

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Katesgrove Ward

App Ref: PL/25/1835 Full planning permission

Address: 176 NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, READING, RG2 7PU

Proposal: Proposed extensions and alterations to existing flats with associated parking, cycle storage, refuse storage, boundary fencing and soft landscaping (amended description).

Applicant: Mr Rami Mursi

Received date: 22/12/2025

Target Decision date: Originally 22/5/2026; EOT agreed until 17/07/2026

Case Officer: Ethne Humphreys / Catrin Davies

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site relates to a two-storey semi detached property located on the western side of Northumberland Avenue. The site has a long rear garden, as well as hardstanding to the front currently used for parking. The site was historically a residential dwelling but gained a certificate for the conversion of the dwelling into two flats (see history below). The existing rear garden is shared by both properties. Whilst the front of the site comprises hardstanding across the frontage of both 176 and 178 Northumberland Road, a 1m high brick wall was supposed to be erected to define property boundaries.

Northumberland Avenue is characterised by two-storey dwellings set along an established building line with long rear gardens. Several dwellings along the street have been extended.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The application seeks planning permission for a single storey ground floor rear extension and first floor side extension, along with internal alterations to increase the size of the two flats.

A fence is proposed at the front of the site between the application site and 178 Northumberland Road, the adjoining semi detached property.

Four car parking spaces are proposed at the front of the site, along with soft landscaping and hedging.

Materials would match the host property.

The proposals as originally submitted were for a two storey rear extension and first floor side extension to create 2 x 4 bed flats. An external staircase was also proposed at the rear, to facilitate access to the first floor flat. Further to concerns raised during the course of the application in respect of excessive scale, overly bulky form, lacking in subservience and overlooking – as well as stark frontage – the plans were revised to omit the first floor rear extension and to include landscaping and boundary treatment on the frontage.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

PL/13/1531-Certificate of Lawfulness for existing use of property as 2 flats. Granted
PL/14/0071-First floor rear extension to 176 Northumberland Avenue and first and second floor rear extensions to 178 Northumberland Avenue. Permitted.
PL/19/0053-Single storey rear extension. Permitted.
PL/24/0307-Application to redefine boundaries between 176 & 176a, internal alterations, and elevation changes. Permitted.

4. CONSULTATIONS

RBC Highways

I have reviewed the proposed (revised) parking and access arrangements. The development provides four on-site car parking spaces arranged in two tandem bays, with each tandem pair serving a single self-contained flat and remaining within the control of the same household. Tandem parking arrangements are considered acceptable in this instance as they do not rely on shared use between unrelated occupiers as they will be allocated to each flat

The proposal includes a repositioned shared access point which is capable of accommodating the anticipated level of vehicle movements associated with the development, and sufficient space is available within the site for vehicles to manoeuvre safely. Subject to the suggested planning conditions below, the proposal is not considered to have a detrimental impact on highway safety or the free flow of traffic

It is best for each flat to have its own cycle store and bin storage and they should not interfere with access to the parking spaces but I am happy to deal with these details by condition.

Suggested conditions

- DC1 VEHICLE PARKING (AS SPECIFIED)
- DC3 VEHICULAR ACCESS (AS SPECIFIED)
- DC6 CYCLE PARKING (TO BE APPROVED)
- DC9 REFUSE COLLECTION (TO BE APPROVED)

RBC Ecology

The updated report concludes that the dwelling is unlikely to host roosting bats. As such, since the proposals are unlikely to affect bats or other protected species, there are no objections to this application on ecological grounds.

Public Consultation

A site notice was published and no neighbour letters of representations were received. A second site notice was displayed following receipt of amended plans and no neighbour letters of representation received.

5. 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).

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.

National Policy

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
CC7: Design and the Public Realm
CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charing

SPD

Affordable Housing SPD (2021)

Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)

Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

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.

6. APPRAISAL

Land Use Considerations

The existing property is in lawful use as 2 flats. The proposals would facilitate an increase in the size of the flats and would not increase the number of flats. Given this also, no affordable housing contribution is sought.

The proposals do not involve any increase in the number of dwellings on the plot and do not involve a change of use. The proposals are assessed on this basis.

Character and Design

Policy CC7 states “All development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form, including: -

- Layout: urban structure and urban grain;
- Landscape;
- Density and mix;
- Scale: height and massing; and
- Architectural detail and materials”

Paragraph 129 of the NPPF 2024 states that decisions should support development that takes into account the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.

Paragraph 131 of the NPPF 2024 states that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2024 details that decisions should ensure that developments are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and are sympathetic to local character including the surrounding built environment.

The proposals were originally considered to be excessive in scale, overly bulky, lacking in subservience resulting in unsympathetic additions to the host property. Indeed, they were considered to overly dominate the host property. The proposed external staircase was considered

to result in unneighbourly disturbance, as well as actual/perceived overlooking. The proposals, combined with the existing stark frontage (along with proposed bin and bike stores) would have been visually dominant and would not have enhanced the character and appearance of the host property. The internal layout was also confusing.

The agent was advised that the rear extension should be reduced in depth, the external staircase removed, the internal layout clearly depicted and to incorporate soft landscaping at the front of the site, with a boundary treatment between No.176 and 178 to define the property boundaries.

Revised plans were received omitting the two storey rear extension (and proposing a single storey rear extension in place) and incorporating soft landscaping on the frontage, along with a 1m high fence between No.176 and 178.

The single storey rear extension, whilst large, would be located at the rear of the property and not readily visible from the public domain. The garden is deep and it can accommodate the extension without resulting in an overly cramped layout. Whilst flat roofs generally fail to enhance the appearance of a property, there are other flat roof additions within the immediate vicinity and as such it would not be so out of keeping so as to result in significant harm.

The first floor side extension would be slightly cramped to the side boundary. However, it would be well set back from the front of the property and would be set down from the main roof ridge assisting in reducing its prominence.

Several properties along Northumberland Avenue have been extended; and the revised proposed extensions are not considered to be so harmful to the host property or out of keeping to warrant a refusal on this basis.

As above, planning permission 14/0071 was to comprise a 1m high brick wall between No.176 and 178 Northumberland Road, due to concerns in respect of covering the entire frontage with an expanse of hardstanding. This did not take place, and the current front appears as a harsh and strident feature within the street scene, and there is no distinction between property boundaries. The site currently does not make a positive contribution to the *“quality of the public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping”* and nor is it *“visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping”* as required by Policy CC7.

Revised plans were received illustrating hedging and a 1m high fence between the properties, along with soft landscaping on the frontage. Further to discussions, the hedging was shown to continue along the frontage, up until the access. This is considered to be an improvement on the existing situation and appropriate, given the increase in built form proposed. Soft landscaping details will be secured by way of condition, to include one new tree.

In overall terms, the proposals to the frontage would be an improvement to the host property and street scene. The extensions, whilst large, would not be so harmful or out of keeping to result in significant design concerns.

Residential Amenity

Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan requires that “Development will 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 ...”

Policy H10 states that “Dwellings will be provided with functional private or communal open space”.

Amenity of future occupiers

The proposals would increase the internal amenity space provided to the occupiers of both flats. Whilst the ground floor rear addition would likely be overbearing to the sole window to the kitchen, it is dual aspect and not considered to be so harmful to result in material harm to future occupiers.

Amenity of Neighbouring properties

Regarding No.174 Northumberland Road to the north, the single storey rear extension would be set away from the common boundary as well as angled away. There would be no breach of 45 degree line to habitable room window and it is not considered to result in any harmful overbearing effects. The proposed first floor extension would be close to the common boundary. However, there are no windows on the flank elevation of No.174 and it would not breach a 45 degree line to any habitable room window. The roof would be hipped away. No overbearing effects are considered to arise. A condition will be attached to restrict openings or roof additions to protect neighbour amenity.

With regard to No.178 Northumberland Road to the south, the single storey rear extension whilst large, would be set away from the common boundary and would not breach a 45 degree line to habitable room window (other than to an existing window of No.176 discussed above).

Owing to the size and flat roof nature of the rear extension proposed, it is considered necessary to include a condition stipulating that the flat roof area shall not be used as a roof terrace, and any access out onto this area shall be for maintenance/means of escape purposes only. This is in order to prevent any detrimental impacts of overlooking and/or noise and disturbance of the neighbouring properties.

To the front of the site, the fence and hedging defining the boundaries is not considered to result in any harm given its position and nature.

Highways Considerations

Policy TR5 requires that the 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.

The development proposes four on-site car parking spaces arranged in two tandem bays, with each tandem pair serving a single self-contained flat and remaining within the control of the same flat. Tandem parking arrangements use the existing space which is unchanged other than the proposed landscaping and there is no change of use involved. As such the layout is considered acceptable in this instance as they do not rely on shared use between unrelated occupiers.

The proposal includes a repositioned shared access point. This cannot be required as there is no change of use or new dwellings proposed and as such the requirement for parking remains unchanged.

The proposal has not provided sufficient information regarding refuse and cycle storage; however, this is not a requirement as no change of use is involved and there is no apparent change in the way the site would operate.

Ecology

Policy EN12 states: 'On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity, and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible.'

A bat survey was submitted with the application due to works proposed to the roof. However, the report included numerous typos, unfinished and unsubstantiated statements and appeared in draft form. A revised report was submitted correcting the errors. Further to this, the Council's Ecologist confirmed that the report is acceptable and agreed with the conclusion that the property is unlikely to host roosting bats. No ecological objection.

The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that all planning permissions are granted subject to the mandatory 10% biodiversity gain condition. However, there are exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply. Based on the information submitted by the applicant this application is considered to be one which the exemptions/ transitional arrangements apply because the proposal falls within the de minimis exemption. Notwithstanding, given the landscaping proposed on the frontage, which will be secured by way of condition, this would be an improvement to the ecology of the site.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposed development has been assessed as set out above and is considered to be acceptable on that basis, subject to conditions.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Grant subject to conditions.