

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Abbey

App Ref: PL/25/0713 Full planning permission

Address: R13 ALL BAR ONE PH THE RIVERSIDE, THE ORACLE, BRIDGE STREET, READING, RG1 2AG

Proposal: Change of Use from Sui Generis drinking establishment with extended food provision to Class E

Applicant: The Oracle Limited Partnership

Received date: 13/05/2025

Target Decision date: 17/07/2025

Case Officer: Sian Hickey

1. Application Site

The application site is currently vacant, it was previously occupied by All Bar One. The site is located along the Riverside at the Oracle on the north/western side of the River Kennet. The unit has an external seating area at the front of the site. The unit is within a designated primary shopping frontage within Central Reading. There are other restaurants, and a mix of retail uses within the vicinity.

2. Proposal

Planning permission is sought for a change of use from a Sui Generis drinking establishment with extended food provision, to Class E.

During the course of the application (email from agent on 11/07/2025) the agent has confirmed that it is not a blanket Class E use sought, but instead only Class E (a), E (b) or E (c) uses which are sought:

- (a) for the display or retail sale of goods, other than hot food, principally to visiting members of the public,*
- (b) for the sale of food and drink principally to visiting members of the public where consumption of that food and drink is mostly undertaken on the premises,*
- (c) for the provision of the following kinds of services principally to visiting members of the public—*
 - (i) financial services,*
 - (ii) professional services (other than health or medical services), or*
 - (iii) any other services which it is appropriate to provide in a commercial, business or service locality,*

As such, the proposal is not seeking for all 11 parts of Class E to be able to occupy any future unit, but instead is proposing to limit the use to any of the 3 component parts of Class E specified above.

There are no external changes proposed.



Plans/documents submitted

Covering/supporting letter

Drawing No. B221999-R13-01 – Location Plan

Drawing No. B221999-R13-02 – Block Plan

FIV397-A21 1 – Proposed Floor Plan

Existing Layout Plan

Email regarding opening hours by Turley 'RE: Acknowledgement of Planning Application - PL/25/0713' dated and received 22/05/2025

Email regarding uses and opening hours by Turley 'RE: Acknowledgement of Planning Application - PL/25/0713' dated and received 11/07/2025

3. Relevant Planning History

No recent history specific to this unit.

4. Representations

A site notice was displayed by the Case Officer at the front of the property on 27th May 2025 for a period of 21 days.

At the time of writing this report, no letters of representation have been received.

5. Consultations

RBC Environmental Health Officer: No objection due to location away from sensitive receptors.

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.

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:

PLANNING POLICY

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

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

National Planning Policy Guidance (2014 onwards)

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC7: Design and the Public Realm

CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

EN15: Air Quality

EN16: Pollution and Water Resources

EN17: Noise Generating Equipment

TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway Related Matters

RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres

RL2: Scale and Location of Retail, Leisure and Culture Development

CR2: Design in Central Reading

CR3: Public Realm in Central Reading

CR5: Drinking Establishments in Central Reading

CR7: Primary Frontages in Central Reading

RBC Supplementary Planning Documents

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2019)

Local Plan 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. The submission version of the Local Plan was submitted on 9th May 2025.

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 this application 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 advice given below and are not considered to be ‘out of date’.

6. Assessment

Principle of development

Policy CR7 states that uses on the ground floor along the designated primary frontages as shown on the Proposals Map will be within one of the following use classes: A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, C1, D1, D2 or related sui generis uses, unless it would be an entrance to upper floors. New developments (or alterations to existing uses) that front onto any of the designated primary frontages will provide an active building frontage with a display window or glazed frontage at ground floor level, in order to contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre, and provide visual interest. Frontages should be of a high visual quality. Any frontages that have the potential to hinder movement or cause unnecessary safety risk will not be permitted. Proposals that would result in the loss of A1 or A2 use such that the proportion of the length of frontage within the street in A1 or A2 use falls below 50% will not be permitted, unless the proposal introduces a use that makes a positive contribution to the overall diversity of the centre. 50% of new primary frontages as shown on the Proposals Map should be in A1/A2 use.

The proposed change of use from Sui Generis (formerly Class A4) to either Class E (a) (formerly Class A1), Class E(b) (formerly Class A3) or Class E (c) (formerly Class A2) would comply with the requirements of Policy CR7, potentially increasing the amount of (former) A1 or A2 uses along the frontage, with all the proposed uses being compatible with this primary frontage location. More specifically, each of these uses are considered to be ‘Centre uses’ (as identified at paragraph 4.6.16 of the Local Plan), indicating in principle that such uses are compatible and appropriate. Given the existing Sui Generis use, there would be no loss of former A1 or A2 uses (now also within Class E).

The narrowing down of the proposed uses (as negotiated with the agent during the course of the application) has assisted in the consideration of the implications of the proposed uses in wider amenity and transport terms. Had the proposal sought for all 11 parts of Class E to potentially operate from the unit, this could have wider impacts which have not been required to be assessed as part of the proposals. Furthermore, from a purely land use perspective, it is questionable whether the use of the unit for office, research and development or industrial processes uses (Class E(g)) for example would have been considered to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of the centre (with office uses being identified as a ‘non-centre use’ at paragraph 4.6.16 of the Local Plan). Whilst unlikely in practice, it is one which could have been possible in the event of a blanket Class E proposal, which it is considered would have been harmful to the town centre as a whole. Hence, a condition will limit the future use of the floorspace to solely the 3 component parts of Class E applied for. This does not necessarily rule out other uses potentially occupying the unit in future, but enables the local planning authority to manage this process through assessing the impact as part of a future application.

Design and Character

Policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm is a strategic policy seeking high standards of design quality in new development. It sets out how various components of development including layout, urban structure and urban grain, and scale, make a positive contribution to their surroundings and respond positively to their local context.

There are no proposed changes to the external appearance, so there would be no effect on the character and appearance of the site.

However, officers are mindful that some shopfront works can be undertaken without the need for specific permission from the local planning authority. From both a design and amenity (to assist with natural surveillance), it is considered appropriate to attach a condition to ensure that the ground floor windows shall retain 'active window displays' along the length of the frontage. Policy OU5e (Shopfronts and Cash Machines) seeks an active frontage to the street at all times and opaque coverings on shop windows, such as paints and films, will be minimised and will not obscure the window. Policy CR7 (Primary frontages in Central Reading) is also relevant, with the riverside elevation designated as a primary function. The policy details that alterations to existing uses that front onto any of the primary frontages will provide an active building frontage with a display window or glazed frontage at ground level, in order to contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre, and provide visual interest.

Impact on Amenity

Policy CC8 requires development to 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; Artificial lighting; Vibration; Dust and fumes; Smell; Crime and safety.

There are no residential properties nearby to the application site at the time of writing, although there are two current applications under consideration at the wider Oracle site which would introduce, if permitted, significant residential uses in close proximity to the site. However, no external works are proposed so no overbearing, overlooking or overshadowing concerns are considered to occur.

With regards to noise and disturbance as a result of the proposal, it is not considered that the proposed use would be significantly different to the previous use of the site. If any external plant is subsequently required for the future occupier, then separate permission would be required for this. In terms of waste storage and servicing, it is anticipated that the unit will utilise the existing long-established waste storage and servicing arrangements associated with all the units along the Riverside, without the necessity for need of details to be submitted as part of this application.

A condition is attached to this planning permission to ensure that no Class E(b) (Sale of food and drink for consumption (mostly) on the premises) use shall commence onsite until an odour assessment has been carried out and a detailed odour management plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These details are required to safeguard amenity and to protect the general environment.

The hours of use would be (following negotiations with the agent during the course of the application):
Sunday to Wednesday 10am to 11pm.
Thursday 10am to 12am.
Friday & Saturday 10am to 12.30am.

These are largely comparable with the previous opening hours, which were:
Monday to Thursday 11am to 11pm.
Friday 10am to 12am.

Saturday 9am to 12am.
Sunday 9am to 10pm.

The hours of use are considered suitable, do not extend beyond those recently approved for the Hollywood Bowl unit on the Riverside, and will be secured via a condition attached to this planning permission.

Other matters

The site is located within an area which provides numerous local facilities including the multi-storey Oracle carpark. There are no parking spaces allocated to the premises and customers, as is the currently the case, would need to rely on local parking facilities or walking to the site. There are bus stops within walking distance. There would be no significant change in this regard, with the proposed uses not considered to result in any significantly greater impacts on the local transport network than the current use is able to.

In relation to sustainability considerations, the nature and context of the application and the proposals (change of use only of an existing unit) means it is not considered necessary in this instance to seek for details in respect of the sustainability credentials of the resultant unit being created, as per Policies CC2 and CC3.

7. Conclusion

It is considered that the proposed change of use is acceptable and would not result in an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the existing building, or the wider surrounding area nor would the development result in an adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties.

8. Recommendation

GRANT Planning Permission subject to conditions.