

## UPDATE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTORATE FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES  
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL  
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019

ITEM NO. 17

Ward: Park

Application No.: 190160

Address: "Alexander House", 205-207 Kings Road, Reading, RG1 4LW

Proposal: Demolition of existing office building and construction of new 182 bed student accommodation development, over 7 storeys of accommodation plus lower ground floor, together with ancillary landscaping, parking and amenity space.

Applicant: P.J. Alexander Estates Ltd

Date Valid: 29 January 2019

Application target decision date: 19<sup>th</sup> July 2019 Extension of time agreed by the applicant - original target decision date was 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019.

26 week date: 14<sup>th</sup> August 2019

### RECOMMENDATION:

**REFUSE**, as per main agenda report, with minor addition to reason for refusal 1 and deletion of reason for refusal 3.

#### Reasons:

1. It has not been clearly demonstrated how this proposal for purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) meets an identified need that cannot be met on those identified sites within the Emerging Local Plan allocated for student accommodation or on those sequentially preferable sites. Alexander House is a specifically allocated housing site within the Emerging Local Plan required to meet the Borough's identified housing needs. Its loss to an alternative use has not been justified and would further reduce the Council's ability to meet its **general and affordable** housing need within its own boundaries. The proposal therefore does not comply with Policy H12 and Policy ER1g of the Emerging Local Plan and conflicts with the aims of the NPPF.
2. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure a construction phase Employment and Skills Plan and use of the living accommodation to be occupied as student accommodation (Sui Generis) only, the proposal will not mitigate its impact on the social and economic infrastructure of the Borough, contrary to Policies CS3 and CS9 of the Reading Borough LDF Core Strategy 2008 (Altered 2015), Policy DM3 of the Reading Borough LDF Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012 (Altered 2015) and the Council's Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents on Employment, Skills & Training (2013) and Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2015).

#### Informatives:

1. Plans and documents refused.
2. Positive and proactive working.
3. Reason for refusal ~~2&3~~ could be overcome by a satisfactory Section 106 Legal Agreement or unilateral undertaking

#### 4. Refused scheme CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) liable development.

### 1. Consultations update

- 1.1 The applicant has submitted via email a document containing 22 additional letters of support from local businesses and 12 letters of support from local residents in a standard template. Officers can confirm that 32 separate letters of support have been received, broadly supporting the proposal for the reasons previously set out in the main agenda report.
- 1.2 A duplicate letter of support from Activate Learning (an umbrella organisation for apprenticeships and courses for the Thames Valley Colleges) on behalf of Reading College has also been received, the contents of which has been summarised below. The points of support raised are as follows:
- The development will help Reading College, as part of Activate Learning, achieve their vision of offering modern, professionally managed student accommodation next to the Reading College campus.
  - The site is ideally located to provide purpose built student accommodation given its proximity to both Reading College and also the nearby University of Reading campuses.
  - The proposed design is a significant improvement from the existing building.
  - The new development is BREEAM level 'Excellent'.
  - Activate Learning are supportive of PJ Alexander Estates' commitment to engaging with the local community, including the Public Exhibition held at Reading College.
  - Activate Learning have agreed that the college will benefit from 'Experience of Work' and 'Work Experience' opportunity for students in construction phase.
  - The development will enhance the character of the local area and provide much needed accommodation.

### 2. Affordable Housing

- 2.1 Refusal reason 3 in the main agenda report referred to failure to provide affordable housing, contrary to affordable housing policies CS16 and H4 as supplemented by the Affordable Housing SPD (2013). The references to securing affordable housing from student accommodation proposals in the SPD pre-dated the more comprehensive and strategic, evidence-led approach to student accommodation that is now provided by Policy H12 in the emerging Local Plan. Following further consideration and engagement with the Council's Planning Policy Team, Officers consider that, as policy H12 in the emerging Local Plan now carries significant weight, it is prudent to determine the application in accordance with the more comprehensive approach to student accommodation in that document, rather than through the requirements of the Affordable Housing SPD (2013). Officers can therefore confirm that Refusal Reason 3 is no longer maintained and withdrawn from the Recommendation above.
- 2.2 Refusal Reason 1 is amended to refer to 'general and affordable' housing need. The reason for this is because of the failure to deliver this as a housing site in accordance with the emerging allocation ER1g also means

that there is a failure to supply the affordable housing associated with such a development. For information, it should be noted that planning permission 162057 provided 17 on-site affordable housing units. The Recommendation is amended as above with the amended wording highlighted.

**Case Officer: Brian Conlon**