

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Redlands Ward

App Ref: PL/24/1409 Full planning permission

Address: 62-66 QUEENS ROAD, READING, RG1 4AZ

Proposal: Change of use of Second Floor from Class E commercial to Residential use to provide 3no flats (2 x 2-bed, 1 x 1-bed)

Applicant: Mr Mandeep Basra

Received date: 22 October 2024

Target Decision date: 30 January 2026 (agreed extension of time)

Case Officer: Anthony Scholes

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site known as Havell House is a 5 storey (including lower ground floor) building located on the southern side of Queens Road. The building was previously in office use. The application site benefits from a number of recent planning approvals. Notably, all floors had recently gained prior approval for the change of use from office to flats, though it would appear these have lapsed. Planning permission was recently granted for the residential use of the third floor as flats.

The application site is not located within a conservation area, nor is the building listed.

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

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

This application seeks planning permission for the conversion of second floor to comprise 3 flats comprising 1 x 2 bed and 1 x 1 bed units. No external alterations are proposed.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Extensive; most recent

PL/24/0085 (FUL) - Change of Use of third floor from Class E commercial to Residential use to provide 2 No. flats. To provide new glazed doors and balustrade to provide access to flat roof to form new balconies. Approved 11 October 2024

210175 - Change of use of upper ground floor from Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to provide 1 x 2 bed flat and 2 x 1 bed flats – Prior Approval Granted (lapsed)

210174 - Change of use of the first floor of the building from Class B1a (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise of 4 no. one bed flats – Prior Approval Granted (lapsed)

210172 - Change of use of the second floor of the building from Class B1a (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise of 4 no. one bed flats – Prior Approval Granted (lapsed)

190956 - Change of Use of lower ground floor from D1 use to C3 use to provide 3 No. flats – Granted

181468 - Change of use of upper ground floor from Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise of 1 x 2 bed flat and 2 x 1 bed flats – Prior Approval Granted

181466 – Change of use of second floor from Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise of 4 x 1 bed flats – Prior Approval Granted

181467 – Change of use of third floor from Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise of 2 x 2 bed flats - Prior Approval Granted

181464 - Change of use of first floor from Class B1(a) (offices) to C3 (dwelling houses) to comprise of 4 x 1 bed flats - Prior Approval Granted

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted:

RBC Transport

No objection subject to conditions.

RBC Environmental Health

No objection subject to conditions.

A site notice was placed 21 November 2024 no comments were received.

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 3 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. As noted in the history section above, residential use of the site has previously been approved albeit through prior approval process.

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.

It is pertinent to note that within the ongoing Local Plan Partial Update Submission Draft (May 2025) significant changes are proposed to the allocation as outlined in the excerpt of draft policy CR14(g). The proposal would align with the draft allocation for the site, though this is afforded little weight as outlined above.

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. Given the size of the proposals for 3 units only the proposed mix of 1 x 1 bed and 2 x 2 bedroom units is considered acceptable.

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.

Due to the nature of the proposals, being a conversion scheme, no external alterations are proposed. It is noted that the proposed elevations indicate new railings and doors, however these have been granted under a previous application. The proposal may be required to upgrade windows to mitigate noise and air quality issues from Queen's Road, these would be secured by condition. 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 3 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 2-bed flat. These would provide sufficient daylight and outlook to all flats. Given distance to properties to the rear (South 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. Provision of terraced areas as shown is acceptable and is similar to the adjacent Wesley Gate.

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 Queens Road, coupled with commercial premises in the vicinity that may cause noise disturbance.

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 Queens Road façade as levels of pollutants will be elevated.

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.

The site is located on Queens Road which is a major transport corridor into Reading (A329). Queens Road and the surrounding road network all have parking restrictions preventing on-street parking.

In accordance with the Council's current parking standards and Design SPD each 1 and 2 bedroom unit would require 1 parking space each, therefore an additional 3 parking spaces added to the existing provision would be required. Given the sites location and extensive parking restriction in place, which prevents unauthorised parking, a car-free development would be acceptable in this location. The site retains 10 parking spaces to the rear. These would appear to be able to be freely allocated to the wider building, including any other flats permitted previously. No restrictions, or provision on this particular application are considered necessary.

The Councils residential parking scheme operates in the area and any additional parking demand created by this development should not be accommodated on the surrounding roads where there is significant demand for on-street parking. Therefore, the parking conditions and informative will be applied to prevent any future occupants of the new units from obtaining resident or visitor parking permits to protect the amenities of the existing residents.

Bin storage is located at the rear of the site and the Council's Transport officer has confirmed that this is acceptable.

The only cycle parking required as part of this application is 1.5 cycle space (0.5 spaces per proposed unit). The proposal provides for an increased level of cycle parking for the whole site, which is acceptable.

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 Queens Road 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 £36,125.00 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.

Contaminated Land

Policy EN16 (Pollution and Water Resources) required that developments on land affected by contamination can be satisfactorily managed or remediated against so that it is suitable for the proposed use.

In case unexpected contamination is found during the development which may affect future occupiers, Environmental Protection colleagues recommend a condition pursuant to contamination found at any point. The proposal is considered to accord with Policy EN16.

CIL

With regards the proposed scheme, development will be potentially liable for CIL if 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 and subject to completion of the S106 agreement to secure affordable housing contributions.