

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Katesgrove

App Ref: PL/24/0699

Address: 104 London Street Reading RG1 4SJ

Proposal: Conversion of existing office building, and 1-bed flat into 5-bed 6-Person HMO, including cycle and bin store to rear.

Applicant: Beenlore Limited

Received date: 29 May 2024

Target Decision date: 25 October 2024

Case Officer: Anthony Scholes

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is a mid-terraced three-storey with partial basement early C-19 building. By the mid-C19 the house had a long narrow range to the rear, extending along the southern boundary wall of the site; this range has largely been replaced by later extensions on the same footprint. The building was converted to office use during the 1990s. The site is provided with access to St Giles Close to the rear for servicing and cycle pedestrian/cycle access.

Site Photos:



2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposal, as amended include the conversion of the existing office building, and 1-bed flat, into a 5-bed 6-Person HMO, including cycle and bin store to rear. The proposal would include mostly refurbishment of the building, given the HMO appears to have operated in an unauthorised state at some point in time. The rear flat was granted permission circa 1992, due to the issues with servicing the proposed HMO the proposal was amended as a result of officer concerns.

Supporting Plans and documents:

Drawing No: 241527/01 B as Received 20 August 2024

Drawing No: 241527/02 B as Received 20 August 2024

Drawing No: 241527/04 C as Received 16 October 2024

The Aether "Air Quality Assessment", ref: AQ_assessment/3488_LondonSt_Reading as Received 15 August 2024

3. 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.

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted by letter: 96, 104, 106 London street (All), Alder House, St Giles Close (All).

Two letters of representation was received, and are summaries as follows:

- Waste storage to front would negatively impact area *Officer Note: Revised plans overcame this objection;*
- Concern over use as HMO compared to single family dwelling;
- Prospect that a flatted scheme would be better than a HMO;
- Concern over access and proper waste management by the HMO use.

Internal

RBC Transport

The site is located within the Market Place / London Street Conservation Area and 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. London Street forms part of the A327 and operates one way southbound with a northbound bus lane that is enforced 24 hours a day. This zone is well served by public transport, with buses continuing either into or out of the Central Core Area via this zone. It is also part of the London Street conservation area although the building itself is not listed.

In accordance with the adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD, the proposed 4 bedroom HMO would require 0.25 parking spaces per lettable room. The applicant has stated that this will be a car free development. Given the extensive parking restrictions in place restricting unauthorised on street parking a car free development can be considered in this instance.

RBC Conservation Advisor

The proposed development would re-instate the property to one planning unit, which would be similar to a family dwellinghouse, the maintains the hierarchy of rooms as well as original circulation, as the proposal would still reflect the original layout, it could be considered reversible and, therefore, acceptable.

RBC Environmental Protection

Air Quality assessment is considered acceptable. A pre-commencement acoustic assessment with recommendation for protection of internal amenity will be required.

RBC HMO team

The proposal provides sufficient facilities for the number of occupants. The shower/w.c within the existing rear flat will be required to be independently accessible to comply with licensing requirements.

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'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 also requires the Council to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of designated Conservation Areas.

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

CC6: ACCESSIBILITY AND THE INTENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

EN1: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

EN3: ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS

EN6: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN A HISTORIC CONTEXT

EN15: AIR QUALITY

EN16: POLLUTION AND WATER RESOURCES

EM3: LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT LAND

H1: PROVISION OF HOUSING

H2: DENSITY AND MIX

H3: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

H8: RESIDENTIAL CONVERSIONS

TR1: ACHIEVING THE TRANSPORT STRATEGY

TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS

TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

SPG/SPD

Affordable Housing (2021)
Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Residential Conversions (2013)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

6. APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The NPPF outlines government policy, including its policy in respect of the historic environment. Chapter 16 of the NPPF (2023) 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' sets out the Government's high-level policies concerning heritage and sustainable development.

Paragraph 200 states, "In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. " And Paragraph 201 says, "Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal."

Paragraph 205 of the NPPF requires that 'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation....' And paragraph 206 says, 'any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification'.

Paragraph 208 requires that 'where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighted against the public benefits of the proposal...'

Policy EN1 'Protection and enhancement of the historic environment' of the Reading Borough Local Plan sets out the Council's aspirations for the historic environment. The policy requires that all proposals to protect and, where possible, enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. It echoes the NPPF by stating, "Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits".

Applications which affect Listed Buildings are expected not to have an adverse impact on the elements that contribute to their special architectural or historic interest, including their settings.

Policy EN3 'Enhancement of conservation areas' of the Reading Borough Local Plan requires that development proposals within Conservation Areas contribute positively to local character and distinctiveness. This policy further states "Positive consideration will be given to proposals which take opportunities to enhance the character of conservation areas."

The application site relates to an attractive three-storey Grade II listed building dating 1820 located to the west of London Street. The site, lined up on London Street together with other grade II listed buildings, is also within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area, designated in 1972.

The proposed change of use would, as stated on the application form be solely for conversion, not proposing any external works to the listed building. The new HMO would utilise the existing bathrooms and kitchens of the office (vacant) and office rooms for either living or bedroom purposes. Although the ideal use for this listed building would be a single-family dwellinghouse, which shows the hierarchy of rooms as well as original circulation, as the proposal would still reflect the original layout, it could be considered reversible and, therefore, acceptable.

There would not be any impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area. The proposed change of use would not involve external or internal works that could be classified as positive or negative. The number of occupants would not substantially alter the use of the building/site. As such, the impact would be neutral.

Character and Appearance of the area, including conservation area

In addition to the above, policies EN1, EN3, and EN6 of the Reading Borough Local Plan require proposals to protect, and where possible enhance the significance of listed buildings, and conservation areas. Policy CC7 also sets out considerations for design and impact on character and appearance of areas more generally.

As discussed above, the proposal would seek to reintegrate the whole listed building into one C4 House in Multiple Occupation. This facilitates storage of waste and bicycles to the rear, including access and collection. The proposal does not include any external alterations. The proposal has not submitted an acoustic assessment to determine if additional acoustic treatments are required. Should secondary glazing or similar be required, a condition is attached to ensure details are provided, and a listed building consent would be required for such works.

Residential Amenity

Policy CC8, and H8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 required consideration for amenity of existing and proposed residents with any proposal. In this instance, the proposal is a conversion of an existing office building within a highly accessible, but highly trafficked area. The proposal would also be for a house in multiple occupation which can be susceptible to greater pressures of noise internally. In addition to the policies above, the Supplementary Planning Document 'Residential Conversions (2023)' includes further details on matters which are considered to ensure compliance with policies.

The proposal, has been demonstrated to be acceptable in terms of pollution from road traffic nearby. Similar proposal have been demonstrated as acceptable in terms of noise, and as such a condition requiring an mitigation measures for noise to be approved.

In terms of the HMO itself, the room sizes are all considered sufficient for the proposed occupancy, with one room designated as a two-person room, with all others as single occupancy. The proposal would result in a kitchen being located over bedroom 5 at ground floor. This situation is not changed from the existing situation, and by virtue of the reintegration of the rear flat into the main property, the impacts upon residents will be able to be mitigate through management of the HMO. Therefore, the proposed layout would be considered to have adequate internal amenity. The garden area would also provide reasonable outdoor seating and communal areas and is therefore acceptable. The proposal includes a communal space within the rear single storey extension, and a basement for storage, these will be secured as such by condition.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposed use of the building as a single planning unit again, would be an adequate use of the listed building, and would be reversible to enable the original use as a single dwelling to occur in the future. The proposal would provide adequate internal and external space, and includes storage for bicycles and waste to the rear.

8. RECOMMENDATION

GRANT