

PLANNING STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF A FULL PLANNING APPLICATION AND LISTED BUILDING CONSENT FOR CHANGE OF USE OF THE BUILDING TO 1 FLAT AND A 8 BEDROOM HMO, INCLUDING INTERNAL ALTERATIONS

41A LONDON STREET, READING, RG1 4PS

ON BEHALF OF

EXP Property Investments

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of EXP Property Investments ('the applicant') and is submitted in support of a full planning and listed building consent application relating to proposals at 41a London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS.
- 1.2 The applicant has experience in delivering high-quality residential developments within the South East.
- 1.3 The applicant has engaged with relevant experts to bring forward a scheme that is sympathetic to the character of the building and surrounding area.
- 1.4 In addition to this statement (P21-0300-PLS), the application is accompanied by the following:

Site Location Plan (P21-0300-SLP)

Block Plan (P21-0300-BP)

Elevations (P21-0300-ELEV1)

Further Elevations (P21-0300-ELEV2)

Existing Plans (P21-0300-EP)

Existing Sections (P21-0300-ES1)

Demolition Elevations (P21-0300-DEMELV)

Demolition Plans (P21-0300-DEMP)

Proposed Elevations (P21-0300-PE01)

Proposed Plans (P21-0300-PP)

Further Proposed Elevations (P21-0300-PE02)

Proposed Sections (P21-0300-PS)

Design and Access Statement (P21-0300-DAS)

Heritage Statement (P21-0300-HS)

2. Site Description

- 2.1 The site is located on London Street in Reading and is a Grade II listed building.
- 2.2 It is circa 0.74 KM from Reading Train Station that provides onward journeys to London and South Wales.
- 2.3 Bus Stops are located on both sides of London Road and are served by a variety of bus services that connect the site to central Reading and surrounding areas.
- 2.4 The site is located approximately 0.25 KM from the Oracle Shopping Centre and Riverside leisure area. The site forms part of a retail parade, typically providing ground floor retail uses, and the hotel and bar 'Great Expectations' is located to the north.

3. Relevant Planning History

- 3.1 The property has no relevant planning history. However, there are several relevant planning histories in the neighbouring area.
- 3.2 Application **191043** relates to 43 London Street and sought the part-demolition of existing London Street facade and internal works to building alongside demolition of two storey building to rear to enable residential-led mixed-use development comprising 48 sqm community use (Class D1) and 21no residential units (2 x studio, 7 x 1 bed, 10 x 2 two bed and 2 x 3 bed units) together with associated services enclosures, parking and landscaping. This was granted on 16th June 2020.
- 3.3 Application **150596** relates to 49-53 London Street was for a proposed change of use from Class B1 offices to mixed B1 offices and three Class C3 self-contained flats, change of use of Class A1 hairdressers to Class A2 beauty salon (No. 53, ground floor only), proposed roof lights to rear elevation and rear courtyard elevation and alterations to fenestration. This was granted on 25th February 2016.
- 3.4 Application **131062** relates to a prior approval application at 55-57 London Street and was for a prior approval application for a change of use to C3. This was granted on 11th September 2013.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 The proposal is for changing the use of the building to provide a 2-bedroom flat over the basement and ground floor levels and 8-Bed HMO with one bedroom on the ground floor and the remaining seven on the subsequent 2 floors.
- 4.2 The proposal does not include alterations to the roof/attic space and will not be used for residential accommodation as part of the HMO. The internal alterations proposed are set out within the accompanying Heritage Statement and Design and Access statement.
- 4.3 The proposal will take place within the existing shell of the building, taking account of the building's heritage and proposing alterations in a sympathetic manner.

5. Relevant Policy and Material Considerations

- 5.1 The application site falls within Reading Borough Council. The development plan for this area consists of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
- 5.2 Planning applications should be determined in accordance with the relevant development plan policies unless material indications indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework is a material consideration in all planning applications. Additionally, there are various supplementary planning documents (SPDs) adopted by the Council. Of relevance to this proposal is the Residential Conversions SPD (2013).

National Policy

- 5.3 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF states that the planning system has 3 overarching objectives; they are economic, social and environmental.
- 5.4 The proposal accords with all of these aims. It will provide an array of jobs during the construction process both directly and indirectly helping to contribute to the wider economic environment around Reading and the Thames Valley. It meets the social objective by helping to create much needed residential accommodation in a desirable urban area, within walking distance of a large urban centre. Lastly, it meets the environmental objective by making efficient use of a sustainable urban site, and ensuring a listed building is protected and has a viable future use within the wider context of an evolving Reading Town Centre. The proposal will constitute sustainable development and is in accordance with Paragraph 11 of the NPPF.

Local Policy

Principle of Development

- 5.5 The proposal is within the settlement boundary and in a highly central location. Additionally, the proposal is considered to make efficient use of a building. As such, the policy is considered to accord with Policy CC1 of the Local Plan which focuses on a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It states that a positive approach will be taken when considering development proposals and that the council will work proactively with applicants to approve proposals wherever possible.
- 5.6 The supporting text for this policy states that the Government has placed sustainable development at the heart of its approach to planning and for the reasons outlined above, the development is considered to meet the three overarching aims of sustainability as outlined in the NPPF.
- 5.7 Checklist 3 of the Residential Conversions Guidance states that any residential conversions must help contribute to a sustainable community through providing an acceptable housing mix. As will be discussed in further sections of this planning statement, this proposal is considered to do this, but it is also important to consider the development's highly sustainable and central location. As such, the proposal is considered to accord with relevant requirements.

Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

- 5.8 Policy H8: relates to Residential Conversions and requires applications for conversion of buildings into self-contained flats or for multiple occupation to be assessed against the impact they will have on amenity and character of the surrounding area. The proposal will largely take place within the existing shell of the building. Minor groundworks and alterations will need to take place to accommodate the lightwell as shown on the Proposed Elevations (P21-0300-PE02). As such, the change of use of the building from offices to a flat and 8 bed HMO will not have any harmful impact on the visual amenities of the surrounding area.
- 5.9 This section of London Street is characterised by a mix of property styles and uses. As is outlined in the planning histories section of this Statement, there are several residential developments within this area and the addition of further residential

development being proposed here is not considered to have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

- 5.10 Additionally, as the proposal will take place within the existing shell of the building, impacts on residential amenity such as privacy concerns, overlooking and overbearing effects of the development will not be of concern. The proposal is no more visually prominent than the existing development and as such is in accordance with Checklist 2 and 5 of the Residential Conversions SPD.
- 5.11 Policy H2 seeks to ensure there is appropriate levels of density and housing mix. This will be informed by factors such as character and mix of uses, accessibility of the development, efficiency of land use and minimising environmental impacts and impacts on amenity. The proposal contributes to a sustainable and appropriate mix of residential units, providing a 2 bedroom flat along with a flexible HMO, both of which will make an efficient use of the building whilst adding to the mix of town centre accommodation. In contributing to this, the proposal is considered to be in accordance with Checklist 3 of the Residential Conversions SPD as well as Policy CC8 of the local plan.

Residential Amenity Space and Layout

- 5.12 Policy H10 of Reading's Local Plan states that dwellings will be provided with functional private and communal space, including green space wherever possible. The supporting text for this policy states that outdoor amenity space can serve several functions, but specifically mentioned clothes drying. The proposal put forward provides a small amount of outdoor amenity space as can be seen on the Site Location Plan (P21-0300-SLP). This area is proposed to be used for clothes drying. Further functional spaces such as those for clothes drying will be made available within the property in non-habitable rooms such as bathrooms. As is noted in Checklist 4 of the Residential Conversions SPD, development in central Reading will not always be expected to comply with outdoor space standards and the Council recognises that some residents will not want to own their own amenity space. Due to the site's central location, the proposal is considered to consistent with this notion, a large amount of publicly available outdoor space is available in the surrounding area such as the Oracle Riverside and Forbury Gardens park. As such, the proposal is considered to provide an acceptable level of amenity space.

- 5.13 Checklist 25 of the Residential Conversions SPD sets out guidance for the private and communal areas within Sui Generis HMOs as well as the level of space that is required for 1 and 2 people to occupy rooms within HMOs. Across the two floors and 8 bedrooms of the HMO, it is proposed that 1 communal area (kitchen) will be provided which is in accordance with the requirements of this checklist. Additionally, it highlights that where cooking facilities are provided in a separate room, the bedrooms must be 6.5 m² for a one-person room and 10.5m² if a room is to be occupied by two persons. These standards are accommodated in the proposal and as such, the proposal is considered in accordance with the relevant standards.
- 5.14 Checklist 11 of the Residential Conversions SPD states that proposals for self-contained basement accommodation as the lower floor of the proposed flat will need to have a minimum floor to ceiling height of 2.15 metres. As can be seen on the plans submitted in support of this application, the basement flat has a height of 2.74 m and as such is in accordance with this requirement. The laundry space for the HMO ranges from 2.01 m to 1.85 m in some locations. It is noted that this is in conflict with the height requirements for ceiling space. However, as this is a utilities area and all habitable spaces within the proposal are of adequate height, this is considered acceptable.
- 5.15 Checklist 9 and 10 of the Residential Conversions SPD state that proposed layouts should avoid locating living rooms, bathrooms and kitchens next to or above proposed bedrooms and that all habitable rooms should benefit from an external window. As can be seen from the plans submitted in support of this application, the stacking of rooms in similar use is accommodated with and windows provided in all habitable rooms. This accords with the assessing criteria put forward in Policy H8: Residential Conversions that states self-contained flats or HMOs will only be acceptable where there is no inappropriate stacking and location of rooms between units.

Parking Provision, Highway Safety and Refuse Storage

- 5.16 As set out in Policy H8, residential conversions will be assessed against their provision of on-site parking whilst also ensuring that their bin and cycle storage is of adequate size. In addition to this, Paragraph 109 of the NPPF states that 'development should only be refused on highways grounds if there was going to be

an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impact would be severe.'

- 5.17 Historically, 41a London Street has no associated parking, this is not uncommon of properties along this stretch of road. Parking bays are located along London street, but these operate on a pay-and-display basis and are not for the exclusive use of the property. As there is a bus-stop directly in-front of the site, it would also not be possible to provide on-site parking. The nature and type of development being proposed does not lend itself to car-ownership and this is not the intended target residents. The building has historically operated as an office and the trip level is likely to be lower for the proposed residential use. It is considered that the additional permanent residents would not have a dissimilar impact to patrons/employees of the existing business on the local highway network.
- 5.18 Additionally, the site is located in a highly sustainable location, within walking distance of Reading Town centre, Reading Station and is located in front of a bus stop – providing easy access to the wider metropolitan area and as such is not considered to be in conflict with Policy H8.
- 5.19 Cycle storage is provided within the property. For the HMO, this is located under the stairs in the basement and for the flat it is located within a hallway cupboard. Further detail of this is discussed in the Design and Access Statement submitted in support of this application. It is noted that Policy H8 requires cycle storage to be located at ground floor level with easy access. However, due to the proposal taking place within a listed building, a solution has been sought so as not to affect the historic fabric of the building.
- 5.20 The hard standing area/clothes drying area is located to the back of the property. Access to the bin store will remain as per the existing situation and is considered suitable and accessible for refuse collectors. As the bin store is located to the back of the property, it is out of sight from the frontage of London Street. The waste will be collected by a private company.

Heritage

- 5.21 As mentioned previously, the proposal utilises a Grade II listed building. Policy EN1 seeks to protect and enhance the historic environment of Reading. Applications that have the potential to impact a heritage asset should be supported by a heritage

statement. The proposal seeks to ensure an historic, listed building does not fall into disrepair, whilst contributing to national government house building targets.

- 5.22 The proposal lies within an area of archaeological significance. Policy EN2 focuses on this and states that where assessment of the archaeological impacts are inadequate, planning permission will be refused. The proposed alterations are sympathetic to the heritage of the building and area and as such, the proposal will not have a negative impact on the archaeological significance of the area.
- 5.23 Due to the historic fabric of the building and the applicant's commitment to not harming the heritage asset, accessibility of the development is somewhat impacted and prevents complete freedom to adapt as needed to meet modern accessibility standards. As such, the proposed is considered to be a sensitive and acceptable solution and to accord with Policy EN4 of the Local Plan.
- 5.24 Checklist 18 of the Residential Conversions SPD states that where possible, a level access from the public highway to the building's principal entrance should be provided and retained. The supporting text for this states that many residential buildings that are suitable for conversion are already constrained by existing levels and steps. This is the case for this proposal and as such, it is considered acceptable.

Accordance with Residential Conversions SPD

- 5.25 Checklist 3 of the above SPD states that any residential conversions must help contribute to a sustainable community through providing an acceptable housing mix. As is discussed elsewhere in this planning statement, the proposal provides a variety of residential accommodation within the pre-existing historically important building. In conjunction with this, the site is in a highly sustainable location within central Reading. As such, the proposal is considered to accord with this checklist.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The proposal brings forward residential accommodation in a highly sustainable location within Central Reading that is well connected to the wider metropolitan area and its array of publicly available and accessible amenity space.
- 6.2 Relevant expert advice has been sought on matters such as heritage and planning to ensure that the proposal that is brought forward contributes positively to the local area, residential amenity for prospective occupiers and the surrounding area.
- 6.3 The proposal utilises an historic listed building, ensuring it is kept relevant and in good condition within a rapidly growing and changing urban area.
- 6.4 The proposal is considered to be in accordance with Development Plan Policy and the NPPF as well as relevant supplementary planning guidance. As such, it is respectfully requested that Reading Borough Council approve this application.