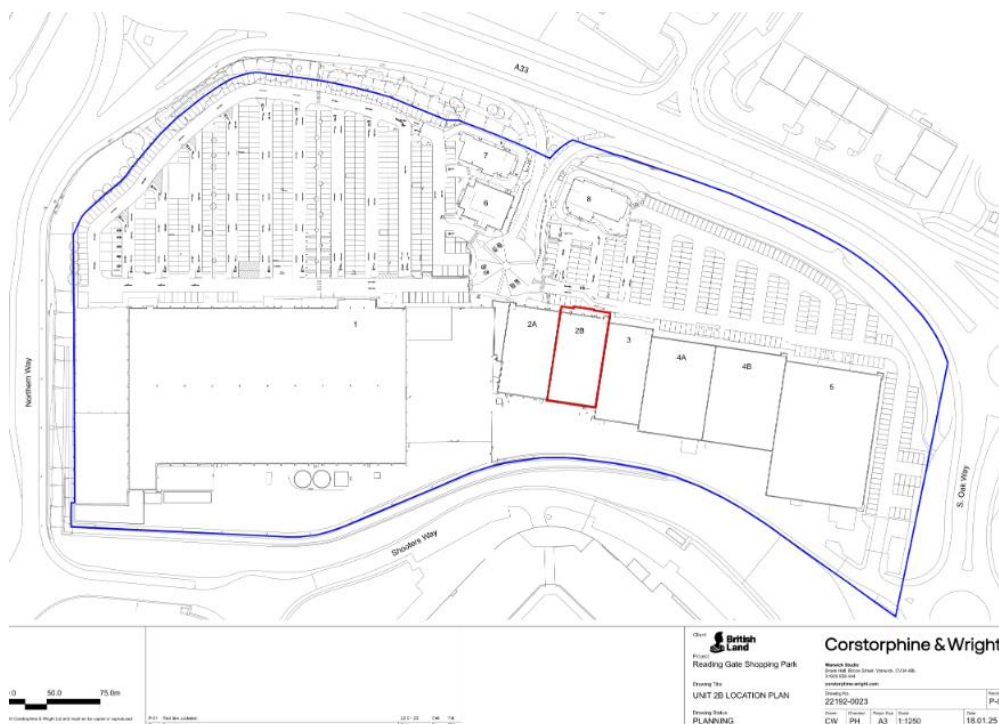


03 April 2025

Title	DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT
Planning Application Reference:	PL/25/0171 FUL
Site Address:	UNIT 2B, READING GATE RETAIL PARK, RG2 0QG
Proposal	Insertion of mezzanine floor and external alterations to front and rear elevations
Report author	Julie Williams
Applicant	The British Land Company PLC
Deadline:	31 March 2025 agreed to be extended to 4 April 2025
Recommendations	Grant with conditions

1. INTRODUCTION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is part of a wider retail provision at Reading Gate Retail Park which currently has 5 other occupied units ranging in size. With a large DIY (B&Q) store occupying Unit 1; a furniture store at Unit 2a; a carpet store at Unit 3, clothing and other goods at Unit 4a (TK Maxx), toy shop at Unit 4b and electrical goods at Unit 5. There are also 4 x food/beverage outlets. The application site Unit 2b was previously the Carpet Right Store.



Location Plan

2. THE PROPOSAL

A mainly clothing retailer is proposing to take up the vacant unit 2b, which measures 955 sq.m. A mezzanine floor measuring 800 sqm is proposed as well as a revised and updated shopfront and rear elevation. See elevations at end of report.

CIL is chargeable for mezzanine floor space where it is part of a scheme which requires planning permission, e.g. when external alterations are proposed, however, the Council's CIL charging schedule identifies A1 retail of under 2000sqm (including food stores) as £0 charge.

3. SITE PLANNING HISTORY

95/0824/OA for the whole of the Reading Gate Retail Park (as varied by permissions 98/0827, 01/01086, 11/01651, 11/01652 and 12/00661). Initially conditions were used to manage the type of retail allowed on site. This has been relaxed over the years however there is an ongoing requirement to control the sale of non-bulky items, to prevent the sale of grocery food stuffs and to prevent sub-division to smaller units.

4. CONSULTATIONS

Statutory – none required

Non-statutory

Transport officer - no objections once additional information provided. See appraisal.

Policy - requested more information on the town centre retail availability/suitability. See appraisal

Public

A site notice was displayed on site and there were no public comments received.

5. POLICY

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) which states "Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development".

The most relevant policies to this proposal in the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 are: CC7, TR1, TR3, TR5, RL1 and RL2

6. APPRAISAL

6.1 The pre-application advice provided to the applicant required that they demonstrate acceptability in terms of an appropriate sequential test assessment, as required by national policy, and Reading Borough Local Plan Policy RL2 (RBLP). Also to demonstrate that there would be no significant impact in terms of transport matters to support the retail use and increased floorspace. If this could be achieved a proposal for additional retail floorspace in this location would be acceptable in policy terms.

Sequential Test

6.2 The agent submitted their explanation for how they considered alternative sites and availability as part of the Planning Statement. On request, an addendum statement was provided to elaborate on the availability of town centre units, and why these were discounted, given the existing presence of the retailer in a large store here, and their operational reasons for having a location in the south of the retail catchment area after the closure of a large store to the west near junction 12 of the M4. The size of unit required (the intention is to use the

additional mezzanine floor to display furniture and household goods ranges) meant that there were no suitable sized units in the nearest district centres. Officers can confirm that the information and justification provided is acceptable in terms of national policy, and Reading Borough Local Plan Policy RL2 (RBLP).

Retail matters

6.3. The original planning permissions included conditions to control the goods that could be sold here and the size of units, to protect the existing town centre retail and smaller units found there, and other district shopping areas. Over time these conditions were relaxed to allow clothing and food to be sold but still with restrictions.

6.4 The condition now states:

“Not more than three units within units 2a, 2b, 3, 4 and 5 and comprising no more than 5,571 sq. m of floorspace at ground and mezzanine level in aggregate may be used for the sale of any retail goods within Class A1. There shall be no sale of food and drink, other than (a) ambient food and drink goods (b) from and ancillary cafe or (c) on an ancillary basis. The remainder of the floorspace shall not be used for the sale of goods other than DIY, garden stock and equipment, furniture, floor coverings, household textiles, automotive parts and accessories, bicycles, bicycle parts and accessories, electrical goods (including personal mobile communication equipment and accessories), gas appliances, pets and pet supplies, office furniture and equipment or toys and indoor/outdoor play equipment/products, entertainment and educational goods and shall not be used for any other purpose (including the sale of food) within Class A1”.

Therefore, with furniture, carpets, toys and electrical goods being sold at Units 2a, 3, 4b and 5 the remaining units 2b and 4a can be used for any retail use (apart from grocery food sales) up to a maximum floor area of 5,571 sq.m.

6.5 The Planning Statement includes a table (see below) of the existing occupiers at Unit2b and 4a to demonstrate that the use proposed, even with the additional floorspace, would still be within the “any retail use” limit. Officers can confirm the current situation but consider it necessary to repeat the above condition if permission is granted. With that the proposal is acceptable in terms of the Local Plan retail policies.

	No of units	Floorspace (sq m)
Non bulky goods allowance	3	5,571
Existing position	1 (TK Maxx)	Ground - 1,405 Mezzanine - 1,122 Total - 2,527
Proposed position	1 (Next)	Ground - 955 Mezzanine - 800 Total – 1,755
Total	2	4,282
Residual	1	1,289

Transport matters

6.4 The site will continue to use the existing access from the A33 dual carriageway. This access accommodates pedestrians and cyclists with dropped kerbs and a shared-use path.

6.5 In accordance with the Council's parking standards and design guidance, 1 space per 30sqm would be required, the additional floor space is likely to increase the car parking demand by 26 spaces. It is recognised that some trips will be linked with other uses within the retail park. The existing car park provides a capacity for 358 vehicles, which comprises 347 publicly available car parking spaces, 3 spaces marked for McDonalds customers to wait for their order, and space for around 11 vehicles to queue for the McDonald's drive through and to wait in a storage area.

6.6 Trics data has been submitted using the Trics research report, that suggests that there would be a minimal increase in parking demand of up to 3 vehicles per hour. Transport officers are satisfied with the assessment undertaken by the applicant to justify the level of trips associated with the development. As stated above, the reason for the minimal increase in trips is due to the number of linked trips to the other retail units.

6.7 A third-party car parking survey was commissioned to confirm the operation of the car park in terms of arrivals, departures, and overall capacity demand and submitted as a separate document to the Transport Assessment.

6.8 Cycle parking should be provided at a ratio of 1 space per 6 staff and 1 space per 300m². However, the applicant's decision to not propose any increase in cycle parking was justified, on request, by way of a survey. This demonstrates that there would be sufficient capacity on the site to accommodate the additional demand from the mezzanine floor space. There is currently provision for 30 cycle parking spaces on site, and the submitted surveys, undertaken on 2 separate days, showed that the cycle parking was not utilised, therefore, Transport confirmed that no additional cycle parking would be required.

6.9 Officers can confirm that the proposal is acceptable in terms of the Local Plan transport policies.

Design and Appearance

6.10 The agent was asked to explain the approach taken with the proposed design of the shopfront, which would be different in appearance to any other unit on this site.

6.11 It was appreciated that the original intention was to have a comprehensive strategy for shopfronts and advertising at the retail park, but currently the park contains a mix of styles; so that there is no longer any comprehensive unifying approach. Therefore, the new occupier has proposed a modern design that does at least accord with similar fundamentals of existing units, such as the glazed frontage and horizontal branding.

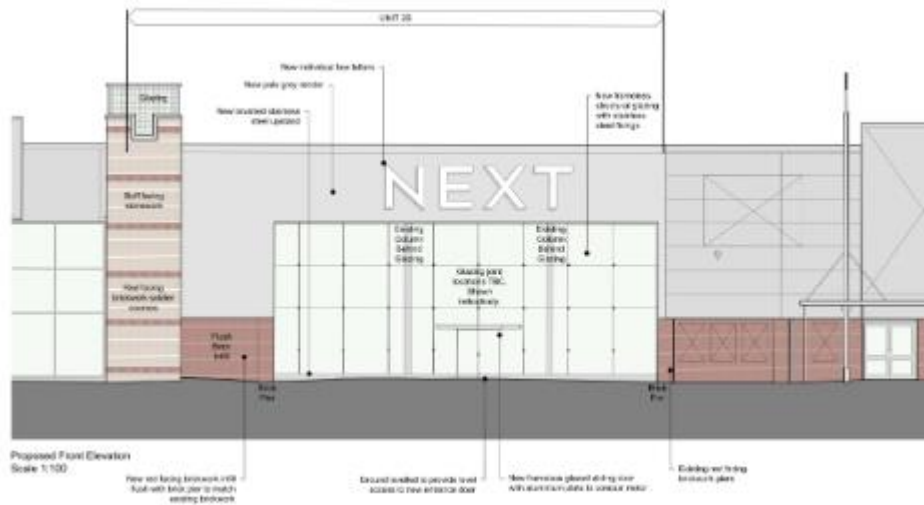
6.12 Officers have considered the applicant's explanation and the proposed design and looked at the site. It can be agreed that there are now different styles and, therefore, the variation in appearance and signage placement would not be out of keeping and may help to revitalise the retail park. It is, therefore, confirmed that the proposal complies with Policy CC7.

7. Conclusion

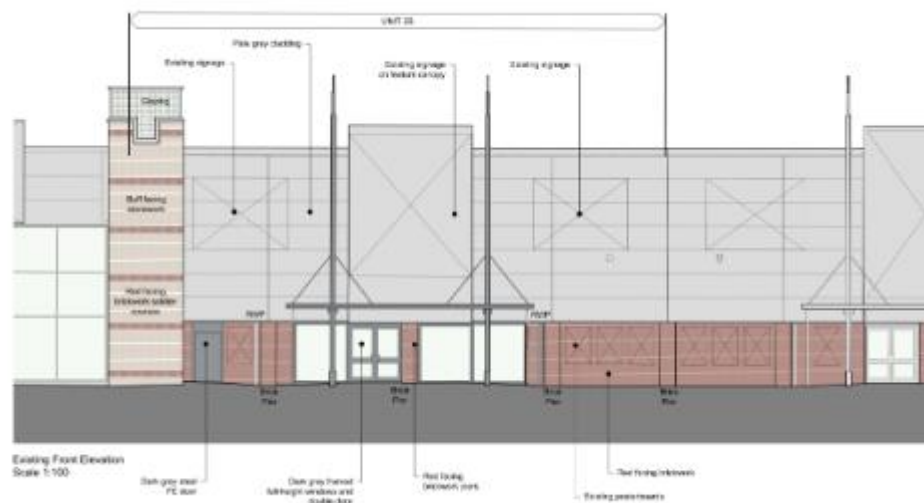
Having considered the application and the information provided by the agent in support and in response to questions asked, officers have concluded that planning permission can be granted for the additional floorspace at this location for retail purposes.

Conditions:

- 3 year to implement
- Approved plans:
 - 22192-U2B-0310-P-00 Proposed Ground and Mezzanine Floor Plans
 - 22192-U2B-0311-P-00 Proposed Elevation
 - 22192-0023-P-01 Unit 2B Location Plan
- Materials as shown on the approved elevation plan.



Proposed



Existing