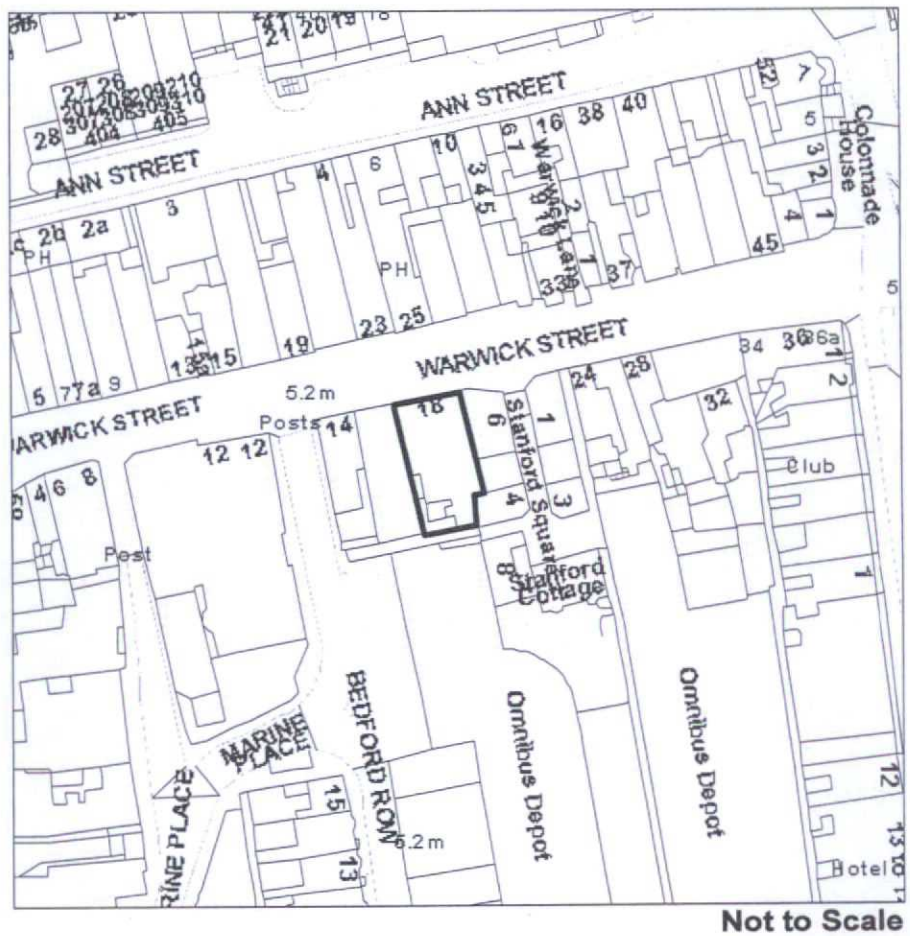
Mr Haydn Jones
Mr J Harris

WB/09/0511/FULL
CEN
MO

Location : 18 Warwick Street

Proposal: Extensions, alterations and conversion of first and second floor offices into 6 no. self-contained flats.



Not to Scale

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1. THE PROPOSAL AND THE SITE

This application relates to a part two and part three storey building on the south side of Warwick Street. The building is part of a short terrace of three. It is situated within the South Street Conservation Area where the building has been identified as a positive indicator. The ground floor has been subdivided into two and these units are in commercial use. The upper floors are occupied as offices.

The building has a painted rendered frontage with a deep decorative first floor cornice detail. It is flat roofed at second floor level on the western half of the

frontage. The other half has a high parapet, including cornice detailing, behind which is a mansard roof.

Permission is sought to add a part first floor and part second floor addition to the eastern half to complete the second floor frontage. The proposal is then to convert the upper floors from offices to five one bedroom flats and a studio flat. The six units proposed include three one bedroom flats at second floor level, two at first floor level together with a large studio unit at the front. All units would be accessed from Warwick Street. The rear first floor flat would have its own roof terrace. Rear access is shown to the rear yard where refuse and recycling bins are indicated. The agent has advised that access is available at all times.

The upper floors of this building are currently occupied by an Insurance brokerage and have been for the last two years. Four staff are employed and the first floor is laid out with desks and computers. The second floor is arranged for storage purposes.

This application follows the withdrawal last year of an application (WB/08/0357 refers) to add second and third floor extensions for a conversion into 7 residential units. The application was withdrawn following advice that a refusal was likely on the grounds that the third floor extension would be harmful to the appearance of the building and the conservation area and also that the loss of viable employment floorspace would be contrary to policy.

2. APPLICANT'S DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT.

The applicant has submitted the following Design and Access Statement:-

"DESIGN

2. ***Development Proposals***

a. *The site under consideration is 18 Warwick Street. The property is situated along a short terrace of four buildings varying in scale and style.*

b. *The proposal is to convert the first and second floor offices into six residential units. This will involve extending to the rear of the property up from the existing flat roofs to create a larger second floor. The footprint of the building will however remain unchanged.*

3. ***Layout***

a. *The site is situated on a pedestrianised town centre street. The surrounding buildings are of mixed use with street level generally accommodating retail and the upper levels residential or office use.*

b. *The building is largely existing and the access and routes to the building will not change. The main entrance to the new apartments will be through the existing entrance in Warwick Street, on the east side of the property.*

c. *There are no vehicular routes to this building.*

d. *Being an urban town centre site, there is little open space. There is currently a small courtyard space at the rear (south side) of the building, which will remain. The addition of a roof terrace is proposed for unit 3 at first floor level.*

4. ***Scale***

a. *The extension largely expands the property upwards and eastwards. This is sympathetic to surrounding buildings ensuring that the development does not affect light levels for neighbouring properties.*

b. *The building to the east of No. 18 Warwick Street does not have any windows facing the direction of No. 18 and therefore provides an ideal area to develop with minimal impact. The furthest section of the flat roof is to be retained as external space for one of the units.*

c. *The proposal will affect the front elevation. The two properties to the west of No.18 are currently a storey higher. The proposal is to extend the second floor eastwards, to the eastern end of the building.*

d. *No.14 Warwick Street has recently been converted into residential units and this included the addition of rear roof terraces for two of the units.*

e. *The proposal has consciously maintained the existing separation of 7m from the rear wall to the neighbouring rear property. This visually creates separation between dwellings and reduces the effect on neighbouring properties whilst also allowing light to penetrate into the dwellings.*

5. ***Landscaping***

There are currently no landscaped areas associated with this building, and that will remain the case with this proposal.

6. ***Appearance***

a. *It is understood that the site is situated within a Conservation Area. As such careful consideration has been taken to minimise any alterations to the appearance of the street façade.*

b. *The proposed elevations have been designed to retain the architectural features at ground and first floor levels and to replicate some of these features, such as the cornice mouldings in the proposed extensions.*

The external walls would be rendered and painted in keeping with the existing Warwick street elevations. The new windows would be timber sash windows to match existing.

7. ***Use***

a. *The existing upper floors and the new extensions will be converted into five one-bedroom rental apartments and one studio flat.*

b. *The ground floor will retain its current usage, in keeping with the other properties in Warwick Street.*

ACCESS

The site is located in the heart of the town centre, within easy reach of bus routes, the shops, the seafront and car parking. As such it is considered a very sustainable location, with good public transport and easy pedestrian access to shopping.

Although there is no vehicular access to the property, the building is close to Bedford Row from which deliveries can be made.

VIABILITY

a. *The town centre is currently over-provided with commercial accommodation, evidenced by business closing or moving out.*

b. *Additional affordable, rental residential accommodation within the town centre would assist in regenerating the town centre and represents a sustainable approach, by providing accommodation in areas where shops, buses and other amenities are in close proximity.*

c. *Due to lack of demand, the premises in question were themselves, vacant for almost 18 months between the beginning of 2006 and June 2007, before finding a tenant. The tenant employs only four people and has an early option to vacate the premises. Any redevelopment of the site, as proposed in this application, would not be completed before the tenant leaves of his own volition. An undertaking has been given to the tenant to that effect.*

d. *The accommodation in question would once have been residential accommodation for the shop keepers and consent has already been given for residential accommodation for most of the premises in Warwick Street. Consent for flats, maisonettes and studio apartments have already been given to the following premises in Warwick street: 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 21, 26, 27, 29, 30, 34, 36, 37, 39, 41 and 45.*

PLANNING POLICY

The property lies within the South Street Conservation Area. The description of this Conservation Area relates more to what happens at street level – shops and shop fronts etc. than to the accommodation above the shops.

The following Worthing Local Plan Saved Policies have been considered in the design:

Policy BE1

In accordance with Planning Policy BE1, this scheme has been designed to give a high quality and to enhance the existing. The design takes into account the massing of the buildings and features around it.

Policy BE21

The proposed development will enhance and protect the Conservation area scale and character.

The following West Sussex County Council Structure Plan Policies have been considered in the design:

Policy CH1

The proposals accord with Structure Plan Policy CH1 in seeking to maintain the character of this distinctive part of the town.

Policy CH8

The proposals follow the intent of Structure Plan Policy CH8, being modest in scale in keeping with the character of the conservation area.

Policy NE5

This policy seeks to protect employment opportunities. However, as explained earlier in this document, there is a great deal of empty commercial property in the town centre particularly office space on upper floors that are inaccessible to the disabled due to the age of the buildings being unsuitable for conversion. Lack of suitable parking facilities in the town centre has also led to a lack of demand as businesses migrate to more suitable premises on the outskirts where expansion is possible. Migration within the town boundary does not cause loss of employment and so the loss of this particular accommodation would not be detrimental to the overall situation in Worthing. Indeed because most office workers leave the town centre after business hours the introduction of permanent residents to the centre is likely to enhance business therein and thus employment.

CONCLUSION

a. *A previous application was submitted for this site in April 2008 (ref: WB/08/0357/FULL) that included the addition of a third floor. This application was withdrawn. The current proposal does not include the third floor.*

b. *As part of this earlier planning application, consultation was undertaken with Worthing Borough Council's Planning Department. A letter was received from Mrs. M. O'Keeffe of Worthing Borough Council's Planning Department on 13th November '07 following initial enquiries made by this office on 21st August 07. Mrs. M. O'Keeffe's comments at that time suggested extending only an additional storey to the east and a sketch elevation illustrating this Proposed Option 2 was included with the application. This is the scheme now proposed (i.e. without a third floor). At that time no reference was made to potential loss of employment by Mrs. O'Keeffe.*

c. *This proposal involves minimal impact on the Warwick street frontage and will bring residents into the town centre, which will help to stimulate business, growth of employment and regeneration of the economy."*

3. CONSULTATIONS

The **Highway Authority** comments as follows:-

"West Sussex County Council provided highway comments on the withdrawn application, WB/08/0357, which sought the provision for the extension, conversion and alteration to accommodate 7 flats. No highway concerns were raised to this proposal. The current scheme, in highway terms at least, differs only in as much as the number of units has been reduced from 7 to 6 flats. A nil car parking provision is still proposed and no highway safety implications are anticipated as a direct consequence of the nil car parking provision. The site is situated within Worthing town centre and the location should encourage and promote walking, cycling and the use of passenger transport in accordance with the advice within PPG13. It is noted that the site is very confined, it would be beneficial if cycle parking could be accommodated, although it is appreciated that this may not be possible and would not insist upon this.

A TAD Contribution would be sought based upon the number of flats proposed. Allowance would be made within this calculation for the existing B1 office use. However, details are not provided. Further information would be sought to enable the existing use to be taken into account. Based on the proposed 6x1 flats alone, a TAD Contribution of £2,880 would be sought. If details are provided for the B1 office use, there may be a nil requirement for a contribution.

In principle, no objection would be raised. Further detail is sought in regards of the existing use."

The **Economic Development Officer** advises that:-

"18 Warwick Street is built to a good standard and the offices on the first floor are light and bright, with potential to expand to the top floor. The premises are currently occupied and employ 4 people and I see no evidence that this would not continue.

I would not wish to set a precedent which would lead to further office accommodation being lost to residential in this area, and would add my concerns that increased residential accommodation could affect existing commercial trade with imposed restrictions to business use/growth. With regard to PPG4 we need to ensure we have a variety of commercial sites to promote diverse economic activity and growth.

Economic Development has commissioned an 'Audit of Town Centre Office Space' which is currently being undertaken by consultants on our behalf. The outcome of this audit is due for release in October 2009. This application is therefore premature of these findings.

Economic Development does not therefore support this application."

The **Executive Head of Health, Housing and Community Safety** raises no objection subject to the adequate provision of refuse storage.

The **Council's Waste Strategy Manager** advises that:-

"There are no communal bins in this area and West Sussex County Council have previously indicated that they will not allow communal bins to be placed on the highway. Refuse collection in this area is a nightmare with several flats having to use litter bins on a daily basis for refuse. If these flats are to go ahead then there must be an external bin compound that can be readily accessed by refuse collectors AND householders (i.e. not too far from properties)or an internal area. This may be a challenge for the developer but the alternative is likely to be substantial amounts of loose waste being set out for collection in a prime retail area on a regular basis (perhaps as often as daily.) This prospect cannot be acceptable."

4. REPRESENTATIONS

One letter of objection has been received from No. 27 Warwick Street commenting that:-

i) There should be provision of internal refuse storage which is secure from vermin and seagulls and does not impinge on Warwick Street. Recently there has been a weekly rubbish fest of ripped bags and strewn refuse from an existing residential

property in the street. This has now been resolved by provision of a wheelie bin which lives on the street itself and is an eyesore.

ii) Retailers are all suffering from the recession and are trying hard to improve the image of Warwick Street as an attractive and enjoyable place to visit and shop. Wheelie bins and refuse sacks do not help.

The **Conservation Area Advisory Committee** comments as follows:-

'There is no objection to the proposed conversion to self-contained flats. The proposal to change the height of part of the building to provide a uniform roof line is regarded as a detraction from the character of the street scene in Warwick Street and it is preferred that a variation in height is retained.'

5. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

WB/87/1311	Change of use of first floor from hairdressing salon to office use.	Granted	16.2.88
WB/87/1312	Change of use of second floor from residential to Class A2 office use.	Granted	16.2.88
WB/08/0357	Extensions, alterations and conversion of first and second floors to provide 7 self contained flats.	Withdrawn	17.7.08

6. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

The principal issues raised by this application are the loss of employment premises, the suitability for conversion to residential use, the design and the impact of the proposed extensions on the amenities of neighbours, the building itself and the conservation area, plus access and parking. As such the proposal should be primarily considered against saved Worthing Local Plan Policies RES7, RES12, H13, H18, BE1 and TR9 and South East Plan Policies CC6, CC7, RE3, RE6, H2, T4, BE1, BE6, TC2, SCT3 and SCT4. Also relevant are the Government guidance in the form of PPS1 (Sustainable Development), PPS6 (Town centres) and PPG4: Industrial, commercial development and small firms.

Loss of Employment floorspace

The existing upper two floors provide approximately 110 square metres of gross office and related floorspace. They are situated in the town centre where many of the upper floors are in office use.

Local Plan policies safeguarding employment land and premises were not saved and the Structure Plan is no longer applicable. The governing policy

now is the South East Plan and in particular Policy RE3 which includes the following statement:-

"Accessible and well located industrial and commercial sites should be retained where there is a good prospect of employment use.'

This objective is reiterated in Policy RE6 of the same plan. In addition, Policy SCT4 requires authorities to:-

'give priority to delivering employment development in strategically accessible locations, particularly by rail, to ensure an appropriate mix of readily available sites and premises whilst also providing sufficient space to

- retain existing firms and enable their expansion or relocation (within the sub-region)
- at least match anticipated increases in the resident workforce.'

The Employment Land Review (ELR) of October 2005 is still the most recent evidence based document. The work carried out for the ELR concluded that at the time of the study there was no excess supply of employment land over demand and that any losses would need to be carefully considered, particularly if site allocations were lost to other uses or failing to come forward.

At the time of the ELR the market for B1 use was relatively quiet, although there was unmet demand for freehold and highest quality small unit space. Employment growth of 3,300 jobs was forecast to 2017 – implying a need of 4-5,000 sq m (43,056–53,820 sq ft) floorspace each year. The study suggests that demand will be driven predominantly by local growth.

Clearly the current economic climate is not conducive to a rapid expansion in the B1 sector. However, the Council is committed to producing more evidence based work to assess the quantity, location and quality of business/office floorspace in Worthing, including the Town Centre. A study is currently underway and this work will entail producing a survey and market assessment of the quality, quantity and suitability of the current business floor space in the town centre, including an assessment of current office clusters as identified in the Worthing Master plan.

In terms of detail it will collect and analyse data required to build a baseline understanding of the economy at Borough level including

- Employment stock in terms of amount, unit size and location (B1,B2 &B8)
- Vacancy levels (buildings and land)
- Quality of employment stock, variance by type (grade a-c)
- Sectoral composition/growth/evidence of potential clustering
- Analysis of current business and economic demands in terms of floor space amount, type, unit size and location.
- Comparison of employment stock against current and future demand, with recommendations for smart growth, intensification and redevelopment opportunities of existing employment locations and settlements.

The final report should be with the Council by October.

The ELR highlighted that there is under-provision of B1 use in the town and although the economic climate is not currently strong we need to take a long term view of B1 market capacity and growth.

The imminent research work on the B1 market in the Town Centre will clarify the situation further

It is considered that the quantitative loss of this viable office floorspace would further compromise the ability of the town to achieve its economic objectives in a sustainable fashion, particularly at a time when the economy is in recession and jobs are being shed. It would also set a precedent and would make the loss of other upper floor offices in the town centre more difficult to resist. The site currently employs 4 staff, with room to expand, and its loss would add to concerns over the proposal's adverse impacts on the local economy. Concerns over the loss of offices are heightened in this case because the proposed change of use to residential would not directly generate employment and, if allowed, the change would likely be irreversible.

Certainly, the premises are very favourably located in the town centre in a highly sustainable location. The building is occupied for office purposes and the current tenant took out a 10 year lease 2 years ago. There is no evidence that it is anyway functionally redundant as office space. It may, therefore, be considered reasonable quality office accommodation in a prime location.

The agent advises that the premises were vacant for 18 months between January 2006 and June 2007. It has however, been occupied by the same firm since June 2007 and this firm is very happy to remain for the duration of its tenancy agreement. Whilst there may be vacant office space elsewhere this site is occupied and its loss to residential could prejudice the future of offices elsewhere in the town centre.

The agent refers to other upper floors in Warwick Street where office space has been allowed to change to residential use. Of those referred to only two decisions are relevant. In 2005 permission was given for a separate building at the rear of No. 21 Warwick Street to convert from vacant offices to a 3 bedroom flat. At the time Policy B2 of the Local Plan applied which allowed for changes of use involving less than 300 square metres of floorspace. In 2007 planning permission was granted for first floor office space above No. 29 Warwick Street to convert to two studio flats. This space was ancillary to the ground floor shop and was not functioning as office space. More recently in 2008 planning permission has been refused at No. 41 for the change of use of offices to 3 flats.

No compelling case has been made which justifies setting aside Policy RE3.

Principle of conversion to residential use in this town centre location

There are no specific saved polices relating to the principle of residential uses in the town centre although saved Policy H13 of the Local Plan covers the quality of such conversions. However, Government policy and the Masterplan recognise the importance of a diverse land use in town centres and the role that residential uses can play in contributing to the centre's vitality and viability.

In practice, the suitability of any part of the town centre for residential use will depend, to a large degree, upon the character of the surroundings and mutual compatibility. This is recognised in PPS6: Planning for Town Centres. Looking at the immediate surroundings, the property is set within an area which is primarily commercial during the day due to the retailing and predominantly leisure at night. It sits close to several pubs and restaurants. There are many other flats above the commercial properties in Warwick Street and the introduction of five more would not be incompatible. The accommodation is small but of a reasonable standard.

Impact of Extensions on the streetscene and neighbours.

The application has been revised since the previous withdrawal (WB/08/0357 refers) and now no longer includes a third floor addition. It is considered that the first and second floor extensions proposed would complete the building at No. 18. The important decorative cornice detailing of the original building would be continued and the extension would have a flat roof with parapet walls front and back to match the original. Timber sliding sash windows are also proposed. The extension would respect the character and detailing of the original building and would be a sympathetic addition in keeping with the character of the building and conservation area. This short terrace of three properties would retain its hierarchy with variations in height.

The proposed extension adjoins a café to the east which has a mansard roof. There are no windows in the side of the café. To the rear is the bus depot which adjoins a flat above a Stanford Square flat. This flat has only a bathroom and WC window in its flank. The proposed extension is no deeper than the extension on the other half and properties to the west will be unaffected. The roof terrace would have little impact also but will be a useful amenity space addition to one of the flats. There are roof terraces on the rear of the recently extended building at No. 14 Warwick Street.

Parking and Refuse arrangements

The site is in a highly sustainable location and as such the absence of car parking space is not of concern. Cycle storage would be desirable but the site limitations make this impossible. Important refuse and recycling space has been shown in the rear yard which is accessed from an alleyway to the rear of the terrace. The agent has confirmed access is available over this alleyway.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposal would result in the loss of good quality office floorspace in a prime location. This would compromise the established economic development strategy for the town and subregion and prejudice the emergent Local Development Framework, not least due to the precedent it would set. Whilst there is an apparent excess of office floorspace currently on the market in the town centre, this is likely to be indicative of a temporary national recession rather than local structural weaknesses or changes and latest research suggests a bottoming out. However, the commissioned research for the Local Development Framework will illuminate the situation shortly and enable a planned and informed response to any new circumstances that are identified. This is far more appropriate than ad hoc releases of land in response to speculative planning applications as proposed in this case. Certainly, no justification for the proposal exists in terms of any shortage of housing land to meet the required 5 years supply and there are sufficient small flats in the town to meet identified need.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Refuse on the grounds that:-

1. The proposal entails the unacceptable loss of good quality employment floorspace in a recognised town centre office location which would set an undesirable precedent and is premature and prejudicial to the preparation of the Local Development Framework. This would be to the detriment of the local economy, the efficient functioning and aspirations of the town centre and its vitality and viability. As such it is contrary to Policy RE3 of the South East Plan.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Observations of the Highway Authority
Observations of the Executive Head of Health, Housing and Community Safety
Observations of the Council's Waste Strategy Manager
Observations of the Conservation Area Advisory Committee
Letters of Representation from members of the public

25th August 2009