

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Park

App Ref: PL/25/0051

Address: 32 St Peters Road, Reading

Proposal: Intensification of existing small 4 bed HMO (Class C4) to 6-bedroom HMO and associated single-storey side extension, part single- part two-storey rear extension and internal alterations

Target Decision date: EOT agreed 16/05/2025

Case Officer: Ethne Humphreys

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is a semi-detached two-storey dwelling on the south side of St Peter's Road. The property is in use as a 4-bedroom small HMO (Class C4). The front and rear garden areas are made up entirely of hard standing. The site is within an Article 4 Direction area (small HMOs) and within an Air Quality Management Area. The surrounding area is predominately residential, with the Wokingham Road local centre located at the top of St Peter's Road. The south side of St Peter's Road is characterised by semi-detached dwellings in similar character, many of which have large extensions, while the north side of the street is comprised of narrow and short terraced housing.



The application site as seen from the road, image taken on 27/01/2025

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Planning permission is sought for intensification of the existing small HMO (Class C4) to a 6-bedroom HMO including a single-storey side extension and a part single- part two-storey rear extension to accommodate the intensified use.

The proposals as originally proposed was for a 7 bed HMO. However, revised plans were received proposing 6 bed HMO following concerns raised by the case officer in respect of insufficient communal areas, privacy, landscaping and scale of extensions.

Plans/Information Submitted:

1397.1.existing.A1-Model Existing Plans and Elevations
Received 10 January 2025

CE4708 Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment, Chase Ecological Consultancy
Received 13 January 2025

1397.Planning Statement
1397.4.HMO Threshold Plan
Received 23 January 2025

Various tenancy agreements dating from 2009 to 2024
Received 17 April 2025

Block and Location Plans 1397/3/d
Plans as Proposed 1397/2/g
Received 9th May 2025

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None.

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted:

- RBC Transport Development Control – No objections subject to conditions.
- GS Ecology - The bat survey (Chase Ecology, December 2024, ref: CE4708) has been undertaken to an appropriate standard and concludes that the risk of bats being affected by the current proposals is minimal. There are therefore no objections on ecology grounds.
- RBC Environmental Protection – No objections.

A site notice was erected on site. No neighbour letters of representation received.

Summary of discussions with applicant/agent:

The agent was advised of concerns relating to insufficient communal areas, privacy issues, landscaping and scale of extensions. Revised plans were received reducing the number of HMO bedrooms proposed, changes to windows, addition of landscaping, discussed below.

No pre-application advice was sought for this specific scheme prior to the submission of this application.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

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

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

National Planning Practice Guidance 2014 onwards

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

H8: RESIDENTIAL CONVERSIONS

H9: HOUSE EXTENSIONS AND ANCILLARY ACCOMMODATION

H10: PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL OUTDOOR SPACE

TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS

TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

SPD

Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)

Residential Conversions SPD (2023)

for beautiful, enduring and successful places (2019)

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

Principle of development: Size requirements and whether the conversion of the property would result in unduly diluting or harming a mixed and sustainable community (Policy H8 and SPD Checklist 3)

Any residential conversion must contribute to achieving an appropriately mixed and sustainable community by providing an acceptable housing mix, ensuring that, as appropriate, single family housing remains the dominant form of dwelling in the vicinity of the application, taking account of the relevant threshold approach, and ensuring there is not a detrimental impact on the physical character of the area.

The site is an existing small HMO (C4 use class). There is no planning history to provide context to when this property would have been converted from a single-family dwelling (C3 use class) to a small HMO. The site is also within an Article 4 Direction area, in force since 2013, requiring conversions from C3 use to C4 use to obtain planning permission. Therefore, the applicant was asked to demonstrate that the property has been in use since before the introduction of the Article 4 Direction area. The applicant submitted various tenancy agreements to demonstrate the use of the property as a small HMO (C4 class) since at least 2009. Therefore, on this occasion it is considered that the use of the site has been sufficiently clarified.

As the property is already in HMO use there would be no change in terms of the mix of the housing stock in the community. The ‘tipping point’¹ calculation, which is used to assess whether there would be harm from a conversion to an HMO, is not applied in this instance as set out in paragraph 4.3 of the SPD. This is because it is considered that there would be *“no further effect on the concentration of HMOs and balance and mix of households in the local community.”*

For large HMOs, the SPD sets out the following requirements, in addition to the general requirements as set out in Appendix 4:

- The property to be converted measures more than 120 sq m gross, and
- There is sufficient communal space.

The first requirement is not considered relevant in this case, as the property is an existing HMO, and the requirement is intended to avoid conversions of smaller dwellinghouses to HMOs, which could result in cramped and overcrowded conditions.

With regard to communal space and further to revisions made during the course of this application, in short this is considered acceptable – and discussed in more details elsewhere in this report.

As such, the principle of intensification is considered acceptable on this site, subject to further considerations as set out below.

¹ ‘tipping point is when the concentration of HMOs becomes over dominant, and the community is no longer considered to be mixed and sustainable.’ The SPD states that “planning permission will not normally be granted for a change of use from a dwelling to HMO where the proportion of HMOs (either C4 or sui generis) will result in HMOs representing 25% or more of the residential properties within a circle of 50m radius measured from the application site” (para. 5.44).

The impact on amenity of existing and future residents of the property and neighbouring properties (Policies CC8, H8 and H10 and SPD Checklist items 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11)

Policy CC8 states that *“Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of:*

- *Privacy and overlooking;*
- *Access to sunlight and daylight;*
- *Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;*
- *Harm to outlook;*
- *Noise and disturbance”*

Policy H8 and the Residential Conversions SPD also refer to residential amenity in relation to HMOs, including preventing noise disturbance to neighbouring properties, and ensuring adequate provision of communal space for future occupiers of the property. Policy H10 also applies and requires the provision of adequate and useable outdoor amenity space.

Impact on future occupiers

Communal Areas

The SPD identifies that the amount of communal space that is considered appropriate in a large HMO would be dependent on the number and size of bedrooms. The standard set out is for one communal room for every 4-6 bedrooms depending on the size of the bedroom. The SPD further states that the provision of communal rooms is in addition to the provision of a kitchen, particularly where the kitchen provides no seating area or space to relax and is purely a functional area.

The proposal was originally for a 78 bed HMO, with one open plan kitchen and dining area. Concerns were raised that there were insufficient and good quality communal areas for the number of bedrooms, and particularly given limited outlook to the kitchen, should this have been provided as a separate room.

Revised plans were received amending the proposal from 7 bedroom to 6 bedrooms, which also allows for additional communal area to be provided, resulting in one open plan kitchen/dining room and one other communal area. Given this and the size of the bedrooms, it is considered that there would be sufficient space for occupiers of the property to not be detrimentally impacted in terms of amenity. A condition will be attached to secure the use of these rooms as communal space.

Room sizes

The residential conversions SPD states, “Where the cooking facilities are provided in a separate room, each bedroom must be a minimum of:

- 6.5 square metres if occupied by one person;

- 10.5 square metres if occupied by two persons”.

The bedrooms are proposed for single occupancy and are all larger than 6.5m² which is acceptable. Alongside, and as above, there are separate kitchen and communal living areas. Occupancy of the HMO will be restricted by condition.

External Windows

All habitable rooms would benefit from existing windows and are considered to be served by adequate daylighting and outlook. Concern was originally raised that there would be no defensible space to ground floor rear bedrooms 3 and 4 as originally annotated - due to full length patio windows (sole openings) to these rooms immediately adjacent communal garden area. One of these rooms has been changed to provide additional communal area. Bedroom 3 as now annotated would have a window rather than patio doors and landscaping has now been illustrated in front of this window which would assist in minimise privacy concerns. A cycle storage unit was originally proposed immediately in front of bedroom 2 as annotated. This was considered to be unneighbourly. Plans illustrate the reorientation of the unit away from the bedroom window which on balance is considered acceptable.

Stacking

The Council's SPD seeks to avoid layouts which locate living rooms, bathrooms and kitchens, next to, above, or below, proposed or neighbouring bedrooms. The layout largely achieves this and is not considered unreasonable. Whilst there would be a bedroom located to next to living room, it is not considered to be so harmful in terms of noise disturbance so as to result in a reason for refusal.

Outdoor Amenity Space

There is an existing garden. Given this and the amount of internal communal area to be provided, it is considered that an acceptable amount of outdoor amenity space would be provided. In addition, the site's location is close to public recreation and leisure facilities.

Impact on neighbouring properties

Given the siting of the two storey rear extension, it is not considered to result in any material loss of light or overbearing effects to any neighbouring property. No windows are proposed on the flank elevations and as such there would be no loss of privacy. A condition will be attached to this effect.

The side extension adjacent the boundary with No.30 St Peters Road would be deep. However, it would be single storey and roof hipped away (this was amended from previously proposed overly large parapet wall). The extension would utilise the footprint of existing garage structure adjacent this boundary with limited projection deeper than this. It is also noted that No.30 has the benefit of a detached garage structure adjacent the boundary in a similar position which would

minimise assist in minimising the impact. Whilst clearly visible to occupiers of No.30, it is not considered to be so harmful to warrant a refusal in this respect.

The single storey rear extension element adjacent No.34 St Peters Road would not project past an existing rear addition to No.34 and as such there would be no overbearing effects.

It would not be expected that the amount of noise from the property, housing a maximum of 6 adults, nor within the garden, would be appreciably different from that generated by the existing 4 bed HMO. A condition is recommended requiring the submission and approval of a management agreement, which among other matters includes the requirement to set out how noise within and outside the property would be managed.

Character and design/Impact on listed building and conservation area

Policy CC7 sets out requirements for high quality design in the borough. Policy H8 is also relevant to the proposal and states that residential conversions should “respect the physical character of the area in terms of scale, location, materials and design, the arrangement of doors, windows and other principal architectural features”.

The proposal includes a single storey side extension, connecting to a part single, part two storey rear extension. The footprint of the extension would be large. However, it is recognised that there are similar large extensions within the surrounding area and the proposal would largely in keeping with the pattern of development along this side of St Peter’s Road. Part of the rear extension would also the footprint of existing garage structure to be demolished. It is likely that this would be the maximum amount of built form permissible at this site. The majority of the development is single storey, and as such contributes to its subservient appearance to the host property. The two storey extension, located at the rear of the property, would not be readily visible from the street scene. At the request of the case officer, the proposed plans have been revised to remove a parapet wall on the side elevation to reduce the overall height of the side extension along this boundary. Furthermore, plans now illustrate glazing on the rear wall of the previously blank elevation, to soften the appearance. The materials are considered sympathetic to the host property and the wider character of the street. As discussed elsewhere, there is some limited soft landscaping proposed which would assist in improving the impact of the proposals. On balance, the proposals are not considered to be so harmful in design terms to warrant a refusal in this respect.

Transport and parking

Policy TR5 states that parking standards for all residential conversions should be in accordance with the Council’s adopted Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD.

The site is located within Zone 3, Secondary Core Area, of the Council’s adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD. Typically, these areas are within 400m of a Reading Buses high frequency ‘Premier Route’, which provides high quality bus routes to and from Reading town centre and other local centre facilities. In accordance with the adopted SPD, the development is

therefore required to provide a parking provision of 0.25 spaces per HMO bedroom. There is a large area of hardstanding to the front of the property which is used for parking and can accommodate 3 parking spaces which complies with the Council's Parking Standards.

St Peters Road and the surrounding road network all have extensive parking restrictions preventing indiscriminate on-street parking. The Council's residential parking permit scheme also operates in the area. A condition is recommended to advise the applicant that future residents of the HMO residential bedrooms would not be entitled to parking permits for the surrounding residential streets where parking is under pressure. This will ensure that the development does not harm the existing amenities of the neighbouring residential properties by adding to the already high level of on-street car parking in the area.

In accordance with the Borough's Parking Standards and Design SPD, a minimum provision of 0.5 cycle storage spaces per HMO room should be provided within a communal lockable store equipped with "Sheffield" style stands. These facilities should be provided in a secure and dry location and not exposed to the elements in respect of security and weather. A store is illustrated on the proposed revised Block Plan; however, a condition is recommended to secure full details of the specifications of this store.

Landscaping and biodiversity

Policy EN12 requires all development to demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity where possible. The proposal is not subject to mandatory biodiversity net gain, as the site is made up entirely of hard surfacing and therefore there is no impact on existing habitats.

At the request of the case officer, the proposal has been revised to include the reduction of the existing hard standing to the front and rear of the site to provide some areas of shrubbery. This is considered an improvement, if somewhat limited, to the appearance, amenity value, and biodiversity of the site. A condition is recommended to secure further details of the proposed soft landscaping prior to first occupation of the property.

CONCLUSION

The proposal has been assessed against national and locally adopted policies, and is considered in accordance with those policies, as set out above.

RECOMMENDATION

GRANT PERMISSION

Subject to conditions and informatives