

UPDATE REPORT:

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 2 DECEMBER 2020

ITEM NO. 8

Ward: Abbey
App No.: 201420/FUL
Address: 45 Caversham Road
Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings and construction of 40 flats including provision of 30% of units as affordable housing with associated landscaping and parking.

RECOMMENDATION (AMENDED TO):

As main Agenda report.

Adjustments to conditions:

Conditions 16 and 17 - clarification: these refer to contaminated land

Additional conditions required: retention of lifts in working order

1. AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE

- 1.1 The main Agenda report (Section 6.4) deals with affordable housing. Paragraph 6.4.3 states that the applicant's affordable housing statement outlines that 6x 2-bed units are to be secured as Affordable Rent dwellings (to be capped at a maximum rent level of 70% of the local market rent). This is not correct, as the applicant has advised that the rent levels proposed for the scheme have been designed, through viability costings of the project, to allow for 80% of market rent or the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) (ie. the amount the Local Housing Authority will pay to subsidise a household's rent; whichever is the lower, including service charges). Officers have checked the applicant's understanding against the current policy situation.
- 1.2 In terms of relative weight to be applied to policy documents, at the time of reporting this application, whilst the 2013 Affordable Housing SPD is still technically in force, it has nevertheless been superseded by the statements set out within Local Plan Policy H3 (Affordable Housing), so the policy (adopted November 2019) carries more weight, with the previous SPD now considered to be largely redundant. However, this SPD will not be formally withdrawn until superseded by the new SPD.
- 1.3 The 2013 SPD sought 50% social rented housing at target rents or Affordable Rent housing of no more than 50% market rents; 50% made up of a mix of:
- Intermediate housing, e.g. shared ownership; and
 - Affordable Rent Housing at rents of less than 80% market rent and, preferably significantly below the 80% market rent level.
- 1.4 The supporting text to LP Policy H3 states:
- 4.4.26 At the time of producing the Local Plan, the tenure split below reflects the most up to date position on needs within Reading. However, a revised Affordable

Housing SPD, to be produced during 2019, will look at this issue in detail. The needs below are therefore subject to change within the SPD.

- Social rented or affordable rent housing of no more than target rent - 70% of affordable housing units; and

- Intermediate and/or shared ownership housing - 30%.

1.5 The Local Plan in November 2019 recognised that in response to research and National policy aims, there needed to be an adjustment to how affordable housing is to continue to be delivered and that there would need to be a predominance of social rent/affordable rent over other more intermediate options.

1.6 The replacement Affordable Housing SPD is currently in draft form, having been subject to public consultation in the Autumn and is expected to be adopted in 2021. During the latter half of 2020, the Council undertook viability and market sensitivity testing in order to attempt to set a suitable Reading Affordable Rent at an appropriate level which provides housing which continues to be 'affordable' using the NPPF definition and which the market and Registered Providers are able to supply. The draft revised SPD - as proposed to be adopted following consultation - states that the affordable housing for Major developments should be provided on site in the form of 62% Reading Affordable Rent (which would be a maximum of 70% of market rent) and 38% in the form of shared ownership units.

1.7 To clarify, the current offer from the applicant is as follows:
6 x 2-bed dwellings Affordable Rented (at a maximum of 80% of Market Rent (the LHA level)); and
6 flats (2 x 2-bed, 4 x 1-bed) will be Shared Ownership.

1.8 In conclusion, at the time of writing, policy and guidance are evolving, and there is not therefore one clearly defined approach to tenure which applies at this point. Whilst the emerging SPD is a material consideration, it cannot be given full weight until such time as it has been adopted. The rent levels being offered by the applicant are that an affordable rent in Reading is 80% of market rent, and for clarification that is still 'capped' at the Local Housing Allowance. The above explanation hopes to provide clarity that the applicant's offer is in general compliance with the local plan's aims and officers are satisfied that this is supportable. It is also welcomed that provision is of a suitable scale on site (helping to produce a mixed community) and it is also noted that in reality, this development is likely to be delivered as a 100% affordable scheme. However, it is still necessary for the Section 106 agreement to stipulate the necessary controls were the site to be developed on the open market.

2. REVISED PLANS: PARKING AND SERVICING

2.1 Since the production of the main Agenda report, officers have received revised plans to attempt to deal with concerns from RBC Transport Strategy regarding bin storage areas (and carry distances) and consequent effects on the parking area.

2.2 The applicant has proposed a bin pickup area at the front of the site, to the right of the undercroft opening on Great Knollys Street, where the bins would be presented on bin day. Once emptied, they would then be returned to the main bin store within the undercroft. However, siting the bins in this new pickup area has meant the removal of a disabled person's parking space. The redesign has moved this to the

rear of the site near the bike store. This has required the loss of one parking space, but Transport Strategy does not object to this reduction. It would also mean the non-provision of a small area of landscaping, but in reality, this was a narrow 'leftover space' which was unlikely to have flourished as a green area.

- 2.3 The cycle store continues to be sited in the rear (open) corner of the car park. The method of securing cycles is not confirmed and will need to be subject to a condition requiring submission of details.

3. CONDITIONS

- 3.1 The Recommendation above has been adjusted to include some conditions which were omitted in error or require clarification from those set out in the Recommendation box in the main report.

Case officers: Anthony Scholes/Richard Eatough

Revised plans received 30/11/2020:

121903-ELS-01 C

121903-ELS-02 C

121903-APT-P1-C

Landscape drawing 7221/LSP Rev. F