

**FULL PLANNING PERMISSION APPLICATION TO ALLOW A CHANGE OF USE
FROM OFFICES (CLASS B1) TO LEISURE USE (CLASS D2)**

PLANNING STATEMENT

Applicant:	James Hamer-Morton
Premises:	Suites 2, 3 & Basement, 122 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RG
Class D2 Use:	Escape Room Centre

1. *INTRODUCTION*

- 1.1 An escape room is a real life problem solving game whereby players enter a themed room and have to use elements of the room to solve a series of puzzles with the aim of escaping within a set time limit. Escape rooms have grown in popularity over the past few years, and the applicant is the co-owner of, and has been running, an escape room in Peterborough for the past six months.
- 1.2 This statement assesses the acceptability of the change of use proposals in planning terms, and is set out as follows:

Section 2 – Details of the site and proposed change of use;

Section 3 – Noise Assessment;

Section 4 – Retail Impact Assessment;

Section 5 – Transport Assessment;

Section 6 – Listed Building Assessment;

Section 7 – Supporting Documents;

2. *DETAILS OF THE SITE AND PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE*

- 2.1 The application site is known as Suites 2, 3 & Basement, 122 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RG (“the premises”). It is situated on the south-west fringe of the city centre. It, like the rest of the building, currently has B1 (Offices) use and the application is to change the use of this part of the building to D2 (Leisure) use.
- 2.2 The premises comprises approximately 459 sqft on the ground floor (suites 2 and 3), and a 918 sqft basement area.
- 2.3 Suites 2 and 3 are currently set up as modern offices, and are located on the ground floor. They would be used as a welcoming area, and the first of three escape rooms. The basement

is currently used as a storage area, currently unsuitable as offices, and has a series of smaller rooms that will be used, as is, for two multi-roomed escape rooms. The premises is a Grade II listed building, and therefore is limited in terms of what modifications can be made, leaving the basement as an area of untapped potential and wasted space.

3. *NOISE ASSESSMENT*

- 3.1 It is submitted that the proposed use of the premises will not result in any increase in existing noise levels, nor would it cause an unacceptable level of noise disturbance for occupiers or users of nearby premises.
- 3.2 An escape room is an intellectual oriented game which, by such nature and characteristics, will not generate a significant degree of background noise. There will only be approximately twelve (12) players and three (3) staff members at any one time which is equivalent in numbers to an average office building or a moderately busy shop.
- 3.3 More particularly, a key requirement for the success of an escape room centre is to ensure there is no external noise spilling into each escape room. Accordingly, the venue has been chosen with regard to sound isolation; the basement area in particular has very little noise spillage. Although such current insulation and layout will be monitored as to its effectiveness, noting the aforementioned importance to the operations of an escape room.
- 3.4 Rooms will be booked and scheduled in advance so there will be minimal waiting times (and thus minimal associated noise therefrom).
- 3.5 The premises will be open until 10pm each evening and over weekends, and will tend to receive bookings in the evenings and over weekends. This is a change from the current standard working hours of B1 use. However, the premises are situated next to a public house which will create far more noise impact than any noise associated with the escape game centre, and the most busy times will lie outside hours that would affect surrounding businesses as they will be closed at these times. As aforementioned, the insulation and the nature of escape rooms will ensure there is no unacceptable risk of a noise impact.

4. *RETAIL IMPACT ASSESSMENT*

- 4.1 The premises are situated on the edge of the central retail area of the city centre and are adding to the Core Strategy of expanding the range of leisure facilities in the Borough, and specifically in the centre of Reading, while not affecting the strong retail character. The basement area has been used for storage by the last tenant, and by changing this to a leisure use does not remove or replace any current retail or leisure units.

- 4.2 While the number of visitors is modest, an escape room centre will draw people in from further afield to benefit other local retail and leisure facilities, such as the public house next door (The Brewer's Tap) for a post-visit drink, or a visit to The Oracle and thus will become a valuable tourism attraction.
- 4.3 Escape room centres tend to benefit from cross promotion with other retail/leisure businesses, so we intend to form relationships with other local businesses that will allow us to promote each other and provide offers to customers, improving the weekend, evening and night time economy.

5. *TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT*

- 5.1 The escape room centre will be located in the city centre and therefore will be easily accessible by the full range of transport modes that serve this area. This includes within close proximity a 24 hour multi-storey car park (The Riverside), bus routes and a mainline train station.
- 5.2 The location also has on site parking which will accommodate two vehicles during normal working hours. It has also been confirmed with the landlord that outside standard business hours, Deadlocked Ltd can use the remaining unused spaces to cover the number of visitors that we will have the capacity for.
- 5.3 It is also noted that the number of visitors for the proposed use of the premises is modest and therefore will not materially impact on the existing transport modes to the city centre.

6. *LISTED BUILDING ASSESSMENT*

- 6.1 The premises at 122 Castle Street is a Grade II listed building. While we are not applying to make any changes to the outside of the building, we are aware of the unlikelihood of having significant internal changes approved. While the ground floor offices would currently suit many purposes, the basement does not seem to fit many uses beyond a storage area, which risks leaving it to a state of disrepair. We believe that our business is uniquely suited to be able to use the space effectively, keeping it clean, safe, and in use.
- 6.2 Having the restrictions of a listed building is an advantage to a business like ours. We are able to use its quirks and small spaces to improve customer experience, unlike many other uses. Its current usage of B1 (Offices) does not seem suitable for the basement, and leaving it to be a storage area seems like a waste of space so close to the city centre.
- 6.3 The Core Strategy intends for additional leisure facilities to develop in the centre of Reading, and we believe that the unusual basement at the premises has a very limited use outside the specific leisure use that we are applying for. Therefore the proposed change of use is a good fit for Suites 2, 3 & Basement, 122 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RG.

7. *SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS*

7.1 In addition to this Planning Statement, the application includes the following;

- a) Community Infrastructure Levy questions
- b) The Location plan of the site
- c) Site plan of the rooms and layout

N.B. We have been advised by Reading Borough Planning department that a Block plan is not necessary for this application, as no external alterations are to be made.

James Hamer-Morton

08/06/2017