

08 January 2025



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT
Ward	Redlands
Planning Application Reference:	PL/23/0909/REG3
Site Address:	56 Bamburgh Close, Reading RG2 7UD
Proposed Development	Retrospective installation of 18No. Air source heat pumps located externally and distributed around full perimeter.
Applicant	Reading Borough Council
Report author	Marcie Rejwerska
Deadline:	10/01/2025 (extension of time agreed with applicant)
Recommendations	Grant planning permission, subject to conditions as follows:
Conditions	1. Approved Plans 2. Noise levels of equipment restricted to -8dB below background noise as per submitted information.
Informatives	1. Terms 2. Positive and proactive - approval

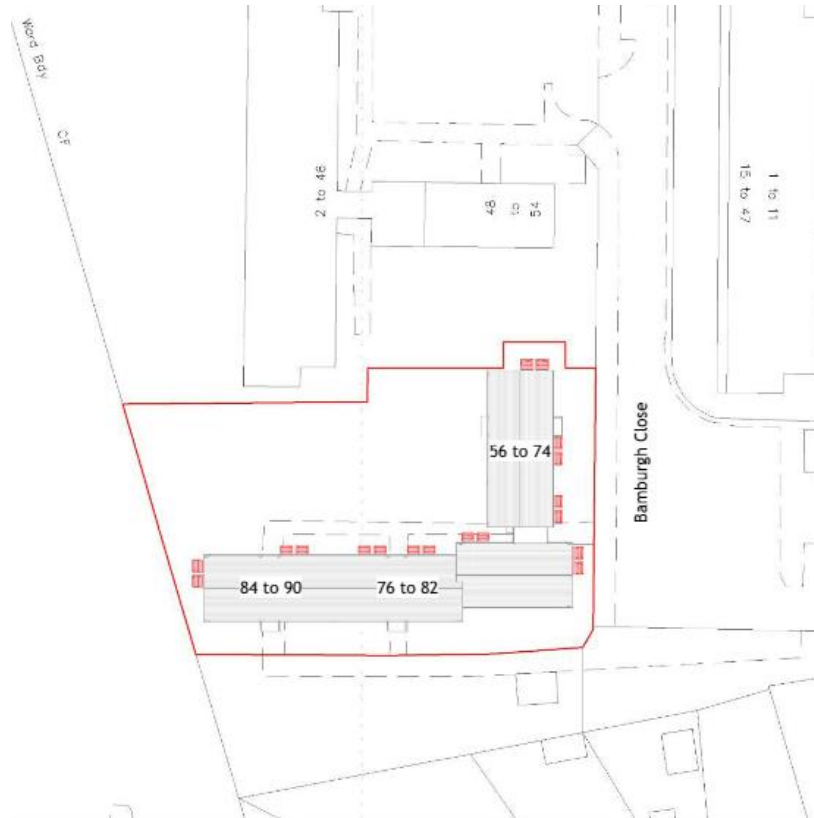
1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This report explains the application for retrospective planning permission for the installation of 18 Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) units around the perimeter of the block comprising nos. 56-90 Bamburgh Close. The units were installed in June 2023 as part of a wider programme of refurbishment of the block. There are minimal concerns with regards to the appearance of the units, and the submitted information demonstrates there is no risk to the residential amenity of the occupiers from resultant noise levels.

2. Introduction and site description

- 2.1. The application is referred to Committee owing to it being works to a property owned by the Council, and the application has been submitted by the Council's Property Services team.
- 2.2. The application site comprises a L-shaped two-storey apartment block on the west side of Bamburgh Close. The block was recently refurbished, and the external finishes comprise blue/grey render.
- 2.3. The 18 ASHPs have already been installed around the perimeter of the block. The units are set behind the fencing which surrounds the block.
- 2.4. The surrounding area is predominately residential, comprising two- and three-storey apartment blocks, and terraced dwellings in similar character. Hexham Road Community Centre is located at the entrance to Bamburgh Close.

Site location plan:



3. The Proposal

- 3.1. Planning permission is sought retrospectively for the 18 ASHP units installed at the premises, as there are no permitted development rights for flats and apartments.
- 3.2. Submitted plans and documentation:

MAP/C3977/PS2/0 – Planning Statement, dated 29/06/2023, received 10/07/23

Noise Assessment [Daikin], dated 24/11/23, received 12/12/23

MAP-C3977-011-A – Location and Block Plan, dated 19/06/23, received 10/07/23

MAP-C3977-121-A – Existing Floor Plans, dated 19/06/23, received 10/07/23

MAP-C3977-190-A – Existing Elevations, dated 19/06/23, received 10/07/23

MAP-C3977-221-A – Proposed Floor Plans, dated 19/06/23, received 10/07/23

MAP-C3977-487-A – Proposed Elevations, dated 19/06/23, received 10/07/23

AS13652.241001.L1 ASHP Sound Impact Assessment, Clarke Saunders Acoustics, dated 04/10/24, received 04/10/24

13652.241213.TN1 – Amended Sound Impact Assessment (Low Noise Mode), Clarke Saunders Acoustics, dated 13/12/24, received 13/12/24

4. Planning history

- 4.1. 221649 – Various external and internal refurbishments include the complete replacement of non-load bearing elevations including wall insulation/cladding, windows, communal doors, gutters, fascias and soffits altering the external appearance of the building, and internally, the removal of internal walls within communal halls – Application permitted by Planning Committee on 02/02/2023
- 4.2. No other relevant planning history for numbers 59-90 Bamburgh Close.

5. Consultations

5.1. Non-Statutory

5.1.1. RBC Environmental Protection – Due to the number of units in proximity to each other a detailed noise assessment was requested to ensure the units together do not create unreasonable noise levels. The submitted noise assessment initially demonstrated the units fail to meet local noise limits (EN17), however, identified that this could be due to “low noise mode” not being switched on by the installation team. This has now been switched on. Following reassessment the units now, the units now run at -8dB below background noise. This does not meet the -10dB target required by policy EN17, however, this is considered acceptable on this occasion due to the overall low level noise performance of the units installed.

5.1.2. RBC Natural Environment – No comments to make.

5.2. Public

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

2-54 Kershope Court, Bamburgh Close

56-90 (even) Bamburgh Close

5.2.2. No letters of representation received.

5.2.3. Two site notices were erected on site on 09/01/2023.

6. Legal context

6.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

6.2. In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

6.3. Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

Policies:

CC1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC3 Adaptation to Climate Change

CC4 Decentralised Energy

CC7 Design and the Public Realm

CC8 Safeguarding Amenity

EN14 Trees, Hedges and Woodland

EN17 Noise Generating Equipment

H10 Private and Communal Outdoor Space

Supplementary Planning Documents:

Local Plan Update

- 6.4 The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) became 5 years old on 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan were considered still up to date. However, the remainder 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, to reflect changing circumstances and national policy updates, was published on 6th November 2024, the consultation period for which ended on 18th December 2024.
- 6.5 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 states 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.
- 6.6 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’.

7. Appraisal

- 7.1. The main considerations are:

- I. Principle of development
- II. Design and appearance
- III. Amenity and noise implications

I) Principle of development

- 7.2. Reading Borough Council is committed to working towards achieving a carbon neutral Reading by 2030. Paragraph 5.1.15 of the Local Plan states that ASHPs should be considered in the first instance as these methods are less carbon intensive.
- 7.3. The principle of development is considered acceptable and in accordance with Policies CC3 and CC4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

II) Design and appearance

- 7.4. The ASHP units have been placed around the perimeter of the block, and protective cages installed for each unit to prevent vandalism. Units and their cages do lessen the visual qualities of the façades fronting the street and a more visually discreet solution could have been achieved. However, of the installed units, only 8 are visible from the street, as the remainder are screened by the layout of the building and there are considered to be overriding public benefits in terms of reduced carbon dioxide emissions.
- 7.5. Overall, the units are not considered to cause significant harm to the appearance of the property nor the wider street scene, in accordance with Policies CC7 and H9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

III) Amenity and noise implications

- 7.6. Due to the number of units that have been installed, the Environmental Health team requested a more detailed noise assessment which considers the cumulative impact of

the ASHPs. The noise assessment which was subsequently submitted demonstrated that the ASHPs met the British Standard noise requirements, but failed to meet the requirements of Policy EN17, which requires mechanical equipment to perform at -10dB below background noise. The assessment also identified that the units have a “low noise mode” but due to the retrospective nature of the application it was uncertain whether this had been enabled by the installation team. It was identified that the low noise mode had in fact not been switched on at the time of the initial assessment. The “low noise mode” has now been switched on, and the performance of the ASHPs re-assessed. The resulting performance is now -8dB below background noise. Although this is 2dB above the policy aim of -10dB below background the policy is to prevent ‘background creep’ where background levels rise due to the cumulative effect of noise-generating equipment. In this instance the blocks are in a spacious setting, and it is unlikely that significant amounts of other new equipment would be likely to exist in the immediate area in the future. As such the risk of background creep is lessened and the proposals are not considered harmful in respect of noise. Any residual harm which might exist would be outweighed by the public benefits of the ASHPs in terms of reduced carbon dioxide emissions.

- 7.7. Overall, the proposal is not considered to cause a risk of harm to nearby sensitive receptors (the residents of the building) and is therefore, acceptable. In accordance with Policy EN17.

8. Equality implications

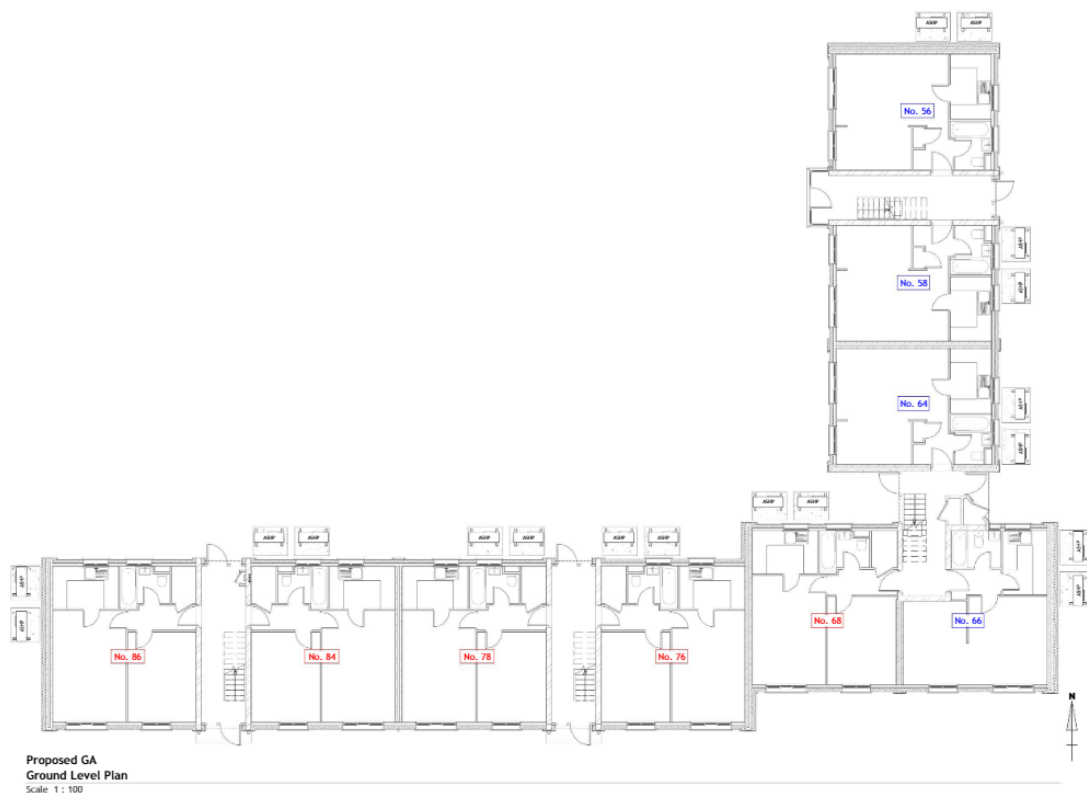
- 8.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons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

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 As with all applications considered by the Local Planning Authority, the application is required to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 9.2 Officers consider that the proposed works are acceptable due to the less than harmful effect of the installed units on the character of the property and the street, and the minimal amenity impacts on the residents and neighbouring properties. The noise performance gap is considered marginal and the benefit of the 18 ASHPs is considered to outweigh this.
- 9.3 As such, this application is recommended for approval for Planning Permission subject to the recommended conditions.

Plans & Appendices

1. Layout



2. Site photographs

