

Design and Access Statement

Non-Material Amendment to Planning Permission 150721

16 Residential Units with associated parking and landscaping at 114 Oxford Road, Reading, RG1 7NE.

History

On the 17th February 2016 planning permission was granted to demolish the existing buildings at the site known as 114 Oxford Road, Reading, with proposals to erect a new building consisting of 16 residential units.

The site was recently sold to a company called Fynecast Limited who are proposing to develop the site according to the permission granted. Having reviewed the plans, Fynecast Limited are proposing to make a few minor amendments to the original application which it is felt will enhance the development and make the building buildable. Fynecast Limited are a company which look after and hold onto buildings rather than sell them on for a “quick profit” and to this end might be considered more careful than the usual developer as they have a long-term interest in the property and the general area.

Prior to this application, Fynecast Limited approached Reading Borough Council with a pre-application enquiry - 172011/PREAPP 114 Oxford Road, Reading. This indicated officer support for the items contained in this Non-Material Amendment Application.

Removal of mezzanine floor level and associated works

It was considered by Fynecast Limited that the mezzanine floor did not really work internally due to the sloping ceilings compromising the internal space. The approved design was a little misleading and upon closer inspection, the sloping ceilings greatly inhibited the usable space. Fynecast Limited believe reformulating the internal layout of the unit on the third floor would provide better usage of the space. This would then reflect the layouts of the ground, first and second floor flats below. Externally there would be no change to the elevations. The planning officers considered that no principal issues would be raised with the suggested approach.

Increase in floor to floor heights, resulting in an overall increase of 0.5 m

From a construction point of view the existing planning consent is unbuildable because the Building Regulations require a minimum floor thickness to achieve acoustic separation between the units - this is in the region of 400mm depending on the construction method used - the approved plus have a floor thickness of only 291mm. We have investigated reducing ceiling heights within each apartment which in turn would allow the floor thicknesses to be increased but the floor to ceiling height shown on the planning drawings is

2.33m which is already the minimum floor to ceiling height acceptable, so there is no opportunity to reduce ceiling heights to gain the aforementioned floor thicknesses necessary.

As such, Fynecast Limited propose to increase each floor height by 0.2m to achieve the necessary floor to floor separation required by the Building Regulations. On the face of it this would lead to an overall height increase of 0.6m to the height of the building, however, by lowering the height of the main and prominent gable ended section the overall height of the building will only rise by 0.5m (1ft, 8"). It is noted that the original permission was sensitive to the impact of the development on the neighbouring listed church and adjacent conservation area. The proposed building is still lower and subservient to the Church and the proposed increase in height only represents a 3.3% increase - a minimal increase.

It should also be borne in mind that when the adjacent property at 106-112 Oxford Road is re-developed, this will have floor to floor heights similar to those now proposed at 114 Oxford Road, so the proposed height will not look out of place.

The whole situation has been exacerbated by two conditions which have been attached to the original consent. Specifically, Conditions No. 15 and No. 16, which have been expanded upon in greater detail below.

Condition 15 relates to measures to protect future occupiers from the external noise environment. This condition deemed necessary due to the presence of a nightclub immediately to the rear of the site.

All dwellings require natural fresh air for obvious reasons, and to comply with the Building Regulations. This is usually in the form of trickle ventilations to windows, or extractor fans to bathrooms and kitchens. Both of these traditional forms of ventilation will 'let the sound through' and won't protect residents from the sound coming from the nightclub, nor comply with the Planning Condition.

As stated in the Noise Assessment Report which accompanied the original application, the solution is to fit a ventilation system which draws air in, circulates it around the apartment and expels the stale air. Acoustic baffles will be fitted to the intake and exhaust to prevent sound from the nightclub leaking into the dwelling.

Condition 16 similarly requires measures to mitigate the impacts of poor air quality. In tandem with the solution to Condition 15, the ventilation system will also be fitted with a carbon filter to remove pollutants from the air.

The ventilation system would distribute clean air around each apartment via ducts above the ceiling. Overlooked on the as approved drawings, the space above the ceiling where this ventilation would be fitted is not high enough to accommodate the ventilation.

By increasing the height of each floor by just 0.2m (6") the necessary sound separation between units, as well as the two planning conditions attached to the original consent will be able to be implemented.

The planning officers considered the increase in height would be unlikely to result in a different overall conclusion to that reached previously.

Amendment to front entrance configuration

We propose to slightly amend the arrangement of the front entrance to the flats by having full height side lights to the doors for aesthetic reasons which will improve the appearance of the building, and also to offset the front door to one side. Currently the doors are central into the building and this means the occupants are in danger of banging their heads on the underside of the stairs which are located immediately inside the entrance lobby. By moving the door to the right-hand side, this will be avoided. Further, the proposed door and window configuration reflects the window lines from the upper floor common areas and the window lines will now "flow" better down the building.

Other matters

The above outlined proposals will have a minimum overall effect on the development, but for the sake of completeness each element will be addressed below

Energy Report

The overall demands on the infrastructure for energy will barely change. Therefore, it is considered there is no material change or real impact on the energy report.

Utilities and servicing statement

Floor areas are similar to the "as approved" designs and therefore the requirements on the utilities and services will be unchanged or even slightly less.

Noise survey

It is acknowledged that the flats will need to be suitably soundproofed to comply with the Supplementary Noise Report that accompanied the original application. As stated earlier, Fynecast is a company that keeps rather than disposes of their developments and rent the flats rather than sell them as soon as they development has finished. Therefore, it is in Fynecast's interests to provide good soundproofing from the noise emitted from the nightclub. The proposed amendments listed above will have no material effect on the noise suppression requirements noted in the report but will allow the necessary ventilation systems to be fitted.

Most Holy Trinity Church

The Most Holy Trinity Church is next door to the site. The proposed amendments have been reviewed by the Church Wardens and they have confirmed their support for the changes and also written in to voice their support. This is important to Fynecast as we will be neighbours and we like to work together with our neighbours.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the building in its current format will not be able to be built and comply with conditions attached to the original planning consent, or the Building Regulations.

The amended proposals seek to raise the building by 0.5m (1ft, 8") or just 3.3% above the as approved height. The street scene drawing included in this application indicates this is barely noticeable.

The omission of the mezzanine floor has no visual impact from the street, maintains the same accommodation (2 bedrooms and living/kitchen space) as the approved scheme, and provides almost identical layouts to the flats on the floors below.

The amendment to the front entrance is simply a very minor practical change, and it is felt enhances the appearance of the development.

The Church next door have also written in to support these minor amendments amendments.

A pre-application was submitted to Reading Borough Council and the above points have received the support of the planning officers. We respectfully request that the above proposed improvements to the scheme are granted planning permission.