

01 July 2020

Planning Department
Directorate of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
Reading Borough Council Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

Dear Sirs

Planning Application for temporary use (until 31 August 2021) of up to 61 studio student accommodation rooms as use class C1 (serviced accommodation) at 79 Silver Street

Student accommodation at 79 Silver Street is currently nearing completion. Although it has proved possible to continue building work during the Covid-19 pandemic the project has been subject to some delays arising from materials supply and revised working arrangement difficulties and as a consequence the building will not be ready for occupation until mid-September 2020 at the earliest, and potentially as late as mid-October.

There had been a positive dialogue between the student housing operator ('Homes for Students') and OnCampus who provide pre-university entry courses for overseas students and are based at the University of Reading's London Road Campus. This dialogue was leading toward the reservation of a significant proportion of the student accommodation at 79 Silver Street for the increased number of overseas students that OnCampus had expected for the academic year 2020/21. However the effects of the recent pandemic are such as to significantly lower the ability and inclination for overseas students to come to Reading for the 2020/21 academic year so these plans will not now be realised.

Students usually book up their accommodation for the academic year ahead between June and August, and will usually take a lease for the whole academic year. If the accommodation at 79 Silver Street had been completed on time as originally planned it would have been available for marketing to and viewing by students during the time when most students commit to the following year's accommodation. As accommodation that is evidently not yet completed, 79 Silver Street is however now at an obvious market disadvantage in terms of attracting student tenants within a market that is particularly competitive this year as a proportion of UK as well as foreign students are deferring university attendance due to the pandemic.

In these circumstances, and despite continuing efforts to market 79 Silver Street for student tenants, it appears likely that it may not prove possible to let a significant proportion of the student studio rooms to students for the 2020-21 academic year.

The operators (and the University) consider it likely that the reduction in student numbers will be temporary during the pandemic and that the underlying strength of Reading's Higher Education offer, including its attractiveness to overseas students, will restore student numbers and student accommodation market demand from 2021-22.

This application therefore seeks a temporary planning consent (to expire 31 August 2021) to allow those of the studio rooms at 79 Silver Street that cannot be let to students in that period to be operated as serviced accommodation (use Class C1).

The operator of 79 Silver Street is Homes For Students which is an established student housing operator with 18,000 student rooms across the UK. General information on the company is available on their website:

www.wearehomesforstudents.com

In order to make positive use of studio rooms that might otherwise be temporarily vacant it is proposed that Homes for Students should offer short lease temporary serviced accommodation at 79 Silver Street to young single workers on closely comparable (no car) tenancy terms to those being offered to student residents. Non-student studio rooms would be available for stays from a few days (allowing them to accommodate short stay visitors in a similar manner to a hotel) through to a number of months so as to accommodate those working in Reading for a longer period.

The types of rooms at 79 Silver Street are relatively large studio accommodation closely equivalent in size to good sized hotel rooms and each having their own en-suite bathroom and small kitchen area. Communal facilities at the site include laundry, gym and other services.

There is growing local demand in Reading for hotel accommodation and for urban living private rental accommodation (PRS). Although not specifically designed for either of these purposes the studio rooms at 79 Silver Street are capable of making a positive interim contribution to meeting needs for such accommodation pending the delivery of hotel and PRS residential schemes that are coming through the local development pipeline but may themselves be delayed due to the pandemic. As such the interim use will support town centre economic activity.

Homes for Students has a related company brand (City Living) who operate Purpose Built Private Rented Sector (PRS) accommodation, so within the company group there is relevant experience of the PRS sector which includes accommodation of various types and sizes.

Homes for Students have updated their Management Plan for 79 Silver Street to include the operation of temporary serviced accommodation use. This will include ensuring that serviced accommodation tenants will be precluded from bringing cars to Reading and will have access to the on-site facilities available to student tenants.

No physical changes are proposed to the building. The studio rooms to be used as serviced accommodation will be let fully furnished.

The planning approval for the student housing at 79 Silver Street is subject to a S106 Planning Legal Agreement limiting occupation to students in full-time education. It is suggested that a

simple variation to this obligation (making it applicable only after 31 August 2021) could be agreed so as to continue the limitation to student occupation after the expiry of the temporary use permission now being sought.

Summary

The temporary use of student studio rooms at 79 Silver Street as serviced accommodation (use Class C1) during the 2020/2021 academic year is appropriate to make positive use of new student residential accommodation that may otherwise be temporarily vacant for several months. Homes for Students, as operator of the student housing scheme, have outlined suitable management arrangements for this interim use (until 31 August 2021) which can be confirmed by planning condition.

Yours sincerely

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