

Application: 2/2006/0855
Proposal: Erect 1 No dwelling and 12 No self contained flats, form new pedestrian and vehicular access and parking (demolish existing building)
Decision: Withdraw
Decision Date: 29.08.2006

Application: 2/2013/0388/PLNG
Proposal: Erect 13 No. self-contained one and two bedroom flats, form 13 No. parking spaces and vehicular and pedestrian access.
Decision: Refuse
Decision Date: 23.01.2014

There have been several renewals of a 1990 permission (2/1990/0948) since the site ceased use as a car workshop. However, the last permission for 8 flats in 2006 lapsed in 2009.

Planning Appraisal:

Background

There have been several renewals of an original 1990 permission since the site ceased use as a car workshop. However, the last permission for 8 flats in 2006 lapsed in 2009. A 2013 proposal sought an almost identical looking building to that granted permission in 1990 but containing 13 flats. This was refused on account of its poor design and lack of provision of affordable housing. This latest proposal seeks a revised design, an increase in the number of units and provision of 8 affordable units.

The main issues are principle, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, amenity, affordable housing provision and parking.

Principle

The site is within the town where residential development on a brownfield site would be acceptable in principle. It is a sustainable location. The last use as an employment site has long since been extinguished and cannot therefore be expected as part of the redevelopment of the site.

Character and appearance

The design of the proposal would consist of a frontage development between the existing houses on each side, on the edge of the footway. Although a single block of flats is proposed the frontage would take on the appearance of a Victorian style Hotel which might typically be found in a location such as this opposite the site of the original railway station. The rear would echo the front. An entrance for cars and a separate entrance for pedestrians would be within the frontage through an arch to the area behind which would be used as a car park. In section the building would be much deeper than those on each side of it. It would also incorporate an existing building next to it (8 Oakfield Street).

The site is located within the Conservation Area opposite the location of the old town railway line and station, now demolished. Originally connected to the Victorian and Edwardian quarter of the town, since the railway line was constructed and vehicular access lost, this street has become a somewhat isolated enclave. Various historic buildings remain which contribute positively to the street scene.

This area of the town is characterised by two storey buildings, a few with small traditional attic dormers, composed of a mix of humble cottages, commercial buildings and detached higher status dwellings all Victorian in style. Modern day developments have been introduced within the vicinity and some matched successfully in scale so as to create a neutral or subservient impact. The buildings on each side of the proposal are particularly ornate.

The proposal would be located on the site of a garage and former mechanics repair workshop. It was two storeys and converted from several, early Victorian, town houses. A large asbestos roofed shed was behind the frontage.

The infill should respond to the local context and be in keeping with its surroundings in terms of massing, height, scale and character. The building would be two storeys in height, with an attic storey behind a parapet. Evoking a hotel it would be classical in design and also employ railings along part of its frontage. It is considered that this approach would be an appropriate form and design and would enhance this part of the Conservation Area. Suitable conditions are recommended to ensure the details would be executed to an appropriate quality and for the use of natural slate on the roof instead of the reconstituted slate shown on the plans and metal rainwater goods.

Alterations to the existing building retained within the scheme to address issues raised by the Conservation Officer about the shop window have been addressed and the plans amended. As to the comment that the dormers appear to sit very low in relating to the eaves and it is recommended that they are pulled back and if possible better spaced. If these are raised then the underside of the dormer head would be above the ceiling level on that floor. The dormers could be better spaced out but then the windows either side of the doorway to the left of the main archway would need to be altered, and this might have the appearance of unbalancing the fenestration at ground and first floor levels.

Affordable housing

The Interim Position Statement on Affordable Housing adopted by the Council in January 2011 requires affordable housing to be negotiated for on all developments of 3 or more properties. The IPS allows for off-site contributions to be secured where Housing Associations are unwilling to deliver small numbers of units as part of an on-site delivery solution. The IPS also allows for reductions in contribution to be negotiated where clear evidence of site cost issues preclude a full contribution.

In relation to Blandford the Authority seeks up to 40% of new housing units as affordable housing. This could alternatively be made as an off-site contribution. The amount required is dependent on the viability of providing affordable housing in a flatted scheme and any onerous costs such as decontamination and remediation for example.

This has been reviewed by the District Valuer. The site should contribute towards affordable housing in accordance with plan policy.

The applicant proposes 8 units of affordable housing within the scheme. This would meet the requirement in Blandford.

Parking

Five parking spaces would be provided on the site. There would be a shortfall of sixteen spaces within the scheme.

The flats would be in the town centre and of a size appealing to those entering the housing market for the first time or those who might not own or need a car. There is unrestricted parking in Oakfield Street and demand for it varies at different times of the day. There is also a large, mostly underused, public car park immediately opposite across a small footbridge as well as other car parks in nearby locations. This car park is free between 6pm and 8am and an annual permit is only £95.00. Cycle parking is proposed and the site is located in close proximity to the town centre.

It is accepted that there is pressure for free street parking particularly in the evening, hence, any purchaser of a property here would be aware of the parking limitations and may well decide that a more sustainable travel outlook can be embraced and enjoyed, utilising alternative modes of transport to the car.

It should be noted that nearly all the existing houses and flats in the town centre have no dedicated parking.

The concern of the Conservation Officer is that parked cars in the street would have a detrimental impact in the form of congestion and noise and an adverse impact on the historic street scene and heritage asset.

As Oakfield Street and other surrounding streets are already occupied by parked cars most of the day and night, it is not considered that this proposal would make the appearance or other nuisance associated with vehicles and parked cars in the street any worse.

Given the site's proximity to the town centre and therefore its sustainable location it is not considered appropriate to refuse the scheme based upon the proposed parking numbers.

Contaminated Land

It is possible that there would be contaminants on the site associated with the former use as a garage. This would normally be dealt with by a condition attached to any permission which would ensure appropriate remediation.

Amenity

Although much taller and deeper than the buildings on each side and behind, the proposal would not lead to overshadowing. A degree of overlooking of the rear garden of the immediate houses would be inevitable but would be screened to some extent by an existing rear projection on the house to the north.

The living conditions of the potential occupants of a basement need not be considered unacceptable or unusual given that basements are often occupied as flats. Each

basement flat would be provided with windows that will receive light from the light wells and will therefore result in acceptable living standards.

It is not essential to have external amenity spaces for flatted developments in town centres.

Density

Concern has been raised about the density of units proposed.

It is not unusual for flatted developments in the town centre to have a greater density than suburban located equivalents. Indeed, Oakfield Street is predominantly flats, a large number of which are social housing for the elderly. This additional development for flats would therefore be no different than the norm for this area and it is not envisaged that this type of accommodation would lead to any adverse issues.

It should also be noted that there is a high demand in Blandford for 1 bedroom flats.

A development of this type would not be considered to be overdevelopment of the site in this sustainable location.

Landscaping

The presence of two trees is acknowledged but was not considered to be a constraint to development in the past. A condition ensuring ground works acknowledge the potential for impacts on rooting zones would be appropriate.

A landscaping condition is proposed to address surfacing materials and potential for planting within the communal area and car park.

Other matters

A bin store is proposed within the building on the ground floor within the arch. The applicant has calculated that the development would need three 1100 litre bins (paladins) which can be put out and back in on collection day.

Details of a cycle store are reserved by condition but the location of it is identified on the plans at the rear of the building.

Conclusion:

There is considerable benefit in securing the re-development of this site for residential uses given its proximity to the town centre and residential context. For the reasons set out above relating to the scale, massing and style of the proposed development which would enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area taken with the provision for affordable housing it is considered that despite a shortfall of parking for 16 of the flats, the proposal would be a sustainable development capable of support.

Recommendation

Subject to a Section 106 Agreement to secure affordable housing provision, officers consider permission should be granted.

Recommendation: APPROVE