

**DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT - Application No. 210588/FUL**

**Address:** 59 Gloucester Road, Reading

**Proposal:** Erection of 2 new dwellings

**Case Officer:** Ethne Humphreys

**Determination Date:** 10/06/2021; EOT agreed until 01/5/2024

**Site Description and Surrounding Area:**

The site relates to land to the east of a detached building located on the south west side of Gloucester Road, on the corner bend of the road. The existing building has most recently been in use as a photographic studio. There is a change in site levels and the land slopes from the south to the north. The site is within an Air Quality Management Area.

**Proposal:**

The application seeks planning permission for the erection of 2 x 4 bed houses.

The proposals include soft landscaping and biodiversity enhancements and each house would have 1 car parking space.

The proposed materials would include:

Dark grey zinc roof

Horizontal and vertical timber boarding

Grey powder coated aluminium

**Plans Considered:**

Proposed Site/First Floor Plan 315-GLR-P-021 Rev D

Proposed Site/Ground Floor Plan (CMS) 315-GLR-P-020 Rev D

Proposed Ground Floor Plan House 1 and 2 20057-BWT-A1-XX-DR-A-GR-0001

Proposed First Floor Plan House 1 and 2 20057-BWT-A1-XX-DR-A-GR-0002

Proposed Roof Plan House 1 and 2 20057-BWT-A1-XX-DR-A-GR-0003

Proposed North and West Elevations House 1 20057-BWT-A1-XX-DR-A-GR-0007 Rev PO4

Proposed South and East Elevations House 1 20057-BWT-A1-XX-DR-A-GR-0008 Rev PO4

Proposed North and East Elevations House 2 20057-BWT-A1-XX-DR-A-GR-0009 Rev PO2

Proposed South and West Elevations House 2 20057-BWT-A1-XX-DR-A-GR-0010 Rev PO2

Received 30th April 2024

Location Plan 315-GLR-P-001 Rev C

Received 15th April 2021

**Relevant Planning History:**

None relevant.

Pre-application advice was sought under reference 201078 and 181388.

**Consultation Responses:**

Natural Environment: Further to revised information, no objection subject to conditions. Discussed further below.

Transport: Further to revised information, no objection subject to condition. Discussed further below.

Ecology: No objection subject to conditions.

Environmental Protection: No comments received.

Nearby neighbouring properties were sent letters 21st May 2021 and a site notice was displayed.

6 neighbour letters of support received, comments summarised:

- Well considered design that blends in, good use of materials
- Good juxtaposition between original building and contemporary design
- Good size, sensitive, not overdevelopment
- Passivhaus standards positive for Reading / climate change
- Unused site back into positive use
- Sense of safety to area

#### **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.

#### **Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance**

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) which states at Paragraph 11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

National Planning Policy Framework 2023

National Planning Policy Guidance 2014 onwards

The relevant sections of the NPPF are:

Section 2 - Achieving Sustainable Development

Section 9 - Promoting Sustainable Transport

Section 11 - Making Effective Use of Land

Section 12 - Achieving Well-Designed and Beautiful Places

Section 14 - Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change

## Section 15 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

### Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development  
CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction  
CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change  
CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage  
CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development  
CC7: Design and the Public Realm  
CC8: Safeguarding Amenity  
EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network  
EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland  
EN15: Air Quality  
EN16: Pollution and Water Resources  
H1: Provision of Housing  
H2: Density and Mix  
H3: Affordable Housing  
H5: Standards for New Housing  
H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space  
H11: Development of Private and Residential Gardens  
TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy  
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters  
TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging

### Supplementary Planning Guidance

Revised Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)  
Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)  
Affordable Housing SPD (2021)  
Section 106 Planning Obligations SPD (2013)  
Reading Tree Strategy (2021)  
Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (2021)  
National Design Guide: Planning practice for beautiful, enduring and successful places (2019)

### Appraisal

#### Land Use Matters

The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF) seeks to ‘boost significantly the supply of housing’ and deliver a wider range of homes, of different types and tenures. This Framework clearly identifies that planning should promote the efficient use and redevelopment of brownfield land. Although the site is not vacant it seems it has not been used to its potential for some time and as it is located in a predominantly residential area the principle of residential development is considered acceptable subject to meeting the relevant planning policies and other material considerations as detailed below.

Furthermore, it is considered that the principle of providing Class C3 residential use at the site is acceptable in that this aligns with the broad objectives of Policy H1. More specifically, the proposals would assist the Borough in meeting its annual housing targets. The proposal

and mix of 2 x 4 bed houses, set within the context of the size and nature of the site, is considered acceptable and the proposal is considered to make an efficient use of the space/land. It is recommended that a condition is secured whereby no change to the unit mix (2 x 4 bed units) shall be made to the development hereby permitted without written approval from the Local Planning Authority. This is to safeguard the mix altering to potentially unacceptable mixes in the future.

The single storey building on site was previously used as a nursery but was most recently in B1 use as a studio. It is proposed to be used as ancillary office for the houses, which will be secured by way of condition.

### Design Considerations

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) 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 various components of development form, including: Layout: urban structure and urban grain; landscape; density and mix; Scale: height and massing; and Architectural detail and materials”.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2021 details that decisions should ensure that developments are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and are sympathetic to local character including the surrounding built environment.

The National Design Guidance identifies 10 key components for good design and of particular note is the characteristic of ‘Context’ and it states that “well designed new development responds positively to the features of the site itself and the surrounding context beyond the site boundary. It should enhance positive qualities and improve negative ones.” Additionally, there is specific reference to ‘views inwards and outwards’.

Comments made at the pre-application advice stage, as well as feedback from the Reading Design Review Panel, have been taken on board which is welcomed. This has included omission of accommodation within the roof space and reduction in road height; reduced forecourt and enlarged garden/landscaping areas; difference in appearance between the two houses and use of materiality.

Barring the B1 unit to the east, the surrounding area is predominantly residential. The proposal would introduce two dwellings of modern contemporary design that would be built to achieve Passivhaus certification. The proposal has acknowledged the tight parameters of the site which would restrict that actual area of development and officers recognise the consideration to achieving a satisfactory density of development.

The dwellings would be distinctly different in appearance to dwellings in the surrounding area and indeed the existing building on site. However, they would be visually interesting and considered to provide a positive contribution to the area. The height of the dwellings has been reduced since pre-application discussions which is appropriate (omitting roof space accommodation). CGI drawings illustrating the proposals within the street scene have been submitted. Whilst visible from Gloucester Road, the proposed dwellings, when seen from all

nearby vantage points, are not considered to be overwhelming and instead, in this very specific instance, considered to acceptably respond to its context and the constraints of the site. The overall design of the development is considered to create a contemporary but unified scheme, with the proposal considered to provide a good balance between site density and an appropriate layout.

Given the change in site levels and proximity of residential properties on three sides of the site, the positioning of the proposed buildings is understandably/appropriately set away from these properties as far as possible. The layout, however, remains spacious.

The proposals include soft landscaping and tree planting - increased since the pre-application stage, including reduction in car parking spaces - which is considered to significantly improve the overall character of the site and wider area as well make for more positive living environs.

Overall, the proposed development is considered to have a high quality satisfactory design and appearance which would cause no adverse harm to the character and appearance of the area given the location and existing context of neighbouring properties. It would not be excessive in scale and would allow for amenity space, parking space, access and landscaping, whilst also not resulting in a cramped appearance. Indeed, the proposal is considered to strike an appropriate balance between maximising the potential of the site for residential development whilst not representing an overdevelopment of the site in any way. However, officers also acknowledge and consider that the amount of development proposed is the maximum permissible at this site, owing to the site constraints and surrounding characteristics of the immediate area. In compliance with Policy CC7.

#### Impact on Neighbouring Amenity

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) requires developments to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing properties in terms of: Privacy and overlooking; Access to sunlight and daylight; Visual dominance and overbearing; Harm to outlook; Noise and disturbance; Artificial lighting; Vibration; Dust and fumes; Smell; and Crime and safety.

Given the significance distance from the proposed dwellings to boundaries with residential to the north, south and west, no overbearing impacts are considered to arise. Windows to north elevations serving bathrooms would be obscurely glazed which would be secured via condition and would prevent material loss of amenity to properties along Kent Road to the north. Similarly, given distances to site boundaries and from the west elevation of house 2 (as annotated) to the boundary with No's 25a and 25b Kent Road, no significant material overlooking is considered to arise. Similarly, given the distances to site boundaries and from the south elevation of house 1 (as annotated) to the boundary with properties along Tilehurst Road to the south, no significant material overlooking is considered to arise.

In respect of 192 Kensington Road to the north, the number of car parking spaces adjacent the side boundary with this property has reduced since the pre-application stage from 5 to 2 - this is appropriate and no significant material harm is considered to arise in respect of noise and disturbance.

In order to protect neighbouring and nearby amenity it is considered reasonable and necessary to remove permitted development rights in relation to Class A (extensions etc), B (roof additions) and E (outbuildings etc). This is due to the constrained nature of the site, with future potentially unrestricted development potentially harming the amenities of neighbouring properties. For example, this could be through overlooking or being overbearing and harm the appearance of the host dwellings and the area in general. As such, these conditions will ensure this is able to be managed where appropriate.

In addition to the above, it is appropriate to protect the amenity of neighbours during the construction period. A construction method statement has been submitted as part of the application which the development will need to adhere to as a compliance condition - and is required from a highway safety perspective too.

In these circumstances, it is not considered that the proposed development would result in any material overlooking or loss of privacy or amenity for the neighbours given the siting and design of the proposed development, the separation distances between properties, the use of landscaping and the use of obscure glazing where appropriate. As such in overall terms, considering all nearby residential occupiers, no significantly harmful amenity impacts would occur, subject to conditions and in compliance with Policy CC8.

#### Amenity of Future Occupiers

Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) seeks that all new building housing is built to high standards. Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) seeks to protect future occupiers from the impacts of pollution and Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) seeks that residential developments are provided with adequate private or communal outdoor amenity space.

It is considered that the proposals will provide an overall good standard of accommodation throughout with fairly regular shaped rooms meeting the national space standards and providing suitable outlook, natural lighting and ventilation.

The relationship between the two dwellings is considered acceptable given the distance between properties, orientation and position of windows.

Policy H10 deals specifically with private and communal space and requires such space to allow for sitting out, children's play areas, home food production, green waste composting, refuse storage, drying space. *"The design of outdoor spaces will respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity"*. Para 4.4.87 of the RBLP sets out that *"in the past, the Council has sought the following minimum provisions for private or communal outdoor space for each type of accommodation, and they provide a useful guide for proposals: (a) Houses: usable private outdoor space should be no less than the gross floor area of the dwelling to which it relates.."*

Each dwelling would have a generous sized plot, commensurate to the size of the property and with space for cycle and waste storage facilities.

The proposal includes the retention of existing building, which was last in use as a

photographic studio. It is proposed that this would be used as an ancillary home office for the dwellings. A condition is proposed to restrict the building to this effect to prevent any undue noise and disturbance or increased traffic generation.

Overall, the proposals are considered to provide suitable accommodation within the context of the constraints of the site, in line with Policies EN5 and H10 in particular.

#### Natural Environment - Trees/Landscaping

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks that development is of high design quality and maintains and enhances the character of the area in which it is located including landscaping. Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) requires new development to make provision for tree retention and planting.

As above, the site is located within the AQMA where tree planting is of great importance. There is existing vegetation on site; however, the majority of trees on site are self-seeded, young or semi mature and the Council's Natural Environment Officer has confirmed are of poor form (category C of British Standards BS 5837:2023). Furthermore, Sycamore is dominant as a tree species on site and will continue to do so if left to grow unchecked - which is not in line with the aim of the Council's Tree Strategy to diversify tree species in the Borough. Given their random layout within the site and poor form, the tree vegetation is of little biodiversity, wildlife and amenity value. Therefore, it is considered that a well thought out landscape and planting scheme has the potential to greatly improve the site in terms of natural environment.

It is proposed to remove 12 trees to enable development. As above, the Council's Natural Environment Officer has confirmed that this is acceptable as these trees are of low value. The submission proposes substantial planting including native shrubs and flowering and fruit trees. 14 new trees and 16 large shrubs are proposed which is positive and is above and beyond the usual replacement planting requirement ratio of 2:1. Notwithstanding this, the planting specification and schedule, as well as maintenance notes are lacking important details (i.e watering requirement, new trees, shrubs and hedges sizes are not given a unit of measure). It is considered, however, that the specific landscape details can be secured by way of a suitably worded condition.

Notwithstanding the above, the submitted tree survey does include off-site category B trees. The Natural Environment Officer has confirmed that whilst the houses are likely to be outside root protection areas, they could be affected by proposed retaining wall. The applicant has responded that only a minor portion (specified in tree report) of the RPAs extend into the site and that due to age, health and species of these trees they would tolerate the disturbance. Whilst this is recognised, details of the installation of the new retaining wall within the RPAs should be secured to ensure that precautions are taken to avoid any unnecessary damage to the trees' roots. This can be secured by way of condition.

The proposal will result in a net gain in trees across the site which is a benefit. Given this and the above, the proposals are considered acceptable on tree/landscape grounds, subject to conditions, and in compliance with Policy EN14.

### Ecology

Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and The Green Network) requires that new development should provide a net gain for biodiversity where possible and should incorporate biodiversity features into proposals where practical.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been provided which the Council's Ecologist considers has been undertaken to an appropriate standard. Whilst the Ecologist agrees with the conclusion that the works are unlikely to impact upon roosting bats and wildlife, the report notes that some vegetation clearance is to be undertaken to facilitate the works and this should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season (March-August). This will be secured via condition.

The proposed works represent an opportunity for habitat enhancement (and noting net gain in trees) to benefit insects, birds and bats and details securing biodiversity enhancements can be secured by way of a suitably worded condition.

Given the above, the proposals are considered acceptable on ecology grounds, subject to conditions, and in compliance with Policy EN12.

### Impact on Parking/Highways

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

The site is located within the Zone 2, the primary core area but on the periphery of the central core area which lies at the heart of Reading Borough, consisting primarily of retail and commercial office developments with good transport hubs.

In accordance with the Councils standards each dwelling would require 2 off road parking spaces. The studio which measures 71m<sup>2</sup> a minimum would not necessarily require a dedicated parking space.

Policy TR5 requires each new house to be provided with an electric vehicle charging point. This can be secured via condition.

There is no existing vehicular access to this site; plans indicate that an access is proposed directly from Gloucester Road. Transport Officers originally advice was that a minimum of 4.1m would be required to allow 2-way movements in and out of the site. Site visit has been undertaken and there is a distance of 5.2m from the wall and the boundary but the lamp column is within that 5.2m, this takes it to 4.8m but that would be taking it up to the lamp column. A minimum of 1m distance is required from the lamp column and the access which further reduces the space available for access; therefore, the lamp column would need to be relocated if a vehicular access is to be achieved. This relocation cost would be met by the applicant and the appropriate licences required. The above was discussed with the applicant and further to subsequent discussions with the applicant, Transport Officers confirmed that the access width can be accepted in this instance, subject to there being on site turning for all parking spaces and a 1m dedicated footway into the site that leads to the studio. Revised

plans were received illustrating ample width and space to serve the typical manoeuvring needs of a development of this type and scale. The space facilitates vehicles to enter and leave in a forward gear.

The development site is located in an area designated as a Residents Parking Permit Area; Zone 07R. Under the Borough's current parking standards, this proposal would generate additional pressure for parking in the area. Therefore, if this application is approved there should be an assumption that any future occupants of the proposed dwelling will not be issued with a resident parking permit which should be covered by condition and an informative applied. This will ensure that the development does not harm the existing amenities of the neighbouring residential properties by adding to the already high level of on street car parking in the area.

Cycle storage has been illustrated on the submitted block plan for the proposed dwellings at the front of the site, which is acceptable.

Bin storage should not be located further than 15m from the access point of the site to avoid the stationing of service vehicles on the carriageway for excessive periods, and should comply with Manual for Streets and British Standard 5906: 2005 for Waste Management in Buildings to avoid the stationing of service vehicles on the carriageway for excessive periods. Bin storage has been illustrated on plans near the site access and is considered acceptable.

Given the above, the Council's Transport Officer has confirmed that the proposals are considered acceptable in relation to all transport related matters, subject to conditions. It would have been necessary to impose a Construction Method Statement (CMS), as the level of construction work will be significant with other residential properties in close proximity. In this instance, a CMS has been submitted and considered acceptable. As such, this will be secured a compliance condition.

Given the above, the proposals are considered acceptable on transport grounds, subject to conditions, and in compliance with Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5.

#### Sustainability

Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) requires that all new build housing integrate additional measures for sustainability, and that a minimum 19% improvement over the 2013 Buildings Regulations for emission rates will be achieved. It is proposed that the dwellings would go beyond this policy requirement and will be as sustainable as possible using modern methods of construction and achieving Passivhaus certification. This is a credit to the proposal and is welcomed as being a significant benefit of the scheme. It will be prudent to ensure that the houses achieve Passivhaus certification prior to first occupation and this will be secured through the S106 legal agreement.

#### Affordable Housing

Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) requires that for development proposals of 1-4 dwellings, the Applicant should make a financial contribution to enable the equivalent of 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere within the Borough. The policy goes on to state that where, as a result of viability considerations, proposals fall short of the policy

target the onus is on the developer to clearly demonstrate the circumstances justifying a lower affordable housing contribution.

The applicant submitted viability information seeking to justify a nil contribution towards affordable housing, set against the context of an adopted local policy position whereby a financial contribution would be secured. The applicant considers that the Passivhaus nature / construction of the proposals further prevents the scheme from being viable to make a contribution.

Accordingly, this viability appraisal has been reviewed by the Council's Viability team. It is noted that the applicant's own viability submission confirms that if non-passivehaus construction was used, then the scheme would be viable, and an affordable housing contribution could be paid. In this respect, whilst the proposed construction method is commendable, it is not in itself a planning requirement. The Council's valuer confirmed that an affordable housing contribution of £48, 650 should be made.

Subsequent to the above, significant further discussions were held between the applicant, the Council's viability team and the planning case officer. A number of the appraisal inputs and viability challenges were discussed, as well as the planning balance of the policy requirement to deliver affordable housing within the Borough and the potential to deliver an exemplar development that sits within the Council's wider sustainability and climate agenda.

Further to the above, and on balance, a contribution of £15,000 was agreed, alongside a deferred payment mechanism, which would enable the Council to share in any subsequent uplift in actual value. This will be secured within the s106 Legal Agreement.

Given the above, it is also considered necessary to bind the Passivhaus obligation in the S106 to ensure its delivery. Consequently, on balance, this is considered the best possible contribution towards affordable housing in this particular case and is acceptable in this respect.

#### CIL

The proposal would be a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) liable development. The applicant has provided the CIL Additional Information Form and an informative will be attached to the decision notice to advise the applicant of their responsibilities in this respect.

#### Other Issues

In relation to planning conditions, in line with section 100ZA(5) of the Town and Country Planning Act (as amended), which came into force on 01/10/18, discussions have been undertaken with the applicant regarding pre-commencement conditions; these have been agreed and some have become compliance conditions.

#### Conclusion and Planning Balance

The proposals are considered to be acceptable within the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above. As such, full planning permission is

recommended for approval, subject to conditions and completion of the S106 Legal Agreement.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

GRANT subject to conditions and completion of S106 legal agreement.