

# Agenda Item 12.

Application Number	Expiry Date	Parish	Ward
190618	20 June 2019	Earley	Hawkedon

<b>Applicant</b>	Kate Bessant of Reading Almshouses Charity
<b>Site Address</b>	Liberty of Earley House, Strand Way, Earley RG6 4EA
<b>Proposal</b>	Full application for the change of use from Aged Care Facility to residential (all affordable), the creation of six new apartments (36no flats in total) through conversion of part of existing communal areas, provision of communal lounge, managers officer and visitor room and the addition of 8no car park spaces
<b>Type</b>	Full
<b>PS Category</b>	1
<b>Officer</b>	Simon Taylor
<b>Reason for determination by committee</b>	Major application comprising of more than 10 dwellings

<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Planning Committee on Wednesday 12 June 2019
<b>REPORT PREPARED BY</b>	Assistant Director – Place

<b>SUMMARY</b>
<p>Liberty of Earley House was constructed as a 30-room aged care home for the elderly in 1990 as part of the late 1980s development of residential housing in the area. The building was purchased by Reading Almshouses Charity in 2018 and all existing residents have since vacated the building.</p> <p>Reading Almshouses Charity is a not for profit organisation providing affordable accommodation for persons of good character, in need of accommodation and who have resided within 20 miles of Reading Town Centre (St Mary's Church, St Mary's Butts) for at least three years. Daily management is delegated by the charity to paid employees.</p> <p>Consistent with the operations of their two other almshouses in Whitley (44 flats) and Reading Town Centre (27 flats), the accommodation is unfurnished and the units are self-contained but there is a communal lounge (which can be used for social activities). Residents are expected to sign a licence requiring payment of a Monthly Maintenance Charge (MMC), which is no more than 80% of market rent. They are also required to give one month notice of departure and would not be asked to leave unless the MMC is not paid, they cannot live independently or they act in an antisocial manner.</p> <p>The subject application involves the internal refurbishment of the building, including the conversion of the existing 30 care rooms to self-contained studio and 1-bedroom flats and the conversion of existing meeting rooms, offices and kitchen to provide six additional self-contained flats as well as the retention of a lounge room, front office and communal laundry, six additional car spaces within the existing car park and provision of bin storage.</p> <p>The principle of the development is acceptable, including from a housing perspective and in terms of implications for traffic/parking and landscaping, with eight additional car parking spaces in the existing car parking accommodated with only minimal tree removal and replacement where removal is required. There are no additional adverse</p>

impacts upon neighbouring residents and the internal and external amenity afforded to residents within the development is acceptable. The application is recommended for approval, subject to the finalisation of a legal agreement to secure the operation of the almshouses as affordable housing and pre commencement Conditions 3-8 requiring additional details relating to landscaping, bin storage and collection, car parking, cycle parking, construction management and sound insulation.

#### **PLANNING STATUS**

- Major Development Location
- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (7km buffer)
- Sand and gravel extraction consultation zone
- Flood Zone 1
- Non-classified road

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the committee authorise the GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION subject to the following:**

- A. Completion of a legal agreement to secure the provision of 100% affordable housing, the limitation of single occupancy for some units and the use of the visitor room**
- B. Conditions and informatives:**

##### **Conditions**

1) Timescale

The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

*Reason: In pursuance of s.91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by s.51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).*

2) Approved details

This permission is in respect of the floor plans numbered SY 3 and SY 4, both dated January 2019 and received by the local planning authority on 4 March 2019 and the block plan numbered SY 10C and car park plan numbered SY 18C, dated May 2019 and received 30 May 2019. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless other minor variations are agreed in writing after the date of this permission and before implementation with the Local Planning Authority.

*Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.*

3) Landscaping details

Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, details of landscaping, including replacement trees, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. It is to include the planting of a minimum of

five trees as replacements for trees lost within the carpark and 1.0m hedging between the carpark and Units 15, 33 and 34 to limit headlight glare. The plan is to specify species, planting sizes, spacing and numbers of trees/shrubs to be planted, and any existing trees or shrubs to be retained.

Planting shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the building(s). Any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the date of the planting (or within a period of 5 years of the occupation of the buildings in the case of retained trees and shrubs) die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species or otherwise as approved in writing by the local planning authority.

*Reason: To ensure adequate planting in the interests of visual amenity.*

*Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21.*

4) Bin storage and collection details

Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, details of bin storage and collection shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. This shall include elevations of the bin storage area, access routes from the front entrance and details of a kerbside collection area and arrangements for collection. The bin storage area and collection area shall be constructed in accordance with the approved details before the flats are occupied and permanently so-retained and used for no purpose other than the temporary storage of refuse and recyclable materials.

*Reason: In the interests of visual and neighbouring amenities and functional development, to ensure the efficient collection of waste materials whilst avoiding highway obstruction and loss of visual amenity and in the interests of a functional development, the character of the area, highway safety and convenience and the quality of the pedestrian environment.*

*Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP1, CP3 and CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC04.*

5) Car Parking Management Plan

No development shall commence until a Car Park Management Plan (CPMP) has been submitted and approved in writing by the local planning authority. As a minimum, the CPMP shall outline the provision of unallocated parking for all residents and the manager, methods of ensuring that the spaces remain unallocated and will remain in force for the life of the development and the implementation of signage outlining that the eight car spaces alongside the building (adjacent to Units 15, 33 and 34) are to be front in parking only. The CPMP shall be implemented before the flats are brought into use and retained in perpetuity.

*Reason: To ensure adequate on-site parking provision in the interests of highway and pedestrian safety, convenience and amenity.*

*Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP3 and CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.*

6) Cycle and mobility parking details

Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, details of secure and covered bicycle and mobility scooter storage (with power) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall not be occupied until the storage has been provided in full accordance with the approved details, shall thereafter be retained in accordance with the approved details and shall remain available for the storage of cycles and mobility scooters at all times.

*Reason: To ensure that secure weather-proof bicycle and mobility scooter parking facilities is provided so as to encourage the use of sustainable modes of travel.*

*Relevant policy: NPPF Section 9 and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 and CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.*

7) Construction method statement

Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Construction Method Statement shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved Statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period and include, as a minimum, the following:

- a) the parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors
- b) loading and unloading of plant and materials
- c) storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development
- d) the erection and maintenance of security hoarding including decorative displays and facilities for public viewing, where appropriate
- e) wheel washing facilities
- f) measures to control the emission of dust and dirt during construction
- g) a scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from demolition and construction works

*Reason: In the interests of highway safety and convenience and neighbour amenities.*

*Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP3 and CP6.*

8) Sound insulation details

Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a scheme for protecting the internal amenity of the bedrooms of Units 1, 32, 34 and 36 from the adjoining potentially intrusive noise sources shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority. All works which form part of the approved scheme shall be completed before the respective units are occupied.

*Reason: To ensure satisfactory noise attenuation measures are installed.*

*Relevant policy: NPPF Section 15, Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC06.*

9) Hours of work

No work relating to the development hereby approved, including works of demolition or preparation prior to building operations, shall take place other than between the hours of 08:00 and 18:00 Monday to Friday and 08:00 to 13:00 Saturdays and at no time on Sundays or Bank or National Holidays.

*Reason: To protect the occupiers of neighbouring properties from noise and disturbance outside the permitted hours during the construction period.*

*Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC06.*

10) Car parking

None of the units hereby permitted shall be occupied until the vehicle parking has been provided in accordance with the approved plans. The parking shall be permanently maintained and remain available for the parking of vehicles at all times.

*Reason: To ensure adequate on-site parking provision, including disabled parking, in the interests of highway safety, convenience and amenity. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP3 & CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.*

11) Permeable surfacing

The additional hard surfacing within the car park and the pedestrian pathway along the western side of the building hereby approved shall be constructed from porous materials or provision shall be made to direct water run-off from the hard surface to a permeable or porous area within the curtilage of the development, and the hard surfacing shall thereafter be so-maintained.

*Reason: To prevent increased flood risk from surface water run-off.*

*Relevant policy: NPPF Section 14 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC09 and CC10.*

12) Single occupancy units

Units 7, 9, 15, 23, 24, 30, 33, 34 and 36 as specified on the approved plans are to be let and occupied as single occupancy units only and maintained as such for the life of the development.

*Reason: To protect the internal amenity afforded to occupants of these units.*

*Relevant policy: Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard, Core Strategy Policies CP1 and CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy TB05.*

13) Retention of trees and shrubs

No trees, shrubs or hedges within the site which are shown as being retained on the approved plans shall be felled, uprooted wilfully damaged or destroyed, cut back in any way or removed without previous written consent of the local planning authority; any trees, shrubs or hedges removed without consent or dying or being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within 5 years from the

completion of the development hereby permitted shall be replaced with trees, shrubs or hedge plants of similar size and species unless the local planning authority gives written consent to any variation.

*Reason: To secure the protection throughout the time that development is being carried out, of trees, shrubs and hedges growing within the site which are of amenity value to the area.*

*Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21.*

14) Gates

Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (or any Order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification), no gates or barriers shall be erected on the shared vehicular access hereby permitted.

*Reason: To assist in the integration of the development into character and community of the area.*

*Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3, and Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document.*

**Informatives**

1) Section 106 agreement

This permission should be read in conjunction with the legal agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act dated # June 2019, the obligations in which relate to this development.

2) Thames Water

Thames Water will aim to provide customers with a minimum pressure of 10m head (approximately 1 bar) and a flow rate of 9 litres/minute at the point where it leaves Thames Waters pipes. The developer should take account of this minimum pressure in the design of the proposed development.

3) Pre commencement conditions

The applicant is reminded that this approval is granted subject to conditions which must be complied with prior to the development starting on site. Commencement of the development without complying with the pre-commencement requirements may be outside the terms of this permission and liable to enforcement action. The information required should be formally submitted to the Council for consideration with the relevant fee. Once the details have been approved in writing the development should be carried out only in accordance with those details. If this is not clear please contact the case officer to discuss.

4) Changes to the approved plans

The applicant is reminded that should there be any change from the approved drawings during the build of the development this may require a fresh planning

application if the changes differ materially from the approved details. Non-material changes may be formalised by way of an application under s.96A Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

5) Protected species

This permission does not convey or imply any approval or consent required under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for protected species. The applicant is advised to contact Natural England with regard to any protected species that may be found on the site.

6) Discussion

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received. This planning application has been the subject of positive and proactive discussions with the applicant in terms of addressing conflicts between existing trees and parking spaces. The decision to grant planning permission in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF is considered to be a positive outcome of these discussions.

<b>PLANNING HISTORY</b>		
<b>App Number</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Decision</b>
23138 and 23139	Residential development (outline)	Approved 13 April 1985
34418	Residential care home for the elderly	Approved 28 June 1990
F/2011/1070	Extension to ground floor lounge	Approved 14 July 2011

<b>SUMMARY INFORMATION</b>	
Land use – existing	Aged care facility (Class C2)
Land use – proposed	Residential flats (Class C3)
Parking spaces – existing	16
Parking spaces – proposed	24
Number of units – existing	30 aged care units
Number of units – proposed	36 self-contained affordable housing units
Site area	0.55 hectares
Number of affordable units	36 (100%)
Density	65 dwellings per hectare

<b>CONSULTATION RESPONSES</b>	
WBC Highways	No objection, subject to pre commencement conditions requiring cycle and mobility storage, a Car parking Management Plan and a Construction Method Statement (Conditions 5-7).
WBC Trees and Landscaping	No objection to the revised car parking layout and compliance with the arboricultural details (Condition 3).
WBC Economic Prosperity and Place	Initial concerns are raised in relation to the demand for such facilities but no objection is raised.
WBC Drainage	No objection.
WBC Ecology	
WBC Cleaner and Greener	

Thames Water	No objections are raised as there is sufficient surface water network, foul water, water network and water treatment infrastructure capacity.
WBC Health and Wellbeing	No comments received.
WBC Education	
WBC Health	
Southern Gas Networks	
National Grid	
SSE Power Distribution	
Berkshire Fire Service	
Thames Valley Police	
NHS Wokingham	

<b>REPRESENTATIONS</b>	
Earley Parish Council	<p>Objections are raised on the grounds that the facility appears to be intended for people requiring care and due to inadequate car parking.</p> <p><u>Officer comment:</u> There are no objections in relation to the use and provision of on-site parking, as discussed in 'Principle of Development' and 'Access and Movement' respectively. A Car Parking Management Plan is also required by Condition 5. The units are self-contained and residents that require care will not be accommodated.</p>
Local Members	No comments received.
Neighbours	<p>Submissions were received from the following properties:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) 9 Strand Way, Earley RG6 4BU</li> <li>2) 14 Strand Way, Earley RG6 4BU</li> <li>3) 18 Strand Way, Earley RG6 4BU</li> <li>4) 14 Regent Close, Earley RG6 4EZ</li> </ol> <p>The submissions raised the following concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unwarranted change of use</li> <li>• Unreliable data relating to a lack of need for care homes</li> <li>• Reading Council have demonstrated a lack of need</li> </ul> <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The principle of the change of use is acceptable, as discussed in 'Principle of Development'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of on-site parking</li> </ul> <p><u>Officer comment:</u> There are no objections in relation to the provision of on-site parking, as discussed in 'Principle of Development' and 'Access and Movement' respectively. A Car Parking Management Plan is required by Condition 5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic congestion and lack of road width leading to obstructions</li> </ul>



	<p><u>Officer comment:</u> The Council's Highways Officer does not raise any objection on traffic grounds. Refer to 'Access and Movement'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of occupants has not been provided</li> </ul> <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The number of occupants is not required to be specified but the units consist of studio spaces or one bedroom (which can be double occupancy). This results in a maximum resident population of 64 people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of school places and GPs</li> </ul> <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The application is not subject to a Community Infrastructure Levy because it involves the provision of affordable housing and is operated by a registered charity. Notwithstanding, the proposal is tailored to a localised population, which will lessen any pressure on existing services. Furthermore, the Council's Education Officer has been consulted and not raised any objection to the application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wokingham Council has already outlined support</li> </ul> <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The proposal was subject to a pre application where advice was sought and provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents may have police records</li> <li>• Is not financially viable</li> </ul> <p><u>Officer comment:</u> These are not relevant planning consideration although it is worth noting that residents are to be of good character (as determined by the charity) to be accepted into the accommodation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some residents will be affiliated to the Church of England and over 55 years</li> </ul> <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The building will be operated by Reading Almshouses Charity, who are entitled to place criteria on prospective tenants as part of the not for profit arrangements. It is understood that neither of the above requirements would be applied within this scheme. This is discussed in 'Principle of Development'.</p>
--	---

<b>APPLICANTS POINTS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The existing care home is not financially viable</li> <li>• Liberty of Earley House represents a very good fit with the applicant's criteria, in terms of location and accommodation provided. Detailed accommodation surveys have demonstrated that the existing building can, with only minor internal modifications,</li> <li>• The Almshouses are not a nursing home or a care home, and residents must be capable of independent living</li> </ul>

- All accommodation is made available at a subsidised rent, normally at 80% of the open market rent, although that is the maximum that is charged and some are lower depending on individual circumstances
- The Council's own research identifies a clear and present need for affordable housing within the Borough
- It is expected that the great majority of the residents that will occupy Liberty of Earley House will come from within Wokingham Borough area
- In terms of car parking, the existing Liberty of Earley House requires the provision of 15 unallocated parking spaces

<b>PLANNING POLICY</b>		
National Policy	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
Adopted Core Strategy DPD 2010	CP1	Sustainable Development
	CP2	Inclusive Communities
	CP3	General Principles for Development
	CP4	Infrastructure Requirements
	CP5	Housing Mix, Density and Affordability
	CP6	Managing Travel Demand
	CP7	Biodiversity
	CP8	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area
	CP9	Scale and Location of Development Proposals
	CP17	Housing Delivery
Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014	CC01	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
	CC03	Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping
	CC04	Sustainable Design and Construction
	CC05	Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks
	CC06	Noise
	CC07	Parking
	CC09	Development and Flood Risk (from all sources)
	CC10	Sustainable Drainage
	TB05	Housing Mix
	TB07	Internal Space Standards
	TB09	Residential Accommodation for Vulnerable Groups
	TB12	Employment Skills Plan
	TB21	Landscape Character
	TB23	Biodiversity and Development
Other	BDG	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Documents – Section 4
	AH SPD	Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document
	SSPD	Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document
	DCLG	National Internal Space Standards

<b>PLANNING ISSUES</b>
<b>Description of Proposal</b>
<p>1. The proposal, as amended, involves the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of use of the existing 30-room residential care home (Class C2) to provide 36 x social affordable housing units (Class C3) in the form of five x studio units and 31 x 1-bedroom units</li> </ul>

- Internal fit out and reconfiguration to suit, including the conversion of communal spaces, offices, meeting room and kitchen to accommodate six of the 36 flats (four on the ground floor and two on the first floor) as well as a new manager's office/reception area on the ground floor and new office and visitor room on the first floor
  - Retention of the existing lounge room for communal use
  - Enlargement of the existing car park by eight spaces to provide a total of 24 car spaces, including three disabled spaces
  - Associated landscaping and site works, including the removal of five trees and new bin storage
2. The development will be 100% affordable housing and residents will be subject to criteria enforced by Reading Almshouses Charity. Occupants will need to be:
- Of good character
  - In need (harassment, overcrowding, medial, social, financial)
  - Able to live independently
  - Resided within 20 miles of Reading Town Centre for not less than years during their life
  - There is no age restriction
3. The accommodation is made available at a maximum 80% of the open market rent (or lower depending upon circumstances) and this is to be secured by a legal agreement. A manager will manage the property and there is office space for this role but they will not live on site.

### **Site Description**

4. The site is between Strand Way to the north and Cutbush Lane cycle/pedestrian pathway to the south. It comprises a 0.55 hectare site consisting of a two storey residential aged care facility with 30 units (with offices, kitchen and communal area) set amongst landscaped gardens along all four boundaries and parking fronting Strand Way. An adjacent vacant plot of land measuring 0.21 hectares adjoins to the east but the area forms part of and is surrounded by the wider residential development of the Lower Earley area dating from the late 1980s.

### **Principle of Development**

5. The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. Policy CC01 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

### **Sustainability**

6. Policy CC02 of the MDD sets out the development limits for each settlement and Policies CP1, CP6 and CP9 of the Core Strategy require that development be sustainable relative to the level of facilities, services and accessibility within the area and with a reduction in the need for travel and the promotion of sustainable transport.

7. The site is located within settlement limits within a major development location and there are numerous bus stops within 400m (No. 21 on Rushey Way and No. 19b on Cutbush Lane) providing good public transport links to Reading and two shopping centres including supermarkets within 750m walking distance at Lower Earley to the west and Earley to the east. The proposal is therefore acceptable in terms of being sustainably located and in accordance with the principles stated in the Core Strategy.

#### Change of Use (and Loss of Aged Care)

8. Policy TB09 of the MDD relates to the provision of residential accommodation for vulnerable groups, including extra care homes, dementia extra care, sheltered schemes and accommodation for those with disabilities.
9. The supporting documentation suggests that the existing aged care home, which is now vacant, has been financially unviable in recent years and the refurbishment of the building to allow the continued operation of the facility was not cost effective for the operators. This is partly because of a gradual reduction in occupancy over time, which has reinforced the financial issues but this would have allowed for a gradual rehousing of residents.
10. Prospective residents of the almshouses are required to demonstrate that they meet the defined needs set by Reading Almshouses Charity, whether it arises because of harassment, overcrowding, medical, social, financial or any other similar need. The units are to be self-contained and residents are to be independent. However, social gatherings are encouraged as part of the almshouse model and a communal lounge and laundry are proposed and the extensive gardens promotes this arrangement. There is no age restriction but residents must have lived within 20 miles of St Mary's Church, St Mary's Butts, Reading for at least three years in their lifetime. This covers the entire borough of Wokingham but would also overlap with other surrounding boroughs.
11. The Council's Housing Officer is supportive of the scheme and there is no in-principle objection to the proposed change of use from Class C2 to Class C3, subject to all units being provided as affordable housing with the same eligibility criteria. This is reinforced in the legal agreement. The application was also considered at the Council's Specialist Housing Group where concerns were raised about demonstrated need for such housing and that outside residents may impact upon the Council's adult social care budget.
12. The application was supported by a relatively broad Housing Needs Study which referred to the following:
  - The Council's Housing Strategy 2015-2018 refers to the need for additional affordable homes, additional accommodation for vulnerable people, the prevention of homelessness and enhancing tenant services
  - The subject application makes a sizeable contribution to the shortfall in affordable housing over the same period and it allows for care and support for vulnerable people (to live independently)
  - The affordable housing is outside of the Council's four Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) and is in marginal areas where there is

increased numbers of vulnerable people but sited with good access to services and facilities

13. It is agreed that the Council's Housing Strategy 2015-2018 notes that there is a broad over-supply of care homes, although aged care needs will require continuous monitoring to ensure that the right number and types of accommodation meets the growing needs of the aging population and that it is provided in the appropriate location. Concurrently, there is a continued acute need for affordable housing in the area and this is highlighted in the 2016 Berkshire Housing Market Assessment, which shows a need of 441 affordable homes (net) per annum. The Housing Strategy refers to the fact that there is a need to increase the supply of smaller properties suitable for young people, with a focus on social rented properties. The Council has demonstrated a robust supply of affordable housing in the past 12 months but requires ongoing delivery of affordable homes outside of that that is attached to the delivery of market homes within the Council's four SDLs.
14. The arguments put forward by the agent are supported. On balance, the loss of 30 partly substandard aged care places is outweighed by the benefits of providing 36 upgraded social affordable rented units because it addresses a greater community need. This is particularly appropriate as it is open to all ages, is outside of the SDLs where need/demand is greater and it is tailored to retain connections to the local area.
15. A visitor room is proposed on the first floor. However, it is intended only as overnight accommodation for a family member when the need arises. The applicant advises that it is not intended to be permanently occupied and the Council does not disagree with this statement and Condition 13 clarifies this point.
16. A resident submission opposes the scheme on the grounds that the Council has applied a contradictory approach to indicating that there is an excess of aged care homes in the area but is also constructing its own aged care facility at Shinfield. It also notes that Reading Council have expressed a lukewarm interest in the conversion of dwellings to Class C3 affordable housing.
17. In response, the subject building is substandard and cannot demonstrate viability whereas the Council's analysis has indicated that there is demand for modernised aged care in Shinfield. Furthermore, Wokingham Council has undertaken its own housing study and despite the close proximity, there may be differences in aged care requirements that have brought about different demand. An assessment of the subject application indicates that there is justification for this scheme.

#### Density

18. Policy CP5 of the Core Strategy and Policy TB05 of the MDD Local Plan require an appropriate dwelling density and R10 of the Borough Design Guide SPD seeks to ensure that the development achieves an appropriate density in relation to local character.
19. The average density of the surrounding area is approximately 25-35 dwellings per hectare, mostly in the form of semi-detached and detached dwellings. The existing Liberty of Earley House is broadly consistent with this at 55 bedrooms per hectare.

## **Character of the Area**

20. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high quality design. The proposed works are limited to the internal reconfiguration of the building and minor fenestration changes. As there are no changes to the footprint or built form, there are no objections.
21. P2 of the Borough Design Guide SPD seeks to ensure that parking is provided in a manner that is compatible with the local character. There is a positive landscape character of the existing Liberty of Earley House site and the revisions made to the scheme achieve an appropriate balance between providing additional parking and retaining the landscape setting of the site, subject to additional tree plantings in Condition 3.
22. R20 of the SPD requires consideration of external elements including the bin storage and cycle storage. There are no objections to the proposed bin store forward of the building, which is a relocation of the existing bin store adjacent to the main entrance. Elevations have not been provided for the bin storage area but it remains subject to pre commencement Condition 4, which will ensure that it is sympathetically designed. Similarly, cycle storage is subject to pre commencement Condition 6.
23. Permitted development rights have been restricted in Condition 14 in relation to the provision of gates at the main entrance in order to retain the openness of the site.

## **Dwelling Mix**

24. Policy CP5 of the Core Strategy and Policy TB05 of the MDD Local Plan require an appropriate dwelling type and tenure for affordable housing schemes. The appropriate mix for a 36 unit, 100% affordable housing development would ordinarily be 7 x 1-bedroom flats (20%), 16 x 2-bedroom flats (45%), 7 x 3-bedroom flats (20%) and 6 x 4-bedroom houses (15%).
25. The proposal has a mix of 14% studio and 86% one bedroom, which is a clear departure. However, it is acknowledged that the proposal is not for profit, intended as an almshouse arrangement, directed at a particular market and involves the refit and refurbishment of the existing accommodation layout within the existing building and on balance, the proposal represents an appropriate outcome.

## **Housing Amenity**

### Internal amenity

26. Policy TB07 of the MDD and R17 of the SPD require adequate internal space to ensure the layout and size achieves good internal amenity. In accordance with the Technical housing standards, a minimum standard of 37-50m<sup>2</sup> applies, dependent upon whether the unit is single or double occupancy. The main bedrooms should

also have a minimum area of 11.5m<sup>2</sup> and living spaces should have a minimum area of 23m<sup>2</sup>. There should also be provision for storage.

27. Unit 8 is compliant in terms of internal floor area and bedroom area. The remaining units are deficient with the minimum standard for double occupancy units. 28 of 36 units have a floor area of 44-45m<sup>2</sup>, which is a departure of 4-5m<sup>2</sup> or 10%. The remaining seven units are studio units and have a floor area of 31-33m<sup>2</sup>. Given the open plan layout and smaller size of these units, Condition 12 limits these units to single occupancy to ensure a minimum level of amenity to occupants of these units. In doing so, the departure is 4-6m<sup>2</sup> or 11-16%. The same requirement is applied to the proposed Units 34 and 36, which at 42m<sup>2</sup> in area, are particularly undersized.

Unit	New or existing	Floor Area	Bed-room	Living Area	Unit	New or existing	Floor Area	Bed-room	Living Area
1	Existing	45m <sup>2</sup>	12.4m <sup>2</sup>	17.2m <sup>2</sup>	19	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
2	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	20	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
3	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	21	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
4	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	22	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
5	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	23	Existing	32m <sup>2</sup>	19m <sup>2</sup>	(studio)
6	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	24	Existing	31m <sup>2</sup>	18m <sup>2</sup>	(studio)
7	Existing	32m <sup>2</sup>	20m <sup>2</sup>	(studio)	25	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
8	New	52m <sup>2</sup>	18m <sup>2</sup>	19m <sup>2</sup>	26	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
9	Existing	32m <sup>2</sup>	20m <sup>2</sup>	(studio)	27	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
10	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	28	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
11	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	29	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>
12	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	30	Existing	31m <sup>2</sup>	13m <sup>2</sup>	18m <sup>2</sup>
13	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	31	New	44m <sup>2</sup>	12m <sup>2</sup>	16m <sup>2</sup>
14	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	32	New	44m <sup>2</sup>	11.5m <sup>2</sup>	17m <sup>2</sup>
15	Existing	31m <sup>2</sup>	18m <sup>2</sup>	(studio)	33	New	33m <sup>2</sup>	10.2m <sup>2</sup>	14.2m <sup>2</sup>
16	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	12m <sup>2</sup>	16m <sup>2</sup>	34	New	42m <sup>2</sup>	11.5m <sup>2</sup>	16m <sup>2</sup>
17	Existing	45m <sup>2</sup>	13m <sup>2</sup>	17.3m <sup>2</sup>	35	New	44m <sup>2</sup>	12.5m <sup>2</sup>	16.3m <sup>2</sup>
18	Existing	44m <sup>2</sup>	14m <sup>2</sup>	16.4m <sup>2</sup>	36	New	42m <sup>2</sup>	10.5m <sup>2</sup>	16.8m <sup>2</sup>

28. Of the 36 units, 29 units will be refitted with no change to the dimensions of the existing care units. On this basis and when noting that the not for profit and affordable nature of the proposal, there is some dispensation in the consideration of internal floor area.
29. Even then, all but two of the units (units 33 and 36) have compliant bedroom sizes and all units have a sufficiently sized and appropriately proportioned living room (in addition to a kitchen) that is capable of accommodating a lounge and dining table. Each unit is also complemented by an indoor communal lounge and expansive outdoor garden areas, which would offset any potential internal shortfall.
30. The visitor room on the first floor has a floor area of 22m<sup>2</sup>. However, it is only intended as overnight accommodation for a family member when the need arises, much like a hotel room. It is not self contained and contains only a shower room. As such, the size of the room is appropriate for its intended use.
31. On balance, the units are of adequate dimensions and there are no in-principle objections to the departures specified above.
32. R18 of the SPD requires sufficient sunlight and daylight to new properties, with dwellings afforded a reasonable dual outlook and southern aspect. Almost all of

the dwellings within the existing building are afforded good internal amenity, with an outlook and access to sunlight via the internal courtyard or the outside elevations. Even the existing bedsits on the north eastern and north western corners are dual aspect and afforded a good outlook and access to morning and afternoon sunlight. On this basis, adequate amenity is maintained and further offsets the shortfalls in internal floor area.

#### External space

33. R16 of the SPD stipulates that each unit should have amenity space and it should retain and protect privacy, benefit from sunlight and be able to accommodate 2–4 chairs and a small table.
34. The proposal will retain the communal landscaped gardens with soft and hard landscaping for use by residents, including a central courtyard garden measuring about 700m<sup>2</sup> and 14m wide gardens along the side and rear of the building. In addition, the ground floor units have doors leading onto an area of semi-private open space, which is delineated by low hedging. There are also Juliette balconies to the first floor units and one communal balcony to the street elevation. On balance, the proposal achieves a satisfactory outdoor environment for residents, particularly given the desire of the charity to promote social interaction between residents.

#### **Residential Amenities**

##### Overlooking

35. R15 of the SPD requires the retention of reasonable levels of visual privacy to habitable rooms, with separation of 22m to the rear and 10m to the street. R23 of the SPD notes that the side walls must not contain windows, especially at first floor level.
36. As the proposal involves the refit of the existing building, there are no real additional overlooking concerns. There are no new windows to the side elevations nor is there any real overlooking with dense screening to the west and an undeveloped site to the east. Within the development, the room configurations remain unchanged with the new units located where no new unreasonable sightlines are introduced.

##### Light and Dominance

37. With no change to the building envelope and only modest bin and cycle storage enclosures forming part of the application, there are no perceived issues with the retention of sunlight or daylight or any dominance to surrounding residents.

##### Light Pollution

38. The conversion of the ground floor offices and meeting room to residential accommodation introduces the potential for headlight glare affecting the occupants of Units 33 and 34. As part of the landscape plan in Condition 3, hedging will be required along the edge of the carpark will be required to limit light spill.



## Air Pollution

39. The conversion of the ground floor offices and meeting room to residential accommodation also poses air pollution concerns to the living room and bedroom on Units 33 and 34 from the parking spaces immediately alongside. As part of the Car Park Management Plan in Condition 5, signage will need to be affixed to the building ensuring that residents are aware that they must park front to kerb to reduce exhaust fumes to these windows.

## Noise pollution

40. Policy CC06 and Appendix 1 of the MDD requires that development protect noise sensitive receptors from noise impact. When noting that there are some similarities in the change of use from aged care home to almshouses and the limitations imposed in Condition 12 that eight of the units are to be single occupancy, the increase in population density is not unreasonable and there are no in-principle objections in terms of any noise disturbance to surrounding properties.
41. Given the nature of the existing aged care home where the units are orientated to open onto the internal communal courtyard, there is a degree of communal living and daily interaction between residents. With its change of use to Class C3 self-contained units, it is envisaged that there will be reduced demand for the communal facilities, there is not envisaged to be an unreasonable outcome on noise disturbance grounds within the complex and between units.
42. Internally, high noise sources such as bathrooms, kitchens and utility spaces remain grouped or stacked together to avoid the adverse transmission of noise within and between units. The only exceptions are the bedroom of Unit 1 is alongside the communal laundry room, the bedrooms of Units 34 and 36 are alongside the lift shaft and the bedroom of Unit 32 is alongside the communal lounge room. Given that existing walls will be retained in each case, Condition 8 requires additional details of acoustic insulation to ensure that there is no adverse noise transmission to the sleeping areas of these units. This could include a limitation in the hours of use of the laundry and communal lounge.

## **Access and Movement**

### Car Parking

43. Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD Local Plan stipulates minimum off street parking standards, including provision for charging facilities. In this case, a total of 18 unallocated spaces are required for the 36 unit development, applied at a rate of 0.5 space per unit. There is no requirement for visitor parking although a small visitor room is proposed on the first floor which would, in theory, necessitate an additional 0.5 space. Parking would also be required for the manager's office, although he does not reside on site and it is not proposed that they would work full time.
44. The revised plans indicate a total of 24 car spaces, with all spaces being unallocated except for one manager space. The proposal therefore accords with the minimum requirements. However, because there are fewer spaces than units

and as the manager space will only be occupied intermittently, it would be appropriate in the circumstances to ensure that this space is made unallocated.

45. Independent of any numerical compliance, the provision of parking is considered to be acceptable on account of its accessible location close to local retail facilities and public transport and given its use as almshouses. As a comparison, the existing building comprises 30 x 2-habitable room flats and would require one space per staff member and 10 visitor spaces, which is comparable to the proposed arrangement.
46. P3 of the Borough Design Guide SPD notes that parking spaces are to be a minimum of 5m x 2.5m and compliance is achieved. Three of the bays have a width of 3.6m for disabled use, which is in accordance with the requirement of two bays + 3% as outlined in Policy CC07.
47. No EV charging facilities are proposed but given the nature of the development as affordable housing and because it is operated in a not for profit arrangement, requiring the provision of charging facilities is considered unnecessary.

#### Cycle and Mobility Parking

48. Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD stipulates minimum cycle parking standards and P2 and P3 of the SPD ensure that it is conveniently located, secure and undercover and provided where it is compatible in the streetscene. A total of 36 spaces are required. No cycle facilities have been provided but the Planning Statement accepts a pre commencement condition, which is applied by Condition 6.
49. Provision of secure and covered mobility scooter storage with power has also been recommended by the Council's Highways Officer. This would only be appropriate if there was an age limited occupancy restriction. However, there is some merit in this approach and is therefore subject to future agreement as part of the same pre commencement condition.

#### Access and Manoeuvring

50. There is an existing access onto Strand Way, which is of acceptable width. Circulation space within the carpark is also satisfactory for safe manoeuvring.

#### Traffic Generation

51. The proposal involves a modest increase in car parking spaces (eight) and the Council's Highways Officer is satisfied that it is unlikely that the proposal would have an adverse impact on the highway network.

#### Construction Management

52. A construction method statement is required by Condition 7 to ensure that there is sufficient on-site parking and no adverse interruption to residential traffic movements.

#### Landscaping and Trees

53. Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan aims to protect green infrastructure networks, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping and Policy TB21 requires consideration of the landscape character. R14 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires well-designed hard and soft landscaping that complements housing.
54. There are a number of areas of open space close to the site and the residential area has front gardens and verges that are landscaped. The subject site is well landscaped to the front with many flowering trees adjacent to the footway and attractive Birch trees that lead into the site.
55. The Council's Trees Officer has reviewed the revised scheme and raises no in principle objection.
56. The landscaped gardens that make up the majority of the site will be retained in their current form and these are a positive asset to the landscaped setting of the site.
57. The extensions to the carpark will necessitate the removal of five trees in total – one at the eastern end of the carpark and four at the western end. These trees provide a setting for the building, enhance the landscape character and provide a pleasant street frontage. However, they are also relatively modest specimens in relation to other trees on the site and are to be replaced in their immediate vicinity as part of a landscape plan required by Condition 3 and this will reinstate the existing landscape character of the site within a few years of planting.
58. The more significant trees lining the front boundary with Strand Way will be retained, including Trees 1 and 2 in the north western corner, with the car park layout amended to accommodate the retention of these trees. The existing landscaping within the car park, which allows for a breaking up of the hard paving and enhances the building, will also be retained as part of the most recent revisions.

### **Ecology**

59. There are no ecology concerns with the application.

### **Building Sustainability**

60. Policy CC04 of the MDD Local Plan and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD require sustainable design and conservation and R21 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that new development contribute to environmental sustainability and the mitigation of climate change. The development would be detailed to comply with the Building Regulations and Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and in this respect, no objection is raised.
61. Policy CC05 of the MDD Local Plan encourages renewable energy and decentralised energy networks, with encouragement of decentralised energy systems and a minimum 10% reduction in carbon emissions for developments of 10+ dwellings or in excess of 1000m<sup>2</sup>. Given the development involves a change

of use where it involves the refitting of the existing building with no additional building footprint, it is not feasible or appropriate to implement Policy CC05.

### **Accessibility**

62. Policy CP2 of the CS seeks to ensure that new development contributes to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities, including for aged persons and the disabled. The existing building most recently operated as a care home and includes lift access to the first floor. There are no issues of accessibility.

### **Boundary Treatments**

63. Fencing is retained unchanged, including boundary hedging.

### **Waste Storage**

64. Policy CC04 of the MDD requires adequate internal storage within each unit, external storage for the segregation of waste, recycling, composting and garden waste as well as appropriate collection facilities.
65. Given the change of use from care home to self-contained units, it is possible that additional waste generation will occur. A bin storage area with a footprint of 40m<sup>2</sup> has been provided on the eastern side of the extended car park but no elevations have been provided nor is there any detail of access thereto. Furthermore, there is no collection area or details of collection arrangements.
66. The storage area appears to be of sufficient dimensions to accommodate in excess of 10 x 360 litre wheeled bins, 55L recycling boxes or 10 x 240 litre recycling bins and bins for composting and garden waste, which is sufficient for the proposed development. However, in the absence of collection and access details and because of a need to ensure that there is no adverse harm to the character of the street, Condition 4 requires further details.

### **Flooding and Drainage**

67. Policy CC09 of the MDD requires consideration of flood risk from historic flooding whilst Policy CC10 requires sustainable drainage methods and the minimisation of surface water flow.
68. The site and access thereto is within Flood Zone 1 and the proposal is acceptable in principle. R23 of the Borough Design Guide SPD notes that parking spaces in front gardens must be paved with permeable surfaces to avoid any increase in surface water run-off and should include for soft landscaping. This is applied by Condition 11.

### **Environmental Health**

69. There are no known contamination issues on the sites or surrounding area and with minimal building works, which are internal only, there are also no construction related issues.

### **Affordable Housing**

70. Policy CP5 of the CS, Policy TB05 of the MDD and the Affordable Housing SPD specify an affordable housing rate of 35% for any development on 0.16 hectares or larger or 10 or more units. As such, 11 units are required to be made affordable. As the development is 100% affordable and capped rent at 80% of market rate in perpetuity, no objection is raised
71. The affordable housing units meet the national space standards and would need to be built to Homes and Communities Agency Design and Quality Standards and designed to meet the Building Regulation M4.2 (access to and Use of Buildings). Given the existing building operated as a care home, there are no concerns on these grounds.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy**

72. CIL is not payable where the application relates to a charity or where it involves 100% affordable housing. The proposal meets both criteria.

### **Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area**

73. Policy CP8 of the CS states that development is likely to have an effect on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA) and it is required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects are delivered.
74. The subject property is located within 7km of the TBH SPA and an Appropriate Assessment is required where there is a net increase of 50 dwellings or more. Only 36 new dwellings are proposed and the net increase in residential population on this site is minimal such that there are no foreseeable obligations with respect to Policy CP8.

### **Employment Skills Plan**

75. Policy TB12 of the MDD requires the submission of an employment skills plan (ESP) with a supporting method statement for all major development planning applications. ESPs are worked out using the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) benchmarks which are based on the value of construction
76. The value of the construction for this pre application is calculated by multiplying the gross internal floor space of the proposed new building by £1025, which is the cost of construction per square metre as set out by Building Cost Information Service of RICS. The proposal involves only minimal internal building works and no additional floor space and the total build cost is below the threshold of £1 million where an Employment Skills Plan would be required.

### **CONCLUSION**

77. The proposal involves minor building works to refit the existing building and addresses the ongoing shortage of affordable housing within the borough. A compliant amount of on-site car parking is provided, the landscape character of the site is retained and there are no adverse neighbour impacts. It is acceptable in

principle, subject to conditions and is recommended for approval, subject to the completion of a legal agreement.