

WAN/906/6 – SOHA Housing Limited

Residential development of 27 no. 1 and 2 bedroom flats together with associated parking and landscaping. Bus Depot, Grove Street, Wantage

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 This application seeks permission for the erection of a block of 27 flats with associated parking and amenity space. The site is located on the corner of Grove Street and Limborough Road to the rear of Sainsbury's. The proposed building would front onto the roundabout on Grove Street which forms one of the main approach roads into Wantage town centre.
- 1.2 The site is currently vacant and consists of an area of open grass land. However, it was formerly a bus depot.
- 1.3 The plans have been amended from those originally submitted. The building has been reduced in size from 33 flats to 27 to accommodate some private amenity space within the site, and the necessary parking provision (27 spaces). The design of the building has also been amended to reduce the bulk of the development along the Limborough Road frontage and enable it to fit more comfortably into the street scene and surrounding area.
- 1.4 The site lies outside but adjacent to the Conservation Area.
- 1.5 It is intended that most, if not all, of the proposed flats will be affordable, with the tenure type to be agreed.
- 1.6 Extracts from the original application plans and the amended drawings are at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.7 The application comes to Committee as the Town Council objects.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 Various planning applications were approved in the 1970's relating to the use of the site as a bus depot.
- 2.2 Planning permission was granted in January 1990 for the change of use of the bus depot to second hand car sales, on a temporary basis. That permission was renewed in April 1991 and May 1992.
- 2.3 An application for residential development consisting of 24 flats was submitted in January 2005 but was withdrawn due to concerns over the proposed height and design of the building.
- 2.4 The area of land opposite the application site on the roundabout has planning permission for a petrol filling station, and the site adjacent to this in Limborough Road has an extant residential permission.

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 Policy H4 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan permits residential development within the Wantage development boundary as set out on the Proposals Map on sites not allocated in the Local Plan. This site is well within this development boundary and close to the town centre.
- 3.2 Policies D1, D2 and D3 of the adopted Local Plan refer to the design of new development, the impact on neighbouring properties, and whether parking, turning and access facilities are adequate.
- 3.3 Policy D4 of the adopted Local Plan refers to the need for both hard and soft landscaping helping to ensure the proposal blends into the surrounding area.

- 3.4 Policy HE8 of the adopted Local Plan refers to the need for new development not to harm the setting of a Conservation Area.
- 3.5 Policy GS1 of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan refers to the general need for new development to be concentrated within the five main settlements (including Wantage), apart from on important open land within the settlement.
- 3.6 Policies DC1, DC5, DC6, and DC9 of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan refer to the design of new development, access and parking considerations, the provision of hard and soft landscaping, and the impact of new development on neighbouring properties.
- 3.7 Policy HE1 of the Draft Local Plan refers to the need for new development not to harm the setting of a Conservation Area.

4.0 **Consultations**

- 4.1 Wantage Town Council strongly objected to the original plans due to the height and design of the building. In relation to the amended plans they acknowledge that they are a considerable improvement on the previous submission but still raise concerns regarding the height. For this reason they object to the amended plans. The Town Council's full comments in relation to both sets of plans are attached at **Appendix 2.**
- 4.2 The County Engineer's comments on both sets of plans have yet to be received and will be reported at the Meeting.
- 4.3 The County Council Development Funding Officer has requested a contribution of £6287 towards library, fire and rescue, and waste management facilities. This has been agreed and payment has been secured in the form of a unilateral undertaking.
- 4.4 The Architects Advisory Panel is supportive of the scheme.
- 4.5 The Consultant Architect is generally supportive of the original drawings with some comments which have been reflected in the amended plans. His full comments are attached at **Appendix 3.**
- 4.6 The Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor commented on the original proposal. These are attached at **Appendix 4.**
- 4.7 One letter of objection has been received from a local resident in Crooks Terrace raising the following concerns in relation to the original plans:
- The proposed building would result in loss of light to the surrounding properties.
 - The parking provision is not sufficient.
 - There is not a need for further housing in the area. Existing houses are not selling.
 - The proposal will put additional pressure on already poor local facilities such as schools, doctors etc.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 The main determining issues to consider in relation to this application are:
- i) Whether the principle of the development is acceptable in this location;
 - ii) The design of the proposed development and its impact on the character of the area in terms of height and design, and its impact on the setting of the Conservation Area;
 - iii) The impact of the proposed building on the amenities of nearby residents; and

iv) Whether the site has sufficient amenity space, car parking and cycle storage to serve 27 flats in this location.

- 5.2 The site lies well within the Wantage Development Boundary and is located only a few minutes walk from the Market Place. The land has been previously developed and, although currently open grassland, it does not form an important open space which contributes positively to the character of the area. Your Officers, therefore, consider that the principle of residential development on this site is acceptable.
- 5.3 Your Officers acknowledge that this site is important in terms of its prominence along one of the main routes into the town centre. Currently, the site provides open views towards the rear of the Sainsbury's building and the adjacent public house car park. By screening this currently unattractive view across the site with a building which would form a feature on this prominent corner, it is considered the proposal would enhance this part of Wantage and enhance the setting of the Conservation Area.
- 5.4 Although the proposed building is 3-storeys, it is considered that this height and mass in itself would not result in an incongruous building in the street scene but, rather, would provide a focal point as you enter the town centre. The corner elevation has been designed as a feature with the building following the road layout on either side. The height of the proposed building is of a similar scale to the nearby development in Letcombe Park and the proposed residential development opposite the site in Limborough Road.
- 5.5 The revised drawings show the elevation to Limborough Road with a variety of heights and treatments which your Officers consider help "break up" the mass of this long elevation. Additional landscaping has been incorporated, including some private amenity space to the rear of the building which was omitted from the original drawings. Your Officers consider this is sufficient to meet the needs of the proposed residents, and has benefited the overall site layout in design terms by reducing the size of the building.
- 5.6 In terms of residential amenity, the site is bounded to the rear by Sainsbury's and the adjacent Abingdon Arms Public House and its car park. The nearest residential properties in this direction are located the other side of the car park and are at a higher level up the hill than the application site. The properties fronting onto Grove Street on the other side of the road are at least 30 metres away from the proposed building. Despite its height, your Officers do not consider that the proposal would have a harmful impact on the amenities of any nearby residential properties.
- 5.7 The proposal incorporates parking for 27 cars which equates to one per flat, and there is some cycle storage provision. Your Officers consider this is sufficient bearing in mind the small units proposed and the proximity of the proposal to the facilities and public transport links available in Wantage town centre. However, the County Engineer's comments on the proposal and will be reported at the Meeting.

6.0 **Recommendation**

- 6.1 *It is recommended that the application be delegated for approval to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair and/or Vice Chair of the Development Control Committee subject to the County Engineer raising no objections and subject to appropriate conditions.*