. Permitted

Consultation Responses:

Highways Officer: Further to revised/additional plans, no objection subject to conditions and informatives.

Tree Officer: Further to additional information, no objection subject to conditions.

Ecologist: No objection subject to conditions.

Environmental Protection: No objection subject to conditions.

Neighbour letters were sent to adjoining properties and 1 neighbour letter of objection received concerned with:

- Suitability of vehicle access

Summary of discussions with applicant/agent:

The agent was advised of concerns relating to visibility splays/on-site parking/manoeuvring of cars. Further to revised plans/additional information, no further objection from the Transport Officer subject to conditions.

During the course of the application, the applicant has submitted two valuations with a view to providing a financial contribution towards affordable housing in the Borough.

An extension of time was agreed on the extension until 26/04/2021.

No formal pre-application advice was sought prior to the submission of this application.

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular 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 development.

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) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. In this case the development plan consists of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction

CC3: Adaptation 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

EM3: Loss of Employment Land

EN9: Provision of Open Space

EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network

EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland

EN15: Air Quality

EN16: Pollution and Water Resources

H1: Provision of Housing

H2: Density and Mix

H3: Affordable Housing

H5: Standards for New Housing

H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space

RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres

RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres

TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy

TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging

RBC Supplementary Planning Documents

Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)

Affordable Housing SPD (2013) / Draft Affordable Housing SPD (October 2020)

Revised SPD on Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2015)

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)

DCLG Technical housing standards - nationally described space standard (2015)

Appraisal

Principle of development / land use matters

The site is within the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre. Criteria c) of Policy RL3 states that “Within and adjacent to district, major and local centres, all new development should provide some ‘centre uses’ at the ground floor, unless it can clearly be demonstrated that this would not be possible or appropriate. The proposals do not propose any ‘centre uses’ and instead propose a solely residential (non-centre) use. However, it is noted that the site is not within a key frontage in the centre as per the Tilehurst Triangle proposals map, with the key frontage starting adjacent to the site to the west. In this very specific instance, the prospect of expanding retail in these Covid 19 times is considered to be limited. This is supported by the supporting text to this policy, which acknowledges at para 4.6.19 states that “criterion (c) recognises the fact that opportunities for expansion of these centres are relatively rare”. Given this, and the pressing need for residential housing within the Borough, it is considered that in this very specific instance a proposal solely for residential use is appropriate.

Further to the above, and given the existing garage structures on the site, the proposed development would also need to be assessed in terms of the change of use of non-core

employment land. Policy EM3 provides criteria for the loss of non-core employment land that includes the following:

- Would continued employment use of the site detrimentally affect the amenity and character of a residential area?
- Is the need for alternative uses stronger than the need for the retention of employment land?

The site is situated to in between the commercial properties along Norcot Road; however, it is situated to the north of a predominantly residential area. The site has recently been used as a car wash/valeting service and car repair business and with no record of planning permission for such use (prior to this the lawful use of the land had been established to be car sales). Furthermore, the use of the site has generated many complaints from nearby neighbouring properties and is currently being investigated by the Council's Enforcement and Environmental Protection teams in this respect. As such it is considered the continued employment use of the site detrimentally affects the amenity and character of a residential area.

In addition to the above, the need for housing within the borough is considered to outweigh the unauthorised use of the site as employment land and the principle of providing Class C3 residential use at the site is acceptable in that this aligns with the broad objectives of Policy H1. More specifically, the proposals would assist the Borough in meeting its annual housing targets. The proposal mix of 1 x 1 bed and 2 x 2 bed flats, set within the context of the size and nature of the site, is considered acceptable. The density of development is also considered suitable, with the proposal making an efficient use of the space/land.

The loss of the non-core employment land to housing and the lack of retail 'centre uses' is therefore considered acceptable in this instance as it accords with Policies EM3, RL1 and H1 of the Local Plan.

Design, Impact on the Character of the Area and Street Scene

Policy CC7: Design requires all development to be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form include layout, landscape, density and mix, scale - height and massing and architectural detail and materials.

The existing garage structures at the site are not considered to be of any particular architectural merit. The buildings are not listed, within a conservation area or locally listed. Furthermore, the visual contribution the site currently makes to the wider area is limited, due to the commercial nature of the buildings and amount of hardstanding which is somewhat stark in appearance. Within this context, there is no in-principle objection to the existing buildings being demolished, subject to the replacement dwellings being appropriate in all other respects (which is detailed further below).

The plans as originally submitted were considered to result in any overly incongruous and dominant appearance due to the depth of the building in combination with the parapet walls, lack of detailing and indeed further exacerbated by the part two/part three storey blank façade with no articulation on the south west facing flank elevation. Revised plans were received removing the parapet walls (now a pitched roof to match the adjacent buildings), lowering the height of the rear element from two storey to single storey (to minimise overall bulk) and adding a brick detailing pattern to the south west facing flank elevation.

The above changes are welcomed. The now proposed building is considered to satisfactorily align with the remainder of the terrace, with the roof profile aligning on the front elevation, with similar roof ridge and eaves height, together with similar set-back from the street. Whilst the south west facing flank elevation would still be deep with no window articulation, and there remains some concern over views from the east, it is acknowledged that this is to protect neighbouring privacy right on the boundary. The overall depth amount of blank wall has been reduced and the brick pattern helps to break up/liven this elevation at first floor. On balance, this element of the scheme is considered acceptable and partly owing to the site constraints in this specific instance.

Two side dormer windows are proposed, one on the south east facing elevation and one on the south west facing elevation. Given their relatively small scale nature and that they would be set back from the main front elevation and down from the main roof ridge (the south west dormer window not readily visible given its position), they are not considered to be so overtly incongruous to cause any adverse harm.

Overall, it is considered that the proposed building has taken enough design cues from the street scene where appropriate, and it is not considered that the design makes the proposals so conspicuous so as to cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The proposals would not be overly excessive in scale, allowing for soft

landscaping, parking spaces and access. Indeed, the proposal is considered to strike an appropriate balance between maximising the potential of the site for residential development whilst not representing an overdevelopment of the site. As discussed further below, soft landscaping is proposed at the front of the site. This is considered to help soften views from the highway and its provision is welcomed in an area largely devoid of soft landscaping along this part of Norcot Road.

Overall, the proposals would be as modest as possible given the location and existing context of neighbouring properties, successfully assimilating into the existing context. However, officers also acknowledge and consider that the amount of development proposed is the maximum permissible at this site, owing to the site constraints and surrounding characteristics of the immediate area. Given the above, in respect of both the buildings themselves and the nearby context, the proposal is considered satisfactory in design terms.

To ensure suitable quality of materials it is considered reasonable and appropriate to secure further details (and samples) of the proposed materials by way of a suitable worded pre-commencement condition. With this condition secured and in light of the above, it is considered that the proposals would not adversely harm the character of the surrounding streetscape or give rise to an overly dominant or incongruous addition to the immediate area such to warrant a refusal. Indeed, in developing what is currently a somewhat utilitarian commercial site, it could make a more positive contribution to the area.

Impact on Neighbour Amenity

Residential amenity is assessed against Policy CC8 which requires developments to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing properties in terms of: Privacy and overlooking; Access to sunlight and daylight; Visual dominance and overbearing; Harm to outlook; Noise and disturbance; Artificial lighting; Vibration; Dust and fumes; Smell; and Crime and safety.

In relation to the recent approval towards the rear (south) of the site (181302), whilst the proposed first floor rear window would look across to the rear gardens of these recently approved properties should they be implemented, there would be a distance of at least 14m to the garden closest to the common boundary. Whilst acknowledging that Policy CC8 references a 20m back to back distance, there are instances where lesser distances are suitable. In this specific instance, this is not an unusual relationship and is not considered to result in any significantly harmful material loss of privacy. Similarly, given the orientation and distance to

the dwellings themselves should they be built, there would be no material loss of light or overbearing impact.

In relation to No.20 Norcot Road itself to the north west, the removal of the single storey structure and replacement with communal garden area and associated soft landscaping is considered to a visual improvement, with no material harm caused to the commercial property in this respect. Whilst the proposed building would project past the rear elevation of the main building, it would not breach a 45 degree line to the nearest habitable room window and the roof would be hipped away to minimise the impact. There is one first floor window on the south east facing flank elevation of No.20 which is obscurely glazed and as such it is not considered there would be any material loss of privacy.

The proposed communal garden area would also be located adjacent the common boundary with No.18 Norcot Road, to the north west. This is not considered unacceptable given the commercial nature of No.18 and indeed the soft landscaping as indicated on the plans would help to soften the impact of the proposals which can be secured by way of a suitably worded condition.

Given the position of the proposed building right on the boundary with No.22 Norcot Road, to the south east of the site, no windows are proposed on the flank elevation facing this property so as to prevent any material loss of privacy. No.22 also features a deep single storey rear extension serving three one bedroom apartments. Whilst visible to the occupiers of these properties, the proposed building would not breach a 45 degree line to the nearest habitable room window and as such would not result in any material loss of light or overbearing impact. Indeed, this is considered to result in a better relationship than the current situation with the existing garage structure. The proposed building would not overlook any garden space (located to the east of the properties) and given the orientation and distance and single storey nature of these properties it is not considered that any overlooking would be materially harmful. Whilst the car parking spaces would be located adjacent the common boundary it is not considered that the properties would be so unduly compromised by vehicle movements to warrant a refusal on this basis and with regard to the existing context (commercial use with higher number of vehicle movements than that proposed). Indeed, as discussed further below, the proposals will likely reduce the number of vehicle movements on the site.

Overall, in terms of general noise and disturbance, it is considered that the impact of the proposed new residential development would not be significantly worse than that likely to be experienced from the daytime use of the existing commercial buildings and uses on the site.

In addition to the above, a further condition is required in respect of protecting the amenity of neighbours during the construction period. A pre-commencement construction method statement will therefore be secured via condition and is required from a highway safety perspective too. Given the proposed units will be self-contained flats (rather than single dwellinghouses), they will not benefit from permitted development rights and therefore this also protects nearby occupiers in the future too. As such in overall terms, considering all nearby residential occupiers, no significantly harmful amenity impacts would occur, subject to conditions and in compliance with policy CC8.

Amenity of Future Occupiers

Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) seeks that all new building housing is built to high standards. Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) seeks to protect future occupiers from the impacts of pollution and Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) seeks that residential developments area provided with adequate private or communal outdoor amenity space.

It is considered that the proposals would provide an overall good standard of accommodation throughout with fairly regular shaped rooms providing suitable outlook, natural lighting and ventilation. Internally, the floor spaces would largely comply with the space standards as set out in Policy H5. Flat 1 (as annotated) would have a minimum gross internal floor area of 49.85m² which is just short of the 50m² set out in Policy H5. This is not considered unacceptable given the double bedroom would meet the required size, with sufficient lighting, outlook and the flat would have access to a dedicated garden area as discussed below. As a single bedroom/study the second bedroom would comply with the floor sizes set out in Policy H5, albeit it is acknowledged that the edges of the room, due to the sloping ceilings where this drops below 1.5m, does not reflect the footprint of the room but on balance, what is considered to be useable space would roughly accord with guidance on floor standards. It is acknowledged that Flat 2 (as annotated) at 43.38m² would fall short of Policy H5. However, on balance, it is considered to be of a suitable size overall with suitable light and outlook to provide an adequate standard of accommodation and it is not considered in this specific instance that the shortfall in respect of size would be so significantly harmful to warrant a refusal on this basis. Flat 3 (as annotated) would comply with the gross internal floor area as set out in Policy H5. Whilst

bedroom 1 (as annotated) would just fall short of the required floor area for a double bedroom, as a second bedroom to this unit, this is not considered unacceptable. It is recommended that a condition is secured whereby no change to the unit mix (1 x 1-bed flat and 2 x 2-bed flats) shall be made to the development hereby permitted without written approval from the Local Planning Authority. This is to safeguard the mix altering to potentially unacceptable mixes in the future. The plans also include conveniently located cycle and waste storage facilities. Overall, the proposals are considered to provide suitable accommodation within the context of the constraints of the site.

A communal garden area is proposed at the front of the site. Whilst as an area of soft landscaping this would help to soften the appearance of the site, it is less likely to be an appealing space for relaxing given its proximity to the busy main road and nature of adjacent commercial properties. However, there is a communal area proposed at the rear of the site and dedicated garden area for the occupiers of flat 1 (as annotated). Whilst close to the proposed parking and turning area, it is not considered to be so compromised by vehicle movements to be unacceptable. It is acknowledged that the communal area would be behind the rear of No.20 Norcot Road itself; however, given the constraints of the site and with suitable landscaping as above, this is not considered to be unacceptable in this specific instance and the provision of garden area is welcomed.

Similarly, in terms of noise, vibrations, dust and fume considerations, comments from Environmental Protection confirms that both during the demolition/construction phase, and subsequently, the proposals will be acceptable subject to a variety of conditions for any permission.

Therefore, in overall terms and having applied a critical planning balance to the consideration of the scheme as a whole, the units are considered to provide an overall suitable standard of accommodation, in line with Policies EN16 and CC8 in particular.

Environmental Health Issues

The development lies adjacent on the site of a former garage which has the potential to have caused contaminated land and the proposed development is a sensitive land use.

In terms of contaminated land, Environmental Protection colleagues recommend the standard four-stage conditions to ensure that the possible presence of contamination is thoroughly

investigated and removed/mitigated if necessary (3 of the conditions are pre-commencement). The proposal is considered to accord with Policy EN16.

Transport Issues

Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5 seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking relates matters relating to development.

The proposed development includes the creation of a dedicated parking area and associated forecourt at the rear of the site, as well as rear access from Lemart Close. It is noted that application 181302 further to the rear of this site would also be served via the existing access from Lemart Close.

The existing commercial use could generate significant number of movements to and from the site, including movements by heavy goods vehicles. The proposed use would reduce the number of movements to the site and in principle is considered acceptable. The existing vehicular access on to the Norcot Road will need to be stopped up and the footway reinstated to line and level which can be secured by way of condition.

It is noted that concern has been raised about access and restricted views of oncoming vehicles. In this respect, it is noted that the access road is constrained by a 90 degree bend and there is a restricted view of oncoming vehicles. However, during the course of the application, the applicant has demonstrated (through submission of a swept path analysis) that a vehicle entering the site would be able to see a vehicle exiting the parking courtyard. In addition, the Council's Transport Officer has reviewed the site plan approved for application 181302 for the development to the rear of this site which demonstrates that an access width of 4.8m is available to the front of the dwellings to allow vehicles to pass each other. Manual for Streets states *"In lightly-trafficked streets, carriageways may be narrowed over short lengths to a single lane as a traffic-calming feature"*. In light of this, the Council's Transport Officer has confirmed that the proposed layout is acceptable. It is noted, however, that the hard landscaping detail approved under application 181302 will need to be modified to accommodate access into the site and this has been relayed to the applicant.

The site is located within a sustainable location with frequent bus service to and from Reading Town Centre. The site is located within Zone 3, Secondary Core Area, of the Council's adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD. In accordance with the adopted SPD, the development would

be required to provide a parking provision of 1.5 spaces per 1 or 2 bedroom dwelling plus 1 space per 4 flats for visitor parking equating to 7 parking spaces.

The plans illustrate a total of 4 parking spaces equating to 1 space per dwelling. Whilst it is noted that the proposed parking provision is lower than the Council's adopted Parking Standards, considering the site is located on a frequent premier bus route which provides links between the site and the town centre area, a reduced provision is acceptable in this specific instance. The site is also within walking distance of the Tilehurst Triangle Local Centre which provides numerous local facilities. The Recreation Road public car park is also available within the immediate vicinity of the site providing short stay parking facilities for visitors to the site.

Policy TR5 requires each new house to be provided with an electric charging point. As the proposed flat will be provide with dedicated off-street parking, each parking space should be provided with an electric charging point and it is considered that this can be dealt with by way of condition.

In accordance with the Borough's Parking Standards and Design SPD, a minimum provision of 0.5 cycle storage spaces should be provided per unit. Cycle storage has been proposed and is located in the parking courtyard. The proposed location is acceptable; however, detailed plans confirming that the cycle parking provision meets the Council's adopted standards in terms of security and layout is required and this can dealt with by way of condition.

Refuse storage / collection area is conveniently located along the Norcot frontage which will provide easy access for refuse collection is acceptable.

In the circumstances there are no transport objections to the proposed development subject to conditions and informatives (Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5).

Natural Environment

Policy CC7 seeks that development is of high design quality and maintains and enhances the character of the area in which it is located including landscaping. Policy EN14 requires new development to make provision for tree retention and planting.

The proposals introduce areas of soft landscaping where currently there is none, which, in itself, is welcomed. However, concern was originally raised that as the proposed areas would be turfed, they would likely be impractical to maintain and would lead to being paved or

astro-turfed to reduce the maintenance requirements of the site. Revised plans were received indicated soft landscaping to include hedge and tree planting, including to the front of the site inside the brick boundary wall which is appropriate. The Council's Tree Officer considers this to improve habitat potential and there is no objection subject to approval and implementation of a scheme of hard and soft landscaping the proposals in compliance with Policies CC7 and EN14.

Ecology

It is proposed demolish the existing garage structures to facilitate the proposals. The proposed dwellings would be erected within the existing hardstanding area and the Council's Ecologist considered that this, combined with the extent of the works and that no vegetation or trees are to be affected (subject to conditions) means it unlikely that the proposals will affect bats or other protected species. The Council's Ecologist has confirmed there are no objections to the proposals on ecological grounds. Given the nature of the scheme, it would also be appropriate to ensure that ecological/biodiversity enhancements are provided and this can also be secured by way of condition in compliance with Policy EN12.

Sustainability

No specific information has been submitted in relation to the sustainability or energy credentials of the proposed development.

Notwithstanding the above, Policy H5 'Housing Standards' requires that all new build housing integrate additional measures for sustainability. In light of this conditions are recommended to ensure the development meets the following requirements:

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

Although secured by planning condition, these new requirements will be administered through the Building Regulations. Confirmation of compliance will need to be submitted to the LPA to discharge the condition.

Affordable Housing

In accordance with Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) the proposed development, being for three additional units, would therefore be liable for a contribution towards off-site affordable

housing provision. The applicant has agreed to provide a policy compliant contribution towards affordable housing of £32,000 which has been secured by way of a Section 106 agreement.

CIL

The proposal would be a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) liable development. The applicant has provided the appropriate CIL Additional Information Form. An informative would be attached to the decision notice to advise the applicant of their responsibilities in this respect. Based on the information provided, this is estimated to amount to £21,596.53 (233.2m² of the proposed dwellings - 95.8m² of the existing x £57.18 per m² (2020 indexation rate)).

Other Issues

In relation to planning conditions, in line with section 100ZA(5) of the Town and Country Planning Act (as amended), which came into force on 01/10/18, the agent was emailed on 30/10/2020 regarding pre-commencement conditions. A second email was sent 6/11/2020 and a third 12/11/2020. No response has been received within the 10 day response time and as such these conditions will be automatically imposed.

Conclusion

The proposals are considered to be acceptable within the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above. Ultimately, when applying an overall critical planning balance of all material considerations, the benefits are considered to outweigh the conflicts. As such, full planning permission is recommended for approval, subject to conditions and completion of the S106 Legal Agreement.