

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT - Application No's: 201554 and 201555

Address: 153 Southampton Street, Reading

Proposal: 201554 - Conversion of a ground floor flat into two separate living units.

201555 - Listed Building Consent for conversion of a ground floor flat into two separate living units.

Case Officer: Ethne Humphreys

Determination Date: Originally 28/1/2021; EOT until 16/4/2021

Site Description and Surrounding Area:

The application site relates to the eastern section of the Grade II listed 'The Old British School' located on the eastern side of Southampton Street.

The listing description is as follows:

"School, later industrial premises, part now Youth Club and part unoccupied and in a state of disrepair (September 1999). 1810 by R Billing, senior; rear addition 1817-18; altered and extended later C19. Of red brick with Welsh slate roofs. Four separate elements, of two or three storeys, and all of different heights. 1. The original 2-storey 1810 section is the lowest, built of red brick in Flemish bond, and having (on its north side): an inserted door; a small window on right with header-brick arch and clerestory. 2. The 1817-18 section added to rear (east) of original part: 3 storeys, the upper storey an addition.; 4 bays. On ground floor, blocked and inserted openings, including a wide segmented-arched door on right. Upper floors have wide segmented-arched windows with stepped chamfered sills and small-pane glazing. Graffiti in the earlier brickwork includes the dates '1874', '1877' and '1878'. 3. Mid-late C19 addition at road (west) end and facing road is of finely-pointed red brick in Flemish bond with yellow-brick pilasters defining bays and gable. Round-arched openings with stone and polychromatic-brick dressings: corbelled sills, pilasters with capitals; voussoirs; keystones; and arches. Central bay has paired windows to each floor one of those on ground floor made into a door, and decorative lozenges. Outer bays have decorative panel instead of window to upper floor. Left return has windows of 2 lights and one light to ground floor and one of 3 lights with chamfered brick sill above. 4. Mid-late C19 addition at east (rear) end set at right angles, is of 2 storeys with loft. North side has 3 bricked-up lunettes to ground floor, one now a window; inserted fire-escape door on 1st floor; and small pane loft window. Rear elevation has paired, wide, segmental arched openings with doors and small pane metal windows. Four large segmental arched windows with similar glazing and stone sills above. Stepped eaves. Raised verges. Interior: 1810 section: board-lined walls and some boarded partitions; braced wooden queen-post roof trusses; later stair up to the first floor of the added front block. 1817-18 section: metal column supporting a large-scantling cross-beam on the ground floor; roof trusses as in 1810 section (probably re-used when roof raised). Piping from former gas lighting throughout. The school was established by committee in 1809, at first in temporary accommodation, and subsequently in the purpose-built school on Southampton Street. Initially there were male pupils only, the 1817-18 addition being built to provide accommodation for girls. The school was run in accordance with the recommendations of Joseph Lancaster, a leader in educational reform in the late C18 and early C19, and it is believed to be the oldest surviving such school in Britain."

The surrounding area comprises a mixture of residential and non-residential uses.

The site is covered by an Article 4 Direction which restricts the change of use from dwellinghouse to C4 HMO. It is also within an Air Quality Management Area.

Proposal:

The proposal seeks full planning permission and associated listed building consent for the conversion of a ground floor two bed unit into two separate one bed units.

Whilst no external works to the building itself are proposed, a landscape buffer is proposed in front of unit 1a as annotated and each unit would have 1 parking space each.

Plans considered:

Drawing No: Proposed Block Plan 02-02
Received 19th March 2021

Drawing No: Site Location Plan 02-00 Rev A
Received 16th March 2021

Drawing No: Cycle Store as Existing 03-90
Received 19th February 2021

Drawing No: Proposed Floor Plans 03-00 Rev A
Received 7th January 2021

Drawing No: Existing Block Plan 02-01
Drawing No: Existing Floor Plans 02-02
Drawing No: Existing Elevations 02-03
Drawing No: Existing Elevations 02-04
Drawing No: Proposed Elevations 03-01
Drawing No: Proposed Elevations 03-02

Other documents:

Design and Access /Heritage Statement
Received 3rd December 2020

Summary of correspondence with agent

During the course of the application revised plans were received showing a soft landscape buffer in front of unit 1a as annotated on the plans. Confirmation was also received regarding cycle and bin storage.

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

Relevant Planning History:

- 06/00376/FUL. Conversion of Grade II listed building to form 7 x 2-bedroom apartments, 5 x 1-bedroom apartments, an arts centre (164 sq. m) and office space (40 sq. m). Granted.

- 06/00377/LBC. Conversion into 12 one and two bedroom flats, arts centre and office with car parking and landscaping.
- 07/01384/LBC. Conversion of existing building into 11 apartments and community centre with 12 car parking spaces, cycle parking and landscaping. Granted.
- 07/01385/FUL. Conversion of building into 11 flats and community centre, with car/cycle parking and landscaping. Granted.
- 09/02203/LBC. Conversion and extension to form 13 Residential units and community arts centre, this includes landscaping, a new bin store and the existing vehicular access off Mount Pleasant. Granted.
- 09/02204/LBC. Conversion and extension to form 13 Residential units and community arts centre, this includes landscaping, a new bin store and the existing vehicular access off Mount Pleasant. Granted.
- 110732 (11-01164-FUL) and 110733 (11-01165-LBC). Conversion of the Old School Building into 14 dwellings with car/cycle parking and landscaping. Granted.
- 130190 (13-00221-VARIAT). Conversion of the Old School Building into 14 dwellings with car/cycle parking and landscaping without complying with Condition 2 of planning permission 11/01164/FUL (110732). Granted.
- 141094. Variation of condition 2 of planning permission 11/01164/FUL (110732). The changes include amendments to landscape and a new access from Illiffe Close, and some small internal changes to walls. Granted.
- 150627/FUL and 150628/LBC. The conversion of a single existing dwelling into 4 studio flats. Both applications refused.
- 151473/FUL and 151474/LBC. The conversion of a single existing 2 bed dwelling into 1 x 1 bedroom flat and 1 x studio flat, including internal alterations only to the listed building. Both applications granted.

Consultation Responses

Transport: Further to revised plans and additional information, no objection subject to condition.

Environmental Protection: No objection subject to condition.

Heritage Officer: No objection.

Neighbour letters were sent to the occupiers of nearby properties and a site notice was put up. No neighbour letters of representation received.

Equality Act 2010:

When 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 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

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

- Policy CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- Policy CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- Policy CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
- Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- Policy CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- Policy EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
- Policy EN15: Air Quality
- Policy EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
- Policy H1: Provision of Housing
- Policy H2: Density and Mix
- Policy H3: Affordable Housing
- Policy H5: Standards for New Housing
- Policy H7: Protecting the Existing Housing Stock
- Policy H8: Residential Conversions
- Policy H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
- Policy TR1: Achieving The Transport Strategy
- Policy TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
- Policy TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

- Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)
- Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
- Residential Conversions (2013)
- Affordable Housing SPD (2013)

Other relevant documentation/guidance/legislation

- Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England, 2016)
- Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015a)

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b)

National Design Guide: Planning practice for beautiful, enduring and successful places (2019)

APPRAISAL:

Policy H8 states that *“Proposals to convert properties into self-contained flats or for multiple occupation will be assessed against the impact on the amenity and character of the surrounding area, particularly in terms of intensification of activity, loss of privacy, loss of external amenity space, the provision and location of adequate on-site car parking, and the treatment of bin storage areas and other related servicing”*.

The Policy provides further detail and states: *“Proposals to convert properties into self-contained flats or for multiple occupation will only be acceptable where:*

- *The proposals to convert the physical character of the area in terms of scale, location, materials and design, the arrangement of doors, windows and other principal architectural features;*
- *The proposal would not, either individually or cumulatively, unduly dilute or harm an existing mixed and sustainable community through the significant loss of single family housing;*
- *There are no unacceptable adverse impacts to residents of the scheme or surrounding properties arising from noise and disturbance in terms of the number and layout of units proposed and the proximity to other properties;*
- *There are no inappropriate stacking and location of rooms between units;*
- *Bin and cycle storage is of an appropriate size and standard for the units proposed and should be located at ground floor level with easy access; and*
- *The resulting property or properties would provide adequate internal floorspace and headroom for residents.”*

Along with these adopted local planning policies any appraisal is assessed against the Council’s ‘Residential Conversions Supplementary Planning Document SPD (2013)’. Section A of the SPD, deals with the ‘General Assessment of all Conversions’ (i.e from C3 dwellinghouses to flats or HMOs). The SPD sets out a number of checklist items.

The main issues to be considered are:

- Principle of development
- The impact on amenity of proposed and existing residents of nearby properties
- Design considerations and impact on listed building
- Transport Impacts
- Sustainability
- Affordable Housing

Principle of development

In terms of whether a property is suitable to be converted to self-contained flats, Policy H8 requires a property to measure more than 120m². It is fully acknowledged that whilst the whole building is substantially above this, the existing flat in question is 100m² in total. As

such this falls below the above recommended size criteria and this will be considered alongside any other material planning considerations.

Further to the above, it is pertinent to note that the intention of the policy is to prevent the loss of family housing. In respect of the above criteria it is also noted that the policy specifically stipulates “in the conversion of houses to self-contained flats”. In this specific instance, the existing unit relates to a modest two bed flat rather than what would generally be considered a family home of three or more bedrooms - and as indicated in Policy H2 (subtext para 4.4.9).

It is also noted that, as discussed elsewhere in this report, the proposed units would comply with Policy H5 and the nationally prescribed space standards in terms of floorspace. Whilst acknowledging that Policy H5 relates to new builds and not specifically conversion to residential, nevertheless, and as per subtext para 4.4.42, “even when it does not apply, the nationally prescribed space standard offers a useful point of reference and a good basis for design of new developments”. Given that the proposals would comply with this, this is considered to be another indication that the subdivision is acceptable.

Additionally, the type of housing in the area is very mixed, with a range of single-family dwellings, self-contained flats and HMOS. Single family housing is currently not dominant and, as discussed further below, the proposal would not result in any detrimental impact on the physical character of the area.

Given the above, it is not considered that the proposals would result in the significant loss of family housing so would not be contrary to the crux of the Policy. Therefore, for the reasons stated, the proposals are considered acceptable in principle subject to other material planning considerations discussed below.

The impact on amenity of proposed and existing residents of nearby properties

The Residential Conversions SPD sets out a number of checklist items which provide further detail related to policies H8, CC8 and H10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Policy CC8 requires development to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of: Privacy and overlooking; Access to sunlight and daylight; Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development; Harm to outlook; Noise and disturbance; Artificial lighting; Vibration; Dust and fumes; Smell; Crime and safety.

Policy H10 deals specifically with private and communal space and requires such space to allow for sitting out, children’s play areas, home food production, green waste composting, refuse storage, drying space.

The internal layout of the proposed units has been arranged in a suitable manner for future occupiers, with sufficient outlook and ventilation and the bedrooms would be regular in shape. As above, it is noted that the proposals would also comply with Policy H5 in terms of floorspace which, noting it is not directly applicable to the proposal, is considered an indication of the acceptable nature of the quality of accommodation.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the window to the living room of unit 1a as indicated would be immediately adjacent the parking spaces, which might result in some noise disturbance, it is recognised that this is an existing situation. Revised plans were received showing of a soft landscaping buffer and it is not considered to be so detrimental - and given the existing context - to warrant a refusal on this basis.

As with the majority of units created by conversion, and given the existing site context, meaningful amenity space is not capable of being provided. The existing unit does not currently benefit from its own private garden space and the creation of two smaller units of accommodation is likely to have no greater requirement for external private space than existing in this instance.

In overall terms, it is considered that the proposals would result in a suitable standard of living accommodation for future occupiers.

Privacy and Overlooking/Overbearing Impacts

Given the nature of the proposals, that does not introduce any additional windows or external alterations, it is not considered that there would be any significant material loss of amenity to neighbouring properties specifically in terms of loss of light, privacy or overbearing impacts.

Furthermore, the conversion of the building and continued residential use is not considered to introduce any inappropriate harm to the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.

The proposal therefore accords with Policies H8 and CC8.

Design Considerations and Impact on Listed Building

Policy CC7 seeks that development should preserve or enhance the character of the area of Reading in which it is located.

Furthermore, the site is a Grade II listed building and as such there is a duty imposed by Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requiring decision makers to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural historic interest which it possesses. This is reflected in Policy EN1 that states that historic features and areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings, will be protected and, where appropriate, enhanced.

Paragraph 193 of the NPPF 2019 details that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Internally, the proposed changes would be minimal and the change from one unit to two units would not alter the physical break up of the ground floor plan to any significant unacceptable

extent and nor would the works conflict with elements referenced within the building's listing.

Given the nature of the proposals, which do not include any external alterations to the building, there would be no harm to either the setting of the listed building or the visual amenities of the street scene. The small amount of soft landscaping as indicated on the floor plans (in front of unit 1a) would help to enhance this area largely dominated by hardstanding. The Council's Conservation and Urban Design Officer has raised no concern with the proposals and, overall, it is not considered that there would be any harm to the character or significance of the building or impact on the wider area.

The proposal therefore accords with Policies CC7 and EN1.

Transport Impacts

Policies TR1, 3 and 5 seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking related matters, relating to development.

In accordance with the adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD, the development would be required to provide a parking provision of 1 off road parking space per unit. There are currently two parking spaces serving the existing 2 bedroom unit accessed via Mount Pleasant. It is proposed that one of the parking spaces would be allocated to the newly created unit. It was agreed as part of the original application for this site, 14 parking spaces would be provided for the 14 units; however, splitting this unit would result in a requirement for an additional off-road parking space. As such, the proposals would result in the new unit not having access to a parking space. However, given the site's location and the extensive parking restrictions in place unauthorised on street parking can be managed.

The development site is located in an area designated as a Residents Parking Permit Area. Under the Borough's current parking standards there should be an assumption that any future occupants of the units would **not** be issued with resident or visitor parking permits. This would ensure that the development does not harm the existing amenities of the neighbouring residential properties by adding to the already high level of on street car parking in the area.

Revised plans were received showing cycle and bin storage details which is acceptable.

In view of the above, there is no transport objection subject to conditions and informatives. Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5.

Sustainability

Local Plan Policy CC2 requires new development to reduce the consumption of resources and materials and includes that *"All minor non-residential developments or conversions to residential are required to meet the most up-to-date BREEAM 'VERY GOOD' standards, as a minimum"* and that *"Conversions to residential should incorporate water conservation measures."*

It is acknowledged that the proposals, as largely a refurbishment proposal and change of use of existing building, do not neatly align with the standard BREEAM requirements.

Furthermore, officers acknowledge additional inherent difficulties incorporating substantial sustainability improvements within a scheme such as this, due to the grade II listing which is a substantial constraint in this respect.

Given the above, the applicant has, instead, set out the existing and proposed scenarios which acknowledge and demonstrate measures available as part of the refurbishment and conversion as follows:

The Existing Scenario:

- thermal insulation was installed in 2015 during conversion to residential. This was inspected and met the building regulations
- space heating system is modern Dimplex panel radiators
- water heating is via a modern unvented Stelflow hot water cylinder
- low energy appliances were installed with water saving features

Proposals:

- the proposals match the specifications above for space and water heating
- the insulation and windows remain untouched so are the same fabric as already consented under planning and building regulations
- modern low energy (A-rated) appliances will be supplied

Under other circumstances, the inclusion for renewables could be considered; however, as above, the listed building constraints prevents such measures (like PV panels etc). In this very specific instance it is therefore considered appropriate to ensure that the development is worse than the existing scenario which includes minimise harm to the listed building by avoiding the need for external alterations in this application.

Further to the above, the applicant has provided the EPC for the 2015 permission. As the spec all remains the same, the new EPC would be the same as existing, or better (new installations may have better ratings than 6 years ago).

Given the above, and in these very specific circumstances, Officers have considered the further information submitted by the applicant and, in short, are satisfied that this has component of the proposals has been satisfactorily justified in this instance.

Affordable Housing

The proposal relates to the conversion of existing dwelling into two flats. With regard to Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) the following types of residential development will be exempt from the requirements to provide affordable housing:

- Replacement of a single dwelling with another single dwelling; and
- Conversion of a dwelling to self-contained flats where there is no new floorspace

No extensions are proposed and the conversion of this property to two flats does not require any additional floorspace.

Given the above, it is considered that the proposals are excluded from the requirements of Policy H3 and no affordable housing contribution is required in this specific instance. Accordingly, no S106 legal agreement is required either.

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 and listed building consent is recommended for approval,