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By email and post

9th January 2013

P. Pennicott Esq
Planning, Regeneration and Wellbeing,
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WORTHING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING SECTION
RECEIVED 10 JAN 2013
TO | REF No.

Dear Sir,

Spells Buildings, Grafton Place, Worthing
Application Numbers 10/1033/FULL and 10/1035/LBC

I refer to your letter dated 20th December 2012 inviting further comments regarding the latest revised proposals for the redevelopment of the above site. In essence these revisions maintain the concept of the original scheme but reflect an intensification of the previous proposals and my comments in relation to the original application still apply, a copy of which is attached for your convenience.

I own the above property which forms part of the original Christchurch School and is immediately opposite the application site. As such it is the property most likely to be affected by these proposals. Notwithstanding the direct effect on my property, my concerns relate to the impact the form of redevelopment of this site will have on the character and amenity of this part of the Conservation Area.

The current buildings are derelict and probably beyond economic repair for their previous commercial uses. I remain therefore broadly in support of concept of the proposed redevelopment in terms of its appearance but the revised proposals represent a greater intensification of the development density.

When deciding whether to grant this consent, I would therefore ask that the Council consider the potential reasoning behind the application and the consequences of giving approval. I remain totally unconvinced that this scheme will ever be built, particularly in the current economic climate, and that any consent will merely establish a density benchmark against which subsequent applications for more basic proposals will need to be judged.

I would comment in detail as follows:-

Height and Density

The revised proposals retain the 3 storey building height of the earlier schemes. Currently the combination of the relatively low buildings on the site together with the former playground space of the Christchurch School site immediately opposite, provide an open character for this part of the Conservation Area. This will be lost if the development is of the same mass as the 3 storey residential buildings in Portland Road and Grafton Road. The position will be exacerbated by the redevelopment of the Christchurch School/Reps site where significant development proposals exist and the Council should be mindful of the overall combined impact the redevelopment of these two sites will have on this area.

In my view a two storey scheme of the same style will therefore have a lesser detrimental effect on the Conservation Area and would be an improvement over the current buildings.

The original application for this site was for 8 separate dwellings. The current application is for 11, 2 bedroom dwellings; a 37.5% increase in density. Clearly this will put pressure on local amenities such as parking, refuse storage (Portland Road is already totally spoilt by dustbins on the pavement) and general disturbance. The proposed units are unlikely to be of attraction to long term occupiers due to their restricted size which will probably result in limited commitment to the maintenance and appearance of the buildings going forward.

I would repeat my previous observation about the claimed DDA compliance of the scheme. While this might technically comply in terms of visitors, the need to access the sleeping areas by means of staircases makes the space uninhabitable in practice for people who need a lift access to the first floor common access balcony.

The Office/Commercial Element

I believe the application site stands just within the area the Council has dedicated for commercial use. However, notwithstanding what uses might be put on plans, the application needs to be considered in the context of what is actually happening on the ground. There are no other current commercial uses in the proximity of this property (other than the Hare and Hounds) as it is entirely surrounded by residential property. This will be even more true when approval is finally given for the redevelopment of the Reps site for residential use.

This therefore is an opportunity to remove non conforming uses from this part of the Conservation Area to enhance the residential environment. For this reason I supported the applicants' previous application for an almost entirely residential scheme.

The original scheme included a commercial content of 288 square metres. The current application includes a commercial content of 77 square metres. . I remain of the view that the commercial use is inappropriate for this site in planning terms and therefore support the applicants' current application in terms of its intended reduction of the commercial content. I believe however that it would be preferable if the commercial content was removed

entirely for the reasons given above and also because I think this would be a difficult unit to let given the limited parking and servicing that is available.

Deliverability

In my responses dated 18th November 2008 to the original application, I expressed doubts that that proposal would ever proceed into construction. Almost four years on I remain of that view. On paper this looks an attractive proposal, albeit one storey too high, but is a potentially a more expensive scheme. I would be happy to see proceed a two storey, fully residential version of this scheme.

However, in today's market finance is likely to be difficult to obtain, particularly as I believe the applicants may not have the established development track record required by the banks before they will give speculative finance. My understanding from other established local developers is that even then the banks currently often require an equity stake which effectively can make development unviable.

For this reason I do not think the Council should grant consent on the presumption that this will in some way act as a catalyst for immediate development of this site.

Precedent

To a certain extent, this bridge has already been burned by the granting of the original consent for the mixed use scheme. The current proposal essentially just converts the previous commercial space into residential space. It is however maintaining the intensive use of the site for multiple small units. This would be a further opportunity for the Council to reduce the density of development by requiring alterations to this scheme in terms of the number of residences created.

I would observe that the Council might reflect on the purpose of the applications for this site. Was it to obtain consent for a scheme for which there was the intention to build it out or was it to establish the most intensive planning approval for future use to maximise the potential sale value of the site? There have been implementable planning consents on this site for approximately three years during which time there has been no development activity but the property has been offered to the market throughout that period as a development opportunity.

This would suggest that this property will be sold on. At that time the Council can expect to receive a subsequent application for a different, probably less attractive but cheaper to construct proposal, which will maintain the development density it has already granted. I believe therefore the Council should consider this application in the context of the future issues for this site and not just in the context of this application because it will create a position potentially committing the Council to less attractive future options

Summary

In summary, therefore, I am in support of the concept of the redevelopment of this site in the style of appearance that is proposed. However, I believe the massing is wrong in that the buildings are too high and result in overdevelopment of the site in terms of the residential density that these latest proposals reflect. While a reduced scheme will improve the local environment, the current proposal will impact adversely on this part of the Conservation Area. Given that my property is the closest to the proposal, it is likely to suffer most in terms of reduced aspect and natural light and disturbance from an intensified use.

If you wish to contact me on any of the matters I have raised my telephone number is 0[redacted]

Yours faithfully,

[redacted]

S. W. King BSc, FRICS

Spencer King/GBR/DTZ

From: Spencer King/GBR/DTZ
Sent: 19 November 2008 11:33
To: [redacted]@worthing.gov.uk'; [redacted]@worthing.gov.uk'
Subject: Spells Yard
Attachments: Spells Buildings - Worthing.pdf

Gentlemen,

Due to work commitments I have been unable to attend the planning department during the week until this Monday to inspect the documents relating to the above proposal which is opposite my property. Having inspected the plans, please find attached my formal representation.

For the record, my concerns are whether this application is made with the intention of actually implementing the scheme or maximising the site value for sale. I believe the current owners are not generally involved in development of this scale which might make it difficult for them to obtain funding for a speculative development to proceed in today's financial climate. The condition of the existing buildings probably renders the property as un-saleable for its existing uses, making it necessary to secure a planning permission if they wish to sell.

You will be aware of the recent changes in the empty rate regulations which now require the owner to pay full rates on empty property, which are assessed on the assumption that the buildings are in repair. I doubt whether the buildings are lettable on any basis without some expenditure which would be a waste of money if redevelopment is envisaged. The only way the owners can avoid this significant ongoing liability therefore would be to demolish the existing buildings.

It is fairly common practice in my market for any new owner to re-apply for planning for their own proposals but will base their scheme on the criteria established by any earlier consents. If faced with a cleared site in the town centre, my concern is that the Council may come under pressure to concede to a subsequent less attractive, cheaper proposal to achieve development of what could then be an eyesore in the town centre.

Apart from its height, I think the scheme you have negotiated would otherwise be an attractive solution to the development of the site and improve the location which suffered previously form a lot of commercial vehicles visiting the businesses operating form the yard. I am not sure however that the Council will be able to secure its implementation once consent has been granted.

I believe that current scheme is an over development of the site in that it maximises the number of units at the expense of reasonable room sizes resulting in a high density even for a town centre site. The scheme is 3 storeys to maximise value rather than to suit the street scene and even though it is more attractive than the existing buildings I think the increased height will reduce the open feeling to this part of the conservation area.

I would be pleased to discuss these view with you if you wished

Yours faithfully,

Spencer King

Spencer King BSc FRICS
Director

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18 November 2008

Dear Mr Pennicott

Spells Buildings, Grafton Place and 89 Portland Road
Application numbers WB/08/1014/FULL & WB/08/1016/LBC

I refer to your letter dated 21 October. I own the property at the address given above, which is situated on the corner of Portland Place and Grafton Place and is part of the former Christchurch School. As such, it is one of the properties most likely to be affected by the above proposal.

When deciding the application, I would be grateful if you would take into account my representations as follows.

In general it is inevitable that this site will be considered appropriate for some form of redevelopment, as the existing buildings are probably beyond repair for any economically viable future use.

I would add that I am broadly supportive of the concept of the proposed development. I have concerns over the specific scheme in terms of its height, density, deliverability and the establishment of a precedent against which other alternative proposals might have to be considered.

Height

I note from the sections on the submitted plans that the proposal is significantly higher than the existing buildings and will in fact be slightly higher than my own property. The artist impressions do not show this as the perspective views distort the relationships.

Although the buildings on three sides are three storeys, the relatively low level of the existing buildings creates a more open environment to this part of the conservation area than would be the result of the proposed tall massing around the edge of the site.

The proposal benefits from a non contiguous roof line, but the height will reduce the natural light to my property and create additional over-looking due to the increased number of windows that are proposed along this elevation. There is currently only one.

The scheme is effectively two and a half storeys high with bedrooms in the roof space. There seems to me to be a contradiction in practical terms between the scheme being DDA compliant by virtue of the lift access to the first floor balcony, and all the bedrooms in the various units being accessed by means of spiral staircases, making them uninhabitable to anyone dependent upon the lift for access. It seems to me therefore that single level flats on the first floor would be more in keeping with the DDA

legislation if there is a need to comply with this. This would allow the roof line of the proposed development to be reduced.

Similarly, two of the car spaces are stated to be available for the disabled. This is inconsistent with the intention that they should also be available to the residential occupiers who will not necessarily be disabled.

Density

The proposed scheme is a significant intensification of the use on this site. Eight two-bedroom units are likely to result in 24-30 additional residents in what appears to be confined room sizes within the space available. The residents are therefore likely to be transitional, since the configuration would not suit elderly occupants or families with young children.

In addition to the residents, the proposal suggests 28 employees on the site. This does suggest that there will be considerable intensification of the use of this site, although office type uses will be preferable to the previous light industrial and distribution uses. This is primarily a residential area and I wonder whether a fully residential scheme would be more appropriate.

Deliverability

The architectural style of the scheme looks attractive from the plans submitted. It is reasonable to anticipate therefore that this will be a relatively expensive scheme to build out. Given the current uncertainty in the residential market for ultimate sales and the lack of funding from the financial sector for speculative residential development, I am concerned whether this scheme, or preferably a reduced version of the proposal, would actually proceed in the foreseeable future.

Precedent

My concern is that if this scheme is approved, the Council will have created a yardstick in terms of development density against which future proposals would need to be considered. The concern is that if consent is granted at the given density for a high quality design, the site might be sold subsequently with the benefit of that consent to a purchaser who would re-apply for the same number of units, but within a more basic and hence cost effective form of development. Ultimately the Council would find the density difficult to resist and may come under pressure to consent to an alternative proposal on the grounds of financial viability particularly if the existing buildings are demolished due to the current impact of empty rates on owners.

In summary therefore, I would support a mixed-use scheme of a similar style to that proposed. However, I consider that the actual proposal is too high and too intensive, and as such would adversely affect the amenity enjoyed by my property, although I would support a two-storey version of this proposal. This may be able to provide more spacious internal arrangements, which might be more suitable for DDA compliance if that is now an obligation.

If you wish to contact me on any of the matters I have raised, my telephone number is [redacted]

Yours sincerely

Spencer King BSc FRICS