

SEQUENTIAL TEST

**Retrospective change of use from
Class B8 Storage to Class E Barber Shop**

**at
32A Ardler Road,
Caversham,
Reading,
RG4 5AE**

Planning Application: PL/26/0814

September 2026

Existing Use: Class B8 Storage

Proposed Use: Class E Barber Shop

Use Commencement Date: 17 September 2025

Relevant Sequential Assessment Date: 31 July 2025

1. Introduction

This Sequential Test has been prepared in response to the Planning Officer's request for further information concerning Policy TC3 and the location of the proposed Class E use outside a designated local or district centre.

The proposal concerns the retrospective change of use of an existing approximately 70 m² commercial building from storage (Use Class B8) to a small-scale barber shop (Use Class E).

The operator undertook a search for suitable commercial premises before establishing the barber shop at the application site on 17th September 2025.

Commercial estate agents were contacted and alternative premises were considered. The search was undertaken having regard to the practical requirements of the business, including:

- a maximum floor area of approximately 70 m²;
- a commercially affordable rental budget available at the time;
- premises capable of accommodating a small barber shop;
- appropriate access for customers;
- suitable internal configuration;
- reasonable servicing arrangements; and
- a location capable of supporting a small local service business.

The assessment therefore considers not merely whether commercial premises existed within Caversham, but whether a **suitable, available and viable alternative premises existed for this particular business at the relevant time.**

2. Relevant Date

The barber shop commenced operating from the application premises on **17 September 2025**.

The sequential assessment is therefore primarily concerned with the availability of alternative premises at or around this date.

This is particularly important because commercial property availability changes frequently. A property which becomes vacant or is marketed in 2026 cannot retrospectively be regarded as an alternative premises which was available to the operator in July 2025.

The assessment therefore distinguishes between:

1. premises available before or on 31 July 2025;
2. premises that were occupied at that date;
3. premises which became available after 31 July 2025; and
4. premises which, although available, did not meet the size, financial, operational or locational requirements of the business.

3. Nature and Scale of the Proposed Use

The proposed barber shop occupies approximately 70 m².

The use is a small-scale personal service operation rather than a large-format retail or leisure business.

The premises need to provide sufficient space for barbering stations, customer waiting/seating, staff facilities, WC accommodation and ancillary storage.

The operator was specifically seeking premises of **approximately 70 m² or less**. This reflected the appropriate scale for the business and the operating budget available at the time.

The operator therefore did not require a large retail unit or substantial commercial floor area.

4. Search for Alternative Premises

Prior to establishing the barber shop at 32A Ardler Road, the operator contacted commercial estate agents and actively searched for suitable premises within the Caversham area.

The search was undertaken with a clear commercial brief:

Maximum approximate floor area: 70 m²

Budget: The rental budget available to the operator at the time

Use: Small Class E barber shop

Location: Caversham / surrounding local area

Requirement: Practical premises capable of accommodating the proposed business

The search was therefore a genuine attempt to identify an appropriate sequentially preferable location rather than an assessment undertaken solely after the planning application was submitted.

5. Caversham Local Centre

Caversham Local Centre is the closest designated centre identified by the Planning Officer and has therefore been given particular consideration.

A review of historic commercial property information has identified a number of premises which were marketed in and around Caversham during 2025.

However, the properties vary substantially in terms of size, use, configuration, location, cost and suitability.

The following examples illustrate the position.

5.1 5 Church Road, Caversham

5 Church Road was marketed in February 2025 and was available from March 2025.

The property comprised approximately **1,000 sq ft / 93 m²** over several levels and was marketed at **£20,000 per annum**. It was described as Class E retail/office accommodation within Caversham's commercial centre.

This property was therefore a genuine commercial premises within the designated centre and has been considered as part of the sequential assessment.

However, at approximately 93 m² it was substantially larger than the approximately 70 m² premises sought by the operator.

The property was also offered at a rental level which needed to be considered against the operator's available budget at the time.

Its multi-level configuration also differed materially from the compact premises required for the proposed small-scale barber shop.

Accordingly, while 5 Church Road demonstrates that a Class E premises was available within Caversham, its size, configuration and commercial terms meant that it did not represent a directly comparable alternative to the application premises.

5.2 Unit 9A, Cantay Business Park

Unit 9A at Cantay Business Park was listed on 27 June 2025 and comprised approximately **788 sq ft / 73.2 m²**, making it broadly comparable in floor area to the application premises.

However, the premises were described as a **two-storey office building** within Cantay Business Park rather than a conventional customer-facing retail or service premises within Caversham Local Centre.

The premises formed part of a commercial/business park environment and were marketed specifically as office accommodation.

Although the floor area was broadly comparable, the nature and configuration of the premises differed materially from the type of premises sought for a small customer-facing barber shop.

It therefore did not provide a directly comparable sequential alternative to the application premises.

5.3 Units 7, 8 and 9, Cantay Business Park

Other units at Cantay Business Park were marketed during June 2025.

The available accommodation included approximately **279 m², 383 m² and 73 m²**, with the larger units being warehouse/business accommodation. The marketing information describes roller-shutter loading doors, yard/parking areas and warehouse accommodation.

The larger units were substantially in excess of the floor area required by the barber shop and were intended for warehouse/business operations.

They could not reasonably be regarded as proportionate alternatives for the proposed approximately 70 m² barber shop.

5.4 Cantay House, Ardler Road

Cantay House was listed immediately before the relevant assessment date.

The premises were described as a **ground-floor light industrial unit with parking** rather than a conventional town-centre Class E service premises. Current commercial listing information identifies it as light-industrial accommodation.

The nature of the premises was therefore materially different from the customer-facing premises sought by the operator.

6. Assessment Against the Operator's Actual Requirements

The sequential assessment should be considered against the actual requirements of the proposed business.

The operator was not seeking an unrestricted commercial property of any size and at any rental level.

The search was specifically for a small premises of approximately **70 m² or less**, within the operator's available budget, and capable of accommodating a barber shop.

This is relevant because the sequential test should identify realistic alternatives rather than theoretical premises which could only become suitable through substantially greater expenditure, substantially increased floor area or a materially different operational model.

The identified premises around the relevant date fell broadly into the following categories:

A. Premises within the centre but exceeding the required size and/or presenting different commercial terms

5 Church Road falls within this category. It was a genuine Class E premises within Caversham, but at approximately 93 m² it exceeded the operator's stated maximum preferred floor area. It was also offered at £20,000 per annum.

B. Premises of broadly suitable size but with a substantially different commercial character

Unit 9A, Cantay Business Park was approximately 73.2 m², but was specifically marketed as office accommodation within a business park rather than as a conventional customer-facing Class E premises within Caversham Local Centre.

C. Premises substantially larger or intended for industrial/warehouse uses

The larger Cantay Business Park units were between approximately 279 m² and 383 m² and were marketed as warehouse/business units. Such premises were not proportionate or directly comparable to the proposed small-scale barber shop.

7. Commercial Viability

The operator's available budget was a genuine commercial consideration when searching for premises.

The operator sought a premises of no more than approximately 70 m² because a larger premises would create a greater rental and operational commitment than was appropriate for the intended small-scale business.

The sequential assessment therefore considers commercial viability as well as physical suitability.

The existence of a larger Class E premises within Caversham does not, in itself, demonstrate that the property represented a realistic alternative where the size and associated financial commitment were materially greater than required for the proposed business.

8. Later Availability

The current commercial property market contains premises which may appear superficially suitable for the proposed use.

However, such properties must not be treated as evidence that a sequentially preferable alternative existed on 17 September 2025 where they only became available subsequently.

Commercial property availability is constantly changing.

The operator's position must therefore be assessed against the market conditions prevailing when the business established itself.

Properties first marketed or becoming available after **17 September 2025** are not treated as sequential alternatives that were available to the operator at the relevant date.

9. Existing Building and Re-use

The application site comprises an existing commercial building which was already in non-residential use.

The proposal does not involve the construction of a new out-of-centre commercial building. Instead, it seeks to retain the productive use of an existing building for a small local service business.

No enlargement of the building is proposed and no additional commercial land is required.

The proposal therefore represents the continued use and re-use of an existing building.

10. Overall Sequential Assessment

The operator made genuine efforts to identify alternative premises before establishing the barber shop at the application site on **17 September 2025**.

Commercial estate agents were contacted and the search was undertaken on the basis of a clear requirement for:

- approximately 70 m² or less;
- a commercially affordable rental commitment;
- premises capable of accommodating a barber shop; and
- an appropriate location for a small local service business.

Commercial premises were available within and around Caversham around the relevant date. However, availability alone does not establish the existence of a suitable sequential alternative.

The identified properties varied materially in size, rental cost, configuration and commercial character.

The principal town-centre property identified, **5 Church Road**, was approximately 93 m² and advertised at £20,000 per annum.

Other premises identified around the relevant date, including units at Cantay Business Park, were predominantly office, warehouse or light-industrial accommodation and did not provide directly comparable premises for the proposed small-scale barber shop.

The assessment therefore concludes that, having regard to the **size, cost, configuration, commercial nature and actual availability of premises at 17 September 2025**, no identified premises represented a commercially realistic and suitable alternative to the existing approximately 70 m² premises.

11. Conclusion

The operator made reasonable efforts to identify suitable premises within Caversham before commencing the barber shop.

The search was undertaken through commercial estate agents and was based on a realistic requirement for a premises of no more than approximately 70 m² and within the budget available at the time.

The evidence demonstrates that although commercial premises existed within Caversham, the identified properties did not provide a suitable combination of **availability, size, affordability, configuration and suitability** for the proposed business at the relevant date.

The existing premises therefore represented a realistic and viable premises from which to operate the small-scale barber shop.

The Council is respectfully requested to consider the sequential assessment on this basis and to assess the proposal having regard to the actual commercial circumstances prevailing on **17 September 2025**.