

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Abbey Ward

App Ref: PL/24/1353 Full planning permission

Address: 7 BLAGRAVE STREET, READING, RG1 1PJ

Proposal: Demolition of the existing building (façade retained) and erection of a five-storey building with a café, bed and breakfast, and ancillary spaces

Applicant: La Baguette (Reading) Ltd

Received date: 09/10/2024

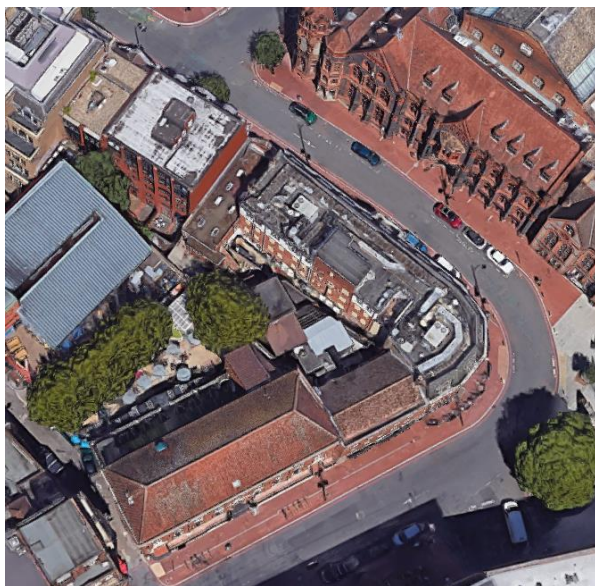
Target Decision date: 18/12/2024 (EOT)

Case Officer: Marcelina Rejwerska

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site comprises a two-storey property on the west side of Blagrove Street, currently in use as a café on the ground floor and a 5-room bed and breakfast above. The bed and breakfast does not have a reception and bookings are made online, with door codes provided to guests to access the property independently. The site is located within the Abbey Quarter, Market Place/London Street conservation area, and is identified within the conservation area appraisal as a building of townscape merit (as are all buildings on the west side of Blagrove Street with the exception of no. 33). The immediate neighbouring buildings are historically three-storeys in size, but have roof additions which create additional storeys. The site is opposite the Grade II listed Museum, attached to the Grade II* listed Town Hall.

At the rear, there is a fire exit from the currently vacant 5-6 Friar Street which leads from the outside bar area through the application site onto Blagrove Street. The site also abuts the more modern 'Walkabout' bar at Winston Terrace and the rear of 'Slug & Lettuce' bar at the former Post Office building. The surrounding area comprises a wide range of uses, including pub/late night uses, commercial and offices with residential units on the upper floors (e.g. Forbury View at 11 Blagrove Street). The site borders the designated Primary Shopping Area, but falls just outside of it, and is located within the Office Core and Central Core, as well as the Air Quality Management Area.



Left: Aerial view of the site and the immediately surrounding area, image taken from Google Maps on 11 December 2024. Right: The site as seen from Blagrove Street, image taken by case officer on 19 November 2024.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposal is a re-submission of planning application ref. PL/23/0328 which was withdrawn on 8 September 2023. The submitted proposal aims to address the concerns raised during the last application. Planning permission is sought for demolition of the existing building (façade retained) and erection of a five-storey building with a café and bed and breakfast (C1 use class). The bed and breakfast is an existing use and would be expanded from 5 rooms to 14 rooms. All rooms would have an en-suite and kitchenette and vary in sizes from 44m² to 14m². The café would be integrated into the bed and breakfast at the ground floor, rather than being a separate commercial unit as is the current arrangement. At the front, the new property is set back approx. 1m from the original façade to be retained. At the rear, the layout is staggered to concentrate the bulk of the property towards the south of the plot.



Proposed Front Elevation

2.1. Information Submitted:

Planning Statement, ET Planning, dated 7 October 2024
 Design and Access Statement, Bad Studio, dated September 2024
 Preliminary Roost Assessment, Cherryfield Ecology, dated 30 May 2023
 BREEAM Pre-Assessment Estimator Report Rev0, Base Energy, dated 31 January 2023
 Emergence and Activity Bat Survey, Cherryfield Ecology, dated 20 September 2023
 Noise Report, Michael Sugira, dated November 2022
 Air Quality Assessment, Hawkins Environmental, dated 4 October 2022
 Heritage Statement, Ridgeway Heritage Consultancy, dated 11 September 2024
 Daylight and Sunlight Assessment, T16 Design, dated May 2024
 Energy Statement, Base Energy, dated December 2022
 2205_P_01_G200_001 Location and Site Plan
 2205_P_00_G200_002 Existing Ground Floor Plan
 2205_P_01_G200_002 Existing 1st Floor

2205_P_RF_G200_002 Existing Roof Plan
2205_E_03_G200_002 Existing Side Elevation
2205_E_01_G200_002 Existing Front Elevation
2205_E_02_G200_002 Existing Rear Elevation

2205_P_00_G200_001_A Proposed Ground Floor Plan
2205_P_01_G200_001_A Proposed 1st Floor
2205_P_02_G200_001_A Proposed 2nd Floor
2205_P_03_G200_001_A Proposed 3rd Floor
2205_P_04_G200_001_A Proposed 4th Floor
2205_P_RF_G200_001_A Proposed Roof Plan
2205_E_03_G200_001_A Proposed Side Elevation
2205_E_01_G200_002_A Proposed Front Elevation
2205_E_02_G200_001_A Proposed Rear Elevation

Received by the LPA on 9 October 2024

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

PL/06/0086 - Retrospective application for bed and breakfast accommodation on first floor. (Coffee shop on ground floor to be used for breakfast). Application permitted.

PL/15/1345 - Erection of basement and 5 storey building to provide café (Class A3) at basement and part ground floor level and 23 bed & breakfast rooms (Class C1) at part ground floor and upper floor levels, following demolition of existing 2 storey building (café and 5 bed & breakfast rooms) barring partial retention of front façade. Application refused and dismissed at appeal, due to the following reasons:

- Significant and demonstrable harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, including harm to the application site, the appearance of the conservation area and the Town Hall.
- Overall harm identified to the living conditions of neighbouring residential occupiers and those using the proposed bed and breakfast.

PL/23/0328 - The demolition of the existing building (facade retained) and erection of a five-storey building with a cafe, bed and breakfast, and ancillary spaces. Application withdrawn following significant concerns raised by the case officer, including:

- Harm to the character of the conservation area and setting of the Town Hall.
- Harm to nearby residential occupiers through loss of light to amenity spaces.
- Proposed roof terraces would result in overlooking and loss of privacy.
- No meaningful outlook for rooms 8, 13 and 18.

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted:

- **RBC Environmental Protection** – The submitted noise assessment was carried out in 2015 and should be redone. It is not clear which façade/windows will have the proposed protective glazing. Conditions recommended requesting the following:
 - New up to date noise assessment.
 - Noise assessment to be submitted prior to installation of any new mechanical plant.
 - Odour assessment to be submitted prior to installation of any new kitchen extract.
 - Construction method statement to be submitted prior to commencement of works.
 - Detail of refuse storage, particularly vermin proofing to be submitted.

- **RBC Conservation Officer** – Objection due to height, scale and façade organisation the development would be unproportioned and imposing on the site resulting in harm to the setting of the Town Hall and appearance of the conservation area.
- **RBC Transport Development Control** – Due to location in the town centre, a car-free development would be acceptable. The proposed location of the cycle store is acceptable but more details are required to demonstrate the location can accommodate the number of storage spaces that would be required. Information required regarding deliveries and services due to location on the red route. Construction method statement will be required, can be conditioned.
- **Ecology Consultations** – Conditions recommended to secure an updated emergence bat survey, and habitat enhancements to be submitted prior to commencement.
- **Conservation Area Advisory Committee** – Support the principle of retaining the existing façade and construction of a boutique hotel, but object to an additional three storeys due to harm to designated heritage assets. Acknowledge some improvements made but more revision should be requested. Insufficient information regarding protection of the original façade during demolition. Concern raised regarding the layout and configuration of the proposed rooms.
- **RBC Waste Operations** – Waste strategy requested. Existing arrangements were discussed with the applicant on site and fed back to the Waste Ops team. Further information is contained within the appraisal below.
- **Berkshire Archaeology** – No objections subject to conditions requiring submission of a programme of archaeological work including a written scheme of investigation.

Adjacent neighbours were also consulted via letter. One letter of representation was received objecting to the proposed rear extension and its impact on Forbury View, with respect to:

- Overbearing mass of the extension
- Overshadowing and loss of light
- Overlooking and loss of privacy
- Increased density in an overcrowded area.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the LPA 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 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.

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

Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance 2008

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
CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM
CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY
EN1: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT
EN2: AREAS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE
EN3: ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS
EN6: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN A HISTORIC CONTEXT
EN15: AIR QUALITY
EN16: POLLUTION AND WATER RESOURCES
EN17: NOISE GENERATING EQUIPMENT
TR1: ACHIEVING THE TRANSPORT STRATEGY
TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS
TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING
CR1: DEFINITION OF CENTRAL READING
CR4: LEISURE, CULTURE AND TOURISM IN CENTRAL READING
CR6: LIVING IN CENTRAL READING
CR15: THE READING ABBEY QUARTER

Other documents

Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD 2011
Sustainable Design and Construction SPD 2019
Market Place/London Street Conservation Area Appraisal 2007

Local Plan Update

The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) turned five years old on Tuesday 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up to date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A consultation version of the draft updated version of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024.

Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become “out of date” when they are five years old. It is a matter of planning judgement rather than legal fact whether a plan or policies within it are out-of-date. This will depend on whether they have been overtaken by things that have happened since the plan was adopted, either on the ground or through changes in national policy, for example.

Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to this application listed above is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remains very similar in the draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the appraisal below and are not considered to be ‘out of date’.

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. Design and Impact on Heritage Assets and Conservation Area

Policies CC7 and CR2 set out design requirements for new developments, with the latter requiring high quality design within the Central Core of the town. Policies EN1, EN3 and EN6 set out the requirements for enhancement of historical assets and their settings, and conservation areas. Para 219 of the NPPF (2024) requires Local Planning Authorities to look for opportunities for new development in conservation areas which will enhance or better reveal their significance. Policy CR15 (The Reading Abbey Quarter) forms the basis for this requirement in this specific location and states *“The Abbey Quarter will be a major area for heritage and cultural life within the Borough, offering educational, economic and open space opportunities. The Council will pursue any opportunities to reinstate features of architectural or historic significance and remove features that harm the asset and its setting.”*

The application site is identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal as a building of townscape merit, meaning it does not meet the criteria for national designation but is nonetheless considered a good example of a relatively unaltered historic building which positively contributes to its local area. This is echoed in the 2015 appeal decision, where the Inspector notes:

“Overall, the building has a pleasing form and because of its appearance in contrast to the surrounding larger buildings, I agree that it warrants the importance placed upon it by the Council and consider it makes an important contribution to the character and appearance of the [conservation area].”

In the context of the previously refused and withdrawn applications, the revisions made to the proposed design are not considered sufficient to address the fundamental concerns with respect to the harm to the character of the site, the appearance of the conservation area, and the setting of the Grade II/II* listed Museum and Town Hall. The contemporary replacement property would introduce large areas of glazing to the front façade, unbalanced when compared to the fenestration pattern of the neighbouring properties on either side (regardless of the finished floor levels). This results in a disorganised facade appearance, which is disproportioned in comparison to adjoining properties. The loss of the recessed entry way at the ground floor level is also considered harmful to the legibility of the heritage asset. The proposed scale of the development is also imposing on the retained original façade, diminishing its significance and contribution to the character of the conservation area, as the additional three storeys, despite the setback, would appear dominant and excessive, irrespective of the neighbouring buildings.



Previous Proposed Front
Elevation



New Proposed Front
Elevation

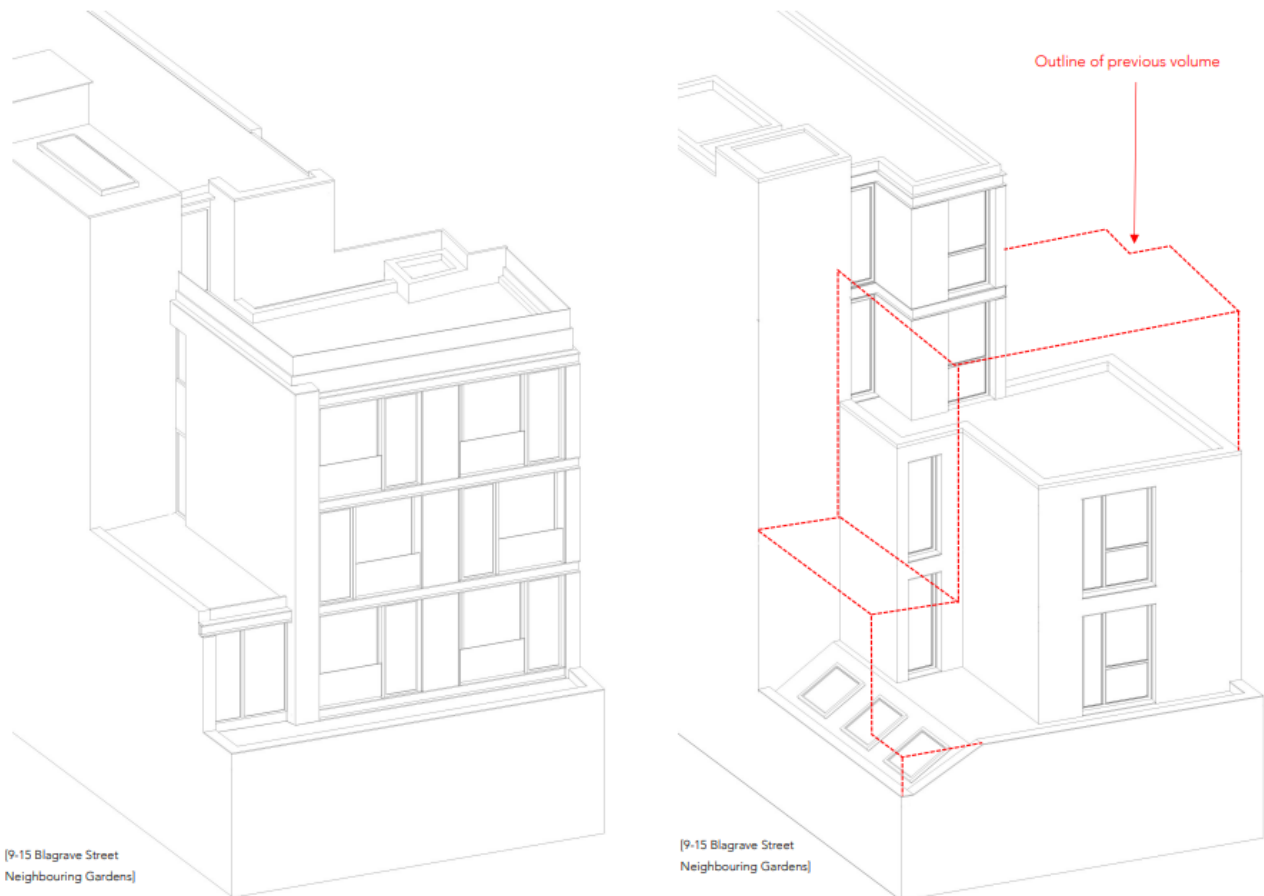
Overall, the proposed development due to its height, scale and façade organisation would be unproportioned and imposing on the application site, the loss of the property resulting in harm to the appearance of the conservation area and the setting of the Grade II*/II listed Museum and Town Hall.

6.2. Residential Amenity

Policy CC8 requires all development to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

Concerns have been previously raised with regards to the loss of privacy and access to sunlight/daylight for residents of Forbury View to the north of the site. Residents of Forbury View have access to outdoor amenity space at lower ground floor level, and concerns have also been raised with regards to maintaining access to sunlight for those areas.

A sunlight and daylight assessment has been submitted to demonstrate that loss of sunlight to both the residential units at Forbury View, and the outdoor amenity spaces, would be minor, and meet BRE standards. The issue raised during the previous submission is therefore considered resolved. There are no windows proposed to the north elevation, and therefore no risk of overlooking or loss of privacy can be identified. Similarly, the reduction in volume to the rear of the site is considered acceptable in resolving the concern with regards to overbearing visual dominance on the residents of Forbury View.



With regards to the amenity of future occupiers, there are no concerns to raise. According to the submitted sunlight and daylight assessment, the proposed rooms will all benefit from access to natural light in excess of the requirements. The rooms, however, are all (with the exception of room 2) below minimum space standards. However, as per policy CR6, a S106 legal agreement would have been sought, if the application had been recommended for approval, to secure the terms of use of the bed and breakfast to ensure it would remain in C1 use and that occupiers would not be permitted to rent the accommodation for a period longer than 3 months. This is because the rooms are not considered suitable for long term habitation.

Overall, there are minimal concerns identified in relation to residential amenity for both neighbouring residents and future occupiers.

6.3. Pollution

Policies EN15, EN16 and EN17 are relevant and require all development to have regard for air quality and pollution and its effects on the environment and sensitive receptors.

The submitted Air Quality Assessment identifies that the proposal would not increase air pollution, nor would it increase exposure to air pollution for future occupants of the site. As such, no permanent mitigations are proposed on site.

The submitted Noise Assessment relies on noise measurements surveys carried out in 2015 – these would now be considered outdated and therefore the submitted assessment is considered limited in

its usefulness. An updated noise assessment could have been reasonably conditioned if the application had been recommended for approval, and therefore, does not form a reason for refusal in this instance.

There is also no submitted information with regards to the relocation of the café and any associated kitchen ventilation and extraction. This again, could be conditioned and, therefore, does not form a reason for refusal in this instance.

6.4. Transport, Parking and Refuse

Policy TR5 requires all development to provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the location and accessibility of the site to the sustainable transport facilities in the Borough, specifically public transport. The site is located within the Central Core within a short walking distance of Reading train station and several bus stops. A car-free development, as proposed, is, therefore, acceptable, and preferable.

The proposal includes a cycle storeroom, which is in an acceptable location, however, further detail would be required about the cycle storage within the room, and this would have been conditioned if the application had been recommended for approval.

Similarly, the proposal lacks information about refuse storage and collection. This again could have been secured by condition.

Overall, the proposal is considered acceptable in transport terms.

6.5. Other Matters

6.5.1. *Planning Obligations*

Should the application have been recommended for approval, a S106 legal agreement would have been sought to secure conditions of use for the proposed bed and breakfast, including the length of stay for occupants, and preventing the use of the site under use class C3. This is particularly important as the proposed units do not meet minimum space standards and would not be suitable for long-term habitation. As the application is recommended for refusal, the legal agreement has not been drafted.

6.5.2. *CIL*

The proposal would be CIL liable.

7. **CONCLUSION**

It is not considered that an expanded provision of bed and breakfast accommodation within the Central Core would outweigh the harm identified to the designated heritage assets.

8. **RECOMMENDATION**

REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION

Due to the following reasons:

1. The proposal by way of its excessive scale and height and large areas of glazing would create an unbalanced front fenestration pattern compared to neighbouring properties and would be

a disorganised front façade resulting in an imposing and unsympathetic development, harmful to the building of townscape merit on site, the setting of the Grade II listed Town Hall, and the overall appearance and character of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area, contrary to policies CC7, CR15, EN1, EN3 and EN6 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019, and para 219 of the NPPF (2024).

2. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure restrictions for the proposed additional C1 use class units, the proposal fails to demonstrate that the units would be let on a short-term basis and would not be in use as residential flats. Notwithstanding that the scheme has not been fully assessed as C3 use class units it has been established that C3 would be unacceptable, fundamentally, due to the overall internal size. Without an obligation restricting the use to C1 the proposal is contrary to Policy CR6 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.