

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No: 191959/FUL

Address: Land at St Johns, Reading,

Proposal: Converting former Bakery to 6 flats and 1 house (5x1 bed flats 1x2 bed flats 1 x2 bed house)

Case officer: Ethne Humphreys

Target decision date: Originally 15/4/20, but a series of extensions of time were subsequently agreed to allow the negotiations concerning affordable housing and completion of the s106 legal agreement, 19/7/2024

Site Description and Surrounding Area:

The application site relates to former St Johns Bakery located on the west side of St Johns Street, close to the junction with Queens Road to the north.

The site is designated as a building of townscape merit within the Eldon Square Conservation Area. The surrounding area is characterised as predominantly residential with 19th century terraced row. The site is located within the Reading Central Area and is also within an air quality management area.

Proposals:

The application seeks full planning permission for the conversion of former bakery to 6 flats and 1 house. The proposals would comprise:

5 x 1 Bedroom dwellings
1 x 2 Bedroom dwelling
1 x 2 Bedroom house

The materials would match those of the host building.

Plans and information considered:

Landscape Plan and Elevation A-1200 Rev B

Received 22nd May 2024

Proposed Floor Plans A-1015 Rev D

Existing and Proposed Context Elevations A-1020 Rev B

Existing and Proposed Rear Elevations A-1021 Rev C

Received 15th May 2024

Proposed Section A-1025 Rev B

Received 14th June 2021

Location Plan A-1000 Rev B

Received 21st February 2020

Relevant Planning History:

None.

Public Consultation:

Consultation letters were sent to neighbouring properties 3/3/20 and a site notice was displayed. The application was also advertised in the local paper 12/3/20.

Two neighbour letters of representation received, concerned with:

- Parking demand

- Loss of light
- Loss of privacy

Consultation Responses:

Transport:

Further to revised plans, no objection subject to conditions and financial contribution towards reinstatement of crossing and extension of CPZ. Discussed further below.

Environmental Protection:

No objection subject to conditions. Discussed further below.

Ecology

No objection, discussed further below.

Conservation and Urban Design Officer (CUDO)

No objection subject to conditions relating to materials and samples. Discussed further below.

Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC)

A positive development, but details of materials should be provided and an enclosed garden area at the front should be provided.

Reading Civic Society

No comments received.

Summary of Discussions with Applicant/Agent

Following officer feedback the applicant agreed to paying the full financial contribution towards affordable housing.

A series of extensions of time were subsequently agreed to allow the negotiations concerning affordable housing and completion of the s106 legal agreement (and for accurate to be submitted).

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 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'.

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).

Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

- CC1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC2 Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC3 Adaption 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
- EN3 Enhancement of Conservation Areas
- EN6 New Development in a Historic Context
- EN12 Biodiversity and The Green Network
- EN14 Trees, Hedges and Woodlands
- EN15 Air Quality
- EN16 Pollution and Water Resources
- H1 Provision of Housing
- H2 Density and Mix
- H3 Affordable Housing
- H5 Housing Standards
- H8 Residential Conversions
- H10 Private and Communal Outdoor Space
- TR1 Achieving The Transport Strategy
- TR3 Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
- TR5 Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Parking
- CR1 Definition of Central Reading
- CR2 Design in Central Reading
- CR6 Living in Central Reading

RBC Supplementary Planning Documents

- Affordable Housing SPD (2021)
- Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)
- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)
- Revised SPD on Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2015)
- Reading Tree Strategy (2021)

Other relevant documents/guidance

Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal (2007)

Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England, 2016)

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015a)

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b)

Principles of Conservation (Historic England, 2008)

Appraisal

Land use matters

The NPPF states that LPAs should “encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value”.

The proposals seek to provide 7 residential units by way of conversion and extension of the existing property. There have been no relevant planning applications at the specific part of the site where works are proposed in the past quarter of a century. It is noted that the element of the site fronting onto Queens Road was converted into flats (on the upper floors) and retail unit remained at ground floor level in 2003/2004. Accordingly, however, it is not abundantly clear what the lawful use of the St Johns Street part of the site (subject of this application) is. This was specifically excluded from the red line of the application site in 2003/2004 but could be considered as ancillary accommodation to the former bakery shop. The building is currently vacant and used as storage. The site is not located within an allocated centre, and it is not considered that its loss would cause harm to the viability or vitality of any nearby centre. Furthermore, given the run down appearance of the site, the proposals represent an opportunity to visually enhance the building and wider area.

With regard to the principle of the proposed use, from purely a land use perspective, a proposal to introduce 7 additional residential units close to the town centre, would comply with the broad objectives of Policies H1 (Provision of Housing) and CC6 (Accessibility and Intensity of Development) by contributing towards meeting the housing needs within the borough in a sustainable location.

Furthermore, in terms of mix, the proposed development seeks to provide 1x2 bed house, 1x2 bed flat and 5x1 bed flats. As such, despite the proposal only providing 7 units in total, there is a mix of different unit sizes, and, set within the context of the size and nature of the site, this is considered acceptable in principle. A compliance condition is recommended to ensure that the proposed development provides the range of housing opportunities required by Policy H2 (Density and Mix).

Design considerations and impact on heritage assets

Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks to ensure that new development enhances and preserves the local character and Policy CR2 (Design in Central Reading) seeks to acceptable relationships between buildings in the town centre are created.

Policy EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) states that development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Positive consideration will be given to proposals which take opportunities to enhance the character of conservation areas.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2023 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.

The National Design Guidance 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’.

Pre-application advice was sought prior to the submission of this application. This initially involved the entire demolition of the building. Officers advised that this would not be supported on the basis of the building being identified as being of townscape merit within the conservation area. However, it recognised that the building has not been well looked after and is run down in appearance both externally and internally. Officers advised that at least the retention of the existing front façade would be required for the proposal to be appropriate in heritage terms.

The applicant has taken on board the pre-application advice provided which is welcomed and the principle of retaining the front façade has, consequently, dictated the scheme. Due to the former nature of the building as bakery, there is limited fenestration to the St Johns Street elevation and there are areas of brick patching, with the many windows and doors currently 'bricked-up'.

There is no objection to the removal of timber lean-to structures to the rear which are poorly built and add little to the appearance of the building. The overall height would be no higher than existing and adjacent built form which is appropriate. The proposed dormer windows on both the front and rear elevations would be relatively small scale, would not appear cluttered and would sit comfortably within the roof slope. They would not be out of keeping with other dormer windows within the street scene. The materials would complement the existing terrace and would assist in ensure the proposal enhances the character and appearance of the conservation area. The small amount of soft landscaping as indicated on the floor plans (in front of unit 1) would also help to enhance this area largely dominated by hardstanding.

A similar warehouse or ancillary building across the street has been converted to one and half storey housing and this also maintains the historic fabric. The proposal would not be too dissimilar.

To ensure suitable quality of materials it is considered reasonable and appropriate to secure further details of the proposed materials by way of a suitable worded pre-commencement condition. With this condition secured and in light of the above, it is considered that the proposals would not adversely harm the character of the surrounding streetscape or give rise to overly dominant or incongruous additions to the immediate area such to warrant a refusal. Indeed, the current building had been poorly maintained and is in a state of disrepair. The proposals represent an opportunity to enhance the building, street scene and wider conservation area. In compliance with Policies CC7, EN3 and EN6 of the Reading Borough Council Local Plan 2019.

Affordable Housing

In accordance with Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) the proposed development, being for 7 additional units (through conversion and extensions to facilitate), would therefore be liable for a contribution towards off-site affordable housing provision. The applicant submitted independent valuations to justify an affordable housing contribution of £163,250 being agreed, which has been secured by way of a Section 106 agreement and is a key benefit to the scheme. In compliance with Policy H3.

Neighbouring 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.

Concern has been raised that the proposals would result in a loss of privacy to No.4 St Johns Street located to the south of the site. Juliet balconies are proposed on the rear elevation.

However, these would face down the application site and any views towards the garden of N0.4 would be at an oblique angle. As such, no significant material loss of privacy would arise. Given the nature and position of the extensions to the south of this property, no significant material overbearing effects are considered to arise to this or any other neighbouring property.

Whilst the new residential use may result in some additional level of noise for neighbouring properties, this is not considered to be detrimental due to the size of the proposed dwellings and number of residents living the properties would largely be constrained by the number of bed spaces. Noting the surrounding residential nature no concerns are considered to arise in this respect.

In general terms it is noted that the proposed dwellings could be subject to significant further extensions and alterations under subsequent permitted development rights, which could negatively impact on the amenity of nearby occupiers. In order to manage this, it is considered necessary and reasonable to have secure a condition to remove permitted development rights under Classes A (alterations), B (roof additions) and E (outbuildings).

In terms of noise, vibrations, dust and fume considerations, it is considered that both during the construction phase, and subsequently, the proposals will be acceptable subject to a variety of conditions for any permission. A construction method statement will therefore be secured via condition and is required from a highway safety perspective too. As such in overall terms, considering all nearby residential occupiers, no significantly harmful amenity impacts would occur, subject to conditions and in compliance with Policy CC8 in particular.

Amenity of future occupiers

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) requires developments to not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing and future occupiers whilst Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) seeks to protect occupiers from the impacts of pollution. Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) states that new residential developments must demonstrate how issues such as noise, disturbance and air quality would be mitigated. Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) sets the standards that new housing should be built to and Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) seeks that residential developments are provided with adequate private or communal outdoor amenity space.

It is considered that the proposals will provide an overall good standard of accommodation throughout with fairly regular shaped rooms with floor spaces that will largely comply with the space standards as set out in Policy H5.

It is acknowledged that there will be somewhat limited outlook at the rear for ground floor rear units due to the limited depth of the rear amenity spaces and the proximity to the boundary wall associated with Barkham Mews. However, this is not considered to be so substandard to warrant a refusal on this basis.

The scheme provides some garden amenity space. Whilst not large, and would not benefit all residents of the site, given the site's accessible location and access to nearby public amenities, combined with the existing site constraints and desire to secure a future use of the building, this is considered to outweigh any concerns over the provision of amenity space.

Fencing between gardens to separate the rear amenity areas is indicated on the proposed plans. This is considered acceptable, and details of fencing will be secured via condition.

In order to help ensure future residents maintain sufficient amenity space (and to protect neighbouring amenity as above) it is proposed to remove PD rights in relation to Class A (enlargement improvement or alteration), B (roof additions) and Class E (outbuildings).

Therefore, in overall terms the units are considered to provide an overall suitable standard of accommodation, within the context of the constraints of the site and in line with Policies CC8, H5, H10 and CR6 in particular.

Environmental Health Matters

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

In case unexpected contamination is found during the development which may affect future occupiers, Environmental Protection colleagues recommend a condition pursuant to contamination found at any point. The proposal is considered to accord with Policy EN16.

Transport Matters

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.

St Johns Street is a one way street accessed from Queens Road. The site 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.

In accordance with the adopted SPD, the development is required to provide parking provision of 1 spaces per dwelling, equating to 7 spaces. In this instance, Transport officers have confirmed that a car free development is acceptable. However, 2 on street parking spaces will be created following the reinstatement of the dropping crossing servicing the 'yard' area and extension to the CPZ permit bay. Provision of this is included within the S106 legal agreement. Given the locality of the development and its close proximity to town and transport networks, the non-provision for parking as considered acceptable. Notwithstanding, the surrounding road network has extensive parking restrictions preventing unauthorised on street parking. It should be noted that future occupants of the proposed units, would not be eligible to apply for resident or visitor parking permits and this will be covered via the appropriate conditions and informatives.

In the circumstances there are no transport objections to the proposed development subject to conditions and informatives. In particular, it is considered necessary to impose a construction method statement in this instance, as the level of construction work will be significant on a relatively narrow highway with other residential properties in close proximity. In compliance with Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5.

Natural environment - trees/landscaping

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks that development is of high design quality and maintains and enhances the character of the area in which it is located including landscaping. Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) requires new development to make provision for tree retention and planting.

Due to the relatively constrained nature of the site, it is accepted that there is limited scope for landscaping. However, the application does propose some limited new planting to the

front and rear of the site which will be a welcome enhancement of the site and details of which will be secured via condition. In compliance with Policies CC7 and EN14.

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.

The Council's Ecologist has confirmed that the ecology report submitted with the application has been undertaken to an appropriate standard and agrees with the conclusion that bats and nesting birds are unlikely to be affected by the proposals.

Further to the above, and in accordance with paragraph 180 of the NPPF, which states that "opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged" conditions are recommended to ensure that the proposals would provide landscaping details and the installation of bird and bat boxes is carried out to ensure adequate biodiversity and ecological enhancements on the site. In compliance with Policy EN12.

Sustainability

Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) requires new development to reduce the consumption of resources and materials and includes that *"All minor non-residential developments or conversions to residential are required to meet the most up-to-date BREEAM 'VERY GOOD' standard as a minimum"* and that *"Conversions to residential should incorporate water conservation measures."*

Policy CC3 (Adaption to Climate Change) requires that all developments demonstrate how they have been designed to incorporate measures to adapt to climate change. Supporting text in para 4.1.8 states that *"The design of developments therefore needs to more carefully consider matters such as shading, insulation and ventilation, surface water runoff and storage and the use of appropriate tree and other planting."*

No specific information has been submitted in relation to the sustainability or energy credentials of the proposed development. Whilst the scheme does incorporate extensions, it is largely a conversion and refurbishment project.

Officers acknowledge that there may be inherent difficulties incorporating substantial sustainability improvements within a scheme such as this, primarily owing to it predominantly involving the change of use of an existing building. That it is a building of townscape merit poses another substantial constraint. As such, it is considered reasonable to allow a flexible approach in this respect and a condition is recommended to be attached to require either the BREEAM certificate to be provided or for an alternative sustainability assessment addressing the requirements of Policy CC2 to be submitted and approved in writing by the LPA.

Given the above, the proposals are considered acceptable on sustainability grounds, subject to conditions, and in compliance with Policy CC2.

CIL

The proposal will be a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) liable development. The applicant has provided the CIL Additional Information Form. An informative will be attached to the decision notice to advise the applicant of their responsibilities in this respect.

Matters raised in representation

All material planning considerations considered in the above appraisal.

Conclusion

In overall terms it is considered that the loss of the existing use has been justified and the provision of 7 residential units would assist the Borough in meeting its annual and plan period housing targets. Furthermore, from a design perspective the proposal would enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. The quality of accommodation is suitable for future occupiers, and the proposals secure an appropriate contribution towards affordable housing. Whilst there are some acknowledged shortfalls (limited amenity space) the proposals are considered to be acceptable within the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above. Ultimately, when considering all material considerations, the benefits are considered to outweigh any harms. As such, full planning permission is recommended for approval, subject to conditions and completion of the S106 Legal Agreement.