



Project

Mothercare, 16 King Street, Reading, RG1 2HE

Application for Change of Use from A1 to A3

Planning Statement

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Contact

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1.0 Ownership, background and description

This document relates to the application for a change of use from A1 (currently trading as Mothercare) to A3 restaurant. The property is trading under A1 use. The landlord and their commercial property advisors consider there to be a strong demand for A3 use having carried some targeted A3 marketing campaigns, whilst demand for A1 use in this location, for this size of unit, is weak.

The site is owned by the applicant. It is anticipated that a new long-term lease for A3 use would be entered into upon the grant of a favourable planning consent in principle, subject to any operator providing and satisfying the council with their extraction details. The applicant would therefore accept a condition against this.

Reference has been made to the Adopted Reading Central Area Action Plan (saved policies) and associated supplementary planning guidance and documents. Reference also made to the Core Strategy Local Development Framework.

The proposal should have little to no impact on vehicular movements in the immediate vicinity given its sustainable town-centre location with nearby public car parking and transport facilities. The site is also considered to be one that serves

local residents who will not require a vehicle to visit, or that they would be able to utilise the abundance of public transport options available within Reading itself. The Highway Authority has therefore not been consulted at this stage.

It is considered that any operator may wish to install a new shop front at lower ground floor level to improve the street scene along Yield Hall Place (but that this is not part of this application as detailed talks have not commenced with any party) heading towards Debenhams at The Oracle Riverside and also Atlantis Village, adding to the 'destination' concept and vitality of this section of the town centre. A3 use would help capture a strong national operator here.

This change of use application is therefore a speculative one.

2.0 Design

A new operator is likely to wish to provide new advertising over the existing shop front design, potentially at ground and lower ground floor levels.

Health, Safety, Food, Access and Advertising Standards would all have to be met by any incoming operator and submitted to the Council for approval.

3.0 Planning Policy

This proposal is one that will help to drive the local economy in Reading, as well as the wider economy to reflect Reading's strong national retail standing. Importantly, King Street is also the focus of urban renaissance and regeneration, which is Council-lead and in our view, the reclassification and improvement of a large and potentially vacant unit along King Street is vital for this section of the town centre. A large vacant A1 property in this location would in our view hamper the efforts of Atlantis Village and the strong A3 uses at 12-16 King Street in particular. A long-term tenant and national occupier will marry with the plans and policy perfectly. The saved Local Plan 'places priority on meeting the requirements in the town centre...in order to assure its continued vitality and viability'.

An A3 use will not only improve the vitality of the area, particularly along this section of King Street, given the prominence of the property but it will act as an important pull for neighbouring uses that are complimentary to help secure this area of Reading as a leisure destination, and one that will help to drive footfall. It is considered that this location is no longer sustainable as A1-use. The Action Plan emphasises the importance of leisure uses and a strong evening economy – the Council wishes to build on this further.

The proposal will not have a negative impact on the character and function of this section of the Centre. Moreover, there is no demand for A1 retail use for this size of property under the targeted marketing to date. The proposal being one to help to maintain a thriving economy, providing value for money and to invest in people for a competitive economy. The upgrading of existing sites is one that we understand is supported by the Council. Particularly in Waterside locations as reiterated in the Action Plan. The lower ground floor in particular is relevant to this statement as it could greatly improve the frontage and vitality of Yield Hall Place, looking over the river.

We are of the opinion that with significant new jobs being made available as a result of this proposal, the economic activity and employment rates will improve. Policy steers development, and redevelopment towards unused / unsustainable sites with good design and layout to complement and reflect the immediate pattern of design, with improved economic activity. This site and proposal works hand in hand with such policy in providing a complimentary use, accessible by foot.

It is our view that the proposed use is in complimentary alignment with immediate commercial neighbours and would retain an important active frontage. It is considered that this is not a sustainable A1 pitch evidenced by the long-term marketing and mix of uses. The proposed A3 use is one that is sustainable in this location, with a strong likelihood of customer attraction and excellent suitability that will aid neighbouring uses and help to add to the destination of this section of the town.

There are no / limited alternative units of a suitable size in the town that could improve the riverside location as well as King Street in terms of A3 use – continuity of frontage along King Street would be improved and Yield Hall Place could potentially be vastly improved.

4.0 Advertisement

It is felt that because the existing signage and shop front will simply be replaced with new branding by any new operator, this would respect the interest of public safety and visual amenity, in fact it will improve visual amenity. This is as supported by the Council's and National guidance on shop front design.

It is our view that the street scene will be enhanced by a good quality façade and frontage particularly from a national operator, and a business that will be well-used and enjoyed by customers.

An A3 frontage would complement neighbouring uses such as Prezzo, The George Hotel, Bhel Puri and Workhouse Coffee and only be 'maintaining the structure and footprint of the existing façade'.

5.0 Conclusion

This proposal is one that will remove a potentially vacant and large unit from King Street / Reading town centre. A potentially empty A1 unit in a prominent location such as this would have a negative impact on the local environment, and vibrancy of this section of the Town centre, particularly given the neighbouring A3 and A4 uses. Similar sites have been redeveloped for change of use such as the former Jackson's opposite, and the adjacent Atlantis Village (which still contains vacant A1 space). Leisure sites are important in this regional centre and further development of A3 is encouraged within Reading saved policies.

Neighbouring uses are complimentary. This change of use to A3 will help to further revitalise the immediate area and may act as a 'magnet' for other good brands and uses in what is a leisure destination in the town.

We therefore trust that this application is one that the Council will therefore be in support of.