

3rd June 2025

Our Ref: 333101801

Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices,
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

SUBMITTED VIA PLANNING PORTAL

Dear Sir/Madam

NON-MATERIAL APPLICATION IN RELATION TO ST MARTINS CENTRE, CAVERSHAM SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF SORBON ESTATES

We write on behalf of Sorbon Estates to submit an application under Section 96A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to Reading Borough Council (RBC) for the non-material amendment of planning permission 140997 relating to St Martins Centre in Caversham.

Introduction

St Martins Centre is a mid-1960s shopping complex located to the south of the A4155 Church Street in Caversham. The centre comprises a mix of retail and service units at ground floor level plus office and residential uses above this. Parking is provided to the rear of the shopping centre, accessed via Archway Road.

St Martins Centre forms an important part of Caversham's District Centre, a second tier Centre identified in the retail hierarchy set out in Policy RL1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Sorbon Estates recently purchased the site and are committed to the long-term viability and vitality of St Martins Centre. In this regard, they are seeking to bring forward redevelopment approved under 140997.

However, following review of the existing consent, a series of non-material changes are proposed to the scheme in order to respond more positively to the site context, including the historic character of Church Street to the north of the site.

The proposed non-material amendment relates only to Block A and Phase 1A of the development approved under 140997.

Planning History

Full planning permission was granted for the redevelopment of St Martins Centre in 2015 (application reference 140997). The approved development is for:

Erection of new and extended retail (use class A1) floorspace, new restaurant (use class A3), new leisure (use class D2) floorspace, residential apartments (use class C3), car park works (including erection of a single storey deck and reconfiguration at ground level) and associated landscaping, surfacing, public realm and shopfront improvement works.

Subsequent to the grant of this permission, alongside applications to discharge planning conditions (application references 161947, 171550 and 180697), a series of amendments to the approved scheme have been made through Section 96A non-material amendment applications, as follows:

- Amendments to shopfront design (application references 161775 and 221887)
- The introduction of a phasing plan to allow for phased discharge of conditions and construction (application reference 160018)
- Amendments to the phasing plan, including to incorporate Block A access into Phase 1A (application references 180671 and 182125)
- Amendments to the elevations of Block A, addition of bicycle and refuse stores at ground floor level and addition of plant at roof level (application reference 180673)

A deed of variation to the Section 106 agreement agreed as part of the original full planning permission was agreed in 2017 (application reference 170076). This redesignated Block A as Phase 1A.

The planning permission has been implemented with some of the approved works, including in relation to shopfronts, already completed.

The Proposed Non-Material Amendments

Section 96A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 permits local planning authorities to make a change to any planning permission relating to land in their area if they are satisfied that the change is not material. Part (2) sets out that in deciding whether a change is material, a local planning authority must have regard to the effect of the change, together with any previous changes made under this section, on the planning permission as originally granted.

The Planning Practice Guidance sets out at paragraph 17a-002-20140306 that:

There is no statutory definition of ‘non-material’. This is because it will be dependent on the context of the overall scheme – an amendment that is non-material in one context may be material in another. The local planning authority must be satisfied that the amendment sought is non-material in order to grant an application under section 96A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

This application seeks to make minor, non-material amendments to the approved plans for Block A and Phase 1A.

Block A forms part of a much larger development approved under 140997. It comprises a single building in the west of the development which will provide a ground floor restaurant and 17 apartments over four additional stories.

A review of the design approved under 140997 (as previously amended) has been undertaken since Sorbon Estates purchased the site. This has included reviewing current Building Regulations as well as how the proposals respond to their surroundings and current market demand.

As a result of the review, a number of small changes are proposed to Block A which are the subject of this non-material amendment application. The changes are proposed in the context of amendments previously agreed through separate NMA applications referred to above.

Importantly, the changes are non-material amendments to the existing approved scheme and in that context:

- The uses proposed remain unchanged, with 17 residential apartments and one restaurant unit to be provided;
- The building height and overall scale is consistent with approved plans;
- The gross internal area of the restaurant has been maintained;
- Access and parking provision is unchanged; and

- The elevational treatment is similar in character, albeit with updates to refine the design.

The changes proposed are limited to what is considered necessary to achieve a deliverable, high-quality development as key stage of the wider redevelopment of St Martins Centre.

Key changes are as follows:

- an update to the palette of materials to compliment the traditional aspects of the surrounding local character in Caversham centre;
- development of layout to comply with latest version of Approved Document Part B and ensure fire safety requirements are met;
- relocation of bin and cycle stores at the rear of the site;
- provision of a larger entrance area and lobby at ground floor for access into residential flats; and
- inclusion of balconies, juliette balconies or terraces to all flats for residential amenity.

Details of the proposed changes are set out in the Design and Access Statement submitted with this application.

Consequently, the effect of the changes proposed will be very limited. The building will appear of the same scale as previously approved and will provide the same uses within a building of very similar proportions and styling which is comparable, albeit enhanced. Indeed, several of the changes proposed predominantly affect the interior of the building and result in minimal external alterations.

Moreover, taken within the context of the whole of the redevelopment approved under permission reference 140997 (as amended by the applications referred to above), the changes to Block A are considered to be have no material impact. Block A is only one building within the approved redevelopment and occupies a small part of the wider St Martins Centre site. The proposed amendments do not depart from the fundamental principles of the existing consent, maintaining the same uses and their quantum as well as the overall scale and height of the building and the same broad architectural styling. When set within this context, the effect of the proposed amendments will be very minor.

In summary, the proposed changes represent non-material amendments to the approved development in the context of the overall scheme. The proposals will ensure that the development will meet the latest Building Regulations, respond positively to their surroundings and reflect market demand. The changes will enable a building to be delivered which responds to user needs and requirements whilst also providing a high-quality addition to Caversham.

For these reasons, the application is submitted as a non-material amendment application.

Under Section 96A(3) local planning authorities are permitted to impose new conditions or remove or alter existing conditions. To enable the minor amendments outlined above, the following changes to conditions attached to 140997 (as amended by 180673) are requested:

- Condition 2 to refer to the latest plans for Block A;
- Condition 19A to reflect the relocated cycle store; and
- Condition 35 to reflect the revised window placement.

Summary

This application seeks to amend the proposals for Phase 1A of the redevelopment of St Martins Centre in Caversham approved under application reference 140997. The amendments proposed are non-material in nature and designed to enable the delivery of a high-quality building as part of the wider St Martins Centre redevelopment.

The changes do not materially depart from the approved plans for Phase 1A, being limited to subtle changes to materials and design. As discussed above, the changes will have minimal impact, particularly in the context of the overall approved development. Indeed, the proposals are considered to have a

positive impact as the development will be styled to be more in-keeping with the surrounding area, including historic buildings on Church Street.

Importantly, the changes will allow for development which reflects and accords with user needs and requirements to be delivered, contributing towards the redevelopment of St Martins Centre and the creation of an attractive entrance to this central area within Caversham.

This application is accompanied by:

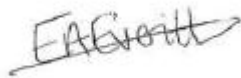
- Completed application form
- Site Plan
- Ground Floor Plan
- First Floor Plan
- Second Floor Plan
- Third Floor Plan
- Fourth Floor Plan
- Roof Plan
- Elevations
- Sections
- Design and Access Statement

The application is also accompanied by the application fee of £298 paid via the Planning Portal.

We trust that you have sufficient information to register the above application as being validly made and thus determine it accordingly.

If you require any additional information or have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at emily.everitt@stantec.com.

Yours faithfully,



EMILY EVERITT
Planning Associate
STANTEC UK LIMITED