

**ABG/20273/3-X – Oxfordshire County Council  
Demolition of existing offices. Erection of 10 apartments comprising of 6x1 bed and 4x2 bed flats with parking and ancillary landscaping. Closure of existing access and formation of new access off Wootton Road.  
Champion House, 12 Wootton Road, Abingdon, OX14 1JA.**

**1.0 The Proposal**

- 1.1 This application seeks outline planning permission for the demolition of the existing office building and the redevelopment of the site for 6x1 bedroom and 4x2 bedroom flats with associated parking, amenity space and landscaping. Only access is due for consideration under this application, with layout, scale, external appearance and landscaping being reserved matters.
- 1.2 The proposal is shown illustratively as a part 2 storey, part 3 storey building perpendicular to Wootton Road and of a traditional design. The layout plan shows car parking for the flats is to be provided to the side and rear of the new building with a new vehicular access directly onto Wootton Road. The majority of existing landscaping on the boundary with John Mason School and Wootton Road is shown to be retained, although some trees will be removed in relation to the new access. It is likely that trees close to the proposed building will also be removed as indicated on the illustrative layout drawing.
- 1.3 A copy of the plans showing the location of the proposal, its illustrative layout and design, together with extracts from the design and access statement are attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.4 The application comes to Committee because a number of objection letters have been received, and Abingdon Town Council objects to the application.

**2.0 Planning History**

- 2.1 In 1995, planning permission was granted for a change of use of the existing building to a non residential social services resource centre. In 1996 permission was granted for the building to be used by Oxfordshire County Council Education Department and a further change of use of the building to offices was granted in 1998.

**3.0 Planning Policies**

- 3.1 *Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011*  
Policy GS5 (making efficient use of land and buildings) seeks to promote the efficient re-use of previously developed / unused land and buildings within settlements (provided there is no conflict with other policies in the Local Plan).
- 3.2 Policy H10 (development in the five main settlements) enables new housing development within the built-up area of Abingdon, provided it makes efficient use of land, the layout, mass and design of the dwellings would not harm the character of the area and it does not involve the loss of facilities important to the local community (i.e. informal public open space).
- 3.3 Policy H15 (housing densities) seeks net residential densities of at least 40 dwellings per hectare in the five main settlements, provided there would be no harm to the character of the surrounding area or the amenities of adjoining properties.

- 3.4 Policies DC1, DC5, DC6, DC8, DC9 and DC14 (quality of new development) are relevant and seek to ensure that all new development is of a high standard of design / landscaping; does not cause harm to the amenity of neighbours; suitable social and physical infrastructure exists for the development or can be provided; the development is acceptable in terms of highway safety, and will not result in adverse surface water run-off.
- 3.5 PPS3, "Housing", is also relevant and reiterates the key objective of developing previously developed sites within urban areas, where suitable, ahead of greenfield sites and making the most effective and efficient use of land. It also comments on the importance of design, in that proposed development should complement the neighbouring buildings and the local area in general in terms of scale, density, layout and access. Paragraph 12 of PPS3 confirms that good design is fundamental to the development of high quality new housing, whilst Paragraph 13 goes on to state that design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted.

#### 4.0 **Consultations**

- 4.1 Abingdon Town Council objects to the proposal stating "Contrary to Policy DC5 (i) of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011. Also inadequate parking facilities."
- 4.2 County Engineer –no objections, subject to conditions and a financial contribution towards the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy.
- 4.3 County Funding Officer – seeks contributions to education / library / fire and rescue provision and waste management operations.
- 4.4 County Archaeologist – no objections.
- 4.5 Drainage Engineer – no objections, subject to conditions.
- 4.6 Environmental Health – no objections.
- 4.7 Consultant Architect – comments attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.8 Architects Panel – "It is a shame that attractive building is to be demolished – could it not have been extended. The proposed scheme is too bulky for the site. Needs much more thought at the design stage."
- 4.9 9 letters of objection have been received, which are summarised as follows:
- Building apartments with associated car parking so close to a large secondary school is not a satisfactory option. Wootton Road is extremely busy and additional vehicle movements onto this road will compromise pupils' health and safety along with the safety of other road users.
  - The location of the access is considered dangerous. It is on a bend in the road and lacks adequate visibility.
  - The design as proposed will overlook properties in Godwyn Close and Bath Street.
  - The proposed building is too large for the site. It is too close to the road and will be visually dominant in views from Wootton Road.

- The current building should be converted and not demolished.
- The total height of the building should be restricted to 2 storeys.
- Too many trees are shown to be removed. This will expose the school and the new building to the detriment of the locality. At present the site is well screened and cannot be seen from the road.
- Parking is insufficient.
- The change in levels between the site and Wootton Road will lead to vehicle headlights intruding into adjoining residents when exiting the site at night.
- Due to the number of flats, the proposed development will lead to unacceptable levels of noise and disturbance to local residents.
- This proposal will set a precedent for other buildings along Wootton Road to be demolished and replaced with housing.

## 5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 The main issues in this case are considered to be 1) the principle of the development in this location, 2) the likely impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, 3) the likely impact of the proposal on neighbouring properties, 4) and the safety of the access and parking arrangements.
- 5.2 On the first issue, PPS 3 'Housing' makes it a priority to use previously developed land for new housing and encourages the use of innovative approaches to achieve higher densities within existing settlements. In this respect, paragraphs 9 and 10 of PPS3 specifically refer to the Government's strategic housing policy goal to create sustainable, inclusive, and mixed communities in all areas, with the planning system delivering a mix of housing to support a wide variety of households at a sufficient quantity to take account of need and demand and to seek to improve choice. In addition, Policy H10 of the adopted Local Plan 2011 enables such development. The principle of a development of 10 flats in the manner proposed, therefore, is considered an acceptable and appropriate form of development in this location.
- 5.3 Regarding the second issue, the development in the form proposed is not considered to be harmful to the character of the locality. The proposed extension of the new building closer to Wootton Road than the existing building is considered, in principle, to be acceptable as it would help create a sense of enclosure with the John Mason School buildings (see Consultant Architect's comments). In terms of design, whilst this is a reserved matter, Officers consider that a contemporary design approach would be acceptable as an alternative to the traditional approach shown on the illustrative drawings given the diverse character of the area. Furthermore the Consultant Architect has commented that such a design approach is one which would be more visually interesting. It would also aid a reduction of the bulk of a residential block on the site.
- 5.4 The scheme has a density in excess of 40 dwellings per hectare, which accords with Policy H15. There is on site communal garden space of approximately 370m for use of the residents and 1 parking space per 1 bed flat and 1.5 spaces per 2 bed flat. Officers, therefore, consider that the proposal is not an overdevelopment of the site.
- 5.5 Turning to the third issue, the impact on neighbouring properties, it is considered that no undue harm would be caused to those properties directly opposite the site in Bath Street, which are located approximately 35m from the road side boundary of the site. Any windows of the new flats facing across Wootton Road are thus not considered to

be harmful, given that this is the public side of these dwellings where the level of amenity is expected to be less than that of the private spaces to the rear. Furthermore, the illustrative plan shows that the proposed building would be set further east than the existing building in relation to properties in Godwyn Close. As a result sufficient distance exists (approximately 30m) to avoid any harmful impact on residential amenity. Sufficient distance (approximately 22m) would also exist between the Barnardo's resource centre building to the south. In respect of noise and disturbance, Officers do not consider that any additional impact over the site's existing office use would be unduly harmful to warrant refusal.

5.6 On the issue of parking and access, the proposed arrangements are considered acceptable. The parking provision shown provides 1 space for each 1 bed flat and 1.5 spaces for each 2 bed flat. Furthermore, adequate visibility can be achieved at the new access to ensure pedestrian and highway safety and turning arrangements / gradients within the site are acceptable. Consequently, the County Engineer has no objections to the proposal.

## 6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *That authority to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions is delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning and Community Strategy) in consultation with the Committee Chair in order to enable the completion of a Section 106 Legal Agreement to secure the required financial contributions for highways and social infrastructure.*

1. *TL2 – Outline Time Limit*
2. *OL2 – Reserved matters*
3. *The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until the construction of the site access junction has been completed (including footways and verges), in accordance with Drawing 3091 Rev A and to the standard specification of Oxfordshire County Council.*
4. *The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until the construction of the estate road serving the development, including footways and verges, has been undertaken in accordance with the standard specification of the Oxfordshire County Council..*
5. *Car parking layout in accordance with Drawing 3091 Rev A.*
6. *Bin storage and cycle parking to be constructed prior to first occupation.*
7. *The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until such time as the existing site access has been closed.*
8. *The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until such time as a sustainable drainage strategy for the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the District Planning Authority.*

6.2 *That authority to refuse planning permission is delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning & Community Strategy) in consultation with the Committee Chair*

*should the Section 106 Agreement not be completed within the 13week period (which expires on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2007).*

*The reason for refusal would be based on the lack of necessary financial contributions towards improving local services and infrastructure.*