

ABG/19291/2 – Mr B Cade

Conversion of passageway to flat with 1 parking space, 21 – 21A West St Helen Street, Abingdon

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1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 The application site is part of a Grade II listed building in Abingdon Town Centre Conservation Area. It is currently a long open space enclosed by two walls, one of which is a stone wall, the other the wall to houses in Hive Mews. The proposal is to roof over the enclosure with a low pitch roof containing rooflights and celestory glazing. All these windows in the roof would be fixed shut. Entry to the flat would be via a door in the stone wall, which would lead to an open court. Windows into this court would serve the living room and bedroom. The bathroom and kitchen would be mechanically ventilated. The applicant can provide 1 car parking space in the courtyard to the rear to serve the flat. Extracts from the application drawings are in **Appendix 1**.
- 1.2 This application comes to Committee as the Town Council and 4 local residents have objected.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 In March 2005, Committee refused planning permission for the conversion of the passageway to a flat (ref ABG/15707/1). The decision letter and plans are in **Appendix 2**. In November 2005, planning permission was refused for a revised application (ABG/19291).

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 In the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan, Policy HE1 requires all development to protect the character or appearance of a conservation area, while Policy HE11 aims to protect the special architectural or historic character of a listed building from harmful development. Policy S8 encourages the provision of residential accommodation within Abingdon town centre. Policies D1, D2 and D3 require all development to be acceptable in terms of design, impact on neighbours and highway safety. Policy D16 seeks to prevent new development that would exacerbate the likelihood of flooding.
- 3.2 The Second Deposit Draft Local Plan 2011 contains similar policies, namely HE1, HE6, S4, DC1, DC2 and DC3

4.0 Consultations

- 4.1 Abingdon Town Council – Objects for the following reason –

“Contrary to Policy DC9(i), (ii) and (vi) of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan 2011. If permitted this development would harm the amenities of neighbouring properties and it was considered to be an overdevelopment of the site. Amended plans showed no material difference.”

- 4.2 Local Residents – 4 local residents object for the following reasons:-

- i) the flat will cause harm to neighbours’ amenity through noise and smells
- ii) the proposal will result in lack of access for maintenance of neighbours’ property
- iii) the flat will have poor amenity for its occupants

- 4.3 County Engineer – no objection subject to conditions.

- 4.4 Council’s Assistant Director (Environmental Health) – no objection

5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 Four main issues are relevant to the consideration of these planning and listed building applications:-

1. The impact on the special character of the listed building
2. The amenity of future occupants
3. The effect on neighbours
4. Highway safety

5.2 Regarding the first issue, the stone wall is of historic significance and is likely to mark a former passageway. The conversion of the passageway to a flat has been carefully designed to retain the stone wall intact. As a space, the passageway is not likely to be attractive – it is on the north side of the dwellings in Hive Mews and receives little sunlight. Officers consider the scheme to be an imaginative way making a positive use of the wall, and of providing greater reassurance about its upkeep. Overall, the impact on the listed structure is considered to be acceptable.

5.3 Regarding the amenity of residents of the flat, Officers have given this matter further thought. Members will be aware that the best means of safeguarding a listed building is to find a beneficial use for it, and that normal standards can be relaxed to allow this to happen. It has also been noted that in 2003, Committee granted planning permission for the conversion of a basement to a flat at No.13 Lombard Street (ref ABG/16290/2). That flat had less intrinsic amenity than the proposed flat. Lighting and ventilation of the proposed flat would meet building regulations and Officers consider that, in view of the desire to safeguard the wall, the proposed flat would have an adequate level of amenity.

5.4 The third issue is the impact on neighbours in Nos 2 and 3 Hive Mews to the south. The previous concerns related to the likely impact from noise and other forms of disturbance in Summer emanating from open rooflights in the flat into open rooflights in the Hive Mews dwellings. This application differs from the previous ones in that both the rooflights and the celestory lights in the flat would be fixed shut. A condition can be imposed to ensure control over this aspect of the proposal. On balance Officers consider the proposal should have an acceptable impact on neighbours.

5.5 Turning to highway safety, the scheme includes the provision of a parking space in the courtyard for the flat. This meets the Council's maximum standard for off-street parking for a 1-bedroom dwelling in the town centre and, subject to this, the County Engineer raises no objections.

5.6 Objections have been made on the grounds of the effect on property maintenance. Members will be aware that this is not a material consideration.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *It is recommended that authority to grant planning permission and listed building consent is delegated to the Chair and/or Vice-Chair, in consultation with the Director of Environmental Services, subject to conditions, including materials; details of new windows, rooflights, doors and glazing; the permanent fixing shut of the rooflights and celestory lights; details of interior works and making good; details of all ventilation systems, vents and flues; details of all new pipe work for water and gas; details of meter boxes; and parking provision*