

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 2 November 2022

Ward: Abbey

App No.: 221473

Address: 32 West Street, Reading, RG1 1TZ

Proposal: The provision of a Cycle Hub in a vacant Retail Unit at 32-41 West Street, Reading RG1 1 TZ, requiring an application for Change of Use involving Cycle Parking/Storage and maintenance.

Applicant: Reading Borough Council

Deadline: 30/11/2022

RECOMMENDATION:

Delegate to officers to GRANT planning permission subject to no substantive objections being received at the expiry of the consultation period on 7 November 2022.

Conditions to include:

1. Std 3 years
2. Temporary Use - 3 years from date of planning permission
3. Approved plans
4. Any adverts applied to each of the shop windows fronting West Street shall be located so to enable views into the premises by pedestrians at street level.

Informatives to include:

1. Positive and Proactive Working - Approval
2. Terms and conditions
3. Advertisement consent may be required for any signage

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The application site is 154sqm and comprises a vacant retail unit formed from part of the ground floor of the former Primark shop site, fronting onto West Street. The wider building is in active use as the UK Primark office headquarters on the upper floors. The retail store ceased trading on 31/10/16 and the unit has remained vacant since then.
- 1.2. The application site is located within the designated Reading Central Area and Primary shopping area, with the West Street frontage a designated active frontage. It is situated on an existing 'on road' cycle route. The application site is also located within an air quality management area and an area of archaeological potential.
- 1.3. The surrounding area comprises a mix of uses, with the Greyfriars Church to the north, a variety of retail and related uses on West Street, Oxford Road and Cheapside, office uses (predominantly on Cheapside) and residential properties (most substantially on the upper floors of Oxford Road and Cheapside).



Site Location Plan (not to scale)

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1. The proposed development seeks the change of use from the existing Class E (Commercial) use of the vacant retail unit to a sui generis (unique) use as a temporary 'cycle hub' to provide 82 secure parking spaces for bicycles and a cycle loan/donation scheme. The purpose of the 'cycle hub' is to provide free, safe and secure cycle storage and maintenance facilities to encourage people with concerns of theft or vandalism to be able to bring their bicycles into Reading. The aim is to support those travelling to town for work or for leisure, who may ordinarily have chosen an alternative form of transport. It is envisaged that customers would use an "app" to book access to the cycle hub.
- 2.2. The proposed cycle store would provide two tiers of bicycle racking. A low-level maintenance rack facility to inflate tyres and undertake small maintenance issues such as changing wheels with spanners, cycle tools and manual cycle air pumps is also proposed. There would be no physical changes to the existing shop or shopfront.
- 2.3. It is an initial temporary proposal with one year of funding from the Department for Transport's (DfT) Capability Fund and the application is by Reading Borough Council Transport. A three year temporary permission is proposed to allow for the potential for the service to be extended, if possible is proves successful.
- 2.4. The use is considered to be sui generis as it falls between bicycle parking and maintenance and outside of established use classes.
- 2.5. Vinyl images of cycles are to be applied to the inside face of the windows and doors to advertise the hub with clear glazing above. No additional signage or external illumination is proposed.
- 2.6. The proposed opening hours are from 07:00 to 19:00 everyday Monday-Sunday.

Submitted Plans and Documentation:

The following plans and documents were submitted on 29th September 2022

Location plan

Block plan

TS/22/01/001 Existing floor plan

TS/22/01/002 Proposed floor plan

TS/22/01/003 Existing front elevation

TS/22/01/004 Proposed front elevation

Drawing No. 005 Cycle hub graphics

Validation checklist

Planning statement for change of use

CIL form

2.7 Community Infrastructure levy (CIL):

In relation to the community infrastructure levy, the applicant has completed a CIL liability form with the submission. The proposed development is not chargeable as is not proposing any new floorspace.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

152269 - Reconfiguration of part of the ground floor West St frontage to provide two retail (Class A1) units, change of use at part basement, ground & first floor from retail (Class A1) to office (B1a), remodelling & reconfiguration of existing offices at all floors, alterations to all external elevations, revised external plant and provision of rooftop plant screen to West St, Friar St and Cheapside and associated works (revised description). Granted following completion of S106 Legal Agreement 14/04/16.

161013/VARIAT - Variation of condition 2 (approved plans) of planning permission 152269 (various works, extensions and associated alterations to the building), namely for minor material amendments including fenestration alterations, relocated cycle storage and revised external plant (revised description). Granted following the completion of a deed of variation s106 legal agreement 27/09/16.

170196 - Non-material amendments to planning permission 152269 (dated 14/04/2016) to include alterations to the ground floor glazing on the Friar Street and Cheapside frontages. Granted 01/03/2017.

4. CONSULTATION

Public consultation

- 4.1. The following neighbouring owners and occupiers were consulted by letter:
30 West Street, Reading RG1 1TZ
43 West Street, Reading, RG1 1TZ

A site notice was displayed on 18/10/2022 with a period of 21 days, expiring on 07/11/2022, for comments. No responses have been received at the time of writing.

Internal Consultation

RBC Transport Strategy

- 4.2. There are no objections to the proposed development. The principle of the proposal is accepted given that this will create a cycle storage facility to encourage alternative modes of travel to the private car. A cycle route currently runs along West Street on the carriageway but access can be gained at either end of West Street or from the dropped crossing which is located directly adjacent to the disabled parking bays located at the frontage of the application site.

RBC Environmental protection

- 4.3 There are no objections to the proposed development.

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

- 5.2. Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019)

CC1 Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development
CC6 Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
CC7 Design and the Public Realm
CC8 Safeguarding Amenity
TR1 Achieving the transport strategy
TR3 Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR4 Cycle routes and facilities
TR5 Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
CR2 Design in Central Reading
CR7 Primary frontages in Central Reading
OU4 Advertisements
OU5 Shopfronts and cash machines

- 5.3. Relevant Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):

Design Guide for Shopfronts (2022)
Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD (2011)

Other:

The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25
Carbon Plan 2020-25
Local Transport Plan 2011-26 and Cycling strategy
Reading Transport Strategy 2036
Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan
Reading Council Corporate Plan 2022-25

6. APPRAISAL

The main matters to be considered are:

- Change of use
- Sustainable Transport
- Design and Security

Change of use

- 6.1. In accordance with policies RL3 and CR2, the proposed change of use is considered to be appropriate for the Reading Central area and should ensure that a strong retail character is retained.
- 6.2. The proposed change as described is acceptable in this location as there would be no net loss of 'centre uses' at ground level in a key frontage area. The proposed use will enable the vacant unit to be occupied for a 12 month period (potentially longer) and encourage greater accessibility to visit Reading on a bicycle rather than by car. In this instance, the application for a temporary permission is a reflection of the proposed initial tenancy period, whether the use is successful and the period of availability of the unit from the Freeholder, and not a judgment on whether or not the use would be suitable for longer retention.

Sustainable Transport

- 6.3. Policies TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD are relevant. These policies support sustainable travel and adopting travel habits providing an alternative to car use. The location is considered to be ideally located, as it would allow users direct and secure cycle parking at a highly visible and secure site, with direct access to the central commercial/retail area of Central Reading.
- 6.4. The proposal will encourage alternative modes of travel and is designed to support a shift in travel behaviour to active modes of transport. It would contribute to Reading Borough Council's aim to achieve a net zero carbon resilient Reading by 2030, the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2025 and Carbon Plan 2020-2025, reducing carbon footprint within Reading.

Design and Security

- 6.5. In accordance with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan; development will; *"Create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; Address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them, including providing suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily"*.
- 6.6. There would be no change to the front elevation, the doors and windows will remain the same, with vinyl images applied.
- 6.7. Vinyl graphics proposed for the unit frontage have been amended to allow views into the proposed Cycle Hub, to comply with policies CR7 or OU5 which state that opaque coverings should be minimised on shop windows and will not obscure windows. The Reading shopfront Design SPD states that

'The area of opaque coverings should not exceed 30% of the total area of glazing. Shopfronts should remain "active" by providing visibility into the space, rather than presenting a blank wall during both the day and night.'

6.8. The proposed graphics slightly exceed 30% of the total area of glazing, however the images primarily cover the lower level of the front windows, providing visual interest and visibility to the inside space, with views of the cycle storage and maintenance area inside the unit possible, therefore retaining an active frontage. A condition is recommended that the use shall not be carried out other than in a manner which maintains views into the building from each window fronting West Street, to ensure that the active frontage is maintained and to provide visual interest to the street. This is considered to be appropriate given that the hub will generally be unstaffed and security will be controlled by a combination of cctv and the access system and app recording the users entering and leaving. With the combination of these security measures and clear glass, it is anticipated that users will consider that the facility is secure and there will be good take up of the facility.

6.9. Other matters

Impact on amenity

6.10. Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan states that; *"Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of: (...) Noise and disturbance; (...); Dust and fumes; (...); Crime and safety"*.

6.11. There are no concerns in respect of noise nuisance as no mechanical plant or noise making machinery is proposed for the cycle hub. The opening hours are proposed to be 7am to 7pm, however, officers consider that given the low level of disturbance and the gains to the security of the street from the activation by this use, a condition restricting opening hours is not required.

Equalities Impact

6.12. 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 as identified in the Act 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.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The proposal to provide convenient secure cycle storage in a central Reading location is considered to be acceptable within the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above. As such, the grant of planning permission is recommended along with relevant conditions.

Case Officer: Nathalie Weekes

Proposed Cycle hub frontage (CGI image provided by applicant)



Existing



Proposed