

DELEGATED PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Abbey

App Ref: 240203/FUL

Address: St Marys Church, 14 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RD

Proposals: Change of use of the existing church hall in F1 (f) use to F1 (f) and Class E (f) use as a children's day nursery.

Case Officer: Nathalie Weekes

Date received: 15 February 2024 Target Decision date: 11 April 2024

1. SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

The site is St Mary's Church in Castle Street is a grade 2 listed building in St Marys Butts/Castle Street Conservation area and High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ).

It is in an Air Quality Management Area and is located within a controlled residential parking permit area, Reading central core and primary shopping area.

Site visit date: 27/03/2024

Site visit photos:



2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposal is for a change of use of St Mary's Chapel Hall within St Mary's church to be used as a children's nursery/day care during the daytime on Monday to Friday. No external

changes or internal works are proposed. The nursery is proposed to have a capacity of 35 children, with 8 members of staff. The church hall would be available for ancillary F1 (f) use for St Mary's Church outside of these times.

Plans considered

2085 E10 Location and site plan

307/01 Rev T1 General arrangement

307/01 Rev P2 GF Proposed plan

Planning, Design and Access Statement, ET planning

Letter from Brighter Futures for Children, Early Years Team Manager, 11 December 2023

2085 Heritage statement, Heritage Fusion conserving the past, inspiring the future

Transport statement 1st draft, motion, 2 February 2024

Photos

CIL

As received 20 February 2024

Cycle store photo - as existing

As received 26/03/2024

Vermin control measures

As received 10/04/2024

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None

4. CONSULTATIONS

A site notice was displayed at the site on 13 March 2024 for the required period and an advert was placed in a local newspaper on 2 April 2024. The following addresses were consulted by letter.

12a Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RD

12-14 Castle Street, Poole, Dorset

Sweeney & Todd, 10 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RD

The Sun Ph, 16 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RD

Co-Operative Bank Plc, 34 St Marys Butts, Reading, RG1 2LQ

St Marys Church, 14 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RD

32 St Marys Butts, Reading, RG1 2LS

Flat 2, 32 St Marys Butts, Reading, RG1 2LS

Flat 1, 32 St Marys Butts, Reading, RG1 2LS

No letters of representation have been received.

RBC Conservation Officer - No objections have been raised regarding the proposed change of use.

The proposal does not include any internal or external works to the listed building; as such, no physical change would appear, and the special interest of the building would be preserved. The proposed new use would be separated from the main church building, resulting in very little impact on its use. Therefore, I would raise no objections.

However, I would like to point out that the application is accompanied by the Heritage Statement, which states, "The part of the building which is the subject of this report is not part of the original church. It was added in approximately 1840 to provide a space for a school." And "The church itself is a key focal landmark building within the Conservation area.

The rear halls cannot be seen from Castle Street and do not contribute to the wider street scene. (...) The school extension to the building added in around 1840 is functional in its design but lacking any architectural or artistic significance.”



Footprint of the listed church in 1853

It should be noted that the footprint of the church had not changed significantly since 1840 when the school was added to it, and it constitutes part of the original footprint and significance. The fact that the halls are not visible from the public realm does not mean that any proposal can be acceptable; it would still impact the character of the conservation area and listed fabric. In addition, the school building still has its historic fixtures, such as panelling, fireplaces, and stairs; it does not lack any significance but shows the mutuality/close relationship between religious and educational use.

The church hall appears to be capable of being converted into the new use without substantial work or modification in relation to fire & safety, physical barriers, sub-division of spaces, floor loading and/or sound insulation. There would be no impact on the conservation area as no external work is proposed. Therefore, the proposed change of use would be in accordance with the Council Policies EN1 and EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

RBC Environmental Protection - No objections subject to a condition requiring a vermin proof bin store

RBC Transport - No objections subject to conditions. The proposal would result in a negligible increase of vehicle trips.

RBC Accessibility officer - It is not possible to comment as the building would remain inaccessible due to internal steps and narrow corridors, the constraints of the layout of the listed building and concerns relating to works that could impact the fabric of the listed building.

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework 2023

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

CC9: SECURING INFRASTRUCTURE

EN1: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

EN3: ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS

EN15: AIR QUALITY

TR1: ACHIEVING THE TRANSPORT STRATEGY

TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS

TR4: CYCLE ROUTES AND FACILITIES

TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

OU1: NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES

RL1: NETWORK AND HIERARCHY OF CENTRES

RL3: VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF SMALLER CENTRES

SPG/SPD

Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

Residential Conversions (2013)

Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

Other Local Documents & other relevant documents/guidance

St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b).

6. APPRAISAL

Use Class

Legislation changed in 2020, with the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 2020.

Previously, non-residential educational uses fell within Use Class D1, which covered crèches, day nurseries, day centres, schools and any use for the provision of education including non-residential education and training centres. Also in this class were surgeries and clinics, libraries, museums, art galleries, public halls and religious uses. As such the proposed use

would have fallen within the same use class, no material changes would have occurred, with no planning permission required.

The Use Classes Order subsequently changed which has split the previous class D1 into two different classes. Public worship or religious instruction now falls under F1 (f), whilst crèches and day nurseries are now under Class E (f).

Churches and educational establishments now require planning permission for a change of use for nursery or day care use. Therefore a planning application is required to change the building to a mixed use Place of Worship and crèche.

Policy OU1 states that 'Proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site', subject to other policies in the plan. The existing use of St Mary's Church and chapel is not being utilised to its potential capacity.

There is a need for additional childcare in Reading as shown in the [Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-2023](#) as the site is located within one of the most populated areas in Reading. The application is supported by the RBC Brighter Futures for Children team as it is a key priority for the local authority is to increase the supply of childcare in Reading to ensure that the market can respond to the growth in demand.

Impact of the change of use on the Listed Building and Conservation area

EN1 Protection and enhancement of the historic environment requires that 'historic features, area of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their setting will be protected and where possible enhanced.'

Grade II* Listing 1113427

Official 'Summary' of the listing

Evangelist chapel of 1798 by R Billing, with embellishment and extension by N Briant around 1840 and further alterations in the late C19 and mid- to late C20.

Official 'Group value' of the listing

** the church is of considerable importance to Castle Street which has many other listed buildings, including the Grade II*-listed, number 15 (National Heritage List for England entry 1303734) which stands opposite.*

The application site is a Grade II* listed building, Church of St Mary, located within the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area. The proposed change of use is for the church halls - former school extension to the main church building.

The proposals are solely for change of use and no external or internal works are proposed to the listed building. St Mary's Church and church hall currently provide religious services for the congregation and the change of use of the building, proposed to improve the future viability of the use and maintenance of the building, would not materially impact upon the listed building and its significance.

In terms of impact on Conservation Area, the entrance to the church hall will remain as existing, along the side entrance to the right of the church. The change of use would not have a material impact on the character of the St Mary's Butts Conservation area and is in keeping with previous uses at the site.

The proposal would preserve the character of the St Marys Butts Conservation Area in accordance with Policy EN1. The Local Authority has therefore discharged their duties under the relevant section of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

If any future changes are required as a result of the change in use of the building that would affect the fabric of the listed building, an application for Listed Building Consent would be required. Any future signage proposed would need to be in keeping with the character of the Conservation Area and would also require separate applications for Listed Building Consent and Advertisement Consent.

Impact on local amenity

Policy CC8 states that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties in terms of noise and disturbance.

The proposed change of use of the church hall is not considered to have any significant impact on neighbouring residential amenity given the small scale nature of the nursery provision proposed which would operate during daytime hours only. The site is located within the town centre and is predominantly surrounded by commercial premises. The nearest residential accommodation is at first floor level above business premises on St Mary's Butts and along Church Street. Conditions relating to the proposed hours of use and maximum number of children attending the proposed children's nursery/ day care are recommended to protect local residents from unreasonable disturbance arising from the proposed use.

Transport

Policies TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway related matters), TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking related matters relating to development.

The site is located within the Reading Central Area and within Reading's primary shopping area which is an area at the very heart of Reading Borough, consisting primarily of retail and commercial office developments. The site is in a key central location and in close proximity to Reading rail station and the main shopping area. The Site has good walking, cycling and public transport connectivity offering sustainable forms of transport. Castle Street is also a red route and extensive parking restrictions are present around the site.

Due to the constraints of the site, there is no existing or proposed on-site parking. Given the site's sustainable location, good walking, cycling and public transport connectivity providing a choice of travel to reach the site and access to a number of public car parks and on street pay and display bays that surround the site, a car free development is acceptable in this instance. The proposal would result in a negligible increase of vehicle trips.

The nursery will operate between 07:30 - 18:30 Monday to Friday, nursery drop off will be at 08:45 and pick up will be at 17:30, with early drop off at 07:30 and late pick up until 18:30. The nursery will have a maximum capacity of 35 children with 8 members of staff.

In accordance with Council's current adopted standards and based on staffing and pupil numbers stated above, cycle parking should be provided at a rate of 1 per 2 FTE staff, this equates to 4 spaces, these would need to be provided in a secure and covered location. Retention of the existing cycle rack is recommended to be secured as a condition.

A private refuse collection is proposed to continue, with bins stored on site, additional details to be provided regarding refuse and recycling storage and collection are recommended as a condition. Vermin proof measures would be required. A highways informative is also recommended.

Accessibility

The layout of the listed building does not appear to be very suitable for wheelchair users due to narrow areas and internal steps. No internal changes are proposed. Accessibility is a requirement for policy CC7.

Other issues

Separate approval is likely to be required from Reading Brighter Futures childcare team and OFSTED approval should be sought.

7. CONCLUSION

The existing community use is supported by Policy OU1 as the overall benefits of an intensification of use would not result in harm to the character or fabric of the listed building or the St Mary Butts conservation area due to the scale of nursery provision and lack of external and internal changes proposed. The change of use complies with Policies EN1 and EN3. On balance, it is recognised that although parts of the building are inaccessible, the benefits of the additional provision would outweigh other constraints.

The proposed development has been assessed as set out above and is considered to be acceptable on that basis, subject to the following conditions.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve

Subject to the following conditions:

1. Time limit
2. Approved plans
3. Retention of cycle storage
4. Pre-occupation submission and approval of refuse and recycling storage and collection and Vermin control measures
5. Hours of use of the nursery/ day care
6. Maximum number of children