

1.9 Site Analysis

1.9.1 Building Uses

The site is within a residential area but is in close proximity to the town centre which has the Oracle shopping and leisure mall that lies on the banks of the river Kennet. There is a large multi storey car park to the north which serves this shopping district. On the other side of the flyover, opposite the site, there is a community dancing school and St Giles Church. Beside these uses the buildings nearby are generally residential with a few small offices and retail.



1.9.2 Amenity Space

The town centre nearby offers public amenity space in the form of the river side promenade and green spaces such as St Mary the Virgin's courtyard. The site itself contains a small plot of land to the rear of the existing public house which can potentially provide amenity space to the occupants of the proposed dwellings.



1.9.3 Scale

The existing buildings are 3 storeys to the front of No.s 34-36, 2 storeys to the front of No.38 and 1 storey to the rear. The heights around the residential area are generally 3 or 4 storeys. However, on approach to the A329 flyover, the heights tend to increase substantially with the Premier Inn building stepping up from 3 to 6 storeys high and the 9 storey car park. Opposite the site St Giles church forms the local landmark with its greater scale and tall spire which could be seen from the city centre.



2.0 PLANNING

2.1 Planning Summary

The site is in a sustainable location within walking distance of shops and other amenities, and is adjacent to a strategic bus route providing services that run regularly into Reading Town Centre and the surrounding area.

With regard to design considerations, Southampton Street is characterised by terraced houses and townhouses and the proposal therefore helps to extend existing built form. In this context, it is considered that the proposal would satisfactorily complete the settlement pattern without causing any adverse harm to the local area.

In considering constraints, the site is not located within a conservation area and design development can adequately mitigate potential impacts on adjacent heritage assets, flood zones and trees. The site is located in an AQMA, however a moderated level of parking provision, combined with excellent public transport connectivity ensures that the proposals shall not exacerbate pollution levels.

In light of the above, the proposals are considered to be compliant with the relevant Development Plan policies, and with regard to paragraph 14 of the NPPF, any adverse effects of allowing the application proposal would not 'significantly or demonstrably outweigh the benefits'.

Accordingly, the application should be considered in relation to the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out in Policy SD1 and Paragraph 14 of the NPPF. Accordingly we consider the proposals to be merited and would advise proceeding directly to full application, particularly given the pre-application work already undertaken.

The scheme will provide much-needed housing within Reading Borough Council at a time when the authority requires identification of additional sites to meet projected housing demand. In making the submission of the emerging Local Plan for examination by the Secretary of State earlier this year, explanatory text for Policy H1 states how Reading Borough only has enough land to provide for 671 homes per annum, thereby not meeting its full objectively assessed housing need (OAHN).

The Plan states that this shortfall from the OAHN (644 homes over 23 years) will need to be accommodated elsewhere in the Housing Market Area (HMA). The above shortfall is based on the emerging Local Plan, which seeks to deliver 671 homes per annum, 2013-2036, which in turn is informed by the Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, which further to sensitivity testing in March 2018 identified a need to provide 759 homes a year to meet Reading's proportion of OAHN within the Berkshire HMA.

Whilst the recent publication of the draft National Planning Policy Framework (dNPPF) which advises a standard methodology to determine Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) potentially reduces this figure to 611 homes per year, nevertheless the Council has a challenge to find sufficient supply to meet forward requirements and this site is therefore considered to provide opportunity to deliver much-needed housing in a sustainable location.

The draft NPPF supports this position and sets a strong focus on housing, which it is considered should be afforded weight in decision-making. Chapter 5, and in particular paragraphs 60-81, deal with the goal of 'delivering a sufficient supply of homes', of which paragraph 69 is most pertinent. To summarise:

'69. Small sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, and are often built-out relatively quickly. To promote the development of a good mix of sites local planning authorities should:

- a) ensure that at least 20% of the sites identified for housing in their plans are of half a hectare or less;*
- b) use tools such as area-wide design assessments and Local Development Orders to help bring small sites forward;*
- c) support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions – giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes;...' (Consultants emphasis)*

Taking the above into account, it is considered that the proposals are considered to be compliant with the relevant Development Plan policies, and with regard to paragraph 14 of the NPPF, any adverse effects of allowing the application proposal would not 'significantly or demonstrably outweigh the benefits'.

Further, that the proposals closely accord with the thrust of emerging governmental guidance on this issue and that this matter should be given appropriate weight in decision-making.

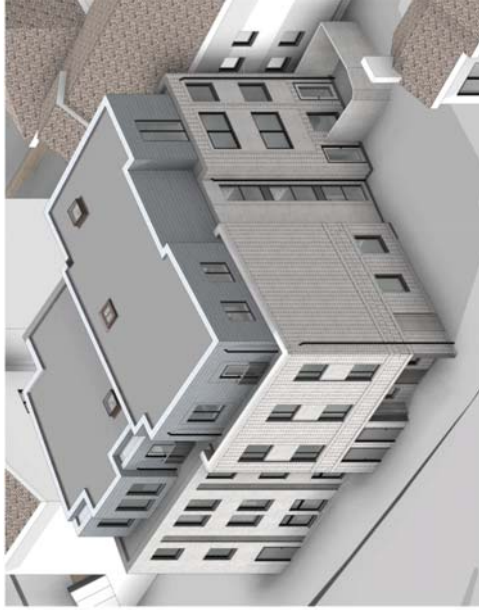
2.2 Evolution of Design

The previous application for the site, which was submitted in December 2017, has been acknowledged as being below the levels of design quality required for such a prominent site within the context of the town. The scheme was presented to the Reading Design Review Panel in April of 2018 and various comments were made, these have been summarised below together with how the new design responds to those criticisms.

- The parapet between the third and fourth floor should be made higher – in the new design, the parapet has been taken away and replaced with an opaque glass balcony.
- The principal of four storeys was of potential concern – this has been dealt with by way of reducing the overall height of the development by 495 mm. Combined with the more light weight feel of the new third storey and the use of opaque glass balconies the overbearing impression and feel has been minimised.
- The mass of the building was too great – in addition to the reduction in overall height and the use of lightweight materials, the design of the building now gives the impression of stepping in from the ground floor and further reducing the appearance of bulk. The building has also been pulled away from the boundary line to the east elevation at ground floor, again creating more space and visual interest – allowing the site to breathe.
- The principal of the access corridor to the south of the property leading to the common stairs served to rob the building of a defined main entrance. This has been addressed by bringing the core back to the middle of the building giving the building a defined main entrance. Again, the use of lightweight materials helps to create the feeling of space and light for both occupiers and passing pedestrian traffic.
- The Southern elevation was considered poor, and offered no visual interest when viewed from further south down Southampton Street. The new southern elevation has been designed to be more visually interesting and now has the benefit of additional glazing and balcony areas.
- The mansard roof as proposed was considered too complicated – this is now replaced with a setback lightweight design offering cleaner, simpler lines.
- The internal layouts of the properties have been refined and improved with 10 of the 11 units now being lifetime home compatible.

- The overall size of the development has reduced from the previously proposed by 82 sq.m, with the number of units being reduced from 12 to 11.
- Subtle refinements have been made to the building lines to the north, west and southern elevations to minimise potential overlooking, coupled with repositioning of windows.
- Amenity space has increased with 6 of the units having access to private balcony or garden spaces.
- The design of the windows was considered too fussy with a mixture of horizontal and vertical details – this has been refined to offer vertical windows that are uniform in appearance.
- In the original scheme, several rooms only had windows on one elevation, with the new scheme there is less reliance on single aspect lighting – most units have double or even triple aspects.

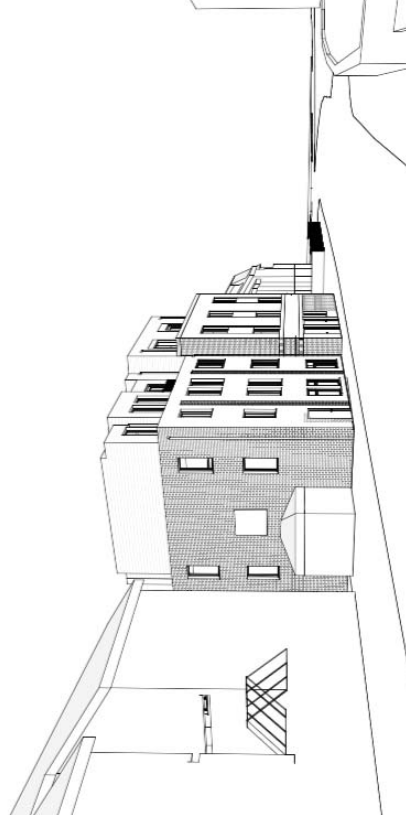
The new application is in effect a complete redesign, seeking to better sit within the context of the street and in better harmony with the neighbouring properties. This has come about as a result of consultation with Reading Borough Council planning department, Reading Design Review Panel and through active dialogue with the landowners to the north of the site. The scheme as now presented is a cleaner, more aesthetically pleasing building designed to sit within a street scene with no defined vernacular from which to make reference.



Aerial View - Withdrawn Scheme Proposal.



Aerial View - New Scheme Proposal.



View on Southampton Street towards Town Centre - Withdrawn Scheme Proposal.



View on Southampton Street towards Town Centre - New Scheme Proposal.