

PLANNING SUPPORT STATEMENT

7 Blagrove Street, Reading

Prepared For

MR. M. BHATTI

Erection of basement and 5 storey building to provide cafe (Class A3) at basement and part ground floor level and 23 bed & breakfast rooms (Class C1) at part ground floor and upper floor level, following demolition of existing 2 storey building (cafe and 5 bed & breakfast rooms) barring partial retention of front facade

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Including:

Design and Access Statement



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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This statement is submitted to provide the planning justification for the proposed development.
- 1.2 The application site is currently operating in lawful A3 and C1 uses and the planning application seeks to retain those uses, whilst making more efficient use of this town centre site. The site is located on the west side of Blagrove Street and benefits from a shop frontage, befitting both its high street location and its existing A3 cafe use. On the ground floor the existing cafe seating areas are confined to the front portion of the building fronting Blagrove Street, whilst the rear part of the ground floor contains the kitchen, beyond which a single storey element contains the toilets, staff room and store room. The existing first floor is therefore smaller than the ground floor and currently provides five en-suite bed & breakfast rooms and a storage room. The application site is located within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and is noted as falling within a grouping of buildings along Blagrove Street which have been identified as 'Buildings of Townscape Merit'.
- 1.3 In terms of uses, the uses proposed (A3 and C1) are already established on the site and operate successfully with regards to the location and various neighbouring uses. It is however clear that the operations of the existing businesses are constrained by the existing two storey building, which itself could make a much more efficient use of this central site in both land use terms and economically in supporting the town centre.
- 1.4 In terms of the surrounding built form, the development on the west side of Blagrove Street generally consists of 4 or 5 storeys in a continuous form. The east side of Blagrove Street (and the adjacent Valpy Street) are then characterised by a more varied mix of buildings, ranging from large office blocks which range up to 7 storeys at the Blagrove Street / Forbury Road junction and the imposing and listed Town Hall, Museum and Art Gallery building, which sits opposite the site. The two storey building of the application site is clearly out of keeping in terms of height with the surrounding development and more specifically its two neighbouring buildings.

- 1.5 Whilst the listed Town Hall building opposite is clearly an important feature of the Conservation Area, it is clear that much of the surrounding development does not carry the same level of significance in historical asset terms. A stand-alone Heritage Statement has been provided in support of the application which considers in the Heritage implications of the proposed development and explains how it is acceptable in the heritage context.

Planning History

- 1.6 The most recent planning application approval is a retrospective application in 2006 for bed and breakfast accommodation on the first floor, which utilised the ground floor cafe to serve breakfast. Previous to this, is the approval of a change of use application in 1998 of the ground floor of the property from A2 (banks and financial services) to A3 (restaurants and cafes). A number of earlier planning applications were submitted at the site (and also including the site with other land as part of a larger scheme) in the early 1990s. Limited information is available on the Council's website regarding these earlier applications.

2 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT – DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

- 2.1 This section provides a description of the proposed development. It should also be read in conjunction with the stand-alone Heritage Statement, which provides a more in depth analysis of the heritage context of the existing building.
- 2.2 The existing building is generally a poor example of architecture in comparison to some of its neighbours within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area. The supporting Heritage Statement concludes that the heritage benefits of the building can only be derived from its facade, which houses some of the historic intricacies to have warranted its inclusion as a 'building of townscape merit'. That said, the Heritage Statement demonstrates the current dilapidated form of these features within the facade and concludes that the retention of these features through the renovation of the building would not harm, but rather enhance the Conservation Area through the improvement of historic features.
- 2.3 The front elevation of the building, which demonstrates details of its historic fabric, is shown below.



Proposal

- 2.4 The proposal is to demolish the existing building and replace it with a 6 storey building (5 storeys above ground level). The basement and ground floor levels would continue the existing A3 use, with its existing shop front presence retained at the front of the building and the addition of one ground floor bed and breakfast room. The first, second, third and fourth floors would then continue but intensify the existing C1 use at the site, with the building providing a total of 17 bed and breakfast rooms. It is considered that the improved and extended accommodation will provide valuable town centre accommodation, which maximises public transport links and leisure and entertainment facilities and provides alternative accommodation to the contractors market, who work for locally based companies but may live elsewhere.

Access

- 2.5 There will be no vehicular access to the site, with no on-site parking provision offered. This is the same as the existing situation, which is fairly characteristic for a highly accessible Reading Town Centre site, located just metres from Reading Station and served by numerous bus routes. Two separate pedestrian access doors will be provided from Blagrove Street; one serving the bed and breakfast facility and the other serving the cafe. A new feature of the improved bed and breakfast facility will also be the internal lift to all floors, which will significantly improve accessibility to the rooms for guests.

Size

- 2.6 The building will fit in the existing gap, slightly reducing the footprint of the building to provide for a more logical new build solution when compared to the slanted rear wall of the existing single storey staff room. The new height of the building corresponds closely with the heights of its adjoining buildings (5a Blagrove Street and 9-15 Blagrove Street). The existing yard to the rear of the site will also be maintained within the proposals.

Appearance

- 2.7 The proposed building has been designed in a modern, yet traditional vernacular, taking its inspirations from the historic elements of the existing dilapidated facade and repeating these features within the front elevation of the replacement building. Repetition of key elements of the existing facade cannot be missed within the proposed front elevation, such as the canopied first floor bay window, the exposed gable and decorative 'arch' feature and indeed the white rendered masonry. The new addition of a slate covered mansard roof, also adds to the historic influence evident within the new building.
- 2.8 The scale (height) and appearance of the proposed building is more consistent with its surroundings. Currently, the narrow two storey building at 7 Blagrove Street, is somewhat lost within the streetscape, dominated by its neighbours, whose exposed flank walls tower above the application property. When viewed in combination with the existing application buildings dilapidated facade, the site is unattractive and is considered to provide very little contribution to the Conservation Area. It is therefore clear that the provision of a new building which retains the historic elements from the existing facade but responds more appropriately with the heights its neighbouring properties (thus removing views of their unsightly flank walls), will improve the streetscene and townscape, and in turn enhance, rather than harm, the Conservation Area.
- 2.9 Whilst the replacement building provides additional floors, the proposed front elevation drawing demonstrates how the application site does not lose its identity within the streetscene, as being one of the smaller buildings in the locality. The materials and size of window openings are delicate and replicate the existing character of the building. Materials such as sandstone cills and slate tiles are also used in order to give the new building additional historical context and to ensure that it is sympathetic to its surroundings. Within the other elevations, facing brick is predominately used, although the use of sandstone cills and coping remain in use.
- 2.10 The new mansard / flat roof of the new building is consistent with many other buildings within the town centre and also within Blagrove Street, including the two

adjoining properties. In this instance, the mansard roof is sympathetically achieved so as to not detract from the gabled top of the white rendered facade, which is a key feature of the existing building which has been importantly replicated.

3 PLANNING POLICY APPRAISAL

- 3.1 This section provides an analysis of relevant planning policies and an appraisal of the proposed development in connection with those policies. As outlined previously, it is also important to note that a separate Heritage Statement has also been provided. This also includes an overview of heritage policies. This section does not therefore seek to repeat the policies already assessed within the Heritage Statement. However, it is important to consider the conclusions from that document when reviewing the additional findings below, which seek to demonstrate the principle of development and additional site specific issues.
- 3.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 makes it clear that “regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise”. The National Planning Policy Framework (The NPPF) does not alter this as a starting point but it does introduce additional material considerations that should be taken into account by the decision maker.
- 3.3 For the sake of determining this application, the relevant development plan refers to the Reading Borough Core Strategy (adopted 2008, with Alteration adopted January 2015), the Sites and Detailed Policies document (adopted October 2012, with Alteration adopted January 2015) and the Reading Central Area Action Plan (adopted 2009).

The Core Strategy (CS)

- 3.4 The Core Strategy sets out the key elements of the planning framework for Reading Borough, providing the spatial vision for the area, strategic objectives, a spatial strategy and core policies required to implement that strategy.
- 3.5 Policy CS7 relates to Design and the Public Realm. It states that all 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. The components of development form are noted as including layout (urban structure and urban grain), landscape, density and mix, scale (height and massing) and architectural detail

and materials. Section 2 of this report has already considered the design of the development in detail, in addition to the Heritage Statement which highlights the historic components of the existing and proposed development and the context of the area of Reading in which the site is located.

- 3.6 The policy advises that proposals will be assessed to ensure that they make a positive contribution to particular urban design objectives. These include, character (i.e. its own identity and sense of place), continuity and enclosure, quality of the public realm and ease of movement and permeability, legibility, adaptability and diversity. Additionally, development proposals will also be assessment to ensure that they create safe and accessible environments, address the needs of all in society and are visually attractive (including using appropriate materials).
- 3.7 It is considered that the proposal meets all the elements of Policy CS7. In particular, it is clear that the proposed building has its own character and identity. Much of this character is already provided in existing historical features and the design of the replacement building has therefore sought to retain these features, rather than seeking to create new ones. Any sense of place provided by the existing building, will not therefore be lost by its demolition and replacement. In addition to this, it is considered that the new building will meet other elements of the policy, such as an improved contribution to public realm, adaptability (through the provision of a building which meets the expectations of modern business) and diversity (through the intensification of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in the ton centre, as opposed to hotel accommodation).
- 3.8 Policy CS9 relates to infrastructure, services, resources and amenities. It states that proposals for development will not normally be permitted unless the local planning authority is satisfied that such issues lost or impacted upon as a result of development have been compensated for.
- 3.9 Policy CP18 could potentially be relevant at is relates to proposals to convert properties into self-contained flats or for *multiple occupation* (presumably HMOs but the policy does not clarify it) and states that these will be assessed against the impact on the amenity and character of the surrounding area, particularly in terms of the intensification of activity, adequate parking and loss of privacy amongst

other issues. The application property already has the benefit of an established C1 use. Whilst the proposal involves the intensification of that use, it is not considered that this would be harmful to the amenity or character of this highly accessible and busy location.

Transport Assessment

- 3.10 Policy CS24 relates to maximum car parking standards and cycle parking requirements vary according to the accessibility of locations within the Borough. As with many town centre developments, the application property does not make any provision for car parking. As previously mentioned, the site is metres away from Reading station and also served by many bus routes. Whilst the bed and breakfast element is being intensified and some residents may travel to the site by car, it is considered that the high number of public car parks within the location could easily provide appropriate car parking arrangements for both staff and users of the site. Generally speaking, however, clientele will arrive to the site by public transport.
- 3.11 As a more general argument, the lack of parking provision is consistent with the NPPF which seeks to reduce the reliance on private motor vehicles, especially in the most accessible of locations. Reading is considered a good example of such a location. Paragraph 29 of The NPPF states that *"the transport system needs to be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving people a real choice of how they travel"*. Paragraph 35 continues that *"developments should be located and designed where practical to...give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements and have access to high quality public transport facilities"*. On this basis, providing parking for the proposed development would actually encourage the use of the private motor car in a location where one is not required for the nature of the development proposed and is therefore categorically contrary to the specific aims of the Framework. By definition, the proposal will be more sustainable by not providing parking, than it would be if parking was provided. It is therefore considered to better reflect the aims of the NPPF.
- 3.12 On this basis, it would be a worthless exercise to submit a formal Transport Statement with estimated vehicle trip generation. The site is only comparable to other large central urban locations and specific trip generation would be limited if

not minimal. Highways impact assessments in the planning system must consider safety. Where there are no highway safety implications, there is no reason to resist planning permission on this basis. The proposal includes the provision for cycle parking on site to further enhance its sustainability credentials.

- 3.13 Policy CS27 relates to maintaining the retail character of centres within Reading Borough. It states that strong retail character will be maintained in the centres identified as being part of the network. It notes that significant groupings of non-retail uses in one part of a centre will not be allowed. As previously outlined, the ground floor use is in a lawful A3 use, having previously been in A2 use. The established use has already therefore been the subject of a planning application and it determined that it is appropriate for the site in the location. Economically, the re-provision of the cafe use within the redevelopment proposal, demonstrates the viability of the use at the site. It also works in the locality by supporting nearby uses such as the high levels of A1 and B1 uses; adding to the diversity of town centre opportunities.

Sites and Detailed Policies Document (2009)

- 3.14 Policy SD1 provides a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It states that where appropriate the Council will work proactively with applicants to jointly find solutions so that proposals can be approved where possible, and also to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.
- 3.15 Pre-application advice has been sought and this application has sought to address the feedback received. For example, drawings have been amended to show existing and proposed site levels and finished floor levels and the application has been supported by the required technical assessments.
- 3.16 Policy DM4 relates to safeguarding amenity. It states that development must not cause a significant detrimental impact to the living environment of existing or new residential properties. In this respect, consideration must be given to issues such as privacy and overlooking, access to sunlight and daylight, issues relating to dominance and overbearing, noise and disturbance and fumes. It is considered that the proposal satisfies the aims of this policy by safeguarding the amenity of any

neighbouring residential residents and the transitory residents who will use the bed and breakfast facility.

Daylight/sunlight

3.17 In terms of daylight/sunlight, it is a usual request for a 6 storey building to provide a daylight/sunlight assessment. However, in this case, the proposed development will fit snugly into the existing gap and will not protrude beyond the existing front rear building line of the neighbouring properties. On this basis, the only possible loss of light can be to windows on the flank elevations of the two surrounding properties and properties to the front and the rear.

3.18 With regard to the side properties, the building at 9-15 Blagrove Street has no side facing windows. Number 1 to 5 Blagrove Street does have a side facing window on the top floor but this serves an attic/storage area and blocking this window has been agreed with the owner of this property. The large public building opposite is neither in residential use nor sufficiently close to the application site for the proposed building to have any impact, detrimental or otherwise, on the light received by this property. Likewise, the large building to the rear is a public house and has no windows facing the application site. There will be no impact on any neighbouring property due to loss of either daylight or sunlight.

3.19 An independent noise assessment is submitted with the application.

Reading Central Area Action Plan (2009)

3.20 Policy RC5 lists a number of attributes, which new development proposals within the Reading central area should demonstrate. These relate to respecting the existing grid layout structure, ensuring that development contributes to the public realm and utilises architectural details and materials of high quality and that respect those used locally and that proposals contribute to diversity, are suitable for adaptation and enhance community safety. It is considered that the proposal meets all the required attributes of new development as outlined by the policy. In particular, the development protects the existing grid layout by maximising a clear opportunity which exists to extend floorspace through the addition of extra floors,

thus making a significantly more efficient use of this town centre site, without extending its current footprint.

3.21 Policy RC7 (Leisure, Culture and Tourism in the Centre) advises that the central area will be the prime focus of these uses. This policy is considered to be relevant to the bed and breakfast element of the proposal. Its intensification is considered to be of benefit to Reading's tourism industry, by supplementing this type of accommodation versus town centre hotels, which in turn will encourage visitors into the town centre area who in turn be likely to support the local economy through the use of other businesses.

3.22 Policy RC9 supports the provision of serviced apartments and apart-hotels which fall outside of the C3 use class within the Central Core. A number of the bed and breakfast rooms which are noted on the plans as being self-catering, could be considered to provide a similar facility to an apartment or apart-hotel. It is considered that these rooms which have the addition of a small kitchen area, would particularly cater for families and the contractors market.

3.23 All these policies are consistent with the requirements of the NPPF as a material planning consideration. Paragraph 23 offers the criteria for development within town centres and requires the following (selected for relevance):

Planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should:

- *Recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality;*
- *Retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones, ensuring that markets remain attractive and competitive*
- *Allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, **tourism**, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres.*

3.24 On this basis, we are satisfied that the relevant development plan documents are consistent with the requirements of the NPPF and that the proposed development is consistent with the development plan policies.

4 INFRASTRUCTURE

4.1 The requirement for a S106 agreement for financial contributions should be considered in line with the NPPF and paragraph 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations (2010) which requires that contributions must be:

- *Relevant to planning;*
- *Necessary to make the proposed development acceptable in planning terms;*
- *Directly related to the proposed development;*
- *Fairly and reasonable related in scale and kind to the proposed development; and*
- *Reasonable in all other respects.*

4.2 PINS 'Good Practice Note' 16/2010 provides further guidance on the CIL Regs. 2010, and requires councils to have the following details available if they are to request financial contributions:

- The relevant development plan policy or policies, and the relevant sections of any SPD or SPG.
- Quantified evidence of the additional demands on facilities or infrastructure which are likely to arise from the proposed development.
- Details of existing facilities or infrastructure, and up-to-date, quantified evidence of the extent to which they are able or unable to meet those additional demands.
- The methodology for calculating any financial contribution which is shown to be necessary to improve existing facilities or infrastructure, or provide new facilities or infrastructure, to meet the additional demands.
- Details of the facilities or infrastructure on which any financial contribution will be spent.

4.3 The Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule January 2015, outlines the types of developments from which CIL will be required, whether

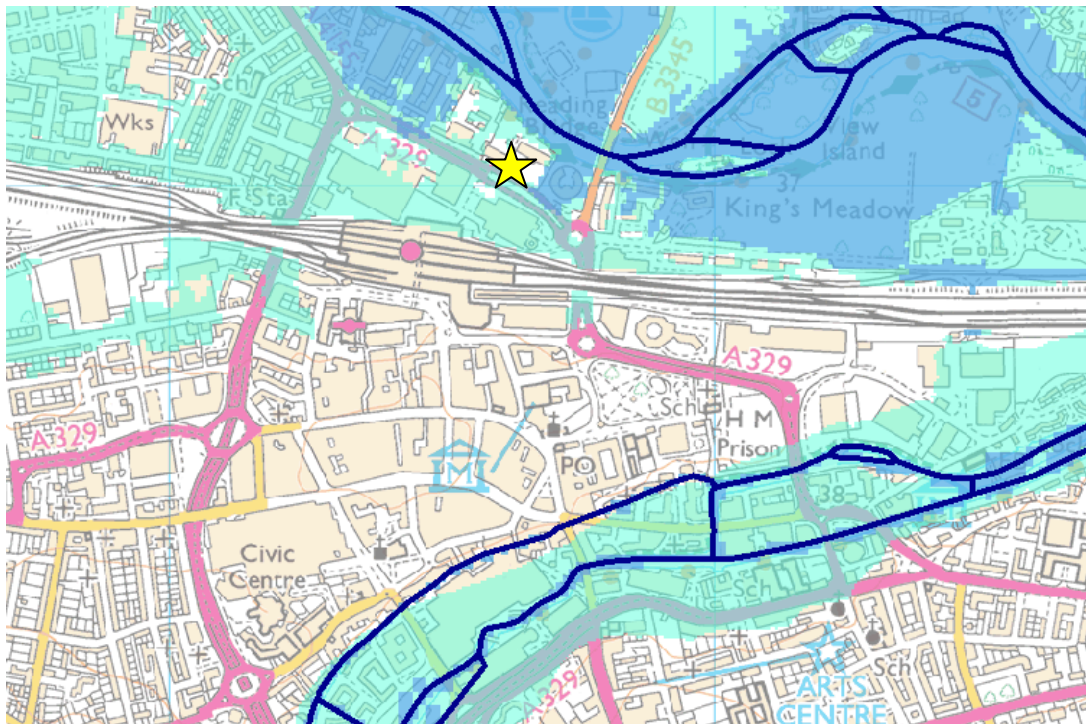
that be from new development or relating to an extension in existing floorspace. The schedule outlines that contributions are not sought from A3 and C1 related developments. Additionally, there are no additional known site specific infrastructure requirements which would be required through a S106 agreement.

5 FOUL SEWAGE, DRAINAGE AND UTILITIES

- 5.1 The site is currently connected to the mains electricity. The proposed new development will be connected similarly.
- 5.2 The existing water supply will adequately serve the proposed development.
- 5.3 The application site is already connected to the network of sewers for which there is sufficient capacity to serve the proposed intensification of the existing uses.

6 FLOODING

The application site falls well outside of the flood zones 2 and 3 which are shown below. It is therefore located in flood zone 1 and as such there are no flood risk implications to consider in respect of the proposed uses. No further assessment is required.



 Denotes location of application site

7 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CONCLUSION

7.1 The above sections and supporting information, all feed into the ultimate planning balance which underpins all decisions; the question of whether the proposal represents “sustainable development”. It is a reasonable conclusion in considering whether an application represents sustainable development to assume that all the aims and aspirations of the NPPF are tailored to reflect its presumption in favour of sustainable development. It is therefore also reasonable, in looking beyond the three tests of sustainable development set out in paragraph 7 of the NPPF, to consider the other advice in the NPPF which is supportive of the development of the application site. In favour of the proposed development, the National Planning Policy Framework provides the following advice:

9 – “Pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment...replacing poor design with better design”

17 - **encourage** the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value – This is one of the *Core Planning Principles* of the NPPF and is considered an important consideration in this proposal

58 - Planning policies **and decisions** should aim to ensure that developments...optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses and support local facilities and transport networks and respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation (our emphasis)

60 - Planning policies **and decisions** should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particularly tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness (our emphasis)

111 – Planning Policies **and decisions** should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value (our emphasis).

137 - Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas...and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance.

7.2 A Core Planning Principle of the NPPF is to make efficient use of previously developed land. The uncharacteristic two storey nature of the previously developed town centre application site is therefore considered to currently provide an inefficient use of land. The proposal seeks to address this issue by providing a development which responds to neighbouring buildings.

7.3 With the proposed uses (A3 and C1) already established on the site and operates with no material harm to its surroundings, it is clear that the principle of the proposed development is already established.

Sustainable development

7.4 As explained above, the prevailing thread throughout the NPPF is 'sustainable development'. Sustainable development has three dimensions, as set out in paragraph 7 of the NPPF, each of which is assessed below:

- **Economic** – This demands sufficient land to come forward in the right places to support growth and innovation. In a town centre location, available land can often be limited. The existing A3 and C1 uses at the site have proved economically successful, to the extent that their extension is hereby sought. It is considered appropriate for Planning to support expansion in such instances where there is scope to do so, as there is in this case. At the same time, the existing building is in bad condition and the renovation of the lower floors, prior to extension, would not be viable. Demolition is therefore considered the only viable option, which at the same time would allow for other improvements to be made for example to the current cafe layout or in the securing of an internal lift to improve accessibility levels for bed and breakfast guests. An intensification of the C1 use is considered to be a positive addition to the area, with the increased level of residents being

likely to provide increase contributions to tourism and the economic well-being of the locality. Additionally, maintaining and replacing the active shop front, is considered to be an attractive proposal for the streetscene, enhancing the viability and viability of the established cafe itself, in addition to the wider area.

- **Social** – this focuses on creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being. The previous sections and supporting documentation discuss and demonstrate the suitability of the proposed design. It is clear that this will retain important features of the existing building, whilst enabling existing businesses to expand. At the same time, the proposed building would be suitable of adaptation in the future should the current uses stop, which the existing building provides fewer opportunities for. In conclusion, the quality of the built environment will improve with the provision of a quality design of building.
- **Environmental** – This includes protecting the environment, minimising waste and pollution and moving to a low carbon economy. This application is supported by a Transport Statement which concludes that a development with zero parking is acceptable in this location. In environmental terms, the lack of parking is ideal as it will focus users of the site into using sustainable methods of transports such as the public transport infrastructure or walking and cycling. Protecting the historical environment is also critical and the proposal will both preserve and enhance the conservation area for reasons previously described, a key consideration in the historic environment argument.

7.5 This sustainability appraisal could reasonably read as a conclusion to the overall planning case offered forward in both this statement and in the accompanying documents. The proposal satisfies all the requirements of sustainable development and should therefore be granted planning permission.