

Planning Statement

Abbey Gate, Kings Road, Reading

October 2018

Introduction

1. This statement has been prepared by Turley on behalf of Swiss Pillar Investments AG to accompany a full planning application for external alterations to an existing office building at Abbey Gate, 57 – 75 Kings Road, Reading. The description of the proposed development is as follows:

“External alterations and ancillary works to the existing building and private terrace area”

2. The external alterations (for which we are seeking planning consent) form part of the sites wider refurbishment, including a number of internal alterations to enhance the buildings appeal to prospective office occupiers. Further details of the proposals can be seen in the Design and Access Statement that accompanies this planning application (prepared by Spratley & Partners).

The Site and Context

3. The application site (approximately 0.28 hectares) is centrally located within Reading and falls within the ‘Central Core’ and ‘Reading Central Area’ (as defined within the adopted Reading Core Strategy) which is supportive of office uses. Across the River Kennet to the north of the site is Reading Abbey which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The site falls within Flood Zone 2, an area at medium risk of flooding.
4. The site is bounded to the north and west by the River Kennet. To the south of the site is King’s Road; beyond is a block of apartments and serviced apartments. To the east is Duncan Place which forms the access road into the Site’s basement car park.
5. The site itself comprises a four storey office building, with a basement car park. Access to the car park for both vehicles and cycles is along the eastern elevation. The main entrance to reception is along the southern elevation (King’s Road). There is a landscaped terrace to the rear of the building, providing views onto the River Kennett. A public access footway routes along the western and northern sides of the building, along the River Kennett, across the lower terrace area.

Planning History

6. The existing Abbey Gate building gained planning permission in May 1988 for the construction of a 4 storey office building with basement car parking (reference: 87/TP/765).
7. Planning permission was granted on 12 September 2007 (07/00945/FUL) for the conversion of half the existing fourth floor storage space into office space and erection of four new pitched roof dormers with alterations to two existing ones. Pitched velux roof lights were also included to increase daylight penetration into the new office space. Other alterations included the replacement of decorative balustrades to conform with current regulation and general façade and hard landscape cleaning.

8. Two planning applications were submitted by the previous landowner in April 2018 for alterations to the existing rear terrace and entrance, including advert consent for new and replacement signage (references: 180642/180643). Both applications are currently awaiting determination albeit, the proposals have not been found to be controversial with no issues raised by statutory consultees to date.

Proposals and Planning Assessment

9. Planning permission is sought for the external alterations to an existing building including:
- An extended entrance canopy across the front (South) elevation of the building;
 - Repainting and recladding;
 - Removal of louvres and replacement glazing proposed to the west elevation on the fourth floor and new skylights on the west and south elevation;
 - Improvements to the outdoor terrace to the rear of the building including:
 - Closure of the existing central stairs to the lower terrace;
 - Replacement of the existing gates on the eastern access with new access controlled security gates;
 - Reconfiguration and painting of planters, re-paving and introduction of a low level lighting scheme on the terrace to provide an attractive outdoor seating area;
 - A new central access to be provided along the buildings northern elevation, providing direct access onto the terrace from the ground floor; and
 - A storage container on the lower terrace to be used as meeting space/boat storage.
10. The proposals will result in a notable colour change which will be consistent across the building on the cladding on the external elevations from white to dark grey (RAL 7021 or similar).
11. A number of improvements will be made to the external terrace area including removal and replacement outdoor planting, improved security, new lighting and security gates and fencing. There is also a proposed container storage/meeting space which is to be used for boat storage and meeting space for the office building.
12. These external changes form part of the wider refurbishment of the building comprising a number of internal alterations (such as enhancement of the internal reception/foyer and additional cycle parking within the basement) which do not require planning permission. In the interests of comprehensiveness, we have provided the existing and proposed floor plans to illustrate how the building will be enhanced in its entirety; albeit the Applicant is seeking planning permission for the external alterations only.

Planning Policy Context

Local Plan

13. The adopted Development Plan for the site currently comprises: the Reading Borough Local Development Framework, Core Strategy (adopted in January 2008), Central Area Action Plan (adopted in January 2009) and Sites and Detailed Policies Document (adopted in October 2012).
14. **Policy CS1** of the Reading Core Strategy provides an overarching sustainability policy for all development, including refurbishments to existing building stock, which seeks to ensure consideration is given to the use of natural resources, energy efficiency and climate change. Other key policies contained within the Development Plan which relate to high quality design and are of relevant to the proposals are summarised below:
 - **Policy CS7** of the Reading Core Strategy requires all development to be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area in Reading in which it is located;
 - **Policy RC5** of the Reading Central Area Action Plan identifies that development within Reading central area should achieve a distinctive high quality environment and should demonstrate that: development will build on and respect the existing grid layout structure of the central area, development will provide appropriate, well designed public spaces and other public realm, including squares, open spaces, streetscape, utilising high quality and well-maintained hard and soft landscape;
 - **Policy DM4** of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document states that development will not cause a significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing or new residential properties, in terms of: privacy and overlooking, access to sunlight and daylight, visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development, noise and disturbance, artificial lighting, vibration, dust and fumes, smell or crime and safety;
 - **Policy DM10** of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document refers to private and communal outdoor space and states that the design of outdoor areas will respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity, clearly identify whether they are private or communal spaces, ensure that they appropriately related to main entrances, enhance safety and the perception of safety for future residents and the general public, and not be compromised by the relationship of other buildings which may be detrimental in terms of overlooking, overbearing or overshadowing.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

15. The revised NPPF was published in July 2018 and sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
16. At the heart of the NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which plans and decisions should apply (paragraph 11).
17. Of relevance to the proposals, paragraph 127 states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

Flood Risk

18. According to the Environment Agency Flood Risk Map, the site is located within Flood Zone 2, an area classified to be at risk of flooding.
19. The external alterations are considered minor and do not increase the size of the building. The existing drainage features will remain unaltered. As such, relevant guidance advises that the development would be highly unlikely to increase the flood risk.

Assessment and Conclusions

20. The proposed external alterations form part of the building's wider refurbishment to improve the buildings facilities and attract new occupiers of the existing office building. The external changes will improve the aesthetics of the building and provide an attractive outdoor seating area for occupiers of the building.
21. The proposals are an opportunity to improve the quality of an existing office building in central Reading. Overall, it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with the relevant Local Plan policies set out in this Statement, particularly those which encourage a high quality design of outdoor spaces. Therefore, we invite the Council to approve this development.

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October 2018

MALA3008