

WAN/7226/3 – Pegasus Retirement Homes Plc

Conversion of workshop building to form two apartments and erection of 2/3 storey building comprising 41 apartments for the retired together with residents lounge, guest suite, estate managers office, access and parking provisions.

61 Mill Street, Wantage.

WAN/7226/4-CA – Pegasus Retirement Homes Plc

Demolition of Buildings.

61 Mill Street, Wantage.

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 These applications relating to 61 Mill Street, Wantage seek conservation area consent for the demolition of a series of concrete block and corrugated iron sheds and planning permission for their replacement with 41 retirement flats in a 2 and 3 storey building. The planning application also includes the retention and conversion of the brick building at the front of the site into 2 apartments.
- 1.2 The flats would be made up of 26 no. 1 bedroom units and 15 no. 2 bedroom units in the main building, and 2 no. 1 bedroom units in the existing building.
- 1.3 The site would be accessed via the existing site entrance from Mill Street, and the scheme includes car parking to the front of the building consisting of 22 spaces and a shelter for 3 battery cars.
- 1.4 The site layout includes areas of communal open space around the building with landscaping, and access to the Betjeman Park adjacent to the site via a bridge across the leat.
- 1.5 The site is within the Wantage Conservation Area and The Lamb Public House adjacent to the site is Grade II listed. Furthermore the site is within a flood plain.
- 1.6 Extracts from the application plans are at **Appendix 1**.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 Planning permission was refused in July 1983 for the erection of an industrial building to be used for packaging purposes. A subsequent appeal was dismissed in February 1984.
- 2.2 Planning permission for 44 apartments for the elderly was refused in March 2006. A copy of the plans and decision notice are attached at **Appendix 2**. An associated application for conservation area consent was also refused in April 2005.

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 Policy H10 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan refers to proposals for specialised accommodation for the elderly within the main built up area of Wantage. Proposals will be permitted providing proposed sites are free from physical impediments to movement and are within easy walking distance of shops and public transport routes.
- 3.2 Policy H18 of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan covers the same issues.
- 3.3 Adopted Policies HE1 and HE5 refer to development and demolition of unlisted buildings within the Conservation Area. HE1 states that new development should preserve or enhance the special character and appearance of the area. HE5 states that any building which makes a positive contribution to the character of the area should be retained. When considering demolition, the quality of the replacement proposal should be taken into consideration.

- 3.4 Policies HE1 and HE2 of the emerging Local Plan cover the same issues.
- 3.5 Adopted Policies D1, D2 and D3 refer to the design of new development, the impact of development on the amenities of neighbouring properties, and access and parking considerations.
- 3.6 The same issues are covered in emerging Policies DC1, DC5 and DC9.
- 3.7 Other policies that need to be taken into account concern the possible requirement for affordable housing – i.e. Policy H3 in the adopted Local Plan and Policy H16 in the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan.
- 4.0 **Consultations**
- 4.1 Wantage Town Council objects to the application. Their full comments are attached at **Appendix 3**.
- 4.2 The County Engineer's comments have yet to be received and will be reported orally at the Meeting.
- 4.3 The Crime Prevention Design Advisor for Oxfordshire has commented on the application. These are attached at **Appendix 4**.
- 4.4 The County Developer Funding Officer has requested a contribution of £39,156 towards Library, Waste Management and Social and Health Care facilities, and the provision of the required number of fire hydrants.
- 4.5 The Council's Consultant Architect is generally supportive of the scheme. His full comments are attached at **Appendix 5**.
- 4.6 Wantage and District Chamber of Commerce objects to the proposal due to the loss of small industrial units.
- 4.7 The Letcombe Brook Project Officer has submitted a holding objection due to concern over the impact of the development on the adjacent leat of the Letcombe Brook which is likely to be a crayfish habitat. An ecological survey has been requested in relation to the crayfish and the possible existence of bats in the buildings. An update will be provided on this at the Meeting. Concern has also been expressed over the likely impact of the proposed landscaping scheme on the watercourse.
- 4.8 The County Archaeologist has requested an archaeological field evaluation on the site prior to determination. An update on this will be provided at the Meeting.
- 4.9 Despite the submission of a flood risk assessment, The Environment Agency has submitted a holding objection due to the lack of information in relation to the potential risk to controlled waters. This information has been requested and a further update will be provided at the Meeting.
- 4.10 The County Ecologist does not object to the proposal from an ecological point of view but has stated that there may be bats associated with the workshops on the site, and crayfish associated with the nearby Letcombe Brook. He has recommended that surveys be undertaken.
- 4.11 The Letcombe Brook Charitable Trust, who are the trustees of the Betjeman Millennium Park, supports the proposal.
- 4.12 5 letters of objection have been received from local residents raising the following concerns:

- Insufficient parking spaces have been provided for this size development which will lead to on street parking in the surrounding area.
- Concern that the conservation area consent application will be permitted without the re-development leading to a vacant site which will attract travellers and rubbish.
- The number of units proposed is too many for this site.
- The scale of the proposed building is too high and will overshadow and reduce sunlight to neighbouring properties.
- Increased traffic will result in congestion in Mill Street.
- The proposed flats will overlook the neighbouring properties and will result in loss of privacy.
- The proposal would result in the loss of employment uses in the Town Centre.
- The building should be restricted to 2 storeys only.

4.13 1 letter of support has been received from a local resident raising the following issue:

- Concerns over the previous scheme have been addressed in relation to the South West elevation which has been reduced in height.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 The main issues to consider in determining this application are: i) Whether the principle of the development is acceptable in this location; ii) Whether the design of the proposal and the demolition of existing buildings is appropriate in this area and its impact on the Conservation Area; iii) The impact of the proposal on the amenities of neighbouring properties; iv) Whether the parking and access provision for the proposal is acceptable; v) The ecological impact of the proposal including flooding; and vi) The requirements for affordable housing provision on the site.

5.2 Given the existing industrial buildings on the site and its previously developed nature, the site does have re-development potential. It is also located within the heart of the town and has an existing vehicular access. The principle of its re-development for retirement apartments does not conflict with the development plan.

5.3 The current design of the building, although similar in form to the previous scheme, has addressed the various elements causing the most significant concern, particularly regarding the elevation facing the dwellings in Priory Orchard and that fronting Betjeman Park. The bulk of the building has been reduced by breaking up the principal elevations with varying roof heights and alternating materials to give the impression of a residential terrace rather than a single building. The Trustees of Betjeman Park, who objected to the original scheme, are now supportive of this current proposal. Subject to some minor changes, the Consultant Architect is also now supportive of the current design.

5.4 The current proposal now seeks to retain the brick building fronting Mill Street, which is proposed to be converted to accommodation in the form of 2 flats. This building forms an important feature in the street scene and its retention is considered necessary. The remaining buildings are industrial and do not currently contribute positively to the character of Conservation Area, so there is no objection to their proposed demolition.

5.5 The closest residential units to the proposed development are located to the north west of the site in Priory Orchard. The land slopes up to these properties, therefore they sit at a slightly higher level than the site. The current plans seek to address the previous concerns of the residents in relation to overshadowing. The element of the building closest to nos 23 and 24 Priory Orchard is now single storey with the higher element now over 20 metres away from the rear of these dwellings. The element of the building facing the rear of nos 25 to 27 Priory Orchard is just under 24 metres away from the rear windows of the neighbouring units and 16 metres from the rear boundary of these properties. The remaining section along this elevation, although close to the boundary, sits to the rear of a garage block with the flank wall of no 28 Priory Orchard 23 metres away and at a higher level than the proposal.

- 5.6 The comments of the Highway Authority have yet to be received on this proposal but its design, layout and parking provision are designed on the assumption of its occupation by retired people. On this basis, the parking provision is reduced and the Highway Authority will assess it with this in mind. There is an existing vehicular access serving this site which has an authorised industrial use, and this represents the fall back position in terms of traffic generation. The Highway Authority's observations will be reported at the Meeting.
- 5.7 The site is within the flood plain and a flood risk assessment has been submitted. The Environment Agency has requested further information and an update on this will be provided at the Meeting.
- 5.8 Consultation responses have revealed the existence of crayfish in the adjacent brook, and the possibility of bats in the buildings. These issues are being investigated and a further update will be provided at the Meeting.
- 5.9 Due to the size of the proposed development there is likely to be a requirement for affordable housing provision. As the development is designed specifically for the retired, the density of development is much higher than a standard residential development. The provision of affordable housing would therefore be based on the development of the site at 50 dwellings per hectare which equates to 17 units. 40% of this is 7 units which would be the likely requirement. The exact nature of the provision is being clarified and an update will be provided at the Meeting.

6.0 **Recommendation**

- 6.1 *It is recommended that authority to grant permission is delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair and/or Vice Chair of the Development Control Committee subject to:*
1. *No objections raised by the County Engineer*
 2. *No objections raised by the Environment Agency*
 3. *No objections raised by the County Archaeologist*
 4. *Securing the contributions required by the County Developer Funding Officer towards local facilities.*
 5. *The completion of an ecological survey identifying protected species on the site and including, where required, a scheme of mitigation to the satisfaction of the County Ecological Officer*
 6. *Conditions to include materials, detailing, boundary treatment, drainage, slab level, occupancy restriction, affordable housing provision, landscaping, conditions recommended by the Environment Agency, and conditions recommended by the County Engineer.*