

Steve Woods Consultants

Transportation, Traffic, and Highways

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

**Planning Application
for a
Sui Generis Use
Members' Retail-Club for a Church
Community (Members Only)
at
Church Lane, Reading
RG7 1HB**

TRANSPORTATION STATEMENT

29 November 2024

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QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

1. This Transportation Statement (TS) has been written by Steve Woods, a director of Steve Woods Consultants Ltd (SWC).
2. Steve Woods has a Masters Degree in Transport. He is a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Town Planning Studies. He is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in the UK, a Member of the Institution of Highways and Transportation, and a Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.
3. He is a transport planner and has over thirty years of experience working in the field of traffic, transportation, and highways, in both the private and the public sectors.

INTRODUCTION

4. Planning approval is sought for a members-only retail club to provide a facility for Zest Trading UK Ltd (ZTUK). The new facility would replace an existing retail club in Arkwright Road which is on an industrial estate in Reading. The proposed retail club would be for a limited number of households currently numbering only 110. It would not be open for the general public.
5. The planning application site is located adjacent to an existing Gospel Hall located to the south of the M4 motorway, and a little east of Three Mile Cross. The application site is on Church Lane and is owned by the Reading Gospel Hall Trust (RGHT).
6. The retail club would be separate from the Gospel Hall site, and as such requires a separate vehicular access. An earlier planning application (Ref: 240307) was also submitted seeking approval for the retail club but was refused because the Local Authority had concerns about the location of the existing vehicular access that was to serve the site. This new planning application seeks to overcome those concerns by closing the existing access and creating a new access to the application site from Church Lane further to the east and further away from the Gospel Hall access.
7. There would be a forecourt to the front of the proposed retail club building, with car parking provision to the side, and space for servicing and deliveries.
8. Drawings and other documentation submitted with this planning application provide details of the site location, the proposed on-site layout, the vehicular access, and retail club members' home locations.

9. SWC has been instructed by the planning applicant to provide advice on traffic matters, and to write this TS to accompany the planning application. The TS supports the planning application submission, and explains the need for the development. It describes the application site, the proposed development, and the surrounding highway network.
10. The TS concludes by affirming that the proposed development would have no adverse effect on the highway network, and that the proposal would be sustainable in nature. Policy CP6 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan relates to managing travel demand, and it states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that provide for sustainable forms of transport, are located where the distance people need to travel is minimised, and which include enhanced facilities for pedestrians and cyclists and for those with reduced mobility. It goes on to say that approval will be granted where appropriate vehicular parking is provided. The appellant believes that in highway terms, the proposed development meets these requirements.
11. SWC visited the site on 18 September 2023 and on 19 September 2023, and a number of investigations were carried out.

SITE LOCATION AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

12. Site Location
13. A sui-generis members-only retail club is proposed on the unused application site. A new building of 375 square metres is proposed.
14. The planning application site is located just south of Reading and the M4 motorway near junction 11. It is accessed off Church Lane at postcode RG7 1HB between Three Mile Cross and Shinfield.
15. There is an existing Gospel Hall at Church Lane, and is located on a site adjacent to the application site.
16. Architectural drawings submitted with the planning application show the location of the site.
17. Vehicular Access
18. Both the Gospel Hall site and the application site are owned by the RGHT, but the applicant, ZTUK, requires a separate vehicular access to the application site. This is because RGHT wishes to keep the retail club separate from the consecrated grounds of the Gospel Hall, but also to ensure that the security of the Gospel Hall is not compromised by open access to the grounds.

19. There is already an existing separate vehicular access to the application site directly from Church Lane. This was previously the main entrance to Shinfield Court, but since a new access was formed to serve the Gospel Hall site, the original access has been used much less.

20. As part of the proposed development, the existing vehicular access to the application site would be closed prior to the new retail club building being brought into use, and a new vehicular access created 42 metres further to the east. The new vehicular access to the application site would be constructed to high standards in terms of geometry and structure, but is discussed in detail below in the chapter, "Site Access and Public Highway".

21. Servicing the Site

22. Adequate car parking for volunteer staff, member visitors, and disabled drivers would be provided as indicated on drawings prepared by the architect. In addition, there would be plenty of delivery and manoeuvring space. Policy CP6 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan states that approval will be granted for schemes where appropriate vehicular parking is provided, including for the disabled.

23. The car park would accommodate nine cars, including space for disabled drivers. The disabled parking space would have 1.25 metres clearance along each side and to the rear of the space for access. Two electric vehicle parking spaces would be made on the car park. Each parking space would be at least 2.5 metres x 5.0 metres. The space for the disabled would be slightly larger. White-lining would be used to delineate the parking spaces. The aisle of the car park would be at least 6 metres wide. The car park would allow easy access to the new building. Low-level external lighting would be provided on the car park, and would be downward-only, and activity-triggered.

24. Bicycle parking provision would also be created near to the building. It would be covered, secure and overlooked. Again, Policy CP6 states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that provide for sustainable forms of transport, and which include enhanced facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.

25. The application site, being close to the highway, is accessible for emergency vehicles, refuse collection vehicles, recycling, etc.

26. Retail Club

27. The planning application is being made by ZTUK. It is a not-for-profit enterprise formed in 2007 as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ealing Educational Resources Trust, a charity which supports provision of education by One School Global UK. The latter provides education mainly for children of the Plymouth Brethren church community.
28. There is an existing members-only retail-club store in Reading. ZTUK currently operates out of leased premises in Arkwright Road. It is too small to provide the service and buying experience its customers need. The lease at Arkwright Road expires soon, but in any case, there is a break clause of three months-notice by the landlord, and there are plans for redevelopment. ZTUK has consent for a temporary change of use to Sui Generis but this will soon expire and the permitted use will revert to office / commercial. It is therefore important to replace the existing facility soon.
29. The existing facility is operated in a very similar way to how the proposed new store would operate in terms of clientele, opening times, deliveries, etc.
30. The proposed retail club would only be for members. It would not be for any other people or the general public. There would be no advertising, either on the site or elsewhere. There are only approximately one-hundred and ten member-households, and the retail club would be for their exclusive use. The applicant would be agreeable for this to be conditioned, as set out in the Planning Statement (PS). The PS is included in the planning application submission.
31. There are approximately fifty other existing retail clubs across the UK, which operate in the same way as this proposed store. Members of other clubs would not need to visit the application site.
32. The retail club would not qualify as an A1 retail shop, (now class E,) because it would not be open to members of the public, would not be advertised for general use, and could be conditioned for no general public use. A section 106 agreement could also be used. There would be minimal external signage to guide delivery drivers, but none are needed for members. It would operate as a restricted members-only retail club with a Sui Generis use. The PS includes a legal-opinion to this effect. The PS suggests two conditions to restrict the permission to the specific members club, and to prevent public use.

33. The operations of ZTUK consist of wholesale purchase, mainly of food and household goods, and retail sale to members of the church community. The concept of the retail club is to provide goods exclusively for members. The store is run by unpaid volunteers, and all profits are directed to charity and to support the One-School-Campus sites.
34. It has been estimated that the retail-club would generate very little profit in retail terms due to its very small customer base, indicating very low levels of vehicular traffic to the application site. More is said about traffic generation in the chapter below, "Traffic Generation".
35. The retail club would likely be open from 8.30am to 8.30pm Monday to Friday. It would only be staffed from 10am to 2pm, when they would be taking deliveries, stacking shelves, stock-taking, and cleaning, etc. All staff members would be volunteers.
36. It would be a self-serve facility at all other times. This supports the "members only" restriction, because community members would gain access by keying a code into the digital-lock access control system. They select from the shelves, and scan and pay at the tills. The system relies entirely on the honesty of the customer members.
37. Usually only approximately two volunteers would be on site at any given time, unless there is a large delivery to unpack, in which case an extra one or two volunteers might assist. Some volunteers might in some circumstances travel together to the site as part of a car-share. Other volunteers who live near to the site, might choose to cycle or walk.
38. In terms of deliveries to the site, the store will operate the same as at the existing location in which 80% of items sold are obtained from one single supplier who provides a twice-weekly delivery. These deliveries would be in rigid lorries of up to ten metres in length. The remaining 20% of items are delivered by small vans, with usually only one or two deliveries each week. Then, onward sale would be provided, but only to members.

TRAFFIC GENERATION

39. Very little traffic would be generated by the proposed retail club. The facility would be restricted to members only, and the applicant is willing to accept a restricted condition to ensure this.
40. The retail club would potentially serve up to one-hundred and ten households. The members live within the surrounding area.

41. Based on patterns at other similar retail clubs, increasingly a home-delivery service is being adopted, which continues to reduce customer journeys. Approximately 75% of households would visit the application site once a week. The applicant also says that some households often share the journey to the retail club in one car. For example, a mother and grandmother are counted as two separate households, but might shop together. The applicant suggests that up to ten households might share five journeys.
42. Based on the above assumptions, only seventy-seven journeys would be made to site each week. With the retail club being open for only sixty hours, there would be approximately only 1.3 trips to site made each hour, or one trip to site every forty-five minutes, on average.
43. Assuming an average shopping time of thirty to forty-five minutes, it is unlikely that there would be any more than two members' cars at the application site at any given time.
44. Further to this, the applicant has explained that a number of households are well within walking distance of the site, and that some might combine a shopping trip with an exercise activity.
45. Volunteer staff would only number two or three each day. Some of them might cycle or walk. Others might car-share, but even if they arrived separately by car, there would only normally be two trips to site each day. If there were two volunteer staff members' cars on site, there would only be a maximum of three or four cars in total on the site car park. There would be sufficient space on site to accommodate this and more.
46. Traffic generation to and from the site would therefore be very low, and as has been shown above, there would be very few deliveries to site.
47. Given this very low expected number of vehicular trips to the site, the effect on the highway would be minimal. Policy CP6 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan relates to managing travel demand, and this proposal does. It states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that provide for sustainable forms of transport, and this proposal does. It states that approval will be granted where appropriate vehicular parking is provided, and this proposal does.
48. Furthermore, arrivals and departures would be spread over time. Highway capacity is not an issue because of this, but also because there is very little background traffic on the local highway network, with gaps in the traffic flow allowing traffic turning into and out from the site to do so easily and would easily be accommodated.

49. The highway is also very safe. There have been no road traffic accidents in the vicinity of the proposed site vehicular access over the last five years for which data are available.

SITE ACCESS AND PUBLIC HIGHWAY

50. As indicated above, traffic generated by the application site would be very low. In addition, there is sufficient space on site for all vehicles to be able to enter and leave the site in a forward gear. The existing vehicular access to the application site would be closed prior to the new retail club building being brought into use, and a new vehicular access created. The new access would provide access for all vehicles and pedestrians.
51. The LHA has indicated that for roads where traffic flows are likely to be over 4,000 vehicles per day, unless stated otherwise, it seeks for access separation to be 40 metres or more for junctions on the same side of a priority carriageway. This local standard requires flexibility, and in any case, Church Lane is not a classified road. However, the proposed new access would be 42 metres further east from the existing site access, and therefore 66 metres from the Gospel Hall access.
52. The gates at the new vehicular access would remain open during retail-club opening hours to allow traffic to and from the site to flow freely. There would be a separate adjoining access for pedestrians.
53. The existing vehicular access to the planning application site from Church Lane would be closed prior to the new retail club building being brought into use, and the existing dropped kerb would be reinstated to full kerbs.
54. The new vehicular access would include 6-metre radii, and the gates would be set back 10 metres from the edge of carriageway to allow vehicles to stand off the carriageway while the gates are unlocked at the beginning of the day and opened. The new gates would open inwards only.
55. Swept-path drawings are included in the planning application submission to show that the new vehicular access could accommodate the vehicles expected to use the site.
56. There are no adverse gradient issues at the vehicular access.
57. The boundary hedging either side of the proposed access would be trimmed as part of the development. The hedge would be trimmed back slightly as it overhangs the highway verge.

58. Policy CP6 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that provide for sustainable forms of transport, and which include enhanced facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. There is a footway on Church Lane adjacent to the existing access and runs between the existing site access and the access to the Gospel Hall. This footway would be extended to the proposed new access. It would extend the footway by approximately 40 metres. There is also a dropped kerb on both sides of Church Lane which was installed for the use of pedestrians wanting to cross the road. This was provided in connection with the development of the Gospel Hall on the adjacent site. A footway is already in place on the opposite side of Church Lane and runs in both directions from the site access. To the west it runs all the way to bus stops on Basingstoke Road. The footway also acts as a cycle route.
59. As stated above, Church Lane is a safe road. There have been no road traffic accidents in the vicinity of the site over the last five years for which data are available.

SUSTAINABLE ACCESSIBILITY

60. The application site is sustainably accessible. There are a number of reasons for this.
61. The planning application site is located more centrally to the community of members than the existing store site. A map has been submitted with the planning application which shows the existing store location, the proposed store location, and the members' homes. The applicant has explained that each household is, on average, 3.5 miles travel distance closer to the new store site, than to the current site. A round-trip would have a saving of 7 miles. Based on the above calculation that 77 customer trips would be made to site each week, and 10 volunteer staff trips would be made to the site each week, the total number of miles travelled each week would be less by (7×87) 609 miles. Policy CP6 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan, relates to managing travel demand. It states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that are located where the distance people need to travel is minimised.
62. Further, the members are community oriented, and car-sharing for trips to the retail club is likely to occur. Car occupancy levels amongst members tend to be high for all trips as extended families, or in groups. The revised NPPF Annex 2 states that car-sharing is a sustainable transport mode.
63. In addition to this, some of the members might combine work/retail-club trips.

64. Some of the volunteer staff are within cycling distance of the site, and provision would be made for parking bicycles on site, near the proposed building. There is a cycle and pedestrian route on the opposite side of Church Lane. Other staff might car-share. In addition, electric vehicle charging points would be provided on the car park for volunteer staff, and retail club members.
65. Bus services are available on Basingstoke Road only a short walk away. Whilst it is not likely that many people would use public transport, the service is available if needed. Bus service 600 operates between Reading and Riseley and the Thames Valley Science Park. Services run from 0604 Hours until 2345 Hours Monday to Friday. Buses are generally every half an hour in both directions. Saturday services are similar. There is a footway on the opposite side of Church Lane which extends to the bus stops. The bus stop for buses to central Reading also has a bus shelter.
66. The applicant wishes to maintain an environmentally friendly profile, and is conscious of the need to protect the environment. Policy CP6 states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that provide for sustainable forms of transport.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

67. Planning approval is sought for a members-only retail club in Church Lane, near Three Mile Cross. The new facility would replace an existing retail club in Arkwright Road, Reading. The retail club would be adjacent to, but separate from the Gospel Hall site, and would require a new separate vehicular access. A forecourt would provide car parking and space for servicing and deliveries.
68. Very little traffic would be generated. There are only one-hundred and ten households amongst the membership, and some households would car-share. Only two staff members would travel to site each day. Only seventy-seven journeys would be made to site each week. Furthermore, arrivals and departures would be spread over time. Highway capacity is not an issue because of this, but also because there is very little background traffic on the local highway network. Traffic turning into and out from the site would easily be accommodated.
69. The highway is also very safe. There have been no road traffic accidents in the vicinity of the proposed site vehicular access and the Gospel Hall access over the last five years for which data are available.

70. Further, the application site is sustainably accessible. It is located more centrally to the community of members than the existing store site. The expected saving in miles travelled each week would be over 600 miles. Combined trips, and car-sharing would also reduce the number of car journeys, and the revised National Planning Policy Framework states that car-sharing is a sustainable transport mode. Provision would also be made for parking bicycles on site, and for electric vehicle charging.
71. Policy CP6 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan, relates to managing travel demand. It states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that provide for sustainable forms of transport, which include enhanced facilities for pedestrians and cyclists and for those with reduced mobility, and are located where the distance people need to travel is minimised. Approval will be granted where appropriate vehicular parking is provided.
72. Clearly, - by bringing a new retail club facility closer to the community members and saving many miles of travel each week, and by providing adequate parking for other forms of travel as well as cars, and by providing safe access for pedestrians, - in highway terms, the proposed development should be approved.
73. In highways terms, the proposed retail club would not have any adverse effects, and would be sustainable in nature. The National Planning Policy Framework states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. The proposed development would not have a severe effect on the road network, and would not have an unacceptable highway safety impact. Therefore, there appears to be every reason why in highways terms the proposal should be approved.

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