

Planning Applications Committee

29 April 2026



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Appeal Report Update – Trinity Hall, South Street
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee, Executive Director Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
Report author	Steve Vigar, Planning Applications Team Leader
Lead Councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Council priority	Promote more equal communities in Reading
Recommendations	N/A

1. Background

Permission ref. PL/24/1079 was appealed under reference APP/E0345/W/25/3376563. A hearing took place on 24 March 2026. The two main issues identified by the Inspector were, a) The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, including whether it would preserve the settings of surrounding heritage assets; and b) Whether the proposed development would make adequate provision for affordable housing.

2. Outcome of the Appeal

On the first issue, character, the inspector disagreed with the Council that the building would be excessive in scale with a bulky appearance and found instead that the apparent massing would be largely unchanged and the appearance would fit with the existing character. The inspector found no harm in respect of the effect on the setting of adjacent listed buildings.

On the second issue, affordable housing, the Inspector found that the £100,000 affordable housing contribution included in the appellant's s106 unilateral undertaking submitted with the appeal was not justified due to the non-viability of the development as demonstrated by the appellant's financial viability assessment.

However, the Inspector did find that there is a demonstrable need for affordable housing provision in the Borough and that there was justification for the deferred payment mechanism set out in the unilateral undertaking. In effect he agreed that the viability assessment demonstrated that no affordable housing could be afforded based on the current financial situation, but should this improve, then the need for affordable housing justifies a contribution.

3. Costs

The Council's independent viability consultants advised the LPA that the development would be capable of providing affordable housing due to viability. The Inspector criticised

the Council for persisting in seeking an upfront contribution towards affordable housing despite failing to provide evidence to demonstrate why it did not accept the expert independent advice of its consultant. The Inspector found that the reason for refusal could have been avoided so the applicant has been put to unnecessary expense in contesting this point.

4. Officer Comment

Although it was disappointing to have the appeal allowed, the Inspector's support of the demonstrable need for affordable housing in the Borough is welcome, also, importantly his support of the Council's approach to securing affordable housing contributions through a deferred payment mechanism should financial conditions improve during the course of the development.

The reason for the costs award is noted and in future officers will be mindful of the need to fully justify all reasons for seeking affordable housing, especially where evidence from the Council's own external consultant throws doubt on the reasonableness of doing so. Having said that, discussions around the affordable housing position had not been concluded when the applicant chose to appeal and officers remain of the view that an appeal could not have been avoided without further discussion on that point, nevertheless the Inspector's decision is final.