



WALSINGHAM PLANNING

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PLANNING STATEMENT AND FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

To support planning and listed building consent applications for change of use from vacant Class B1 office to Class A3 restaurant with associated alterations to north-east and south-east elevations and installation of extract and ventilation equipment at:

**Seven Bridges House
19 Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LR**

September 2015

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Walsingham Planning has been instructed to prepare a planning statement and flood risk assessment to support planning and listed building consent applications for change of use of Seven Bridges House, 19 Bridge Street in Reading from a vacant Class B1 office to a Class A3 restaurant with associated alterations to the north-east and south-east elevations and installation of extract and ventilation equipment.
- 1.2 This statement should be read with reference to other supporting planning documents including the Design & Access Statement and Heritage Statement.
- 1.3 This statement considers the site, surroundings and nature of the proposed use and assesses the proposals against relevant planning policy. It is concluded that the proposal accords with the Development Plan and a recommendation for approval is therefore appropriate.
- 1.4 The proposal would not attract the Community Infrastructure Levy as the building has been occupied for more than six months in the last three years.

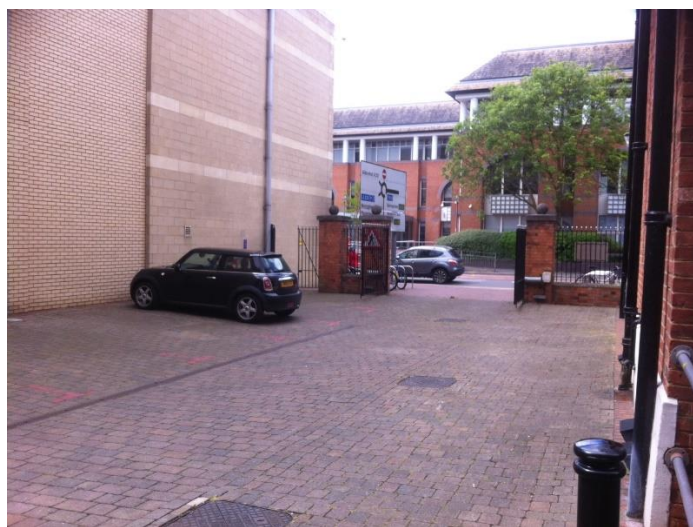
2 SITE & SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 The application property is a three storey detached building which lies on the east side of Bridge Street in Reading town centre. The premises have been vacant since Christmas 2014. The property lies within Flood Zone 2.



Seven Bridges House

- 2.2 There is a parking area to the south-east of the building with a gated access and a yard area to the rear which includes two air conditioning condensers.



Parking area to south-east of Seven Bridges House



Yard area to rear of Seven Bridges House

2.3 The building was Grade II listed in 1957. The listing description is as follows:

Early C19. Attributed by Pevsner to Soane but this is probably an error. 2 storey villa. Brick with stucco string between ground and first floors, stucco cornice, parapet and hipped slate roof. 5 windows on first floor, glazing bar sashes with moulded architraves (spoiled by poor double glazing). 4 windows and central door on ground floor with double panelled doors and radiating fanlight over. Greek Doric portico with fluted columns and pilasters supporting and plain cornice; panelled soffit. Interior altered but enriched ceiling cornice kept on ground floor.

2.4 This part of the town centre is dominated by The Oracle shopping centre. To the north-west of the application building is the entrance to the Holy Brook car park, which serves The Oracle, beyond which is a yard and two bars. To the south-east is the rear of the House of Fraser store, including the staff entrance. Reading Borough Council offices are opposite the site.

2.5 The site's town centre location ensures easy access by bicycle and on foot. The property also enjoys excellent access to public transport as it lies approximately 500m south of Reading train station and Bridge Street is a main bus route providing convenient access across the town centre and the wider area.

Planning History

- 2.6 Listed building consent was granted in 1990 for internal and external works to facilitate use of the building as offices including demolition of rear and side extensions (900380).
- 2.7 Listed building consent was granted in 1995 and again in 1997 for similar works (950105 & 970063). Planning permission was granted in 1998 for use as either a Class B1 office or a Class D1 doctor's surgery (980893) and in 1999 for a Class D1 education and training centre (990926).

3 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The proposal is to change the use of the building from a vacant Class B1 office to a Class A3 restaurant, make associated alterations to the south-east and north-east elevations and install new ventilation and extraction equipment. The proposals are shown on the Drawings 1015.10.03.PIn1.002, 021, 022, 023, 025, 060, 061, 062, 063, 040, 130, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209 and 210.
- 3.2 The main entrance will remain at the front of the building which is accessed via three steps but there is also a ramped access to the left side of the portico. The ground floor will provide a bar servery, customer dining areas and toilets. The first floor will accommodate the kitchen, a further bar and additional customer dining areas. The basement will provide ancillary storage. A full description of the internal and external alterations is included in the Design & Access Statement.
- 3.3 The area to the south-east of the building is to be used for external seating. To provide direct access to this area, it is proposed to convert the existing ground floor window opening into a door with stepped access.



South-east (side) elevation

- 3.4 The modern rear door will also be amended to provide a widened, wheelchair accessible rear door. A bin store will be added alongside the steps to the basement.



North-east (rear) elevation

- 3.5 The two existing condenser units will be supplemented with a chiller evaporator and a chiller condensing unit. The kitchen extract will exit the building through two discreet louvres at high level on the rear of the building.
- 3.6 A dedicated refuse and recycling store will be created at the rear of the building.

4 PLANNING POLICY

The Development Plan

- 4.1 The Development Plan includes the Reading Borough Core strategy (2008, altered 2015), Central Area Action Plan (2009) and Sites & Detailed Policies (2012). The property forms part of the Central Core and Primary Shopping Area of Reading Regional Centre. The site lies outside the Core Employment Areas and outside the Conservation Area. Relevant policies are summarised below.

Policy CS4 - The scale and density of development within the Borough will be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities.

Policy CS5 - All buildings should be located, sited and designed to provide suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily.

Policy CS11 – Outside the Core Employment Areas, the following criteria will be considered when assessing proposals which would result in a loss of employment land:

- (i) Is access by a choice of means of transport, including access to the strategic road network, poor, and likely to remain poor?
- (ii) Is the continued use of the site for employment, including the potential for redevelopment for employment uses, viable?
- (iii) Is there a surplus of a similar size and type of accommodation in Reading?
- (iv) Would continued employment use of the site detrimentally affect the amenity and character of a residential area?
- (v) Is the need for alternative uses stronger than the need for the retention of employment land?
- (vi) Would the proposal result in a piecemeal loss of employment land where there is potential for a more comprehensive scheme?

Policy CS26 - The vitality and viability of these centres should be maintained and enhanced. This will include widening the range of uses, environmental enhancements and improvements to access. Development for main town centre uses in these centres should be of an appropriate scale.

Policy CS33 - Historic features and areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings, will be protected and where appropriate enhanced. 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 RC6 - Other main town centre uses will take place in the Central Core.

National Planning Policy Statement

4.2 The NPPF was published in March 2012 and sets out the Government's planning policies for England. Paragraph 14 emphasises that the presumption in favour of sustainable development should be at the heart of plan-making and decision-taking. Development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay. Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF as a whole or specific NPPF policies indicate that development should be restricted.

4.3 Paragraph 17 sets out the twelve core principles which should guide planning decisions, including:

- Proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs.
- Seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

- Encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed;
- Conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.

4.4 Paragraph 18 states the Government's commitment to securing economic growth and places significant weight on the need to create jobs and prosperity through the planning system. Paragraph 23 recognises the need to provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer to ensure the vitality and viability of town centres. It encourages local planning authorities to plan positively to encourage economic activity. Paragraph 69 promotes planning decisions which offer opportunities for members of the community to meet. Paragraph 131 states that, in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; and
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic viability.

4.5 Paragraphs 186 and 187 state that local planning authorities should approach decision-taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development, working proactively with applicants, looking for solutions rather than problems and seeking to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

5 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) promotes sustainable development and a competitive economy through ensuring the vitality of town centres and shopping areas. It encourages customer choice and a diverse retail offer to ensure that centres remain attractive and competitive. At present, the vacant building is unproductive and detrimental to the character, vitality and viability of this part of the town centre. The proposed change of use would support the key aims of the NPPF by bringing a sustainably located, vacant property back into gainful use, adding an attractive new restaurant to this part of the town centre and providing local employment.
- 5.2 The property has previously been used as an office but lies outside the Borough's Core Employment Areas. One of the key criteria set out in Core Strategy Policy CS11 is whether the need for alternative uses is stronger than the need for the retention of employment land.
- 5.3 The property has been vacant since Christmas 2014. It has been on the market since August 2014 and a letter from the marketing agent, Hicks Baker, is attached at Appendix 1. This confirms that marketing particulars were prepared and the property was advertised by way of an advertising board, direct contact to their internal database of potential occupiers and on the website. There were six expressions of interest leading to viewings, of which two were office occupiers. The reason that the potential office occupiers did not progress with taking the property was principally due to the configuration of the rooms not being suitable for the current trend of open plan use. The building was not able to provide the flexibility of working space that was required.
- 5.4 In light of this documented lack of demand for the property to be used as offices, the proposed restaurant use is considered to be an appropriate, employment-generating alternative.
- 5.5 The property lies within the Central Core and Primary Shopping Area of Reading Regional Centre. Area Action Plan Policy RC6 notes that non-retail main town centre uses, such as restaurants, should be situated within the Central Core. Core Strategy Policy CS26 encourages the enhancement of the vitality and viability of the Borough's

centres. The proposed change of use wholly supports this policy by bringing the property back into gainful use after an extended period of vacancy, adding an attractive new restaurant to this part of the town centre and creating new jobs.

- 5.6 The need to find a viable new use for the property is even more important in this instance because the building is listed. The NPPF emphasises the desirability of putting heritage assets to viable uses and the positive role that they can play in promoting sustainable communities and the local economy. The proposed restaurant development would represent a significant financial investment and give the building a new lease of life.

Design

- 5.7 As the building is listed, alterations to the building have been kept to a minimum and constitute only works necessary to facilitate the proposed restaurant use. The main entrance will remain at the front of the building which is accessed via three steps but there is also a ramped access to the left side of the portico. The ground floor will provide a bar servery, customer dining areas and toilets. The first floor will accommodate the kitchen, a further bar and additional customer dining areas. The basement will provide ancillary storage.
- 5.8 The area to the south-east of the building is to be used for external seating. To provide direct access to this area, it is proposed to convert the existing ground floor window opening into a door and create three steps. Using the existing window opening minimises disruption to the existing building fabric and is considered to be a neat way of solving the requirement for side access.
- 5.9 The modern rear door will also be amended to provide a widened, wheelchair accessible rear door. This will significantly improve the provision of equal convenient access to the ground floor. A bin store will be added alongside the steps to the basement. These alterations will only affect modern additions to the building and are therefore considered acceptable.
- 5.10 The two additional condenser units required can be accommodated next to the existing ones at the rear of the building which cannot be seen from any public views. This is a neat arrangement which will allow easy access for maintenance.

- 5.11 The kitchen extract system will exit the building at high level via two louvres fitted to the rear elevation of the building. This is again a subtle but effective solution which will have a minimal effect on the external appearance of the building.

Operational Considerations

- 5.12 Deliveries would be timed and managed to minimise any disruption to the highway network. The application property has a service yard where loading/unloading can be carried out without interfering with the pavement or road. It is likely that larger service vehicles would need to reverse in and drive out in forward gear due to the space constraints of the service area. However, this would be no worse than the existing situation as the current Class B1 use could theoretically require a similar level of servicing, particularly if it was in light industrial use.

- 5.13 A dedicated refuse and recycling store will be created at the rear of the building.

Flood Risk Assessment

- 5.14 The application property lies within Flood Zone 2 due to its risk of fluvial flooding from the River Kennet. This is defined as having between a 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river flooding (1% – 0.1%). A flood risk assessment is therefore required to accompany any planning application.
- 5.15 The Planning Practice Guidance confirms that neither the Sequential Test nor the Exception Test are relevant to proposals for change of use. The existing office use and the proposed restaurant use are both classified as Less Vulnerable uses so the proposed change of use would not increase the vulnerability of the building.
- 5.16 It is therefore concluded that the proposed change of use would not increase flood risk to people or property and would not affect flood risk elsewhere.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This proposal is for change of use of a vacant Class B1 office building to provide a Class A3 restaurant with associated alterations to the south-east and north-east elevations and installation of extract and ventilation equipment.
- 6.2 The proposed change of use would support the key aims of the NPPF by bringing a sustainably located, vacant property back into gainful use, adding an attractive new restaurant to this part of the town centre and providing local employment. The change of use will support the long-term future of the listed building by securing significant investment and viable new use with minimal changes to the building fabric.
- 6.3 The restaurant will be well managed and will have no adverse impact on traffic or neighbouring uses. The proposal would have no flooding implications.
- 6.4 The proposed change of use complies with the provisions of the Development Plan and a recommendation for approval is therefore appropriate.

Our Ref:

18th August 2015

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Dear Sophie

Re: 19 Bridge Street, Reading

We commenced marketing the above property in August 2014 and it was promoted as being suitable for either offices or A3 or D1, with the latter two uses only being possible if planning consent was forthcoming for such a COU.

The property was marketed via a board, brochure, web site and our own database of potential applicants. We undertook 6 viewings prior to agreeing terms with The Stables in January this year, three of whom were office occupiers, two were restaurateurs and one was a D1 use.

The reason that the potential office occupiers didn't progress with taking the property was principally due to the configuration of the rooms not being suitable for the current trend of open plan use. The building was not able to provide the flexibility of working space that was required.

Yours sincerely



FIONA BROWNFOOT MRICS
DIRECTOR
HICKS BAKER

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