
APPLICATION NO.	P11/W1942
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL
REGISTERED	20.12.2011
PARISH	WALLINGFORD
WARD MEMBER(S)	Mr Imran Lokhon Mr Marcus Harris
APPLICANT	Morcroft Property Developments
SITE	69 & 70 and 71 High Street Wallingford, OX10 0BX
PROPOSAL	Change of use of ground and first floor offices to provide seven residential flats (As amended by drawing numbers BS253-13A, 10B & 12A accompanying email from agent dated 11 January 2011). As amended by drawing numbers BS253 09A, 10C, 11A, 12B, 13B, and accompanying email from Agent dated 10 February 2012.
AMENDMENTS	As above
GRID REFERENCE	460643/189505
OFFICER	Mrs K Gould (W)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application is referred to Planning Committee as the Officer's recommendations conflict with the views of Wallingford Town Council.
- 1.2 The site is located within the heart of Wallingford's Conservation Area and comprises two blocks of two storey premises constructed of brick and tile and connected by a first floor archway. The existing/lawful use of the premises is B1 office use. There is on site parking.
- 1.3 The front of the premises faces onto the High Street and extends to the rear of High Street. Immediately to the rear of the premises is Bull Croft Park which is a scheduled ancient monument. The ground floor below the northern block (68 High Street) is currently occupied by Stan James bookmaker, this unit does not form part of the application for change of use.
- 1.4 The first floor is currently occupied by a B1 office use who have been endeavouring to sublet their surplus space for quite some time without success. Other units are empty and have been for a considerable time. The first floor offices at no 71 High Street are currently vacant.
- 1.5 The site which extends to some 0.134 hectares is identified on the Ordnance Survey Extract **attached** at Appendix 1.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 When originally submitted, the application included the change of use of the existing building from B1 to residential and also included an extension to the building to create additional residential accommodation. The extension element of the proposal has now been deleted and the proposal just involves change of use.
- 2.2 The proposal seeks full planning permission to change the use of the ground floor premises at no 71 High Street from B1 (office) to 3 no residential flats and the first

floor of nos 69 and no 71 High Street to create 4 no flats – proposing 7 no flats in total. Six of these flats would have 2 bedrooms, and one of them would be one bedroom flat.

- 2.3 The details of the application are available for inspection on the Council's website. Reduced copies of the plans accompanying the amended application are **attached** at Appendix 2.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 3.1 Wallingford Town Council – Refuse (both original and amended plans) - The planned expansion of Wallingford will, it is considered, see an increased demand for office accommodation. To change these premises to residential would result in a lack of quality accommodation within the town which could affect the town's ability to attract new businesses in the future. We are also concerned that the introduction of residential parking would also prove a problem to existing business on site and would exacerbate the already difficult access onto the High Street.

- 3.2 English Heritage (South East) – The application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance , and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice.

- 3.3 County Archaeological Services – Original Plans – Archaeological field evaluation required . Amended Plans – no objection as no new build proposed.

- 3.4 Area Liaison Officer - No Objection subject to condition re turning area and car parking. Health & Housing - Air Quality - No strong views

- 3.5 Leisure & Economic Development - No Objection – Economic Development would not be overly concerned about the proposal for residential development at the rear of High Street in place of existing office space. There is currently over 35,000 sq feet of vacant office space in and around Wallingford town centre, according to the Council's vacant property register for January, 2012. This register does not contain all vacant property in the town as it is dependent on a voluntary contribution from property agents. However it does indicate that there is a significant amount of vacant office space in and around the town. This space includes vacant office space in Howberry Park and on the outskirts of Wallingford in Nosworthy Way, so there would appear to be excess office supply in relation to current demand. Although the country is technically in recession and the demand for office accommodation is currently low, I still feel that there is sufficient supply of modern office accommodation within the town centre should demand increase.

The residential flats with easy access for the town centre would also have a beneficial effect on the footfall in the town centre which should help improve economic vitality in the town. The Economic Development team do not therefore object to this application for the reasons stated above.

- 3.6 Conservation Officer – Original Plans – Objection – the new build part of the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the special interest of the Wallingford conservation area. Amended Plans – no objection given that there is now no new build proposed.

- 3.7 Health and Housing – In relation to the air quality issues with this application, it not only increases the amount of traffic within the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) having a negative effect on air quality but also introduces sensitive receptors into it as residential dwellings are considered as sensitive whilst workplaces are not. It is for these reasons why we would like the developer to mitigate against the air quality

impacts of the development. For this development, I feel appropriate measures would be for example:

- An electronic charging point being installed
- A reduction in the number of parking spaces to one per dwelling
- Creation of a green space
- Tree planting within the green space
- Installation of cycle racks.

3.8 Neighbour Object (1) The Planning application applies not only to 71 High Street but also to 70 and 69 High Street. 71 and 69 High Street is occupied by Ridgeway International Ltd. The present lease has 13 years before expiry and currently I believe the company has not intention of vacating the premises before 2025.

69,70 and 71 High Street was built specifically for office accommodation. There is little office accommodation of its type near the centre of Wallingford. Although the economic climate at present is uncertain and part of the office space in 71 and 70 has been vacant for some months, with the proposed housing developments in Cholsey and the possibility of 500+ houses in Wallingford the loss of first class office premises would be a retrograde step for the Town. Unlike out of town or edge of town office accommodation, employees based centrally use the town's shops and facilities on a daily basis thereby helping the town's economy. Centrally based employment is beneficial to Wallingford residents – to walk to work is a great advantage. The access onto the High Street is located near the town centre traffic lights and currently there are problems accessing and existing the site. The parking fails to take account of the necessary turning areas for delivery vehicles to the shops and food outlets backing onto the site – a problem which can be viewed most working days.

3.9 Monson – Surface Water Drainage – the proposed drainage for the new extension is indicated but there is no detail of the existing car park drainage, which also needs to be allowed for. Details should be submitted and approved prior to development commencing and a scheme implemented in accordance with such.

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P04/W0671/RET](#) - Refused (04/09/2007)

Installation of roller shutters over existing window and door to front elevation.

[P04/W0124](#) - Approved (06/05/2004)

Construction of new doorway, erection of air-conditioning units to side elevation. Placement of satellite dish. (As amended by drawing nos.BS077/01B and 2B accompanying letter from Agent dated 22 March 2004).

[P04/W0218/A](#) - Withdrawn (31/03/2004)

To display three illuminated fascia advertisements.

[P90/W0516](#) - Approved (03/10/1990)

Retain use of premises without compliance with condition 3 of planning permission reference No. SO/W/104/83/CU (use restricted to Mr Fernandez and his employees).

[P82/W0542/CU](#) - Approved (28/02/1983)

Change of use of first floor offices partly related to shop on ground floor to offices.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

- 5.1 Adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan
- G2 - Protection and enhancement of the environment
 - G5 - Making the best use of land
 - CON 7 - Proposals affecting a conservation area
 - D2 – Vehicle and bicycle parking
 - D4 – Privacy and daylight
 - D6 - Design against crime
 - H7 – Range of dwelling types and size.
 - E6 – Retention of employment sites
 - TC4 –Encouraging a diversity of uses.
 - EP6 - Surface Water Protection.
 - EP2 - Air Quality
 - H4 - Housing in the towns

South Oxfordshire Local Plan

PPS 5 – Planning for the historic environment.

PPS 3 - Housing.

PPS 6 – Planning for Town Centres.

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main issues to be considered in the determination of this planning application are:

- i. Whether the principle of a change of use in this location is acceptable.
- ii. Policy H4 criteria
- iii. Housing mix
- iv. Air Quality
- v. Diversity of uses in the town centres
- vi. Loss of town centre office space

6.2 **The principle.**

The site lies within Wallingford town centre, outside the primary shopping frontage. The proposal would change the use of existing premises from B1 to residential. Policy E6 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan allows for the change of use of buildings in employment use to non employment use if the site is either less than 0.25 ha in size and the buildings are under 500sqm. The size of the site in this case does not trigger the requirement for the premises to have been marketed for a minimum of 12 months. However, the agent has confirmed in the Design and Access statement that the first floor offices at no 71 High Street have been marketed by them for over 2 years but they have received no offers from any prospective tenants. The ground floor offices (no 70 High Street) have been occupied for only a short period by a local business.

6.3 This policy seeks to retain local employment opportunities and to address net out commuting from the district by retaining employment opportunities where possible. However, the supporting text to this policy does recognise that there are competing demands for sites and buildings in the town and that there may be circumstances in relation to the smaller employment sites and buildings which would result in changes of use to housing or retailing being considered appropriate. In this particular case, the site is less than 0.25 hectares and the office buildings are under 500sqm. As such, the principle of changing the use of these premises is acceptable.

6.4 **Policy H4 criteria.**

The application proposes 7 no flats. Policy H4 of the SOLP allows for the dwellings within the built up areas of Wallingford provided the proposal accords with the following criteria:

i. An important open space of public, environment or ecological value is not lost, nor an important public view spoilt – this proposal is for the conversion of an existing building. Therefore there is no loss of open space.

ii The design, height, scale and materials of the proposed development are in keeping with its surrounding; As this proposal seeks permission to convert an existing building, this is not relevant in this case.

iii The character of the area is not adversely affected. The building exists and the car parking which is used currently by the employees will be used by the new residents. The site lies within the Wallingford conservation area. By having residents in the building, the premises will not be vacant at night time and as such will contribute to the town centre in the evening and in that way will enhance the character of the area. A proposed planting scheme will seek to provide some planting within the hard landscaped area which will enhance the visual amenity of the area.

iv There are no overriding amenity, environmental or highway objections – Now that the application has been amended and the number of flats has been reduced, there is ample parking on the site to satisfy the Council's requirement for parking on this site. There is no amenity space provided for the flats as they are in a town centre location and are located immediately adjacent to the Bull Croft park. A landscaping/ planting scheme for the site is recommended as a condition and this will seek to soften the existing tarmac parking area and assist in the air quality management of the area. There is no additional harm to the amenity of occupiers of adjacent dwellings as a result of this proposal. The windows exist and no additional windows are proposed.

v. If the proposal constitutes backland development, it would not create problems of privacy and access and would not extend the built limits of the settlement. - As the building exists, this is not applicable in this case.

6.5 **Housing Mix**

Policy H7 of the SOLP seeks to provide a mix of dwelling types and sizes to meet the needs of current and future households in the district. In this proposal, 6 of the flats would have 2 bedrooms and one of the flats would have 1 bedroom. As such all the units are relatively small which is appropriate for this sustainable town centre location.

6.6 **Air Quality**

The site lies within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) which reflects Government's air quality objectives. The Council is duty bound to improve air quality within these areas and this is reflected in the emerging Core Strategy. In line with the Core Strategy and government guidance, the Council is seeking to mitigate against developments which increase both receptors and sources in air quality management area. The Council's Health and Housing Officers have requested that certain features are included in this scheme (please see 3.1) Given the relatively small nature of this scheme, it has not been possible to secure all the features on the list. However, cycle parking has been proposed for the scheme and this is conditioned to be provided and in addition, a planting scheme has been recommended which will not only improve the visual appearance of the site by softening the parking area but will also improve air quality in this area.

6.7 **Diversity of uses within the town centres**

Policy TC 4 of the SOLP seeks to encourage a diversity of uses within town centres. This recognises that government guidance set out in PPS3 and PPS6 seeks to encourage an increase in housing in town centres, above ground floor retail, leisure or

other facilities. Such residential use is desirable because it not only provides ideal accommodation for small households but also adds to the vitality and security of the town centre. Part of this proposal will be above an existing bookmakers, whilst the remaining change of use would replace existing offices both at ground floor and at first floor. The sentiments of this policy are still relevant in this case and the proposal is considered acceptable.

6.8 Loss of town centre employment use

There is concern from the Town Council and from a local resident that the change of use of these premises will result in a shortage of office space when the economy picks up and when the housing stock in Wallingford and Cholsey increases. The Council's Economic Development Team has been consulted on this application. They have raised no objection to this proposal and a full account of their comments is set out in paragraph 3.1. In summary, there is over 35,000 sq ft of vacant office space in and around Wallingford town centre. The team recognises that this low take up of office space reflects the current economic state but also confirm that they are of the view that there is a sufficient supply of modern office accommodation within the town centre should demand increase. As such, it is not appropriate for this application to be refused on the loss of town centre employment space. Having the building occupied is beneficial for the local economy as the future occupiers of these flats will contribute to the economic vitality in the town.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 Planning permission is granted because the principle of a change of use of the premises is acceptable. The proposal accords with the criteria of policy H4 and there are no objections to the proposal on highway, amenity or conservation grounds. As such, the proposal accords with Development Plan policies.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

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

1. **Commencement 3 yrs - Full Planning Permission**
2. **planning condition listing the approved drawings**
3. **Parking & Manoeuvring Areas Retained**
4. **Surface water drainage works (details required)**
5. **Landscaping / Planting scheme.**
6. **Cycle provision as shown on plan to be retained.**

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