

APPLICATION NO.	P12/V2196/FUL
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL APPLICATION
REGISTERED	26 October 2012
PARISH	ABINGDON
WARD MEMBER(S)	Julie Mayhew-Archer Tony de Vere
APPLICANT	Ms T L Norris-Evans, Mr R A Peet and Mrs A R Battson
SITE PROPOSAL	33 West St Helen Street Abingdon, OX14 5BL Change of use of building from Class B1 (offices) to Class C3 (residential) to form 10 flats (9 x 1 bed and 1 x 2 bed flat)
AMENDMENTS	Re-configuration of two flats – received 14.12.12
GRID REFERENCE	449649/196939
OFFICER	Laura Hudson

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application relates to 33 West St Helen Street, which is currently divided into five office units amounting to approximately 332 sq metres of floor space located in the centre of Abingdon. The offices are now largely vacant.
- 1.2 The building is attached at the rear of a terrace of residential properties and has a small external courtyard to the rear.
- 1.3 The building has no parking specifically allocated to its existing use.
- 1.4 The property is located in the Abingdon Conservation Area.
- 1.5 The application comes to committee as Abingdon Town Council objects.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of the building from offices to flats. The building would be divided into ten flats all with one bedroom apart from one unit on the ground floor which has two bedrooms and benefits from use of the outside courtyard.
- 2.2 The building currently has no allocated parking for the office use and the proposed residential use would be a car-free scheme with no parking provision.
- 2.3 The application includes some minor external alterations including on the front elevation changing the door of the building to a window and inserting a new door in place of an existing window, and on the rear elevation inserting obscure glazing within the windows on the first and second floors which face neighbouring gardens. In addition the existing air conditioning units would be removed from the rear elevation.
- 2.4 The application includes the provision of an additional bin storage area within the archway underneath the building.
- 2.5 A site plan and extracts from the application drawings are **attached** at appendix 1.

3.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 Abingdon Town Council – “The Committee objected to this application that there is insufficient provision for car parking within the proposed development, in contravention of policy DC5 (iv) (access – provision for parking vehicles) of the adopted Vale of White Horse District Local Plan 2011. However they were supportive of all other aspects of the application, and asked that this be noted.”
- 3.2 County Engineer – No objection to the proposal given the town centre location and access to services and public transport links. However there is no capacity within the residents’ parking permit scheme, therefore future residents should be excluded from the scheme which will become a car-free development. A condition to ensure this happens is necessary in addition to a contribution of £1,000 towards the provision of a new pole flag on the existing bus stop.
- 3.3 Thames Water – No objections.
- 3.4 Equalities Officer – No objections
- 3.5 Council Drainage Engineer – No objections subject the submission of details
- 3.6 Conservation Officer – No objections subject to details
- 3.7 Council Waste Management – No objections to the proposed bin provision
- 3.8 Six letters of objection and one letter of comment have been received from local residents raising the following concerns:
- The proposal has no parking which will put pressure on parking in the local area and the residents’ parking scheme.
 - The proposal will result in overlooking which, due to the existing office use, does not occur in the evenings or weekends.
 - The proposal will result in an increase in noise in the area.
 - The proposed bin storage will result in increased smells in the vicinity of the site.
 - Glad to see the noisy air conditioning units going.
 - Glad to see the rear windows will be obscure glazed to prevent overlooking.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 [P01/V0197](#) - Approved (05/11/2002)
Demolition of office building, derelict cinema and Southern Electricity showrooms.
Construction of 33 houses, 23 flats, 13 Foyer units with offices and shop on the site.
- 4.2 [P01/V0198/CA](#) - Approved (05/11/2002)
Demolition of office building, derelict cinema and SEB showroom.
- 4.3 [P98/V0941/O](#) - Approved (28/10/1999)
Redevelopment of existing site to provide a mix of retail, residential, office and community uses and associated car parking. Demolition of Regal Cinema and Neave House (offices). (Site area approximately 0.84 hectares).

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

Vale of White Horse Local Plans

- 5.1 Policy DC1 requires new development to be of a high design quality in terms of layout, scale, mass, height, detailing, materials to be used, and its relationship with adjoining buildings.
- 5.2 Policy DC5 requires safe and convenient access and parking and suitable access from the public highway.
- 5.3 Policy DC9 seeks to ensure development will not unacceptably harm the amenities of neighbouring properties and the wider environment.
- 5.4 Policy H10 states that development within the built-up area of the five main settlements of the District including Abingdon will be permitted provided it would not result in the loss of areas of informal public open space, and provided the layout, mass and design would not harm the character of the area.
- 5.5 Policy HE1 refers to development in conservation areas stating that it will not be permitted unless the established character of the area is preserved or enhanced.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 5.6 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraphs 14 and 49). Paragraphs 34 and 37 encourage minimised journey lengths to work, shopping, leisure and education, and paragraphs 57, 60 and 61 seek to promote local distinctiveness and integrate development into the natural, built and historic environment. Paragraph 51 encourages the change of use of commercial uses (currently in the B use classes) to residential providing there is no strong economic reason why the development is not appropriate.

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 The main issues to consider in determining this application are; i) the principle of the change of use; ii) the impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area; iii) the impact on neighbouring properties; iv) parking considerations.
- 6.2 The building is located within Abingdon town centre and currently has an established commercial office use. The proposal seeks to change the use to residential in a location where there are no policies which protect commercial uses but where residential is considered an appropriate town centre use adding to the vitality of the area. The property is also outside the primary and secondary shopping frontages defined in the local plan which seek to protect commercial uses on the ground floor of the premises. Given the central and sustainable location of the site, residential use of the building is considered acceptable in principle and in accordance with local plan policies and the NPPF which encourages the re-use of commercial premises for residential purposes.
- 6.3 The office building was constructed as part of a larger scheme which included a significant amount of residential development to the rear of the application site. The building has a residential rather than commercial appearance and fits comfortably into

the existing mixed street scene. The application proposes few external alterations which would retain the character of the building and with the removal of the air conditioning units at the rear the building's appearance would be enhanced. Subject to agreeing details of the proposed new external joinery, the proposal would have no harmful impact on the character or appearance of the conservation area.

- 6.4 The building is attached at the rear to an existing terrace of dwellings which formed part of the original development. In addition, there are other dwellings in close proximity as would be expected of this town centre location. Concern has been raised by the occupants of neighbouring properties over the overlooking impact of rear facing windows in the application building which would change from a commercial use and is therefore empty at weekends and evenings, to a residential use. However, the first and second floor windows of the building which face towards the gardens of 25-27 Neave Mews to the rear are proposed as obscure glazed. The internal arrangement of the flats affected have been re-organised so that the windows in question do not serve habitable rooms but only hallways and bathrooms. The proposal, therefore, would not have a harmful impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties in terms of overlooking.
- 6.5 Concern has also been raised by local residents over the impact of additional noise created by the proposed use. However, given the town centre uses in the vicinity of the site it is considered that a residential use in this location adjacent to existing similar uses is entirely appropriate and would not have an unacceptable noise impact on existing residents.
- 6.6 One of the main concerns of residents and the town council is the lack of car parking for the proposed flats. The building does not have any associated parking under its current use and, therefore, there are no opportunities to provide parking on site. The site is located within the town centre where there are a range of services and facilities, and good public transport links and, therefore, it is a sustainable location. The County Engineer has raised no objections subject to conditions requiring bicycle storage to be implemented prior to occupation and to ensure that the residents are not eligible to join the local car parking permit scheme given its limited capacity. The proposed development, therefore, would be a car-free scheme which is considered acceptable in this sustainable location, particularly as it relates to the re-use of an existing building.
- 6.7 A unilateral undertaking is necessary in order to secure the required improvement to the bus stop. The applicants have agreed to prepare this.
- 6.8 The application includes additional bin storage for the proposed flats which would be located adjacent to existing provision. The council's waste management team are satisfied with the proposed additional provision. A condition is recommended requiring full details of the new enclosure and to ensure that it is implemented prior to occupation of the flats.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The building lies within Abingdon town centre which is a sustainable location for additional residential units in accordance with the NPPF. The absence of allocated parking in this sustainable location is considered acceptable given the fact that the development involves the conversion of an existing building in the town centre which currently has no parking. The proposal involves few external changes to the building and, therefore, the character and appearance of the conservation area would be preserved and enhanced by the removal of the air conditioning units. Subject to the obscure glazing of the windows on the rear elevation, there would be no harmful impact

on the amenity of neighbouring properties.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the application is delegated for approval to the head of planning in consultation with the committee chairman and vice chairman subject to a unilateral undertaking to secure the required contributions and subject to the following conditions:

- 1. TL1 - Time limit**
- 2. Planning condition listing the approved drawings**
- 3. RE28 - Obscured glazing (opening)**
- 4. CN8 - Submission of details**
- 5. HY20 - Bicycle parking**
- 6. MC24 - Drainage details (surface and foul)**
- 7. RE31 – Car-free housing – To prevent residents joining the permit scheme.**
- 8. Full details of bin storage enclosure and implementation before occupation**

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