

New Directions, Planning Statement

April 2020

Turley

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6 April 2020

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement is submitted by Turley on behalf of Hermes Property Unit Trust ('the Applicant') in support of a full application for the change of use of the existing New Directions building, Archway Road, Caversham with associated internal and external works proposed to support the use.
- 1.2 The application seeks permission for the following development:
- 'Change of use from D1 to D2 including demolition of 9.7sqm and creation of a 39.5 sqm extension with internal and external alterations.'*
- 1.3 Further details of the proposed development can be found under Section 3 of this Statement, and within the Design and Access Statement submitted in support of this application.
- 1.4 This application should be considered with reference to the existing planning consent for the 'wider site' (under reference: 140997), which is currently being implemented as a phased development.
- 1.5 Whilst these proposals have been submitted as a standalone planning application, they have evolved to ensure that the proposed uses complement the wider regeneration of the Centre (approved under ref: 140097) and ensure integration with the proposed with the wider District Centre.
- 1.6 This Planning Statement is intended to address all the relevant planning policy considerations associated with the proposed development, but should be read in conjunction with the other documents and drawings supported in support of the application, including:
- Application Forms and Certificates;
 - Application Drawings and Plans; and
 - Design and Access Statement.

Report Structure

- 1.7 This report is intended to assist Reading Borough Council in its determination of the application and has been prepared in accordance with the requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (the Framework) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). It seeks to evaluate the proposed development against national and local planning policies, and considers the planning justification for the proposed scheme.
- 1.8 The remainder of the Statement is structured as follows:
- **Section 2:** The Application Site
 - **Section 3:** Proposed Development

- **Section 4:** Planning Policy
- **Section 5:** Planning Assessment
- **Section 6:** Summary and Conclusions

2. The Application Site

Site Location, Description and Context

- 2.1 The St Martin's Centre is located to the north of Reading and forms the principle shopping area within the District Centre of Reading. The Centre itself comprising a range of retail and community facilities with planning permission granted in 2014 focussing on the phased regeneration of the Centre. Since that time, the same Applicant has secured the former New Directions building, accessed from Archway Road, which is the site to which this application relates.
- 2.2 The New Directions building is located to the south-east of St Martin's Centre, with access taken from Gosbrook Road onto Archway Road which is the main vehicular access route into the existing car parking associated with the Centre. Archway Road provides a gateway into the Centre, with the New Directions building positioned as a key building leading into the wider development.
- 2.3 The building itself is single storey and brick built with a variety of pitched and flat roof elements although does not benefit from a principal elevation based on its former use by New Directions. The south of the site is an existing car parking with trees abutting the eastern boundary.
- 2.4 The site abuts a two and a half storey building to the north, currently believed to be in operation for use as an office. To the east, the site adjoins School Lane, beyond which lies Crayshaw Court, a residential development dedicated to retirement living which is three storeys in height. The west of the site aligns with Archway Road which provides access to the car park for St Martin's Centre. To the south of the building there is a car park, beyond which lies Abbotsmead Place.

Planning Designations

- 2.5 The adopted Local Plan does not identify the site as within any Local Plan designations.
- 2.6 The site is within Flood Zone 1.
- 2.7 The building is not listed or locally listed based on-line records.

Planning History

- 2.8 A review of Reading Borough Council's on-line history search does not identify any relevant planning history for the site.

Wider Site Context

- 2.9 The most relevant application in relation to the site is that for the St Martins Centre Regeneration which was granted planning permission on 11th February 2015 (Ref:140997) for the following development:

"Erection of new and extended retail (use class A1) floor space, new restaurant (use class A3), new leisure (use class D2) floorspace, residential apartments (use class C3),

car park works (including erection of a single storey deck and reconfiguration at ground level) and associated landscaping, surfacing, public realm and shopfront improvement works”.

- 2.10 A non-material Amendment to Condition 2 of the permission 140997 was determined on the 8th June 2016 under reference 160018, and approved a phasing plan allowing the development to be carried out in stages. The approved phasing plan is shown in Figure 2.1 above.
- 2.11 A planning application has recently been submitted for the change of use of 51 Church Street from B1(a) and D2 (gym) to provide a new cinema facility for the Centre under reference 192009. The application currently awaits determination.

3. Proposed Development

- 3.1 The proposed development will seek to bring back into use the currently vacant building formerly occupied by New Directions. New Directions most recently operated the building as one of their Adult Education Centres before consolidating its services within Berkshire to its site at Northumberland Avenue, Whitley, Reading¹. Since this time, the Applicant has acquired the site and considered alternative uses that will support the long term viability of St Martin's Centre and Caversham as a whole.
- 3.2 As part of these proposals, a change of use of the existing use of the building is sought from D1 Use to D2 (Assembly and Leisure) to support the delivery of a new gym facility following discussions with a potential occupier.
- 3.3 To deliver the scheme it is not necessary to demolish the existing building, but to deliver a small extension (39.5 sqm) to the southern elevation of the building which will provide an additional office / consulting room and enhance the entrance to the building. Internal and external alterations are proposed to support the gym use which focus on enhancing the external appearance of the existing building with internal alterations proposed to facilitate the operation of the building as a gym. Full details of the proposed changes can be found within the accompanying Design and Access Statement which accompanies the application.

- 3.4 The amendments proposed include:

External alterations

- 3.5 The external alterations will be necessary to improve the overall appearance and operation of the building. The aim is to produce an external appearance commensurate with a health and fitness centre. The changes comprise an overall reduction of hardstanding with new planting and new trees being included within the development proposals, as well as wider improvements to vehicle access and parking with the inclusion of a cycle centre.

Internal alterations

- 3.6 To complement the external refurbishment, the internal alterations proposed are associated with the new D2 use which will ensure that the building is fit for purpose and responds to the operational requirements of the occupier. The amendments relate to internal layout changes to the internal arrangement of walls with internal improvements and updates with regard to Part M of the building regulations.

¹ <http://servicesguide.reading.gov.uk/kb5/reading/directory/service.page?id=8iOCtBZ4Yc4>

4. Planning Policy

- 4.1 This Section outlines the key planning policy relevant to the proposed development at a national and local level.
- 4.2 Section 54(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990), as amended by Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should determine planning applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.3 At a national level, relevant planning policy and guidance is set out within the National Planning Policy Framework ('the NPPF') published 2019 and the Planning Practice Guidance ('the PPG').
- 4.4 The adopted development plan for Reading Borough Council comprises the newly adopted Local Plan (November 2019). This is the core development plan document and sets out numerous policies which are of relevance to the proposals included within this application.

Adopted Development Plan

- 4.5 The relevant policies to the proposals contained within the adopted Development Plan are as follows:
- **CC1:** Presumption in favour of sustainable development which reflects the requirements of the Framework with 'planning applications that accord with the policies in the development plan (including where relevant, policies in neighbourhood Plans) will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise'.
 - **CC2:** Sustainable Design and Construction discusses that where the refurbishment of existing build stock is proposed the design of building and layouts should take account of climate change with a requirement for recycling greywater and rainwater harvesting to be incorporated into proposals where energy and cost effective.
 - **CC7:** Design and the Public Realm sets out requirements for development to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area. Of most relevance in this case, is the architectural detail and materials being proposed with a need to respond to the local context and provide safe and accessible environments.
 - **CC8:** Safeguarding amenity seeks to ensure development does not have a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties.
 - **TR5:** Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging sets out that development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of the location.

- **RL1:** Network and Hierarchy of Centres where Caversham is identified as a District Centre.
- **RL3:** Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres requires that within and adjacent to district centres all new development should provide some 'centre uses' at the ground floor, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would not be possible or appropriate. Centre uses are defined as including D2 uses under supporting text, paragraph 4.1.16.
- **OU1:** New and Existing Community Facility states that 'proposals involving the redevelopment of existing community facilities for non-community uses will not be permitted, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there is no longer a need to retain that facility'.

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

4.6 The relevant paragraphs of the Framework are as follows:

- Paragraph 11(c) sets out that decision making means approving proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.
- Paragraph 47 requires that decision on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing
- Paragraph 85 sets out that 'planning policies and decision should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaption.
- Paragraph 85(d) states that 'meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses over this period should not be compromised by limited site availability'
- Paragraph 91 focusses on enabling and supporting 'healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs'.
- Paragraph 118 (c) states that substantial weight should be given to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs
- Paragraph 124 recognises that 'good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities'.
- Paragraph 127 discusses that 'developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development' and 'are sympathetic to local character and history'. In addition, development 'should create places that are safe inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being'.

5. Planning Assessment

- 5.1 As set out previously, Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that development proposals are considered against the relevant provisions of the Development Plan, and other material considerations. Proposals are to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.2 Accordingly, this section provides an appraisal of the proposed development against the relevant planning policy considerations and any other material considerations. This focuses on the suitability of the site to accommodate the proposed development and the specific issues associated with the suitability and deliverability of the application proposals.

Principle of Development

- 5.3 The adopted Local Plan and the Framework are clear that the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ requires that planning applications that accord with the development plan are determined without delay, a matter which we demonstrate compliance with through this section of the Statement.
- 5.4 The existing building on-site was most recently used by New Directions as an Adult Education Centre, within Use Class D1 within Caversham District Centre (as recognised under Local Plan policy RL1). However, the operations were consolidated into an alternative centre in Whitley, Reading, with no further requirement for the building. The building is previously developed and is well related to St Martin’s Centre, within walking distance of a range of other District Centre facilities within Caversham, a matter that should be given significant weight in line with paragraph 118 of the Framework.
- 5.5 The Applicant acquired the site in 2019 and has been considering alternative uses for the building that would complement the wider regeneration of St Martins Centre and support the District Centre function in line with the Framework. Particular attention has been paid to paragraph 85 of the Framework with regard to ensuring that a ‘positive approach’ is taken to manage and adapt the District Centre to respond to the evolving face of District Centres and the needs of the local community.
- 5.6 The building is now vacant and thus is currently failing to promote the long-term vitality and viability of St Martin’s Centre itself and Caversham more widely. The proposals are considered to represent an appropriate alternative use for the building based upon market demand and forms part of the wider positive strategy to secure the future of the District Centre.
- 5.7 The key planning consideration relates to the justification for the loss of the existing D1 use on-site as a former Adult Education Centre. Adopted Local Plan policy OU1 (New and Existing Community Facilities) states that where proposal involve the loss of an existing community facility for non-community uses, then it needs to be demonstrate that there is no longer a need for the facility.

- 5.8 As previously discussed, New Directions vacated the property as the building was surplus to its operational requirements. The facility has been consolidated elsewhere within Reading Borough. Given the above, it is considered policy OU1 has been addressed and alternative uses have been considered.
- 5.9 In line with Local Plan policy RL3 (Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres), the Applicant proposes a D2 use (Assembly and Leisure) which is considered a 'centre use' for the purposes of the policy. These uses are required at ground floor level and are clarified explicitly within the Local Plan supporting text at 4.1.16. The proposal further incorporate internal and external alterations which are discussed later in this Section, albeit has been designed to accommodate a new gym facility for the District Centre.
- 5.10 The new gym offer will be an expansion of the existing gym offer within the District Centre responding to the anticipated needs within the local market (as required under paragraph 85 of the Framework), whilst supporting the provision of use that will enhance healthy lifestyles and address well-being needs of local people in line with paragraph 91 of the Framework. It is considered the proposed D2 use will complement the existing offer within the District Centre.

Design Approach

- 5.11 The Framework discusses that 'good design is a key aspect of sustainable development' and this proposal recognises the contribution that the existing building provides to the streetscene along Archway Road. The intention is to retain the existing building with external alterations to enhance the facades and adapt the building to deliver a building suitable for a D2 use occupier.
- 5.12 The approach to design has considered the contribution that the building can make to the overall quality of the area, particularly its use and function to the vitality of St Martins Centre. The alterations proposed to the existing building are as follows:
- All-round internal refurbishment, including alterations to the building wall layout in line with Part M of the building regulations and to maximise the space required within the building for its proposed use
 - This will be accompanied by external enhancements to the site with additional cycle parking and amenity planting with new trees proposed on site.
- 5.13 The proposed extension extends to 39.5sqm and provides an additional office/consulting room to support the use. The design of the extension is considered to respect the host building and will make an efficient use of a previously developed site.

Parking: Car and Cycle Provision

- 5.14 The proposal includes the provision of 17 parking spaces in line with the RBC Parking Standards SPD as shown on drawing A – P10-002, with 4 identified specifically as disabled spaces. It is considered this should be sufficient to accommodate the proposed use.

- 5.15 In addition, Sheffield cycle parking stands can be accommodated to provide cycle provision for the proposed use.

6. Summary and Conclusions

- 6.1 This application seeks planning permission for the change of use of the former New Directions building from D1 (Adult Education) to D2 (Assembly and Leisure). The intention is to retain the existing building although undertake internal and external amendments alongside a small extension to support the alternative use for the building.
- 6.2 Hermes is committed to delivering on the regeneration of the District Centre and is proactively seeking opportunities to deliver additional facilities within St Martin's Centre that support its vitality and viability. The provision of a new gym facilitate will also support the health and well-being offer to local residents within Caversham and will have a positive impact upon the District Centre and the 'main town centre use' offer.
- 6.3 The proposed development retains the current structure's scale and form, but proposes an alternative internal configuration and external amendments to enhance the appearance of the existing building. The supporting documents set out in detail the design approach to the application.
- 6.4 It is considered that the proposed development represents sustainable development and accords with the relevant policies of the adopted and emerging development plan and should be approved without delay in line with paragraph 11 (c) and 47 of the Framework.

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