

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT - Application No. 25/0052/FUL

Address: Great Brighams Mead Vastern Road

Proposal: External alterations in connection with conversion of the building to residential use

Case officer: Matt Burns

Site Description and Surrounding Area

The application site comprises a three-storey office building called Great Brighams Mead with a part brick façade, a hipped roof and a distinctive clocktower. The site is surrounded by mature Plane trees protected trees to the south and west of the building (TPO ref. 80/05).

The site is located to the north of Reading Station, fronting onto the Caversham Road / Vastern Road roundabout. It is on the edge of a residential area comprising terraced Victorian houses and flats to the rear.

The site is located within Flood Zone 3. The River Thames is located 40m to the rear of the site.

The site is within an air quality management area and includes land identified as being potentially contaminated.

The site lies outside, but on the edge, of the Central Core Policy Area and the Office Core Policy Area.

Proposal

The proposals seek full planning permission for external alterations to the existing building. The changes are proposed in connection with the prior approval consent ref. 24/1320/VAR for change of use of the building from offices to 110 residential units under Class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.

This prior approval consent was originally granted on 1st June 2021 (ref. 21/0567) and then 24/1320/VAR was granted under a section 73 variation of condition application to extend the timeframe for completion of the prior approval change of use from 1st June 2024 to 1st June 2027. The conversion works commenced in May 2022 but have not yet been completed. A concurrent section 73 variation of condition application (ref. 25/0046) has also been submitted alongside this application to make associated changes to the internal layout of the building to reflect the external alterations proposed.

The external changes to the building include:

- Removal of some windows to all floors and replacement with slightly smaller new windows of same design, materials (aluminium) and colour. Windows to be replaced to ensure that the internal party walls between apartments comply with the latest fire regulations. All infill brickwork to match the existing building.
- Infill brickwork (to match existing) indicated at ground level below existing windows, to reflect the internal raised ground floor level appropriate for residential use.
- Existing faceted full-height curtain walling to each end of the building replaced with matching fire-rated curtain walling to ensure adequate fire compartmentation between floors.
- Installation of automatic smoke vents within pitch of existing roof and to central flat roof areas (projection of 0.5m in height to flat roof) to ensure compliance with current fire regulations.
- New entrance curtain walling and entrance doors indicated at front and rear of the central atrium part of the building (previously approved under planning permission ref. 22/0717)
- New external escape doors from new stair cores and adjoining external ground floor ramps to provide a safe level exit from the building with black galvanised steel railings.

The application outlines that the external works are proposed to assist in making the building suitable for residential occupation under the extant prior approval consent and to ensure the building complies with the latest building and fire safety regulations.

Plans and Documents Considered

- Covering Letter ref. SP24-1060 dated 9th January 2025 (Simply Planning)
- Location plan ref. PP-13652021V1 dated 10th January 2025
- Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0901 Rev A – Existing Elevations
- Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0902 Rev A – Existing Elevations Inner Elevations
- Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0907 Rev B – Proposed Elevations Wind Replacements Suitable for Planning
- Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0907 Rev B – Proposed Elevations Window Replacement Suitable for Planning
- Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0908 Rev B - Proposed Inner Elevations Window Replacements Suitable for Planning
- Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0904 Rev B – Proposed Inner Elevations Suitable for Planning
- Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0903 Rev B – Proposed Elevations Suitable for Planning

Received by the Local Planning Authority on 10th January 2025

Planning History

210567 - Change of use from office use Class B1(a) to use Class C3 to comprise 110 residential units. Prior Notification under Class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015. Approved on 1st June 2021.

220717 - External alterations in connection with conversion to residential use, including replacement of main revolving doors with double swing doors, new glazing to lobby, creation of side and rear door openings, new window openings and replacement windows. Approved on 4 August 2022.

221479 - Application for prior approval of 72 proposed new dwellinghouses on detached buildings in commercial or mixed use - Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) - Schedule 2, Part 20, Class AA, for the proposed additional storeys to result in a third and fourth floor. Refused 21 November 2022

220778 - Application for prior approval of 72 proposed new dwellinghouses on detached buildings in commercial or mixed use - Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) - Schedule 2, Part 20, Class AA, for the proposed additional storeys to result in a maximum overall building height of 21.92m. Refused 4 August 2022

220343 - Application for approval of details reserved by conditions 3 (nature and extent of contamination), 4 (remediation scheme) and 5 (validation report) of consent ref. 210567 (amended description). Details Approved 13 May 2022

230182 - Replacement of existing non-illuminated signage. Granted 20th September 2023

230698 - Application for approval of details reserved by condition 8 (Flood Management and Evacuation Plan) of consent ref. 210567. Details Approved 10 October 2023

230745 Construction of a two-storey roof (third and fourth floor) extension to accommodate 100 apart-hotel rooms (Use Class C1) with associated parking, cycle stores and bin stores. Refused 13 August 2024

241320 - Change of use from office use Class B1(a) to use Class C3 to comprise 110 residential units. Prior Notification under Class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 without complying with condition 1 (time limit for completion) of consent ref. 210567 to allow for completion of the development within 6 years rather than 3 years. Granted 2 December 2024

250046 - Change of use from office use Class B1(a) to use Class C3 to comprise 110 residential units. Prior Notification under Class O, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 without complying with condition 2 (approved plans) of consent ref. 241320 for internal alterations to layout. Under Consideration.

Consultation Responses

RBC Transport – The proposed ground floor escape ramps would result in reconfiguration of 2 disabled parking bays and loss of 4 parking spaces. Do not object, given the extensive on site car parking and parking restrictions on surrounding roads.

RBC Environmental Protection – Seek a noise assessment to understand if the new windows would provide adequate road noise mitigation. *(Officer comment – noise impact for future occupiers would fall to be considered and if necessary mitigated as part of the prior approval consent for change of use of the building not the current application which is for external alterations to the building only. Under the prior approval process only commercial noise can be considered (not road noise) and when prior approval ref. 21/0567 was granted for change of use of the building from offices to residential no commercial noise impacts requiring mitigation were identified. Therefore, a requirement for a noise assessment is not considered to be justified as part of this application for external change to an existing office building).*

Public Consultation

A site notice was displayed at the application site on 13th February 2025. No letters of objection have been received.

Equality Act

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 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.

Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework 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

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM
CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY
EN14: TREES, HEDGES AND WOODLANDS
EN16: POLLUTION AND WATER RESOURCES
EN18: FLOODING AND DRAINAGE
TR1: ACHIEVING THE TRANSPORT STRATEGY
TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS
TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING
RL1: NETWORK AND HIERARCHY OF CENTRES
CR1: DEFINITION OF CENTRAL READING
CR2: DESIGN IN CENTRAL READING

Appraisal

There is no change of use proposed as part of this application which is for external works to the existing building only which would facilitate the change of use of the building from offices to residential under separate prior approval consent ref. 24/1320/VAR.

Character and Appearance

The proposed replacement windows and doors, infill brick work and curtain walling would match the existing building in terms of use of materials, colour and design and as such are considered to integrate satisfactorily with the appearance of the existing building. The proposed smoke vents would project 0.5m above the existing crown flat roof to the building but given their small size are not considered to appear prominent or have material visual impact.

At ground floor level four new entrance ramps are proposed to provide inclusive escape routes from the building. These ramps are modest additions given the scale of the existing building and are not considered to result in a significant adverse impact on the appearance of the building. Location at ground floor level the ramps would not be readily visible to views from outside of the site.

Subject to condition to secure submission and approval of details and samples of all external materials the proposed external changes are considered to integrate satisfactorily with the character and appearance of the existing building. The proposals would result in an overall more residential appearance to the building compared to the existing office building and large stretches of windows which appear more commercial in style. The character of the surrounding area is mixed containing a variety of residential and commercial buildings of a variety of styles. It is considered that the proposals would integrate with and be appropriate within this character. The changes proposed would not result in a significant change to the appearance of the building from the surrounding streets.

The proposals would accord with Policies CC7 and CR2.

Amenity

The building is surrounded by terraced residential dwellings to the east and west to De Montfort Road and Brigham Road and with flats to Regents Riverside adjacent to the site to the north. The proposed changes to the windows would result in an overall reduction to the number and size of windows, particularly to the upper most floor of the building. It is considered that this would be a positive change in terms of the building's relationship with existing surrounding dwellings and would reduce instances of overlooking and loss of privacy compared to the current approved residential use of the site under the prior approval consent.

The proposals would not result in an increase in scale or footprint of the building and as such no impacts upon surrounding occupiers in terms of overbearing or loss of light are identified. No impacts in terms of noise or disturbance are identified from the proposed external changes to the building.

As discussed above the external changes are proposed in connection with a concurrent section 73 variation of condition application (ref . 25/0046) to make associated changes to the internal layout of the prior approval residential units to reflect the external alterations proposed. It is considered that the changes to the windows would ensure that each unit within the prior approval development would continue to be served by adequate windows and receipt of daylight. All habitable rooms would be served by a window.

The proposals would accord with Policies CC8 and EN16.

Transport

The proposed ground floor escape ramps would result in reconfiguration of 2 disabled parking bays and loss of 4 parking spaces. RBC Transport Officers do not object to these changes, given the extensive on site car parking and parking restrictions on surrounding roads. It is not considered that the proposed external changes to the building would have detrimental impact on the surrounding highway network.

The proposals would accord with Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5.

Natural Environment

A TPO tree group (ref. 80/05) lies to the west and southern boundaries of the site. The external works proposed would not impact on these trees and no works to the trees are proposed. An informative would be attach to any planning permission to remind the applicant that any works to these trees would require a tree works consent application to the Council. No conflict with Policy EN14 is identified.

Flooding

The site is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The proposals relates to external changes to the building only and do not seek a change of use. The proposals are not considered to have a material impact upon the flood risk. The extant prior approval consent for residential use includes a condition to require the development to be undertaken in accordance with an approved flood risk assessment and flood risk management plan which would need to be satisfied prior to residential occupation of the site. No conflict with Policy EN18 is identified.

Conclusion

The proposals are considered to be acceptable and not result detrimental impacts and comply with the relevant policies of the Development Plan outlined above.

RECOMMENDATION:

Grant Full Planning Permission, subject to the following 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) in order 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 plan ref. PP-13652021V1 dated 10th January 2025
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0901 Rev A – Existing Elevations
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0902 Rev A – Existing Elevations Inner Elevations
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0907 Rev B – Proposed Elevations Wind Replacements Suitable for Planning
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RGD-XX-EL-D-B-0907 Rev B – Proposed Elevations Window Replacement Suitable for Planning
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0908 Rev B - Proposed Inner Elevations Window Replacements Suitable for Planning
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0904 Rev B – Proposed Inner Elevations Suitable for Planning
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-EL-D-B-0903 Rev B – Proposed Elevations Suitable for Planning
- Received by the Local Planning Authority on 10th January 2025
- Drawing ref. 5025893 ref. RDG-00-PL-D-B-0305 Rev D – Proposed Ground Floor Plan Suitable for Planning
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-XX-XX-A-0603 – External Ramp Stair Core B Floor Plan
 - Drawing ref. 5025893-RDG-XX-XX-DT-A-0629 Rev B – Typical Section External Ramp – Stairs Junction
- Received by the Local Planning Authority on 1st April 2025

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. No development hereby permitted shall commence until a schedule and samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out and thereafter maintained in accordance with the details approved unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: These details are required due to insufficient information being contained within this submission and 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

4. No construction, demolition or associated deliveries shall take place outside the hours of 0800hrs to 1800hrs Mondays to Fridays, and 0800hrs to 1300hrs on Saturdays, and not at any time on Sundays and Bank or Statutory Holidays without prior written approval from the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: In order to protect occupiers of nearby properties from unreasonable disturbance from works connected with implementing this permission in accordance with Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Informatives:

1. You are advised to avoid the use of grassed areas for development related activity, e.g. storage of materials, due to the resulting potential harm to trees.
2. i) The attention of the applicant is drawn to Section 59 of the Highways Act 1980, which enables the Highway Authority to recover expenses due to damage caused by extraordinary traffic.
ii) Any works affecting the Highway shall be in accordance with Reading Borough's Council's document "Guidance Notes for Activities on the Public Highway within the Borough of Reading". The applicant should note that compliance with this document is mandatory and licences to work on the Highway will only be issued if the requirements contained within it are met. A copy can be obtained from the Council's website.
3. Any grounds works and methods of construction of any structure or materials storage within Root Protection Areas (defined as per BS5837:2012) and/or any pruning of trees, required to implement the development, must be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) prior to works taking place.
4. Your attention is drawn to the terms and conditions of this permission. Any development which is carried out but which differs materially from the approved plans and details, or does not comply with any condition(s) or planning obligation(s) attached to the permission may result in the Council taking action to remedy the breach of planning control. If you are in any doubt please contact the Council.
5. Your attention is drawn to the requirement for submission of a Building Regulations application for the proposed development. Please contact Building Control on 0118 937 2449 for advice.
6. 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.
7. You are advised that the development lies on a potentially contaminated site. Due to the nature of the historic land use there is the potential of contaminated land being present. The developers must be aware that any ground or enabling works may bring receptors into contact with the aforementioned contaminants. You may wish to satisfy yourself that the details of the construction proposals take the necessary account of the possibility of contaminants from that source.
8. 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.