

Ms. Grace Gomez

The Way Ministry

By email only to:

thewayministry@outlook.com

Emma Gee

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Our Ref: PL/25/1585

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14 November 2025

Your contact is: **Richard Eatough, Planning**

Without prejudice

Dear Ms. Gomez,

Preapplication ref: PL/25/1585

Former Market Café site, Great Knollys Street, Reading

Proposed use as a homeless persons' drop-in centre

Thank you for pre-application planning submission for a change of use of the above site.

Firstly, we need to be clear, in planning use terms, exactly what the current (lawful) use of the premises is, and exactly what the proposed use is.

Existing and proposed uses

In respect of the existing building/site, the original planning permission from 1968 identifies the building as being constructed as a dining-room for users of the cattle market. It latterly operated as 'The Market Café', again, principally for the purposes of the market/auction function. Unless any information is produced to indicate the contrary, my advice is that the building's/site's lawful planning use is as part of the wider auction/cattle market site (a *sui generis*, ie. unique use) and the café is

therefore not within the usual E (commercial) use class as a café. Change of use to anything else will therefore require planning permission.

From the information supplied, it would appear that your proposal is for a homeless persons' drop-in centre. I hope this is a reasonably accurate summation. In terms of planning uses, my view is that the nearest applicable planning use would be a F2(b) use (halls or meeting places for the principal use of the local community), but given that the use of the premises is not open to the general public, I do not consider this a suitable 'fit' and I advise that this is a *sui generis* use. Therefore, this would need to be a change of use planning application from one unique use (ancillary café to a market) to another unique use (as a homeless persons' drop-in centre). I am assuming from the pre-application form that there is no overnight accommodation envisaged, as this could change the nature of the use to including hostel accommodation and this would raise other planning issues.

The proposal area does not appear to extend to the whole of the building. It is not clear the reason for this, or what the remainder of the building would be used for and whether the two uses would be compatible. It is understood that the floorspace of the building offered for lease is approximately 100 square metres.

Assessment of the proposal

The main issues for this proposal, were a planning application to be submitted, are as follows:

Loss of the existing use and any Local Plan policy protection for it. Loss of a community/communal use for the market is protected by local plan Policy OU1 (New and Existing Community Facilities). It would be necessary for the planning application supporting documents to demonstrate why the café is no longer required as part of the support function for the market, so please supply as much information as you can. It is likely that the length of time that the café has been vacant will be a material consideration.

The proposed use is for a community-type use with clear public benefits, to this extent, it also enjoys policy support from Policy OU1, but your planning statement should also detail the various public benefits and community benefits fully.

Suitability in terms of Local planning policy: you are advised that the site lies within an identified allocated site for mixed use development within the Reading Borough Local Plan (Policy CR12a Cattle Market, within Policy CR12 which is the West Side Major Opportunity Area). This allocation site includes residential development, which is obviously a sensitive land use to noise and disturbance. As you would expect, the delivery of dwellings in the local plan period is also a priority for the Local Plan (Policy H1 is relevant). You should also note that the Local Plan Partial Update seeks to amend this allocation so that it is primarily a residential redevelopment. Homelessness priorities do not feature in the allocation.

Therefore, the proposal would need to adequately demonstrate how the use will not adversely prejudice the delivery of the allocation. My without prejudice advice at this point would be to understand when the wider site may become available for redevelopment, link this to the lease period which you would be offered as a result and apply for a temporary planning permission for no longer than this. For the above reasons, a permanent planning permission is unlikely to be supported by officers, as it would compromise the ability to achieve wider local plan objectives.

Suitability of the proposed use in terms of the character of the area and impacts on disturbance on local amenity and trip generation. On these matters, subject to adequate supporting information in a supporting planning statement regarding the various aspects of the use being proposed (including vehicle and pedestrian movements), it is likely that the use would be generally acceptable in terms of our transport Policy TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters) and cc6 (Accessibility and the Intensity of Development, and CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity).

Flooding. The site is situated within Flood Zone 2 (at a Medium probability of flooding) and therefore a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) will be required to support your planning application, to demonstrate compliance with Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems).

Other matters:

The proposal may raise security issues. Your planning supporting statement should explain the hours of use of the premises and the security arrangements proposed and as much detail as possible about the proposed operation.

Conclusion and advice

My advice, without prejudice and without the fullest information at this point is that it is possible that there could be officer support for the proposal; however, this would be on the basis of dealing with the matters raised in this letter and the permission applied being for a temporary period only, as this must not prejudice the wider planning of the area. You are strongly advised to instruct your own planning agent to fully demonstrate that the proposal is suitable for officer support/permission. Please bear in mind the possibility that the application may require a Committee-level decision as this is a Council-owned property.

Please see our online planning application validation requirements, which are here:

<https://images.reading.gov.uk/2021/12/Validation-Checklist-2021-Final-Version-02.12.21.pdf>

The above advice is provided at officer-level only and is given on the basis of the information provided and without prejudice to either the officer recommendation or the final decision of the Local Planning Authority should a planning application be

submitted. Please note that other permissions/consents may apply and this response does not consider these.

I trust the above information has been of use.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Richard Eatough

Planning Projects Team Leader

SDV