

20 May 2025



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT
Ward	Katesgrove
Planning Application Reference	PL/25/0496
Site Address	Southern Court, 5-6 South Street, Reading, RG1 4QS
Proposal	External alterations to property
Applicant	Reading Borough Council
Report Author	Matthew Harding
Deadline	23 May 2025
Recommendation	Grant with conditions

1. Introduction and Site Description

Southern Court is a three-storey red brick building, located on the southern side of South Street, between East Street and Sidmouth South to the south-east of Reading town centre. The building is in use as Class E offices, with a recent prior approval for the conversion to residential (PL/25/0344). This application has been submitted to make external alternations to the building to support its residential conversion and use.



Figure 1: Application building

The building is one of 5 of the same buildings along the southern side of South Street, alternating from red brick and red fenestration, and buff brick and yellow fenestration finish (image of application building below). There is a shared surface level car park to the rear of the application property and neighbouring buildings.

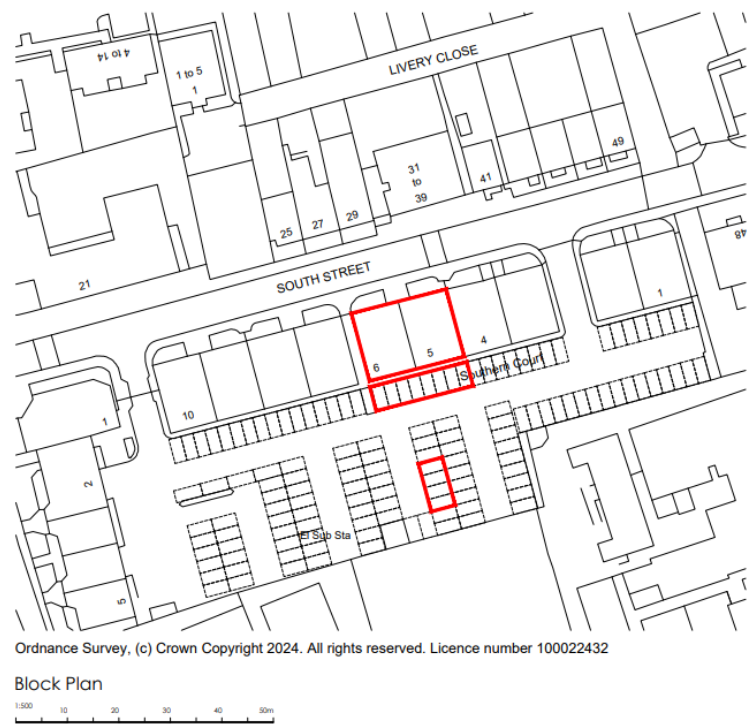


Figure 2: Site Location Plan

The site falls outside of the Article 4 restricting prior approval changes of use. The building is not listed, nor within a Conservation Area and the site is not within a Flood Zone.

2. The Proposal

This planning application seeks alterations to facilitate the functioning of the building for residential development. The following alterations to the building are sought:

Front elevation	Rear elevation	Side (west) elevation	Roof
New rooflights x 2	New doorway (existing window enlarged to form doorway) x 2	New window – first floor	Glazed atrium blocked up
	New rooflights x 2	New external doorway	Rooflights added x 24
		Block up existing doorway	

Proposed Plans

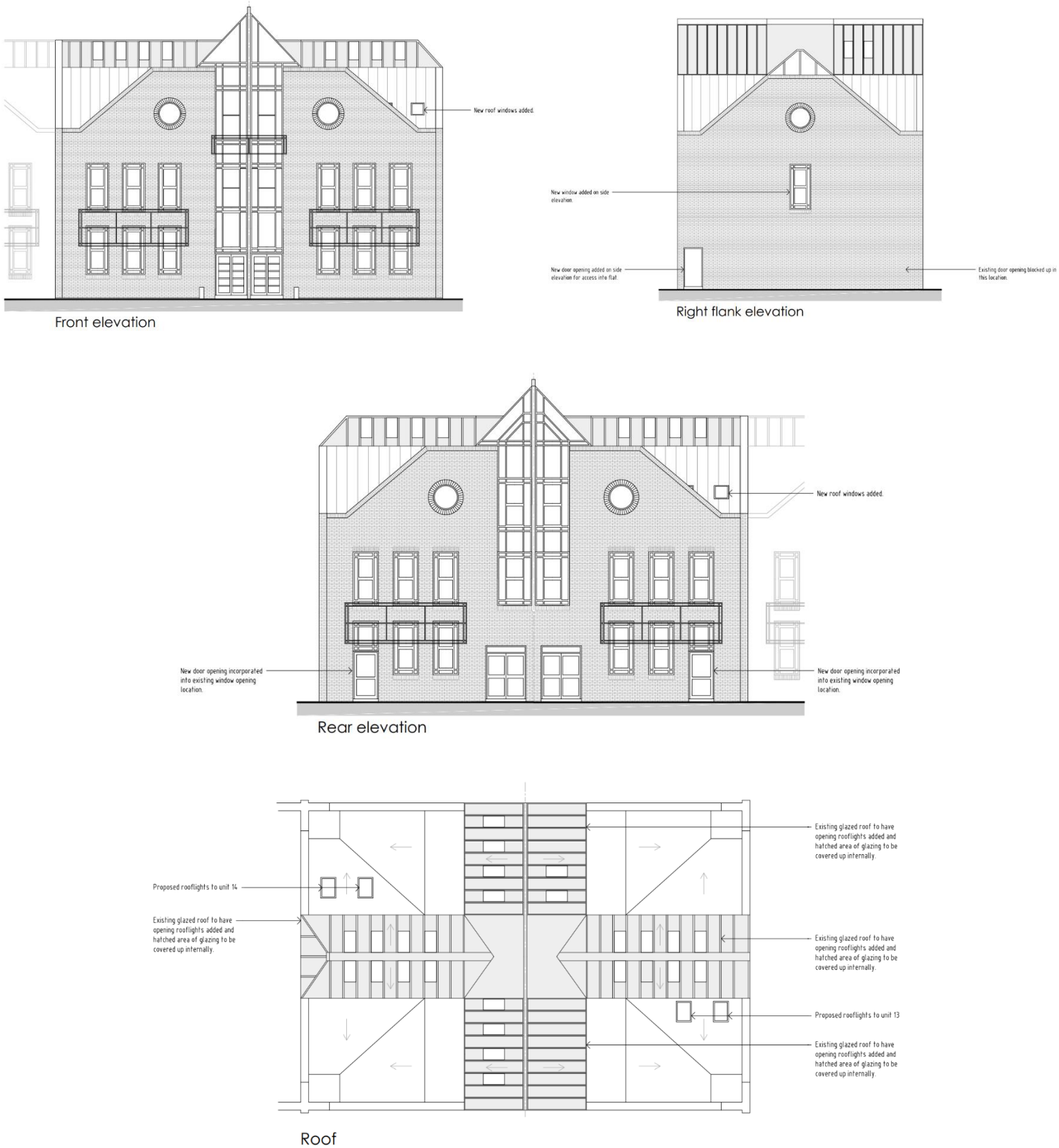


Figure 3: Proposed Plans - Front, Rear and Side Elevations and Roof Plan

3. Site Planning History

- PL/19/1351 – Change of use of ground floor from B1 Business to D1 Non-Residential Institution. Approved 3 October 2019.
- PL/25/0344 - Change of use from Class E (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) resulting in the creation of 18 x 1-bedroom flats, with associated car parking and cycle storage. Prior Notification under Class MA, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015. Prior Approval granted 13 May 2025.

4. Consultations and third-party comments

None received.

5. 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) 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: Design and The Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

Planning Policy Guidance

Residential Conversions SPD, March 2023

Other relevant documentation

- Reading Borough Local Plan Pre-Submission Draft Partial Update, November 2024

Local Plan Update

The present 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.

The Local Plan policies pertinent to these applications 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 determination of this planning application and are not considered to be 'out of date'.

6. Appraisal

This application is for a small number of external alterations to the existing building (Southern Court), to facilitate the change of use from office to residential as considered and no objections raised as part of an earlier prior approval application (PL/25/0344).

Wider policy considerations relating to transport, air quality, building suitability and any flood risk have been considered as part of the earlier prior approval application. This application is solely considering matters relating to design and appearance and amenity from the proposed external alterations.

Design and Appearance

Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm requires all development to be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading it is located. In this context, the existing building is a three-storey red brick building with a central glazed roof atrium fronting South Street originally purpose built for office use.

The external alterations are sought to facilitate an alternative residential conversion use of the building and are minor in nature. The most significant change to the building is central glazed roof is to be covered up internally and have opening rooflights added, to provide light and ventilation to the flats within the roof space. The further changes see three new doorways: two on the rear elevation and one on the side elevation; the bricking up of an existing doorway on the rear elevation, a new window at first floor level on the side elevation and two new roof light windows on both the front and rear elevations of the building.

The changes sought are modest in nature and are sympathetic to the existing design, appearance and character of the building whilst appropriate to allow for its new residential use. As such, the proposed alterations are of a high quality of design that maintains the character of the building, which in turns maintains the character and appearance of the area, in accordance with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

Amenity

Policy CC8: Safeguarding Amenity ensures development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

In this instance, the conversion and residential use of the building has been established through the recent prior approval application (PL/25/0344) and this application seeks to make some relatively minor external alterations to the building to facilitate its residential use.

The immediate area comprising a mixture of uses, with residential properties on the opposite northern side of the application site, the neighbouring buildings mirroring the application property and operating commercial uses. There is also a place of worship on the corner of South Street and Sidmouth Street and a large open car park and enclosed swimming pool to the rear of the site.

The new window on the side elevation at first floor level would face the blank side elevation of 4 Southern Court and the and the proposed roof lights on the front and rear elevations would serve a bedroom each for units 13 and 14 at second floor, with the lowest part of the windows positioned 1.5 metres above finished floor level. Views from the front facing rooflights would be towards the street and largely over and above those properties on the opposite side of the road and views from the rear facing rooflights are towards the rear carpark. These new window openings would not result in any unacceptable loss of privacy to the occupants of the neighbouring and surrounding properties.

Similarly, there are several rooflights shown within the roof space. However, this space is presently fully glazed and would be blocked up internally. The new rooflights installed within the roof are to serve the two residential units (Units 17 & 18), serving primary habitable accommodation. The lowest parts of the window openings are raised 1.5m above finished floor level and are positioned centrally within the roof space. The alterations to the roof of the building would reduce the extent of glazing and the new rooflights would be positioned away from the neighbouring buildings. As such, these new rooflight windows are also not considered to result in an unacceptable loss of privacy to the occupants of the neighbouring and surrounding properties.

For the aforementioned reasons, the proposed external alterations would not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties and would support an acceptable living environment for future

residents of the building. Therefore, the development proposal complies with Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) came into place on 12 February 2024, by way of an amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, requiring development proposals to deliver a BNG minimum of 10%. However, there are certain exemptions to the BNG requirements depending on the scale of the development proposal and impact on habitats, these are:

A development that does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than:

- *25 square metres (5m by 5m) of on-site habitat*
- *5 metres of on-site linear habitats such as hedgerows*

The proposed development is external alterations to an existing building that would not increase the buildings overall size. Therefore, the development impacts less than 25 square metres of any on-site habitat and would not impact any on-site linear habitat features. Therefore, the proposal is except from the BNG requirements.

7. Conclusion

Having considered the application and the information provided by the agent in support of the application, Officers have concluded that the proposed external alterations to the building to facilitate its residential use comply with the relevant policies of the Reading Borough Local Plan and can be granted planning permission.

8. Recommendation:

Grant permission, subject to conditions:

Conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall begin no later than *three* years from the date of this planning permission.

REASON: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) to prevent an accumulation of unimplemented planning permissions.

2. The development hereby permitted shall ONLY be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

- Location and Block Plan (drawing no. 1944-001)
- Existing Plans and Elevations (drawing no. 1944-002)
- Proposed Plans (drawing no. 1944-003)
- Proposed Elevations (drawing no. 1944-004)

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out and adhered to in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.

3. The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used on the existing building.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and ensuring the new development responds positively to the local context and character in accordance with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Informatives

1. The Local Planning Authority has worked positively and proactively with the applicant to resolve relevant matters to allow permission to be granted within the prescribed target or agreed extended timescale for the decision to be issued.
2. Your attention is drawn to the requirement for submission of a Building Regulations application for the proposed development. Please contact RBC Building Control on Building.control@reading.gov.uk OR telephone 0118 9372449 9.00am to 1.00pm Monday to Friday.
3. Complaints are commonly received about noise and dust caused by construction and demolition works, particularly working outside reasonable hours and smoke from bonfires associated with the burning of waste on site. The developer is reminded that construction and demolition associated with the approved development will be subject to environmental health law.
4. To minimise the disturbance by noise of future residential occupiers of the flats and its effect on neighbouring residents, residential accommodation must be designed and constructed or converted so as to achieve the

insulation requirements set out in Building Regulations Approved Document E.

5. The Council introduced the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on 1st April 2015. CIL is a way of securing financial contributions towards infrastructure from new development, and partially replaces the Section 106 planning obligation regime. It is a set charge per sq m of floorspace for different uses, and, unlike Section 106, it is non-negotiable. It applies to developments which result in at least one dwelling; where the space has not been in lawful use for 6 months within the last 3 years or 100 sq m of new floorspace. For this approved development the CIL status is (*Officer* - INSERT IF NIL CHARGE/CHARGEABLE/NOT APPLICABLE). If chargeable you will be sent a CIL Liability Notice with the calculated amount soon. CIL becomes payable on commencement of the development or by instalments.

For more information go to:

https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/CIL_Advice_to_Applicants.pdf

6. Work on a loft or roof may affect bats. The applicant will need to consider protected species when planning work of this type. A survey may be needed, and if bats are using the building, a licence may be required. To view specific information regarding bats use the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences>