

Update Report

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 28 APRIL 2021

ITEM NO. 8 Page 39

Ward: Abbey

Address: 109a Oxford Road, Reading, RG1 7UD

App No: 201585/FUL: Change of use from an estate agent use class E to a restaurant and hot food takeaway sui generis use class

App No: 201586/ADV: New fascia and projecting sign

Applicant: ARA FT Investment Ltd t/a Fat Twins Reading

RECOMMENDATION:

As on main report - Grant both applications

1. Comments Received

1.1 The Conservation Area Advisory Committee has commented again on this application to reiterate their earlier grounds for objecting to the proposed change of use and alterations to the building. The letter is appended to this update report.

2. Officer Comments

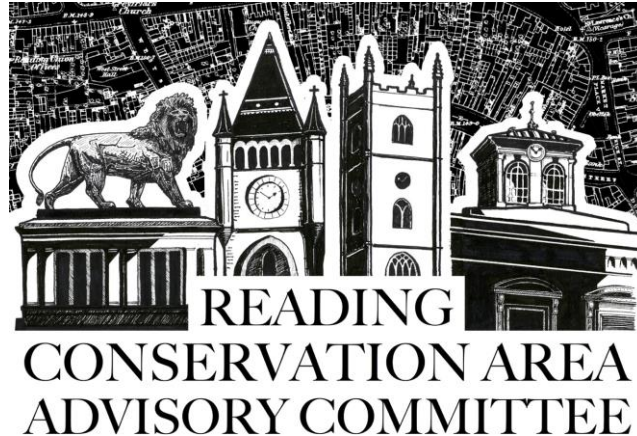
2.1 The concerns raised are already addressed in the main report presented to this meeting. The application is not for 109 so requiring that this application includes changes to that shopfront too as requested is not reasonable.

2.2 In reply to the concerns about the diversity of uses having looked at the properties on the south of Oxford Road there are currently only 2 take-aways outlets between Howard St and Russell Street within a mix of community uses, residential and retail.

2.3 On the point raised about Policy EN3 and preserving the appearance of the site this proposal seeks to replace the existing modern shopfront and signage with a design more in keeping with the age of the building. The existing shop front has projected forward by about 500mm for many years. It is not original. The final proposed shop front is considered an enhancement to the Conservation Area streetscape and was negotiated to make it more appropriate in relation to the HAZ zone.

2.4 The officer recommendation is to grant planning permission and advertisement consent.

Julie Williams



26 April 2021

To members of the Planning Applications Committee and Planning Officers

Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) comments on and objection to planning applications 201585 and 201586 for change of use and signage at 109a Oxford Road.

SUMMARY

Reading CAAC objected to the application for change of use of 109a Oxford Road for the reasons below, some of which have been partially responded to in the officer's report to the 28 April PAC.

We would also like to expand on our earlier comments in relation to the policies which apply to this application and the area in which it is located.

Reasons for objection

- Improvements to the shop front in the amended plans are welcomed however we note that in terms of overall improvement of the streetscape they fall very far short of those in the 2014 consented application 140959. That application would also have improved the adjacent shop front. For such a significant corner location and one of the two gateposts to Zinzan Street more significant improvement is required and the adjacent shop front should be similarly upgraded.

CAAC response to officer's report: Despite changes in ownership since the 2014 application we insist that more significant improvement is required to this shopfront for reasons explained in the detailed paragraphs below.

- In our opinion the height of the fascia board, just below first floor window level, is excessive and detracts from the heritage features of the frontage.
- The boundary treatment agreed in application 140959 has still not been fully implemented. The impact of that, should this change of use be approved, will be even greater as the quantity of waste and the type of waste produced by a restaurant differs considerably from that of an estate agent.
- It is questionable whether this section of Oxford Road needs yet another restaurant/takeaway. Given that there is a restaurant/takeaway in the adjacent shop unit and on the opposite corner of Zinzan Street (109b) another similar offering does not enhance the diversity of the high street offering in this section of the town centre.

CAAC response to officer's report: Oxford Road west of the IDR may not be 'primary frontage' however Reading does have planning policies which can protect this street from a lack of diversity in offerings as explained in the detailed paragraphs below.

- The restaurant/takeaway at 109b followed a change of use application from a betting shop in 2018 (180273). Consequently, there is a risk that the living environment of local residents on Zinzan Street will be damaged by the noise, waste and odours of three restaurant/takeaways if this application is approved.



Expansion of Comments

1. DIVERSITY OF USES

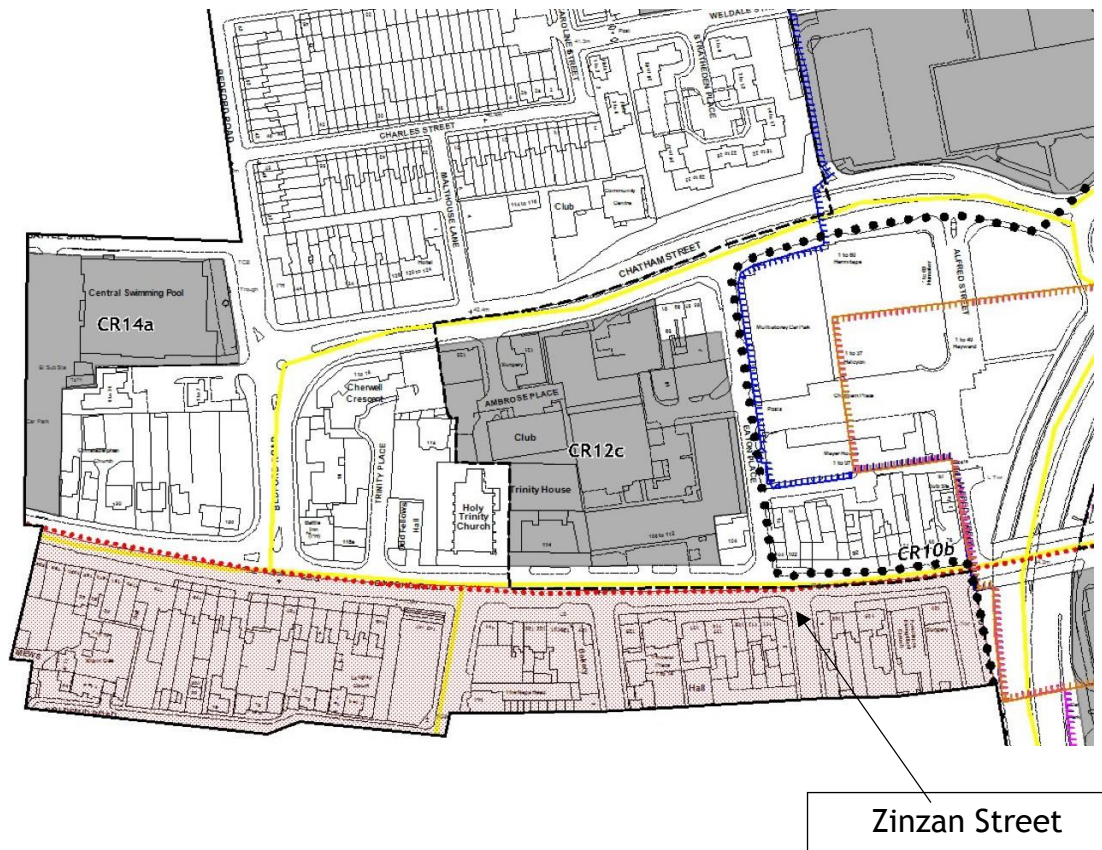
1.1 The explanatory paragraphs of policy CR1 Definition of Central Reading state '*Mixing uses within the centre is at the heart of the strategy*'.

1.2 Policy CR8 Small Shop Units in Central Reading states '*Small shop units make an important contribution to the diversity of the centre*'.

Further explanatory sections of this policy state (our italics):

5.3.31 In promoting town centres' vitality and viability, national policy in the NPPF focuses development in town centres and states that policies will allow centres to "grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters" (paragraph 85). It also states that local planning authorities should actively plan for growth and manage the role and function of existing centres. This includes the range of sizes of shops, which can cater for different and varied retail offers."

5.3.32 In order to ensure that the vitality, diversity and retail offer of the centre of Reading is maintained and enhanced, this policy seeks to retain these small retail units, and the provision of additional small units within new retail development.



From New Local Plan - south of Oxford Road is outside the Primary Frontage Area Shading = conservation area (since extended)

1.3 If a third takeaway is allowed in a row at the junction of Zinzan Street and Oxford Road to the detriment of other retail uses and the amenity of local residents this is excessive and does not demonstrate that the LPA is managing the development of this high street.

2. HERITAGE

2.1 Policy CR2 Design in Central Reading applies to this proposal particularly CR2b (streetscape) and CR2d ('The architectural details and materials used in the central area should be high quality and respect the form and quality of the detailing and materials in areas local to the development site).

2.2 The proposal does not improve the streetscape and does not respect the heritage and context of the Russell Hill/Castle Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area. To improve the streetscape the projection of the front ground floor window should be removed and the corbels on the shop front and the string course above the fascia board exposed and / or made more visible (see images of 109 and 109a above).

2.3 We note that the revised elevation to Zinzan Street does not include the wires and piping that are currently present on this side of the property. As to the pipework, this seems unlikely as the rear elevation submitted does show the pipe joining from the west. Confirmation as to the actual expectation is required before these plans are approved.

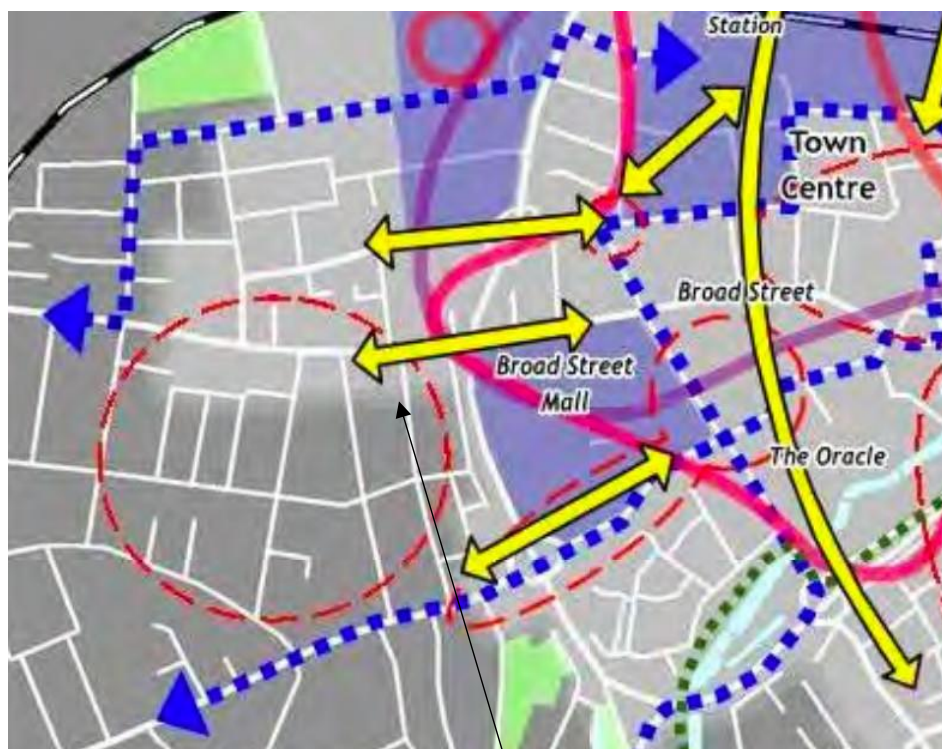
2.4 Policy EN3 Enhancement of Conservation Areas sets out various opportunities that should be taken to enhance conservation areas many of which are appropriate to this application. The proposal does not deliver in exploring these possibilities.

2.5 Policy EN3 also states:

“Where a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan has been adopted for a particular Conservation Area, this will be a material consideration in determining applications for development.”

The management plan for this CA specifically mentions the issues of loss of original shopfronts and damage from retail signage that hides original features. Therefore this application should be rejected as it does not address this loss.

2.6 The area of 109a Oxford Road is within an area marked in the New Local Plan as being in ‘particular cluster of heritage assets’. This means that heritage in the area is a key feature for planning purposes.



Zinzan Street

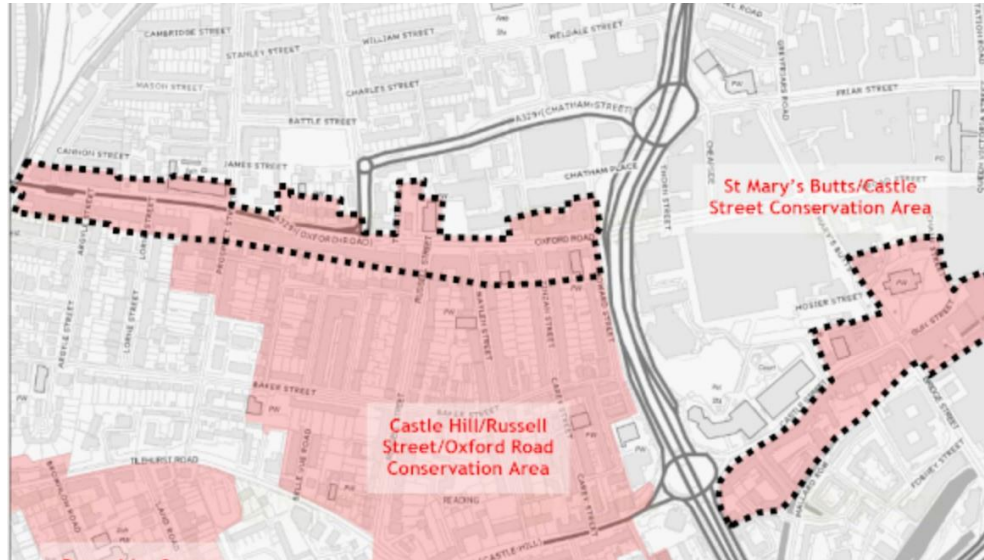
From New Local Plan - Oxford Road within a dashed circle = particular cluster of heritage assets

3. HIGH STREETS HERITAGE ACTION ZONE IMPROVEMENTS

3.1 With the High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Project, Reading has obtained an opportunity to improve the visibility of the heritage of the buildings of Oxford Road so that can be better appreciated. That includes funding for physical improvements that expose hidden heritage features including to shopfronts.

Reading Borough Council HSHAZ web page sets out the potential for:

- *Investment in listed buildings, including facades, forecourts and boundaries.*
- *Shopfront improvements in the HSHAZ Conservation Areas.*
- *Surveys to support, protect and enhance culturally significant assets.*
- *Improvements to public realm in the HSHAZ high streets.*



SHAZ area along Oxford Road – dotted line – within the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area

It goes on to say:

If your property is situated in one of our High Street Heritage Action Zones, you may be eligible to apply for a grant to help you to carry out improvements that you need that will also renovate the appearance of Reading's historic streets. We can offer up to 80% of the cost of carrying out these works where they include repair and restoration of lost features from the original shop/property fronts.

<https://www.reading.gov.uk/planning/reading-high-streets-heritage-action-zone/>

4. AMENITY OF RESIDENTS

4.1 Policy CC8 Safeguarding Amenity covers nuisances that may be caused by living close to properties with non-residential uses such as noise, smells and artificial lighting.

4.2 The amenity of the residents of Zinzan Street and the flats above the shops on Oxford Road will be cumulatively damaged by yet another takeaway making three in a row at the junction. The cumulative effect of this damage as well as the individual impact should be considered in arriving at a decision on this application.

4.3 Should this application be approved, we would like to be assured that expectations of waste management, odour and noise management conditions will be enforced if the Fat Twins fail to comply with them.

5.SUMMARY

5.1 This application should be rejected for the reasons stated.

Evelyn Williams
Chair, Reading Conservation Area
Advisory Committee
43 Milman Road, Reading