



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 March 2022

by Rachael Pipkin BA (Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 March 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/21/3278190

66 Berkeley Avenue, Reading RG1 6HY

- 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 Dr Rabhinder Mittal against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 210116, dated 22 January 2021, was refused by notice dated 23 June 2021.
 - The development proposed is change of use from hotel to health clinic with associated alterations, new parking and entrance path for clinic.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on highway safety.

Reasons

3. The appeal proposal relates to the change of use of a vacant property located on the northern side of the A4, Berkeley Avenue. Access to the property would be off Upcross Way, a private road with gated access to a residential development close to the appeal site entrance. Berkeley Avenue is subject to a 30 miles per hour speed limit and there are double yellow lines and 'No waiting at any time' restrictions are in place.
4. The Council has adopted parking standards set out within the Revised Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document (2011) (the SPD). This takes a zonal approach to parking requirements, radiating from the centre of Reading based on the density of developments and access to public transport. The appeal site lies within the designated Zone 2, Primary Core Area. Typically, this zone is well served by public transport, including buses and within walking distance of railway stations.
5. For clinics and health centres, the SPD sets out a maximum parking requirement of 2.5 spaces per clinical room plus 1 space for each full time equivalent (FTE) staff. The proposed clinic would provide 6 clinical rooms and would employ 6 FTE staff. This would give rise to a maximum parking requirement of 21 spaces.
6. The proposal would be for a private clinic with pre-booked and timed appointments. It would offer a range of medical services including counselling/psychotherapy, acupuncture, physio, rehab therapies, minor operations and nursing care. I agree with the appellant that these would

essentially be individual appointments rather than group sessions. Appointment times would also last between 30 minute and 1 hour and the appellant has stated that there would be a gap between appointments so that patients will have left the site before the next patient arrives.

7. I accept that on this basis the proposed development would be more akin to a GP surgery as argued by the appellant. For GP or dental surgeries, the SPD requires 1.5 spaces per consulting room and 1 space per general practitioner. Based on this, the maximum parking requirement would be 15 parking spaces.
8. The appeal site can accommodate parking for 9 vehicles and would fall short of the requirement for a GP surgery. The appellant has proposed measures to reduce the need for on-site car parking. This includes making no provision for staff parking with the expectation that staff would access the site via alternative means as well as a discount on treatment for patients who do not use the car to access the facility.
9. The site is served by bus stops, those with frequent services to and from the town centre are some 500m away on Bath Road, whilst less frequent services are accessed from a stop some 300m away. It is likely that some staff and users of the facility would come by bus. In addition, the National Cycle Route runs along the site frontage. With on-site cycle parking, staff facilities for changing and incentives for staff to encourage travel to work by bicycle or alternative non-motorised means, it is feasible that some staff will travel by means other than the private car. However, this does not remove the requirement to provide some staff parking.
10. The proposed measures to encourage travel to the site by alternative means to the private car are noted and recognised as a positive aspect of the scheme. However, they may not be practical and they would not be enforceable as part of any planning permission.
11. I appreciate that the parking requirements are a maximum. However, I do not have sufficient evidence to conclude that the parking generated by the proposal would be likely to fall below the 15 spaces sought by the Council.
12. With inadequate on site car parking, it is likely that overspill parking would occur. With restrictions along Berkeley Avenue this may give rise to parking on Upcross Way. However, as only a short stretch of this road is accessible, this could result in parking close to its junction with Berkeley Avenue where I observed there is a dropped kerb as well as the cycle lane running adjacent to the kerb. With vehicles parked here, they could obstruct the pedestrian crossing, reduce visibility, particularly for vehicles emerging from Upcross Way, as well as block other vehicles turning into Upcross Way which could harm the free flow of traffic along Berkeley Avenue.
13. As Upcross Way is a private road it would not be possible for dangerous parking along this road to be enforced against. This would increase the risk of conflict between users of the highway. In addition, parking along this road could block the entrance gates to the residential development served by Upcross Way which would both inconvenience occupants of this development and may give rise to safety issues.
14. The appellant has drawn my attention to recently completed facilities of a similar scale or location where on average 1.1 parking spaces were provided

per clinical room. However, I do not have the full details of these schemes and whether they give rise to similar overspill parking or whether there are surrounding streets that can accommodate overspill parking which does not exist here. These other schemes do not therefore alter my findings.

15. I appreciate that the appellant had originally proposed 10 parking spaces and reduced this in order to maintain the front garden. However, even if 10 spaces were to be provided, this would still not be adequate to avoid any harm arising from overspill parking.
16. The adequacy of the junction to serve the number of vehicles accessing the proposed development is not an issue. The layout of the on-site parking proposed would also enable cars to enter and exit the site in forward gear thereby avoiding any reversing off the site onto the adjacent road.
17. There are plans to make Bath Road a mass rapid transit route from a park and ride area and the appeal site would be within 500m of this. However, this is not in place as yet and the appeal proposal must be assessed on the current circumstances of the site.
18. I conclude the proposed development would not provide an adequate level of car parking. This would be likely to lead to overspill parking which would increase the risk of conflict between road users, thus harming highway safety. It would therefore conflict with Policies TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 which together only permit development that would not have a material detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network or the safety of users of that network and to provide car and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of the location.

Other Matters

19. The scheme would bring a vacant building back into use. It would also update the building and improve its energy efficiency and appearance, which the appellant has suggested would be subsequently maintained in order to maintain the appeal of the business to its customers. Whilst this is not disputed, planning permission has recently been granted for the subdivision of the property into 4 residential flats which would deliver a similar benefit. Thus, whilst I acknowledge the benefit, I only give it limited weight on the basis that there is an alternative proposal that is approved that would deliver this.
20. The proposal would also provide employment opportunities and a number of community benefits in providing health services to the community and helping to address the backlog of NHS care. All of these are benefits of the scheme that weigh in its favour. However, they do not outweigh the harm that would arise through the inadequate provision of on site car parking to serve the development.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons set out above, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Rachael Pipkin

INSPECTOR