

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Abbey

App Ref: PL/24/0876 (FUL)

Address: 28-30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading, RG1 1TG

Proposal: Proposed conversion the existing unused first, second & third floors offices from Class E(c)(i) Financial services, to 3No One Bedroom Residential Apartments (Class C3 Dwellinghouses)

Applicant: Mr Ha Tuan Mai

Received date: 09 July 2024

Target Decision date: 30 May 2025

Case Officer: Anthony Scholes

Ward: Abbey

App Ref: PL/24/1382 (LBC)

Address: 28-30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading, RG1 1TG

Proposal: Works associated with the creation of 3No Apartments at The First, Second & Third Floors, no alteration to the external Building, other than the addition of a new front door and a new Retail Shop Front. New internal staircase to all levels, including the retention of previously completed work for blocking up of openings to previous shared staircase and service area.

Applicant: Mr Ha Tuan Mai

Received date: 17 October 2024

Target Decision date: 30 May 2025

Case Officer: Anthony Scholes

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is part of Queen Victoria Street, which contains two listed terraces constructed in the mid-19th century. The property is vacant and was last in use a part of HSBC bank. The property was internally subdivided from the remainder of the HSBC building (26 Broad St, Cnr Queen Victoria Street). This internal subdivision has left the building without an internal staircase as evidenced at the site visit.

The building is listed, though not within a conservation area. The listing description is as follows:

"QUEEN VICTORIA STREET 1. 5128 Nos 1 to 31 (odd) Nos 2 to 32 (even) SU 7173 NE 1/558 SU 7173 SW 2/558 SU 7173 SE 3/558 SU 7173 12/558 II

2. Including Nos 148 and 149 Friar Street and Nos 24 to 28 and 35 to 37 (consec) Broad Street. A circa 1894 commercial street with returns to Broad and Friar Streets. Probably by Joseph Morris. Dutch gabled free Baroque style. 3 1/2 storeys, yellow brick and terracotta with dividing Ionic pilasters. Dentil cornice. Pilasters to dormers, broken pediments above. An elongated pattern of shallow bays to 1st and 2nd floors 4:2:1:1:1:3. Mullion and transom window to bays, sashes with architraves (and pediments on 1st floor) to rest. Modern shopfronts, retaining cornice to fascia and scroll brackets to pilasters, only one shop retains prewar shopfront. Large returns to Broad Street. The return to east (No 28 Broad Street) supported by No 26 (dated 1894, grey brick with red terracotta dressings) and by No 24 (an early C20 Bank with -large shaped pediment doorway on corner to Cross Street; red brick with stone dressings and stone fret patterns to gables)."

The site is located within the Central Core of the Reading Central Area, is within the Primary Shopping Area and Office Core, and is designated a primary frontage. The site is within an area of archaeological potential and air quality management area.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Planning permission and associated listed building consent is sought for the change of use of the upper floors from office use to 3 x 1-bedroom dwellings. The proposal also includes the introduction of a new entrance to the upper floors, this necessitates a redesign of the shopfront.

Plans and information submitted:

- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Existing front elevation
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Existing shop front
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Existing basement plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Existing ground floor plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Existing first floor plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Existing second floor plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Existing third floor plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Proposed basement level
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Proposed ground floor plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Proposed first floor plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Proposed second floor plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Proposed third floor plan
- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Proposed typical staircase section

As received by the LPA 15 July 2024

Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Proposed revised - Entrance and retail unit plan

- Drawing: 30 Queen Victoria Street, Reading: Proposed revised - Entrance and shop front design

As received by the LPA 11 October 2024

3. CONSULTATIONS

The following consultation responses were received:

- RBC Conservation Officer
No objections to the proposal, subject to details being secured by condition for the external alterations to ensure appropriate materials are used.
- RBC Environmental Health Officer
No objections, subject to conditions relating to noise from commercial premises below dwellings, and noise from town centre activity.
- RBC Transport
No objection, subject to conditions.
- RBC Waste
No objection.

A site notice was displayed for 21 days, and letters to adjoining properties were sent. No representations have been received.

4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

PL/01/0260 - One projecting circular sign and matching existing projecting signs on existing branch

PL/01/0283 - Refurbishment of ground floor and banking hall at 26 Broad Street and incorporation of 30 Queen Victoria Street into the HSBC bank

PL/97/0180 - Installation of automatic teller machine within shop frontage of premises.

PL/97/0641 - Installation of externally illuminated projecting sign.

PL/91/0383 - Fascia and projecting sign

PL/91/0384 - Fascia and projecting sign

PL/91/1084 - Fascia and projecting sign
PL/92/0737 – New shop front
PL/92/0738 - Externally illuminated letters individually mounted on fascia. Non-illuminated projecting sign.
PL/92/0739 - Internal modification of existing premises. New timber and glass shop front.
PL/95/0179 - Alterations to fascia sign (listed building consent)
PL/95/0931 - New fascia sign.
PL/95/0559 - Erection of 90cm satellite dish for business TV.
PL/95/0560 - Erection of 90 cm satellite dish for Business TV.
PL/97/0141 - Installation of externally illuminated projecting sign.
PL/97/0506 - Installation of automatic teller machine within shop frontage.
Note: Full decision details and dates not included.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the LPA to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the LPA to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the 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'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

Local Plan Partial Update

The current 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 update of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024.

Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become “out of date” when they are five years old. It is a matter of planning judgement rather than legal fact whether a plan or policies within it are out-of-date. This will depend on whether they have been overtaken by things that have happened since the plan was adopted, either on the ground or through changes in national policy, for example. Officer advice in respect of 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’.

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

CC2: SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

CC3: ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

CC5: WASTE MINIMISATION AND STORAGE

CC6: ACCESSIBILITY AND THE INTENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

EN1: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

EN2: AREAS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

EN6: NEW DEVELOPMENT IN A HISTORIC CONTEXT

EN12: BIODIVERSITY AND THE GREEN NETWORK

EN15: AIR QUALITY

EN16: POLLUTION AND WATER RESOURCES

EM3: LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT LAND

H1: PROVISION OF HOUSING

H2: DENSITY AND MIX

H3: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

H5: STANDARDS FOR NEW HOUSING

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 CHARGING

RL1: NETWORK AND HIERARCHY OF CENTRES

OU5: SHOPFRONTS AND CASH MACHINES

CR2: DESIGN IN CENTRAL READING

CR3: PUBLIC REALM IN CENTRAL READING

CR6: LIVING IN CENTRAL READING

CR7: PRIMARY FRONTAGES IN CENTRAL READING

CR8: SMALL SHOP UNITS IN CENTRAL READING

SPD

Affordable Housing SPD (2021)

Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD (2021)

Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)

Residential Conversions SPD (2023)

Planning Obligations under Section 106 SPD (2015)

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)

Other relevant documentation / guidance / legislation

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)

Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings (British Standards Publication BS 7913:2013, 2015)

DCLG Technical housing standards – nationally described space standards (2015)

National Design Guide: Planning practice 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

The proposal is for the conversion of existing floor area and as such is entirely on previously developed land. The proposal would retain the existing shop use on ground floor including the basement being associated with it, and as such would accord with Policies RL1, RL3 and CR1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan and being part of an existing active frontage the proposal would also continue to accord with Policy CR7.

The site is not located within a core employment area, however Policy EM3 sets out a criteria for consideration of the loss of employment land. It is considered that the continued use of a relatively small amount of office space within the town centre is not a viable use of the land. Large and new office spaces which are fit for modern use exist in areas with high levels of accessibility (including by car and rail) such as Green Park, Reading International Business Park, Station Hill have vacancies which are more likely to be taken up than small bespoke existing office spaces. In addition, the provision of residential uses on upper floors of the town centre is in stronger need than the continued use for employment. Given the current provision of office accommodation available within the Borough as a whole, it is not considered that the loss would result in any significant economic harm in the context of Policy EM3.

In addition to the above the proposal would provide 3 no. residential units which would be in line with the housing targets as outlined within Policy H1.

Design and Impact on Listed Building

The application site is a mid-terraced portion of the eastern side of Queen Victoria Street which is a Listed Building (in its entirety). The proposal, by virtue of the change of use of upper floors would have limited external alterations above ground floor. The primary change to the site would be the introduction of a new residential entrance to the proposal. By virtue of this change, the proposal would alter the shop front in such a way that necessitates the entire shop front to be re-designed to accommodate. Given the

site is a listed building, is located within a primary frontage and is a small shop in accordance with Policy CR8, careful consideration to the design is required.

Shopfront and ground floor of proposal

Multiple local plan policies require development to be of a high quality design which maintains and enhances the character of the area, respects the historic features and preserves and enhances the historic importance of the listed building. As well as providing a high visual quality to primary frontages and shopfronts.

The existing shopfront appears to have been altered to suit HSBC and match the remainder of the HSBC building which wraps around the Queen Victoria Street and Broad Street corner. The shop front which was approved via an application circa 2001 increased the stallriser height and centralised the entrance to the site compared to the older shopfront.



Figure 1 - Pre-2001 approval shop front (left), existing shop front (right)

The existing shopfronts on the eastern side of Queen Victoria Street are varying in style, however generally include uniform stallriser height, large panels of glazing with limited mullions, uniform fascia heights, retained corbelling and cornice, and the inconsistent inclusion of transoms (figure 2).



Figure 2 - Existing shop fronts to north of site

The proposed shopfront would include a new entrance door within recessed doorway to provide entrances to both the flats above and the commercial unit at ground and basement level. There would be two large panes of glass on lowered stallrisers, with uniform transoms above the doorway and shopfront glazing. The shopfront is proposed to be constructed with hardwood timber for the cill and surrounds. The existing granite wall surrounding it would be retained to match at a reduced stallriser height.



Figure 3 - Proposed shop front and entrance

Works to facilitate conversion of upper floors, including listed building works

The proposal would include the restoration and preservation of the existing sash windows to the upper floors with secondary glazing to be installed. The existing building has been internally subdivided by the previous owner to facilitate its sale independent of the existing shared stairwell which previously served it. This included the blocking up of existing opening with concrete blocks. Therefore, in addition to overall refurbishment of the building to meet current standards for residential use, the proposal would include the installation of internal staircases for the flats and for the access to the basement associated with the ground floor commercial use.

The proposal would include:

- New internal staircase over all levels
- New floor finishings, over existing floor boards where they remain/exist
- Dampproofing to basement
- Internal walls, and external wall lined with studwork and plasterboard to be skimmed and painted
- New internal partition walls studwork and plasterboard to be skimmed and painted
- Ceiling reinstatement with plasterboard to be skimmed and painted
- Sash windows inspection and repair
- Ventilation and extraction for bathrooms

Generally, the proposed works are considered acceptable. Further details are required from a listed building perspective, and as such a condition will be included to ensure that all materials used are appropriate to the building elements they are attached to and to ensure design quality.

Overall, the proposed design for the revised shopfront would meet the Local Plan requirements for a high quality design which matches the high quality of the building to which it is attached.

Amenity

Policies CC8, EN15, EN16, and CR6 seek to ensure that dwellings are provided with a high level of amenity and are appropriately treated for noise, particularly given the high level of activity expected within the town centre, including within nighttime hours. In addition, policy H5 seeks to ensure a good standard of accommodation with regard to size. Though not mandatory within the town centre, the nationally described space standards are a guide for acceptable size of accommodation.

With regard to noise, the applicant has provided information that double glazing will be applied to windows in order to mitigate potential noise issues. Environmental health officers have advised that though this may be the end scenario, a noise assessment will be required for both noise to residential properties, and between the below commercial premise and the flat above. Conditions are recommended to be attached to secure details of this.

The proposal, by virtue of its orientation, layout and location of windows would provide sufficient daylight and sunlight for the proposed flats. There would be no privacy concerns as a result of the proposal, and the distance between other windows/properties. Each flat would also be provided with sufficient outlook.

The proposed flats would range from 49m² – 53m². These are considered to be good sized flats which meet the floor areas for 2 person flats within the nationally described space standards.

The proposed development does not include private or communal open space. Policy H10 seeks to ensure that dwellings and flats are provided with functional private amenity (balconies or roof gardens). Given the listed building status, and proximity to other buildings, balconies would be unlikely to be appropriate in this instance. The supporting text of the policy (4.4.83) notes that flats in central Reading are less likely to attract families, and have the ability to walk to public open space would reduce the need for private open space. In this instance, the site is located near Forbury Gardens and further would have reasonable access to King's Meadow for open space. As such, the lack of private open space for the development would not be sufficiently harmful to merit refusal, and the nearby public open space would be sufficient to offset this harm.

Mix of Units

Policy H2 and CR6 seek to ensure all development provide a mix of different sized units. The proposal would provide 3 x 1-bedrooms units which as above, are a good size equivalent to 2-person units. This is in excess of the minimum 39m² 1-bed units which are traditionally provided. As such, though these are 3 x 1-bed units, which does not have a mix of unit sizes, the provision of larger 2-person units, with one flat per floor is considered to be the most efficient use of the listed building, and provide a mix of unit sizes within the borough above 1-bed, 1-person units which predominantly come forward.

Transport and Waste

The proposed development for 3 x 1-bed units and retention of the existing ground floor and basement for commercial use would not have side access, or access to the rear garden for the storage of waste or bicycles for the development. The proposal instead incorporates bike storage within each units. Council's waste team has confirmed that the units would be serviced by Council's waste collection for the town centre which is weekly waste sacks (rather than wheely bins). The proposal would not have any parking, and would not be entitled to on-street parking permits, though given the site is within the town centre which is a confluence of bus routes, and within 300m of Reading Train Station the proposal would be well served for transport options. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with the Local Plan in this regard.

Sustainability

Policy CC2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, supported by the Council's Sustainable Design and Construction SPD seeks the proposal, as a 'creation of new residential units through conversion', to comply with BREEAM Level of 'Very Good', albeit that the SPD acknowledged that listed buildings may have difficulty meeting this. The applicant has not submitted a BREEAM reports however, this matter can be dealt with by way of two suitably worded conditions, including flexibility for a less than 'very good' standard subject to demonstrating impacts to the listed building would arise in meeting the standard.

Affordable Housing

The Council's adopted Policy H3: Affordable Housing states *"on sites of 1 – 4 dwellings, a financial contribution will be made that will enable the equivalent of 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough."*

The applicant has entered into a legal agreement to secure a financial contribution to allow planning permission to be granted.

A Section 106 Legal Agreement has been signed, which secures a financial contribution of £45,000.00 for the purposes of providing affordable housing elsewhere within the Borough. The figure has been calculated based on the valuations of the existing property and the proposed additional dwellings from two Estate Agents. As per Policy H3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan and the Affordable Housing SPD (2021); for sites of 1-4 dwellings, where the contribution required by policy H3 is 10%, this will equate to 5% of GDV of the development.

This is considered acceptable and complies with Policy H3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan and the Affordable Housing SPD (2021).

Community Infrastructure Levy

The proposal seeks conversion of the existing offices to residential which is CIL liable.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposed development would bring the heritage asset back to functional life, within a new use. The use of the building is the best way to ensure that such a building does not fall into further disrepair. The loss of the office use is considered acceptable, and the provision of residential accommodation in this highly accessible location would provide additional housing in line with Local Plan housing targets, and be wholly within an existing underutilised building. Subject to additional details to be secured by condition the proposal is considered acceptable.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Approve.