

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No: 200765/FUL

Address: 5a Bridgewater Close

Proposal: Change of use of part of building (B8 use) to a gym (D2 use) with the provision of cycle parking within the site boundary

Target Date: 29/09/20

Case Officer: Connie Davis

Site Description and Surrounding Area:

The proposed application site is located circa. 2 miles to the west of central Reading. Oxford Road is located circa 0.1 miles to the south, with Portman Road located 0.2 miles to the north. To the west of the site are further industrial units comprising a number of uses including Elite Wheels and Tyres and Red Kangaroo Trampoline Park.

The site is located south of allocated employment site EM2h: Portman Road (a Core Employment Area, as defined in Reading Borough Council's adopted Local Plan) and east of site EM2j: Bridgewater Close. The site itself is not located within the boundary of EM2j. Vehicular access to the Unit 5a is taken from Bridgewater Close, which leads west and onto Portman Road. Access on foot and cycle is available from Dorset Street which connects the site to Oxford Road. Dorset Road comprises of terrace residential dwellings.

The application site is not listed, nor in a conservation area.

Proposal:

Planning Permission is sought for the proposed change of use of 192 sqm of the unit to D2 space (gym). This portion of the building was used most recently by a company storing plumbing supplies (B8 use) which ceased operation at the site in January 2020.

The remainder of the building would continue to be used by Thames Valley Cleaning Services. No external changes are proposed under this application, although external advertisements are depicted on the plans (separate advertisement consent would be required for this and can be dealt with via an informative).

The proposal will enable the existing gym at no. 4 Bridgewater Close to relocate to this site. It should be noted that there is no record of the existing gym having been granted planning permission, nor no Certificate of Lawfulness confirming the use of the site so this will not hold any weight in the assessment of this proposal. This is contrary to the view of the applicant who uses this as justification for the scheme in the submitted Design and Access Statement.

Plans/ Documents considered:

00 Rev P2 - Location Plan

02 Rev P4 - Proposed Plans & Elevations

Received 8th June 2020

Letter serving notice on 5a Bridgewater Close
Design & Access Statement/ Planning Statement prepared by Turley

Received 4th June 2020

20.354 01 P5 - Existing Elevations
20.354 03 P1 - Site Plan

Received 7th August 2020

Proposed Cycle Storage for TNT gym

Received 16th September 2020

Relevant Planning History:

121158/FUL - Change of use from storage to tattoo studio - Application Permitted

There are 3 planning records for no. 5 Bridgewater Close which have been noted in the Design and Access Statement provided by the agent. However, it is not clear from location plans as to whether this is the same unit as no. 5a.

Consultation Responses:

Internal Consultees

Transport: No objection, subject to conditions.

External consultation:

The following addresses were formally consulted via letter on 16/06/20:

46, 48 Dorset Street
29, 40 Westbrook Road

In addition, a site notice was displayed between 16th June - 7th July 2020.

No responses have been received.

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 (NPPF paragraph 12).

In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Development Framework (LDF) (Reading Borough Local Plan) according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

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

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CR1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CC7 Design and the Public Realm
CC8 Safeguarding Amenity
EM1 Provision of Employment
EM2 Location of New Employment Development
EM3 Loss of Employment Land
TR3 Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR5 Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging

Appraisal

Principle of change of use

The application site lies just outside of the Bridgewater Close Employment Area (area EM2j on the Proposals Map). As such, the proposal would not be reducing the amount of employment space within the core employment area, and as such is considered acceptable in relation to Policy EM2. With regard to Policy EM3, it states that a number of matters will be considered when assessing proposals which would result in a loss of employment land. Although not strictly reducing employment land, given its close proximity to an employment area, it is considered that the criteria of Policy EM3 should still be referred to: -

- (i) Is access by a choice of means of transport, including access to the strategic road network, poor, and likely to remain poor? ***The site is well served by public transport with frequent bus services along the Oxford Road. Cycle provision is included as part of this application along with some vehicle***

parking spaces. As such, it is considered that the site would have the potential to be accessed by a variety of modes of transport.

- (ii) *Is the continued use of the site for employment, including the potential for redevelopment for employment uses, viable? The site comprises part of an existing building the remainder of which is occupied and will continue in operation for Class B employment use. It should also be noted that planning permission has been granted at the site (in 2012) for a Sui Generis use (tattoo parlour) and previously granted planning permissions are a material consideration in the planning process. The premises has been vacant for 5 months, and in light of the covid-19 pandemic changing employment and working patterns, it is considered that bringing back a vacant site into an alternative use (in this specific context given the above - particularly the planning history) is acceptable. As such, it is considered that the part of the building for which change of use is sought could, potentially, continue in Class B use however in light of the above, the proposal is considered acceptable in this regard.*

- (iii) *Is there a surplus of a similar size and type of accommodation in Reading? The agent has provided the following statement:*

A review of the Costar online commercial property database confirms that there are 46 units of up to 300 sqm of commercial floorspace available within the Borough at this time. Whilst a degree of vacancy is necessary to allow for churn of floorspace to support a healthy market, the number of similar size units available indicates that granting permission for the proposed change of use, will not materially affect the supply and availability of units for Class B commercial use.

It is important to note the release of 88 sqm of commercial floorspace circa. 100 yards to the west of the proposed development site, which would become available and offer alternative accommodation to support demand within the Borough should planning permission be granted.

Based on the above, and the desire to bring back vacant sites into use (particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic), the proposal is considered acceptable in this respect.

- (iv) *Would continued employment use of the site detrimentally affect the amenity and character of a residential area? The site is located adjacent to residential development (that at Dorset Close). However, given the nature of the proposal, it is not considered that the proposed change of use would detrimentally affect the amenity and or character of the residential area. The proposed alterations to accommodate the use are primarily being made internally as opposed to externally and the use itself is not one which will give rise to emissions, noise or disturbance. Rather, it is likely*

that the proposed use would enhance the residential amenity of the area and provide a health and fitness facility for the nearby community.

- (v) Is the need for alternative uses stronger than the need for the retention of employment land? ***The portion of the building proposed to change use has been vacant since January 2020. Given the economic circumstances facing many town centres and the need for Councils to be more flexible, it is considered that this use is acceptable given that alternative uses have been permitted at the site. Furthermore, a portion of the building will remain in a 'B' use class.***
- (vi) Would the proposal result in a piecemeal loss of employment land where there is potential for a more comprehensive scheme? ***The proposal would not result in a piecemeal loss of employment land as this part of the building is currently vacant.***

Overall it is considered that the proposed use would support the objectives of the 2019 NPPF in placing significant weight on the need to support economic growth through the planning system, and the need to support healthy communities. The principle of development is therefore accepted.

On balance, the proposed change of use is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policies EN2 and EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) in this specific instance.

Impact on character of the surrounding area

The proposal does not seek any external alterations to the building and is not considered to result in any harm to the visual amenities of the surrounding area in accordance with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Separate advertisement consent will be required for the proposed signage shown on the plans. An informative will be attached to cover this matter.

Impact on neighbouring amenity

It is not considered that the proposed change of use would result in a harmful level of noise or disturbance to neighbouring properties. Vehicle numbers are restricted due to parking capacity (meaning that the noise from vehicle numbers should be managed). In addition, a condition would be attached to the permission restricting opening hours:

Monday - Friday: 0600 - 2200

Saturday - Sunday: 0800 - 1800

As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Transport

The RBC Transport officer has confirmed that the proposal is acceptable in respect of vehicle and cycle parking. Compliance conditions will be attached to ensure that these approved details are complied with.

As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to Policies TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Conclusion

It is considered that the proposal is acceptable for the reasons set out in this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

GRANT Planning Permission subject to conditions.

- 1) TL1
- 2) Approved Plans
- 3) Hours of operation
- 4) Vehicle parking as specified
- 5) Cycle parking as specified

Informatives

- 1) Terms
- 2) Building Control
- 3) Complaints about Construction
- 4) Encroachment
- 5) Separate advertisement consent is required
- 6) Positive and Proactive