



Town Planning Bureau

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PLANNING STATEMENT

Site: 146 Friar Street, Reading RG1 1EX
Application by: The Thackeray Estate
Lead Consultant: Mr Paul S Bottomley
Date: 5th December 2017
Our Ref: URB-482-ST5

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This planning statement is prepared by Mr Paul S Bottomley BA (Hons), MA, MRTPI of Town Planning Bureau and comprises supporting information in respect of a planning application for the development as described at para 1.2 below.

- Applicant: The Thackeray Estate (“the Applicant”).
- Site: 146 Friar Street, Reading RG1 1EX (“No 146” / “the site”).
- LPA: Reading Borough Council (“the Council”).

Proposal

1.2 Planning permission is sought for the change of use of the first and second floors from office (Class B1a) to residential (Class C3), in connection with the provision of one x one-bedroom self-contained residential flat.

1.3 There would be no external alterations.

Access arrangements

1.4 Access to the upper floors would be as existing, from a direct, separate access off Friar Street. Access to the upper floors would be via a staircase - there is no scope for an alternative arrangement in this small building.

Parking

1.5 There would be no change over the existing situation - no off street car parking space is provided or capable of being provided.

Sustainability

1.6 The proposed works provide the opportunity to improve the energy efficiency and sustainability of the building.

2.0 Site Location & Description

- 2.1 The application site (“the site”) is a three storey building on Friar Street near the junction with Station Road, comprising a shop on the ground floor with two floors of vacant offices above. The site is located within Reading Town Centre in the northern section of the Primary Shopping Area and is surrounded by a mixture of town centre uses. Access to the upper floors is by an existing stairway accessed from Friar Street.
- 2.2 The site is not a listed building nor is it located within a conservation area; however the adjoining property, No. 147 Friar Street, a shop with three vacant office floors above, is Grade II listed.

3.0 Relevant Planning History

3.1 The property has an extensive planning history over the years. The most relevant decisions are:-

- Ref: 170654: Change of use of first and second floor from B1a Office to C3 residential to provide two self-contained flats, together with additional first floor window to rear elevation. Granted 19 July 2017.
- Ref: 150726: change of use of first and second floors from Consulting Rooms to Offices (B1). Granted 2nd July 2015.
- Ref: 140031: change of use from opticians to Class A1 (shops) on the ground floor to include new shop front. Granted 11th March 2014.
- Ref: 130028: change of use of 1st and 2nd floors from ancillary A1 use to C3. This application for a Certificate of Lawfulness for a proposed change of use was refused on 23rd April 2013 as it had not been demonstrated that the whole building was in A1 retail use rather than in mixed use for purposes within A1 and D1.

4.0 Relevant Planning Policy

- 4.1 In preparing this application regard has been had to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Development Plan policies including the adopted Reading Core Strategy (Jan 2008, 2015), the adopted Sites and Detailed Policies Document (October 2012, 2015) and the adopted Reading Central Area Action Plan (Jan 2009).

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Section 6 contains policies on delivering a wide choice of high quality homes.

Reading Core Strategy (Jan 2008, 2015)

- 4.3 The principal policies relevant include:
- Policy CS1: Sustainable construction and design
 - Policy CS7: Design and the public realm
 - Policy CS11: Use of employment land for alternative uses
 - Policy CS14: Provision of housing
 - Policy CS15: Location, accessibility, density and housing mix
 - Policy CS16: Affordable housing
 - Policy CS24: Car and cycle parking
 - Policy CS29: Provision of open space
 - Policy CS33: Protection and enhancement of the historic environment

Sites and Detailed Policies Document (October 2012, 2015) (SDPD)

- 4.4 The SDPD forms part of the adopted Development Plan, the principal policies relevant to this application include:-
- Policy DM1: Adaptation to climate change
 - Policy DM4: Safeguarding amenity
 - Policy DM10: Private and communal amenity space

Reading Central Area Action Plan (Jan 2009)

- 4.5 The principal policies relevant include:
- Policy RC9: Living in the centre
- 4.6 In addition, the Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (October 2011) sets out guidance and standards to be considered for such a proposal.

5.0 Planning considerations

- 5.1 This planning application is seeking the change of use of the upper two floors from office to residential to provide in a single new self-contained residential units in the heart of the town centre.
- 5.2 We consider the main planning issues to be:-
- Principle of the change of use of the B1a office use of the upper floors to residential use and the provision of additional housing units.
 - Quality of accommodation proposed.
 - Design and appearance of the proposed extension and impact on the streetscene and adjoining listed building.
 - The effect on residential amenity of adjoining properties.
 - Other issues include parking and sustainability.
- 5.3 We address them in turn to demonstrate that the scheme complies with development plan policy and guidance.

Principle of the change of use of the B1 office use of the upper floors to residential, and the provision of additional housing units.

- 5.4 The overriding emphasis in national, regional and local planning policy is to enable increased provision for new housing. This is set out in the NPPF and amplified in the development plan documents referred to above. In terms of the provision of new homes the NPPF seeks to significantly boost the supply of housing. Local Planning Authorities should normally approve planning applications for a change to residential use and any associated development from commercial buildings (currently in the B use classes) where there is an identified need for additional housing in that area, provided that there are no strong economic reasons why such development would be inappropriate.
- 5.5 The site does not fall within any Development Plan designated 'Core Employment Areas'. Reading Core Strategy Policy CS11 sets a series of criteria against which proposals involving the loss of employment land outside 'Core Employment Areas' are assessed. The criteria in the policy allows the change of use of premises to residential from office use if the need for the proposed residential use is stronger than the need for office accommodation and it would not compromise the health of the office accommodation market within the Central Area of Reading.
- 5.6 The Core Strategy indicates a need to provide 521 dwellings per year in the period 2016-2026. The development strategy set out in the Core Strategy identifies housing as an integral element of development within the Central Area of Reading. The Reading Central Area

Action Plan promotes the Central Area as a place to live in, work in, study in, and visit. The Action Plan identifies housing as a main land use in the Central Area and states that the centre of Reading is becoming ever more important as a residential location, not just the inner areas surrounding the core, but increasingly the commercial and shopping core itself. Policy RC9 of the Reading Central Area Action Plan sets a series of criteria against which proposals for residential development in the central area will be assessed. These criteria include that all proposals for residential development within the central area contribute towards a mix of different sized units within the development; demonstrate how the issue of potential noise disturbance from neighbouring land uses and other sources, and air quality implications of residential development, have been considered and if necessary, mitigated; contribute towards affordable housing in line with Policy CS16 of the Core Strategy; and meet the need for additional community facilities generated by the development.

- 5.7 As the site is not specifically designated as being within an employment area, and the increasing importance of residential accommodation within the core central area of the town is being recognised, we consider that the principle of residential accommodation on the upper floors of these buildings is acceptable. The change of use of the upper floors is one that, generally, is permitted under the General Permitted Development Order 2015; however given the inconclusive planning history of the property it is considered appropriate to apply for this change of use by means of this planning application. There are no strong economic reasons why they should remain in office use. Given the policy framework outlined above residential is clearly an appropriate alternative use and in these circumstances the change of the office space to residential and the additional unit provided by the extension is acceptable, in particular given the need to provide additional housing units.

The quality of accommodation proposed including density and mix

- 5.8 Core Strategy Policy CS15 states that the appropriate density and mix of residential development within the Borough will be informed by a number of factors, including the nature of the area, its public transport accessibility and the impact on amenities. The policy goes on to state that developments should provide an appropriate range of housing opportunities in terms of a mix of housing types, sizes and tenures, in accordance with the findings of a housing market assessment. The mix of dwellings should include an appropriate proportion of units designed to Lifetime Homes standard. Net densities of below 30 dwellings per hectare will not be acceptable. The indicative density for the Town Centre is set out to be above 70 dwellings per hectare. The proposed density of this development meets this, being approximately 75 dwellings per hectare. Given the central location of the site we consider that this density is acceptable.
- 5.9 The proposed residential units would provide a good standard of accommodation, of good size, arrangement and layout in line with standards. The number of units proposed, three, falls below the threshold required to make a contribution to affordable housing as set out in

Policy CS16. In terms of amenity space Policy DM10 requires that dwellings will be provided with functional private or communal open space; it indicates that flats may be provided with communal outdoor space, balconies and/or roof gardens. Paragraph 5.6.5 indicates that flats in central Reading will not require the same amount of outdoor space as houses in other parts of Reading, and the sites are usually more constrained in any case. Paragraph 5.6.10 adds that development in central Reading will not always be expected to comply with normal standards. With regard to Open Space provision Core Strategy Policy SC29 states that all new development should make provision for the open space needs of the development through appropriate on or off-site provision, or through contributions towards the provision or improvement of leisure or recreational facilities, including open space. On sites of less than 50 dwellings or in areas not identified as deficient in the provision of open space, new open space provision/improvements/enhancements will be sought through appropriate contributions. It is considered that on this small site in the city centre the absence of amenity space is acceptable given the lack of scope for outdoor amenity space. Juliet balconies are provided for the second floor and upper flats.

Design and appearance of the proposed extension and impact on the streetscene and adjoining listed building.

- 5.10 Core Strategy Policy CS33 states that planning permission will only be granted where development has no adverse impact on historic assets and their settings. All proposals will be expected to protect and where appropriate enhance the character and appearance of the area in which they are located. Policy CS7 states that new development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located.
- 5.11 While the site is not a listed building or located within a conservation area the adjoining building No. 147 Friar Street is Grade II listed. There are no changes to the mass of the building. Accordingly, we submit it would be compatible with the scale and character of existing development, its neighbours and its setting.

The effect on residential amenity of adjoining properties

- 5.12 Policy DM4 requires that development will not cause a significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing or new residential properties, in terms of privacy and overlooking; access to sunlight and daylight; visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development; noise and disturbance; artificial lighting; vibration; dust and fumes; smell; or crime and safety. The position of habitable rooms, windows and outdoor living spaces will be particularly important. A back-to-back distance of 20 metres between dwellings is usually appropriate, although the circumstances on individual sites may enable dwellings to be closer without a detrimental effect on privacy.

- 5.13 It is considered the proposal is acceptable in these terms with respect to the impact on amenity of neighbouring properties. There are no windows on the side elevations of the two adjoining properties that would be affected by the proposed extension and there is a significant gap between buildings to the rear of the property. The scale and position of the proposed development is such that it will not harm daylight/sunlight or cause problems of overlooking or loss of privacy. The residential use will not lead to other problems such as noise and disturbance identified in the policy.

Other issues

- 5.14 **Parking:** Policy CS24: Car/ Cycle Parking states that maximum car parking standards and cycle parking requirements will be applied in relation to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport. As existing, no off-street car parking spaces are provided due to site constraints. The building covers the whole of the site. It is considered that in this highly accessible location to public transport within the town centre the absence of off-street parking is acceptable. There is no space to provide cycle parking facilities at ground level but they can be provided within the flat.
- 5.15 **Sustainable design and construction:** Policy CS1 states that proposals for new development including the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing building stock, will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change. The development provides the opportunity to achieve this, with the new residential units being designed to meet BREEAM very good standards and to incorporate energy saving measures.

6.0 Summary and Conclusions

6.1 Planning permission is sought for the change of use of the first and second floors from office (Class B1a) to residential (Class C3), in connection with the provision of one self-contained residential dwelling.

- The principle of the change of use from B1a office space to C3 residential is acceptable in policy terms. The site is not located in a designated employment area and the loss of the upper floor office spaces, is acceptable when replaced by a housing use.
- There is little demand for office space in this location with many floors of nearby buildings also vacant.
- Residential is an appropriate and much needed alternative use and is encouraged to be provided in this part of Reading town centre.
- The residential unit will provide a good standard accommodation.
- The proposal results in a good density scheme which is appropriate for this accessible town centre location.
- The development would preserve the character and appearance of the site and to ensure it would have no adverse impact on the setting of the adjoining building.
- The proposal is acceptable in respect to the impact on amenity of neighbouring properties.
- It is considered that in this highly accessible location to public transport within the town centre the absence of off-street parking is acceptable. There is no space to provide cycle parking facilities at ground level but they can be provided within the flat.
- The new units would meet sustainability and energy reduction targets and standards.
- The proposal is considered to be in accordance with relevant development plan policy and guidance.
- The policy presumption is in favour of the grant of planning permission and there are no material considerations that outweigh that presumption.

