

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No's: 24/0900

Address: Land adjacent to 24 George Street, Reading

Proposal: The construction of 5 no.3 bedroom town houses to land adjacent 24 George Street

Case officer: Ethne Humphreys

Decision date: 29/10/2024

Site Description and Surrounding Area:

The application site relates to land to the north of 24 George Street, close to the junction with Gosbrook Road. The site comprises an undeveloped area of land that is currently enclosed by fencing.

The site is within an Air Quality Management Area, and Flood Zone 3.

There is a S215 Notice on the site, which is currently at appeal, alongside a Tree Replacement Notice which is also at appeal.

Proposal:

This application seeks planning permission for the erection of 5 x 3 bed dwelling houses within a terrace. Indicative landscaping is shown, with cycle and bin storage. It is proposed to be a car free development.

Materials would comprise:

Intermittent blue render and red brick to match neighbouring properties

Slate and black gutters and drainpipes

White windows and doors to match neighbouring properties

Plans and Documents considered:

Block and Location Plan 9220 Rev 2

S-1 Building Section 9220 Rev 2

First Floor 9220 Rev 2

Ground Floor 9220 Rev 2

Roof 9220 Rev 2

Proposed Elevations 9220 Rev 2

Perspective 9220

Arboricultural Report by Harper Tree Consulting dated February 04 2024

BS8233:2104 Assessment by Jostec Building Regulations Compliance Services Ref 23796

Air Quality Assessment by RF Environmental

Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Arbtech

Sustainability Statement by Jostec Building Regulations Compliance Services

Flood Risk Assessment dated 28 February 2024

Functional Floodplain 9220 Rev 2

Transport Statement by Motion

Received 25 September 2024

Open Space Statement

Landscape Principles Statement

Received 3 September 2024

Proposed Side Elevations 9220 Rev 2
Received 21 August 2024

Planning Statement dated April 2024 Ref.220
Received 1 August 2024

Relevant Planning History:

None, but there is a S215 Notice and TRN in force, currently at appeal.

Internal Consultation Responses:

Environment Agency: OBJECT. Discussed below.

Environmental Protection Officer: No objection subject to conditions.

Ecologist: OBJECT. Discussed below.

Natural Environment Officer: OBJECT. Discussed below.

Transport Officer: No objection subject to revised plans. Discussed below.

CADRA: OBJECT. Loss of green space, flooding, insufficient landscaping and tree planting detail, lack of car parking , insufficient bin storage detail, impact on neighbours.

Caversham Globe: OBJECT. Loss of open green space and loss of trees, concerns over flooding.

Neighbours

The following neighbouring properties were notified by letter and a site notice was displayed.

24, 26, 28 George Street
184, 186, 188, 190, 192, 194, 196, 198, 200, 202, 204, 206, 208, 208A, 210, 212, 214, 216,
218, 220, 222, 224, 226, 228, 235, 237 Gosbrook Road

8 neighbour letters of objection, concerns summarised as:

Not suitable due to flooding on site
Loss of light
Loss of view
Lack of parking, increase in traffic
Too close to highway and footpath
No disabled access
Insufficient space for bins
Will be an eyesore

Correspondence with Councillors

The application was originally 'called-in' for determination by the Planning Application Committee by Councillor Barnett-Ward. However, further to discussion with Members regarding

the concerns raised, it was agreed for the application to be determined under delegated powers.

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) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', which means 'approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay' (NPPF paragraph 11).

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

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

The following NPPF chapters are the most relevant (others apply to a lesser extent):

- 2. Achieving sustainable development
- 4. Decision-making
- 5. Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 9. Promoting sustainable transport
- 11. Making effective use of land
- 12. Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
- 14. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

National Planning Policy Guidance (2014 onwards)

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
- CC9: Securing Infrastructure
- EN8: Undesignated Open Space
- EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network

EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
EN15: Air Quality
EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
EN18: Flooding and Drainage
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 Residential Gardens
TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging

RBC Supplementary Planning Documents

Affordable Housing SPD (2021)
Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)
Revised SPD on Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2019)
Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)
Reading Tree Strategy (2021)
Biodiversity Action Plan (2021)

Other relevant documentation / guidance / legislation

National Design Guide: Planning practice for beautiful, enduring and successful places (2019)

Appraisal

Land Use Matters and Design Considerations

At National level, paragraph 123 of the NPPF states that: “Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or ‘brownfield’ land”.

The land in question is not considered to be previously developed land and as such the priority for development should be on other sites.

Paragraph 124 of the NPPF goes on to state “Planning policies and decisions should...recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production”.

Furthermore, at Local level, Policy EN8 (Undesignated Open Space) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 goes into more detail specific to Reading and states that *“There will be a presumption in favour of retention of undesignated open space...Development should not result in the loss of or jeopardise use and enjoyment of undesignated open space...The quality of existing open space should not be eroded by insensitive development on adjoining land”*. Whilst the site is in private ownership, the supporting text to the Policy in paragraph 4.2.30 explains that *“Reading has many areas of open space not identified in Policy EN7 (Local Green Space and*

Public Open Space) in both public and private ownership. It is important that these areas are retained where possible". The definition of open space in the glossary to the NPPF does not limit it to land in public ownership, but all open space of public value. Indeed, the NPPG (Ref: Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 37-001-20140306) confirms that open space can take many forms, including being an important part of the landscape and setting of built development.

Further to the above, the immediate rear of the site (west) forms part of the Thames Valley Major Landscape Feature Area. Policy EN13 (Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) states that "Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature Area'. This area is also a designated Local Green Space – Christchurch Meadows (ENC7a). Policy EN7 (Local Green Space and Public Open Space) states that '*Proposals that would result in the loss of any of these areas of open space, erode their quality through insensitive adjacent development or jeopardise their use or enjoyment by the public will not be permitted*'.

The site in question is considered to be 'undesigned open space' as defined within Policy EN8 and as such there would be a presumption in favour of its retention. The existing land is undeveloped and characterised by its openness. It has historically been open green space with significant trees and vegetation, and it currently provides an important contribution to the visual amenity of the area as well biodiversity value and integrates well between the designated open space Christchurch Meadows and Thames Valley Major Landscape Feature Area immediately adjacent and the busy Gosbrook Road/George Street junction to the north.

The site is currently enclosed by fencing (of temporary appearance) and the applicant states that the land is in commercial use and not amenity use. It has also previously featured advertisements/hoarding around the site – whilst this was not directly on the site frontage, the current fencing does enclose the site frontage. The Planning Statement states "*The green stretch of land to the front of the hoardings is to allow them to be seen by motorists and the general public when walking past. The land is not suitable for recreation*".

The presence of fencing does not change the use of the land and a sense of openness remains with an absence of development and views to tree canopies and the Christchurch Meadows beyond. The public good currently served by the land is that of amenity value which is, and has, been a feature of the area for a substantial period of time (being present on old maps between 1915 and 1930) and even in its current condition (fencing/felling of trees/untidy state) the openness of the site and its undeveloped nature makes an important contribution to the character of the area and adjacent the busy junction. Buildings on the site would erode these qualities to a much greater extent than existing fencing. It is not considered that fencing/hoarding provides convincing justification for the loss of the open space to be accepted as the contribution of the space in terms of visual amenity, openness and vegetated character are likely to remain in the long term.

As noted elsewhere in this report, trees have been felled without replacement. There is also a S215 Notice on the site. The application has also advised of asbestos on the site. Whilst the actions of the landowner and lack of resolving matters on the site may have diminished the aesthetic qualities of the site to a degree, it is considered that the site continues to provide an important open landscaped setting for the more densely developed groups of houses to the north,

south and east of the site and continues to form an important part of the distinctive character of the local area adjacent the very busy Gosbrook Road/George Street junction.

It is apparent that notwithstanding land ownership matters, this has been an area of undeveloped open and treed space for a significant period of time. The Planning Statements states *“Looking at this Google Map the parcel of land was never intended to form part of the park as trees were planted on its boundary (some of which were subject to removal). I suspect the only reason the terraced properties did not extend any further North was due to the curved front boundary”*. The LPA is not stating that the area in question specifically formed part of the park itself. It has, however, historically been open green space with significant trees and vegetation, integrating well with the designated open space Christchurch Meadows behind. The trees subject to removal were also subject to replacement.

The proposals would place a significant amount of built form on this area of undeveloped land, that would result in harm to the openness and visual amenity value of the undeveloped vegetated and open area at this otherwise heavily built up corner.

Notwithstanding the fundamental matters of loss of openness outlined above, in terms of design, Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) aims to preserve or enhance the character of the area in which a development is in terms of layout, landscape, density, scale, height, massing, architectural detail and materials.

Paragraph 96 of the NPPF 2023 states that decision should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings.

Paragraph 131 of the NPPF 2023 states that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF 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 and landscape setting.

The National Design Guide 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’.

The proposal would result in a terrace of 5 dwellings. The terrace would fill much of the space in visual terms, appearing cramped and visually dominant in this very visually prominent location. Indeed, in this location adjacent the Gosbrook Road / George Street junction, the terrace would appear a visually jarring feature in the street scene. The pre-existing vegetation – and tree planting required to be replaced – and overall open space combine to provide a spacious undeveloped and open character of this stretch of the road which makes a positive contribution to the character of the area. Whilst the height of the terrace and use of materials would generally be comparable with nearby built form, the footprint would be deeper than the terrace to the south

and there would be limited space for meaningful private garden areas and landscaping due to the cramped and overdeveloped nature of the proposals.

Bin storage is proposed to the south of the site adjacent the site frontage. As noted elsewhere in this report, it is likely that a greater storage facility would be required to serve the proposed number of occupiers. This would add to the visual intrusion of built form within the street scene and add to the crampedness of the site.

The exposed and visually prominent location of the site increases the prominence of the development which, due to its tapering nature and its wide span, would be highly visible and dominant in views from Gosbrook Road and George Street as well as the designated local green space and major landscape feature as above.

It is considered that the proposals would harm the visual amenity value of the undeveloped and open area and as such the proposal would be contrary to Policies CC7 and EN8 the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the NPPF 2023.

Flood Risk

Policy EN18 (Flooding and Drainage) sets out the planning permission will not be granted for development that would increase risks arising from flooding.

The site is within Flood Zone 3, which in accordance with the NPPG is considered as having a '*high probability*' of fluvial flooding.

For the purpose of assessing flood risk, NPPG defines housing as '*more vulnerable*' and indicates that such development should not be permitted in Flood Zone 3b. Housing may be permitted in Flood Zone 3 a, subject to the sequential and exception tests.

The applicant states that the majority of the proposals would be sited within Flood Zone 3a. The PPG explains that functional floodplain "Zone 3b" it to be identified in the LPA's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. The SFRA for Reading identifies the majority of the application site as located within Flood Zone 3b which the NPPG states must be regarded as '*functional floodplain*' as it is land where water has to flow or be stored in times of flood (Table 1: Flood Zones, Ref: ID: 7-065-20140306). This has also been confirmed by the Environment Agency, who have raised an objection in this respect.

The NPPG states that only water compatible uses and infrastructure (which passes the Exceptions Test) should be constructed on sites assessed as Flood Zone 3b (Table 3: Flood risk vulnerability and compatibility, Ref: ID: 7-067-20140306). Such water compatible uses do not include buildings used as dwelling houses which are classified as '*more vulnerable*'. In this respect, it is considered that the Flood Risk Assessment submitted with the application incorrectly identifies the flood zone.

The NPPG and NPPF states that inappropriate development in areas at risk from flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk. The Sequential Test should be used to assess the possibility of alternative locations for development. The FRA includes a sequential test. However, as the proposed development is not water compatible, the sequential test has been incorrectly applied. In fact, the Sequential Test does not apply as Table 2: Flood

Risk Vulnerability and Flood Zone 'Incompatibility' is clear that More Vulnerable uses in Flood Zone 3b "should not be permitted". It is clear that the development falls short of being acceptable in terms of flood risk by some significant margin, i.e. the development does not proceed to be assessed under the sequential test. If it were, it would need to be demonstrated that no reasonably available sites are available at lower risk, firstly in Zone 1, then also in Zone 2. Even if this were passed, the Exceptions Test would need to be applied.

With regard to site-specific flood risk, it is noted that the Flood Risk Assessment appears out of date as it does not acknowledge or reference flooding of the site in January 2024, as noted in neighbouring representation. Despite photographic evidence to this effect, the applicant contends that the site has never flooded. It is also stated in the submitted FRA that "There is a significant risk of river flooding at the site and safe access and egress will not be possible to and from the proposed building during design conditions without intervention of emergency services". It is therefore unclear how the development could avoid harm to life and property during an anticipated flood event or how it would be safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

The information submitted by the applicant is considered to be inaccurate and therefore insufficient to conclude that the proposal represents an acceptable form of development having regard to its location with Flood Zone 3b. As such, the proposals are contrary to Policy EN18 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and paragraphs 165-168, 170 and 173 of the NPPF 2023.

Amenity of Future Occupiers

Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) seeks that all new building housing is built to high standards and Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) seeks that residential developments are provided with adequate private or communal outdoor amenity space.

The proposed schedule of accommodation indicates the dwellings would comply with National Space Standards and Policy H5 in terms of size. However, the internal layout at first floor would appear cramped (irregular layout of bedrooms 3 as annotated) and, due to the design of the rear projections this would result in a somewhat oppressive outlook for future occupiers of bedroom 2 (as annotated). It is not clear whether there would be sufficient lighting to these rooms, noting no daylight/sunlight report has been submitted, and the outlook would feel 'hemmed in'. This would be contrary to Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Not all dwellings would have sufficient garden space, the sizes of which would also not be comparable to surrounding garden sizes. Private garden amenity space would be further compromised by cycle storage units and tree planting and the relationship between trees and proposed accommodation would likely lead to tension between their management and the living conditions of future occupiers. The applicant notes the nearby Christchurch Meadows located to the rear of the site. Whilst this is acknowledged, this is public space that would not provide private or functional spaces for the range of uses set out in Policy H10.

The above further highlights the cramped and overdeveloped nature of the proposals, with the proposals contrary to Policy CC8 and Policy H10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

A noise report has been submitted with the application, due to the site's location next to the busy George Street/Gosbrook Road junction. The Council's Environmental Protection Officer

considers the report to be of poor quality, missing criteria required to demonstrate acceptability in this respect. However, it is considered that matters could be suitably addressed as part of consideration of a good quality noise report which could have been imposed by way of condition should the proposals have otherwise been supportable.

Should the application have otherwise been supportable and in order to help ensure future residents maintain sufficient amenity space a condition would have been attached removing PD rights in relation to Class A (enlargement improvement or alteration), B (roof additions) and Class E (outbuildings).

Environmental Health

Policy EN16 (Water Resources) require that developments on land affected by contamination be satisfactorily managed or remediated against so that it is suitable for the proposed use.

The applicant stated in a meeting that 24 October that asbestos had been disposed of on the site. The applicant is advised to engage the services of a contractor qualified to dispose of asbestos, who would then be relied upon to carry it out safely. The applicant is also advised to seek advice from HSE in this respect.

Policy EN15 (Air Quality) seeks that development should have regard to the need to improve air quality and reduce the effects of poor air quality.

As above, the site is located within an Air Quality Management Area and An Air Quality Assessment has been submitted with the application. The Council's Environmental Protection Officer has raised no concern in this respect.

Impact on Neighbour Amenity

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) which 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.

The neighbouring property most affected by the proposals is No.24 George Street, located to the south of the site. Three first floor windows are proposed on the south facing flank elevation. Two would serve a bathroom and en-suite and could have been conditioned to be obscurely glazed. One would serve a bedroom; however, as this would have been a secondary window this could also have been conditioned to be obscurely glazed without resulting in significant harm to light levels to this bedroom. No material loss of privacy is considered to occur.

The proposed terrace at its closest point to No.24 George Street would just breach a 45 degree line to the nearest habitable room window. However, this would be minimal. Given the distance to No.24 and orientation to the north, the proposals are not considered to be so overbearing to occupiers of No.24 to warrant a reason for refusal in this respect.

The construction phase of the proposed development would also have potential to impact on the amenity of surrounding occupiers. Should the application have otherwise been supportable, conditions would have been recommended to secure a submission and approval of a construction

method statement and to control construction hours to mitigate potential noise and dust impacts on the surrounding area.

Natural Environment - Trees/Landscaping

Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) seeks to extend the Borough's vegetation cover and that development should make provision for tree planting whilst Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks proposals should include appropriate landscaping. Given that the site is also located within an Air Quality Management Area, tree retention and planting is a high priority and proposals should demonstrate an appropriate level of greening and/or net gain in the tree number.

Following the land being sold in 2022 tree works commenced on site and an emergency area TPO (ref.3/22) was served on the land 8 June 2022 to protect all Poplar trees on site until discussions with the new owner could take place and the condition of the trees established.

Following service of the TPO, it was agreed that one the Poplar trees could be felled under the 'dead/dangerous' exemption and permission was given to fell 3 Poplar trees due to their poor condition under tree works application 221187/TPO. However, importantly, replacements are required for all 4 trees and have yet to be provided.

A Tree Replacement Notice has been served requiring planting of 4 replacement trees with time for compliance 4 months from 23 July 2024. This is currently being appealed by the applicant.

With regard to landscaping and tree planting, whilst some tree principles have been provided, this information is conflicting between the Arboricultural report and planning statement, with neither making specific reference to the TRN requirements.

An area of landscaping is indicatively shown to the north of the site. However, this would appear token, given the loss of green space and remainder of the site to make way for built form. The pre-existing vegetated and treed area provided a characterful feature of the site and contributed positively to the visual amenity of the open space. It has not been demonstrated that suitable replacement tree planting would be achieved. Furthermore, given the above concerns regarding small private garden spaces, the development would be likely to result in pressure to prune existing and proposed trees, due to overshadowing from canopies.

The proposed development fails to demonstrate acceptable provision of replacement tree planting and soft landscaping with consequent harm to visual amenity, the character and appearance of the area, biodiversity and environmental quality of the area. As such, the proposed development fails to demonstrate acceptable provision of tree planting and landscaping contrary to Policies CC7, EN12 and EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and to the Tree Strategy 2021 and paragraphs 135, 136 and 180 of the NPPF 2023.

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.

Furthermore, from 12 February 2024, amendments to Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) made it mandatory

for all developments in England to provide a biodiversity net gain of 10%. This included, as of 2 May 2024, that this also applied to all 'minor' developments. As such, all development approvals are considered to have a condition applied that they must provide this. A Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted and approved by the planning authority before commencement of the development. In accordance with Central Government guidance: *"When determining a planning application, biodiversity net gain will often be a material consideration, and local planning authorities will want to consider, where relevant, whether the biodiversity gain condition is capable of being discharged successfully through the imposition of conditions and agreement of section 106 planning obligations to secure significant onsite biodiversity gains and registered offsite biodiversity gains."*

As above, significant vegetation and mature trees have recently been removed from site. The applicant has provided a biodiversity improvement calculation, indicating a net gain in biodiversity. However, as noted elsewhere in this report four significant trees have recently been felled (there is a Tree Replacement Notice (TRN) on the site, requiring their replacement – currently at appeal) The Council's Ecologist considers that the applicant has failed to correctly assess the pre-development biodiversity value of the site as they have failed to take account of the four trees which have been felled within the baseline. If the 4 trees (required to be planted as a result of the TRN) had been included in the baseline habitat then this would result in a net loss of biodiversity. Given this, it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would deliver a statutory 10% Net Gain, and this forms a reason for refusal.

Policy EN12 outlines the hierarchy of biodiversity interventions in planning:

On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible.

Development should:

- *Protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and*
- *Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable.*

In exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site, and it is demonstrated that the impacts cannot be: 1) avoided; 2) mitigated or; 3) compensated for on-site; then new development will provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is "no net loss" of biodiversity.

Provision of off-site compensation shall be calculated in accordance with nationally or locally recognised guidance and metrics. It should not replace existing alternative habitats, and should be provided prior to development.

It has not been demonstrated that the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy can be complied with and that if planning permission were to be granted that the biodiversity gain calculation could be discharged. As such, the proposals are contrary to Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Given the nature of the scheme, and should the application have been recommended for approval, it would also have been appropriate to ensure that ecological enhancements were provided, namely bird/bat boxes and wildlife friendly landscaping.

Affordable Housing

In accordance with Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) the proposed development, being for 5 additional dwellings, would be liable for an off-site affordable housing contribution equivalent of 20% of the GDV of the development.

The applicant stated they agreed in principle to enter into a legal agreement to secure a financial contribution. However, GDV valuations to calculate the contribution have not been submitted and as such an affordable housing contribution has not been agreed (in any future application or appeal it would be expected that at least two independent valuations would be submitted at the outset to resolve this matter). Given that the proposal is not considered acceptable in other planning terms, the Council has not pursued the S106 legal agreement to secure the financial affordable housing provision.

The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies H3 and CC9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and paragraph 64 of the NPPF.

An informative will specify that this reason for refusal could be overcome, in the context of an acceptable scheme in all other respects, by entering into a S106 legal agreement or unilateral undertaking.

Transport Issues

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 in Zone 2, Primary Core Area and is located adjacent to Christchurch Meadows to the west & 24 George St to the South and the signalised junction of Gosbrook Rd and Bridge Street. This zone directly surrounds the Central Core Area and extends to walking distances of 2 kilometres from the centre of Reading. Typically, this zone is well served by public transport, with buses continuing either into or out of the Central Core Area via this zone.

In accordance with the Council's Parking Standards and Design SPD, each dwelling would require 2 off road parking spaces. The proposal is for a car free development.

The site is in close proximity to the town centre with access to good transport links and other sustainable modes of travel including by foot and cycle. There are extensive parking restrictions in place which include the operation of the Councils Residential Parking Permit Scheme which over recent years has been extended into the surrounding street. The NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities should only refuse applications where there is a severe impact on Highway safety or congestion on the network. Given the surrounding area is controlled through extensive parking restrictions that are in place and overspill parking could not occur, this would not warrant a Transport reason for refusal in this instance. Should the application have otherwise been supportable, conditions and informatives would have been imposed to prevent future occupants of the dwellings applying for resident or visitor permits.

Plans illustrate cycle storage facilities in each private amenity area which would be acceptable.

A central bin collection/storage area has been illustrated on plans; however, there is a loading ban during peak periods along the frontage of the site. The applicant has also stated the following in the submitted Transport Statement 3.5:

Given the width of the left turn lane, a vehicle is unable to unload from the carriageway without obstructing the flow of traffic, an offence under Section 22 of Road Traffic Act (1988) and Section 103 of The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 as detailed under Highway Code Rule 242.

This is acknowledged and is correct. A refuse storage/collection has been illustrated located at the southern element of the site and this is not dissimilar to the adjacent properties in particular to No.24. As such, this is considered acceptable to the correct size and type of bins being provided. It is noted that 2 x 1100L bins have been illustrated – this would likely not be sufficient but could have been dealt with via condition (notwithstanding visual/cramped concerns raised above in this respect).

The Council's Transport Officer has stated that an assessment of forward visibility to the zebra crossing would be required. Whilst not provide, the Transport Officer has confirmed that this would not form a reason for refusal.

The construction phase of the proposed development would be likely to impact the surrounding highway network given the prominent location. Should the application have otherwise been considered supportable, a condition would have been attached to secure submission, approval and implementation of a detailed Construction Method Statement.

Sustainability

Policy CC3 (Adaptation to Climate Change) requires that development proposals incorporate sustainable design practices to take account of climate change. Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) requires that all new housing is be built to the higher level of water efficiency standards under Building Regulations and achieves at a minimum a 19% improvement in the dwelling emission rates above the Building Regulations standards.

As sustainability statement has been submitted. It is noted, however, that parts of the document make reference to a different proposal at a site in Ruislip. Notwithstanding this, and should the application have otherwise been recommended for approval, conditions would have been recommended to ensure the development meets the following requirements:

- Higher water efficiency standards of 110 litres per person per day; and
- A 19% improvement over building regulations energy requirements

Although secured by planning condition, these new requirements would have been administered through the Building Regulations, with confirmation of compliance submitted to the LPA to discharge the condition.

CIL

The proposal would be a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) liable development. The applicant has provided the CIL Additional Information Form. Based on the information provided by the applicant and the 2024 CIL rate, this is estimated to amount to £102,195 (570m² of the proposals

x £120 per m² x 2024 indexation (£179.29)). If the scheme had been acceptable an informative would have been attached to the decision notice to advise the applicant of their responsibilities in this respect.

Overall Planning Balance and Conclusion

It is acknowledged that there would be some planning benefits associated with the proposed development, such as the provision of 5 dwellings to assist with the Borough housing targets. However, this is a general benefit and not specific to the site and other housing land is available.

In contrast, it is clear from the assessment above that the proposals would result in harmful loss of open space and would represent an overdevelopment of the site, harmful to the character of the area.

The site is not suitable for residential use due to its location in the functional flood plain (zone 3b) and it has not been demonstrated to be safe during a flood event.

The impact on biodiversity and insufficient soft landscaping are further shortcomings, particularly pertinent given the felling of trees on site.

The proposals would offer inadequate standards of residential amenity for future occupiers in terms of outlook and outdoor space (both amount and layout).

In addition, the proposals do not make adequate provision for affordable housing with consequent harm to meeting housing need and the aims of achieving sustainable mixed and balanced communities.

The proposals are recommended for refusal on this basis for the following reasons:

1. The proposed development would result in the loss of open space that has not been previously developed and which makes a positive contribution to the character, appearance and environmental quality of the area due to its openness, undeveloped character and green vegetated appearance. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) and EN8 (Undesignated Open Space) of the Reading Borough Local Plan and paragraphs 103, 124, 128 of the NPPF 2023.
2. The proposed development, due to its excessive scale and plot coverage would represent a cramped overdevelopment of the site which fails to accommodate built form and landscaping in a manner that enhances the character and appearance of the area. This harmful arrangement together with the visual prominence of the site would result in harm to the street scene and character of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and paragraphs 96, 123, 128, 131, 135 and 136 of the NPPF 2023.
3. The site is located within Flood Zone 3b (functional floodplain) and is therefore not suitable for residential (more vulnerable) development. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and

paragraphs 165-168 of the NPPF 2023 and 'Table 2: Flood vulnerability and flood zone incompatibility' Paragraph 079 Reference ID: 7-079-20220825 of the NPPG.

4. The proposed development has failed to demonstrate through an adequate flood risk assessment how occupiers of the site and also those of the surrounding areas would be kept safe from flood hazards associated with the development, leading to an unacceptable risk to the health and safety of future occupants in a flood event. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and paragraphs 165 and 173 of the NPPF 2023.
5. The proposed development would result in sub-standard accommodation for future occupiers due to a cramped internal layout and inadequate outlook at first floor level. This would result in a detrimental impact to the living environment of future occupiers. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) of the Reading Borough Council Local Plan 2019 and paragraph 123 of the NPPF 2023.
6. The proposed development, due to the cramped size of the gardens combined with overshadowing from trees, would not provide adequate and functional outdoor private amenity space for future occupiers. This would be contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) and Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) of the Reading Borough Council Local Plan 2019 and paragraphs 123 and 128 of the NPPF 2023.
7. The proposed development fails to demonstrate acceptable provision of tree planting, (including replacements for those TPO trees which have been removed) and other soft landscaping. With consequent harm to the visual amenity, biodiversity and environmental quality of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) and EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 as well as the Reading Borough Council Tree Strategy 2021 and paragraphs 135, 136 and 180 of the NPPF 2023.
8. The proposed development fails to demonstrate that it would not result in a net loss of biodiversity and a statutory net gain. The application has failed to correctly assess the pre-development biodiversity value of the site as it fails to take into account the value of the replacement TPO trees within the baseline. The minimum information as set out in Article 7 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 has not been provided. It has also not been demonstrated that the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy could be complied with, and that the biodiversity gain condition could be discharged. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) and EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and paragraphs 180 and 186 of the NPPF 2023.
9. 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 and the need to provide sustainable mixed and balanced communities. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies H3 (Affordable Housing) and CC9 (Securing Infrastructure)

of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the Council's Adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document 2021 and paragraph 64 of the NPPF 2023.