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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 June 2025

by **SE Hughes BA (Hons) PGDip MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 July 2025

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**Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/25/3359304**

**74 School Road, Tilehurst, Reading RG31 4AW**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by Mr Nick Edwards against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
  - The application Ref is PL/24/0858.
  - The development proposed is the conversion of a Class E office to 2no flats C3 to first floor areas.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development on the application form refers to a first-floor conversion. However, I have determined the appeal on the basis of the submitted plans and written evidence which clearly indicate the development would comprise the conversion of the rear, ground floor area of the property to a one-bedroom, ground floor flat.
3. Although I had arranged to view the site unaccompanied, the appellant allowed me to view the proposed flat from the inside. I was able to see that the front of the property was occupied by 'Beechwood Mortgages' and that the rear of the property was vacant.

### Main Issues

4. The main issues in this appeal are the effect of the proposal on:
  - the character of the district centre including the functionality of the retained commercial unit;
  - the living conditions of the occupiers of the proposed flat, with particular regard to noise and disturbance, sunlight and daylight; and
  - whether the proposal makes appropriate provision for affordable housing.

### Reasons

#### *District centre and functionality*

5. The appeal site is located in Tilehurst Triangle district centre. The area is characterised by its variety of shops, food outlets and commercial uses with an absence of residential uses at the ground floor. As such, despite its rear positioning, the proposed ground floor residential unit and its associated amenity area would appear out of place.

6. Policy RL1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (RBLP) seeks to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of Tilehurst Triangle district centre. In addition, Policy RL3 of the RBLP identifies the property's ground floor street frontage as being a key frontage, which the policy seeks to maintain with an appropriate mix of 'centre uses'. Criterion (b) of Policy RL3 indicates that there should be no net loss of 'centre uses' for 'non-centre uses', including residential uses at the ground floor (apart from entrances to upper floors) except in 'exceptional circumstances'.
7. Whilst the property's shop frontage would be maintained, the change of use would withdraw the rear part of the commercial unit from the district centre, replacing it with a residential use. The proposal would therefore result in a net loss of 'centre uses'.
8. The appellant argues that the rear ground floor area is underutilised and that by repurposing it to a dwelling, it will regenerate the site. However, no viability or marketing evidence, nor evidence of any 'exceptional circumstances', has been provided to persuade me that the rear unit could not accommodate a 'centre use' in keeping with the area and the provisions of the development plan.
9. Moreover, the proposed residential change of use to the rear ground floor area would restrict direct access to the service yard. This would limit the type of future users of the front commercial unit, as it would not have an accessible space for refuse storage or deliveries.
10. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the proposal would harm the character of the district centre and would restrict the functionality of the retained commercial unit.
11. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policy CC7 which requires development to respond positively to its local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, and RBLP Policies RL1 and RL3 which together require proposals to maintain the vitality and viability of centres.

#### *Living conditions*

12. The flat would be close to the service yard and the access into the service area for 76 School Road. The appellant asserts the proposed development would incorporate measures such as sound insulation to ensure future occupants are not adversely affected by noise or disturbance from activity within the rear service yard. However, in the absence of detailed information, I am unable to conclusively determine the efficacy of such measures.
13. Furthermore, with the comings and goings of cars and delivery vehicles and the like on three sides, the outside amenity area would not be a calm space in which to relax. Therefore, I conclude that the flat's occupants would be exposed to unacceptable noise and disturbance.
14. Whilst there would be no overshadowing, the proposed flat is north facing so would not receive any sunlight through its north facing window and a transom window which I saw had been installed above the entrance door. Coupled with its unfavourable orientation I observed that the flat's depth has resulted in the rear area being dark and gloomy. Whilst I accept that a window on the west elevation and/or rooflights could help resolve this, based on the design shown on the

submitted plans, the flat would not receive sufficient light to ensure it would not be oppressive for its occupant.

15. In view of the above, having particular regard to noise and disturbance and sunlight and daylight, I conclude that the proposed development would fail to deliver adequate living conditions for future occupiers.
16. The proposed development would therefore fail to accord with Policy CC8 of the RBLP which requires new residential development to provide a quality living environment for future occupants in terms of noise and disturbance and access to sunlight and daylight.

### *Affordable Housing*

17. Policy H3 of the RBLP states that developments of one to four dwellings are required to provide a financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough. This policy is not consistent with paragraph 65 of the National Planning Policy Framework which indicates that the provision of affordable housing should not be sought for residential developments that are not major developments, other than in designated rural areas. However, the RBLP and the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (AHSPD) explain that that there are exceptional circumstances in terms of affordability and housing need in Reading that justify the local approach.
18. In line with Reading's approach above, the appellant indicates they are preparing a Unilateral Undertaking (UU) to secure an appropriate contribution towards affordable housing provision. However, the UU was not made available during the appeal. Given that I have found the development to be harmful in other respects it has not been necessary to go back to the appellant on this matter.
19. Therefore, in the absence of a signed UU, I have concluded that the proposal would not make appropriate provision for affordable housing. As such, the proposal would fail to accord with policies H3 and CC9 of the RBLP which require the proposal make provision for affordable housing.

### **Other Matters**

20. Although the proposal would make a positive contribution to Reading's housing supply, whilst also retaining a commercial use to the front, given the policy conflict I have identified above, this benefit would be insufficient to counter the harm I have found elsewhere. This is equally the case, in respect of the proposal's beneficial proximity to local amenities including the neighbouring newsagent.
21. With regards to the examples of similar consented planning applications and mixed-use development in Reading, they have a different site context to the appeal proposal. Furthermore, I do not have full details of the circumstances that led to planning permission being granted so I cannot be sure that they represent a direct parallel to the appeal proposal. For example, 114-116 School Road does not have a key frontage thus the provisions of Policy RL3(b) of the RBLP would not apply.

### **Conclusion**

22. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations which outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given the appeal should be dismissed.

*SE Hughes*

INSPECTOR