

SITE 33 - 35 High Street Watlington
PROPOSAL Two storey extension, internal refurbishment & roofing works to create two residential flats on 1st floor and third in new extension (as amended by drawing nos.10.03A, 11.02C, 12.02A and 12.03A received 21 June 2007).
AMENDMENTS Various internal and external alterations
GRID 468829/194523
REFERENCE
OFFICER Ms P.A.Fox

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the Planning Committee on 5 September 2007 these applications were deferred in order that Members could visit the site.
- 1.2 These applications are referred to the Planning Committee as the Development Manager's recommendation conflicts with the views of Watlington Parish Council.
- 1.3 These applications, submitted on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), are seeking to improve and extend the existing library space and upgrade the facilities provided for Age Concern. In the supporting statement it is stated that both services currently have internal layouts that are not rationalised and they are having difficulty with complying with disabled access requirements.
- 1.4 In addition, the intention is to bring back into use a currently vacant flat above the library, convert the office space above the Age Concern premises into a residential unit and to create a new flat within the extended building. It is stated that that OCC intend to use the capital receipt from the sale of the three flats to fund the improvements listed in paragraph 1.2 above.
- 1.5 The supporting design statement, **attached** as Appendix C, refers to some deficiencies in the existing building which include damp and cracking to the render.
- 1.6 The site lies on the south side of the High Street and comprises No's.33 and 35, and an access and parking area with garages to the rear. It is shown on the ordnance survey plan **attached** as Appendix A. The building is two storeys with a single storey projection at the rear. Immediately to the east of the site lies a footpath providing access to Davenport Place and to the west lies 37 High Street which is in part commercial and part residential use. 33-35 High Street dates from the 16th Century and is Grade II listed. The whole site lies within the Watlington Conservation Area.

2.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The plans show that the single storey twentieth century addition at the rear of the building would be demolished and replaced with two storey extensions. They would be slightly stepped down in height from the main roof and would be linked by a glazed flat roof section. The staggered extensions would project to a depth of 8 metres and 6.5 metres. The interior layout of the existing building would be rearranged at ground and first floor level. Three flats would be created at first floor level, comprising one 1 bed, one 2 bed and one 3 bed unit. The plans indicate an intention to increase the current car parking provision from eight to ten spaces. Three of the spaces would be allocated for use by the flats. A mature sycamore

tree would be removed and a small garden area enclosed by timber fencing would be created for use by the flats.

- 2.2 The proposed materials would contrast with those of the existing building. The walls would be clad with either cement fibre or timber weather boarding and some render would be used. Slate is proposed on the roof and the windows would have timber frames.
- 2.3 The library revised layout would allow full disabled access throughout the building. The changes to the Age Concern area would result in one single level of accommodation and allow for wheelchair access throughout.

Amended plans were submitted on 27 June and in summary these included the following changes;

- The remodelling of two flats to reduce the openings in the existing fabric
- A stepping back in the rear façade to allow a more traditional roof junction
- A reduction in the amount of fenestration and changes to its proportions
- The retention of the garden wall on the east side of the site
- The use of slate on the roof and either cement fibre boarding or stained timber boarding for the cladding
- The omission of dry lining
- An overall reduction in the amount of subdivision

It should be noted that some of the annotations on the amended plans conflict with the architect's statement that is **attached** as Appendix C (such as the reference to the removal of dry lining).

- 2.4 Reduced copies of the amended plans and photographs of the site are **attached** as Appendix B.

3.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES & REPRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 Watlington Parish Council - The application should be approved.

OCC Highways - No objection subject to conditions.

Public Amenities - Would like to see the provision of some cycle parking
- Refuse and recycling facilities are required.

Environmental Health Officer - No objection but contaminated land study required which could be covered by a condition.

Conservation Officer - Objections raised – full copy of comments **attached** as Appendix D.

Neighbours (2) - Owners of 37 High Street express objections to the original and amended plans based on the size of the extension, overlooking, loss of light and loss of a mature tree.

Owner of 11 Davenport Place – happy with design of extensions but concerns about boundary wall on eastern side

– it should be dismantled and rebuilt.

2 letters of support from the Chairman of Friends of Watlington Library and a Trustee - **attached** as Appendix E.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 There is relatively little planning history of direct relevance. In 2002 Watlington Parish Council obtained permission for some external changes to the building and improvements to the car park.

4.2 In 2001 Co-op Homes obtained consents for the refurbishment of the flat above the library which included changes to the rear elevation, access and staircase. This does not appear to have been implemented.

5.0 PLANNING POLICIES

5.1 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011.

- G2 - Protection and enhancement of environment
- G5 - Making best use of land
- G6 - Promoting good design
- H4 - Housing policy
- H7 - Housing mix
- H11 - Sub-division of dwellings
- D1 - Design and local distinction
- D2 - Vehicle and bicycle parking
- D3 - Plot coverage and garden areas
- D4 - Privacy and daylight
- D7 - Disabled access
- D8 - Sustainable design
- D10 - Waste management
- D11 - Infrastructure
- C9 - Landscape Features
- CON2 - Extensions to listed buildings
- CON3 - Alterations to listed buildings
- CON4 - Changes of use of listed buildings
- CON5 - Setting of listed buildings
- CON7 - Conservation Areas
- CON10 - Burgage plots
- EP8 - Contaminated land
- CF1 - Safeguarding community facilities and services
- CF2 - Provision of community facilities and services
- T1 - Transport requirements for new developments
- T2 - Transport requirements for new developments

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 The relevant SOLP 2011 policies are generally supportive of proposals in connection with community facilities and services within settlements provided there are no overriding amenity, environmental or traffic objections and there is no conflict with other policies in the Local Plan (Policy CF2). Residential use of first floors above existing shops and other commercial premises are also encouraged provided they do not adversely affect the viability of the ground floor use (Policy TC4).

In respect of the planning application the key issues in this case are:

- i. The acceptability of the proposals in terms of their impact on the character and special historic and architectural qualities of the listed building, its setting and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- ii. The impact on the amenity of the nearest neighbours, especially 37 High Street.
- iii. The acceptability of the loss of a mature Sycamore tree.
- iv. The adequacy of the access and car parking facilities.
- v. Any other material planning considerations.

In respect of the listed building application the issues are the acceptability of the proposals in terms of their impact on the character and special historic and architectural qualities of the listed building and its setting.

i) Impact on the listed building, its setting and the Conservation Area

6.2 As 33-35 High Street is a listed building policies CON2 and CON3 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 are of particular relevance. These require any extension to be appropriate to its character and to be sympathetic to its original structure in design, scale and materials and any proposal must not dominate or overwhelm it. Alterations are expected to respect the listed building's established character and not diminish its special historical or architectural qualities.

6.3 The proposal involves a full width two storey extension which, at its maximum, would project some 8 metres in depth. Whilst the roof line attempts to follow the existing three gables, their heights vary and the raised valley gutters disrupt the approach. The extension on the east side (to the rear of Age Concern) has a rather clumsy roof form. Generally the fenestration does not respect the form and style of

the openings in the original building and some of the materials proposed, such as cement fibre boarding, are considered not to be appropriate. In respect of the internal changes some important details are lacking. The plans do not, for example, show how acoustic and fire separation would be achieved and some of the annotations on the plans are contradictory. Important features such as chimney breasts are shown as being removed and some windows are to be blocked up. It is acknowledged that some of the unacceptable internal alterations have been changed on the amended plans but your officers still consider that the revised scheme would diminish the building's special historical features to an unacceptable extent.

- 6.4 Policy CON5 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 explains that the treatment of the external areas should ensure that the development respects the setting of the listed building. The Forestry Officer has commented that the remaining garden space is not suitable for any significant planting and the fencing in of a small area of amenity space with 2.1 metres high panels would only serve to detract from the building's setting. Details of refuse facilities and cycle storage have not been provided.
- 6.5 Views of the rear of the listed building can be gained from the public footpath leading to Davenport Place, the public open space in front of Old School Place and neighbouring gardens. The extensions would be prominent in these views, and having regard to their scale, massing and details of design, the proposals would detract from the setting of the application property and the adjoining listed buildings and would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of this part of the Watlington Conservation Area. They are therefore be contrary to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 Policies G2, G6, CON2, CON3, CON4, CON5, CON7 and D1.

ii) The impact on the amenity of the nearest neighbours

- 6.6 Policy CF2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 requires regard to be had to residential amenity. The site is located at the eastern end of the High Street where the surrounding uses are mixed but become more residential in character. 37 High Street, another listed building, lies to the west of the site immediately abutting the access. The property has an antique shop at ground floor level fronting the High Street but has residential accommodation to the rear of the ground floor and at first floor level. There are a number of clear glazed windows the property's eastern side elevation including ones serving a reception room. As a result of the size and massing of the extension to the library these windows would suffer some loss of light and aspect. Furthermore windows serving one of the new flats at first floor level in the western side elevation would lead to increased opportunities for overlooking into the windows and the garden of 37 High Street. Whilst it is recognised that the amended plans have reduced the number and size of the openings in the west elevation, the proposals would still lead to some loss of privacy and light and to an overbearing impact on this property and its garden. The nearest neighbour on the other side, 31 High Street, is in a mixed commercial and residential use. Partly because this building extends to significant depth at single storey level and partly because of the gap provided by the footpath to Davenport Place the impact on this property's amenities is considered not to be significant. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan Policies G2, D4 and CF2.

iii) The adequacy of the access and car parking arrangements

6.7 Policy T1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 stipulates that all types of development should provide safe and convenient access to the highway network and T2 requires proposals to make provision for parking of vehicles in accordance with the Council's parking standards. The site is obviously centrally located and is easy accessible to local residents arriving on foot or by cycle and those using the local bus service. The existing vehicular access would remain as it is and the Highways Liaison Officer has confirmed that visibility at the exit would be acceptable for the level of development proposed. There is currently sufficient space to park up to 8 cars with one being suitable for disabled users. The range of utilitarian garages at the rear of the site is currently in private use and they would not be affected by the scheme. The intention would be to increase the number of spaces to 10 which would include one space for disabled users. Three of the spaces would be allocated to the three flats with the remainder being for the community uses. The Highways Officer has confirmed that he has no objection to the proposed parking arrangements although he would like to see some sheltered and secure cycle provision. Given the site's central location Officers consider that the level of car parking provision would be appropriate for three flats and the extended community uses.

iv) The acceptability of the loss of a mature sycamore tree

6.8 Policy C9 of SOLP 2011 states that development which would cause the loss of a landscape feature will not be permitted where that feature makes an important contribution to the local scene. The proposals will necessitate the removal of a Sycamore which is a mature and prominent specimen which is visible over quite a wide area. The Forestry Officer advises that the tree appears to be in good health although he acknowledges that there is a significant amount of ivy growing up its trunk which could hide defects. He also advises that there is limited scope for any replacement planting, given that the only remaining garden is to be surrounded by fencing and intended to serve as an amenity space for the flats. The tree lies within relatively close proximity of the rear of the building and immediately adjacent to the access. It is an attractive feature that contributes positively to the conservation area and its loss would be regrettable. However Officers support the principle of some form of extension and it would be difficult to extend the library without compromising the health and/or long term retention of the Sycamore. On this basis and, notwithstanding the Forestry Officer's views, Officers have concluded that the loss of the tree would not, in itself, justify a reason for refusal.

v) Other material planning considerations

6.9 Notwithstanding the listed building concerns about the impact of the internal works associated with the creation of the three flats, the principle of residential use at first floor level purposes is in line with the Council's housing policies. The mix in the size of the flats would accord with the requirements of Policy H7. In respect of the quality of the living environment that would be provided for future residents, there are some unresolved issues including the treatment of sound insulation. Your officers consider the treatment of the external space around the building to be unsatisfactory for example the proposed 2.1 metre fenced enclosure of a small amenity area would only serve to detract from the building's setting and the details

of refuse and recycling facilities and cycle storage have not been provided. In such a sensitive setting officers consider that these details should be available for assessment at the application stage.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 The Council's policies are generally supportive of improving and extending community facilities and the importance and convenience of these facilities to the residents of Watlington are understood. Furthermore it is recognised that there is need to upgrade and improve the building to bring it into line with current requirements. The community benefits have to be weighed against the conflict with conservation policies and the harm that would be caused to the amenities of the nearest residential property. The scale and design of the extensions and alterations associated with them are considered to overwhelm the character and proportions of the listed building and would fail to respect its features of special interest. The proposals would detract from the setting of listed buildings, and the appearance of this part of the Watlington Conservation Area. Furthermore the extensions would be detrimental to the amenities of 37 High Street on account of their overbearing appearance and the loss of light and privacy they would cause. It is acknowledged that there is scope to extend the building but not to the very significant extent that is envisaged in this application. Hence it is your Officer's conclusion that the benefits associated with the scheme do not outweigh the harm to the listed building, the character of the area and the amenities of the nearest neighbour.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 That planning permission be refused for the following reasons:

- 1. That having regard to the size, form, details of design and materials of the extensions and the extent of the internal alterations, the proposals would fail to respect the established character of the listed building and its special historical and architectural qualities which make it worthy of listing. Furthermore, having regard to the scale and design of the extensions and layout of the external space, the proposals would detract from the setting of the listed buildings and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. As such the proposal would be contrary to the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011, particularly policies G2, G6, D1, CON2, CON3, CON4, CON5 and CON7 and to advice in PPG15, Planning and the Historic Environment.**
- 2. That having regard to their scale and massing and the location of the fenestration in the west elevation, the extensions would be detrimental to the amenities of 37 High Street on account of their overbearing appearance and the loss of light and privacy they would cause. As**

such they would be contrary to the provisions of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011, particularly policies G2, D4 and CF2.

8.2 That listed building consent be refused for the following reason:

1. That having regard to the size, form, details of design and materials of the extensions and the extent of the internal alterations, the proposals would fail to respect the established character of the listed building and its special historical and architectural qualities which make it worthy of listing. Furthermore, having regard to the scale and design of the extensions, the proposals would detract from the setting of the listed building. As such the proposal would be contrary to the provisions of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 particularly policies CON2, CON3, CON4 and CON5 and to advice in PPG 15 Planning and the Historic Environment.

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