

PLANNING STATEMENT

ON BEHALF OF

LAUNCHPAD READING

**172 Caversham Road, Reading
Berkshire, RG1 8AZ**

Proposed conversion from C1 (Guest House) to C4 (home in multiple ownership) use and minor building alterations including the removal of canopies above existing doors, replacement of the front door, a raised window sill at ground floor level, the insertion of a rear window at ground floor level & internal alterations

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This application is submitted on behalf of our client, Launchpad Reading, in relation to a planning application for the change of use of an existing 8 bedroom guest house (Use Class C1) to a 7 bedroom HMO ('House in Multiple Occupation') (Use Class C4). A number of minor building alterations are also proposed as listed in the development description.
- 1.2. The site has been a guesthouse for over 15 years. This planning statement demonstrates how the proposed conversion can positively contribute to the sustainability of the area in respect of the potential reduction in noise and disturbance to the surrounding area. Further to this, the proposal does not seek to significantly alter the building's external form and enables the provision of much needed, shared residential accommodation in an accessible location.
- 1.3. The applicant, Launchpad Reading is a charity that helps some of Reading's most vulnerable and disadvantaged people. The charity provides accommodation to those in need (housing approximately 100 people), provides a drop-in service, and offers a floating support service to those in risk of becoming homeless. This application would provide accommodation for 7 no. further people in need and would provide improved accommodation when compared to the charity's existing accommodation located elsewhere in Reading Borough.

2. THE SITE

- 2.1. The application site, 172 Caversham Road, is situated on the eastern side of the A4155 Caversham Road, a short distance to the north/northwest of Reading town centre and Reading train station.
- 2.2. The site comprises a three storey mid-terraced dwelling historically used as an 8 bedroom guest house. In respect of the building's existing layout, 3 of the bedrooms are situated on the ground floor, 3 on the first floor and the final 2 on the second floor.
- 2.3. Externally, the property has an open paved forecourt to the front and a car parking area to the rear accessible from Caversham Road.
- 2.4. The surrounding area comprises a mixture of residential dwellings, HMOs, guest houses and shops.
- 2.5. The site, its surrounding area and associated parking area to the rear are illustrated in the image below:



Image 1: Site Context

Application Site

Associated Parking Area

3. PROPOSALS

3.1. For the purposes of this application the following facts are relevant:

1. The conversion of an existing 8 bedroom guest house to a 7 bedroom HMO.
2. There will be some limited alterations to the outside of the building. The rear of the site will be used as a rear garden area.
3. The 7 no. residential HMO units will be managed by Launchpad Reading, a homelessness charity. The scheme will therefore contribute to tackling a significant social concern specific to Reading, and in turn will meet an identified housing need.

4. **PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

4.1. This section summarises the planning policy position, against which the detailed design elements of the scheme are to be assessed.

4.2 For the purposes of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the development plan, against which the application proposal will be determined, comprises:

- The Reading Core Strategy (2008, Alteration Adopted January 2015); &
- The Reading Sites and Detailed Policies Document (2008, Alteration Adopted January 2015).

4.3 The relevant policies from each are referred to below with the relevant sections and paragraphs from the NPPF referred to thereafter.

Relevant Development Plan Policies

4.4 The following policy considerations are relevant to the proposed application.

Policy	Acceptability of the Application Scheme
DM8	This policy is specific to the conversion of properties into self-contained flats or for houses in multiple occupation and sets criteria against which such proposals will be assessed. The policy states that proposals to convert properties into self contained flats or houses for multiple occupation under Core Strategy policy CS18 will only be acceptable where: • The proposal respects the physical character of the area and additionally would not, either individually or cumulatively, unduly dilute or harm an existing mixed and sustainable community through the significant loss of a single family home. • There are no unacceptable adverse impacts to other residential properties arising from noise and disturbance in terms of the number and layout of units proposed and

	proximity to other properties. In the case of Sui Generis houses in multiple occupation ('HMOs') this policy states: • The property to be converted has four or more bedrooms or measures more than 120 square metres gross • There is an appropriate balance between communal and private area for sui generis HMOs. The application proposal seeks to reduce the current number of bedrooms in the property from 8 to 7. This would naturally result in a reduced impact to surrounding residential properties in terms of noise or disturbance. In addition, the site's lawful use as a guesthouse means that there is no loss of a single family home.
CS18	This policy sets out the general design and amenity considerations for which a proposal to convert properties into self contained flats or for a house in multiple occupations will be assessed against. <i>This policy states '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.'</i> The application proposal does not involve any substantive alternations to the external built form or appearance of the property. An external amenity space is proposed. As such, the proposed conversion, resulting in a reduction of 8 bedrooms to 7, would have no negative impact on the considerations set out in this policy.

National Planning Policy Considerations

- 4.5. The National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') was published in February 2019 and sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The presumption in favour of sustainable development has been a constant theme within both the 2012 NPPF and the most recent version.
- 4.6. Of particular relevance to this application is Section 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes. Paragraph 59 of the NPPF supports the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of homes and has placed importance on the need of groups with specific housing requirements being addressed through the planning system.
- 4.7. Paragraph 61 states that the housing need for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policy. This paragraph seeks to ensure that housing requirements are addressed for all members of the community including but not limited to those who require affordable housing, students and people who rent their homes. Clearly by assisting the demands upon a homelessness charity, the proposed scheme would contribute towards housing needs for those in greatest poverty.
- 4.8. It is clear that there is both local and national support for the proposal subject to an assessment of the proposals impact on the surrounding area and the site's ability to meet an identified housing need.

5. **MAIN ISSUES**

5.1 This section sets out the main issues the application gives rise to and how each is in full accordance with relevant policies and national guidance.

5.2 The application seeks permission for the change of use of an 8 bedroom guesthouse (C1 Use) to a 7 bedroom HMO (C4 Use) in Reading. The main issues are:

- a) Meeting a specific housing need
- b) Potential impact on neighbouring properties
- c) Access and parking
- d) Loss of employment
- e) Flooding

Meeting a specific housing need

5.3 The proposed application seeks permission for the change of use of an 8 bedroom guesthouse (Use Class C1) into a 7 bedroom HMO (Use Class C4). This will contribute towards identified housing needs in Reading Borough Council without any significant adverse impacts upon the character of the surrounding area or other material considerations referenced in the Reading Local Plan.

5.4 The applicant, Launchpad Reading, are a charity dedicated to preventing homelessness in the Reading area. Reading Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021 found that from 2011 to 2015 the number of households that the Council owed a statutory duty to secure accommodation had increased from 80 to 339. In 2016 there were on average 27 statutory homelessness applications made per month. Homelessness is still a very significant social issue in Reading and this is self-evident if one walks the town centre streets in the evening.

5.5 Last year Launchpad Reading helped over 1,200 people across all their services. This application would contribute significantly to addressing social concerns in Reading and make a direct contribution to meeting this specific identified housing need.

Potential impact on neighbouring properties

- 5.6 The property is located on a mid-terraced residential street just north/northwest of Reading town centre and train station. Residential developments around Reading's centre are considerably dense, including along Caversham Road. The proximity of the proposed site to adjacent dwellings means that the impact of a conversion on the surrounding area is a material consideration.
- 5.7 The site is surrounded by residential dwellings to the north, east, south and west. In addition to this, the site is in close proximity to a variety of shops (Use Class A1), pubs (Use Class A4), hotels (Use Class C1) and takeaway food venues (Use Class A5).
- 5.8 As previously addressed, the proposal does not involve any extension or significant alteration to the building and therefore will not negatively impact on amenities of the occupants of the surrounding properties.
- 5.9 The proposed conversion reduces the number of bedrooms in the property from 8 to 7. It is therefore unlikely that this proposal will contribute toward any intensification of activity in the area. Further to this, the reduced number of bedspaces will reduce the impact of noise and disturbance on surrounding properties.
- 5.10 The retention of the site's character in-keeping with the surrounding area and reduced impact of noise and disturbance means the scheme would not adversely impact upon the amenities of any of the surrounding properties.

Access and parking

- 5.11. The current use of the site accommodates at least 8 (potentially more if couples / families) separate temporary occupants. In respect of car parking, the Council's standard would require between a total 1 and 2 spaces to serve the proposed HMO use. However, the nature of the Charity is such that the residents of the proposed use are homeless and thus below the poverty line. It follows that the likelihood of them owning a car is extremely low and consequently it has been deemed appropriate that the land located to the immediate rear of the building is

best used as amenity space to serve the social needs of the HMO residents, rather than as parking spaces for which there would be no demand.

- 5.12. The proposed approach is especially logical given the site's location within 300 metres of the central core area, including the town's central transport hubs. Cycle storage provision can be secured by way of condition and provided either in front of or behind the building. It follows that having regard to the NPPF test, the scheme would not result in any unacceptable impact on highway safety and any impact could not be described as severe. Consequently, a car free scheme is justified by virtue of the specific characteristics of the future residents and the site's highly accessible location.

Loss of employment

- 5.11 The conversion would result in a small loss of an employment use. The proposed application would most likely result in the loss of one/two employees as the guesthouse is converted into HMO units.
- 5.12 It is considered that this reduction in employment can be granted lesser weight than the considerable contribution to meeting the specific housing needs of the homeless and disadvantaged that Launchpad Reading are attempting to provide, including the specific needs identified in the Reading Homelessness Strategy.

Flooding

- 5.13 The property is in flood zone 2 and the rear of the site falls under flood zone 3.
- 5.14 This proposal does not seek to alter the built form of the site nor make any alterations that would make the site more susceptible to flooding. Paragraph 164 of the NPPF is clear that applications for change of use should not be subject to the sequential or exception tests. Consequently, neither of these tests are required in this case. Having regard to the Planning Practice Guidance, 'hotels' and 'buildings used for dwelling houses' are in the same 'more vulnerable' category. Given the scheme will result in a reduction in the number of residents on site (7 against a minimum of 8 currently), the scheme will not result in any increase in flood risk to human life.

6. **CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The application for 172 Caversham Road seeks to convert an 8 bedroom guesthouse (Use Class C1) into a 7 bedroom HMO (Use Class C4). A number of minor building alterations are also proposed as listed in the development description.
- 6.2 The mid-terraced property is located in a sustainable location in Reading and lies in close proximity to Reading town centre and train station.
- 6.3 Only minor external alterations to the site's built form or appearance are proposed and it is unlikely that the scheme will not create any adverse impacts in terms of noise or disturbance to surrounding properties. The proposed conversion will positively contribute to reducing noise and disturbance when compared to the site's existing use.
- 6.4 This application on behalf of the homeless charity, Launchpad Reading, will positively contribute to a number of social concerns specific to Reading Borough Council by meeting an identified housing need.
- 6.5 In summary, the conversion of 8 guesthouse units to 7 HMO units would be consistent with all relevant local and national planning policy, will significantly contribute to an identified housing need and address the social role of the planning system. The proposal does not adversely impact the character and amenity for surrounding development. This proposal is therefore a sustainable form of development which is fully supported by local planning policy and the NPPF.
