

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Battle Ward

App Ref: PL/24/1521 Full planning permission

Address: ROYAL ALBION HOTEL PH, 642 OXFORD ROAD, READING, RG30 1EH

Proposal: Change of use of the ground and first floor from public house (sui generis) to commercial (Class E (a) or (b)) with associated internal alterations.

Applicant: Mr Manny Safern

Received date: 15/11/2024

Extended Target Decision date: 29/09/2025

Case Officer: Nathalie Weekes

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application relates to a two-storey Victorian public house with a cellar located on the corner of Oxford Road and Alma Street. Given the information gathered from the historic maps and literature research, the RBC Conservation officer has noted that Royal Albion PH has conserved most of its external features including its footprint and its function, and it exemplifies the product of speculative builders of early-mid Victorian times when a patchwork of builders putting up a row of houses or a street or a block including pubs.

In his book 'Victorian Pubs' (1931), Mark Girouard states, "The pub was often the first part of speculation to be built, with the builder is the first licensee. (...) Sometimes a pub could stand a long time waiting for the approaching rows of houses (...) if their plot included a corner site, builders almost inevitably put the pub on it (...) A good many builders probably acted as their own designer of their pubs and their houses..."

It is evident from OS Maps dating from the 1870s and 1910 that Royal Albion, with its position, scale and distinctive -two bay- architecture, has been recognisable among the surrounding modest-scale late Victorian terraces through the years. As the building appears not to belong to any known architect, it was probably constructed by a speculative builder before the terraces on Oxford Road, Alma Street, Beecham Road and St George's Road, confirming its being a traditional Victorian pub.

The Royal Albion public house is located on the north side of Oxford Road, and had originally been operated as a pub/hotel but has been in use as a pub for many years. A site visit was undertaken on 12 February 2025 and the case officer noted that the building was undergoing refurbishment, with a pub layout on the ground floor. Rooms were all being redecorated on the first floor and the use of the first floor was unclear. There is a car park to the rear with vehicular access via a driveway at the side of the building. Neighbouring uses are mixed, with a parade of shops to the east and industrial buildings to the north.

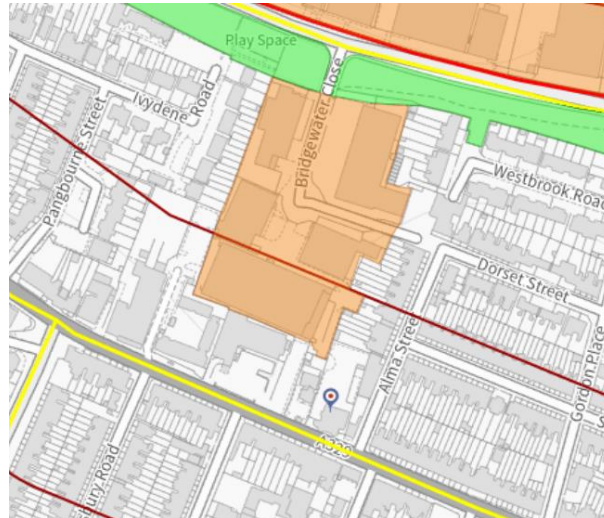
There are residential units directly to the west in a four storey block of flats at Chesters Walk. To the north are the rear gardens of the houses on Alma Street. To the east is car parking area and some commercial buildings. To the south is Oxford Road, with two storey terraced houses on the other side of the road.

To the north west of the site is adjacent to a local plan allocation site EM2j Bridgewater Close, a core employment area including industrial and storage and distribution businesses.

The location is not in a conservation area and the building is not listed although it is considered to be a non designated heritage asset as it dates from at least the 1870s and is a fine and largely complete Victorian building.

It is located within an Air Quality management area and on a classified highway network, sited outside of the Oxford Road west district centre.

Map of the Royal Albion with the EM2j allocation site shown adjacent to the site (in orange), and located on a classified highway network (in yellow).



Site Visit photos 12/02/2025



Front of pub



Pub car park to rear



Rear of pub



Ground floor bar



Kitchen



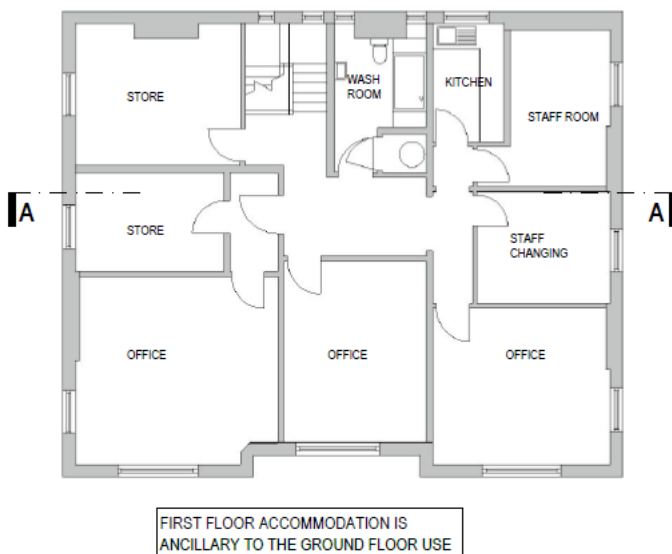
First floor

During the site visit, many internal features, such as the original staircase, skirting boards, fireplaces, arched doorways, etc., all represent the building's mostly intact impressive architecture. As such, the Royal Albion public house is considered to be a 'non-designated' heritage asset, a particular type of building style and part of the Victorian urban development history of the Oxford Road and Reading.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposal is for a permanent change of use of the ground and first floor from public house (sui generis) to commercial (Class E (a) or (b)) with associated internal alterations.

The floorspace consists of 219 sqm on the ground floor to comprise a commercial E (a) or (b) and 133 sqm on the first floor for ancillary uses including a staff room, kitchenette, wash facilities and storage. The proposed change of use would retain an employment use at the site and does not result in a loss of employment land.



Plan P02 Rev A

Supporting information implies that the proposal would be used as a Greggs, but this has not been definitely confirmed and it is possible that the premises could be used by another use falling under part E (a) for the display of retail sale of goods, other than hot food or E (b) for the sale of food and drink for consumption **on** the premises only.

The proposal is to be assessed on the basis of revised plans and the amended description. The initial plans included a residential use on the first floor, which was later amended to bring the first floor into ancillary use to a Class E a) or b) use only. It is noted that the Savills marketing report provided by the applicant states that there is existing residential accommodation comprising 3/4 double bedrooms situated on the first floor but this is not reflected in the plans as submitted.

No details have been provided as to the exact Class E a) or b) use that will be actioned. The Needs Assessment submitted on 5 August 2025 stated that the first floor would be in use as 'E3c'. No further explanation was provided. (*Case officer comment – see discussion below*)

Plans considered

Location plan

S01 Basement & Ground floor plans as existing

S02 First floor & Section AA as existing

S03 Roof plan as existing

S04 North & West Elevations as existing

S05 South & East elevations as existing

As received 15 November 2024

CIL V3

As received 10 December 2025

P01 C Basement & ground floor plans as proposed

P02 A First floor & Section AA as proposed

P10 C Block Plan

Planning Statement for proposed change of use V5 4 April 2025, H+M

As received 8 April 2025

Albion - Marketing Report (Savills)

Royal Albion Public House and Community Needs Assessment, M&M Property Investment, July 2025

As received 5 August 2025

PLANNING HISTORY

PL/07/0473 Construction of new covered external dining/drinking area and new front wall. Permitted 18 June 2007

PL93/0560 Proposed change of use of laundry to hot food takeaway outlet, and use part of Royal Albion PH car park for 4 parking bays. Refused 29 April 1993 *Case officer – application was refused due to insufficient parking arrangements and the potential detriment to highway safety and the free flow of traffic in addition to the use being detrimental to amenities of residential occupiers living nearby due to lack of parking, late night opening noise and smells.*

3. CONSULTATIONS

A site notice was displayed at the site on 15 January 2025 for the required period. No objections were received. One email enquiry was received from a local resident querying the amount of deliveries to be made to the premises.

The following were consulted:

- RBC Conservation Officer – No objections.

- Transport Development Control – No objections subject to conditions for parking, bicycle parking, layout and tracking and a delivery and servicing plan prior to occupation.
- Environmental Protection – No objections subject to conditions, no mechanical plant has been proposed.
- Licensing – No objections
- Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA) – No comments were received at the time of writing this report
- Reading Civic Society - No comments were received at the time of writing this report.
- RBC Valuations team – Concern was raised regarding the content of the supporting statements and reasons provided to justify the loss of the public house. *Case officer – RBC valuations consulted due to concerns regarding the content of the Marketing report and Needs assessment reports submitted for consideration)*

Battle Ward councillors were contacted on this planning application on 8 May 2025 and advised that they were content for officers to deal with the application under officers delegated powers.

Communications with the agent

Additional information, revised plans and an amended description were provided to validate the planning application. The agent was given the opportunity to provide additional information to justify the loss of the Royal Albion public house. An additional marketing report and needs assessment were submitted. The agent was notified that the additional information provided by the applicant was not considered to overcome concerns relating to the loss of the Royal Albion public house and the opportunity to withdraw the application was provided. The agent raised the possibility of investigating other use classes for the site such as class F1 or F2 in an email on 30 September 2025, however this cannot be addressed as part of this application. Pre application advice is recommended.

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.

4. 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'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12). In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework December 2024 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
CC3 Adaption to Climate Change
CC7 Design and the Public Realm

CC8 Safeguarding Amenity
EN4 Locally important heritage assets
EN15 Air Quality
EN16 Pollution and Water Resources
EN17 Noise Generating Equipment
RL6 Protection of Leisure Facilities and Public Houses
TR3 Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR5 Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Parking
EM2j Bridgewater Close

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024 (as updated)

- 2. Achieving sustainable development
- 4. Decision-making
- 6. Building a strong, competitive economy
- 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 9. Promoting sustainable transport
- 11. Making effective use of land
- 12. Achieving well-designed places
- 14. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

In particular:

- 8. Building a strong, competitive economy Paragraph 93 – Promoting healthy and safe communities

National Planning Policy Guidance (2014 onwards)

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents
Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

Other

Historic England Advice Note 7 – Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conserving Local Heritage
Public House Viability test - Campaign for Real Ale

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. A consultation version of the draft updated version 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 this application listed above is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remain 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’.

Policy RL6 remains relevant.

Policy CC3 requires that 'all non-residential development proposals must include an energy statement which confirms that proposals: Can generate at least the same amount of renewable electricity on-site (and preferably on-plot) as they demand over the course of the year (reasonable estimates of regulated and unregulated use) using a methodology proven to accurately predict post-occupancy performance; and • Achieve a site average space heating demand of 15-20kWH/m² /yr and a site average total energy demand of 70kWH/m² /yr. No unit shall exceed total energy demand of 90kWH/m² /yr, irrespective of the amount of onsite renewable production. ('Total energy demand' means the amount of energy used as measured by the metering of the building with no deduction for renewable energy generated on site).' Whilst CC3 will require that 'All development must address the risks of overheating through passive cooling and energy efficiency measures in the first instance'.

Policy EN4 is revised for proposals to be granted which result in 'substantial harm' where 'substantial public benefits outweigh that harm or loss'. Policy TR4 provides greater protection and enhancement for cycling and walking networks and supports the 'adopted Local Transport Plan 2040 and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan LCWIP, published in 2020' where the Oxford Road will be a Primary Walking Route.

5. APPRAISAL

Introduction

The planning application has been assessed on the revised plans, additional marketing and needs assessment documents and description as revised, subject to local planning policy. In order to assess whether the change of use is acceptable for the site, the positive and negative impacts of the proposal have been assessed in order to make an on-balance conclusion.

The main benefits are the retention of the use of the site with continued employment provision to be weighed against the loss of a public house and the community use of the building. Other material considerations affecting the planning balance include access to the site.

The appraisal will focus on the main benefits and drawbacks of the proposed change of use.

The proposed use is still unclear. A revised description was amended to 'Change of use of the ground and first floor from public house (sui generis) to commercial (Class E (a) or (b)) with associated internal alterations. However the Public house and community facility needs Assessment, July 2025 states 'The proposed use is commercial, with the ground floor functioning as E3(b) and the separate first floor to be E3(c).'

Use class E a) is for a shop other than for the sale of food, use Class E b) is for food and drink to be consumed on the premises. The application has been assessed on this basis. There is a failure to demonstrate exactly what type of business will occupy the building and how any intensification of a proposed change of use would impact local residents for example a supermarket or a shop would have a different impact to a business supplying food and drinks for consumption on the premises. It is not specified what proportion of food would be consumed on and off the premises.

It is noted that the first floor has the almost same proposed area as the retail area on the ground floor and that there is also an additional service access area to the rear of the ground floor. A large proportion of the property is proposed to be ancillary in relation to the ground floor use,

For information, Use Class c) is for services to visiting members of the public i) financial services, ii) professional services or iii) any other commercial business or service locality. This would be contrary to the description as agreed.

The proposal would retain the site in a commercial use, providing continued employment opportunities. This is considered a positive contribution to the local economy and the vitality of Oxford Road.

It is important to assess, land use considerations, the impact on future occupants and use of the site.

The proposed change of use has been assessed based on the submitted plans, including access arrangements, vehicle tracking, and parking layout. The current proposal does not include any external alterations or intensification of use beyond what is shown on the submitted layout.

Land Use Considerations

Although the site is not located within a district centre, the retention of employment at the site is a positive benefit to the vitality of Oxford Road.

Protection of public houses

Policy RL6 of the Reading Borough Local Plan seeks to protect leisure facilities, including public houses. The policy establishes a presumption in favour of retaining such uses unless one of the following criteria is met:

- a) There is no longer a need for the facility;
- b) The function can be adequately fulfilled by another facility;
- c) The continued use would have a negative impact on the area.

It is noted that the wording of Policy RL6 is not proposed to be amended as part of the Local Plan Partial Review, has not been taken forwards for discussion during the local plan examination and therefore remains a relevant and material consideration in the determination of this application.

RL6 states:

Protection of Leisure Facilities and Public Houses

RL6: PROTECTION OF LEISURE FACILITIES AND PUBLIC HOUSES

Existing leisure facilities or public houses will generally be retained, and there is a strong presumption in favour of retaining leisure facilities or public houses where they are the only facility of their type in a district, major local or local centre. Developments that would result in the loss of a leisure facility or a public house will not be permitted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that:

- a. There is no need for this type of facility in this area; or***
- b. The function of the facility can be adequately fulfilled by an existing facility, or a facility proposed as part of the development, where that facility would be at least as accessible to the same catchment; or***
- c. Unless the site is a sports or recreation facility, the impacts on amenity of residents or on crime and security of retaining the facility could not be dealt with through other measures, and would be so severe as to outweigh the benefits to the wider community of retaining the facility.***

The proposal would result in the loss of a public house that has only recently become vacant. The applicant is required to demonstrate that the function of the public house can be adequately fulfilled by other facilities in the area. This must be robustly justified through appropriate evidence submitted as part of the application.

There is no evidence been presented by the applicant, nor have the council obtained evidence that this has been anything other than a pub.

The following sections of this report will assess the proposal against each of the three criteria set out in Policy RL6 to determine whether the loss of the public house is acceptable in planning terms.

a) Whether there is a need for this type of facility in the area.

Supporting information from the applicant argues that there is no longer a need for this type of facility at the Royal Albion, however the submitted *Marketing report*, does not adequately demonstrate that there is no longer a valid need for this community public house use at the site.

The property was not marketed over a long period of time. The planning statement states that it was put on sale in July 2023 and it was sold on 8 May 2024. The marketing report provides an indication of efforts made to sell the site. The guide price was £650,000 plus VAT for the sale of a public house however was subsequently sold to a property developer for £932,200 as stated on the HM Land Registry website: https://landregistry.data.gov.uk/app/ppd/search?relative_url_root=%2Fapp%2Fppd It is unclear whether the price as sold was considered to be a realistic competitive price for a public house offered for sale as a going concern. It is not considered that the public house was marketed adequately for sale in continued use as a public house. The advert as shown below was provided in the Marketing report and can be online found at : <https://propertylinkassets.estatesgazette.com/images/20230830/1-116126003.pdf>





ROYAL ALBION

642 Oxford Road, Reading, RG30 1EH

• Guide price is £650,000 + VAT • Prominent roadside public house fronting A329 (Oxford Road) • For sale with vacant possession • Excellent transport links into London Paddington in under 37 minutes • Large car park for 26 vehicles • Benefits from a good-size trade garden • Alternate use potential subject to obtaining the necessary consents • Gross External Area of approximately 3,353 square feet and sits on a plot size of 0.37 acres



Location

Reading is a historic town located in Berkshire situated in Thames Valley approximately 40 miles west of London. The Royal Albion occupies a prominent roadside position fronting the A329 (Oxford Road) and is surrounded by mixture of both residential dwellings and commercial amenities. Oxford Road has always been one of the main routes leading west from Reading's medieval town centre towards Pangbourne and Oxford. The area is well connected with Reading West Station located 0.8 miles distant providing direct links to London Paddington in 30 minutes.

Description

The Royal Albion is a two storey detached property of brick construction with part rendered and painted elevations beneath a pitched roof with valley. There is single storey extensions to the side and rear.

The ground floor trading area is styled traditionally throughout and comprises; open plan bar and restaurant area for c.53 covers with an additional 8 covers at the main bar.

Ancillary trade areas include customer W/C's including disabled, good sized catering kitchen and a basement which includes a cooled beer cellarage.

The private accommodation is situated on the first floor and comprises; 3 / 4 double bedrooms, office, kitchen, utility room and a family bathroom.

Externally there is a good-sized beer garden to the side and rear of the property for circa 60 covers. The property benefits from a large car park for 26 vehicles including two disabled.

The property sits on a plot size of approximately 0.37 of an acre and Gross Internal Area of approximately 3,300 square feet.

Tenure

The property is held freehold (Title Number BK386893) and is to be sold with vacant possession.

Ratable Value

The property has a current rateable value of £27,900.

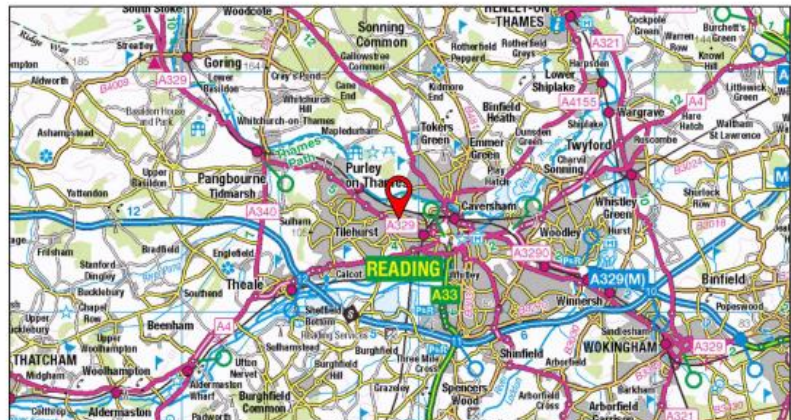
EPC

The property current has an EPC rating of 86-D.

Planning

The property is not listed and is not situated within a Conservation Area.

All other queries relating to planning should be directed to the planning department of Reading Borough Council <https://www.reading.gov.uk/>





IMPORTANT NOTICE

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Trading

The premises are open for trading.

Terms

Guide price: £650,000 + VAT.

Services

We are verbally advised that all mains services are connected to the property.

Fixtures and Fittings

No fixtures and fittings will be included in the sale unless agreed. Any third party items, such as gaming machines, dispense equipment, sound systems etc, will also be excluded.

Premises Licence

The property has been granted a Premises Licence in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003. We understand that the premises is permitted to sell alcohol under the following hours:

- Monday to Thursday: 11:00 – 24:00
- Friday and Saturday: 11:00 – 00:30
- Sunday: 11:00 – 24:00

Viewings

The property is currently open and trading and all viewings must be arranged through the sole selling agents Savills.

VAT

VAT may be applicable on the sale of this property.

Money Laundering

Money Laundering Regulations require Savills to conduct checks upon all purchasers. Prospective purchasers will need to provide proof of identity and residence.

William Baker

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Charlie Noad

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The advert states that the Royal Albion has a 'prominent freehold available with vacant possession' and that there is 'Alternate use potential subject to obtaining the necessary consents' and as such, marketed as an investment opportunity rather than for continued use as a public house.

It is also relevant to note that the site has recently been the subject of a local newspaper article on 18 September 2025 in Reading Today in which a former landlord expressed a clear interest in retaining the public house use. This reinforces the view that there remains community interest and potential viability for the site to continue operating as a public house. The agent has responded to state that the 'interested party' was not considered viable.

The site has a wide catchment area with future business opportunities. The rear boundary is adjacent to a core employment site in the Local Plan. The Oxford Road has a mixture of residential housing in the vicinity and local businesses within close proximity of the Royal Albion with few other community venues that are easily accessible. A former Ibis Styles hotel in the Oxford Road remains in use as temporary housing.

The applicant has referenced incidents of drug-related activity and declining footfall as justification for the loss of the public house. However, these issues could be linked to poor management and operational challenges rather than to a demonstrable long-term lack of need. Generic information has been provided that drinking habits are changing and disposable income is decreasing however this is not specific to the site. There is a failure to demonstrate that there is no longer a need for the Royal Albion and a lack of robust evidence has been provided and no robust sales figures or business plans for the Royal Albion have been submitted by the applicant.

b) Whether the function can be adequately fulfilled by another facility;

In assessing whether the function of the Royal Albion can be adequately fulfilled by another facility, consideration has been given to the proximity, accessibility, and community function of nearby public houses. While some establishments are located within a wider radius, several alternatives are beyond a reasonable walking distance and may not serve the same catchment or offer comparable facilities.

Although there is no national guidance for what constitutes a 'reasonable walking distance', if a function can be adequately fulfilled by another facility, it should be easily accessible and in close proximity to the existing site. In order to assess the Royal Albion a distance of 400 -800 metres which is the equivalent of 5 to 10 minutes walking would be considered a 'reasonable walking distance'. A 400-metre walk to a bus stop is a recommended standard in urban planning and is considered to be a 'reasonable distance to assess whether the function could be adequately fulfilled by another facility. Any distances greater than this are considered inadequate and less accessible.

The type of businesses considered to be an acceptable alternative use to the Royal Albion are public houses and drinking establishments within the same use class and within a reasonable walking distance providing facilities a family pub. The list provided by the applicant was not considered to be comprehensive and included venues that cannot be considered an adequate alternative in this instance. The case officer has assessed the venues listed by the applicant and included an additional site that was not included in the Needs Assessment provided by the applicant. The table below examines the actual existing use, the distance from the Royal Albion, the type of business offer and whether the venue is comparable to the Royal Albion.

Review of nearby establishments

Name of premises	Existing use	Distance from Royal Albion	Business offering
Royal Albion	Public House		Family pub, with darts, pool evenings, karaoke and food offer
The Pond House ¹	Public House	160m – approx. 3 min walk	Promotes watching live sporting events and drinks offers.- drinking pub, not comparable
The White Eagle ²	Public House	643m – approx. 10 min walk	Polish run bar providing primarily Polish beer and Polish food – specialist pub, not comparable
Double Barrelled brewery ³	Taproom/brewery/off licence	804m – approx. 11 min walk	Primarily a brewery with ancillary sales, only 14% of floor area for craft beer sales open only at restricted times – not a public house, not comparable
Bagheera Indian Restaurant& Bar (at The Spread Eagle) ⁴	Bar/Restaurant	804m – approx. 11 min walk	Bar with Indian Restaurant – core function is as an Indian restaurant, not comparable

¹ <https://www.pondhousereading.co.uk/>

² <https://www.facebook.com/whiteeaglepub/>

³ <https://www.doublebarrelled.co.uk/pages/our-story>

⁴ <https://bagheerarestaurant.co.uk/>

The Wishing Well ⁵	Public House	965m – approx. 13 min walk	Pub promoting live sports, live entertainment and drinks offers - drinking pub, not comparable
The Tylers Rest ⁶	Public House	1609m – approx. 20 min walk	Family pub with restaurant offer – not considered a reasonable distance away
The Rose and Thistle ⁷	Public House	1609m – approx. 21 min walk	Live sports, drink and food offer – not considered a reasonable distance away
The Battle Inn ⁸	Public House	1609m – approx. 24 min walk	Former public house - currently vacant
The Butler ⁹	Public house and live music venue	1931m – approx. 27 min walk	Real ale, drinks, food and live music – not comparable

Map of venues in the vicinity of The Royal Albion



The Pond House is primarily a drinking pub that promotes live sports events whilst The White Eagle is a Polish run business specialising in Polish beer and Polish food. Neither would be a comparable venue. The Double Barrelled Brewery is a taproom/brewery (with restricted planning permission PL/18/1703 - Certificate of lawfulness for proposed ground floor tap room/off licence sales shop ancillary to primary use of the site as a brewery (Use Class B2). The size of the proposed tap room to be no greater than 14% of the total floor area, as shown on the submitted drawing, and the operating times as set out on the application form to be no more than 13 hours per week, to be on Friday and Saturday afternoons and

⁵ https://www.craftunionpubs.com/wishing-well-reading?utm_source=gmb&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=homepage

⁶ <https://www.sizzlingpubs.co.uk/findapub/southeast/thetylersresttilehurst#/>

⁷ <https://www.roseandthistlereading.co.uk/index>

⁸ <https://camra.org.uk/pubs/royal-reading-155656>

⁹ <https://www.thebutlerreading.co.uk/>

evenings only.) that has restrictions for ancillary sales and is not comparable. The Spread eagle is primarily an Indian restaurant.

The other venues are not considered within 'a reasonable distance'. The Royal Albion served a distinct catchment, and its loss would not be adequately mitigated by the remaining pubs within walking distance. This analysis supports the conclusion that the proposal does not meet the requirements of Policy RL6(b), as the different sorts of diversifications provided do not adequately fulfil the required function of a family use public house. No professional qualifications or credentials were provided within the 'Needs Assessment' report to support the conclusions drawn in the document on behalf of M&M Property Investment Co. Limited. There has been a failure to demonstrate that the function can be adequately fulfilled by suitable facility.

c) Whether the continued use of a public house would have a negative impact

While there have been reported incidents of drug-related activity at the site, the applicant has not provided any formal amenity complaints. Although the site has experienced anti-social behaviour, this has not been shown to be unresolvable. The absence of reported amenity issues and the lack of evidence that alternative management or security measures have been exhausted weakens the applicant's argument for the loss of the pub use under this criterion.

The policy starting point is that there is a strong presumption to retain pubs, particularly those in retail centres. Although the Royal Albion is not within an identified district centre, it lies on a principal radial route (the A329 Oxford Road) and is easily accessible by walking, cycling, public transport and by car. The information provided does not preclude the public house from being viable or having a positive impact from a continued use as a public house if managed in accordance with Licensing regulations, with a good management team and trained staff. There has been a failure to demonstrate that the continued use of the Royal Albion as a public house would have a negative effect.

RL6 officer summary

In terms of criteria a) 'no need for type of facility' the supporting text to the policy explains that evidence to show that there is no need for the facility should be based on clear, long-term issues and trends, rather than short-term economic circumstances or lack of viability due to poor management.

The applicant's supporting planning statement V5 prepared by H+M, 4 April 2025 and the Public house and community facility needs Assessment by M&M Property Investment, July 2025 suggest an over-saturation of pubs in the area and that the trading at the premises had been in decline due to a reduction in the number of visitors by foot and increased operational costs. No in depth business accounts have been provided in evidence and there has been a failure to demonstrate how a new public house venture would be unviable. The property was marketed as an investment opportunity, with a significant hope value. The advert stated that there was; 'Alternate use potential subject to obtaining the necessary consents', with existing residential accommodation on the first floor, for which there is no previous established use.

In terms of criteria b) 'facility can be adequately fulfilled by an existing facility', it is not possible to provide a suitable alternative facility within the same catchment area as can be seen in the 'Review of nearby establishments' table and assessment above.

In terms of criteria c) the site has experienced a number of drug and anti-social activities. There are some allegations of anti-social behaviour which could probably be dealt with under the licensing regime and with a good management team.

The document provided by the applicant states that the Royal Albion has not been able to operate efficiently and has had a number of changes in management and provided a list of tenants at the site. A

letter from Greene King has been provided as evidence stating that the main reasons for the long term failure of the public house are '1 falling footfall, 2 a troublesome reputation, 3 numerous local competitors and a low rent', stating that it is no longer commercially viable, particularly following the closure of an adjacent hotel in 2021. However there has been a failure to demonstrate a thorough financial viability assessment and it cannot be determined whether the business losses were primarily due to management and business failings rather than the location of the pub and the local market.

In addition, although the nearby hotel listed in the supporting documents was closed for new business, it was repurposed to be used for temporary housing rather than as a hotel and is still considered to provide a customer base within the catchment area of the venue.

The application does not demonstrate sufficient compliance with the criteria as set out in Policy RL6. The loss of the public house is therefore contrary to the Local Plan and cannot be supported. Before consideration can be given to the proposed new use, the principle of the loss of the existing use must be satisfactorily addressed, which has not been achieved in this case. The Campaign for Real Ale provides guidance for the assessment of a public house viability test to require an in depth assessment, consideration of the building, assessment of local trade and flexibility of the site to extend the offer. Supporting documents provided by the applicant are not considered to have provided sufficient justification in respect of the requirements of the NPPF and Paragraph 93 for the protection of public houses, the Reading Local Plan 2019 and guidance provided by CAMRA. Consequently, the loss of the public house is considered unacceptable in this instance for the reasons described above.

Impact on Parking/Highways and Access

Policies TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway related matters), TR1 (Achieving the Transport Strategy) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking relates matters relating to development. The Parking Standards and Design SPD sets out guidance in respect of parking provision.

The site is fronts onto the A329 Oxford Road which is the main transport corridor between central Reading and the west. The A329 Oxford Road has parking restrictions preventing on-street parking and forms part of the Red Route 'no stopping' corridor. This site is well served by public transport, with buses continuing either into or out of the Central Core Area via the Oxford Road.

The application consists of a change of use from a public house to commercial use (Class E (a) (for the display or retail sale of goods, other than hot food, principally to visiting members of the public) and (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)).

The vehicular access to the site is via the existing crossover from Oxford Road to the south. The existing car park to the north is retained with no changes proposed. The ground floor unit will be accessed from the existing front doors opening onto Oxford Road as it does currently.

Policy TR5 states that development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable transport facilities, particularly public transport. There are currently 24 parking spaces associated with the public house which will be retained for the proposed retail or café/restaurant use.

In transport terms, it is considered that the proposed change of use as outlined in information provided would not result in a material increase vehicular trips to the site given that that parking provision remains the same. However, it is probable that the peak traffic hours will differ from the existing public house use which would be more intensive in the evening.

The planning statement asserts that servicing will take place from the car park at the rear as per the existing public house. The potential operator Greggs have confirmed that they would have one delivery a day, using an 18T rigid truck. Tracking diagrams have been submitted (Drawing P10C) to demonstrate that a 18T vehicle would be able to enter and leave the site in forward gear with deliveries undertaken within the loading bay at the rear of the site. The applicant states that the existing pub would have required beer deliveries from a dray of a similar size, so this is not a change to the existing situation.

The submitted first floor plans indicate that there is no change to the existing layout and the first floor use is ancillary to the ground floor use, particularly in relation to a Class E use a) and b) only. There will be minimal additional impact on pedestrians and cyclists using the Oxford Road as a primary walking route due to a class E use only that would not include a drive through take away service, requiring a greater intensification of car trips to the site.

Cycle storage in the form of 4X Sheffield stands will be provided at the rear of the site adjacent to the side entrance and considered acceptable.

Traffic can be congested along the Oxford Road and visibility when existing the side access can result in restricted views of pedestrian approaching the site along the pedestrian footpath. A previous change of use was refused on access and highway grounds, and a condition is proposed to ensure that the access and delivery layout is as specified with the provision of one delivery a day.

Should planning permission be granted, it is recommended that the use be restricted to the layout and operational details as proposed. Any future intensification of use—such as the introduction of a drive-through or takeaway function—or any external changes to access or servicing arrangements would require a separate planning application. Such proposals would need to be supported by detailed transport assessments, including vehicle access, parking provision, and pedestrian safety measures, to ensure that highway safety is not compromised.

Other issues

Design Considerations on the non designated heritage asset

Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks to ensure that new development enhances and preserves the local character. The policy places importance on the layout of the urban structure and urban grain, stipulating that development should respond positively to the local context and create safe and accessible environments. The policy requires a “high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located”, whilst policy EN4 aims to conserve the significance, character and setting of the asset.

No changes to the external façade are proposed and the first floor level will remain ancillary to the ground floor business. The proposed internal changes from a sui generis pub to a Class E use is not considered to detrimentally impact the layout or architectural details of the existing building. Any internal changes would need to confirm to Building regulations. The proposed bike stand for staff, cycle spaces and euro bin, are considered to have a have minimal impact.

The RBC Conservation officer has no objection to the proposed change of use and whilst being mindful of policy EN4, due to the lack of external changes to the non-designated heritage asset, there is not considered to be a conflict with Policy CC7 or EN4 and is in accordance with the NPPF.

Impact on Neighbouring Properties

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) states that development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

There is no policy objection in principle to the proposed development in terms of retained employment at the site and for a retail use that is considered a 'suitable' use that would not adversely affect local businesses. The site is not located within the Oxford Road West district centre.

The proposed change of use should not result in a detrimental impact on the surrounding residential accommodation.

The Needs Assessment states in para 6.3.4 on p22 that the proposed opening hours, if the site was to be a Greggs, permission would be sought for opening hours to be 05:00 to 23:00. The early opening is likely to cause a disturbance to neighbouring residential properties and would have a more detrimental impact than for a retained use as a public house. Working and operational hours commencing at 5am would result in harm to the amenity of local residents due to the close proximity of neighbouring residential properties around the site.

The proposed change of use would allow a wide range of future uses to be considered at the site and insufficient information has been provided regarding the differences in the potential intensification of different uses, for example use of the property as a 'shop other than for the sale of food and drink' such as a supermarket could result in a detrimental impact and result in a large rise in the number of short trips to the site whilst a use 'to provide food and drink which is mostly consumed on the premises' could result in additional noise and odour due to changes in cooking processes due to a change in the type of food offering and/or food preparation.

There has been a failure to demonstrate sufficient information regarding the requirements of the proposed change of use and whether any specific plant, flue or equipment would be required that could result in additional noise or odour disturbance and how it would impact the non-designated heritage asset or the local amenity and character of the area.

If otherwise considered acceptable, a condition would be recommended to restrict the addition of any plant, flue or noise Tannoy system details and a noise assessment to be submitted to and approved by the local authority to ensure that there is no detrimental impact on surrounding properties. A condition would also be required to restrict the hours of opening and for details of any exterior lighting required to be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, to avoid a detrimental impact on the amenity of surrounding houses.

Accessibility

The proposed building should be accessible to all and for future occupants to be able to move around easily, especially for vulnerable users and take into account the diverse needs of its users. The proposed map shows that the only access is via a single staircase.



First Floor Plan @ 1:100
(No change)

P02 Rev A First floor & Section AA

The application has failed to demonstrate that the building will provide accessible access to the first floor for future staff and any business visitors. The development should promote activity and social interaction and is contrary to policy CC7.

BNG

No external changes are proposed. The car park to the rear is tarmacked to provide a car park and would be exempt for BNG purposes.

Sustainability

Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) requires new development to reduce the consumption of resources and materials. The proposal requires predominantly minor external changes and an internal fitout.

Prior to a change of use, if otherwise considered acceptable, a sustainability statement should be provided to detail measures in place for the change of use to improve the target emission rate of the building. *'Proposals for new development, including the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing building stock, will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change.'*

The current proposal is for a change of use and refurbishment of the existing building, it is considered reasonable to allow a flexible approach in this respect. Any refurbishment works will be required to make reasonable adjustments to satisfy current Building Regulations requirements.

6. CONCLUSION

The proposed change of use would result in the permanent loss of a public house and community facility. While the retention of employment use and the reactivation of a currently vacant building in an accessible location are acknowledged as positive aspects of the proposal, these benefits do not outweigh the harm caused by the loss of the public house.

The application fails to demonstrate that there is no longer a need for the facility or that the property was marketed appropriately as a pub, that its function can be adequately fulfilled by alternative provision within a reasonable walking distance, or that its continued use would result in unacceptable impacts on the local area. As such, the proposal does not meet any of the criteria set out in Policy RL6 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019), which seeks to protect leisure facilities and public houses.

The proposal raises concerns regarding the impact on neighbouring amenity and the character of the area and the application is incomplete and does not provide sufficient information regarding the proposed change of use for the ground and first floor, with the potential for noise and disturbance and future intensification of use (eg as a takeaway or drive through), where the provision of food to be consumed off site increases. These concerns would require further assessment under Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

The layout of the proposed building would not provide sufficient accessibility to future staff and visitors to access the first floor from the ground floor level.

For these reasons, the proposal is considered unacceptable and contrary to Policies RL6 and CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and para 93 of the NPPF.

7. RECOMMENDATION
Refuse

REASONS FOR REFUSAL

1. The proposed change of use would lead to the permanent loss of the Royal Albion public house, a valued community facility in a prominent location on the Oxford Road. There is a failure to demonstrate that there is no longer a need for the facility, that its function can be adequately fulfilled by alternative provision and that the continued use as a public house would result in an unacceptable impact on the local area. In addition the property is not considered to have been marketed adequately for the continued use as a public house. As such, the proposal does not meet any of the criteria set out in Policy RL6 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019), which seeks to protect leisure facilities and public houses. It is also contrary to Paragraph 93 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which requires planning decisions to guard against the unnecessary loss of valued community facilities.
2. There is a failure to demonstrate that the development will not result in a noise disturbance to neighbouring residents. The proposed change of use would result in changes to the proposed hours of opening as stated operating on site between 5:00 and 23:00, change in type of offering and or food preparation and due to the absence of information regarding any additional plant, kitchen equipment or flue and given the potential use of the site, the proposal raises concerns regarding the impact of noise, odour and disturbance on neighbouring amenity and the character of the area. This is contrary to policy CC7 Design in the Public Realm, EN16 Pollution and water resources, and EN17 Noise Generating Equipment of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
3. The proposed layout does not demonstrate that future staff and any other business visitors would have sufficient and inclusive access to the first floor from the ground floor level. This is contrary to the requirements of Policy CC7 which seeks to ensure high standards of design and accessibility.

INFORMATIVES

1. Refused plans
Location plan

As received 15 November 2024

P01 C Basement & ground floor plans as proposed

P02 A First floor & Section AA as proposed

P10 C Block Plan

Planning Statement for proposed change of use V5 4 April 2025, H+M

As received 8 April 2025

Albion - Marketing Report (Savills)

Royal Albion Public House and Community Needs Assessment, M&M Property Investment, July 2025

As received 5 August 2025

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.

2. The Local Planning Authority has worked positively and proactively with the applicant to see if relevant concerns could be resolved to allow permission to be granted. However, that has not been possible and therefore the decision to refuse planning permission has been taken.
3. This planning application was submitted without the benefit of first seeking pre-application advice from the Local Planning Authority, which can often result in the avoidance of refusal of planning permission. Please see the following link to the Council's pre-application service here:
<https://www.reading.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-applications/before-making-a-planning-application/pre-application-planning-advice/>
4. Inconsistent information has been provided regarding the proposed change of use of the property to determine the intensification of use of a class E a) or b) use and the proposed use of the first floor.
5. Additional planning permission may be required for any intensification of use ie as a drive through or take away which would involve an intensification of use of the site and require additional transport evidence and highway safety reports.