

Examination of the Tunbridge Wells
Borough Local Plan

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Hearing Statement

**Matter 2: The Strategy for Royal
Tunbridge Wells and Southborough**
**Issue 1: Former Cinema Site, Royal
Tunbridge Wells – Policy AL/RTW1**

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Matter 2 – The Strategy for Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough

Issue 1 – Former Cinema Site, Royal Tunbridge Wells – Policy AL/RTW1

Inspector's Question 1: [Re: Latest position on the cinema site]

What is the latest position regarding development proposals for the site?

TWBC response to Question 1

Introduction

1. As set out in the Inspectors Initial Findings letter ([ID_012](#)), this is considered to be a prominent town centre site within the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The site has a lengthy planning history and a number of planning permissions have been granted for a range of mixed-use schemes since the cinema closed in 2000. The history of the site and the position set out within the Submission Local Plan (SLP) ([3.128](#)) is contained within the Council's previous Hearing Statement in relation to this site – ([TWLP_063 - Matter 11: Retail, Town Centres and Community Facilities \(Policies STR/RTW1, ED8, ED9, ED10 and EN6\) Issue 4: Commercial and Mixed-Use Site Allocations](#)).

Consideration

2. The site was considered at the Hearing Session on the 12 July 2022. Much of the discussion focused around the history of the site, the planning consents that have been approved for the site and the appropriateness of the mix of uses proposed/permitted.
3. At the time the Council's planning team had been engaged in pre-application discussions. The discussion focused on the appropriate mix of uses for the site and whether extra care retirement housing (along with other ancillary and commercial uses) was a suitable use for this key town centre site.
4. The Inspectors Initial Findings Letter ([ID_012](#)), considers this and at paragraphs 54-56, he sets out the following;

- It is a prominent town centre site and despite a number of planning permissions, no development has yet to come forward;
 - Most recent proposals for the site include extra care housing, which some objectors do not consider to be appropriate, however he found that this would be an appropriate use and would comply with Para 86(f) of the NPPF.
 - The site has been vacant for a long time and its redevelopment should be supported and encouraged by the Plan.
 - In order to make the plan sound, greater flexibility should be provided and the policy should be re-drafted to support the principle of a broader range of town centre uses as well as the importance of the regeneration of the site to the town centre as well as requirements for a sensitive, high quality design.
5. Since the Hearing Sessions, a planning application has been pursued by the owners of the site and planning permission [\(22/02304/FULL\)](#) was granted on 5 January 2023 for; *'The redevelopment of the former Cinema Site comprising the demolition of no. 41 Mount Pleasant Road, removal of existing hardstanding and the provision of an extra care retirement community comprising extra care accommodation together with associated facilities (Use Class C2), new commercial floorspace Use Classes E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d) (soft/indoor play only) E(e), E(g i& ii) & Sui Generis Uses (beauty related uses and drinking establishments); access; landscaping, public realm improvement works; engineering and earthworks; associated infrastructure; and the re-alignment of Public Right of Way ref WBX17 and extinguishment of Public Right of Way ref WBX18'*.
6. The consented scheme broadly conforms with the emerging allocation policy for this site through the provision of a mixed-use scheme including residential accommodation (166 units) and ancillary uses as well as mixed commercial and leisure floorspace including commercial floorspace on the ground floor along Mount Pleasant Road.
7. A number of the pre-commencement planning conditions have been discharged, and site clearance has been completed. The development has now commenced on site and the planning consent referred to above has been implemented. An update will be provided at the Examination hearing session on this matter.

Inspector's Question 2: [Re: How can the Plan be modified to make it sound]

Considering the conclusions reached in paragraphs 54-56 of the Inspector's Initial Findings, how can the Plan be modified to rectify the soundness issues identified?

TWBC response to Question 2

Introduction

8. It is considered that the policy for the site should be retained within the Local Plan. Modifications are proposed to reflect the discussion about the site at the previous hearing session, the Inspectors comments at paragraphs 54-56 within his initial findings letter, as referred to above and the latest position with regard to development on the site.
9. To summarise, amendments have been made to provide greater flexibility to the policy wording to support the principle of a broader range of town centre uses to be permissible on the site as well as the requirement for sensitive, high-quality development. This recognises the appropriateness of all types of residential accommodation as a means of maintaining and enhancing the vibrancy of the town centre as part of a mixed-use scheme, as well as the importance of facilitating the sensitive regeneration of this key site within the town centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells.
10. The amended policy wording is set out at **Appendix 1** to this hearing statement.

Conclusion

11. The Council have considered the comments made by the Inspector within his Initial Findings letter, which reflect the discussion that was held at the Hearing session on the 12 July 2022. Proposed amendments have been made to the policy, in order to make the Plan sound which are referred to above.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Proposed amended Policy Wording

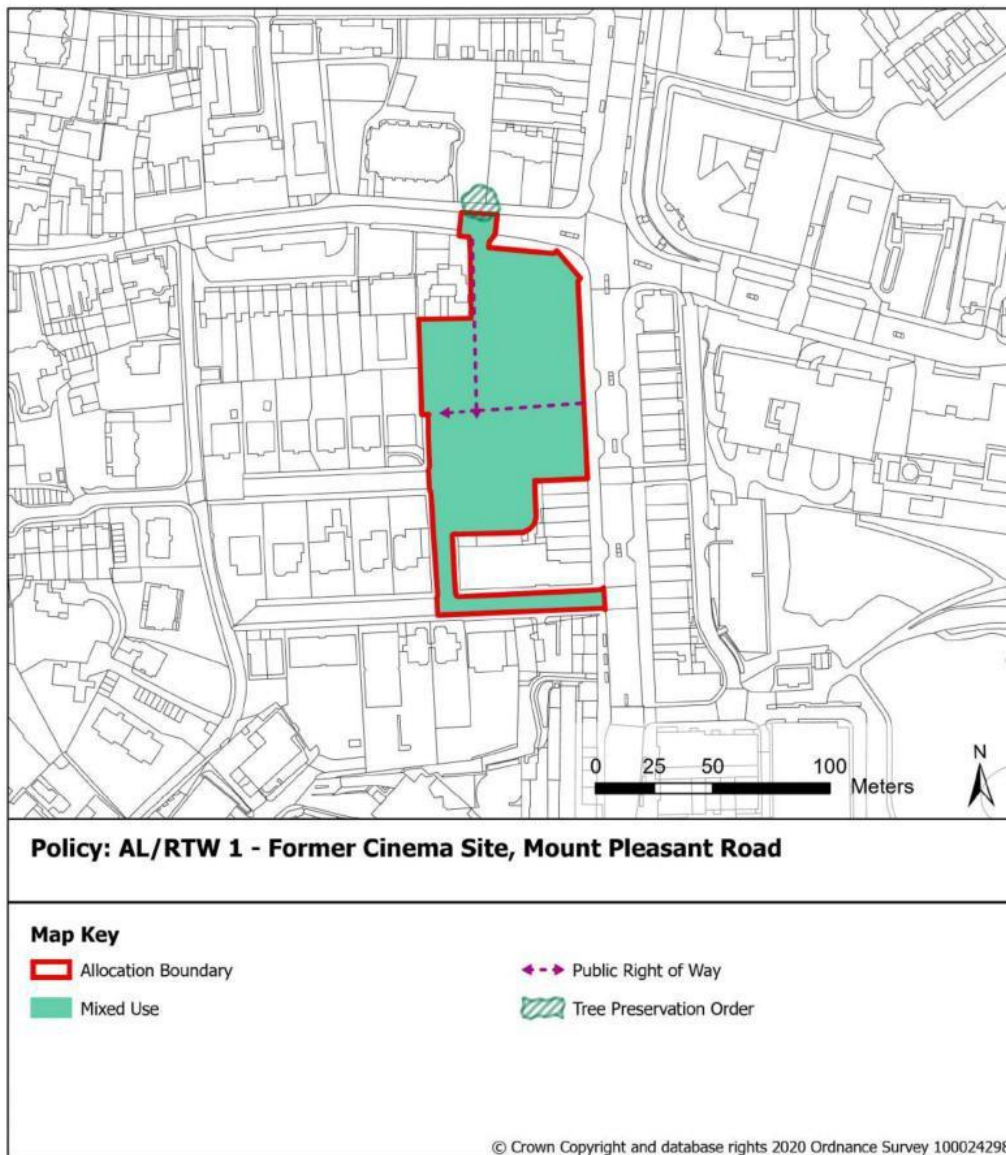
Allocation policies for Royal Tunbridge Wells

Former Cinema Site, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells

- 5.7 This is a prominent, previously developed town centre site, within the Main Urban Area, which has been vacant for a considerable length of time, the former cinema having been demolished in 2014 ready for redevelopment of the site subject to planning permission.
- 5.8 The site has a lengthy frontage along Mount Pleasant Road and wrapping around the corner into Church Road, occupying a prominent corner position in the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells. It is well located for a range of town centre uses due to its central location and proximity to other retail and leisure uses, services, and facilities, as well as the train station.
- 5.9 The site falls within the Royal Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area and is adjacent to, and in proximity to, a number of listed buildings, and any development will need to respect not only the historic context of its location and its potential impact/relationship with adjacent properties, but also its wider context and impact on the street scene and wider views.
- 5.10 Planning permission was granted for a comprehensive mixed-use development comprising A1/A2/A3 retail and restaurant uses, D2 cinema use and C3 (99 residential dwellings) under 17/02262/FULL. A minor material amendment application was approved in 2019 for a number of amendments, although still incorporating a mixed-use development but with a reduction of retail floorspace, removal of office accommodation, and external and internal alterations. This permission was has been implemented but not built out.
- 5.11 A subsequent planning application was submitted for the site in August 2022, (22/02304/FULL) for the redevelopment of the site comprising the demolition of 41 Mount Pleasant Road, removal of hard-standing and the provision of an extra care accommodation, together with associated facilities, (Use Class C2), new commercial floorspace Use Classes E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d) (soft/ indoor play only) E (e), E(g i & ii) and Sui Generis Uses (beauty related uses and drinking establishments); access; landscaping, public realm improvement works; engineering and earthworks; associated infrastructure; and the re-alignment of Public Right of Way ref WBX17 and extinguishment of Public Right of Way ref WXB18. Planning permission was granted in January 2023 and development has commenced on site. however, the site is currently being marketed and it is uncertain at this stage if any new site owner will implement the current scheme or pursue an alternative scheme for the site.

5.12 The policy therefore sets out the requirement for a mix of town centre uses which are considered appropriate for the site and the criteria which any future development should accord with, with particular attention to the design and heritage considerations of this prominent town centre site.

Map 1 Site Layout Plan



Policy AL/RTW1

Former Cinema Site, Mount Pleasant Road

This site, as defined on the Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough Policies Map (Inset Maps 1a-1d and 2), is allocated for mixed use development to include ~~approximately 400~~ approximately 166 residential units dwellings (which may be in the form of extra-care accommodation) and any uses falling within Commercial Use Class E (a—shops), (b—restaurants), (c—financial services, professional services and other services) and sui generis town centre uses to which may include a cinema and cafés or and drinking establishments.

Development on the site shall accord with the following requirements:

1. Provision of shops, restaurants that fall within Use Class E(a), and sui generis uses, to include cafés or drinking establishments, along an active retail frontage to Mount Pleasant Road, and turning the corner at the junction with Church Road;
2. All servicing and delivery activity shall be contained within the site boundary. The development shall ensure suitable pedestrian and cycling permeability through the site and to the surrounding area; the location and design of the access to the site, and highways and transport mitigation measures, to be informed by a highway assessment;
3. Development must be of a high-quality design, informed by landscape and visual impact and heritage assessments, and shall demonstrate how it ~~conserves~~ preserves and or enhances the conservation area and protects the setting of the adjacent listed buildings. Particular regard shall be had to the relationship to the spire of Trinity Church, and in relationship to the tree-lined ridge when viewed from Mount Ephraim Road (i.e. adjacent to the Common);
4. Development shall promote the use of high quality, locally distinctive materials and features;
5. Provision of a strong architectural element to address the corner of Church Road and Mount Pleasant Road;
6. Provision of public realm improvements to complement and extend the new public realm features already delivered to the north of the site. This should include the provision of public art, which may include water features;
7. Proposals shall explore the potential to enhance the lighting of the area to promote public safety and improve the night-time setting of historic buildings and the associated public realm;

8. Proposals must be accompanied by an air quality assessment and appropriate mitigation measures;
9. An archaeological desk-based assessment is required for the site;
10. Provision of on-site amenity/natural green space and children's play space;
11. The layout should be planned to ensure access to existing wastewater infrastructure for maintenance and upsizing purposes;
12. Contributions are to be provided to mitigate the impact of the development, in accordance with Policy STR/RTW 1.

In addition to the criteria in the above Policy, the relevant Policies that should be referred to in the Local Plan include: Policies EN 1: Sustainable Design; EN 4: Historic Environment; EN 5: Heritage Assets; EN 8: Outdoor Lighting and Dark Skies; EN 21: Air Quality; EN 24: Water Supply, Quality, and Conservation; TP 1: Transport Assessments, Travel Plans, and Mitigation; TP 2: Transport Design and Accessibility; and OSSR 2: The Provision of Publicly Accessible Open Space and Recreation.