

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Tilehurst

App Ref: PL/24/0858 Full planning permission

Address: 74 School Road, Tilehurst, Reading RG31 5BN

Proposal: Conversion from Class E office to 1no flat C3 to rear of ground floor area

Applicant: Mr Nick Edwards

Received date: 2024-07-05

Target Decision date: 2024-10-04 (EOT)

Case Officer: Marcelina Rejwerska

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site comprises a two-storey property within the Tilehurst district centre. The proposal relates to the ground floor only which comprises a commercial unit which is currently vacant. The unit was previously occupied by a bank. The unit is set back from School Road and has a private access and parking yard at the rear. The property is identified as a key frontage within the Tilehurst Triangle district centre. The site is also in an Article 4 Direction area which removed permitted development rights relating to Class MA (change of use from Class E to Class C). The surrounding area comprises both commercial and residential properties.



Left: Aerial view of the site. Right: Rear of the site. Photo taken by Planning Officer.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Planning permission is sought for the part conversion of the ground floor of the commercial unit from Class E(c) to Class C3 to create 1x studio apartment at the rear of the property. The flat would have a gross internal area (GIA) of 46.78m² and include a private outdoor garden measuring an area of under 20m². This application has been submitted in conjunction with a separate planning application to convert the first floor to residential use also but is assessed and determined on its own merit.

2.1. Information submitted:

9329-24 – Design & Access Statement, dated 02/07/24

9329-100 – Location Plan, dated 04/07/24

9329-101 – Existing Block & Proposed Block Plan, dated 04/07/24

9329-103 – Existing Plan, dated 04/07/24
9329-105 – Existing Roof Plan, dated 04/07/24
9329-106 – Existing Elevations, dated 04/07/24
9329-108 – Proposed Ground Floor Plan, dated 04/07/24
9329-110 – Proposed Roof Plan, dated 04/07/24
9329-112 – Proposed Elevations, dated 04/07/24
9329-115 – Proposed Site Plan, dated 04/07/24

Received by the LPA on 5 July 2024.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- PL/24/0866 - Conversion of from Class E office to 2no flats C3 to first floor areas – Not yet determined
- PL/24/0798 - Change of use from Class E (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 1 flat. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015. – Application closed
- PL/14/1993 - 1 fascia sign at front and 1 at rear, 1 projecting sign, ATM Surround signage and 3 purple vinyl cladding – Application permitted
- PL/02/0817 - External signage alteration – Application permitted

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted:

- RBC Transport Development Control – No objections subject to conditions.

The following addresses were consulted by letter:

- 70 School Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5AW
- 72 School Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5AW
- 72a School Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5AW
- Flat 2, 72a School Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5AW
- 76 School Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5AW

No letters of representation received.

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'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION
CC5: WASTE MINIMISATION AND STORAGE
CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY
H1: PROVISION OF HOUSING
H2: DENSITY AND MIX
H3: AFFORDABLE HOUSING
H5: STANDARDS FOR NEW HOUSING
H10: PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL OUTDOOR SPACE
TR1: ACHIEVING THE TRANSPORT STRATEGY
TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS
TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING
RL1: NETWORK AND HIERARCHY OF CENTRES
RL2: SCALE AND LOCATION OF RETAIL, LEISURE AND CULTURE DEVELOPMENT
RL3: VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF SMALLER CENTRES
RL5: IMPACT OF MAIN TOWN CENTRE USES

SPD

Affordable Housing (2021)
Employment Skills and Training (2013)
Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

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.

6. APPRAISAL

6.1. Land Use Matters

Policies RL1 and RL3 require town centre uses to be retained and enhanced within identified centres. The proposal would include retention of part of the commercial unit on the ground floor. However, the layout of the proposed flat would result in the commercial unit having no access to the rear service yard, resulting in no access to the existing refuse storage area. The risk is, therefore, created that the remaining commercial unit may become unviable – no information has been submitted to demonstrate otherwise. As such, the proposal poses a risk to the commercial centre through potential deterioration of a commercial unit within the defined Key Frontage (RL3) strip of School Road.

The residential flat itself would poorly integrate with the surrounding area. While residential uses on the upper floors exist in the surrounding area and are common in the centre, the ground floor use would appear out of place. The presence of service yards and commercial uses around the flat would result in a number of amenity concerns which are discussed later in this report.

Overall, the principle of development has not been demonstrated and is not accepted on this site.

6.2. Character and Design

Policy CC7 states “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 proposed flat would meet the nationally described minimum space standards for a studio flat in single occupancy, as demonstrated on the proposed plans. No external alterations are proposed with the exception of the creation of the private garden, which would create some degree of defensible space.

As such, there are no further comments to be made on the external appearance of the proposal.

6.3. Residential Amenity

Policy CC8 states “Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties”.

As no external alterations are proposed, the entire flat would be served by one existing north-facing window. This is unlikely to allow adequate access to natural sunlight/daylight, creating unfavourable conditions for future occupants. While the addition of a window to the western elevation might resolve this issue, it would likely result in a new harm developing from the noise associated with cars accessing the private yard at the rear of the commercial units.

The presence of the service yard to the rear is also likely to create a risk of harm from noise and disturbance from other commercial uses along the terrace. While the private garden creates some degree of defensible space from the yard, this is unlikely to adequately resolve the issue. No information has been submitted to demonstrate mitigations for potential noise concerns.

Policy H10 is also relevant and states “Dwellings will be provided with functional private or communal open space, including green space wherever possible, that allows for suitable sitting-out areas, children’s play areas, home food production, green waste composting, refuse storage, general outdoor storage and drying space.”

The proposed garden space falls below the minimum space as set out in Policy H10 which requires up to 2-bedroom flats to have a minimum of 25m² of private outdoor amenity space. While it appears that this could be increased, the location of the garden within the service yard is unlikely to result in suitable conditions for an amenity space due to being directly adjacent to commercial activity.

Overall, the location of the proposal is likely to create a number of risks to future occupiers, contrary to Policies CC7 and H10.

6.4. Transport Matters

Policy TR5 states “Development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport.”

The application site lies within Tilehurst District Centre and is in a highly sustainable location in terms of proximity to local services and transport links to Reading town centre. The C402 School Road has parking restrictions preventing on-street parking and forms part of the Red Route ‘no stopping’ corridor. There is a Council owned public car park located to the rear off Dunstall Road and charges apply between 6am to 6pm Monday to Saturday.

Local parking standards are set out in the Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD which takes into account the accessibility of the site. The site is located in Zone 3, Secondary Core Area and the parking requirement in this zone is 1 space per 1–2-bedroom dwelling.

There is a private car park located to the rear of the building but the submitted plan indicates that there are no parking spaces proposed with this application. Therefore, the main consideration for this application is the non-provision of parking and the impact on the local highway network.

A car-free development is considered acceptable on this site. No cycle storage or refuse storage and collection details have been submitted, however, had the scheme been acceptable overall, this could have been secured by condition, therefore, is not considered a reasonable reason for refusal.

6.5. Affordable Housing

In line with Policy H3, the proposal if found acceptable would be required to provide a policy-compliant contribution to affordable housing in the borough. Policy H3 states “on sites of 1 – 4 dwellings, a financial contribution will be made that will enable the equivalent of 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough”.

No legal agreement has been drafted due to the recommendation made. This forms one of the reasons for refusal which could be overcome at appeal.

6.6. CIL

The proposal would be CIL liable as it includes creation of a new residential unit. The GIA measures 46.78m². The current rate of charge for residential development, boroughwide, is £179.29/m². Therefore, the CIL charge would have been £8,387.19.

7. CONCLUSION

The principle of development on the ground floor within a commercial district is not accepted, which is made evident through a number of risks of harm to the future occupiers as outlined above. The public benefit of a new residential unit is not considered to outweigh the harms identified.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Refuse

Due to the following reasons:

1. The proposal due to its location in an identified local commercial centre and an identified key frontage within that centre, would fail to positively respond to the commercial character of the area, fragmenting access to the service yard for the retained commercial unit, contrary to Policies RL1, RL3 and CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
2. The future occupiers of the proposed residential unit would be put at risk of harm from lack of adequate sunlight/daylight due to the proposed fenestration layout, and noise and disturbance from neighbouring commercial units using the rear service yard and other vehicles accessing the service yard. This is contrary to Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
3. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure an acceptable contribution towards the provision of Affordable Housing, the proposal fails to contribute adequately to the housing needs of Reading Borough. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies H3 and CC9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the Council's Adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document 2021.