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Planning Statement (incorporating Flood Risk Assessment)

Narrowboat, Blakes Lock, Reading, RG1 3EQ

Proposed change of use of the existing public house to a kitchen training facility for a temporary period of up to two years

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Walsingham Planning has been instructed by Fuller Smith and Turner PLC to submit an application for planning permission for a temporary change of use at the Narrowboat public house, Blakes Lock, Reading.

1.2 This Planning Statement is submitted in support of the application for planning permission, which seeks a change of use of the existing public house to a kitchen training facility for a temporary period of up to two years, after which, the existing public house will return to its former permanent use.

1.3 The Narrowboat public house is a popular destination for visitors to this area which also accommodates bookings for private wedding parties and events within its attractive and historic interior.

1.4 The proposed development will assist the business with its training and development agenda and its sustainability agenda, by providing opportunities for learning and development in a practical and accessible environment, without affecting the long-term viability of the public house as an important community and leisure facility within this part of Reading.

1.5 This statement will describe the site and surroundings, will include a review of its planning history and relevant designations, and will describe the proposed development and assess the proposals against relevant planning policy in terms of planning impacts.

1.6 This application submission comprises a comprehensive set of plans, together with the following supporting documents which should be read alongside this Planning Statement:

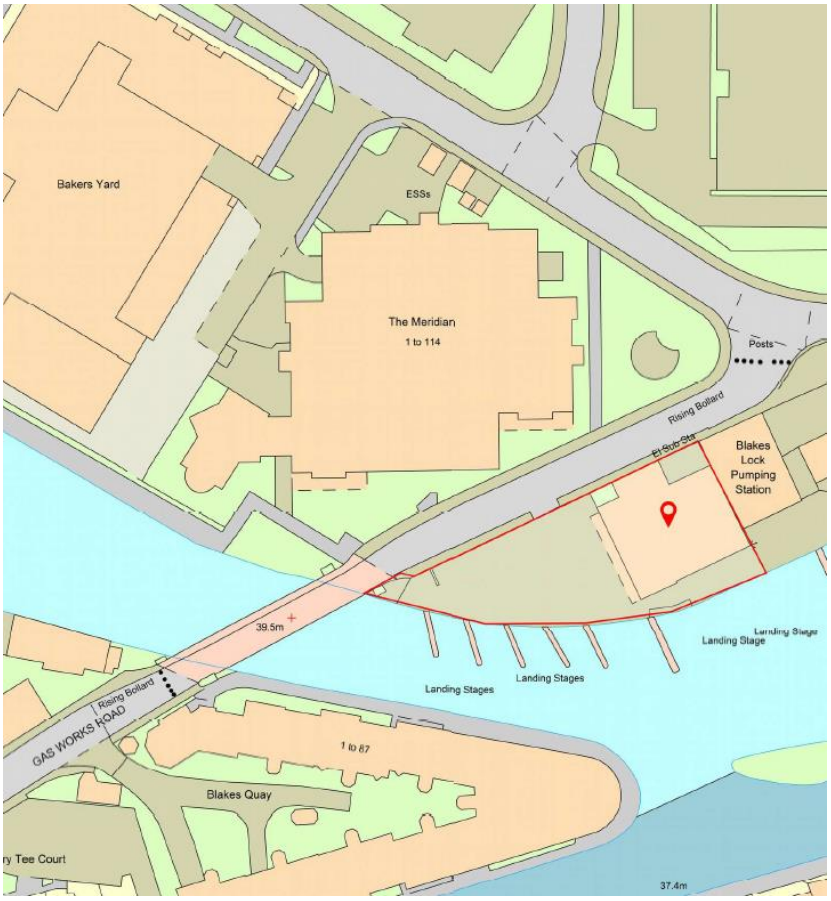
- Application Form
- Cover Letter
- Planning Statement including Flood Risk Assessment
- Site Location Plan - Promap
- Existing Ground Floor Plan Drawing No 3719/01 01
- Existing First Floor Plan Drawing No 3719/01 02
- Existing Elevations Drawing No 3719/01 03 Rev A
- Proposed Ground Floor Plan Drawing No 3719/01 04
- Proposed First Floor Plan Drawing No 3719/01 05
- Proposed Elevations Drawing No 3719/01 06 Rev A

- CIL Form

1.7 It is concluded that the proposals would accord with the Development Plan such that temporary planning permission should be granted.

2 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

2.1 The application site is formed of two adjoining buildings occupied by the Narrowboat public house and restaurant. The buildings are located on the south side of Gas Works Road in Reading, and there is a large car parking area to the west.



Above – Site Location plan with site outlined in red

2.2 The site is outlined in red in the site location plan above.

2.3 The site is also part of a historic grouping of Grade II Listed buildings and sits on the riverfront of the River Kennet.

2.4 The site does not sit within a conservation area.

2.5 The restaurant comprises the original Engine House which is Grade II Listed and has an upper mezzanine floor level occupied by additional restaurant seating. This building was built circa. 1870 and is adjoined to the east by the Pump and Turbine House and Screens House, which are currently occupied by a museum.

Above – View of river front access to adjacent Museum

2.6 The more modern attached two-storey timber clad building to the east is occupied by the Narrowboat's bar area, kitchen, and ancillary storerooms. This building also has an upper floor comprising ancillary bedrooms.

Above – View of river front entrance to the application site and more modern timber clad building to the east, which sits immediately adjacent to the car park

2.7 The site is located within an area of flood risk and classified by the Environment Agency as being within Flood Zone 3.

Above – View of application site from Gas Works Road

Above – Google Earth Image of the site with site outlined in red

Planning History

2.8 The following planning permissions and listed building consents are relevant to this site:

- 010817 – Part change of use to restaurant (A3) demolition of existing industrial sheds and retention, extension and refurbishment of museum buildings – Granted 5 March 2002

- 030242 – Erection of 3-metre high timber gates – Granted 23 June 2003

- 161260 – Proposed change of use at first floor to create five guest bedrooms and associated external alterations – Granted subject to S106 agreement 14 June 2017

3 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 This planning statement supports an application for the temporary change of use for the existing public house to a kitchen and training facility, for a period of two years.

3.2 The proposed temporary change of use will facilitate the creation of an enhanced facility to offer training and development which will protect the viability of the business. The kitchen training facility will be open from 9AM until 5PM Monday to Friday and will be closed on weekends and bank holidays.

3.3 The proposed kitchen training facility will not be operated outside of these hours and will only be used for a maximum of 11 members of staff at any one time. This is not envisaged to be a course led facility which is structured around terms. The facility will be used on an ad hoc basis based on the needs of the wider business.

3.4 The proposed kitchen will be used as a training facility for new and existing chefs within the business and to teach them additional skills used in cooking particular dishes.

3.5 The existing permanent use of the site will be retained in line with Policy RL6 of the Reading Local Plan and the temporary change of use does not include any change to the internal layout of the building and therefore will not affect any of its historic fabric.

4 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

4.1 This section of the statement sets out the relevant planning policies at national and local level, as well as any other documents which are material planning considerations.

4.2 Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that "*if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes 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*". Any issue that relates to the use and development of land is capable of being a material planning consideration.

Development Plan

4.3 The Development Plan includes the Reading Local Plan (adopted 4 November 2019) and the relevant policies are summarised below.

Reading Local Plan

4.4 Local Plan Policy CC1, Presumption in favour of sustainable development states that a positive approach to considering development proposals will be taken that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. Where possible, the policy advocates that the Council will work proactively with applicants to jointly find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible.

4.5 The Local Plan Policy CC7, Design and the Public Realm states that all development must be of a high-quality design that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The policy says that developments must respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough.

4.6 Policy EN1, Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment states that listed buildings and their settings will be protected and where possible enhanced. The policy states that proposals which affect listed buildings shall not have an adverse impact on those elements which contribute to their special architectural or historic interest, including where appropriate, their setting.

4.7 Policy RL1 of the Local Plan, Network and Hierarchy of Centres, states that the vitality and viability of the regional centre of Reading should be maintained and enhanced. The same policy also aims to broaden the range of facilities within the regional centre of Reading.

4.8 Policy RL2 of the Local Plan, Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure, and Cultural Development states that main town centre leisure and cultural development will take place within or as an extension to the town centre of Reading, in order to enhance and maintain vitality and viability.

4.9 Policy RL6, Protection of Leisure Facilities and Public Houses, states that existing leisure facilities or public houses will generally be retained, and there is a strong presumption in favour of retaining leisure facilities or public houses where they are the only facilities of their type in a district, major local or local centre. The policy also states that developments that result in a loss of a leisure facility or public house will not be permitted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there is no need for this type of facility in the area, the function of the facility can be adequately fulfilled by an existing facility, or a facility proposed as part of the development, where the facility would be at least as accessible to the same catchment.

4.10 Policy CR11, Station/River Major Opportunity Area states that development in this area will contribute towards providing a high density mix of uses to create a destination in itself and capitalise on its role as one of the most accessible locations in the south east, and that development for education will be an acceptable part of that mix.

4.11 Policy CR13, East Side Major Opportunity Area, states that development within this area will provide a defined urban environment, conserve and enhance listed buildings, and demonstrate that it is part of a comprehensive approach to the sub-area, which does not prevent neighbouring sites from fulfilling the aspirations of the policy.

National Planning Policy Framework

4.12 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012. A revised version of the NPPF was published in July 2021, and various updates have followed the latest of which was in December 2023, with minor amendments incorporated. The NPPF is supplemented by the (ever evolving) Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), first published in March 2014.

4.13 Paragraph 8 of the Framework explains that sustainable development comprises three overarching objectives:

- An economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy;
- A social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities;
- An environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.

4.14 Paragraph 10 confirms that the presumption in favour of sustainable development is at the heart of the Framework in order to ensure that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way.

4.15 Chapter 6 of the NPPF: Building a Strong, competitive economy states (at Paragraph 85) that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future.

4.16 Chapter 7 of the NPPF: Ensuring the vitality of town centres, states that planning policies and decisions should support the role which town centres play at the heart of local communities by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and their adaptation. This approach should define a network of town centres which promotes town centres and their long-term vitality and viability, allowing them to grow and diversify in a way which can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries.

4.17 Chapter 8 of the NPPF: Promoting healthy and safe communities (Paragraphs 96 and 97) state that planning policies should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction including opportunities for meetings between people, and planning positively for the provision of community facilities such as public houses. The policy states that established facilities should be able to develop and modernise whilst being retained for the benefit of a community.

4.18 Chapter 12 of the NPPF: Achieving well-designed places (Paragraph 131) states that "The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve…" and goes on to state (Paragraph 135) that "…planning policies should ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of development".

5 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

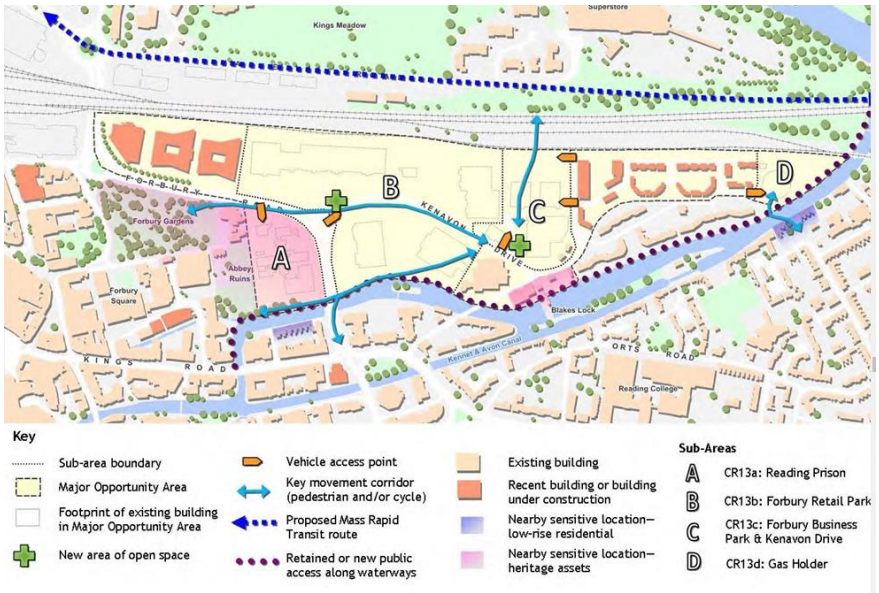
Principle of Development

5.1 The proposal will promote sustainable development by supporting the building's continued use as a public house and providing a temporary use as a kitchen and training facility for a period of up to two years, after which the use will revert back to a restaurant ancillary to the public house.

5.2 The buildings will remain within the ownership of our client throughout the temporary period and thereafter. This will allow for the protection of the existing public house use for the benefit of the local community and will protect the contribution that the existing public house makes to the vitality of this part of Reading, and the viability of the town centre as a whole.

5.3 The proposal will support the growth and development needs of the business and cater for additional jobs whilst retaining the current layout of the restaurant and retaining the function and vitality of this part of Blakes Lock.

5.4 The site sits outside of the Station and Riverside Opportunity Area identified in Policy CR11 of the Local Plan but, is a 15-minute walk from the railway station. The site is located entirely within the East Side Major Opportunity Area as indicated in the plan below and as identified as an important location for development in Policy CR13 of the Local Plan.



Above – Extract from Local Plan Policy CR13 showing the connectivity of the site and the subject site at the western edge of the area highlighted pink

5.5 The above extract from the Reading Local Plan highlights the areas of development within Policy CR13 and demonstrates the vitality and accessibility of the site along with its importance as a grouping of historic buildings.

5.6 The potential of the buildings is not currently being maximised and these improvements will assist the business in promoting its use as a place of vitality within Reading and Blakes Lock.

5.7 The proposal will also allow the business to diversify with a new educational facility which will protect and enhance the development of its employees and will foster its sustainability objectives by making the best use of this site for an interim and temporary period.

5.8 The area is bound to the north by the Reading Local Plan allocated development site within Policy CR13c 'Kenavon Drive and Forbury Business Park', and the site is also closeby to a number of sites for development, as identified in Policy ER1, East Reading.

5.9 In summary, this location supports the use of the site as a kitchen training facility, because it would protect its long-term public house use, will retain the thriving vitality of this part of Reading as an important location for businesses and visitors, and will continue to protect and adhere to the aims of sustainable development as set out in Policies CC1, CR11 and CR13 of the Local Plan.

5.10 The Local Plan has a strong presumption in favour of retaining public houses where they are the only facility of this type in a district, major or local centre. Notwithstanding the location of the site adjacent to the town centre where there are a number of other public house uses, the proposal will retain the permanent use of the site as an existing public house within this area and will be in line with Paragraph 97 of the National Framework, and Policy RL6 of the Local Plan.

Size and Scale

5.11 There would be no change to the scale of the existing building and no change to its elevations as part of the proposals.

5.12 The proposal is for a change of use only and will not affect the exterior or interior of the building. As such the proposals will conserve and protect the design and public realm of the site, in line with Policies CC1 and CC7 of the Local Plan.

Residential Amenity and Noise

5.13 The use of the building as a kitchen and training facility will not harm the residential amenities of nearby occupiers. The closest residential occupiers to the site are on the opposite side of Gas Works Road and since the proposals will not increase the customer offering of the site or increase the intensity of its use there will be no harm in terms of noise and no disturbance to neighbours.

Flood Risk Assessment

5.14 According to the Government's flood map for planning, the whole of the site lies within Flood Zone 3 and has a high probability of flooding. However, the use of the site falls within the NPPG's 'less vulnerable' classification where an exception test is not required. Further, the proposal represents a 'minor development' in flood risk terms (non-residential, and not in excess of 250sqm. of additional floorspace).

5.15 As confirmed by the National Planning Practice Guidance, minor developments are unlikely to raise significant flood risk issues.

5.16 The vulnerability classification of the use will not be altered as part of the proposals and there will be no adverse impact on flood risk as part of the proposals.

Summary

5.17 The proposed temporary change of use will allow for the building to accommodate a kitchen and training facility for a temporary period to suit the needs of the business and ensure that the venue is able to develop and modernise in a sustainable way. The proposal will do this whilst retaining its long-term use as a community facility and promoting healthy and safe communities in line with Paragraph 97 of the National Framework.

5.18 The proposed development will allow the public house to continue with a use consistent with its conservation, whilst making a positive contribution to the economic vitality of the community and contributing to local character and distinctiveness of this part of Reading.

5.19 The proposals would not affect the high-quality design of the existing building in line with the NPPF (2024) and would support the aims of the Reading Local Plan.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 This application seeks planning permission for a temporary change of use which will retain the attraction of the Narrowboat public house as a well-known public house, improving the viability and training needs of the business with an enhanced offering of a kitchen and training facility. The existing floorspace will be converted back to its former use following the two-year period and its permanent function and use as a public house will not be altered.

6.2 The change of use will continue to protect the vitality and long-term use of the public house as a community and leisure facility in the long term in line with the National Framework and with Policy RL6 of the Local Plan.

6.3 The proposal will contribute to sustainable development by adapting to the needs of the business and protecting the vitality and viability of Reading in line with the National Framework and Policies CC1, RL1 and RL2 of the Reading Local Plan.

6.4 Further, the proposal will assist the Borough in promoting the adjacent Station and River Major Opportunity Area as a destination in itself, and the East Side Major Opportunity Area, assisting how the Borough can capitalise on its role as an accessible area for education and development. The proposal therefore also aligns with Policies CR11 and CR13 of the Local Plan.

6.5 The proposal will also protect the defined urban environment in this area and the significance and setting of the existing building as a heritage asset, in line with the National Framework and in line with the Reading Local Plan.

6.6 In summary, the proposal will contribute to sustainable development for this part of Reading and for the business, will seek to ensure the viability of an important existing use, and will support the vitality of an accessible and iconic area.

6.7 This application is therefore recommended to Reading Borough Council for approval.