



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 August 2017

by S M Holden BSc MSc CEng MICE TPP FCIHT MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 24 August 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/17/3175877

Unit 1, The Portman Centre, 37-45 Loverock Road, Reading RG30 1DZ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr S Kachwaha against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 170034, dated 10 January 2017, was refused by notice dated 28 April 2017.
 - The development proposed is a change of use of existing commercial premises from Class B1 offices and light industrial use to Class "Sui Generis" vehicle motor trade sales showroom.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether or not the proposal would result in an unacceptable loss of employment floorspace.

Reasons

3. The Portman Road Core Employment Area is characterised by a mix of commercial uses. The appeal site is a small unit within a metal clad industrial building. Its lawful use is Class B1 offices/light industrial and the application seeks to change it to Sui Generis in order to provide a vehicle motor trade sales showroom.
4. Policy CS11 of the Reading Borough Local Development Core Strategy (Core Strategy) seeks to retain employment land within Core Employment Areas in order to protect the local economy. The policy resists any loss of employment land in those designated areas and no criteria are suggested to make an exception that would justify a change of use. The appellant contends that some changes of use from employment to Sui Generis have been allowed over the years, demonstrating that the Council has taken a flexible approach to the retention of such facilities. However, from what I have read it appears that most of these took place prior to the adoption of the Core Strategy.
5. Policy CS12 of the Core Strategy seeks to maintain a variety of premises throughout the Borough and the loss of small units should be offset by new provision. As a modest sized unit the appeal premises is particularly valuable for a start-up or small growing business. Its loss without any compensatory provision would therefore be contrary to this policy.
6. Policy SA12 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Sites and Detailed Policies Document (Detailed Policies Document) defines the Core

- Employment Areas. The supporting text suggests that some Sui Generis uses can be included in these areas in addition to offices, industry and storage and distribution (use classes B1, B2 and B8). However, it specifically excludes vehicle dealerships, which it considers are more flexible in their locational requirements.
7. I note that permission was granted in 2016 for a dog day-care centre, grooming parlour and boarding kennels. However, although I have no specific details of that scheme, the Council assessed that such uses could only be accommodated on industrial land. It was therefore judged to be a special case. This would not apply for a change of use to a vehicle dealership.
 8. Although the unit was vacant at the time of my site visit, the application form stated that it was occupied when the application was submitted. There was no evidence to suggest that the unit had been vacant for any prolonged period over recent years. Neither did it appear that any marketing exercise had been undertaken to demonstrate that there was no demand for the unit from businesses requiring B1 floor space. There is therefore no substantive evidence to suggest that the unit could not be occupied for a B1 use.
 9. It is evident that Portman Road is developed on both sides with a variety of mixed uses including out of town shopping. However, the area which is designated as the Core Employment Area lies to the north of Portman Road and it is this specific area to which the policies resisting the loss of employment land apply. The proximity of the appeal site to other areas that are the subject of regeneration and development is therefore not a matter of significant weight in assessing the appeal proposal against the relevant policies.
 10. The appeal premises is one of the smallest available in the area and could be used for the storage of goods associated with a light industrial use. In such uses it would probably employ a similar number of people to the appeal proposal. However, these factors do not constitute a justification of changing the use of the building from B1. Similarly, it is not necessary to change the use of the appeal premises in order to encourage a diversity of uses in the area as a B1 unit could provide accommodation for a wide variety of commercial activities.
 11. The Council has granted planning permissions which have resulted in a net increase in the amount of B1/B8 floorspace within the Core Employment Area. However, this appears to be in line with its policy of encouraging and supporting the local economy, rather than a justification for permitting changes of use from B1 in other parts of the area. I appreciate that some premises elsewhere in the Borough, that might previously have been suitable for vehicle dealerships, may have been lost to housing development. However, I can give this assertion little weight in my determination of the appeal in the absence of specific evidence to demonstrate that no other suitable sites are available.
 12. Taking all these factors into account I conclude that the proposed change of use would result in the unacceptable loss of employment land contrary to Policies CS11 and CS12 of the Core Strategy and Policy SA12 of the Detailed Policies Document.
 13. For this reason, and having regard to all other relevant matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR