

**PLANNING APPLICATION FOR CHANGE OF USE FROM CLASS A4
(DRINKING ESTABLISHMENTS) TO CLASS A1 (SHOPS)**

PLANNING STATEMENT

70 WHITLEY STREET, READING



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This statement has been produced to support a Change of Use planning application for 70 Whitley Street, Reading (“the Property”) which forms part of 70-72 Whitley Street, Reading (“the Building”) from Class A4 (drinking establishments) to Class A1 (shops).
- 1.2 This document sets out to explain the planning history, current policy and the rationale behind the proposed new use.
- 1.3 In accordance with statutory and local information requirements, the following supporting material is submitted, and will enable a full assessment of the proposals to be undertaken:

- 1.3.1 Block Plan

- 1.3.2 Location Plan; and

- 1.3.3 Site Plan.

- 1.4 In brief the Property was closed by the previous owner, Enterprise Inns who then sold the Building to the Applicant in 2012. Over the last 2 years the Applicant has marketed the Property with A4 use but with no success or even interest. The Property is located just 125 meters away from The Pheasant Public House which is arguably the reason for the lack of interest. Approval of this application will enable the Applicant bring it back into use as whilst vacant the Property has high potential for unsociable issues – e.g. vandalism and squatters.
- 1.5 Overall this Statement will demonstrate that, on balance, this proposal represents a planning gain for the Property and surrounding area. It is therefore respectfully requested that planning permission should be granted.

2. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 The Property comprises the majority of the ground floor of the Building (formally The Wellington Arms Public House), situated on the west side of Whitley Street on the outskirts of Reading town centre. The submitted Block Plan and Location Plan show the location of the Building and the Site Plan shows the location of the Property within the Building.
- 2.2 The Property has been vacant since March 2012. It has 1,635 square feet of floorspace and the space was last used as a Public House. The upper floors are

accessed separately and an application for a Certificate of Lawful Use has been submitted with the local authority and is awaiting determination.

- 2.3 The Building has been extensively and tastefully refurbished throughout and the visual appearance of the external parts of the Building improved dramatically. Positive comments have been received from local residents and there is a desire to see the Property occupied.
- 2.4 The Property is located within a District and Community Centre, directly opposite a busy parade of shops which includes Dalchini Indian Cuisine, Pizza Presto, Tesco Express, Relax Me Hair & Beauty Salon and Mr. Cod. Adjacent to the Property is residential accommodation to the South and a public car park and bus stop to the North.
- 2.5 The Property benefits from a central location with a wide variety of services and facilities in the vicinity to serve the residential population. The building is highly accessible, being located on a major arterial road into Reading town centre and on well-served bus routes, with a bus stop located less than 50 meters from the Property. The Property also benefits from a private off-road car park with 7 car parking spaces.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 Planning history comprises of the following:
 - 3.1.1 Application Ref. 970964 – Permission was granted on 17th September 1997 for a new fascia sign, amenity signs and lighting.
 - 3.1.2 Application Ref. 970871 – Permission was granted on 7th January 1998 for external alterations to include a new fire escape, garden pergola and new fire doors.
 - 3.1.3 Application Ref. 140150 – Permission was granted on 2nd April 2014 for a change of fenestration to the site with internal and external alterations, incorporating a new covered stairway to the south elevation and a new entrance to the Property. The Planning Statement which was submitted with the application was clear that the intended use of the Property was for A1, A2, A3 or A4 Use. However, at the time the application was submitted and approved a change of use was able to proceed under Permitted Development and therefore formal consent was not sought.

4. PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The Applicant is the freehold owner of the scheme and is seeking to lease the Property. After 2 years of active marketing (for any use falling within use class A1, A2, A3 and A4) with local agent's terms have been agreed, subject to contract, with an operator who would require A1 Use.
- 4.2 Noting the changes to the layout and style of the Property approved under Application Ref 140150, the Property is ideally suited for A1 Use, and less so for A4 Use. Further noting the use of the upper floors this is considered advantageous against its existing A4 use (drinking establishments).
- 4.3 The Property will be accessed via its dedicated entrance on the Northern elevation of the site.
- 4.4 The proposed reuse of the Property would utilise a space that has been vacant and unused for in excess of six years since the previous occupier ceased occupation in March 2012. The overall proposal would represent a viable and efficient use of the Property.
- 4.5 No external alterations are proposed as part of this application. Planning permission is, therefore, only required for the change of use of the Property from Class A4 to Class A1.

5. PLANNING POLICIES

- 5.1 The Development Plan for the area consists of the Reading Borough Core Strategy ("RBCS") (adopted in 2008 and amended in 2015) and the Reading Sites and Details Policies Document ("SDPD") (adopted in 2012).
- 5.2 In the context of the Development Plan, the Property is located within a designated 'District and Local Centres' area.

Reading Borough Core Strategy ("RBCS")

- 5.3 **Policy CB26** identifies a network of centres, with Whitley Street identified as a Major Local Centre, and aims to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of the centres and widen their ranges of uses.
- 5.4 **Policy CB27** is aimed at maintaining "a strong retail character" in the designated centres. The change of use of the Property from A4 to A1 will aid this aim in enhancing the retail character of the area and ensuring that the 40% Target is maintained / achieved.

Reading Sites and Details Policies Document ("SDPD")

- 5.5 **Policy DM13** sets out to ensure that A1 use is retained for “centre uses”. The change of use of the Property from A4 to A1 will aid this aim in enhancing the retail character of the area and ensuring that the 40% Target is maintained / achieved.
- 5.6 **Policy DM15(i)** is aimed at ensuring that the loss of a public house would only be permitted where it is the only facility of that type in the centre. In this case there is an operational public house (The Pheasant) at the top of Southampton Street located 125 meters away from the Property and therefore Whitley Street will retain this facility.
- 5.7 **Policy DM15(ii)** confirms that the loss of a public house would only be granted if it can be demonstrated that there is no requirement for this type of facility in the area. The Wellington Arms was closed in March 2012 by its brewery and has been vacant since this date. The function of the facility has been adequately fulfilled by The Pheasant Public House (a very similar establishment seeking the same target audience) and there has been no negative impact as a result of the closure for in excess of 6 years. The Pheasant is located just 125 meters away from the Property and is therefore considered to be adequately fulfilling the needs of a Public House in the Whitley Street Centre.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The proposal is for the change of use of the Property from Use Class A4 (drinking establishments) to Use Class A1 (shops), to enable the Applicant to lease the Property.
- 6.2 The site has been vacant for some time (since March 2012) and this proposal offers an opportunity to by bringing the Property back into a viable use.
- 6.3 The Property has been actively marketed for 2 years for any use falling within Use Class A1, A2, A3 or A4.
- 6.4 At the time the application was made for the external changes (Reference 140150) to the Building, it was made clear that the Applicant intended to utilise the Property for any use falling in Use Class A1, A2, A3 or A4.
- 6.5 The principle of the proposed change of use is supported by relevant Development Plan policies, including RBCS policies CS26 and CS27 and policies DM13 of the SDPD.
- 6.6 Whilst the loss of a Public House in the area is not considered ideal under DM15 of the SDPD, the Applicant has demonstrated that:

- 6.6.1 the Property has not been used as a Public House for in excess of 6 years and there has not been any known negative impact as a result of the closure;
 - 6.6.2 there is a very similar Public House located only 125 meters from the Property;
 - 6.6.3 despite active marketing for 2 years the Applicant has been unable to secure the leasing of the Property as a drinking establishment.
- 6.7 The proposal would provide clear benefits for the local area, including the creation of jobs and economic prosperity, and would represent sustainable economic growth for the area, which should be a material consideration in the determination of this application.
- 6.8 Overall this Statement has demonstrated that the proposed change of use is compliant with the provisions of the local planning policies. It is considered that there are no reasons why planning permission should be withheld, and therefore it is respectfully requested that planning permission is granted.