Ex 8/9

Delegated Officer Report

Application Number: ADC/0266/09 Recommendation - APPROVE

Site: 5 Church Street, Shoreham-by-Sea BN43 5DQ

Proposal: Change of use from offices (Class B1a) to a one-bedroom flat and a two-bedroom maisonette (Class C3) with associated minor alterations

The Application

The proposal relates to a double-fronted two-storey building (plus rooms in its mansard roof), named 'Press House', located on the west side of the street, 25m north of its junction with High Street.

The building, believed to date from the late 18th/early 19th century and to have been a house until 1960, has a gross internal floor area of 128sqm (including the rooms in the roof) and is part vacant and part in occupation until September 2009, the tenants having given notice in November 2008 that they did not wish to renew their lease.

The plans show that the ground floor would comprise a flat with a living room, one double bedroom, a kitchen and bathroom; below it is a cellar not proposed for any use. The 2 upper floors would be a maisonette with a living room, kitchen and bathroom on the first floor and two bedrooms within the roofspace. Bin storage would be in the narrow space at the rear which also serves the rear fire escape. The only external changes proposed are altering one groundfloor rear window to a door and vice versa to the existing adjacent door, plus rendering the north side elevation (above the single-storey Co-op) which has a mixture of materials.

The application is accompanied by a Design & Access Statement and a Marketing appraisal by a local firm of estate agents, surveyors and valuers. These refer to extensive marketing having taken place since 2007 for the top floor and since November 2008 for the whole premises with only 2 viewings neither of which showed positive interest. It states that in the current economic climate, with a drastic drop in demand for offices and many other town centre offices to let, the premises will remain empty for some considerable time. The trend to home working has not helped. Having regard to the small scale of the premises and the location in a side street, they would be better used as residential accommodation for which there is a demand particularly having regard to permissions for similar residential conversions both nearby and elsewhere in the town centre.

Consultations and Representations

West Sussex County Council: No highways/transport objections subject to provision of secure on-site covered parking for 3 cycles. Comments that the

site is in a highly sustainable location very close to public transport and other facilities so that the lack of on-site car parking is appropriate although the LPA may wish to consider the implications for on-street parking.

Adur District Conservation Advisory Group: No objection.

Adur District Council: The EHO has no objection.

Third Parties: No comments received.

Relevant Planning Policies and Guidance

The South East Plan (GOSE 2009): SCT1-6, T4, BE6
Adopted Adur District Local Plan 1993-2006 (ADC 1996) (saved policies): AG1, AS1, AE5-6, AH5 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)
Planning Policy Statement PPS1 'Delivering Sustainable Development' (ODPM 2005)
Consultation Paper on proposed new PPS4 'Planning for Prosperous Economies' (DCLG 2009)
PPS6 'Planning for Town Centres' (ODPM 2005)
PPG15 'Planning and the Historic Environment' (DoE 1994)

Planning Assessment

Policies

In the Local Plan, the site is within the town centre in the area identified for shopping and office uses under policies AS1, AE5 & AE6:-

- AS1 states that shopping uses will be permitted but that development leading to the loss of existing shopping provision will not be permitted if it would detract from the character and vitality of the area.
- AE5 states that extensions to existing offices will be permitted subject, amongst other things, to no loss of residential accommodation at first floor level unless required to satisfy specific business expansion requirements.
- AE6 states that in considering new offices regard will be had to the need to retain the character, viability and vitality of the shopping centre and whether parking provision is acceptable.

Local Plan policy AH5 favours the supply of dwellings suitable for small households such as single persons, small families and the elderly. Development Control Standard No.4 'Flat Conversions' relates to conversion of houses to flats, not other buildings. However, it is of some relevance as it provides relevant criteria for standards of residential amenity, including floor areas, room sizes, and external amenity space.

Policy SCT1 of the South East Plan gives priority to pro-actively pursuing sustainable economic growth and regeneration of the Sussex Coast whilst also protecting and enhancing its high environmental quality, its cultural and historic assets and promoting excellence in design of new developments in recognition of their importance to economic success and quality of life. SCT2 aims to realise a step change in economic performance with all relevant agencies giving increased priority to investment decisions and other direct support for the Sussex Coast. SCT3 requires delivery of sufficient appropriate sites and premises for business and other uses that will help facilitate regeneration of the local economy and to bring forward mixed use schemes on sites allocated for employment where employment only schemes are unviable. SCT4 states that in allocating land for development, LPAs should give priority to delivering employment development in strategically-accessible locations. SCT5 sets housing targets for the Sussex coast sub-regional area (and Adur) for 2006-2026. These targets are to be met by focusing development in existing towns and by optimising the use of previously developed land. T4 states that guidance on parking standards for housing should be in line with PPS3, reflecting local circumstances, and ensure sufficient and secure cycle parking for new flats and houses. BE6 states that policies should be adopted and sensitive proposals supported which protect, conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the historic environment particularly where these bring redundant or underused buildings into appropriate use.

PPS6 states that LPAs should encourage diversification of uses in the town centre as a whole and adopt a positive and proactive approach to planning for their future. They should assess the need for new floorspace for retail and other main town centre uses (including offices), taking account of quantitative and qualitative considerations; identify deficiencies in provision; the capacity for expansion; review existing allocations; and develop strategies for developing and strengthening appropriate centres, including spatial policies and allocation of sites. Residential or office uses should be encouraged above ground floor retail, leisure and other uses. Regional spatial strategies should identify suitable broad locations for regionally-significant office development and local assessment should be informed by the regional assessment, with the town centre's role in the hierarchy and its capacity to accommodate new office development in combination with the needs of other main town centre uses being relevant factors.

Principle and character of use

As stated above, the site is within the area identified for shopping and office uses but, whilst the policies state that loss of shops will be opposed, they do not contain any requirement to prevent loss of offices. There clearly are concerns about the need to regenerate the economy and increase the level of employment within the District, as reflected in the aims and policies of the South East Plan for the Sussex Coast as set out above. However, in principle, it would be difficult to substantiate refusal of the present application given the lack of any policies specifically preventing loss of office floorspace.

Moreover, in recent years and especially at the present time, it is evident from the number of vacant offices to let that there is weak demand for office premises in Shoreham. The present recession has clearly exacerbated the situation and makes it more difficult, with the prospect of the premises likely to remain vacant for the foreseeable future, to justify refusal of the present application. This evidenced from the submitted report from Warwick Baker Assocs (and also in a recent more wide-ranging report from Oakley Commercial submitted in respect of ADC/0210/09 at Ropetackle).

As regards the character of the area, Church Street is primarily a residential street of particular historic and architectural quality. There are only non-residential uses at this southern extremity, adjoining the High Street. Apart from the office premises forming the subject of the application, to the immediate north there is the rear goods entrance/store to the Co-operative supermarket (fronting the High Street) and, on the opposite side of the road, a dental practice and a kitchen/bathroom display shop with a cottage in between. To the south, the neighbouring premises at No.3 are currently a holistic treatment centre but were granted permission for change of use from an office to a dwelling in 2001 and this was renewed in 2006 (ADC/0066/06). No.1 was granted permission for change of use from a shop to a one-bedroom dwelling in 1993 (SU/198/92). The view was taken that because of its small size (42sqm) and the fact that Church Street is primarily residential there would be no significant adverse effect on the vitality or viability of the shopping centre such as to warrant refusal. Both No's 1 & 3 had originally been built as dwellings. Owing to these previous decisions, in the absence of any change in policy other than at regional level, it would be difficult to justify refusal of the present application.

Residential Amenity

DC Standard No.4 'Flat Conversions' relates to conversion of houses to flats but is of some relevance in assessing standards of residential amenity. The proposed groundfloor flat, at 58sqm, comfortably exceeds the minimum internal floorspace required for a one-bedroom flat (45sqm) and its living room (16sqm), kitchen (8sqm) and double bedroom (15sqm) all exceed the minima. The proposed upper flat is on two levels and similarly exceeds the minimum standard in total size (70sqm) and for its rooms, kitchen (8sqm), bedrooms (11sqm & 12sqm) and living room (20sqm). The accommodation would provide acceptable internal living conditions.

The deficiency is in respect of external amenity space. The above DC standard refers to a minimum 20sqm for each flat whereas in the present case there is only a very narrow strip at the rear of the building. It is proposed to locate refuse bins at the south end of this area, closest to the rear access path to the street. The groundfloor flat will have direct private access to this rear area and the upper flat via the rear fire escape stairs. Whilst not ideal, as in other cases, it is considered that town centre flats, on this small scale, are acceptable without external amenity space (whether communal or private).

Access and Parking

WSCC have no objection subject to the provision of secure covered cycle parking for 3 cycles. There is no space for car parking on-site but the site is in a highly sustainable location with good access to public transport and facilities. Under the adopted maximum parking standard, the proposals require 3 car parking spaces. However, this is a reduction compared to the existing office use which requires 4 spaces and, because of this, no section 106 Obligation for a sustainable transport contribution is required.

Recommendation

APPROVE for reason that:-

The proposed development is in a highly sustainable location within the built-up area and would help meet the need for additional dwelling units without detracting from the Conservation Area or from the viability and vitality of the shopping centre. It can take place without resulting in detriment to the amenities of nearby properties or detraction from highway safety. It would consequently not conflict with the relevant policies of the Adur District Local Plan (AG1, AB4, AS1, AE5-6, AH5).

Subject to:-

1. C1Ci (Standard time limit)
2. C8Gi (Provision and retention of secure cycle parking) (amended)
3. Prior to commencement of use of the property as 2 dwelling units, waste storage shall be provided as shown on the submitted plan.

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Case Officer. [redacted] Date 13/8/09