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<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	<a href="#">P08/E1327</a>
<b>APPLICATION TYPE</b>	FULL
<b>REGISTERED</b>	02.12.2008
<b>PARISH</b>	WATLINGTON
<b>WARD MEMBER(S)</b>	Mr Rodney Mann The Rev'd Angie Paterson
<b>APPLICANT</b>	South Oxfordshire Conservative Association
<b>SITE</b>	8 Gorwell Watlington
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Change of use of first floor flat to office use (B1) and widening of vehicular access.
<b>AMENDMENTS</b>	As amended by Agent's letter dated 7 <sup>th</sup> January and accompanying plan and photograph
<b>GRID REFERENCE</b>	468727/194471
<b>OFFICER</b>	Ms P.A.Fox

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1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This application has been referred to the Planning Committee at the discretion of the Head of Planning.
- 1.2 8 Gorwell is one half of a semi-detached property, which lies in close proximity to the centre of Watlington within the Conservation Area. It is identified on the OS plan **attached** as Appendix A. The property was originally a house but it has been in partial use as an office for the South Oxfordshire Conservative Association since the late 1970's. The whole of the ground floor is currently used as an office and there is a two bedroomed flat at first floor level. The property has an access onto Gorwell, which is a one way street, and there is space to accommodate up to three cars.

2.0 **THE PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The application seeks permission for the change of use of the first floor from a flat into additional office accommodation and storage space in connection with the existing use of the ground floor. This would involve a few minor internal changes to the building such as the reinstatement of internal doorways. Externally there would be no changes to the appearance of the building. The information accompanying the application indicates the intention to widen the entrance driveway. The amended plans have clarified that the increase in the width of the driveway would be by one metre. The informal car parking arrangement for up to three cars would remain as it is. Copies of the submitted plans and a photograph are **attached** as Appendix B.
- 2.2 The first floor flat has a floor area of 48.1 m<sup>2</sup>. The supporting documentation states that the office is used from Monday to Friday and on a 9 am – 5 pm basis. There are currently 4 full-time staff working in the office and the documentation indicates that it is not envisaged that the number will increase.

3.0 **CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 3.1 Watlington Parish Council
- Original plans – recommend refusal. Trees are present and the widening of the access would necessitate their removal. This site is within the Watlington Conservation Area
  - Amended plans – comments to be reported.

Conservation Officer	Original plans - No objection to change of use. Some concerns about the widening of the vehicular access in the manner proposed. It would result in an unacceptable gap tooth appearance in a streetscape which is characterised by houses with small front gardens or low brick walls. Amended plans – no objection
OCC Highways	- Original and amended plans – no objection subject to conditions.
Forestry Officer	- Original plans – the proposal would necessitate the removal of two semi mature ash trees and some shrubbery. Whilst there is no objection to their removal it would be important to mitigate their loss by way of an appropriate landscaping scheme. Amended plan – there would be some minor root damage to the adjacent ash tree but that should not warrant its removal. It is not of significant arboricultural value and there is no objection.

#### 4.0 **PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 There is very little in the way of planning history on this building.

4.2 An application for the retention of some existing buildings and the change of use of the property's garage to an office in 1978 suggests that at least some of the site has been in use as an office for the South Oxfordshire Conservation Association since the late 1970's.

4.3 In 1992 planning permission was granted for the change of use of the ground floor rooms of the former house to office use in connection with the approved office use of the garage.

#### 5.0 **POLICIES**

5.1 SOLP 2011

G1 – Protection of the district's resources

G6 – High quality and inclusive design

C9 – Loss of landscape features

CON7 – Conservation Areas

D1 – Good design

D2 – Car parking

D5 – Mix of uses

E3 – Employment in rural areas

E4 – General Employment Policy

E5 – Proposals for business

T1 – Access to the highway

T2 – Parking

PPS1 – Planning Policy Statement 1

**6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The site lies close to the centre of Watlington and Policy E3 (Rural Areas) is relevant in so far as this is a location outside one of the District's four main towns. This policy recognises that some small scale developments within villages may be permitted as a means of providing local job opportunities and for meeting the needs of small businesses and local firms. The policy goes on to state that the Council will support the establishment of small employment concerns on suitable sites within the built-up area of villages outside the Green Belt. In this case the proposal involves the conversion of the existing building within the built up area of Watlington and the floorspace is intended for use in connection with an already established office use.

6.2 Policy E3 requires the criteria of Policies E4 and E5 (General Employment policies) to be satisfied. Given the small floor area involved (just 48.1 m<sup>2</sup>) there is no conflict with Policy E4. The site lies outside the Green Belt and would not conflict with policies to protect the built environment or to retain recreational uses and essential community facilities.

6.3 The remaining criteria of E5 that are of relevance are:

- i) Whether the proposal is of a scale and type appropriate to the site and its surroundings

The proposal would not involve any extension of the existing premises. Gorwell is located just off the High Street where the properties are predominantly residential but there are a number of other uses including a fire station and a community building in the immediate vicinity. Taking into account the long established use of part of the building as an office and the location of the site close to the centre of Watlington the relatively small increase in the scale of the use would not be inappropriate.

- 6.4 ii) Whether the design, layout and materials would be in keeping with the surrounding area which lies within a Conservation Area

As originally submitted the plans indicated a significant widening of the access which would have involved the removal of two semi mature trees and some shrubbery. Whilst the trees and vegetation are not of particularly good quality they soften the appearance of the site and contribute to the appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, which is characterised by properties with small front gardens with railings and low brick walls. The amended plans have clarified that the intention is to increase the width of the access by one metre and that the work would only involve the removal of a small section of the dwarf wall and railings and the loss of a very small amount of vegetation. The Forestry Officer has advised that the work may involve some minor root damage to the adjacent ash tree but it should not necessitate its removal. As the tree is not of any significant arboricultural value there is no objection. Officers are therefore satisfied that the proposal as amended would preserve the established character of this part of the Watlington Conservation Area in accordance with the requirements of Policy CON7 .

- 6.5 iii) Whether the proposal has adequate access and car parking and manoeuvring facilities in accordance with policies D2, T1 and T2.

There is no intention to change the current car parking arrangements. The spaces are not formally laid out but the driveway can accommodate up to three cars. The car parking standard for a two bed roomed flat is the same as that for the new office space, hence there is no requirement to increase the number of spaces on the site. Whilst the arrangement is not ideal it has existed for many years and the use of the whole of the

building for a single purpose would be less likely to give rise to any conflict than the current mixed use. The widening of the access will improve the current arrangement by increasing the manoeuvring space. The Highway Authority has commented that the proposal will have no material impact on the highway and the widened access is acceptable subject to conditions.

- 6.6 iv) Where appropriate the location is accessible by public transport in accordance with Policy T2

Whilst it is likely that most staff and visitors will come to the office by car the site is close enough to the village centre and bus stop to allow some local people the option of walking to the site or taking a bus.

- 6.7 v) Whether the proposal would result in noise, smell, dust, a loss of privacy or any other environmental problems in accordance with Policies EP1 to EP9

The existing mixed use of the property does not appear to have given rise to any adverse impact on neighbours. The applicants have confirmed that they intend to use the additional office space on the same basis as the existing. They do not envisage any increase in the number of staff working in the office. Whilst it could be argued that the increase of the office floorspace has the potential to attract more traffic to the site, the amount of floorspace involved is relatively small and the traffic is unlikely to be significantly more than the residential use could generate. A B1 office use by definition is one that can be conducted in a residential area without causing noise or disturbance. As such officers are satisfied that there would not be any environmental problems.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The proposal would represent the modest expansion of a now well established office use that does not appear to cause any significant problems to the predominantly residential area. Given the layout of the access and car parking arrangements there could be some potential for conflict between users if the ground floor and first floor were in separate uses. Hence officers consider that it is appropriate to tie the use of the new office floorspace to the existing.

- 7.2 Subject to the recommended conditions, the proposal accords with the relevant policies of the Development Plan as it would not adversely impact on the amenities of neighbours, harm the character and appearance of the Conservation Area or prejudice highway safety.

## 8.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 **That planning permission is granted subject to:**

- 1) **Standard 3 year time limit.**
- 2) **Access to OCC specification.**
- 3) **New office use to be ancillary to the existing office use.**

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