

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Katesgrove

App Ref: PL/23/1535 Full planning permission & PL/23/1536 Listed Building Consent

Address: 81 London Street, Reading RG1 4QA

Proposal: Change of Use of the third floor from office space to residential, the creation of two 3-bed flats and the removal of existing modern partitions and the addition of new partitions

Applicant: S Lipschitz

Received date: 26 October 2023

Target Decision date: 5 November 2025 (agreed extension of time)

Case Officer: Anthony Scholes

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is a 3-storey building located on the eastern side of Queens Road. The building was previously in office use, with ground floor and first floor partly in use as an education use by 'Shichida UK'.

The application site is located within a conservation area, and is a building listed.

The listing describes the building as:

Townhouse, built in the early C19. Significantly enlarged to the rear in the late C20.

MATERIALS: red brick with stucco dressings. Slate roof covering.

PLAN: early-C19, three-storey range facing westward onto London Street, connected to a three-storey, late-C20 range which extends eastwards at the rear, forming a long rectangular plan with a lightwell in the centre.

EXTERIOR: the ground floor of the principal elevation has a modern shopfront with a double-door entrance to the left (north), a large, fixed-pane shop window over a panelled stall riser in the centre, and a glazed door to the south giving access to the shop unit. Each of these openings is framed by full-height pilasters that rise to a fascia shop sign.

A stucco band separates the ground-floor shopfront from the upper floors, which are of red brick laid in irregular Flemish bond. The first and second floors each contain three recessed, six-over-six glazed sash windows with gauged brickwork flat-arch heads. Above the second floor is a stucco entablature and cornice, topped by a broad, plain parapet painted white. The hipped roof of the original building joins to another hipped roof over the late-C20 rear extension. The rear extension is of three storeys. The east elevation contains a bay window at first-floor level which is topped by a jettied box window on the second floor. INTERIOR: it is understood that the building has been redeveloped behind the façade.

The site is located within the central area and is within an air quality management area.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The application is for the conversion of the top floor (3rd storey) to 2 no. 3-bedroom flats. The proposal includes waste storage bins to the rear of the building. The access to the proposal is from both the front and rear through a shared 2 no. communal staircase. The proposal includes bicycle storage.

The following revised plans and documents were considered for this recommendation:

Drawing No: P01 – Proposed Floor Plans, Rev B, dated 11 April 2024
 Drawing No: P02 – Proposed Floor Plans, Rev B, dated 11 April 2024
 Drawing No: P03 – Proposed Elevations & Section, Rev B, dated 11 April 2024
 As received by the LPA 15 April 2025
 Financial viability assessment dated June 2024
 As received by the LPA 19 June 2025
 Noise Assessment dated November 2023
 Air Quality Assessment dated November 2023
 As received by the LPA 28 November 2023
 Heritage Impact Assessment dated September 2023
 Planning Statement dated October 2023
 Internal Daylight/sunlight assessment dated 7 September 2023
 Drawing No: P01 - Location and block plan (titled incorrectly 'Proposed Floor Plans') dated 25 July 2023
 As received by the LPA 26 October 2023

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Reference	Description	Status
PL/25/1228	Change of use from private parking to commercial car park	Under Consideration
PL/25/0566	Change of use of first floor from Class E (commercial) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise 2 x 3-bedroom flats. Prior Notification under Class G, Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.	Refused 30 June 2025
PL/25/0564	Removal of existing modern partitions and addition of new partitions to facilitate a change of use of the first floor from office space to residential (2 x 3-bed flats).	Refused 30 June 2025
PL/18/0581	Display of non-illuminated fascia signage	Consent Given 8 August 2018
PL/16/0832	Display of non-illuminated fascia and projecting sign (listed building consent)	Granted 27 July 2016
PL/16/0833	Redecoration of shop front and internal alterations at ground floor level	Consent Given 27 July 2016
PL/12/0423	Use of part of the ground floor and all of the first floor for education use, including ancillary admin functions. (Certificate of lawfulness)	Certificate Given 26 November 2012
PL/11/1770	Application for a Certificate of Lawfulness for Existing Use for D1 Non-Residential Education Use (Certificate of lawfulness)	Certificate Not Given 26 August 2011
PL/98/1048	Change of use from retail use to an office for financial and professional services or business use.	

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted on this application:

RBC Environmental Protection
 No objection subject to conditions.

RBC Waste

No objection subject to conditions.

RBC Transport

No objection subject to conditions.

RBC Conservation Officer

No objection subject to conditions.

5. EQUALITY ACT

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. 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:

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction

CC3: Adaption to Climate Change

CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage

CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development

CC7: Design and The Public Realm

CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

EN15: Air Quality

EN16: Pollution and Water Resources

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

TR3: Access, Traffic And Highway-Related Matters

TR5: Car And Cycle Parking And Electric Vehicle Charging

CR2: Design in Central Reading

CR6: Living in Central Reading

RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres

SPG/SPD

Affordable Housing (2021)

Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Residential Conversions (2023)
Planning Obligations Under S106 (2015)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

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’.

The Local Plan Partial Update was submitted to the Secretary of State on 9th May 2025. Submission marks the beginning of a process of public examination led by an independent Inspector. Due to the stage of examination, the draft Local Plan can be afforded limited weight.

7. APPRAISAL

Land Use Considerations

The NPPF states that LPAs should “encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value”.

The proposals seek to provide 2 residential units by way of conversion. The site is on previously developed land within the urban area and is therefore considered suitable for residential development in principle, subject to any other relevant policies relating to the existing or proposed uses.

Prior to considering the proposed use, consideration of the loss of the existing uses must first be provided. In this respect, it is considered that Policy EM3 (Loss of Employment Land) is relevant to the proposal. The site is located outside of the office core and is not located within a Core Employment Area and, therefore, a loss of employment (in this case office) use would be appropriate, subject to consideration of the criteria set out in this policy.

It is noted that there is a relatively high level of properties in residential use in the surrounding area. It is recognised at both national and local level that the introduction of residential accommodation within centres serves to enhance the vitality and viability of those areas as well as being an important source of delivering affordable housing in sustainable locations. It is also supported by Policy RL1 which notes that ‘residential use of upper floors’ would be acceptable in all centres.

There are no significant concerns regarding the loss of the existing use, and the principle of providing a residential use is acceptable, which aligns with the broad objectives of Policy H1 in assisting in meeting

the annual housing targets. On the basis of the above, the proposed change of use is considered acceptable in principle, subject to other material considerations discussed below.

Unit Mix

Policy CR6 (Living in Central Reading) seeks that the residential developments within the town centre provide a range of different sized units, ideally a mix of 1, 2- and 3-bedroom units. The provision of 2 x 3 bedroom units is considered acceptable in this regard.

Design Considerations

Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks to ensure that new development enhances and preserves the local character and Policy CR2 (Design in Central Reading) seeks to acceptable relationships between buildings in the town centre are created. Policies EN1, EN3, and EN6 seeks collectively to protect designated heritage assets (including listed buildings and conservation areas).

Due to the nature of the proposals, being a conversion scheme, no external alterations are proposed. The proposal may be required to upgrade windows to mitigate noise and air quality issues from London Street, a noise assessment would be secured by condition. Any future works to the windows required, would require separate planning consent/listed building consent. It is accepted that meaningful landscaping cannot appropriately be achieved. In accordance with Policy CC7 and CR2.

Impact on Neighbours Policy

CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) 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. Policy CR6 (Living in Central Area) seeks to safeguard neighbour amenity from potential noise disturbance.

The use of the second floor for 2 residential units is not considered to result in any harm or disturbance to the surrounding area where residential uses are common. No external changes are proposed that could result in any overbearing effects or loss of light to any neighbouring property. Given the distance to properties at the rear, no significant loss of privacy is considered to arise. The proposed flats are not considered to harm the living conditions to neighbouring properties or the surrounding area.

Amenity of future occupiers

Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) seeks to ensure that both the amenity of neighbouring properties and the amenity of future occupiers is adequately protected. Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) requires all development to comply with internal space standards as outlined within the local plan. Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) seeks that residential developments are provided with adequate private or communal outdoor amenity space.

The proposed unit sizes meet the minimum gross internal floor areas stated in Policy H5. Individual bedroom sizes would comply with internal space standards as set out in Policy H5. Each unit would be served with a good aspect, including a dual aspect flats, albeit that one aspect is provided to an internal lightwell. The lightwell would provide a sufficient degree of outlook, albeit constrained. The layouts of the flats have been revised to ensure the living areas are provided with outlook to the street (front and rear). The roof also contains a large number of roof lights to provide. These would provide sufficient daylight and outlook to all flats. Given distance to properties to the rear (East Street) no privacy impacts are considered to impact the proposed flats.

As is the case with the majority of town centre dwellings, meaningful amenity space is not capable of being provided on site. Given the location of the site and access to nearby public amenities it is considered that in this instance the limited amenity space is acceptable and is not considered to unduly compromise the overall quality of accommodation proposed such to warrant a refusal on this basis.

In terms of noise and disturbance, RBC Environmental Protection officers have raised no objection subject to a pre-commencement condition to require a noise assessment. This is required owing to the busy nature of London Street, coupled with commercial premises in the vicinity that may cause noise disturbance. The proposal also would be above a Class E unit. There is potential that there would be noise disturbance between these uses. A condition is also recommended for noise between the uses.

The proposed development is located within an air quality management area that the Council has identified with monitoring as being a pollution hot-spot (may breach the EU limit value for NO₂) and introduces new exposure / receptors. However, as the units are at third floor there is unlikely to be levels of pollutants above the objective limit value. However, if ventilation is to be installed, the intakes should avoid the London street façade as levels of pollutants will be elevated.

The proposal includes two bedrooms of each unit facing into an internal lightwell. This would be directly looking at one another (i.e. two separate flats). This would be necessary for daylight/sunlight and outlook to these bedrooms, however privacy could be impacted. Through discussions with the application, it was considered necessary to provide reflective glazing to these internal facing windows. This would allow outlook and daylight/sunlight whilst protecting privacy of residents. This is to be secured in perpetuity by condition.

Listed Building Matters

The proposed development, as it is a Listed Building, is a combined full planning application and Listed Building Consent application. The Applicant has provided a heritage assessment to consider the impacts on the historic building. The specific works proposed to the listed building, include the removal of all internal partitioning, and replacement with new partitioning, and the provision of reflective coating to the internal lightwell glass only. There may be a need to provide additional window glazing, as a result of recommendations of the noise conditions, or other works not detailed already would require separate listed building consent.

Transport Matters

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.

In accordance with the Council's current parking standards and Design SPD each 3 bedroom unit would require 1 parking space each, therefore an 2 parking spaces would be required. The Applicant has confirmed that the proposal would include 2 no. parking spaces within the existing parking area to the rear. The remainder of the rear includes 11 other parking spaces (13 total). These would appear to be able to be freely allocated to the wider building, including any other uses within the building. The rear of the site is subject to a full planning application for the change of use of private parking to a separate privately operated carpark. This application is under consideration, and whilst of note, is not considered to have any weight in the consideration of this application given that the application is under consideration by the LPA. The existing parking area generally measure 4.8m in their parking space depth. With a deficient forecourt depth compared to the required standards (i.e. less than 6m). Though this would be a concern, the proposed use a carparking for residential would have a similar turnover rate to the existing carparking use (i.e. not an intensification of the carpark). This lack of space would therefore be acceptable in this limited instance given the use would be low turnover with low risk of increased reversing onto the highway.

Bin storage is located at the rear of the site and the Council's Transport officer has confirmed that this is acceptable, presentation of bins is to London Street as per the current arrangements, a condition is applied to ensure bins are not stored on London Street other than on collection days.

The only cycle parking required as part of this application is 2 cycle space (1 spaces per proposed unit). The proposal provides a secure enclosed cycle storage area on ground floor. No details of cycle stands are provided at this time, and full details will be secured by condition.

In the circumstances there are no transport objections to the proposed development subject to conditions and informatives. In particular, it is considered necessary to impose a construction method statement in this instance, given the busy London Street and with other residential properties in close proximity. In compliance with Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5.

Affordable Housing

In accordance with Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) of the Reading Borough Local Plan; *"Residential development will make appropriate contribution towards affordable housing to meet the needs of Reading: • (...) 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 agreed to enter into a legal agreement to secure a financial contribution if planning permission were to be granted. Valuations from 2 independent estate agents were submitted during the course of the application and a Section 106 Legal Agreement has been drawn up, which secures a financial contribution of £37,500.00 for the purposes of providing affordable housing elsewhere within the Borough. The figure has been calculated based on the valuations provided and this is considered acceptable and complies with Policy H3 and the Affordable Housing SPD (2021).

Sustainability

Policy CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction) requires new development to reduce the consumption of resources and materials and includes that "All minor non-residential developments or conversions to residential are required to meet the most up-to-date BREEAM 'VERY GOOD' standards, as a minimum" and that "Conversions to residential should incorporate water conservation measures."

It is acknowledged that the proposals, as largely a refurbishment proposal and change of use of existing building, do not neatly align with the standard BREEAM requirements. As such, it is considered reasonable to allow a flexible approach in this respect and a condition is recommended to be attached to require either the BREEAM certificate to be provided or for an alternative sustainability assessment addressing the requirements of Policy CC2 to be submitted and approved in writing by the LPA.

BNG

BNG is mandatory for all development lodged after February 2024. The development is also internal only, and the site contains hardstanding or built form entirely. Therefore, policy EN12 (no net loss of biodiversity) are met. Mandatory BNG is also not required.

CIL

With regards the proposed scheme, development will be liable for CIL as it involves the change of use to residential where floorspace has not been in use for 6 months of the previous 3 years on the day planning permission is granted. The standard CIL informative will be attached to the decision notice reminding the applicant of their duty in this respect.

8. CONCLUSION

The application, in providing additional dwellings to assist the Council in meeting its housing targets pursuant to policy H1 of the RBLP, would weight in favour of the proposal. The provision of good sized flats, as well as appropriate mitigation of air quality and noise for future occupants is positive. The minor loss of employment, is considered to weight slightly against the proposal. The lack of private of communal open space is negative, though due to the location is neutral overall. It is considered, that the planning balance weighs in favour of granting permission subject to conditions.

9. RECOMMENDATION

GRANT.