

18th April 2024

Delivered by email

Planning Department
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

Ref: HAMS3032

Dear Sir/Madam,

FULL PLANNING APPLICATION FOR MINOR ALTERATIONS TO EXTERNAL ELEVATION OF FORMER HOUSE OF FRASER DEPARTMENT STORE AND THE REMOVAL OF GLASS ATRIUM AT ROOFTOP LEVEL OF HOLYBROOK CAR PARK, THE ORACLE, READING

On behalf of our client, Oracle Limited Partnership, we are pleased to submit a full planning application for the removal of the glass atrium at the rooftop level of Holybrook Car Park, the Oracle Shopping Centre Reading (hereafter referred to as 'the site'), and subsequent surface works to create additional car parking spaces as well as minor alterations to the external elevations of the former House of Fraser. These works are associated with the sub-division of the department store floorspace, to create 3 no. commercial units.

SITE CONTEXT

The Oracle shopping centre is located within the defined 'Reading Central Area' and is bound to the west by Bridge Street, to the south by the River Kennet and to the east by Yield Hall Place.

The former House of Fraser department store is sited at the western end of the shopping centre. The department store ceased trading in 2023 and work is underway to sub-divide the unit to create 2 no. Retail units, one each at Upper Mall and Lower Mall levels and a leisure unit at Riverside level.

The glass atrium, to which this application relates, is located at the rooftop level of Holybrook carpark at the Oracle Shopping Centre in Reading town centre. The glass atrium previously provided rooftop access and weather protection for a set of escalators within the former House of Fraser unit below.

The car park comprises approximately 595 spaces which includes 37 disabled and 23 family spaces as well as 6 electric vehicle charging spaces and car washing facilities.

The Pinnacle
20 Tudor Road
Reading

T 0118 902 2830 [turley.co.uk](https://www.turley.co.uk)

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

This application proposes the removal of the existing glass atrium located on the rooftop level of Holybrook Car park which contains a set of escalators, providing access to the former House of Fraser department store unit at the Oracle Shopping Centre. In addition, the proposals seek to make minor changes to the external elevations of the former department store unit associated with the sub-division of the floorspace and reoccupation by other new occupiers.

The proposed description of development is as follows:

“Demolition of a glass atrium at rooftop level of the Holybrook car park and infilling of the existing opening, all to create 10 new car parking spaces, together with the reconfiguration of entrance points at Riverside level and associated works.”

As part of the sub-division of the House of Fraser department store, the escalator core will be removed in order to create three no standalone units, one each across each Riverside, Lower Mall and Upper Mall levels. The escalator opening will then be filled in at each level to create ceiling / floors for each unit, including at Upper Mall level where the escalator reaches the car park. As such, it is considered necessary to remove the glass atrium, rather than leave an enclosed void space at rooftop level and reutilise this space for additional car parking. As demonstrated on the submitted plans it is proposed to provide an additional 10 standard car parking bays in place of the removed atrium.

It should be noted that the existing lift core through the former department store floorspace is retained through the sub-division. Public access from the rooftop car park via this lift to the shopping centre below will remain. The existing car park escape stair will also remain in situ, along with all other points of access located at the rooftop level of the car park.

It is recognised that planning condition no. 38 attached to the main Oracle planning permission (ref. 230682) requires pedestrian routes from the car park shown on the specified approved plans to be retained. This escalator access point is specified on an approved plan in respect of condition no. 38. Following discussions with Officers, a S96a application will be required to regularise the works proposed through this application and associated amendments to plans approved with the ongoing operation of the Oracle permission (230682). The proposed S96a submission will also include details and amendments resulting from this permission on respective conditions 37 (Access to Public Highway) and 49 (CCTV) of permission ref. 230682.

The proposed development also seeks to make minor changes to the Bridge Street and Riverside elevations at ground floor level, in association with the reoccupation of the former House of Fraser unit by new occupiers. On the Riverside elevation, this includes relocating an entrance area for the Riverside level unit, through replacing an existing set of entrance doors with shopfront glazing and providing a new set of entrance doors within an existing area of glazing.

The proposal also seeks to alter the entrance to the unit currently utilised by Yo Sushi. With the existing shopfront the entrance doors will be relocated, with new automatic bi-parting entrance doors will be installed. The existing doors will be replaced with glazing. Further, the existing balustrading to the front of the entrance area demarcating the level change will also be replaced.

New doors will also be installed within the Bridge Street elevation of the unit to provide access to new internal sub-station installed to serve the repurposed department store floorspace. These doors will not be accessible to the general public.

Further details of the proposals are provided on the application plans which accompany this application.

PLANNING POLICY

In accordance with the provisions of Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, any planning application on the Site needs to be considered against the provisions of the adopted Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In this case, the Development Plan currently comprises Reading Borough Council Local Plan (adopted November 2019) and Proposals Map (adopted November 2019).

Reading Borough Council Local Plan (2019)

The following policies contained within the Local Plan are considered most relevant to the determination of this planning application:

- **Policy CC7: Design and Public Realm** – states that 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 various components of development form – layout, landscape, density and mix, scale, architectural detail and materials are assessed to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to urban design.
- **Policy CR2: Design in Central Reading** – states that architectural details and materials used in the central area should be high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials in areas local to the development site. In addition, it states that development should be designed with consideration of adjacent development sites and should not prevent or cause unreasonable burdens on the future development of those sites. Moreover, the policy requires development to be designed to enhance community safety.
- **Policy CR7: Designated Primary frontage in Central Reading:** New developments (or alterations to existing uses) that front onto any of the designated primary frontages will provide an active building frontage with a display window or glazed frontage at ground floor level, in order to contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre and provide visual interest.
- **Policy TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy** – the supporting text for this policy outlines that one of the Council's objectives for transport is to improve personal safety on the transport network (paragraph 4.5.1).

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023)

The NPPF was revised in December 2023 and outlines national planning policy for England. It is a material consideration in the determination of this planning application.

The following paragraphs of the NPPF are considered most relevant to the proposed development:

- **Paragraph 10** outlines that at the heart of the Framework is a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'.
- **Paragraph 11** states that development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development should be approved without delay.

- **Paragraph 90** highlights that planning decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation.
- **Paragraph 96** emphasises that planning decisions should aim to achieve inclusive and safe places promote social interaction through street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections, and active street frontages.
- **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. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Design

The design of the proposed development has been guided by the principles in the above guidance resources.

The proposed development will provide an additional 10 parking spaces, in place of the existing glass atrium. The surface of the new car parking area will be repainted with a grey base (RAL 7037) and the individual parking bays will be painted in dark grey (RAL 7021) to mimic the existing layout. The pedestrian walkways, crossings and accessible parking bays will be painted in blue (RAL 5017) to provide a clear contrast.

This is consistent with the existing material palette at the rooftop parking and will ensure that the new car parking spaces will integrate into the existing car park arrangement.

The changes to the ground floor façade of the building are simply to reconfigure the entrance points into the unit and are considered to provide better placement of access points to the unit along the Riverside frontage. The level of glazing and active frontage will be unchanged as a result of the proposal and is therefore considered in accordance with Policy CR7 of the Reading Local Plan. The materials of the new entrance doors are sympathetic to the existing and the glazing proposed to be installed in place of the existing entrance doors will also match the existing façade. In light of the above, it is considered that the removal of the atrium and re-surfacing of the area and the proposed façade changes are acceptable and in accordance with Paragraph 131 of the NPPF and the requirements of Policies CC7 and CR2 which necessitates high quality design that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of Reading.

Principle

As set out above, the demolition of the rooftop enclosure is a result of the removal of the escalator core within the former House of Fraser department store unit associated with planning permission ref. 230682 and the subdivision of floorspace to attract individual occupiers at each level. Retaining the enclosure following the removal of the escalator core would result in an enclosed void space on the rooftop level, which would have ongoing maintenance issues and would not be an effective use of space.

Importantly, the proposal will not affect the existing use of the car park. The additional 10 parking spaces will be provided without impacting upon the existing circulation or layout of the car park.

As aforementioned, Holybrook carpark currently comprises 595 car parking spaces. The proposed development seeks to provide 10 additional parking bays, equating to only a 1.7% increase in the overall provision, presenting a negligible increase in spaces to serve the Oracle Shopping Centre.

The provision of the additional parking spaces will not result in additional vehicle trips/movements as they will continue to only be utilised by people using the shopping centre. The very limited uplift in car parking spaces would not facilitate a level of additional vehicle trips that would cause adverse impacts to the existing highways around the shopping centre, nor impact upon traffic flows around the car park.

With regards to the changes to the façade of the building, importantly, the proposed development will retain the same number of entrance doors on the building, but the placement of these will be enhanced and facilitate engagement with the streetscene. The proposals will not have any further impact the existing streetscene arrangement on Bridge Street and the design is considered to be sympathetic to the existing building.

Visual Impact

Due to the very minor scale of the proposed development, it is considered that the proposed works will not have an adverse visual impact on the surrounding built environment. Due to the position of the glazed atrium on the rooftop, it is not visible at street level from either Bridge Street or Riverside walkway. Visibility of the atrium is only within the rooftop parking area itself. As such, the impact of the proposal upon the streetscene will be negligible.

Following the demolition of the glazed enclosure, the opening to the retail unit below will be infilled. At rooftop level, this will be surfaced to match that of the existing car parking area and therefore the new car parking spaces will seamlessly integrate with the existing parking arrangement at this level.

The proposed changes to the façade of the building are also considered to have a very limited visual impact. The proposal will result in the same number of access points to the building, but better placed, and the materials chosen are sympathetic to the existing. As such, it is also considered that the façade changes will have a negligible impact upon the streetscene.

The new doors on the Bridge Street elevation are designed to minimise visual impact and match existing escape and back of house access points around the shopping centre. Overall, it is considered that the proposed development accords with the requirements of Policies CC7 and CR2 of the adopted Local Plan and Paragraph 131 of the NPPF.

CONCLUSION

The proposal has been designed in line with national and local policy requirements. The proposal is in response to the repurposing works to the former House of Fraser unit and would not cause any adverse visual impact on the appearance of the car park itself and on the wider townscape.

Overall, the application demonstrates that there are no adverse impacts which significantly and demonstrably outweigh the planning benefits. It is therefore concluded that, for the reasons outlined in the covering letter, there is a compelling case in favour of the grant of planning permission.

APPLICATION DOCUMENTATION

In accordance with Reading Borough Council's validation requirements, the following documents in the table below are submitted in support of this application.

Document	Reference
Application Forms	PP-12824058
Site Location Plan	2216-URB-LR-37-DR-A-208900 Rev P00
General Arrangement Car Park Level 2 As Proposed	2216-URB-ZZ-58-DR-A-420150 Rev P00
Car Park Level 2 As Existing	2216-URB-LR-58-DR-A-208100 Rev P00
General Sections as Proposed	2216-URB-LR-XX-DR-A-208350 Rev C00
Elevations as Existing	2216-URB-LR-XX-DR-A-208200 Rev P00
Elevations as Proposed	2216-URB-LR-XX-DR-A-208250 Rev P01
Sections as Existing	2216-URB-LR-XX-DR-A-208300 Rev P00
Riverside Level as Existing	2216-URB-LR-37-DR-A-208100 Rev P00
General Arrangement Riverside Level As Proposed	2216-URB-LR-27-DR-A-208150 Rev P00

The requisite planning application fee of £363 has been paid via the Planning Portal.

We trust that the above information and the submitted documents are satisfactory and we look forward to receiving acknowledgement of our submission and its validation. Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleague Cat White (cat.white@turley.co.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Amelia Harford
Assistant Planner

amelia.harford@turley.co.uk