

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 21 July 2021

ITEM NO.

Ward: Abbey

App No.: 210879

Address: 134 Oxford Road, Reading, RG1 7NL

Proposal: Install Artwork on existing metal railings on a vacant site to the West of 134 Oxford Road

Applicant: Reading Borough Council Economic & Cultural Development

Deadline: 22/07/2021

RECOMMENDATION:

Grant

Conditions

3 years to implement

Materials as proposed

Construction Methods Statement

Informatives

Positive & Proactive

Section 59 Highways Act advice

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application site is on the pavement immediately to the south of the railings bordering the car park that once served Central Swimming Pool. The site is in the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area.



Site Location Plan



Site photo



Aerial View

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposal is for two art works presented on aluminium sheets to be located on the railings. As shown below they would measure 6 metres long by 1.8 metres high.



- 2.2 Submitted Plans and Documentation:
ECD/21/001/01 Proposed Plan and Elevations
Location Plan
Block Plan
Planning Statement including Heritage Statement
- 2.3 The Planning Statement explains that in connection with the High Street Heritage Action Programme running in parts of the town centre, including this town centre end of Oxford Road the Council was awarded £9,231 from Historic England to initiate a cultural pilot project around the Oxford Road.
- 2.4 As part of the project, the University of Reading collected residents' stories and memories that would be used as the inspiration for three new art projects along the Oxford Road. Three local artists were selected by a community panel to produce exciting new art works along the eastern end of Oxford Road, their projects aiming to amplify the local heritage and rich multicultural history of the road. Gemma Anusa has been asked to produce this artwork for the railings at the Oxford Road end of the Battle Street Car Park, which is the subject of this Planning Application.
- 2.5 The Planning Statement describes the proposed works as follows:
"The proposed work is called "Through Your Eyes" and will consist of two parts, which will be presented either side of the pedestrian entrance to the car park. The content of the design will be two half portrait faces which reflect the diversity of the area, with a gradient skin tone and hair and eye colourings. Embedded into the portraits and background will be quotes, dates, stories that reference the history of the Oxford Road area and the resident's stories and memories, which were collected from the research by the University of Reading. The installation will be on display for at least until the end of the Oxford Road HSHAZ project, which would be March 2024."
- 2.6 The Heritage Statement explains that:
"Early 19th century mapping evidence suggests that shops with residential accommodation above them extended westward from the town centre; notably between Alfred Street and Eaton Place and also between Russell Street and Waylen Street. However, the nature of the shops and services has altered over time, reflective of incoming immigrant populations. The current speciality hair salons, grocers and bakers, along with the estate agents, key cutters, pharmacies and dentists, all serve the needs of the diverse local community and Reading's wider population. Today's

businesses are a continuation of the Oxford Road's history of diverse retail services established over many generations.

The application site for the art work is the boundary fence of a modern car park that once served the Central Swimming Pool. The pool has recently been demolished and the site is to be redeveloped for residential use. The existing railings to the remaining car park provide an ideal opportunity to brighten the appearance of this part of the Oxford Road while celebrating the local history.

The site of the proposed Artwork Installation is on a busy pedestrian and vehicular traffic route and the diverse nature of the local community and the character of the area makes the application site the ideal location”.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

None relevant to this application.

4. CONSULTATIONS

Statutory: As the site is in a conservation area a notice was displayed on site and published in the local paper.

Non-statutory:

Conservation Area Advisory Committee: No objections received

Conservation and Urban Design Officer: No objections received

Valuations: No objections received

Transport: No objections received

Public

Neighbouring properties were notified by letter. No objections received.

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) which states at Paragraph 11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

5.2 The development plan for this Local Planning Authority is the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019). The relevant policies are:

CC7: Design and the Public Realm

CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas

EN6: New Development in a Historic Context

TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres

6. APPRAISAL

6.1 Principle of development

6.1.1 The principle of providing the art works as proposed in the selected location has been considered in the context of the site being in a Conservation Area and forming part of the public realm and as discussed further below raises no policy concerns and so the structures are therefore acceptable in principle.

6.2 Design & Appearance - Impact on Conservation Area

6.2.1 The pair of artworks would be large and eye catching and located in a position where they would be seen by many members of the public, which is the objective of the scheme. The proposed location on existing car park railings would screen what is an unattractive area of unused car park from view and so would be a benefit to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The image being provided on an existing functional structure makes it an object of interest and fun so would also contribute to the vitality of this area of local shops.

6.2.2 Policy EN1 requires that historic features, areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment will be protected and where possible enhanced. Policy EN3 then focuses on conservation areas by requiring that development proposals within these areas should make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

6.2.3 Overall the conclusion is that the proposed works would not harm or detract from any historic features or other elements of the historic environment and as mentioned above would hide the unused car park. It would be an improvement in that respect to the public realm and while clearly a very modern piece of work through its connection with the local area would make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. The proposal is therefore compatible with the aims of Policy CC7, EN1 and EN3. It is also clearly relevant that the project is supported by Historic England as part of the local High Street Heritage Action Zone.

6.3 Impact on neighbours

6.3.1 Officers are satisfied that given the distance from closest residents or occupiers the art work structures will not lead to any harm to amenities. Therefore, there is no breach of Policy CC8.

6.4 Highway matters

6.4.1 No transport or highways related concerns have been however an informative is recommended to advise on the need to consider the Highways Act when works are being carried out to install the works to ensure pedestrians and road users are not obstructed and any damage caused is repaired.

6.5 Equalities Impact

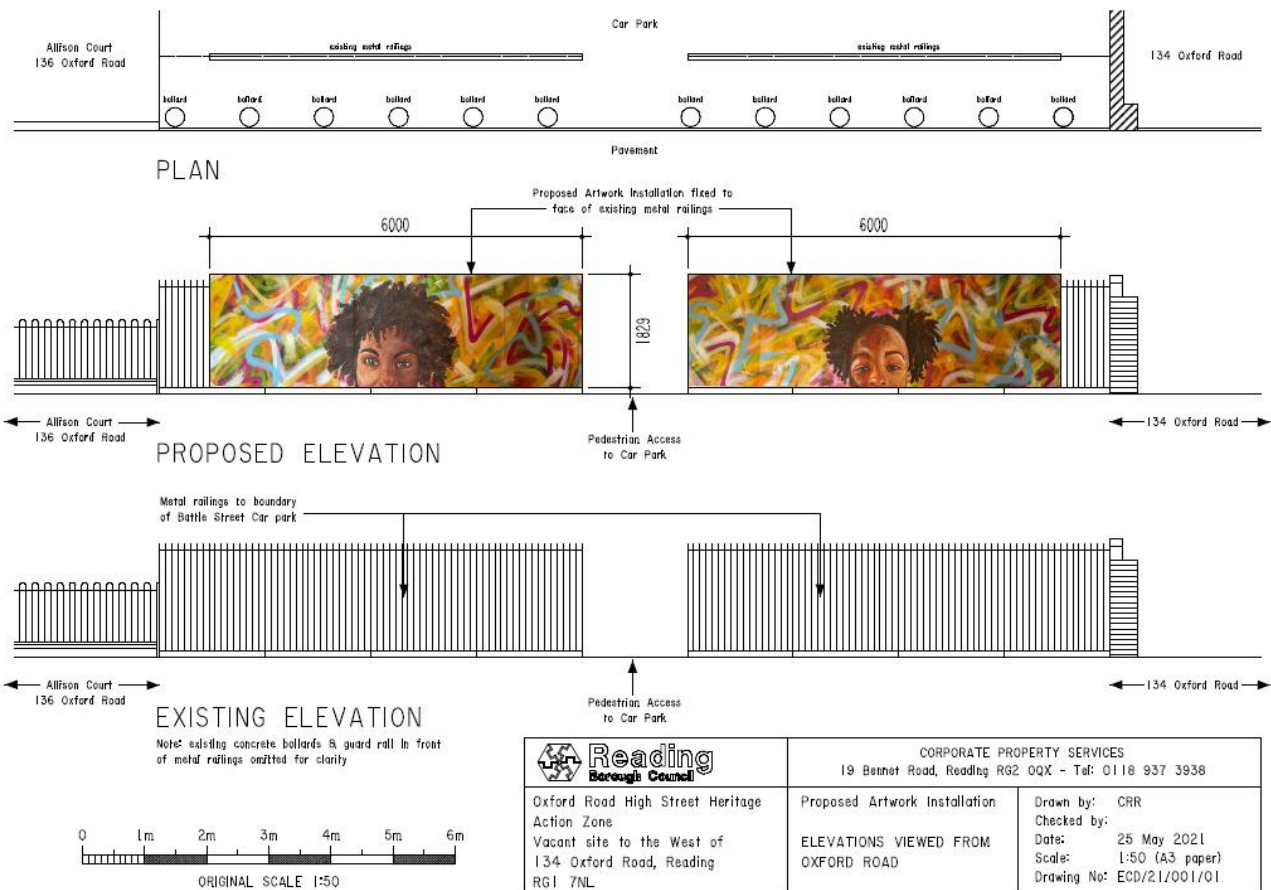
6.5.1 When determining an application for planning permission the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups as identified by the Act have or will

have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this 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 proposed development.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 This proposal has been carefully considered in the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and has been found to be acceptable. The recommendation is shown above.

Case Officer: Nathalie Weekes



Proposed Plan