

24 July 2024



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT
Ward	Abbey
Planning Application Reference:	240475/FUL
Site Address:	Russell House, 117-119 Oxford Road, Reading, RG1 7UH
Proposed Development	Shopfront alterations to include new disabled access door, increased depth of two frontage windows and disabled access ramp, resurfacing of front forecourt (amended description)
Report author	Marcie Rejwerska
Applicant	Mr Mirwis Golestan
Deadline:	26 July 2024
Recommendations	Grant planning permission, subject to conditions as follows:
Conditions	1. Time Limit Standard 2. Approved Plans 3. Materials details including large scale drawings of new shopfront framework, to be submitted prior to commencement. Provision in entirety prior to first use of new ramp or steps 4. Provision of hard surface to forecourt prior to provision of ramp or steps or first use of new doorway. 5. Provision of ramp and steps prior to first use of new doorway. 6. Landscaping and planting to be provided as shown on the approved drawings prior to first use of new ramp or doorway. Maintained as approved.
Informatives	1. Terms 2. Pre-commencement conditions 3. Building Control 4. Complaints about construction 5. Encroachment 6. Keep forecourt clear of unnecessary clutter and waste. 7. Applicant advised to adhere to waste management plan. 8. Positive and proactive - approval

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This report explains the proposal for a new shopfront for Russell House at 117-119 Oxford Road, to accommodate the use of the ground floor office as a retail unit. Both uses fall within Class E and therefore there is no material change of use. The existing door on the

Introduction and site description

3.1. Planning permission is sought for alterations to the existing shopfront to consist of replacement of the eastern window with a door, enlargement of the existing ground floor window openings, and installation of an access ramp on the forecourt. The existing windows are timber, with some unsympathetic uPVC repairs, to be replaced with new timber framed windows in black.

- 3.2. The proposal includes details regarding bin storage and collection using the rear private access road.
- 3.3. Submitted plans and documentation:

4. Planning history

- 4.1. 930643/FUL - Change of use from office (Class B1) to opticians (Class A1) – Application permitted
- 4.2. 121793/FUL - Change of use from the extant D2 use to D1 use (place of worship) – Application permitted but not implemented (hall to rear)
- 4.3. 150535/FUL - Erection of second floor rear extension and various alterations associated with change of use of upper floors from Class B1 offices to 6 (5x2 & 1x3-bed) residential dwellings. – Application refused
- 4.4. 151133/OPA - Change of use of first & second floors from Class B1(a) offices to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 4 residential flats. Prior Notification under Class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015. – Prior Approval Given
- 4.5. 160961/FUL - Change of use at basement and part ground floor level from retail (Class A1) to office (Class B1a) – Application permitted

5. Consultations

Non-Statutory:

- 5.1. RBC Transport Development Control – No objections to change of use.
- 5.2. RBC Waste Operations – Request for additional bin provision. Advice provided for refuse collection arrangements.
- 5.3. RBC Conservation Officer – No objections raised.
- 5.4. RCAAC – No comments received.

Public:

- 5.5. The following neighbouring properties were consulted by letter for both applications:

Flats 1-4, 117-119 Oxford Road

Flats 1-7, Muylinda House, 121 Oxford Road

Flats 1-6, 115 Oxford Road

Russell Hall, Oxford Road

- 5.6. 11 objections received citing concerns relating to:

- The use of the ground floor as a retail shop – no more shops needed along Oxford Road
- Increased traffic and associated noise
- Increased crime
- Impact on the conservation area

1 letter of support received.

- 5.7. Site notice was also displayed on site.

6. Legal context

- 6.1. 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.
- 6.2. 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'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).
- 6.3. In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).
- 6.4. Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

National Planning Policy Framework

Conservation Practices Policies and Guidance 2008

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

Policies:

CC1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC5 Waste Minimisation and Storage

CC7 Design and the Public Realm

CC8 Safeguarding Amenity

EN3 Enhancement of Conservation Areas

RL1 Network and Hierarchy of Centres

RL2 Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development

OU5 Shopfronts and Cash Machines

CR1 Definition of Central Reading

CR2 Design in Central Reading

CR7 Primary Frontages in Central Reading

Supplementary Planning Documents and other guidance

Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD (2022)

Other documents:

Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal 2020

7. Appraisal

The main considerations are:

- Principle of Development
- Heritage impact, design and appearance
- Amenity and pollution

7.1 Principle of Development

- 7.1.1. The existing use of the ground floor of Russell House is offices which falls into Class E. The ground floor has a history of having previously been in use as retail, with the use interchanging over the years between office and retail. The current use classes were last updated on 1 September 2020 and the use of both retail and office now fall into the same Class E. As such, change of use within a Use Class is not Development and therefore no permission is required for the retail use. Matters relating to the use fall outside the scope of this application.

7.2. Design, appearance, and implications on the conservation area.

- 7.2.1. The existing frontage of the site includes a front door at the west side of the front elevation leading to upstairs flats and a private forecourt which has no existing furniture installed and is paved with a poor-quality surface. The previous ground floor use would have been accessed from the neighbouring unit at 115 Oxford Road which has now been subdivided and is no longer part of the application site. As such, the ground floor unit currently has no independent access from the front of the property.
- 7.2.2. The Conservation Area Appraisal makes note of the modern, irregular and neglected facades of the shopfronts along Oxford Road, with issues of goods spilling out onto the public footpaths, creating a disjointed appearance. Careful consideration must therefore be made to ensure the proposed development is a positive addition to the area and does not further contribute to the negative aspects identified within the appraisal.
- 7.2.3. The proposal includes the replacement of the eastern window with an external door accessed via a ramp to allow step-free access into the shop. There are no objections to this, and indeed the step-free access is considered a positive addition to allow disabled persons to access the shop.
- 7.2.4. The proposed ramp will have a simple design with a planter at the boundary with the neighbouring 115 Oxford Road. The ramp will not have a railing which reduces its visual impact. Overall, the ramp design would be suitably discreet and would not disrupt the openness and visual qualities of the frontage. This is considered acceptable in design terms for this location.
- 7.2.5. The enlargement of the existing window openings is also considered acceptable in this case. The design of the frontage differs from those of the adjacent retail units. The building has not historically had a shopfront. The proposals successfully re-work existing openings, lowering the cill to form a shopfront display window, whilst ensuring that the original window arrangement remains legible. The use of timber for window and door frames and the door is considered to be an appropriate response to the character of the existing building. Details of mouldings, materials and finishes are recommended to be secured by condition. The RBC Conservation Officer has accepted and raises no concern with regards to the design.
- 7.2.6. The existing timber signage fascia boards are to be retained as existing.
- 7.2.7. The proposals include the resurfacing of the forecourt and a small area of planting within a raised planter. The existing surface is cracked, stained and poor quality and the frontage appears stark and does not contribute positively to the appearance of the conservation area. Resurfacing and the landscaping are considered a necessary part of the proposals to ensure the ramp and shopfront works preserve and enhance the appearance of the conservation area. Conditions securing these are recommended.
- 7.2.8. The applicant has indicated that the forecourt would be used for the display of fruit and vegetables for sale, suggesting that this would be achieved through the use of moveable furniture which would not be affixed to the forecourt. The current proposals do not include any works to the forecourt other than resurfacing. Any additional structures may require planning permission, to be considered separately.

- 7.2.9. Overall, the changes are considered to be sympathetic to the location and its historical context. The proposal is not considered harmful to the wider conservation area nor the nearby listed heritage assets and is therefore considered acceptable in terms of the proposed shopfront design, in accordance with Policies CC7 and OU5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, and the Shopfronts SPD.

7.3. Amenity and pollution

- 7.3.1. The proposed shopfront alterations pose minimal risk of harm to nearby residential units. Most concerns raised relate to the change of use of the unit itself, which is not subject to this planning application.
- 7.3.2. One significant issue raised during the consultation process has been in relation to the management of refuse at the site, as there is an existing issue with commercial bins being stored on the public highway on Zinzan Street, creating an obstruction to the public. The applicant has therefore confirmed that refuse is to be stored at the rear of the site and collected from Zinzan Street by a private collection service – the refuse bins are then to be immediately taken back to the storage area. This matter relates to the use of the property rather than the works to the frontage and is therefore beyond the scope of this application. A condition would therefore not be appropriate. However, an informative is recommended to advise the applicant to adhere to the submitted waste management plan.

8. Equality implications

- 8.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that there is no indication or evidence that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular application. It is considered that the proposed step-free access will improve access to retail for disabled customers and is therefore a positive development.

9. Conclusion & planning balance

- 9.1 The proposed works to the shopfront and forecourt are considered to be acceptable in their revised form. They would relate acceptably to the host building in terms of their form and appearance and would enhance the appearance of the existing forecourt area. The proposals would preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area. Matters relating to waste storage and collection and use of the forecourt have been considered so far as they are material. The application is recommended for approval, subject to conditions, as set out in the recommendation above.

Case Officer: Marcie Rejwerska

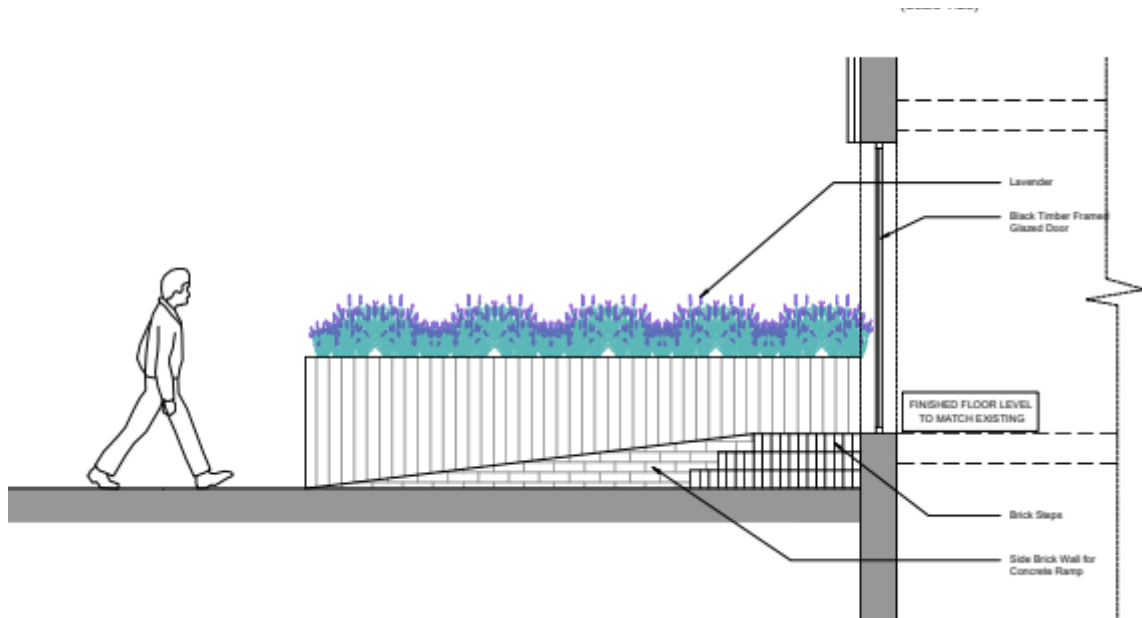
Plans

1. Existing Elevations

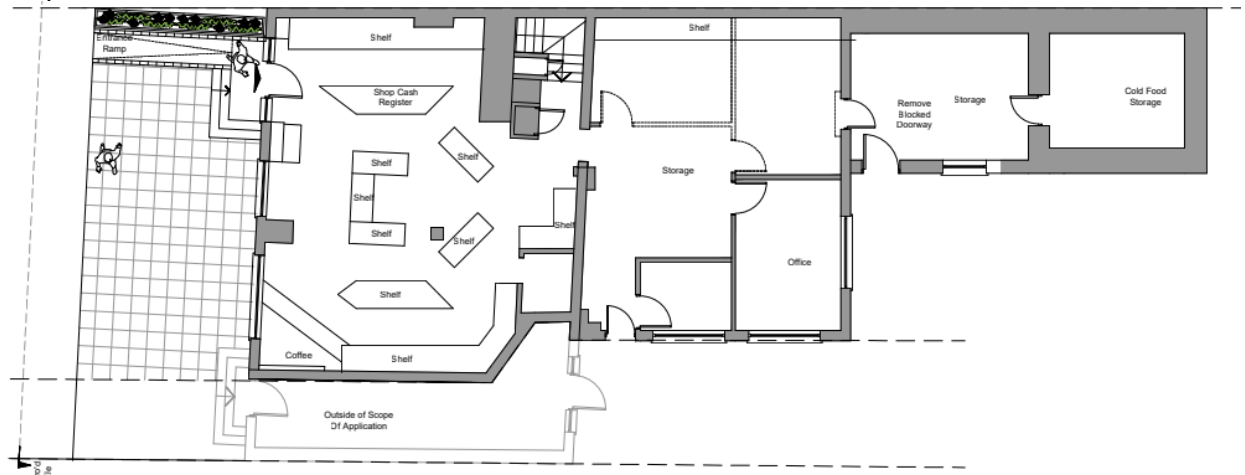


2. Proposed Elevations





3. Proposed Ground Floor Plan



4. Street view of the existing frontage



5. Street view of the private access road at the rear, as seen from Zinzan Street

