Application Number: ADC/0251/08 Recommendation – APPROVE

Site: Milldene Stores, 6 Mill Road, Lancing BN15 0PX

Proposal: Change of use and conversion of ground floor from Class A1 (retail) to form a two-bedroom flat (amended description)

The Application

Following the deferral of this application at the last Committee meeting, the applicant has amended the proposal to a single two-bedroom flat instead of 2 flats (a one-bedroom flat and a studio flat). An amended plan has been submitted showing the revised internal layout (broadly similar to the layout of the existing first-floor flat) and showing a minor external change by extending the raised planting bed at the front towards the west corner.

Milldene Stores is located on the north corner of the junction of The Street with Mill Road, in the North Lancing Conservation Area. It has a mock-Tudor facade with white rendered walls, black exposed joists and a tiled roof. It has been operating as a shop and post office for over 50 years and has an associated flat at first floor level.
Permission was granted and implemented (L/194/76) to convert most of the ground floor shop into a self-contained flat, with a smaller shop and post office retained on the western side. However, much of the ground floor was subsequently converted back to shop use under permission L/213/78, with the remainder converted to its current size of 93 square metres at a subsequent unknown date. To the rear/north, a former storehouse attached to the building was extended and converted to flats under permission L/404/76.

The present application (as now amended) seeks to convert all of the ground floor to a single two-bedroom flat (except for the easternmost section where the existing entrance hall to the firstfloor flat is located). No external alterations to the building are proposed, other than the western enlargement of the existing front planting bed. Bin storage and covered cycle provision will be catered for within the small rear yard. There are no on-site car parking facilities.

The application is accompanied by a copy of a letter from estate agents Bacon & Co stating that, in their opinion, and following the closure of the Post Office "it would be very difficult for me to find a suitable purchaser/leaseholder for the shop in its current guise....there is a huge reduction in customer traffic through the door and, therefore, from a business point of view, any perspective suitable parties would find the business plan untenable. .....with the prevailing economic climate I would consider it almost impossible to introduce somebody for the shop as it stands." "It is my view that there is a proven need for flats and I would be confident of finding purchasers/tenants for the units should your application be successful".
The applicant has also sent a letter stating that the shop has become increasingly unviable due to the decrease in footfall arising from loss of the post office.

Consultations and Representations

West Sussex County Council: No objection. The property is located in a sustainable location within walking distance of a range of services and public transport and the proposals comply with PPG13 and policy DEV4.

Adur District Council: The EHO has no objection.

Adur District Conservation Advisory Group: No objection.

Lancing Parish Council: No objection.

Third Parties: 30 letters have been received of which 18 are in support or have no objection to the proposal and 12 object.

The 12 letters of objection are from residents in Mill Road, The Street, Rossiter Road and Firle Road and are on grounds that:-

- The conversion of the shop to flats will increase on-street parking to the detriment of highway safety. The site as existing has no on-site parking provision whilst street parking is already limited by double yellow lines. The addition of a possible 4 extra vehicles associated with this development will overcrowd the streets.
- The principle of conversion should be rejected as it will result in the loss of a village amenity for the community. Milldene stores is the only such store in the immediate area and provides a focal point for the elderly, disabled and the wider community.
- The proposed conversion sets a precedent for the conversion of other large buildings in the area to flats which is out of keeping with the character of North Lancing.
- The proposal is overdevelopment of the site and will reduce privacy to adjoining properties as well as increasing general noise and disturbance.
- The store is being intentionally run down for conversion. The business could still be viable if it was better stocked.
- No attempt appears to have been made to market the store or explore the possibility of new owners making a thriving business of it.
- The existing sewerage facilities are overstretched with capacity problems in the past. Additional flats could add to the problems caused by recent telephone and electricity cuts.

The 18 letters of support/no objection are from residents in The Street and Mill Road on grounds that:-

- The loss of the store is an inevitable product of the loss of its Post Office and the current economic situation.
- The proposals will reduce parking problems associated with passing trade and deliveries.
- The shops to the west in Manor Road provide a suitable alternative facility for the area.

The North Lancing Residents Association have supplied the results of a survey they have undertaken on local public opinion of the store. The key results show that 77% of persons surveyed wished to see a store retained at the site and that 41% of respondents stated they used the store more than once a week. Attached to the survey are a selection of opinions from the respondents that are both supportive of the problems the owners have

had since the closure of the post office and critical of the running of the store and the general principle of conversion to flats.

Relevant Planning Policies and Guidance

Adopted West Sussex Structure Plan 2001-2016 (WSCC 2005) (saved policies): LOC1, NE1, CH1, CH4, ERA1, DEV1, DEV4-5
Adopted Adur District Local Plan 1993-2006 (ADC 1996) (saved policies): AG1, AB3-4, AH2, AH5, AH9 and Appendix 11 'Supplementary Planning Guidance' comprising: Development Control Standard No.4 'Flat Conversions'
Revised West Sussex Parking Standards and Transport Contributions Methodology (WSCC 2003 and ADC 2004)
PPS1 'Delivering Sustainable Development' (ODPM 2005)
PPS3 'Housing' (DCLG 2006)
PPS6 'Planning for Town Centres' (ODPM 2005) (paras 2.55-2.59)
PPG15 'Planning and the Historic Environment' (DoE 1994) and Circulars 01/01 and 09/05

Planning Assessment

Policies

The Adur District Local Plan identifies specific neighbourhood shopping facilities which are considered important to met local needs and these are subject to policy AS5. However, Milldene Stores is not identified as such. The parade of shops at Manor Road (600m to the west) is identified as subject to AS5 and the Crabtree Lane parade (850m south) is identified as a town centre shopping area under AS1.

Structure Plan policy NE9, relating to town, village, district and neighbourhood centres has not been 'saved'. Although it required development to help such centres meet local needs for shopping, etc, and encouraged provision of local shops (and in the explanatory text stated that their provision and retention should be supported), it contained no specific policy preventing loss of individual shops as in the present case.

PPS6 'Planning for Town Centres' contains a short section on providing for local shopping and other services. It refers to the importance of having an easily accessible network of local centres from a sustainability point of view and states that the need for local shops is equally important in both urban and rural areas. "Local authorities should, where appropriate, seek to protect existing facilities which provide for people's day-to-day needs and seek to remedy deficiencies in local shopping and other facilities to help address social exclusion". However, it states that this should be achieved through Development Plan documents or other local strategies and, in the absence of these, it provides no specific development control guidance regarding loss of individual shops.

The Structure Plan gives significant weight to making the best use of land through higher density residential development provided that the impact on the character of the area and environment is acceptable (LOC1, ERA1, CH1) and subject to policy DEV1 requiring high quality development. Policy CH4 requires that development should not be permitted unless Conservation Areas will be preserved and, where possible, enhanced. Policy NE1 requires the provision of new residential developments of sizes, types and tenures to suit the varied needs of local households and to minimise the need to develop greenfield sites. Policy DEV4 states (amongst other things) that development should not be permitted unless the travel needs it generates are met. DEV5 states that "Development should not

be permitted unless the level of parking is compatible with the need to avoid environmental or safety problems and the need is to encourage walking, cycling and the use of passenger transport where this is or can be a realistic alternative". The explanatory text refers to a transport contributions methodology (now adopted as TAD payments to sustainable transport improvements).

Policy AH9 of the Local Plan, although relating to the conversion of dwellinghouses rather than other buildings into flats, is of some relevance. It refers to the needs for: access and car parking provision to be acceptable; for there not to be an unacceptable adverse effect on neighbouring properties in terms of overlooking or noise transmission through party walls; and for the standard of accommodation to be provided accord with adopted standards.

Government policy guidance in PPS3 encourages best use of urban land for housing development, particularly affordable housing and a mixture of types to create a balanced community, at higher densities (avoiding developments at less than 30 dwellings per hectare) and without rigid application of parking and amenity space standards.The density of existing development should not dictate that of new housing by stifling change or requiring a replication of existing style of form.....If done well, imaginative design and layout of new development can lead to a more efficient use of land without compromising the quality of the local environment."

Principle of Conversion

Milldene Stores is within the North Lancing Conservation Area and is a long-established feature of the locality, having been used as a local convenience store for very many years. However, it is not identified for any particular use or development in the Local Plan and, most significantly, as stated above, is not identified as a neighbourhood shopping facility (under policy AS5). As there is no conflict with any adopted planning policy and having regard to PPS6, it is considered that it would be difficult to justify refusal of the principle of the loss of this local shop.

Another aspect to be considered is the effect of the loss of the shop on the character of the Conservation Area. PPG15 (para 4.2) states that people's experience of historic areas depends not only on the quality of individual buildings but also on historic layouts, particular 'mix' of uses, etc. When viewed from the street, with the tight junction of The Street and Mill Road and the historic buildings in its vicinity, Milldene Stores lends the appearance of a traditional village shop and, it is considered, helps to create the sense of character as a village centre. However, the designation report related to the North Lancing Conservation Area contains no reference to Milldene Stores as contributing to the character of the area either in terms of its use or the quality of the building.

There is no indication that the store has been marketed for any period of time so the opinion of the estate agent that it is wholly unviable and would not be purchased and invigorated by new owners (whether now or in the future) is open to question. Moreover, although the individual third party letters received are split between those who object and those who do not, the survey by the North Lancing Residents Association indicates that local public opinion (77%) wishes the store to be retained.

However, whilst the loss of this shop is highly regrettable and, from a sustainability point of view, not in the best interests of reducing the need to travel, a refusal of planning

permission would be difficult to justify because of the lack of conflict with any specific policy.

Visual Amenity and Density

The proposal does not involve alterations to the external appearance of the building. The existing doors will be retained to access each flat whilst the existing windows will serve the living spaces. The main noticeable difference will be the removal of the signage and general paraphernalia that defines this building as a convenience store. The minor enlargement of the raised front planting bed westwards (with approx 0.4m high wall) would be a visual improvement and help improve privacy for the occupants of the flat.

PPS3 requires densities of at least 30dph, without rigid application of parking and amenity standards, and mixture of types and tenures of dwellings to create balanced communities. The proposal is not considered to conflict with this and, as the building is not to be enlarged, the proposed flat would make effective use of it without giving rise to any detriment to the appearance of the locality.

Residential Amenity

The site is bounded tightly to the north and east by other residential properties. To the north, No.8 Mill Road adjoins the shop, with a flying freehold over part and a rear garden tight to the east. To the east, the dwelling at No.21 The Street sits much further back on its plot. Both these properties are on higher ground than the shop and face the existing first-floor flat rather than the proposed south and west-facing ground-floor flat. An existing east side door (rear access to the shop) would now serve as a rear door for the firstfloor flat. The proposed conversion will not result in any additional living spaces or windows opening towards the neighbouring properties and as such it is not considered that the proposed flat would result in any significant amenity concerns.

The proposed flat itself exceeds the minimum floor space requirements as set out in Development Control Standard No.4 'Flat Conversions'. It is shown with a floor area of approx 70 square metres (the DC Standard states 57 square metres as a minimum). It will have a southerly aspect to its living room and main bedroom and will provide acceptable living conditions. In terms of stacking, the layout now broadly reflects that of the flat above to minimise potential disturbance.

With regard to external amenity space, the Council's DC Standards are for a minimum 20 square metres. The building is such that the only outdoor space (although having an area of 37sqm) is a small yard only about 2m-2.5m wide sited to the rear and east side which is currently in sole use by the existing firstfloor flat. Part of this space is to be taken up by bin storage whilst it will also serve as access to the covered cycle storage at the rear. Both flats will have direct access to this space. However, it is not considered that this is sufficient reason for refusal. The location of the site near the extensive Lancing Manor public open space, with its range of facilities, provides ample amenity space to serve the local area.

Parking and Access

The site has no existing car parking space and proposal does not include any parking provision as the space available is too narrow. The existing roads are narrow with small

pavements and parking restrictions but some on-street parking takes place where space is available.

WSCC as local highway authority have raised no objection stating that the site is in a sustainable location within walking distance of a range of services and public transport. The use of the premises for its lawful purpose as a shop generates traffic and, on the basis of the adopted maximum parking standards, the use as a shop requires a maximum of 5 car parking spaces whereas the proposed flat only requires a maximum of 2 spaces. Consequently, refusal on this basis could not be substantiated. For similar reasons, a sustainable transport contribution is not required.

With regard to cycle parking, the proposed covered cycle storage for 4 bicycles in the rear store meets the standard.

Recommendation

APPROVE for the reason:-

The proposed development is within the built-up area and would help meet the need for additional housing without detracting from the existing local urban environment. The loss of the shop does not conflict with adopted planning policy and the development can take place without resulting in unacceptable detriment to the amenities of neighbouring properties and without detraction from highway safety. It would consequently not conflict with the relevant policies of the Adur District Local Plan (AG1, AH2, AH5, AH9) and the West Sussex Structure Plan 2001-2006 (LOC1, NE1, CH4, ERA1, DEV1, DEV4-5).

Subject to:-

1. C1Ci (Standard time limit)
2. C8Biv (Covered cycle parking spaces to be provided and retained) (amended)
3. C14A3 (Permission relates to application as amended by revised plan received on 11 July 2008) (amended)
4. C18K (Waste storage provision) (amended)

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