

PLANNING STATEMENT – EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES JUSTIFICATION

Application for: Change of use of 2A-2C Donnington Gardens, RG1 5LY

Application Reference: PL/26/0223

Relevant policy: Policy RL3 – Retention of Non-Residential Uses in Residential Areas

1. Introduction

This statement has been prepared in support of an application for the change of use of 2A-2C Donnington Gardens from a small office (Use Class E) to a one-bedroom residential dwelling (Use Class C3).

The purpose of this statement is to demonstrate that **exceptional circumstances** exist to justify the loss of the existing office use in accordance with **Reading Borough Council Policy RL3**, having regard to:

- The shortage of affordable and smaller housing units in the locality;
- The limited housing stock in the surrounding area; and
- The lack of demonstrable demand for office floorspace in this primarily residential context.

2. Site and Surrounding Area

The application site comprises a small office building of 43.87m² arranged over one floor, fronting Donnington Gardens within a predominantly residential area. The immediate surroundings are characterised by Victorian/Edwardian terraced and semi-detached dwellings, with only a small number of residual commercial premises, many of which are in mixed or ancillary residential use.

The existing office accommodation is of limited size and specification, with a constrained floor print, limited parking which further reduces its attractiveness to modern office occupiers.

3. Policy Context – RL3

Policy RL3 seeks to **retain non-residential uses in residential areas** where they make a positive contribution to the local community, safeguard employment opportunities or support a mixed and sustainable neighbourhood. The policy also recognises that exceptions may be appropriate where there is:

- Clear evidence of a **lack of demand** for the existing use; and/or
- A **strong justification** based on alternative community or housing needs; and
- No unacceptable impact on the character or amenity of the surrounding area.

This statement explains how the proposal meets these criteria and why the specific circumstances of this site are exceptional.

4. Lack of Demand for Office Space

There is clear and demonstrable evidence that the existing office use at 2A–2C Donnington Gardens is no longer in realistic demand in this location.

- The premises are located within a **predominantly residential street**, away from established employment hubs and town centre services, which limits their attractiveness to potential office occupiers.
- Local demand for office space in Reading has increasingly focused on **higher-specification premises in established commercial locations**, such as Reading town centre and key business parks, where occupiers benefit from better transport accessibility, parking and shared facilities.
- The property has been subject to **professional valuation for commercial purposes**, with valuations of **£180,000 from Davis Tate** and **£160,000 from Hunters Reading**. These valuations reflect the limited commercial potential of the building in its current form and context, and indicate that there is no realistic prospect of the site accommodating a viable, modern office use.

Given these factors, the continued safeguarding of this small, outdated office unit as employment floorspace would be unreasonable and would risk long-term underuse or vacancy. The loss of this very limited quantum of office space would have a **negligible impact on overall employment provision** within the Borough.

5. Shortage of Housing and Limited Local Housing Stock

Reading is experiencing significant and sustained pressure on its housing supply, particularly in relation to **smaller, more affordable dwellings** suitable for single people and couples.

The Council's evidence base (including the Reading Borough Local Plan and associated housing studies) identifies:

- **A shortfall in the delivery of smaller units**, notably one-bedroom homes, relative to identified need; and
- Significant and ongoing **affordability pressures**, with private rents and sale values placing strain on those seeking to live and work within the Borough.

Within the Donnington Gardens area and the surrounding neighbourhood, the housing stock is predominantly formed of family-sized houses and larger converted properties. There is a relative scarcity of **self-contained one-bedroom units** at the lower end of the market.

The proposed conversion will:

- Deliver an **additional one-bedroom dwelling** in an area with an identified need for smaller units;
- Make **efficient use of an existing building**, rather than requiring new land or extensive new-build construction; and
- Contribute to improving the **mix and choice of accommodation** locally, supporting a more balanced and inclusive community.

6. Exceptional Circumstances under Policy RL3

Taken together, the following factors amount to **exceptional circumstances** justifying a departure from the general presumption in favour of retaining non-residential uses under Policy RL3 in the case of 2A–2C Donnington Gardens:

1. Demonstrable lack of viable office demand

- The location within a quiet residential street, combined with the small scale and domestic layout of the building, means it does not meet the requirements or expectations of modern office occupiers.
- Valuations from **Davis Tate (£180,000)** and **Hunters Reading (£160,000)** demonstrate that the premises have limited commercial value and highlight the absence of a strong office market for this type and location of property.
- The loss of this small quantum of office floorspace will **not materially affect employment opportunities** in the Borough, given the extensive provision of more suitable accommodation elsewhere in Reading.

2. Acute need for smaller and more affordable homes

- The proposal directly responds to the **documented shortage of smaller units**, particularly one-bedroom dwellings, across Reading.
- By converting an under-used office into a one-bedroom home, the scheme contributes to **meeting local housing needs** in a sustainable manner.

3. Compatibility with the established residential character

- 2A–2C Donnington Gardens sits within a **predominantly residential environment**, where the introduction of a single dwelling would be entirely in keeping with the prevailing pattern of land use, scale and activity.
- The conversion will not result in the loss of a valued local service or community facility and will therefore **not harm the social or economic function** of the area.

4. Efficient and sustainable use of land and buildings

- The proposal represents the **sustainable re-use of an existing building**, consistent with both national and local policy objectives to maximise the use of previously developed land.
- Bringing the property into full residential use will secure its **long-term maintenance and occupation**, avoiding the visual and social impacts associated with vacant or under-used commercial premises.

7. Conclusion

In summary, the proposed conversion of **2A–2C Donnington Gardens, RG1 5LY** from a small office to a one-bedroom dwelling is justified by a combination of:

- Evident lack of realistic demand for office use in this specific location and form of property;
- The pressing and well-documented **shortage of smaller, more affordable residential units** in Reading;
- The predominantly **residential character of Donnington Gardens**, with which a dwelling is clearly more compatible than an isolated office; and
- The broader **sustainability benefits** of re-using an existing building to meet local housing needs.

These considerations collectively constitute **exceptional circumstances** within the meaning of **Policy RL3**, such that the loss of this minor element of non-residential floorspace is clearly outweighed by the public benefits of delivering a much-needed additional home.

Accordingly, it is submitted that the proposal accords with the spirit and intent of Policy RL3 and that **planning permission should be granted**.

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