

PRE-APPLICATION ENQUIRY RESPONSE - without prejudice

Enquiry Reference: 181889/PRE

Address: Whitley Library, Northumberland Avenue

Proposal: Conversion to 3 x 1 bedroom flats

The following information was supplied:

Planning Statement

Drawing No: 3576/210 - Site Location and Block Plan

Drawing No: 3576/01 - Existing Floor Plan

Drawing No: 3576/211 - Proposed Floor Plan

Drawing No: 3576/02 - Existing Elevations

Drawing No: 3576/212 - Proposed Front and Rear Elevations

Drawing No: 3576/213 - Proposed Side Elevations

Site Location

The site comprises a Reading Borough Council owned parcel of land to the east of a roundabout at the junction of Northumberland Avenue and Cressingham Road, containing the former Whitley Library. The building dates to the early 1930's and was locally listed in September 2018. The building has a distinctive frontage with a large, projecting gabled entrance porch. The building was purpose built for community use and is a significant local landmark. A flat roofed extension projects beyond the original southward side elevation, but is devoid of architectural or historic interest.

The site contains a number of significant trees and there is evidence of a WW2 ARP shelter to the rear. The surrounding area is predominantly residential. The library facility relocated to South Reading Community Hub in June 2018, so the building is currently vacant.

Proposal

The proposal is for the conversion of the existing building to 3 x 1 bedroom flats. The footprint of the building would not be altered, with only minor elevational alterations proposed and the raising in height of the roof of the extended part. The distinctive original frontage would remain unaltered. To the front elevation of the extended part would be located two windows and a single door. To the rear elevation of the original part would be located two windows and two sets of double doors. Two further windows and a set of double doors would be located to the rear elevation of the extended part. A further window would be located to the northward side elevation. The roof of the extended part would be increased in height by approximately 0.5m. Internal reconfiguration would subdivide the building into 3 individual flats, each with their own independent access. Each of the flats would have a floor area between 48.6 square metres and 49.6 square metres. To the rear of the site would be located three car parking spaces with access onto Cressingham Road.

Planning History

Local Listing - 2018.

Consultation Responses

Transport Development Control

The site is located at the roundabout junction of Northumberland Avenue, Cressingham Road, Buckland Road and Long Barn Lane. Northumberland Avenue, Cressingham Road and Buckland Road are all classified roads. The development is within Zone, 3, Secondary Core Area of the Council's adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD. Typically these are areas within 400m of a Reading Buses high frequency 'Premier Route', which provides high quality bus routes to and from Reading town centre and other local centre facilities.

There are parking restrictions along Northumberland Avenue and Cressingham Road in the form of double yellow lines.

In accordance with the adopted Parking Standards and Design SPD, the proposed residential development would be required to provide parking provision of one parking space per 1 bedroom flat; therefore equating to three spaces. Each parking space should measure 2.5m x 5m with a minimum forecourt depth of 6m to ensure vehicles can manoeuvre in and out of spaces unhindered and also allow for vehicles to enter and exit the site in forward gear. The submitted Block Plan 3576/2107 illustrates three parking spaces which would be in accordance with the Council's current standards.

Block Plan 3576/2107 illustrates a new dropped crossing from Cressingham Road to serve the proposed three car parking spaces. Any new dropped residential crossing on a classified road must comply with the Council's Geometric Design Guidance, Residential Accesses onto Classified Roads.

A licence will be required to undertake any works on the public highway. Lamp columns and telegraph poles situated on the sites boundary will need to be illustrated on plans. Dropped crossings cannot be within 1m from lamp columns/telegraph poles. Any relocation costs will need to be met by the applicant.

Visibility splays of 2.4m x 90m will need to be illustrated on submitted plans. Any reductions from this standard would need to be justified in the form of speed surveys to establish the actual visibility required. This would be of particular importance given that the access is located within close proximity to the Northumberland Avenue/Cressingham Road/Buckland Road roundabout.

Cycle storage will also be required at a ratio of 0.5 spaces per flat, therefore equating to a minimum provision of 2 spaces. These spaces should be secure, conveniently located and equipped with Sheffield type stands. This will need to be illustrated on submitted plans.

Refuse storage should be provided and be located so that the collection of waste does not impact on Northumberland Avenue/Cressingham Road. This has not been illustrated on plans. Storage and collection areas must not obstruct the access to the site or hinder manoeuvrability of vehicles.

Environmental Protection

A noise assessment should be submitted in support of applications for new residential development proposed in noisy areas. The proposed site is located close to a moderately busy road. It may be possible through clever design to reduce the need for additional noise mitigation measures, for example, ensuring that noise sensitive rooms are located on the quieter facades and bathrooms, kitchens, hallways and cupboards etc on the noisiest facades.

Noise mitigation is likely to focus on the weak point in the structure; glazing. Given that the acoustic integrity would be compromised should the windows be opened, ventilation details also must be provided, where mitigation relies on closed windows. Ventilation measures should be selected which do not allow unacceptable noise ingress and should provide sufficient ventilation to avoid the need to open windows in hot weather, however non-openable windows are not considered an acceptable solution due to the impact on living standards. The mitigation measures shall be installed in accordance with the approved specifications prior to occupation.

To minimise the disturbance by noise of future residential occupiers of the flats and its effect on neighbouring residents, residential accommodation must be designed and constructed or converted so as to achieve the insulation requirements set out in Building Regulations Approved Document E.

We commonly receive complaints about noise and dust caused by construction and demolition works, particularly working outside reasonable hours and about smoke from bonfires associated with the burning of waste on site of minor developments. Construction, demolition and associated activities should be restricted to between the hours of 08:00hrs to 18:00hrs Mondays to Fridays, and 09:00hrs to 13:00hrs on Saturdays, with no noisy works taking place at any time on Sundays and Bank or Statutory Holidays. There should be no burning of waste on the site.

Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance

The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Planning Policy Framework

Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2008)

Policy CS1 - Sustainable Construction and Design

Policy CS2 - Waste Minimisation

Policy CS4 - Accessibility and the Intensity of Development

Policy CS5 - Inclusive Access

Policy CS7 - Design and the Public Realm

Policy CS14 - Provision of Housing

Policy CS15 - Location, Accessibility, Density and Housing Mix

Policy CS18 - Residential Conversions

Policy CS24 - Car/Cycle Parking

Policy CS26 - Network and Hierarchy of Centres

Policy CS31 - Additional and Existing Community Facilities

Policy CS33 - Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

Policy CS38 - Trees, Hedges and Woodlands

Sites and Detailed Policies Document (2012)

Policy SD1 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Policy DM4 - Safeguarding Amenity

Policy DM6 - Affordable Housing

Policy DM8 - Residential Conversions

Policy DM10 - Private and Communal Outdoor Space

Policy DM12 - Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

Policy DM13 - Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres

Policy DM18 - Tree Planting

Policy SA15 - District and Local Centres

Supplementary Planning Document - Residential Conversions (2013)

Supplementary Planning Document - Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

Appraisal

The main issues to be considered are:

- a) Principle of development
- b) Design and impact on the character of the site and surrounding area
- c) Amenity of future occupiers
- d) Impact on neighbouring amenities
- e) Transport
- f) Community use
- g) Affordable housing and CIL
- h) Submitting a planning application

a) Principle of development

The NPPF states that LPAs should encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed, provided that it is not of high environmental value. The proposal seeks to ensure that a building of local significance is put back into active use, a means of ensuring that it can be maintained in a good condition. Subject to demonstration that the loss of a building in community use is justified, the principle of the development is acceptable. However, regard must be had for the relevant planning policies as identified above. The appraisal below identifies a number of issues with the proposed development which should be addressed prior to the submission of any future application.

b) Design and impact on the character of the site and surrounding area

Policy CS7 of the Core Strategy states that all development must be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area. Policy CS33 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will only be granted where development has no adverse impact on historic assets and their settings. All proposals will be expected to protect and where appropriate enhance the character and appearance of the area in which they are located.

Whitley Library was locally listed in September 2018. The listing notes the local significance of the building, purpose built for community use with a distinctive frontage

with a number characterful features. The listing notes that all windows have been replaced in uPVC and other elevations of the main building are devoid of architectural detailing. The listing also notes that the extended part is not of architectural or historic interest and that interior of the building is largely 'institutionalised' with few surviving features.

The proposed conversion would be facilitated by minor elevational alterations and a slight increase in height of the later extended part. The proposed alterations are considered to be sensitive in design, with the distinctive frontage of the main building remaining unaltered. The alterations are contained solely to the rear of the building and to the later extended part, which are of little architectural or historic merit. This is considered appropriate and is acceptable. The proposed alterations do not increase the footprint of the building, but the increase in roof height facilitates a more functional use of the space. The increase in roof height and the elevational alterations are not considered to detract from the original buildings appearance, or cause harm to the character of the surrounding area.

While no significant alterations are proposed to the distinctive front façade, it is considered that the proposed conversion would provide opportunity for further restoration of the building. Brickwork, while in a generally good state, has been tarnished by dirt and pollution. The cleaning of the brickwork and stone detailing would improve the appearance of the building considerably. The proposed fenestration and other openings should be of materials selected to match the existing as closely as possible. Details of materials should be provided with any future application.

c) Amenity of future occupiers

Each flat would have an independent access, with entry achieved into a private hallway. Adequate ventilation and daylight is available to all rooms, and all habitable rooms would benefit from an external window. Each flat benefits from an acceptable dual aspect, and internal floor space standards are achieved. Due to the proximity to the road, it would be preferable for the bedroom in flat 3 to be located to the rear. The layout of rooms is otherwise considered to be acceptable. The control of noise between dwellings would be subject to compliance with the relevant building regulations. On this basis, the proposal is generally in accordance with Policy DM4 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document.

Of concern is the lack of private outdoor amenity space that has been provided within the site. Policy DM10 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document states that one bedroom flats should be provided with 25sqm outdoor amenity space. It is considered that there may be scope to provide formal outdoor amenity space to the rear of the building.

In accordance with the consultation response from Environmental Protection, there is concern that future occupants would be subject to unacceptable external noise. Accordingly, any future application should include an assessment of noise impact on the development, with ventilation details also provided. Mitigation measures would be secured by condition prior to the occupation of any future development.

d) Impact on neighbouring amenities

Neither the conversion of the building nor the minor elevational alterations are considered to cause harm to the amenity of neighbouring owners and occupiers. A sufficient distance is maintained to the neighbouring dwellings and the residential use of the building is not considered to be any more harmful than the use of the building for community purposes. Any noise issues that might arise as a result of the conversion could reasonably be controlled by separate Environmental Health legislation. The proposal is therefore in accordance with Policy DM4 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document.

e) Transport

The site is located at a busy roundabout junction, with on-street parking restrictions in place. Located within Zone 3 of the Council's Parking Standards and Design SPD, the development is required to provide one parking space per one bedroom flat. The proposed on-site parking provision is therefore acceptable in this regard. As per the consultation response from Transport Development Control, each parking space should meet the required space and manoeuvrability standards.

Any future application should demonstrate visibility splays of 2.4m x 90m. A new dropped kerb would require a licence. Any relocation costs would be met by the applicant. Full details should also accompany any future submission.

Details of bicycle and bin storage should also accompany any future application.

f) Community use

Policy CS31 of the Core Strategy states that proposals for the redevelopment of existing community facilities for non-community uses will not be permitted, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there is no longer a need to retain that facility. As detailed in the local listing, the building was purpose built for community use, opening as a library in 1935 until relocation of the facility during the summer of 2018. The site is a significant local landmark and is of considerable community significance.

It is acknowledged that the library has now relocated to South Reading Community Hub, a short distance from the site, and that the building is currently vacant. Any future application should therefore justify the loss of a community asset.

g) Affordable housing and CIL

The Council's most recently adopted approach to Policy DM6 (Affordable Housing) includes the following:

"To implement Policy DM6 as currently adopted in the SDPD but excluding proposals that solely involve the conversion of an existing property, where the conversion involves the provision of 10 or less dwelling units (i.e. not HMOs), or the replacement of dwellings by the same number of replacement dwellings where there is no net increase."

The proposal is for the conversion of an existing building and therefore on the basis of the above amendment to Policy DM6, the proposal is not considered to require an affordable housing contribution.

h) Submitting a planning application

The Council's Planning Application Validation Information Requirements document should be read prior to submitting an application. This document can be found on the Reading Borough Council website at: www.reading.gov.uk

The following is required should an application be submitted:

- Correct fee
- Correct application form and certificates
- Site Location with the application site outline in red, to a scale of 1:1250 showing at least two road names
- Block Plan showing the proposed development to a scale of 1:200
- Noise Assessment and details of ventilation

- Vehicle parking, access, cycle and refuse storage and details of collection
- Details of materials
- Heritage statement
- Justification for the loss of a community use

Additional Advice

I would recommend you contact the Building Control Department in order to obtain their comments in respect of your proposal on 01189 372 449.