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Planning Statement

BOROUGH OF WORTHING
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Application for Change of Use from B1 Office to D1 Dental Surgery

23 Farncombe Road
Worthing
West Sussex

December 2009

Rapleys

Our Ref: ML/ljs

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the change of use of the existing B1 offices to D1 Use for a dental surgery, at 23 Farncombe Road, Worthing.

1.2 The statement addresses the following matters:

(i) The site and surrounding area;
(ii) The planning history;
(iii) The proposal;
(iv) Planning Policy and Guidance, and;
(v) Planning Considerations and Issues.

1.3 It concludes by finding that the application should be supported in planning terms.

1.4 This statement should be read in conjunction with the plans and documents comprising the remainder of the formal application package.

2 SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

2.1 The application site is situated on the west side of Farncombe Road, close to the junction with Lyndhurst Road, and approximately 1km to the east of Worthing Town Centre.

2.2 23 Farncombe Road is a two storey building, constructed as a dwelling house in the early part of the 19th century. It remained in residential use up until 1985, at which time it was converted to office use on the back of the appropriate planning consent.

2.3 The site has off-street car parking to the front, with a semi-mature tree in the south east corner of the plot. There is a flat roof extension to the rear of the premises, which covers the remainder of the site. In total it provides for around 140sqm of gross internal floorspace.

2.4 To the north of the site, and immediately abutting 23 Farncombe Road is 25A. This is part of a larger plot with a further detached building, together with hardstanding, which is in use as the St John's Ambulance HQ. To the south of the application site, on the far side of is a 1.5m high timber fence is a five storey office building, occupied by HSBC, with car parking to the front and rear. Further afield land uses are predominantly residential, interspersed with some commercial premises, particularly on the opposite side of Farncombe Road.

2.5 The application site falls within the environs of the Farncombe Road Conservation Area.

3 PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 As noted, the premises were converted from a single residential dwelling into B1 office accommodation in 1985, the planning history relating to this site is summarised as follows.

3.2 Planning permission was granted in August 1990 for the replacement of the translucent roof at the rear with a flat felt roof and the inclusion of 2 no. roof lights.

3.3 More recently, and of direct relevance to the application now before the Council, planning permission was granted in January 2009 for the conversion of the office building to provide three self-contained residential flats. This consent remains extant and has not been implemented, albeit submissions have been made, and approved, for the discharge of conditions pursuant to that consent.

3.4 In recent months, having reconsidered the commercial realities of the proposed conversion, the site owner has made a planning application to convert the office building to 2 no. self contained flats, in effect a variation of the current planning approval. This application remains under consideration by the Council.

3.5 The key factor emerging from the planning history is the precedent set for the loss of employment (office) floorspace in this location under a consent that remains implementable. This key material consideration is examined further in the following sections of this statement.

4 THE PROPOSAL

4.1 The application seeks consent for the change of use of 23 Farncombe Road from B1 office use to a D1 use for a dental surgery. The proposed conversion will provide a surgery comprising three treatment rooms, a reception/waiting area and associated ancillary space for administration and staff. This will be spread across the two floors of the existing premises.

4.2 There will be a minor degree of internal alteration to the space, including partitions and screens that will sub-divide the existing accommodation, but without the requirement for structural and/or external alterations. In these terms, whilst the proposal is for a permanent consent, the premises will remain capable of occupation by a range of employment generating uses, subject to the necessary planning consents being obtained in the future.

4.3 The proposal provides for two off-street car parking spaces on the existing hardstanding to the front of no. 23. There will also be parking for a minimum of two bicycles to the side of the premises, accessed via the gate which will also provide a route to the wheelchair access via the existing side door. The main entrance to the premises will be via the existing door and lobby on the eastern facing front elevation.

4.4 Whilst the existing external layout of the plot is generally unaffected by the proposal, the applicant does propose to introduce additional soft landscaping and allocate a small area adjacent to the southern boundary for refuse/recycling. The existing semi-mature tree in the south east corner of the plot will be retained.

5 PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

5.1 The Development Plan for Worthing comprises the saved policies from the Worthing Borough Local Plan (2003) and the South East Plan, adopted in May 2009. However, Local Plan policies safeguarding employment land/premises were not 'saved' and, in these terms, the Council will give consideration to policies in the emerging Core Strategy. In the absence of a clearer policy framework for employment land, Officers have indicated that the Council will consider each proposal for a change of use on its own merits, on the basis of material planning considerations and other matters of accepted importance.

5.2 In respect of the adopted Local Plan, the site has no specific policy designation, but does lie within a Conservation Area.

5.3 In respect of the loss of employment use, policy SCT3 of the Regional Spatial Strategy – the South East Plan - provides the overarching policy framework and is the guidance for the emerging Core Strategy. Policy SCT3 seeks to control the management of existing employment sites and premises to ensure the delivery of sufficient appropriate sites for businesses and other users that would help to facilitate the regeneration of local economies.

5.4 Worthing's emerging Core Strategy has reached a relatively advanced stage, with a revised document published in June 2009 and the proposed submission for Examination in Public expected in April 2010. Policy 3 of this emerging document seeks to protect buildings on land currently in employment use, but does indicate that a criteria based approach will be applied to proposals that seek to justify the release of employment land to other uses and that this will be addressed through the Council's SPD for a sustainable economy. At the present time this supplementary planning document is yet to be drafted.

5.5 Policies in respect of transport are saved in the Worthing Local Plan 2003. In particular, policy TR9 deals with the requirement for on-site parking provision. This policy indicates that the Council will refer to their adopted parking standards as the basis for the requirement on specific sites.

5.6 The Council's standards are maximum levels and therefore provision in excess will not be allowed, in the interests of promoting travel by a range of modes. Policy TR9 indicates that in considering the acceptability of the extent of any reduced on-site parking provision, regard will be given to a number of environmental and highway safety considerations. These include - the availability, type and proximity of public parking, the availability and proximity of alternative means of transport, the type and scale of development proposed, and the relationship of the proposal with, and the proximity to, nearby land uses.

5.7 The Council's standards as they relate to dental surgeries are one space per practitioner and four spaces per consultation room.

6 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 The analysis of the planning history and policy framework indicates that there are two key planning considerations relevant to the application proposal. They are:

(i) Loss of employment, and
(ii) Car parking.

LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT

6.2 The Council do not, at the present time, have a comprehensive adopted policy framework for assessing proposals for change of use from defined employment generating uses. The Regional Spatial Strategy (South East Plan) provides the overarching policy background for proposals affecting existing employment sites and premises. However, this does not provide specific guidance on changes of use and does not preclude local authorities from setting a policy framework that makes provision for the loss of employment sites in appropriate circumstances.

6.3 In the absence of relevant saved policies, the Council are placing appropriate weight on the emerging Core Strategy. The draft policy in this respect is referred to in the relevant section of this statement. Whilst this policy is to be supplemented by an appropriate guidance note (yet to be produced) the wording does indicate that the Council will make provision for allowing change of use from employment defined uses in appropriate circumstances, subject to a number of specific criteria.

6.4 However, the key factor in the consideration of the application is the extant planning consent for the change of use to residential, granted in January 2009. This consent sets a clear precedent for the loss of B Class employment, and in these terms the principle of allowing a change of use of 23 Farncombe Road has already been established.

6.5 In assessing the previous change of use application (ref: 08/1127) the Council concluded, in the relevant Committee report, that the premises is not ideally suited to office use and that, whilst there is no specific evidence of marketing, it is apparent that significant office vacancies exist in the immediate locality. In any event, 23 Farncombe Road has only been in employment use since 1985, having previously been residential.

6.6 The application now before the Council seeks to provide for an employment generating use, albeit one falling outside of defined B Class Uses. In securing D1 consent, it will also deliver a valuable local amenity. In addition, based on the current operations on site, the change of use would provide a net increase in direct employment.

PARKING PROVISION

6.7 The proposal provides for a minimum of two off-street car parking spaces on site. In addition, free car parking is available, on street, in close proximity to the site. This includes Farncombe Road itself, on which the public can park without a permit, other than between the hours of 1000 to 1100 and 1400 to 1500. Due to this restriction, local workers are prevented from parking all day and hence spaces are generally readily available for short-term users.

6.8 In addition to the local street provision, a large public 'pay and display' car park is located approximately 200m from the application site, on Lyndhurst Road. This is supplemented by a number of public car parks in Worthing Town Centre, within easy walking distance of 23 Farncombe Road.

6.9 A number of local busses serve Farncombe Road, in part due to the proximity to Worthing Hospital, located a short distance from the application site.

6.10 The Council's parking standards set a maximum level of provision, which the proposal does not exceed. In these terms, the scheme accords with adopted planning policy.

6.11 The level of parking provision should be set in the context of the existing lawful use of the premises, and the parking demand that this office use could generate. Equally, the nature of the proposed use is such that parking is effectively managed by the regular turnover of visitors, on the basis of an appointments system. Patients will be requiring parking on a short-term basis, with the maximum number of vehicle movements will be restricted by the capacity of the surgery.

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The preceding sections of this statement have assessed the planning case for a change of use from B1 to D1 for a dental surgery. In this respect, four key factors have emerged:

(i) The extant planning consent for a change of use to residential confirms that the proposal is acceptable in principle;

(ii) Notwithstanding the above, the Council's policy framework, insofar as it exists at present, makes provision for proposals to be considered on their own merits;

(iii) The loss of defined employment use will have no detrimental impact on the supply of employment space, and the proposal seeks consent for an employment generating use, and

(iv) The provision of allocated off-street car parking accords with the Council's policy requirements and will be supplemented by readily available street parking and public car parks in the immediate vicinity.

7.2 In light of the above, and all other material planning considerations, it is considered that the proposal should be supported in planning terms and it is therefore requested that consent for a change of use is forthcoming.