Expiry Date - 10/10/2012

Application Number: AWDM/0926/12 **Recommendation – Approve**

Site: **21 - 23 Buckingham Road Shoreham-By-Sea West Sussex BN43 5UA**

Proposal: **Conversion of offices to two houses with allied alterations including to forecourt (and access) and replacement windows**

Applicant: Mr Darren Wetherill Ward: St. Nicolas
Case Officer: Peter Devonport

Not to Scale Reproduced fro OS Mapping with the permission of HMSO © Crown Copyright Licence number LA100024321

Site and Surroundings

The site lies just to the north of the railway (level crossing) on the edge of Shoreham town centre and comprises two adjoining and linked properties occupied as offices by a local firm of electrical fitters and suppliers- DW Electrical Ltd. The properties sit in a two storey terrace originally built as houses in the Victorian period. However, all but one (No 17) have converted since to commercial use. Uses include a fish and chip shop (No 19) immediately to the south of the application properties with an outbuilding in the rear yard and (vacant) offices to the north (No 25) which have added a two storey rear extension whose flank windows overlook the rear garden of No 23. Other uses in the terrace include various shops and other takeaways and the Royal British legion social club.

The terrace is set back from the road with many of the commercial forecourts used for parking. At the rear of the terrace are the modest hard surfaced yards enclosed by substantial walls and, beyond these, a twitten which marks the boundary of the Shoreham Conservation Area, and another terrace of housing (Queens Place). The outriggers of the cottages extend deep into their small rear yards but do not contain any windows in the facing elevation.

Opposite is a commercial terrace and the Crab Tree PH. There are bus stops closeby on both sides of the roads and on street parking is strictly controlled.

No 23 was converted from a house to offices in 1981 and DW Electrical Ltd moved into the premises in 2000. The two units were integrated internally in 2003 to enable DW Electrical Ltd to expand. Apart from the internal links; the introduction of some simple signage and one street entrance blocked off (No 23), the premises otherwise retain their original internal layout and domestic appearance, with rendered walls, small bays and tiled roof and extensive basements apiece.

Expiry Date - 10/10/2012

Proposal

The proposal is to convert the premises back to two houses to provide 2 x two/three bedroom houses. No external works are proposed, save reinstating the front door to No 23 and replacement windows; removal of signage and the individual enclosure of the front gardens by low solid walls typical of the terrace, whilst retaining a parking space apiece. Corresponding alterations to the vehicular access and forecourt hard landscaping are also planned together with the soft landscaping of part of the rear yards.

The proposal is supported by a Design and Access Statement, Planning Statement and company report and marketing report.

Consultations

West Sussex County Council:

The proposed houses are to be situated in a sustainable location as the site is within walking distance of public car parks and has close links with the public transport network. The proposal would also not be anticipated to generate an increase in vehicle movements with respect to the existing office use, and the peak usage times would not be expected to coincide with peak traffic levels in this area.

If the LPA are minded to approve this application a condition securing cycle parking should be included.

Adur & Worthing Councils:

The ***Environmental Health*** officer comments that there are no adverse comments from environmental health on this matter. Precautionary land contamination informative recommended.

Representations

One representation from the freeholder of No 25 has been received. This expresses concerns over the siting of the bins adjacent to the boundary wall with No 23 due to smells and also wishes to see the common rear boundary wall raised to protect residential privacy.

Relevant Planning Policies and Guidance

South East Plan (GOSE 2009): SCT1, SCT3, SCT5, SP3, RE3, H1, H4. T2;
Adur District Local Plan 1993-2006 (ADC 1996) (saved policies): AG1, AB 14,AP4, AH3, AH5, AP9, AS1, AE5, AE6 and Appendix 11 ‘Supplementary Planning Guidance’ comprising: Development Control Standard No.2 ‘Space Around New Dwellings and Flats’;
‘Good Practice Guidance Note: Internal Space Standards for New Homes’ (ADC 2010)
National Planning Policy Framework
Draft Adur Local Plan 2012; Policies, 3, 6, 11, 14, 24, 26

Expiry Date - 10/10/2012

Planning Assessment

Principle of loss of office use and conversion to residential use

The starting point for assessing these matters is the Development Plan, comprising the adopted Local Plan and the South East Plan.

The adopted Local Plan designates the site and the terrace in which it sits as an area where policies AE5, AE6 and AS1 apply. Policies AE5 and AE6 indicate office development will be permitted in this shopping area, subject to certain safeguards. However, whilst the spirit of the Plan arguably suggests otherwise, the wording of these polices does not expressly resist the loss of offices. Policy AS1 is not strictly relevant to the current application either as it deals with the loss of/new shops.

Resistance to the loss of offices does find some support in the South East Plan. Policy RE3 states that *Accessible and well-located industrial and commercial sites should be retained where there is a good prospect of employment use.* However, the South East Plan is due to be abolished shortly and, whilst still material, it has diminishing weight.

The Draft replacement Local Plan in Policy 24 resists the loss of offices as a B1 use unless it can be demonstrated that the site is genuinely redundant. However, although this is based on up to date evidence of need (The Adur Employment Land Review Update, 2011), the Plan is at a very early stage of preparation and so has very little weight currently.

In these circumstances, where the Development Plan is, arguably, silent on the matter in hand, unclear or out of date, the National Planning Policy Framework provides the most relevant guidance. This actively promotes sustainable development and states that (paragraph 22) *Planning policies should avoid the long term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose.* Paragraph 51 also indicates that (Local Planning Authorities) *should normally approve planning applications for change to residential use and any associated development from commercial buildings (currently in the B use classes) where there is an identified need for additional housing in that area, provided that there are not strong economic reasons why such development would be inappropriate.*

Judged in relation to the National guidance, it is clear that the proposal would compromise the ability of the District to retain business floorspace and meet future employment requirements. However, in quantitative terms the loss of floorspace is quite small (165 sq metres) and, in qualitative terms, the premises are not high or even good quality office accommodation, being no more than converted, (albeit, otherwise, sound) Victorian houses, with correspondingly small rooms and awkward layout.

It is disappointing that no active marketing of the premises has taken place to test their economic viability for office or other employment use. A supporting report by Michael Jones estate agents, nonetheless, comments that;

it is felt that is it unlikely that the offices are re-lettable without a change of use to possible D1 Medical and Health Services however a significant amount of investment would be needed by any ingoing tenant or purchaser in order to make this viable. Demand for these offices is likely to be relatively poor, bearing in mind that commercial agents Warwick Baker have available office suites in the building next door.

Some reassurance may be drawn from the fact that the applicants report that as a local business they intend to relocate closeby and that the 8-10 jobs based in the office and further 35 or so jobs associated with the wider business would be safeguarded. They also report that the equity the sale will release would enable the company to weather the current economic storm more safely; fund the relocation to more suitable premises and, even, possibly, enable the company to expand.

The impact on the commercial viability of the remainder of the terrace is unlikely to be significant either as the site is located at the northern end, furthest away from the commercial heart of the town centre. There is an argument of undesirable precedent being set here, especially as an application to convert the adjacent premises to the north (No25) to residential has also been recently submitted. However, precedent alone would not be sufficient reason to withhold consent and it is apparent that, historically, uses have switched between residential and commercial in response to market forces. In any event, each case remains to be considered on its merits.

In these circumstances the loss of the offices, may, on balance, be accepted.

Turning to the principle of conversion to residential use, the proposal would certainly contribute to meeting the District's housing provision targets and the size and type of housing proposed gels with the needs identified in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Draft Local Plan Policy 20. As noted above, The National Planning Policy Framework is particularly supportive of residential conversions where the economic case for retention of business use is not compelling. However, the acceptability of any specific proposal depends upon its specific circumstances which are considered below.

Residential amenity for future occupiers

The houses are a good size and sustainably located. The gardens are small but typical of such a town centre /fringe location and the soft landscaping proposed will enhance their value. Whilst the rear garden is directly overlooked by the two storey rear extension to No 25, this is not unacceptably invasive given its commercial use. Intervisibility is a feature of two storey terraces anyway, especially by the town centre but some improved screening o the northern boundary wall would be justified. The immediate area is somewhat noisy - in a town centre, close to a level crossing, bus stops, takeaways, social club and a pub. However, the levels of ambient noise appear not to be problematic and the adjacent fish and chip shop does not operate at unsocial hours. The Executive Head of Health and Community Safety raises no objections.

Bin stores siting may be reserved by condition but may be best located in the adjacent corners in the font gardens.

Visual amenity

The conversion works proposed to the buildings generally respect the domestic and period appearance of the buildings. However, as no details of the replacement windows and new front door are shown, they should be reserved by condition to ensure period harmony.

The enclosure of the front gardens will help reinstate the character of the terrace and the landscaping helps soften their appearance.

It would be prudent to remove the Permitted Development rights to safeguard the appearance and character of these attractive buildings.

Accessibility and parking

The parking space apiece proposed in the forecourt is satisfactory for this location and size of dwellings, especially given the on- street controls. There is scope for future occupiers to customize their own cycle parking storage arrangements. The Highway Authority raises no objections to the access arrangements.

APPROVE for the reason:-

The loss of offices is acceptable in view of the planning policy framework, the size and quality of the offices and retention of the business locally and limited immediate prospects for reoccupation. The properties are sustainably located and the addition of two small family dwellings would help meet housing requirements. The new properties would offer an acceptable environment for new occupiers, albeit in a town centre location, and the external works are visually satisfactory and the parking and access arrangements are acceptable. Subject to the safeguards secured by conditions, the proposal is acceptable in terms of the adopted Adur Local Plan; South East Plan and National Planning Policy Framework

and subject to completion of a satisfactory section 106 Obligation undertaking to pay the required sustainable transport contribution.

Subject to Conditions:-

1. Standard 3 year time limit
2. This permission relates to the approved plans
3. Details of replacement windows, doors and bin stores to be approved.
4. Details of forecourt treatment, landscaping, front boundary walls, screening to rear flank and access to be approved.
5. Remove Permitted Development rights for extension and alterations and out buildings.