

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 3rd March 2021

Ward: ABBEY

App No.: 200656/FUL and 200657/LBC

Address: 9 Castle Street, Reading

Proposal: To convert the existing building from commercial office use to residential comprising 2 x 2 bed apartments and 3 x 1 bed apartments and to provide a rear pedestrian access from Simmonds Street via the rear garden of the property.

Applicant: LVR Homes Ltd

Deadline: Extension of Time to be Agreed

RECOMMENDATION:

200656/FUL

Delegate to Head of Planning, Development and Regulatory Services to (i) GRANT full planning permission subject to completion of a S106 legal agreement or (ii) REFUSE permission should the legal agreement not be completed by the 10th April 2021 (unless officers on behalf of the Head of Planning, Development and Regulatory Services agree to a later date for completion of the legal agreement). The legal agreement to secure the following:

- a deferred affordable housing contribution mechanism;

CONDITIONS TO INCLUDE:

- 1) Time
- 2) Approved Plans
- 3) Materials to be submitted
- 4) Pre-commencement hard and soft landscaping details
- 5) Pre-commencement boundary details
- 6) Pre-commencement BREEAM
- 7) Pre-commencement cycle parking
- 8) Pre-commencement programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation
- 9) Pre-commencement noise assessment
- 10) Refuse and recycling as specified
- 11) Parking permits (full postal address)
- 12) Parking permits (no automatic entitlement)
- 13) No change to unit mix
- 14) Hours of Construction
- 15) No Bonfires

INFORMATIVES TO INCLUDE:

- 1) Terms and conditions
- 2) Building regulations

- 3) Pre-Commencement conditions
- 4) Advice about trees
- 5) CIL
- 6) Highways
- 7) Rights of access
- 8) Complaints about construction
- 9) Positive & proactive.

200657/LBC

GRANT Listed Building Consent subject to conditions and informatives.

CONDITIONS TO INCLUDE:

- 1) Time
- 2) Approved plans
- 3) Plan, elevation and section drawings, with materials annotated, of new windows and window openings (including surrounds) and new staircase handrail including method of fixing at a minimum scale of 1:10
- 4) Windows to be timber framed
- 5) Materials and workmanship to be as detailed in application
- 6) No other works

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application relates to No.9 Castle Crescent, a three storey terraced building with basement located on the south side of Castle Street. The lawful use of the site is Class E (as of 1st September 2020, subject to the outcome of the recent legal challenge to the Use Classes Order) but was formally in B1 (office) use. However, it has been vacant since December 2019.
- 1.2 The building is Grade II listed and the listing is as follows:

“CASTLE STREET 1. 5128 (South Side) No 9 SU 7173 SW 2/48 II GV 2. Mid-late C18. 3 storeys and basement. Silver grey brick with red dressings, and plain parapet. Old tile roof. 2 windows with red brick flat arches, oriel bays with glazing bar sashes and segmental relieving arches. Central 6 panel door with plain surround, pilasters and open pediment on scroll brackets. Radiating fanlight. Modern shop windows on ground floor.”
- 1.3 To the south of the site is the Reading Borough Council Civic Offices and courtyard.
- 1.4 There is a TPO on the adjoining site No.7 Castle Street, which is overhanging the boundary of No.9 Castle Street.
- 1.5 The site is within the St Mary’s Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area and falls within the High Street Heritage Action Zone. The site is also within

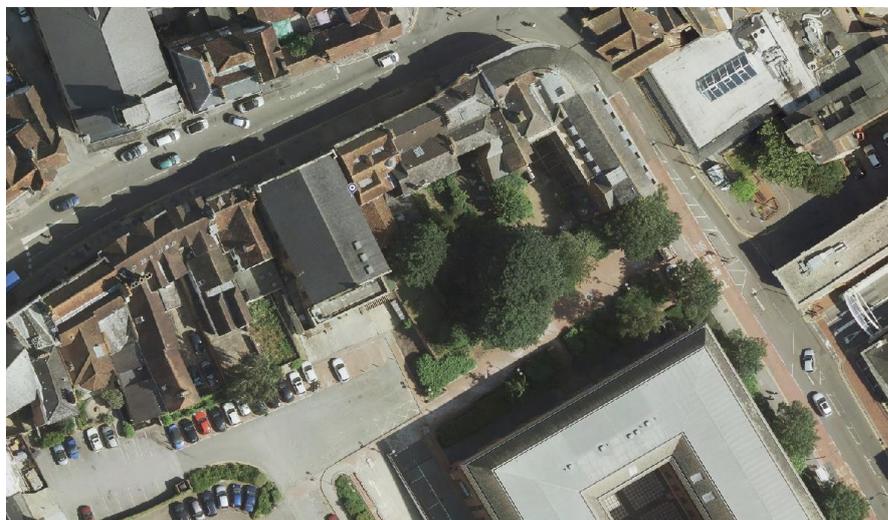
an Air Quality Management Area and an identified area of archaeological significance. The site is located within the Reading Central Area; however, it is outside the office core.

- 1.6 This application has been called to your meeting by Councillor Page due to concerns over heritage and archaeological sensitivities of the site. The site in relation to the wider area is shown below, together with an aerial view.

Location Plan



Aerial view



2. PROPOSAL

2.1 These applications seek full planning permission and associated listed building consent for the conversion of offices to 5 residential apartments and provision of a pedestrian access via the rear garden of the property.

2.2 The mix of units proposed is as follows:

- 2 x 2 bed (1 at second floor level and 1 at basement level)
- 3 x 1 bed (2 at first floor level, 1 at ground floor level)

2.3 The proposals include the insertion of 5 new windows; 3 on the western elevation at ground, first and second floor levels, 1 on the eastern elevation at first floor level and one on the eastern elevation at basement level.

2.4 A pedestrian access (and associated steps) is proposed at the rear of the site along the western boundary on to Simmonds Street.

2.5 Bin storage and a cycle storage area is proposed.

2.6 Submitted plans:

Drawing No: Proposed Alterations - Floor Plans as Proposed Rev 3C

Drawing No: Proposed Alterations - Elevations Existing and Proposed Rev 9C

Drawing No: Proposed Rear Access Rev 8A

Received 4th November 2020

Drawing No: Location Plan Ref Layout1

Received 13th May 2020

Proposed Alterations - Photo Views Ref Layout 2

Received 13th May 2020

Other documents:

Heritage Impact Assessment - Interim

Design and Access Statement

Received 13th May 2020

Heritage Impact Assessment - Complete

Received 11th August 2020

Submitted on a private and confidential basis:

Letter from applicant regarding affordable housing and viability

Viability Costs Analysis Spreadsheet

Received 21st October 2020

Letter from Parkinson Holt dated 1st December 2020
Received 2nd December 2020

- 2.7 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): the applicant has completed a CIL liability form with the submission and this confirms that no additional floorspace is proposed.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 **191858/PREAPP** - Pre-application advice for the pedestrian access element of the scheme submitted.

- 3.2 **011460/FUL** New access and parking to rear of site and associated landscaping. Refused.

- 3.3 **100363/PREAAP** - Pre-application advice for proposed disabled access and partial demolition of rear curtilage wall.

3.4 RELEVANT NEARBY SITES - 7 CASTLE STREET

210008/TPO - Works to overhanging Sycamore in rear garden of 7 Castle St. Permitted.

4 CONSULTATIONS

Statutory

- 4.1 ***RBC Transport Strategy*** - no objection subject to conditions and informatives discussed below.

Non-statutory

- 4.2 ***Berkshire Archaeology*** - no objection subject to condition. Discussed below.

- 4.3 ***Environmental Protection & Nuisance (EP&N)*** - no objection subject to conditions. Discussed below.

- 4.4 ***RBC (former) Heritage Consultant/Current CUDO*** - no objection subject to condition. Discussed below.

- 4.5 ***Natural Environment (tree officer)*** - further to revised and additional information, no objection subject to conditions and informatives. Discussed below.

Public consultation

- 4.6 The following addresses were consulted; a site notice was displayed and details of the applications were publicised in the local paper. No comments were received:

2, 6, 7, 8 and 11 Castle Street

5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 5.1 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) (2019) which states at Paragraph 11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development”. The relevant sections of the NPPF are:

5.2 National Policy

Section 2 - Achieving Sustainable Development

Section 6 - Building a Strong Competitive Economy

Section 9 - Promoting Sustainable Transport

Section 12 - Achieving Well-Designed Places

Section 14 - Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change

Section 15 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Section 16 - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

- 5.3 Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the Local Planning Authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

- 5.4 Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the Local Planning Authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

- 5.5 The Development Plan is the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019) (RBLP). The relevant policies are:

CC1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development

CC2 Sustainable design and construction

CC3 Adaptation to climate change

CC5 Waste minimisation and storage

CC6 Accessibility and the integrity of development

CC7 Design and the public realm

EN1 Protection and enhancement of the historic environment

EN2 Areas of archaeological significance
EN3 Enhancement of conservation areas
EN6 New development in a historic context
EN14 Trees, hedges and woodlands
EN15 Air quality
EN16 Pollution and Water Resources
EM3 Loss of Employment Land
H1 Provision of housing
H2 Density and mix
H3 Affordable housing
H8 Residential Conversions
TR1 Achieving the transport strategy
TR3 Access, traffic and highway related matters
TR5 Car and cycle parking and electric vehicle charging
RL1 Network and Hierarchy of Centres
CR6 Living in central Reading

Supplementary Planning Documents

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD 2019
Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD 2011
Affordable Housing SPD (2013) / Draft Affordable Housing SPD (October 2020)
Tree Strategy (2010) / Draft Tree Strategy (currently out for consultation)
Draft Climate Change Strategy (currently out for consultation)

Other relevant documentation / guidance / legislation

St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal 2008
Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England, 2016)
Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015a)
Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2015b)
Principles of Conservation (Historic England, 2008)
Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings (British Standards Publication BS 7913:2013, 2015)

6. APPRAISAL

The main matters to be considered are:

- **Principle of Development**
- **Design Considerations and Impact on Heritage Assets and Archaeology**
- **Amenity - for Future Occupiers and Impact on Neighbours**
- **Transport**

- **Natural Environment**
- **Affordable Housing**
- **Sustainability**
- **Other Matters**
 - **Inclusive Access**
 - **S106 Legal Agreement**
 - **Pre-Commencement Conditions**
 - **Equalities impact**

Principle of Development

- 6.1 Prior to considering the proposed use, consideration of the loss of the existing uses must first be provided. In this respect, it is considered that Policy EM3 (Loss of Employment Land) is relevant to the proposal. The site is located outside of the office core and is not located within a Core Employment Area and, therefore, a loss of employment (in this case office) use would be appropriate, subject to consideration of the criteria set out in this policy.
- 6.2 The applicant has confirmed that the building has been vacant since December 2019 and provided evidence of marketing that had taken place for several months prior to becoming vacant. During the course of the application the applicant has also provided a report from local agent Parkinson Holt which provides commentary on the market for office accommodation in Reading particularly following Covid-19, and with examples of the sort of facilities that are now being requested by potential purchasers that are difficult to provide in period buildings. In short, the proposals are considered to have demonstrated compliance with the EM3 criteria, while also including commentary regarding the commercial difficulties in seeking alternative employment use at the site.
- 6.3 Furthermore, it is noted that paragraph 121 of the NPPF 2019 states:
- Local planning authorities should also take a positive approach to applications for alternative uses of land which is currently developed but not allocated for a specific purpose in plans, where this would help to meet identified development needs. In particular, they should support proposals to use: a) retail and employment land for homes in areas of high housing demand, provided this would not undermine key economic sectors or sites or the vitality and viability of town centres, and would be compatible with other policies in this Framework;*
- 6.4 It is recognised at both national and local level that the introduction of residential accommodation within centres serves to enhance the vitality and viability of those areas as well as being an important source of delivering affordable housing in sustainable locations. It is also supported by Policy RL1 which notes that ‘residential use of upper floors’ would be acceptable in all centres. It is noted that there has been other conversion

from office to residential along this part of Castle Street, and this part of the terrace in particular.

- 6.5 It is also recognised that the building's listed status prevents the utilization of permitted development rights to create the residential units. Given the loss of the existing use is considered acceptable, it is considered that the principle of providing a residential use is acceptable, which aligns with the broad objectives of Policy H1 in assisting in meeting the annual housing targets. On the basis of the above, the proposed change of use is considered acceptable in principle, subject to other material considerations discussed below.
- 6.6 Following on from this, the mix of 3x1 and 2x2 bed flats means that the proposal will provide a variety of flat sizes to serve a range of household types. The overall size of the scheme (5 units) means that housing mix stipulations do not apply in this instance; in any event a suitable mix is shown to be proposed in this case.

Design Considerations and Impact on Heritage Assets and Archaeology

- 6.7 Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks to ensure that new development enhances and preserves the local character. Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) states that historic features and areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings, will be protected and where appropriate enhanced and Policy EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) states that the special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas will be conserved and enhanced and that development proposals within Conservation Areas must make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Policy EN2 (Areas of Archaeological Significance).
- 6.8 The building has previously been converted to office use and has a large two storey extension at the rear which has been modified over time. As a consequence of previous works, internal features of architectural or historic interest are largely absent apart from the stairs which are proposed be retained and which is appropriate. Some re-configuration of the rooms is proposed; however, since these are largely confined to the newer extension to the rear, which is of no special interest, both the Council's former Historic Building's Consultant and current Conservation and Urban Design Officer considers this to be acceptable and not considered to significantly harm the historic fabric of the listed building.
- 6.9 No external changes are proposed to the front elevation (to which the listing description refers) and as such, the proposals are not considered to result in any adverse effect on the visual amenities of Castle Street.
- 6.10 The external changes proposed to the rear of the property comprise the insertion of 5 windows. In line with the comments from the Council's

former Historic Building's Consultant, it is recognised that the 3 windows proposed on the western elevation would be asymmetrical in appearance. They would also necessitate the removal of historic fabric. However, this elevation is somewhat utilitarian and in itself devoid of features of architectural interest - indeed, the windows would not be readily visible from the public domain (or wider conservation area). It is recognised by officers, including both the former Historic Building's Consultant and current Conservation and Urban Design Officer that the potential loss of fabric would be relatively small in relation to that which would remain intact and it is considered that the building could absorb the new windows without any significant undue harm to its special architectural or historic interest. Given this, there is no objection to the insertion of the windows subject to some further details being secured via condition. These matters are detailed in full in the recommended listed building conditions section above.

- 6.11 As discussed elsewhere in this report, the building has been vacant for a period of time and this scheme would allow the building to be occupied. On balance, this is considered to be a positive benefit and follows the intent of the NPPF, para 196, in securing a viable use for the building. Taking this into account and that the proposals would lead to the retention of the building and generate an income stream that would ensure the conservation and preservation of the listed building - and give it a use which is welcomed and supported in principle - the scheme as a whole is considered to also represent an enhancement to the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street Conservation Area.
- 6.12 The proposals also incorporate a pedestrian access - an opening in the brick wall - along the south west boundary at the rear of the site. Whilst there is some concern that this might result in a loss of historic fabric of the boundary wall, this has been carefully considered from a heritage perspective, by both the Council's former Historic Building's Consultant and the current Conservation and Urban Design Officer. On the spectrum of less than substantial harm, the level of harm would be relatively low because the proportion of the wall affected would be small relative to that which would remain intact. Both have concluded that, on balance, taking into account the sustainable long-term use and conservation of the listed building, there would be no objection to this proposal.
- 6.13 Further to this, Berkshire Archaeology consider that the rear of the site has the potential to contain medieval and later archaeological remains. They have commented that whilst this is a modest development in terms of its below ground impacts, and they do not raise any objection, it would be precautionary for some form of archaeological monitoring during ground works to take place should the application be permitted. This would be secured by way of a suitably worded condition.
- 6.14 It should be noted that the Heritage and Archaeological advice received is consistent with previous consultation responses on this site. Whilst

application 011460/FUL was refused, this was for a new vehicular access and parking to the rear of the site to replace the garden which was not supported on transport grounds - and an overall much larger proposal (in terms of the opening of the brick boundary wall) than that currently proposed. The Berkshire Archaeologist for that application raised no objection subject to a condition in respect of an archaeological watching brief. The application, which was for a bigger aperture in the wall, was not refused on archaeological sensitivity grounds.

- 6.15 It is noted that application 011460/FUL included the following reason for refusal:

“The proposed development would have an undue detrimental impact on the setting of the listed buildings and the character of the conservation area contrary to policies CUD 4 and CUD 7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.”

However, as noted above, this was for a fundamentally different and larger scheme - a vehicular access rather than pedestrian access, and creation of car parking area to replace the garden - that also had wider visual implications in terms of the setting of the listed building and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

- 6.16 Heritage and Archaeological advice has been consistent as received under planning applications and pre-application advice. In overall terms, officers are satisfied that the proposals are appropriate in relation to national legislation/policy (most pertinently section 16 (2) of the Act and paragraph 196 of the NPPF) and local policy (predominantly policies CC7, EN1, EN2, EN3 and EN6), subject to conditions which shall ensure the Asset's conservation.

Amenity - for future occupiers and impact on neighbours

- 6.17 Policy CC8 seeks to ensure that both the amenity of neighbouring properties and the amenity of future occupiers is adequately protected. Policy CR6 (Living in Central Area) seeks to safeguard neighbour amenity from potential noise disturbance. Policy H10 (Private and Communal Outdoor Space) seeks that residential developments are provided with adequate private or communal outdoor amenity space.
- 6.18 The proposals do not include any extensions such that there will be no loss of light or overbearing impact to any neighbouring property. Whilst the insertion of a first floor window on the south east elevation would face across the rear of No.7, there is already a first floor window on this elevation. There is an intervening Sycamore tree (referenced elsewhere in this report) which is in the garden of No.7, which also provides significant screening to the rear of No.7. It is not considered that there would be any significant material loss of privacy to the detriment of this neighbouring property such to warrant a refusal on this basis.

- 6.19 The site is predominantly surrounded by residential dwellings at upper floors and the loss of the existing use is considered to be beneficial to the amenity of existing nearby occupiers in terms of removal of a source of potential noise and disturbance.
- 6.20 For future occupiers, it is considered that the layout of the proposed residential units are suitable in size and shape to provide an appropriate standard of accommodation, given the constraints of the nature of the proposals, site and (listed) building. Some of the rooms do not follow a standard shape/size, owing to the listed nature of the building and therefore these compromises are considered inevitable/acceptable. In the vast majority of instances, the stacking of rooms between floors is consistent. The insertion of a window to bedroom 2 (as annotated) at basement level is considered to allow for sufficient light levels.
- 6.21 Further to a site visit, and with Officers having stood inside the building, concerns were originally raised that given the position and state of the Sycamore Tree in the garden of No.7 (significant overhanging the boundary), that there would be a future pressure to prune or fell this tree, to allow sufficient light to the rear first floor windows. As a commercial property, the impact of the tree on light into the building might not be so pertinent, with lower light levels not considered unacceptable. However, a residential premises requires a greater amount of daylight to be achieved, putting pressure on the LPA to allow more pruning of the tree than would otherwise be necessary.
- 6.22 During the course of the application, and as discussed elsewhere in this report, additional tree information was received and assessed by the Council's Tree Officer. This was considered acceptable, subject to condition. Further to this, the applicant also submitted a separate tree works application, for the pruning of the tree (as referenced in the history above) which was permitted 6th January 2021. Given this, and whilst the impact on the tree itself is discussed elsewhere in this report, there are no longer the same concerns over pressure to prune, and light levels are considered acceptable.
- 6.23 A welcome benefit of the scheme is the provision of some garden amenity space as it is generally the case that the majority of town centre dwellings are unable to provide meaningful amenity space. It is proposed to be a shared communal area, which would also house cycle and bin storage. Whilst not overtly large, given the site's accessible location and access to nearby public amenities, combined with the existing site constraints and desire to secure a future use of the listed building, this is considered to outweigh any concerns over provision of private amenity space. On balance, the provision is considered appropriate in this instance in this central area location.

- 6.24 In terms of noise and disturbance, RBC Environmental Protection officers have raised no objection subject to a pre-commencement condition to require a noise assessment. This is required owing to the busy nature of Castle Street, coupled with the nearby neighbouring bar and pub uses (albeit residential uses have been implemented on the upper floors of other buildings fronting Castle Street). Therefore, in overall terms and in applying a critical planning balance to the consideration of the scheme as a whole, the units are considered to provide an overall suitable standard of accommodation, in line with Policies CC8, EN16, H10 and CR6.

Transport

- 6.25 Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5 seek to address access, traffic, highway and parking related matters relating to development.
- 6.26 The site is located within the Reading Central Area and within Reading's primary shopping area. The site is located within Zone 1 of the adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD which is an area at the very heart of Reading Borough, consisting primarily of retail and commercial office developments, with limited residential. This area is well served by rail and bus links and also contains the largest proportion of public car parking spaces.
- 6.27 The proposal includes no parking spaces. However, Castle Street and the surrounding road network all have extensive parking restrictions preventing indiscriminate on-street parking. Conditions and informatives would be applied to prevent the flats from obtaining a Resident's Parking Permit. Therefore, the non-provision of parking is acceptable in this town centre location.
- 6.28 With regard to the pedestrian access, it is noted that the grass verge between the Simmonds Street 'hammerhead' and the application site whilst not classified as highway land, is within the ownership of Reading Borough Council. As such a licence will be required to permit pedestrian movements. Whilst the granting of planning permission does not confer any rights of access, confirmation has been received from RBC that a licence has been offered to the applicant and an informative will also be attached in this respect.
- 6.29 There is no objection to the location of the bin store at the rear of the site. Similarly, the proposed location of the cycle storage is acceptable; however, detailed plans confirming that the provision meets the Council's adopted standards in terms of layout is required. It is considered that this can be dealt with by way of a suitably worded condition.
- 6.30 Based on the above and no adverse comments from RBC Transport Strategy, officers advise that the scheme would be acceptable in transport terms (subject to a number of conditions as set out in the

Recommendation above) and would therefore accord with requirements of policies TR1-TR5.

Natural Environment - Trees

- 6.31 Policy EN14 states that “...trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance...New development shall make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, ... to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change.” Policy CC7 seeks proposal should include appropriate landscaping. The site is also within an Air Quality Management Area (EN15) where the provision of tree coverage is important.
- 6.32 Concerns were originally raised about the impact of the proposals, including the cycle stands, on the protected Sycamore in No.7 Castle Street. A tree survey and Arboricultural method statement was subsequently submitted and the cycle stands relocated further away from the rpa of the tree. Alongside, and as referenced elsewhere in this report, the applicant also submitted a separate tree works application for the pruning of the tree, which was permitted. As such, the Tree Officer has confirmed that there is no objection to the proposals subject to conditions, to also include hard and soft landscaping and details of the boundary treatment.
- 6.34 Based on the above and no adverse comments from RBC Natural Environment, officers advise that the scheme would be acceptable in tree/landscape terms (subject to a number of conditions as set out in the Recommendation above) and would therefore accord with requirements of policies EN14 and CC7.

Affordable Housing

- 6.35 Policy H3 seeks to ensure that an appropriate affordable housing contribution is made for the delivery of new housing. This proposal seeks 5 new dwellings and therefore requires a financial contribution to be made that will enable the equivalent of 20% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough.
- 6.36 In this instance the applicant has submitted viability justification (as referenced in Policy H3 in instances where proposals fall short of the policy target) to provide nil affordable housing.
- 6.37 This has been reviewed by the Council’s Viability Officer who has concluded that it is not viable for the scheme to provide an initial financial contribution towards any off-site affordable housing elsewhere

within the Borough. Although naturally disappointing to officers in light of the pressing need for affordable housing in the Borough, the nil provision at this point in time has been suitably evidenced in a robust manner, in line with the circumstances allowed by Policy H3.

- 6.38 Notwithstanding this, a deferred affordable housing contribution payment mechanism has been recommended to ensure that the Council shares in any uplift in value or savings in costs associated with the development in the future. The applicant has confirmed agreement to the principle of this mechanism, with the exact details to be secured within the s106 Legal Agreement.
- 6.39 If this element is secured as recommended, although acknowledging and accepting that no off-site affordable housing financial contribution is provided at this stage, this has been specifically evidenced, justified and independently reviewed as such, as Policy H3 allows for. Thus, on balance, this is considered the best possible contribution towards affordable housing in this instance. The proposal is therefore considered to be policy compliant in this regard.

Sustainability:

- 6.40 Local Plan Policy CC2 requires new development to reduce the consumption of resources and materials and includes that *“All minor non-residential developments or conversions to residential are required to meet the most up-to-date BREEAM ‘VERY GOOD’ standards, as a minimum”* and that *“Conversions to residential should incorporate water conservation measures.”*
- 6.41 Given that no substantial details have been submitted it is therefore considered necessary to secure the standard two-part sustainability condition. The first, a pre-commencement condition, seeks a final design stage assessment and certificate to demonstrate that the units would achieve the required ‘very good’ rating. The second element, secured prior to first occupation, will secure final BREEAM domestic refurbishment certificate of compliance with the ‘very good’ rating.
- 6.42 Officers acknowledge that there may be inherent difficulties incorporating substantial sustainability improvements within a scheme such as this, primarily owing to it predominantly involving the change of use of an existing building, with the grade II listing likely to be a further substantial constraint. As such, should there be shortfalls in the subsequent discharge of condition submissions (i.e. not in line with the wording of the condition), mitigating factors will be taken in to account by officers when subsequently assessing such matters (i.e. a flexible approach to the stipulations of the BREEAM rating will be able to be applied by officers. in the event that justifiable reasons for any shortfalls are put forward for consideration by the applicant). As such, the conditions are conditions to be necessary in this case (and pass the other

tests of a condition too), but a degree of flexibility will be able to be applied by officers (if justified) in the future at the discharge of conditions stage.

Other Matters

Inclusive Access

- 6.43 It should be noted that the design, which includes steps to resolve a change of gradient between the car park at the end of Simmonds Street and the garden of 9 Castle Street, would improve ease of movements for occupants of 9 Castle Street and would promote easier pedestrian travel. Whilst acknowledging this could preclude wheelchair users, it is noted that the rear of the property is accessed by a flight of stairs and therefore easier access would be available from the main front door from Castle Street.

S06 Legal Agreement

- 6.44 The site falls within one of Reading Borough's High Street Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ), which forms part of a heritage-led regeneration initiative led by Historic England working with local councils to create economic growth and improve the quality of life in Reading Borough's historic high streets.
- 6.45 In respect of the above, the proposals are not considered to result in any harm to the character or the appearance of the Conservation Area. Given the nature of the proposals there is limited scope to make a specific positive contribution to the character or appearance, although the opportunity for a landscaped garden area is recognised and considered a welcome improvement.
- 6.46 Therefore, in this specific instance, an off-site financial contribution towards public realm enhancements within the High Street Heritage Action Zone is not considered to meet the S106 tests. For a planning obligation to be taken into account in deciding a planning application it must be for a planning purpose, fairly and reasonably relate to the development proposed and rational. In addition, it may only then be relied upon to approve an application if it is necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms.

Pre-Commencement Conditions

- 6.47 Pre-commencement conditions - In line with section 100ZA(5) of the Town and Country Planning Act (as amended) discussions are being undertaken with the applicant regarding pre-commencement conditions. At the time of writing a response is awaited from the applicant in terms of agreement to pre-commencement conditions. If appropriate, a response will be reported in an update report prior to committee.

Equalities Impact

- 6.48 In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the 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.

CONCLUSION

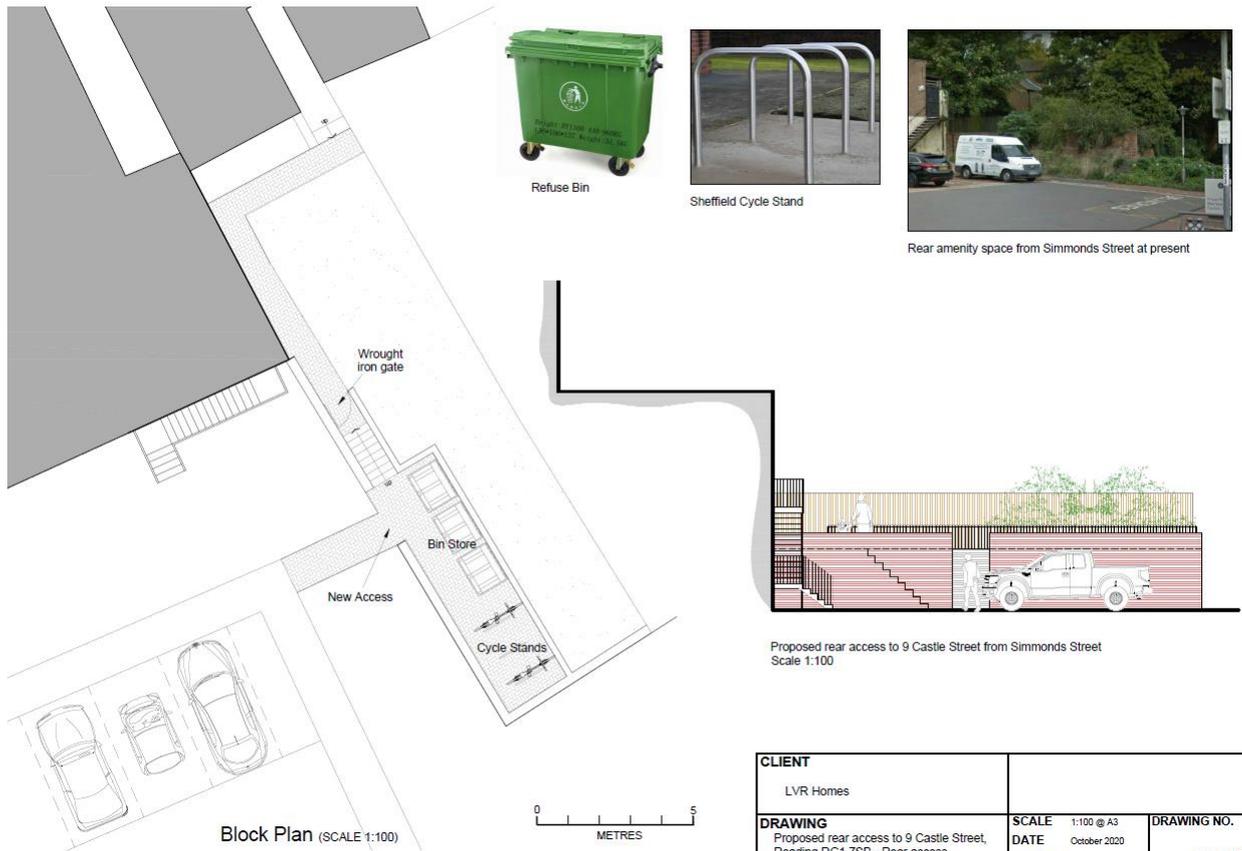
- 6.49 This proposal has been carefully considered in the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and previous planning history and officers have worked positively and proactively with the applicant on this scheme.
- 6.50 The proposals are considered to be acceptable within the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above. As such, when applying a critical planning balance, it is considered that the planning benefits of the proposals outweigh any conflicts identified in the appraisal. Accordingly, full planning permission and listed building consent is recommended for approval, subject to the recommended conditions and completion of the S106 Legal Agreement.

Case Officer: Ethne Humphreys

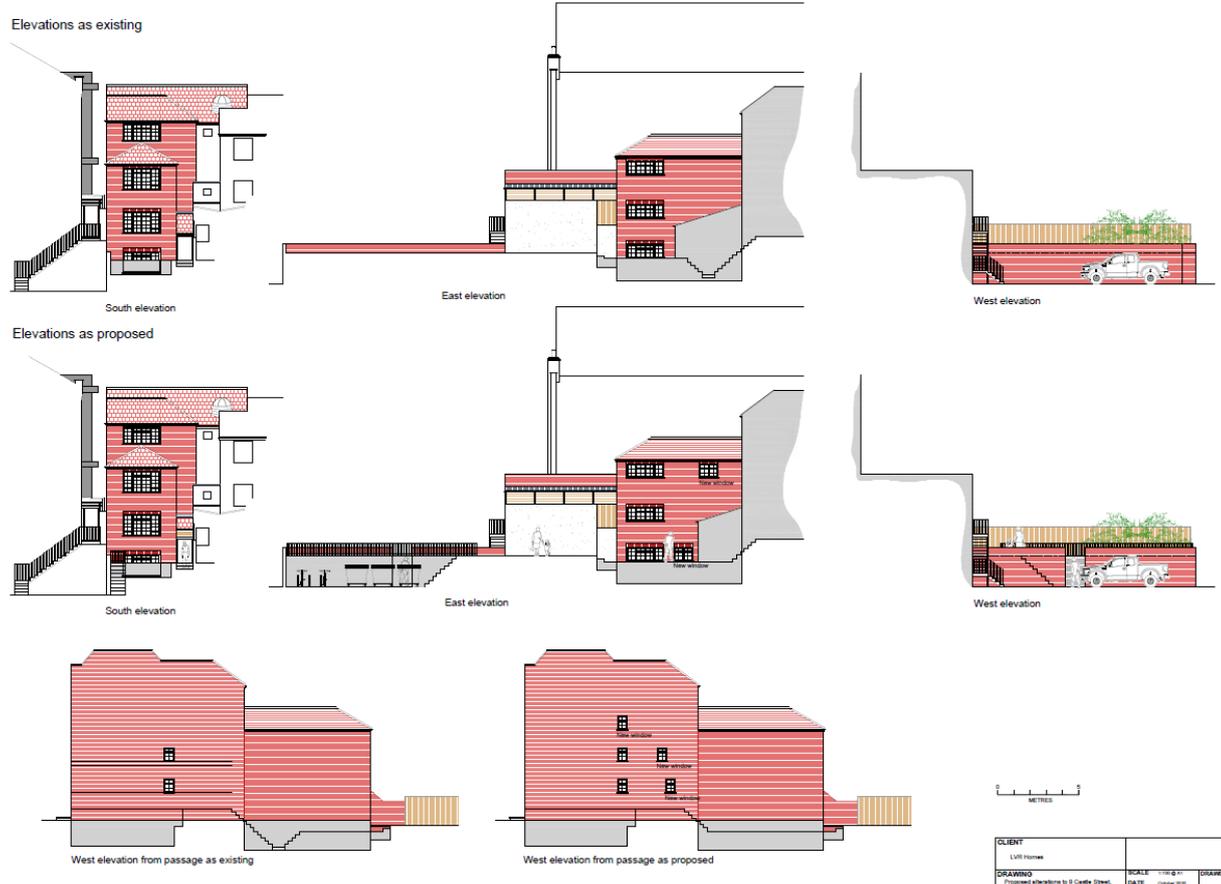
Plans:



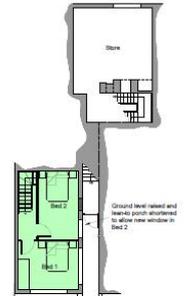
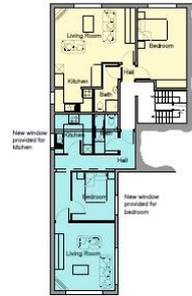
Location Plan



Proposed Rear Access



Existing and Proposed Elevations



- Two Bedroom (Existing Ground Floor) 07.204 / 70204
- One Bedroom (New Floor) 08.204 / 50204
- Two Bedroom (New Floor) 09.204 / 60204
- One Bedroom (New Floor) 10.204 / 70204
- Two Bedroom (Ground & Basement Floor) 11.204 / 70204

CLIENT		
LMI Homes	SCALE	DRAWING NO.
DRAWING	1:100 @ 01	
Proposed alterations to 2 Castle Street, Reading RG1 2GS - All proposed	DATE	08/04/2020
	DRAWN	AD
		Layout 3d

Proposed Elevations