

Our ref: LB1288
Your Ref: PP-14320604

Matthew Brewer
07919 890 207

Matt.Brewer@urbanspaceplanning.co.uk

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

Via PlanningPortal

Dear Sir/Madam

PLANNING APPLICATION
ST LAWRENCE HOUSE, ABBEY SQUARE, READING, RG1 3AG

On behalf of our client, Happy Valley Recreation Ltd, please find enclosed a planning application in relation to the ground floor and basement commercial premises at St Lawrence House, Abbey Square, Reading, RG1 3AG.

This planning application proposes minor external alterations to the ground and lower ground floor of the commercial unit at St Lawrence House, Abbey Square, Reading, RG1 3AG to facilitate its use and effective operation.

The application site comprises a ground and lower ground floor commercial unit. The proposed development involves minor external modifications which involve the installation of small louvred panels within the front and rear facades of the building.

Overall, the proposals will facilitate active and beneficial use of the property and ensure effective operation of the premises.

Site, Surroundings and History

St Lawrence House is a mixed-use building located on Abbey Square, Reading, RG1 3AG, within Reading Town Centre. The building comprises residential apartments above and a ground and basement floor commercial unit fronting Abbey Square, positioned within a highly accessible urban setting.

The property lies within the Abbey Quarter, close to key amenities including Reading Central Library, the Oracle shopping centre, and the Broad Street Mall. The immediate area is characterised by a mix of office, retail, leisure and residential uses, reflecting its central location and designation as part of Reading's primary commercial area.

The most recent planning application granted consent for the unit was for the *"Proposed Change of Use to allow flexible use Including Class E and Class F(1) Non residential Institutions."* The application Ref: 231091 was granted in November 2023.

The Proposal

The premises are to be occupied by Happy Valley Recreational Ltd for leisure use. Minor alterations to the façade are however necessary at ground and lower ground floor level to facilitate the effective operation of the premises and enable active and beneficial use.

The front elevation comprises six full-height glazed sections with fanlights above, all set within aluminium framing. These include the main entrance door to the unit. The proposed works will retain the existing main glazed shopfront sections, framing, and the principal entrance.

The front side elevation features a glazed access door and adjacent full-height glazing with fanlights above, also within aluminium framing. This configuration will also be retained as existing.

The proposal involves the installation of louvres within the fanlight sections on both the front and side elevations at ground floor level above the principal shopfront glazing elements. On the front elevation, two coloured fanlight panels will be replaced with small louvred panels. On the side elevation, the coloured glazing within the fanlights will similarly be replaced with matching louvres. All new louvres will be coloured to match the existing framing and fanlight elements, ensuring a consistent visual appearance.

The rear elevation consists of 10 double height glazed sections with fanlights set above the main glazing elements at the top of the lower ground and ground floor glazed elements. These are set within aluminium framing, with two access doors at lower ground floor level. The proposed works will retain the existing principle glazing elements, framing, and the access doors.

The side elevation features a double height glazed panel with fanlights set above the main glazing elements at the top of the lower ground and ground floor glazed elements, also within aluminium framing. This configuration will also be retained as existing.

The proposal involves the installation of small louvres within the fanlight sections at lower ground and ground floor levels to the rear elevation above the principal glazing. Four coloured fanlight panels will be replaced with small louvred panels to the rear, the new louvres will be coloured to match the existing white coloured glazing.

On the side elevation of the lower ground floor, the coloured glazing will similarly be replaced with a small matching louvre. The new louvre will again be coloured to match the existing white coloured glazing, ensuring the overall visual appearance across the façade is maintained.

The new louvres are small elements located at high level within the floors and are necessary to facilitate the required air intake and extract to the unit and will be finished to match the framing and glazing of the fenestration within the shopfronts. No changes are proposed to the principle glazing elements of the shopfronts or entrances to the premises.

Development Plan

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires development proposals to be considered in accordance with the statutory Development Plan and other material considerations.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated in 2024, forms the national planning policy guidance document, and is supported by the National Planning Practice Guidance, which is an online resource and are also material considerations.

The development Plan for the site is the Reading Borough Local Plan adopted 4th November 2019.

The site sits within Reading Central Area and the Abbey Quarter.

Planning, Design and Heritage

The NPPF includes a requirement on local planning authorities to plan positively for growth and identifies the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Paragraph 8 sets out three overarching objectives related to economic, social and environment objectives.

Paragraph 85 of the NPPF (2024) states that "Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future".

Policy CR2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan relates to Design in Central Reading and development within Central Reading should demonstrate architectural details and materials should be of high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials in the local area.

Policy CR15 of the Reading Borough Local plan relates to The Reading Abbey Quarter and states development in the vicinity should promote the architectural, archaeological or historic interest of the Abbey and its setting.

The proposals will support use of the ground and lower ground floor commercial premises as an active use, providing a new additional service to the local community. The proposal will enable this previously vacant property to be actively used, positively contributing to the local economy. The proposals are therefore supported by paragraphs 8, 85, 123 and 124d of the NPPF which promotes planning decisions which achieve effective use of land, supports the development of under-utilised buildings and support economic growth.

To facilitate the occupation of the building minor external alterations are required. These alterations have considered the existing design and appearance of the property and its neighbours, and the character of the area.

The proposed louvres are small scale elements set within the existing architecture of the building. The position of the louvres in the fanlight sections of the elevations will maintain the principle glazing elements of the elevations and interaction between the unit and the street. The position of the louvres maintains the existing configuration of the facades, with their location within the small upper fanlight elements and sitting within the existing framing of the facades. The louvres to the front of the building are to be finished to match the framing of the fenestration and colour of the existing fanlight elements, with those to the rear matching the coloured glazed panels within the facade. The framing materials and proportions will maintain those of the existing shopfront as installing the louvres within the existing high level openings. The proposed location and appearance of the louvres will therefore follow the overall design and materiality of the building, maintain the principal open glazed shopfront elements of the ground and lower ground floor premises and be in keeping with the character and appearance of the building.

The overall amendments to the elevations maintain the approach, character and materials of the existing facades and shopfront. The proposed elements sit within the existing features of the building, are appropriately scaled and located and enable the commercial occupation and operation of the building. The works respond positively to the design of the building and do not detract or clutter the existing shopfront elevations. The proposals are in line with the design, form and appearance of the building and maintain the character of the area. The proposals are compliant with the design and character policies of the Local Plan.

Amenity

Policy EN17 of the Reading Borough Local Plan relates to Noise Generating Equipment, it states Reading is a

densely populated town with many new planning developments taking place. Residents live in close proximity to commercial activities, therefore it is important to minimise background creep in order to protect the noise environment and maintain quality of life for people living and working in the town.

In order to assess and ensure any impact of noise from the installation of louvres in this proposal does not impact residents within this locality Air and Acoustics Consultants were commissioned to complete a Noise Impact Assessment. The assessment report states an assessment of operational activity along with sound insulation and design of the ground to first floor separating slab and building services noise was completed along with an assessment of the sound insulation scheme and noise emissions from the building services plant and internal activity.

Sound break out via the ground floor and lower ground floor facades was reviewed and concluded in the noise assessment to be controlled to requirements in the receptors above for both open and closed residential window scenarios. The assessment confirms that noise emissions from building services are in line with required levels and will not be harmful to the amenity of residential occupiers.

The report demonstrates that the proposed new louvres are acceptable in respect of environmental noise considerations and meet the requirements of the Local Plan.

Summary

The proposals will maintain high quality building elevations reflecting the commercial character of the ground and lower ground floor unit of this building in the streetscene and in this part of Central Reading and The Abbey Quarter. The proposals sit within the existing proportions and form of the building and the appearance of the new louvres will be in keeping with the colour and materiality of the existing elevations, maintaining the character of this building and ensuring no harm in terms of residential amenity by way of noise emissions.

The following has been submitted through the Planning Portal in support of this application:

- Application Form;
- Planning & Design Statement (this letter);
- Location Plan;
- Existing Elevations;
- Proposed Elevations;
- Existing Plan;
- Proposed Plan
- Noise Assessment.

The fee has been paid via the Planning Portal.

I look forward to receiving confirmation of validation of the planning application and to hearing from you during the determination.

Yours sincerely

Matt Brewer
URBANSPACE Planning Ltd
Enc.