



Design, Access and Planning Statement

**Change of use of B1 building at
448a Basingstoke Road, Reading RG2 0RX
to mixed B1/D1/A3 use**

April 2018

**Red Kite Development Consultancy
On behalf of The Reading Family Church**

DESIGN, ACCESS AND PLANNING STATEMENT

**PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE OF PREMISES AT 448A BASINGSTOKE ROAD,
READING RG2 0RX**

1.00 INTRODUCTION

- 1.01 The existing building at 448a Basingstoke Road was constructed in accordance with Planning permission Ref 83/TP/707. The permission recognized that modern high-tech businesses required a different form of building to traditional industry, with a high proportion of the floorspace being used for office and research, in the form of open plan office space. The building was therefore constructed in an L shape, with the front wing as open plan office space, and the rear to be used for assembly/R&D/offices and ancillary storage, with a central service link.
- 1.02 A S52 (forerunner to S106) Agreement confirmed that the premises should be treated as a single planning unit, ensuring that the office/research element remained ancillary to the light industrial use (Class III at the time, now incorporated in Class B1) of the building. No part of the site was designated to be used for storage or industry (now Classes B2 or B8).
- 1.03 The lawful use at the time of construction was in today's terms therefore entirely within Class B1. As described in further detail below, for the last 20 years while it has been in the current owners' possession and occupied by Ultima Business Solutions Ltd, it has been used for B1 purposes (office, research and development and assembly with ancillary storage). Ultima Business Solutions vacated the site in 2016 to relocate to nearby larger premises, and no prospective purchaser for the site has come forward in 2 years of marketing, despite continuous advertisement by expert commercial agents.
- 1.04 This new application proposes a Change of Use of the entire site to allow it to be used by the Reading Family Church as its main centre serving the Reading community. Physical alterations are minimal as the building is eminently suitable for this proposed use.

- 1.05 This statement and supporting documents explain the nature of the new use and the activities of the Reading Family Church, and also describe the significant benefits this new use will deliver to the community, in accordance with the Development Plan and NPPF advice.

2.00 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.01 The site lies to the west of Basingstoke Road, but access is taken from a small slip road / cul de sac that runs parallel to Basingstoke Road with a junction to Manor Farm Road. It is thus set back from the Basingstoke Road frontage behind an intervening landscaped buffer.



Site location on service road parallel to Basingstoke Road

- 2.02 Historically the site formed part of an extensive edge of settlement South Reading industrial area. Recent years have seen significant changes, with large scale residential development to the west at Kennet Island, south at Worton Grange and redevelopment of sites north of Manor Farm Road for modern high tech businesses.
- 2.03 The site is highly accessible by bus and cycle routes to the wider Reading urban area, and within a few minutes walk of the large residential populations of South Reading, Kennet Island and other new large scale residential developments to the south. The adopted Sites and Detailed Policies Document anticipates and plans for additional housing development in South Reading and highlights the need for developments which link these otherwise potentially isolated communities.

- 2.04 Neighbouring land to the south is currently being redeveloped for commercial/industrial use. The application site lies within an area identified as SA12(d) – Bennet Road Core Employment Area.
- 2.05 Section 1.00 briefly refers to the planning history of the site. The building was built in accordance with approved plans, with the rear wing including a double height area suitable for light industrial activities. In 1997 when Ultima purchased the site, internal alterations were made to this area to provide glass cubicles and a false (lower) ceiling, to better suit the workspace needs of the computer software R&D and installation activity. This has been the position for more than 20 years.
- 2.06 A delivery bay with a roller door remains at the southern end of the rear wing. Outside, the site is enclosed by a secure fence and gate, with a landscaped car park providing 60 car spaces, cycle parking and refuse storage space.

3.00 PROPOSED NEW USE

- 3.01 The attached leaflet sets out the scope of activities of The Reading Family Church (TRFC). This is a Christian faith organisation with extensive community outreach programmes, with particular focus on addressing problems of local deprivation. It has been established in Reading for more than 15 years, during which time it has forged excellent relationships with local organisations and assists in the delivery of social programmes including training for job-seekers, youth projects, ReadiFood and childrens nursery groups.
- 3.02 To date, the many and varied church activities have been undertaken from a variety of sites in Reading, relying on rented accommodation. This has not always been well suited to the activities, or easily accessible for all, or available when needed. Equipment, including musical instruments, has to be taken to each venue for every individual occasion.
- 3.03 The Reading Family Church (TRFC) is a registered charity and has now grown to a faith community of around 500 people who have determined to create a permanent worship, administration and activity centre. Premises which failed to include a worship/community meeting space would not be acceptable to meet TRFC needs.

What is required is a mixed use building, with flexible accommodation to reflect the various activities (both Church and community) which would share the space.

- 3.04 The applicant has been searching for a suitable home for the Church for several years. Around 25 alternative sites have been investigated but have proved to be unsuitable. At **APPENDIX 6** the facilities manager provides detail on the principal sites investigated. With the continued growth in the scale of membership and the range of activities undertaken, the need for a permanent site is now extremely urgent.
- 3.05 The importance of a location in South Reading is that this is within 0-2 miles of the majority of the Church members and has immediate accessibility for a large community of 'clients' of the outreach activities. The majority of these activities focus on improving the social and employment opportunities for deprived sectors of the South Reading community, together with partnership working with other local charities and organisations.
- 3.06 The proposed change of use would involve:

Rear Wing

- Converting the ground floor of the delivery bay to a Community Café [A3 – 128 sm]
- Adding a small mezzanine office above the Community Café [72 sm B1]
- Using the ground floor [former open assembly/R &D area] as a flexible worship space/events/community space, with adjacent cubicles used to provide a kitchen, music equipment and furniture storage/rehearsal space/private meetings etc, and a youth hall [D1 – 724 sm]

The worship activities will take place on around 65 days a year. For the remaining 300 days a year the Church will use this space both for its own community programmes (e.g. Mother and toddler group) and with the space

otherwise available for hire for community events, subject to any terms specified by TRFC management team (See **APPENDIX 1**)

- Using the first floor accommodation for church office and building administration [B1a].

Front Wing

- Using the ground floor open plan office space for Church run groups – job seekers training and advice, youth training, retraining workshops, food bank collection point etc [888 sm B1].
- Creating a suite of small/flexible office units at first floor for rental to community groups, small start-ups, social enterprises, charities, local businesses etc [B1(a)].

Existing local contacts confirm that there is considerable unmet demand for this type of space locally, and that co-location within a new centre would provide the best support for growth and linkages.

- 3.07 The application therefore proposes a mixed D1/B1/A3 use. The total floorspace is enlarged by the addition of the mezzanine from 2515sm to 2587 sm, with a total of 1735 sm of B1 included. The plan attached at **APPENDIX 5** shows the split between the three uses.

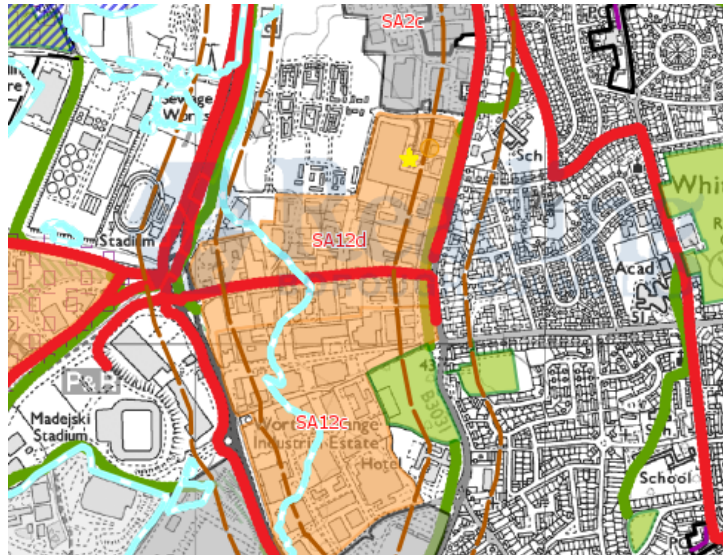
4.00 ACCESS AND PARKING

- 4.01 The site benefits from a fully engineered access to an adopted road, which is also a cul de sac with no passing traffic. Visibility is excellent, and access arrangements for all types of vehicle, cyclists and pedestrians are safe. No changes are proposed.
- 4.02 The Basingstoke Road provides a segregated cycle route and regular frequent bus services. There are footways along both sides of Manor Farm Road, linking the site to residential communities to east and west.

- 4.03 The building has a total floorspace of 2587 sm. On site parking is available at an overall ratio of 1: 43 sm.
- 4.04 The worship element of the use – faith celebrations and observances – where large numbers of attendees will visit the site, will be principally at weekends or on Bank Holidays i.e. 65 days a year, when activity on nearby business sites is reduced. The Church will be promoting travel via car sharing and non-car modes (**APPENDIX 2**), but in the event that additional overflow parking is required, private arrangements are in place for overflow parking to take place on the nearby new Ultima site immediately north of Manor Farm Road, within a one minute walk of the site.
- 4.05 A licence has been agreed with Ultima Properties Ltd which provides for use of up to 266 additional nearby parking spaces on Sundays and on agreed other non-working days, which is considered to be well in excess of potential demand. (A copy can be provided to the Council on request, but this is not considered to be a public document for display on the public file). This overflow parking is located at Gainsborough House, Manor Farm Road, Reading, RG2 0NA
- 4.06 The only change visible externally will be the replacement of the roller shutter door with a new glazed façade to the café area. The content of the existing signage would be altered but the size will remain the same.

5.00 NATIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING POLICY ISSUES

- 5.01 The site lies within the settlement boundary. In the Adopted (amended) 2015 SDPD document it is shown within an area identified as SA12(d) – Bennet Road Core Employment Area.
- 5.02 The SDPD provides detail on the South Reading Strategy, and also includes an explanation as to which of the Core Strategy Employment Policies are relevant to individual sites. While Policy CS11 applies to all CEAs confirmed in the SDPD, that part of Policy CS12 which refers to the protection of the overall level of B8 floorspace only relates to the area identified as SA12c and is therefore not pertinent to this application site.



Extract from Local Plan Policies Map with site location identified

- 5.03 CS10 is a general locational policy, directing employment development to identified parts of the Borough. The site and existing use accords with this strategy.

CS10: Location of Employment Development

Major office development will take place in the centre of Reading and along the A33 corridor. Office development will also take place in the other centres in the network set out in Policy CS 26 but should be of an appropriate scale to those centres.

Other major employment uses, including industrial and storage and distribution will be located in the A33 corridor or in the Core Employment Areas.

- 5.04 Policy CS11 seeks to retain employment land within CEAs, pending further definition in the later SPDP.

CS11: Use of Employment Land for Alternative Uses

Within the Core Employment Areas, the overall level of employment land should be maintained. Proposals that would result in a loss of such land will not be permitted.

The term 'Employment land' is generally used to denote B use classes, although it is acknowledged in the Development Plan that some sui generis uses might also be compatible with the CEA strategy.

15.2.5 These areas will be the main location for industrial and warehouse uses (CS10), and there is a general presumption against loss of employment land in these areas (CS11). In addition, SA12c (South of Basingstoke Road) is the area

referred to in CS12, where the overall level of storage and distribution uses will be maintained.

15.2.6 Where policies in this document and the Core Strategy refer to the need to maintain the overall supply of employment land (e.g. CS11), in addition to offices, industry and storage and distribution (use classes B1, B2 and B8), it includes any use that can only reasonably be accommodated on industrial land, which may include some 'sui generis' uses.

South Reading Strategy in SDPD

- 5.05 Policy CS12 deals with maintaining a variety of premises and promotes developments which assist in the supply of small units and start up space, as is proposed in this application.

CS12: Maintaining a Variety of Premises

A range of types and sizes of units should be present in the Borough, and proposals should maintain or enhance this range. In particular, the overall level of start-up and grow-on space should be maintained and, where possible, increased, and any loss of small units should be offset by new provision. Proposals should maintain the overall level of storage and distribution uses in the south of Basingstoke Road. **(N.B. later defined in SDPD as sites within SA12c)**

Subject to these considerations, proposals for redevelopment of older industrial units for more flexible employment premises will be acceptable.

- 5.06 On this site, approval was granted and implemented many years ago for redevelopment to meet the needs of the high-tech industry, rather than traditional B2 and B8 uses.
- 5.07 While the 2008 Policy CS11 seeks to maintain the overall quantum of employment land, subsequent policies of the 2015 (as amended) SDPD and decisions on individual sites however have released large amounts of employment land for redevelopment. Both Development Plan documents pre-date the national GPDO changes which permit the change of use of employment premises to residential use (subject to a Prior Approval Process). It is thus extremely difficult to calculate the overall quantum at any particular time, to track whether the quantum is up or down, let alone to take account of changes in need and demand.

- 5.08 The South Reading Framework (part of SDPD) refers in several places to the need to promote the integration of housing areas which are physically separated by intervening employment areas, in particular:

Part of SA2c - promote the integration of Kennet Island with the established areas of Whitley to the east

South Reading Vision: IA reduce the isolation of housing areas in South Reading thereby enhancing it as an attractive and pleasant place to live;

13.6.3 There are pockets of areas within South Reading that have significant social and economic shortfalls that are well above national averages. The relatively large size and isolated nature of some of South Reading's major potential redevelopment sites provides a unique opportunity to direct future investment in a manner that is relevant to the most deprived areas within South Reading in order to maintain community cohesion.

- 5.09 Policy guiding development (SA1) in South Reading anticipates major sites assisting in improving integration and community facilities. This application site is located so that it is close to a linking walking route accessible to both the older areas and the new, where it is ideally placed to support the objectives of SA1. In terms of the nature of the use, it directly targets the more disadvantaged parts of the local communities.

SA1: SOUTH READING DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

Development will contribute to the provision of community services and facilities that properly integrate, in a physical sense and in terms of community infrastructure provision, with established residential areas, taking account of the socio-economic and environmental characteristics of South Reading.

6.00 DISCUSSION

(i) Pre-application advice

- 6.01 Reading Family Church is an important and thriving organization, with the potential for additional growth and increased involvement in social and community cohesion. It started life in South Reading and this site forms a natural location for a permanent home.
- 6.02 Pre-application advice was sought from the Council. The advice received highlighted the inclusion of the site within a Core Employment Area and subject to Policy CS12

where loss of B8 land is to be resisted. It acknowledged that in part the new uses proposed would support employment in general but expressed concern about the reduction in Class B floorspace.

- 6.03 The advice however was based on an erroneous assumption that the site was approved (at least in part) for B8 warehousing use, which is not the case (see Planning Permission 83/TP/707). The site is approved for use as a single planning unit, with all approved uses falling within the modern Class B1. It also lies in an area defined as SA12d, which is not subject to the CS12 presumption against loss of B8.
- 6.04 The principal use of the proposed mixed-use scheme is B1, thus maintaining the existing situation.

(ii) Consideration of local precedents

- 6.05 The Council drew attention to an appeal decision concerning a D1 (worship) use previously granted temporary permission for 3 years on another site within a designated Core Employment Area, at 141 Cardiff Road, RG1 8JF. An enforcement appeal was made against a notice requiring cessation of the D1 use and resumption of the previous B2 (Industrial) Use.
- 6.06 Policy CS11 affects all land in Core Employment Areas (CEA), seeking to protect its employment function. The Appeal site lies within an area identified as SA12(g) in the SDPD.
- 6.07 The circumstances are very different, in that the fallback in that case was a B2 industrial use, and the proposed development would have been wholly D1. This is brought to the fore by the Inspectors comments at paragraph 8 (APP/E0345/C/15/3137299 and 3138913):

The current occupier does employ people, but the policy is not about employment alone, but employment in industrial uses, and it is perfectly reasonable for the Council to seek to protect the stock of B2 uses.

- 6.08 Other problems identified in the above appeal are not present in the current case. There are no proximate residential units which might experience noise disturbance,

and the building has been designed and built of modern materials which would prevent this. The proposed worship/meeting/event space is set as far away as possible within the site from residential areas. At its closest point, the area for community events is around 110m from a residential unit. It is likely that noise from existing traffic (which persists at weekends) would be the primary source of any noise nuisance for local residential occupiers.

- 6.09 Unlike the appeal site, no on street parking is possible near the current application site, due to traffic regulation orders and yellow lining on adjacent roads.
- 6.10 The decision of the Inspector in the enforcement appeal at Cardiff Road is therefore based on very different circumstances and does not form a precedent that affects the determination of the current application.

(iii) Reduction in employment land in CEA

- 6.11 Looking to the proposed mix of uses on the site, the largest use by floorspace would be B1 (67%). The café use can be seen to assist in the operation of the CEA by providing a facility that would be useful for local employees within the CEA and is in any event ancillary to other B1 uses on the site – i.e. likely to be used by those attending activities or working in the B1 areas.
- 6.12 Thus it is only the worship/meeting/community facility area which does not accord with the definition of employment floorspace and is lost from the total of B1 floorspace previously on the site. Taking account of the additional office mezzanine, the loss of B1 floorspace is only 780sm. The operation of a community facility will of course involve employees, in the same way that the A3 café use will have staff. This non-B1 area represents only 33% of the building.

(iv) The Planning Balance

- 6.13 This modest reduction in B1 floorspace needs to be considered in the planning balance with several material considerations as addressed below:

(i) The social and community value of the new facility as a whole.

- 6.11 In addition to providing a permanent base for faith activities, the Church has a proven track record in providing training for job-seekers, mother and toddler groups, special interest groups and mentoring. These are available to all sectors of the community regardless of faith and include delivering services in association with Reading Borough Council programmes for disadvantaged residents. The Church also has significant involvement in organizing events such as the annual Carnival.
- 6.12 The new centre will allow these activities to continue and to expand, in addition to providing rentable space to similar social enterprises, charities, small businesses and the wider community. This enrichment of the community entirely accords with Policy CS31 of the Development Plan:

Policy CS31: Additional and Existing Community Facilities

Proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site. Community facilities should be located where there is a choice of means of travel (including walking and cycling), and in existing centres where possible.

(ii) Active implementation of South Reading Strategy

- 6.13 The problems of creating a well integrated community in South Reading, due to the physical separation of housing by the intervening industrial estates, is identified as an issue in the Local Plan.
- 6.14 By providing a home for the TRFC (which is itself a community group) and space for use by the community and other local groups, the scheme directly aids the objectives of the South Reading Strategy (SA1). In **APPENDIX 1** a list sets out the activities for which the Church intends to use the community/meeting space. Many of these activities are already established parts of its work, although carried out with some difficulty from diverse rented accommodation. The list will expand and programmes will become more regular with the creation of the new facility.

(iii) Lack of market interest despite extensive marketing

- 6.15 The attached letter from Sharps Commercial (**APPENDIX 3**) explains that every effort has been made to find a new Class B occupier, over an extended period of time, with full marketing exposure. A copy of the sales brochure is attached at **APPENDIX 4**.
- 6.16 The agents confirm that the only expressions of interest received, other than from the Reading Family Church, have been from residential developers and D2 leisure operators. None showed interest in using it for its approved use.
- 6.17 Sharps Commercial add helpful comment from their excellent local knowledge of the commercial property market, pointing out that:
- a) Large exclusively office occupiers have no interest in Basingstoke Road, preferring instead a Town Centre location close to the railway station;
 - b) Businesses with both office and storage requirements prefer to have them on separate sites, or to pay for a building designed with high bay traditional space for 90% B8, with only 10% B1 (this building is entirely unsuitable for such use);
 - c) There is a shortage of accommodation for small occupiers/start ups, due in part to GPDO allowances for COU to residential, so provision of such space is to be welcomed.

(iii) Absence of any harm to neighbours

- 6.18 The appeal decision at Cardiff Road referenced by the Council in pre-application discussions highlights those factors which might cause nuisance to local residential properties from the worship element of the application scheme – noise from music, overflow parking and high levels of activity at anti- social hours. The B1 element of the proposal will by definition be compatible with residential neighbours.

6.19 A community use will generally be located close to residential uses to maximise accessibility. In this case the following factors will prevent any nuisance to local residents.

- a) The location of the community space, set 110m from any residential properties
- b) The intervening background noise from traffic along the major artery of the Basingstoke Road
- c) The well insulated structure of the building
- d) Hours of use being limited to social hours
- e) Provision of adequate on site parking space with overflow space secured
- f) On site management at all times

7.00 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.01 The existing building is in a B1 use, and was designed, approved and constructed for this purpose in 1983. Some internal modifications (lowered ceiling etc in rear wing) have been in place for more than 20 years, reflecting the absence of B8 storage and distribution activities.

7.02 The building has been well maintained and is of sound construction and attractive appearance. It benefits from 60 on site parking spaces, cycle parking and refuse storage, all within a gated secure compound.

7.03 Lengthy marketing by expert local agents has failed to secure any rental or purchase market interest for its existing use.

7.04 The Reading Family Church is an established charitable organization serving the Reading Community with both faith and social outreach activities (the latter include programmes to benefit disadvantaged groups and individuals locally, regardless of faith.)

7.05 The Church needs a permanent centre close to the community it serves. In brief, this new centre will have a mixed function:

- an administration base for Church activities
- a meeting place for church services and community activities, with a café open to all
- flexible group meeting/ job training/advice/classrooms/play areas and offices
- a suite of small office units for letting to local startups, charities and social enterprises

7.06 The primary use of the premises will be B1, which continues the established and approved use of the site.

7.07 The small reduction in B1 space within the CEA that will occur will be addressed in the planning balance by the significant advantages to the local community arising from:

- New community space for regular use by groups and occasional use for celebrations
- Much needed small office suites for small business
- A permanent on-site management organization dedicated to community enhancement
- A positive use of vacant premises which are not attractive to mainstream business occupiers

7.08 Overall, the project will deliver a direct and positive contribution to the integration and enhancement of the community in South Reading in accordance with the Development Plan, without harm to any interests of importance.

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Red Kite Development Consultancy
April 2018***

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1	Reading Family Church and other community activities
APPENDIX 2	Outline Travel Plan
APPENDIX 3	Sharps Commercial letter explaining marketing outcomes
APPENDIX 4	Marketing brochure
APPENDIX 5	Floorspace areas by use (Mixed Use)
APPENDIX 6	Alternative sites considered

APPENDIX 1

RANGE OF ACTIVITIES [other than B1 office]

300 days Community Use including:

- Weddings
- Funerals
- Sure Start Partner activities
- After School clubs
- Children's Holidays clubs (school holidays)
- Children's Saturday Club
- Youth Club
- Parent and Toddler groups
- Parenting Courses (young children and teenagers)
- Marriage preparation and Marriage Course
- Advocacy Advice group
- Lunch time club for the elderly / lonely
- Job Club and Careers Advice
- SEND groups (Special Education Needs and Disabilities)

[The above are activities run by Reading Family Church.]

- External bookings by other charities and organisations e.g. examination hall
- Community bookings for user events

65 days Christian Worship

- Weekly Sunday services
- Christian festival days (Christmas day, Good Friday, Pentecost etc)

APPENDIX 2

TRAVEL PLAN OUTLINE

The principal use for the site will remain as B1, with the introduction of D1 and ancillary A4 uses.

This outline summary primarily addresses the journeys which will be made by those attending faith events. TRFC has surveyed its members and so has a good understanding of the likely pattern of use of various methods of transport which will be used by these attending faith events.

Without a travel plan, it is anticipated that:

Typical Sunday morning church attendance attracts approximately 400 [Adults 290 / Under 18s 110]

- Cars 132
- Cycles 10
- Pedestrians 47

Typical Sunday evening church attendance approximately 80 adults

- Cars 25
- Cycles 3
- Pedestrians 15

Around 6 times a year the two services are combined. While these numbers can easily be accommodated within the available on site and overflow parking space and will not have a significant impact on highway capacity, it is intended to encourage non-car travel via adoption and publication of a Travel Plan. These general principles will also be advised to all staff and visitors to other parts of the facility via information boards within the building and on the website.

Promoting non-car modes

- Car sharing
- Cycle to work and onsite activities (showers and lockers available)
- Public transport – local bus stops and service frequency/destinations
- Travel times to allow
- Website providing advice on who to contact (Identified travel coordinator) if help needed
- Disabled facilities
- Number of parking spaces allocated to tenants on first floor
- Directions to overflow parking for duration of event only