

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 7 OCTOBER 2020

Present: Councillor McKenna (Chair);
Councillors Sokale (Vice-Chair), Duveen, Ennis, Lovelock, Page, Robinson, Rowland, Stanford-Beale and J Williams

RESOLVED ITEMS

42. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

43. QUESTIONS

Councillor Josh Williams asked the Chair of the Planning Applications Committee:

Locally Listed Buildings

One year ago I asked about the process for Local Listing of Reading's important buildings, which at the moment is conducted by officers and decided by the Lead Councillor for Planning. The answer from the Chair was that following a discussion with the Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport a review would be undertaken of the whole local listing process and a report brought back for discussion at Planning Applications Committee. Could the Chair update us on what progress has been made over the last 12 months on making the Local Listing process more proactive, more public facing and part of the democratic work of the Planning Committee?

REPLY by the Chair of the Planning Applications Committee (Councillor McKenna):

'I have provided the answers to the questions you had asked on the 9th October 2019 as an appendix to this answer for the written record. While I will not read those previous responses into the spoken record, I believe they may serve as a helpful reminder to members of the committee and may be of value to members of the public who may view this meeting in the future.

Turning to your direct question, initial conversations and scoping was begun and a named officer assigned who began the main body of work in the review in late February this year. This was to involve liaising with Historic England, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), interested bodies within Reading, elected members and with a number of other local planning authorities to identify best practice and develop a model for Reading Borough Council that would be fit for the next decade.

This was to have resulted in a report to this committee which provided options and asked for our views on any proposed changes to the current process. A recommendation would then have been made to a constitutionally appropriate committee to formally endorse and enact any required alterations to enshrine a formal role for this committee.

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Then our world changed. This is readily evidenced by our virtual meeting this evening. Understandably it became impossible to make good progress.

As you are unfortunately well aware as another serving councillor, councils have seen a decade long squeeze on available budgets. It should therefore be recognised that the staff of the planning service at Reading Borough Council, akin to all other Local planning authorities are often stretched.

This led to a necessary refocus on the 'core business' of determining applications, while at the same time having to develop entirely new ways of processing applications when remote working. This has been achieved at a time of considerable disruption and uncertainty while already in the middle of a long overdue upgrade of our IT infrastructure which was underway in the first few months of 2020.

We can all appreciate the scale of the challenges our new world has laid before us. However, I can easily commend our officers who have been able to adapt to this new and changing world without losing focus on the core function of the planning service. They have, despite the numerous challenges, continued the processing of planning applications within the statutory timeframes. This is evidenced clearly within the performance monitoring report we will come to discuss as Agenda item 6 of tonight's meeting and so I will not speak to it here.

That said, I would like to reassure you that neither I, the Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, who is a member of this committee, nor officers, have forgotten the commitment to bring a report to this committee.

Indeed, I can report a positive outcome of the initial scoping exercise, which along with the visit of the historic places panel of historic England, identified both the need and opportunity for creation of a new specialist post within the planning directorate. Our first Conservation and Urban Design Officer has joined the authority in mid-September and a refresh of the local listing process is already underway as one of their assigned duties.

As they are still in their onboarding process, I'm afraid I can't provide a definitive timeline at this point and will instead ask your indulgence to return to this discussion in our next meeting on the 4th of November.'

It was agreed at the meeting that Councillor Williams would submit a follow-up question to the next meeting.

(The full text of the question, answer and appendix was made available on the Reading Borough Council website.)

44. PLANNING APPEALS

(i) New Appeals

The Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a schedule giving details of notification received from the Planning Inspectorate regarding

one planning appeal, the method of determination for which she had already expressed a preference in accordance with delegated powers, which was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

(ii) Appeals Recently Determined

An update report was tabled at the meeting showing the decision of the Planning Inspectorate relating to an appeal for 39 Brunswick Hill (application 191915/FUL).

(iii) Reports on Appeal Decisions

There were no reports on appeal decisions.

Resolved -

- (1) That the new appeals, as set out in Appendix 1, be noted;
- (2) That the appeal decision on 39 Brunswick Hill be noted.

45. APPLICATIONS FOR PRIOR APPROVAL

The Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report giving details in Table 1 of eight prior approval applications received, and in Table 2 of 13 applications for prior approval decided, between 27 August and 24 September 2020.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

46. PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT SERVICE - QUARTERS 1 & 2 2020/2021

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing information on how the Planning Service had performed over the past six months in terms of meeting government set targets for dealing with planning applications and success at planning appeals. Detail on the types of applications handled and appeal decisions for Quarters 1 & 2 (the period 1 April 2020 - 30 September 2020) were provided with comparison data from the previous year.

The report noted that it been a challenging year for officers with new processes and procedures for working remotely in addition to getting used to a raft of changes introduced by government. However, Reading's Planning Service had still managed to perform well, working with applicants and consultees in similar circumstances, to meet MHCLG's performance criteria as shown on tables set out in the report.

Resolved - That the contents of the report be noted.

47. PLANNING WHITE PAPER AND OTHER NATIONAL PLANNING CHANGES

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The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on a Planning White Paper (Planning for the Future) proposing a new planning system, and a government consultation on other proposed changes to the existing planning system. A proposed response to the Planning White Paper was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and a response to the other proposed changes to the existing planning system was attached at Appendix 2.

The report explained that the Planning White Paper had been published on 6 August 2020 for consultation. The main changes proposed had been designed to support key themes of reducing regulation in order to remove barriers to development and creating much greater certainty within the planning process. The White Paper was based around three pillars of Planning for Development, Planning for Beautiful and Sustainable Places, and Planning for Infrastructure and Connected Places, and it was proposed to form a 'zoning system', whereby the use of all land was defined at the plan-making stage. The proposals included nationally-set development management policies, national standard conditions, a nationally-set Consolidated Infrastructure Levy (replacing the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements and including affordable housing), binding nationally-set housing numbers through a standard methodology, a national design guide taking precedence where no design codes were in place, and a national body to support local design codes. As a result, there would be reduced opportunities for democratic oversight and local consultation on developments. The consultation was open until 29 October 2020 and attached to the report at Appendix 1 was a draft response for approval.

The report noted that alongside the White Paper another consultation had been published on changes to the existing planning system, which looked at measures that could be introduced within the existing context in advance of primary legislation to enact the White Paper. This consultation had closed on 1 October 2020 and attached to the report at Appendix 2 was the Council's response, which had been agreed by the Policy Committee at its meeting on 28 September 2020 (Minute 48 refers).

Resolved -

- (1) That the proposed response to the consultation on the Planning White Paper at Appendix 1 be approved;
- (2) That the response to the consultation on changes to the current planning system at Appendix 2 be noted.

48. 191792/FUL - 71-73 CAVERSHAM ROAD

Demolition of former retail warehouse and erection of a mixed-use building comprising 44 residential units consisting of x5 affordable units, 194 sqm of retail floorspace (Use Class A1) at ground floor and associated car parking, cycle parking and landscaping.

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the above application. An update report was tabled at the meeting which summarised a petition against the proposed demolition of the building and two additional letters of

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representation that had been received, and set out written statements from the Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee, Caversham and District Residents Association and the Bell Tower Community Association. The report also explained that the applicant had agreed to make an Addendum to the original Financial Viability report publicly available, which was attached at Appendix 1. The information had been provided to support the revised affordable housing position and showed that, should permission be granted, the developer was willing to accept a less competitive rate of return on the site. The applicant had also confirmed that the application's CIL obligation and S106 contribution for Open Space and Leisure would not affect the agreed affordable housing offer as set out in Appendix 1.

Comments and objections were received and considered.

Objectors Evelyn Williams (Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee) and David Neale (Bell Tower Community Association), and Sam Berg the applicant's agent, attended the meeting and addressed the Committee on this application.

Resolved -

- (1) That application 191792/FUL be refused for the following reasons:
 - a) the proposed removal of a building classified as a non-designated heritage asset would cause substantial harm to the special architectural and historical interest of that asset and a reduction in significance of the remaining buildings to the rear resulting in harm to those remaining non-designated heritage assets, contrary to policies EN1 and EN4 of the Local Plan and Section 16 of the NPPF;
 - b) the proposed replacement building would be out of scale with the neighbouring buildings within the adjoining sites on Northfield Road and Caversham Road and the development would therefore fail to appropriately transition down to the more modestly-scaled buildings due to the proximity and the abrupt change in the building height, contrary to Policies CC7, EN1 and EN4 of the Local Plan;
 - c) the lack of a Section 106 agreement;
- (2) That the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be authorised to finalise the reasons for refusal and the informatives, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and Ward Councillors.

49. 201109/REG3 & 201110/LBC - KATESGROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL, DOROTHY STREET

201109/REG3 - New boiler flue to East elevation of Henry Building. Replacement buttressing to retaining wall of Henry Building.

201110/LBC - Listed Building Consent for the above proposal

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The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the above applications. It was reported at the meeting that the applicant had not confirmed the use of materials details and that it was therefore recommended that the relevant pre-commencement conditions be imposed. It was also reported that the Environmental Protection team had confirmed that they had no objections to the proposals.

Comments were received and considered.

Resolved -

- (1) That, pursuant to Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992, the carrying out of the development 201109/REG3 be authorised, subject to the conditions and informatives as recommended;
- (2) That Listed Building Consent for application 201110/LBC be granted, subject to the conditions and informatives as recommended in the report, with the additional pre-commencement conditions regarding use of materials as recommended at the meeting.

50. 201108/FUL - UNIT 1, STADIUM WAY, TILEHURST

Proposed industrial unit to replace existing fire damaged industrial unit. The new building will consist of 4 smaller base build units suitable for class use B1(C), B2 or B8 with flexibility for trade counter fit out (B8). Note, Demolition of existing building has been covered under separate Prior Approval - Demolition of Building Application.

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the above application. An update report was tabled at the meeting which set out additional transport information, comments from Environmental Protection officers and confirmation that there were no objections from the Environment Agency. Eight additional conditions relating to transport and environmental protection were recommended.

Comments were received and considered.

Resolved -

That planning permission for application 201108/FUL be granted, subject to the conditions and informatives as recommended in the original report, with the additional conditions as recommended in the update report.

51. 191265/FUL - ST PAUL'S CHURCH, WHITLEY WOOD LANE

Redevelop the site, creating a new Church Centre building, comprising Cafe, Worship Area, Meeting Rooms, two one bed residential flats and also a Health Centre Building

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The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the above application. An update report was tabled at the meeting which set out information on a further visual survey of an Ash tree to determine whether it had the potential to host a bat roost, and explained that amended plans had been submitted by the agent which included a reconfigured internal layout. The update report also had appended a written statement in support of the proposal from Alok Sharma MP and a written statement from the applicant's agent, DLK Architects, which had been submitted in lieu of speaking at the Committee. It was reported at the meeting that an additional objection had been received since preparation of the update report but that the issues raised had been covered in the original or update reports.

Comments and objections were received and considered.

Whitley Ward Councillors Rachel Eden and Micky Leng attended the meeting and addressed the Committee on this application.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be authorised to grant full planning permission for application 191265/FUL, subject to completion of a section 106 legal agreement by 27 November 2020 (unless a later date be agreed by the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services) to secure the Heads of Terms set out in the original report;
- (2) That, in the event of the requirements set out not being met, the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be authorised to refuse permission;
- (3) That planning permission be subject to the conditions and informatives as recommended in the original report.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.00 pm)