

COMMITTEE REPORT

**BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 31 May 2023**

Ward: Tilehurst

App Ref: 230241/FUL

Address: Land adjacent 114-116 School Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5AX

Proposals: Change of use of ground floor retail unit to a residential apartment including fenestration alterations.

Applicant: Chesters Place Ltd

Date received (valid from): 27 February 2023

Extended Target Decision date: 02 June 2023

RECOMMENDATION:

Delegate to the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services (AD PTPPS) to (i) **GRANT** full planning permission subject to completion of a S106 legal agreement or (ii) to **REFUSE** permission should the legal agreement not be completed by 2 June 2023 (unless officers, on behalf of the AD PTPPS, agree to a later date for completion of the legal agreement). The legal agreement to secure the following:

An off-site financial contribution of £10,750 in relation to affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough, payable prior to first occupation of the dwelling, in accordance with Policy H3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the Council's adopted SPD, Affordable Housing.

Conditions to include:

- 1 TL1 Time Limit (Standard)
- 2 AP1 Approved Plans
- 3 M1 Materials to match/as shown on approved plans
- 4 Restriction on storage of plant and materials
- 5 N10 Noise Mitigation Scheme (as specified)
- 6 DC1 Vehicle Parking (as specified)
- 7 DC5 Cycle Parking (as specified)
- 8 DC3 Vehicular Access (as specified)
- 9 DC8 Refuse and Recycling (as specified)
- 10 C1 Hours of Construction/Demolition (standard)
- 11 C4 No bonfires

Informatives:

- IF3 Highways
- I29 Access construction
- Schools Street Initiative in operation

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The application site lies on a corner plot at the junction of School Road and Downing Road and comprises a recent 2.5 storey building containing space for a retail unit and parking on the ground floor with residential dwellings above. The planning history and a site visit shows that permission 220086 has been implemented and at the time of the site visit (05/04/2023), the majority of the external fabric of the building had been completed with the exception of the retail unit which did not have windows fitted.
- 1.2 The surrounding area is a mixture of uses, mainly commercial (retail), residential (for example Downing Road, with the Park Lane Primary Junior Annexe building close by), with Park Lane Primary School opposite and the Prince of Wales pub on the opposite side of School Road. The site is located adjacent to the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre, as defined by Policy RL1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
- 1.3 Downing Road is also a designated 'School Street' which means the road closes at certain times of the day for the benefit of the safety of pupils of Park Lane Primary School.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 The application seeks planning permission to change the use of the existing ground floor retail unit to 1no. dwelling. The dwelling will comprise 2 bedrooms, living and kitchen areas. The window openings associated with the retail unit will be replaced with residential style windows and brick infill to match the appearance of the existing building.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 211276: Erection of building to provide ground floor retail unit (Class E) with 4 residential flats above (Class C3). Allowed on appeal – 21/09/2022

220086: Erection of building to provide ground floor retail unit with 4 no. residential flats above. Granted – 26/05/2022 (Officers consider this permission has been implemented)

220857: Application for approval of details reserved by conditions 3, 4, 9, 10, 15 and 18 of application 220086. Approved – 25/07/2022

230025: Application for approval of details reserved by conditions 17 (Strategy for litter collection) and 8 (Hard and Soft landscaping) of application 220086. Deemed Discharged - 21/04/2023

230026: Non-Material amendment to planning permission 220086 to increase the parking from 2 to 3 bays, relocation of the front door to the apartments, remove the stallrisers to the retail unit, opening of the Tax window on the School Road elevation and an additional velux roof light to Apartment 4 on the Downing Road elevation - Approved 15/02/2023

4. CONSULTATIONS

4.1 A site notice was displayed at the site and the following addresses were consulted by letter:

25 Appleby End, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 2NR
19 Downing Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG31 5BA
4 Tree Close, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 4TG
29 Elvaston Way, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 4LX
59 Denby Way, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 6HX
13 Beechwood Avenue, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5BJ
112 School Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG31 5AX
2 Lambourne Close, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG31 5BE
Llandaff, Beechwood Avenue, Reading, Berks
103 Oak Tree Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG31 6LA

4.2 8 letters of representation have been received. The main points raised in the 7 letters of objections are summarised below (any direct comments from officers are in *italics below*):

- Objected to the initial plan to convert the open green space into a retail unit and 4 residential units with only 3 parking spaces. The proposed change of use is outrageous and reeks of duplicity. *Officer comment: there is no objection able to be responded to here*
- Suspicious that the change of use is being proposed before the builders have left the site. *Officer comment: there is no objection able to be responded to here*
- High chance this change of use was always intended by the developer as it will generate a higher income. *Officer comment: this is not a relevant planning matter*
- Considers parking levels at the development would continue to be insufficient
- The application throughout its life has changed considerably. An extra parking space has been gained in a covered area that is barely big enough for 3 cars and traverses the footpath outside a school.
- Insufficient parking infrastructure for residents to park in Downing Road anywhere near their houses already and the proposal will worsen the situation
- Having an apartment instead of a shop will add to the imbalance of not enough parking for these properties.
- There will be additional parking and refuse collection needs of possibly 2 additional cars in a residential street with reduced daytime parking due to school access.
- Concerns regarding construction traffic for the original proposal are now more severe for this proposal
- The front downstairs elevations differ from the first floor elevations and the building appears 'unbalanced'.
- Questions building flats with a large balcony overlooking a primary school playground.

The main points raised in the letter of support are summarised below:

- I welcome the change. There is limited off road parking in Downing Road and I think a retail unit would cause further parking pressure. I would like to see if parking permits can be considered again for Downing Road.

4.3 Internal Consultees:

RBC Transport Development Control – Initial request for additional information. No objection in updated response.

RBC Environmental Health Officer – No objection subject to condition, informative advised.

Equality Act 2010:

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

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 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) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)
National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
CC6 Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
CC7: Design and the Public Realm
CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
H1: Provision of Housing
H3: Affordable Housing
H5: Standards for New Housing
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
RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres

SPDs

Affordable Housing (2021)
Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Planning Obligations under S106 (2015)

6. APPRAISAL

This application raises the following planning issues:

Principle of Development and Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres
Design
Residential Amenity
Transport and Parking
Affordable Housing/S106

Principle of Development and Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres

- 6.1 Local Plan Policy RL3 seeks to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of smaller centres. Criterion C of the policy states all new development within or adjacent to District Centres should provide some 'centre uses' at the ground floor, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would not be possible or appropriate.
- 6.2 Whilst national and local planning policies encourage mixed uses, it is recognised that these need to be realistic and appropriate to their locations to be sustained. The site is outside the District Centre, but adjacent to it. It is therefore at the (south-) western extremity of the District Centre, on a corner plot at the junction of a commercial road (School Road) and a quieter residential road (Downing Road). Its use could therefore be suitable for a range of uses.
- 6.3 Officers have surveyed the District Centre and note that there are currently three commercial units vacant, these being No. 70 and 100 School Road and No. 5 The Triangle. In addition, the unit located at No. 74 School Road (currently a bank) is due to close in June 2023. Whilst not a severe level of vacancies, it does suggest that there are difficulties in sustaining uses within the centre. The application retail unit is located at the very western end of the District Centre, separated from the designated Primary Shopping Frontages and does not benefit from any parking either on site or in close proximity. In this respect, officers do not consider it would provide any significant further benefit towards the range of types of units available to prospective occupiers, above those which are already located more centrally within the District Centre, including the highlighted vacant units. Further, this unit has never operated as a retail unit, so there is no physical loss and it is not clear if it had been provided whether it would have been viable. As such, and on balance, officers do not consider the retail unit would provide any significant benefit to maintaining or enhancing the vitality and viability of the district centre and therefore its non-provision would not be clearly harmful to the centre..
- 6.4 Paragraph 86(f) of the NPPF recognises the role that residential development plays in maintaining the vitality of centres and also encourages residential development where appropriate. Local Plan Policy CC6 also encourages development to be at appropriate densities relative to their accessibility and officers advise that increasing residential densities to consolidate the viability of Centres is appropriate. As discussed in paragraph 6.3, officers have noted the limited value the retail unit is considered to provide towards the District Centre and consider the benefits to vitality of the centre through the economic benefits of increasing the number of potential users of the district centre are more significant than the any benefits from retaining the retail unit.

- 6.5 Therefore, in this instance, officers consider that it has been sufficiently demonstrated that the loss/non-provision of the retail unit would not be harmful to the character and vitality of the District Centre and residential would be appropriate in principle and therefore the proposal complies with policies RL3 and CC6.

Design

- 6.6 Policy CC7 requires all new development to be of high-quality design that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area in which it is located. The development will involve alterations to the ground floor elevations involving the replacement of the approved retail unit windows with smaller residential windows along the elevations with School Road and Downing Road. The windows and surrounding infill brickwork are considered to match those on the existing building. The development will thus harmonise with the appearance of the building and in this respect, will have no materially harmful impact on the streetscene or wider character of the area. Officers therefore consider the development to achieve a high quality of design which complies with Policy CC7.

Residential Amenity

- 6.7 Policy CC8 seeks to safeguard residential amenity by ensuring development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties whilst Policy H5 sets standards for new housing. The proposed dwelling will be dual-aspect with south and west facing windows which will provide an acceptable level of outlook and daylight for future occupiers of the flat. The dwelling will have a floor area of approximately 66sqm which exceeds the nationally described space standards for a two-bed, three-person single storey dwelling. The dwelling is also within walking distance of the shops and amenities in the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre, as well as Blagrove Recreation Ground. As with the rest of the development, no on-site open space is provided and again, none is considered to be appropriate given the nature of the block.
- 6.8 The dwelling will be located adjacent to School Road with habitable room windows at the back of the footway. This is clearly not an ideal situation in terms of 'defensible space' and privacy, although ultimately it will be up to the eventual occupier how they wish to respond to this. A noise report has been submitted with the application. The Council's Environmental Protection Team were consulted on the application and raised no objection. The noise assessment is the same as that approved under application 220857/APPCON in respect of Condition 10 of the implemented development approved under permission 220086. The noise assessment includes ventilation and mitigation measures to ensure the existing dwellings will be protected from noise from the adjacent road and officers consider these mitigation measures are again suitable for the additional dwelling and a condition has been recommended to secure these. Officers therefore consider that the development would provide an acceptable level of residential amenity for the future occupiers of the dwelling and would have no materially harmful impact on the amenities of any other properties and therefore complies with Policies CC8 and H5.

Transport and Parking

- 6.9 Local Plan Policy TR1 seeks to ensure that development contributes to meeting the objectives of the most up-to-date Local Transport Plan. Policy TR3 requires consideration of the impacts of development on the safety, congestion and environment of the local transport network whilst Policies TR4 and TR5 seek to ensure development improves access to cycling and provides sufficient vehicle parking, respectively. Downing Road is a narrow 2-way road that provides access to dwellings north along the road as well as Park Lane Primary School which comprises buildings located on both sides of the road, the British Legion and access to Lambourne Close. Given the width of the road and congestion/traffic conflict at school admission and closing times, the road has been designated as a School Street by the Council. Outside of this, there are no specific parking controls in place along the road. Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) are typically limited to the roads closer to Central Reading.
- 6.10 Initial comments were received from the Council's Transport Development Control Team who raised no in principle objection to the change of use, noting the replacement of the retail unit with a residential unit would be an improvement on the consented scheme (ie. retail) with regards to trip rates and the overall parking for the residential units would be a similar ratio to what has already been agreed. In this instance, the site is located in a sustainable location, close to the services and amenities of Tilehurst and served by frequent bus services along School Road which provide access to the wider areas of Reading. Previous permissions on site have accepted the provision of reduced parking on site on this basis and given the modest increase of one dwelling, officers again consider this appropriate.
- 6.11 It was noted in the Transport comments received that the additional unit will require an additional cycle space and a scaled down Construction Method Statement (CMS) was also requested. The applicant subsequently submitted an amended ground floor plan showing the additional cycle space, as well as a CMS. The Transport team subsequently provided updated comments noting the proposed cycle storage is acceptable. It was also noted that the detail provided in the CMS is satisfactory with the exception of details regarding the location on site for storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development which were not shown within the CMS. However, it is considered that this can be dealt with via a condition prohibiting the storage of materials or plant on the public highway and site access. As the building is still under construction, it is necessary to secure cycle spaces, vehicle parking and vehicle access as detailed prior to occupation of the residential unit. Subject to these conditions, officers consider the development will have an acceptable impact on the local highway network, in compliance with Policies TR1 and TR3-TR5 and CC6.
- 6.12 An informative has been included to advise the applicant of the Schools Street initiative that operates in the area, in line with the updated comments from the Transport team.

Affordable Housing/S106

- 6.13 In accordance with Policy H3 (Affordable Housing) the proposed development, being for one residential unit, would be liable for an off-site affordable housing contribution.

- 6.14 The applicant has stated they agree in principle to enter into a legal agreement to secure a financial contribution. A contribution of £10,750 has been agreed based on 2 independent valuations of the proposed development. Subject to the satisfactory completion of this S106 agreement, the proposal will provide policy compliant affordable housing contribution in line with Policy H3 and the Affordable Housing SPD 2021.
- 6.15 Officers consider it appropriate for the financial contribution to be made payable prior to occupation of the dwelling as the applicant may choose not to implement the change of use and instead, continue to implement the development approved under application 220086/FUL.

Other Matters

- 6.16 Details of bin storage have been secured through the previous approvals and the submitted plans show storage will be provided in accordance with these details. A condition has been recommended to ensure bin storage is provided prior to occupation in order to comply with Policy CC5.
- 6.17 The previous permissions approving the construction of the existing building have approved matters regarding landscaping, biodiversity enhancements and sustainability measures therefore it is not considered necessary or reasonable to impose these conditions again, as these matters are considered to be unaffected by this current application.
- 6.18 In responding to any other objection issues where necessary, officers advise as follows. Several objectors question the motives of the developer in bringing this proposal forward so soon after gaining planning permission for the development. Whether or not the developer ever intended to provide a retail unit in the first place is not a relevant material consideration to this application, which has been considered on its own individual planning merits.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Officers do not consider 'retaining' the originally-proposed retail unit will materially maintain or enhance the vitality and viability of the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre and accept the principle of the change to residential use. The development is considered visually acceptable and the new dwelling will provide an acceptable standard of residential amenity for future occupiers of the unit. The development will not prejudice highway safety and will have an acceptable impact on the surrounding highway network. The applicant has agreed to provide a policy compliant affordable housing contribution therefore, subject to the satisfactory completion of a S106 agreement to secure this contribution, Officers consider the development complies with Policies CC1, CC5, CC6, CC7, CC8, H1, H3, H5, TR1, TR3-TR5 and RL3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Case Officer: Joel Grist

Plans and documents considered:

Genesis Town Planning letter dated 15/05/2023 – received 16/05/2023

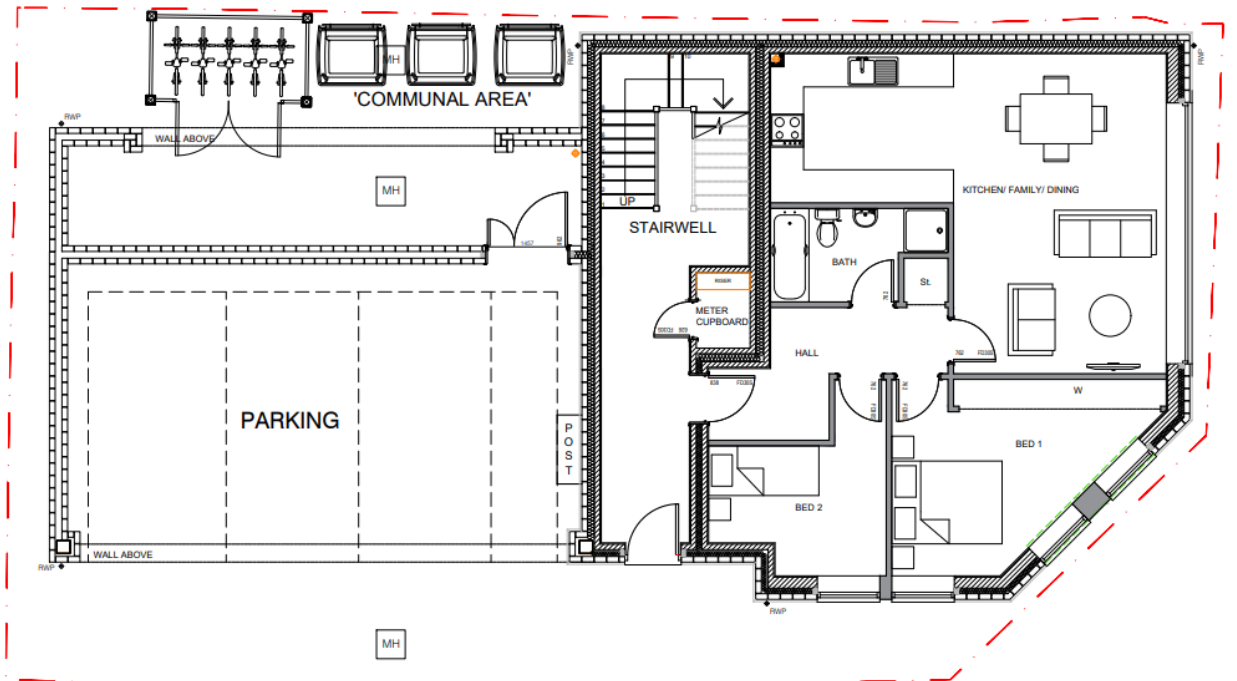
Construction Method Statement and Method Statement v1 dated 17/04/2023 – received 18/04/2023

P104 RevB – received 04/04/2023

22.993 P.103; P.102; L.101; B.101; P.105; P.101 – Received 28/02/2023



EXISTING FRONT ELEVATION (SOUTH WEST)



PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR



PROPOSED FRONT ELEVATION (SOUTH WEST)



PROPOSED SIDE ELEVATION (SOUTH EAST)