

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

17 SEPTEMBER 2020

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to determine the planning application outlined below

APPLICATION NO: **18/0886/10 - CHANGE OF USE OF FIRST AND SECOND FLOORS OF PROPERTY FROM FORMER SNOOKER HALL (CLASS D2) TO 22 NO. SELF-CONTAINED RESIDENTIAL STUDENT FLATS (SUI GENERIS) AND ASSOCIATED WORKS, 1 FOTHERGILL STREET, TREFOREST, PONTYPRIDD, CF37 1SG**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to consider the determination of the above planning application.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Members consider the report in respect of the application and determine the application having regard to the advice given.

3. BACKGROUND

This application was reported to the 16th July 2020 meeting of the Planning and Development Committee with an officer recommendation of approval (a copy of the original report is attached as Appendix A). At that meeting Members were minded to defer the application for a site visit which was undertaken on 28th July 2020 (the site visit report is attached as Appendix B). The application was then reported back to the Planning and Development Committee meeting on 20th August 2020 where Members were minded to refuse the application contrary to the officer recommendation. Members considered that:

- The proposed development would result in an over-intensive use and overdevelopment of the building; and in trying to accommodate as many self-contained flats as possible within the building and with no amenity space, would result in the creation of cramped and poor quality living accommodation for future occupiers.

- With no off-street parking provision provided and no space within the site to accommodate any, future occupants would be forced to park in the surrounding residential streets which are already congested, resulting in indiscriminate on-street parking, to the detriment of pedestrian and highway safety in the vicinity.
- The proposed bin store area would be sited directly adjacent to the highway and at the junction of Park Street and Cyrch-y-Gwas Road with no footway provision. Therefore occupants would have to enter the busy highway to use the communal bins. This would result in significant highway and pedestrian safety implications for both future residents and highway users alike.
- The building's rear entrance would inevitably be used as a primary means of access by some occupants. With no footway provision here, this would be extremely dangerous for future occupants.

As a consequence it was resolved to defer determination of the application for a further report to highlight the potential strengths and weaknesses of taking a decision contrary to officer recommendation.

4. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

The officer considerations regarding the issues detailed above are set out in full within the original report, however, a further brief summary of each issue is provided below:

Overdevelopment of the building / poor quality living accommodation

It is accepted that a considerable number of units are proposed and the self-contained units would be relatively small in nature, essentially forming bedsits. However, they are generally considered acceptable in respect of their scale, design, outlook and resulting living accommodation. It is also accepted that there would be no outdoor amenity space for the occupants, but again, this is typical of these types of facilities or many blocks of flats. As such the proposed development is considered to generally comply with the Council's adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG): Development of Flats.

However, notwithstanding the above and the fact that the broader principle of using the property for a number of student flats is generally considered acceptable, given the number of units proposed within the building and the minor scale of each unit proposed, it could be considered the conversion would result in an over-intensive use of the building and overdevelopment of the site; resulting in poor quality and cramped living accommodation for future residents, contrary to the guidance set out in Policy AW5 of the LDP and SPG: Development of Flats which explains that poor quality living accommodation can cause health, safety and welfare issues.

This is demonstrated by the fact that each of the units proposed would accommodate only approximately 18m² floor space, which is barely large

enough to accommodate a bed, let alone any additional facilities required such as adequate kitchen/bathroom spaces along with storage units and furniture etc. This would result in a very limited living space and inadequate facilities within each flat, and would also likely result in noise, disturbance and privacy issues for the occupants of the proposed flats living in such cramped conditions, again contrary to the guidance set out in the aforementioned Policy and SPG.

It is acknowledged that a number of large student accommodation blocks have recently been constructed in the area where room sizes are comparable to that proposed within this scheme, however, those developments form purpose built 'halls of residence' student accommodation facilities whereby each occupier has their own bedroom with en-suite bathroom, with larger communal living and kitchen areas, essentially forming a number of houses in multiple occupation. In such instances smaller room sizes are generally considered acceptable because they simply form bedrooms and occupants would spend a large amount of their general time within the communal kitchen/living areas provided. However, in this instance, each unit would form a self-contained flat with no additional shared or independent living/amenity areas, and there would be no outdoor amenity space which is a further recommendation of the SPG. Consequently residents would be restricted to the room they are occupying only at all times, which essentially forms a small bedroom with only enough space for minimal facilities.

Therefore, whilst the general conversion of the property to a number of self-contained student flats could generally be considered acceptable in principle, it could be considered that the number of units proposed would place significant pressure on the plot, representing an over-intensive use of the building and overdevelopment of the site; and furthermore, in trying to accommodate as many units as possible within the building, would result in the creation of cramped and poor quality living accommodation for future occupiers to the detriment of their health and wellbeing. Consequently it could be considered that the use of the property for 22 no. self-contained flats would be overdevelopment and therefore not appropriate.

Highway Safety

Following consideration of the scheme the Council's Transportation Section commented that the proposed facility would have a satisfactory means of primary access; and whilst no off-street parking is proposed and none can be provided, the site is located in a highly sustainable location with good access to various public transport links. Therefore, on balance, the scheme is generally considered acceptable in respect of its potential impact upon pedestrian and highway safety in the vicinity of the site.

However, it is inevitable that the introduction of 22 no. self-contained residential units at the site would result in an intensification of use and that many, if not all, of the future occupiers could have their own vehicle. Therefore with no off-street parking provided and no space within the site to accommodate any, future occupiers would be forced to park on the highways

along the neighbouring residential streets which are already congested, potentially resulting in indiscriminate on-street parking and associated pedestrian and highway safety implications throughout the wider area.

Furthermore, the proposed bin store area to the rear of the building would be sited directly adjacent to the highway and at the junction of Park Street and Cyrch-y-Gwas Road with no footway provision. Therefore occupants would have to enter the busy highway to use the communal bins which would have significant highway and pedestrian safety implications for both future residents and highway users alike.

It would also be extremely difficult to enforce the use of the building's rear entrance to 'use of the bin store only' which for convenience, would inevitably be used by some occupants as their primary means of access. This again, with no footway provision, would be dangerous for both occupants and highway users alike.

As such there is concern with both the lack of off-street parking provision and the secondary means of access / bin store area and the proposed development will inevitably result in a degree of impact to the safety of future occupiers and highway users alike in these respects. Consequently the proposed development could therefore be considered unacceptable in respect of its potential impact upon pedestrian and highway safety in the vicinity.

Conclusion

Whilst the application is recommended for approval, subject to the conditions set out in the original report, if, having considered the above advice, Members remain of a mind to refuse planning permission, it is suggested that the following reasons for refusal would reflect those views:

1. The proposed development would place significant pressure on the plot, representing an over-intensive use and overdevelopment of the site; and in trying to accommodate as many self-contained flats as possible within the building and with no amenity space, would result in the creation of cramped and poor quality living accommodation for future occupiers. As such the proposal is contrary to Policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan and the Council's adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance: Development of Flats.
2. The proposed development would have a detrimental impact upon pedestrian and highway safety in the vicinity of the site, contrary to Policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan, for the following reasons:
 - i. The proposed development would result in an intensification of use at the site and additional traffic along the residential streets which are already oversubscribed with on-street car parking narrowing the available width to single file traffic and blocking footways to the detriment of safety of all highway users and the free flow of traffic.

- ii. With no off-street parking provision proposed and no space within the site to provide any, future occupiers would be forced to park on the highways along neighbouring residential streets which are already congested, resulting in indiscriminate on-street parking to the detriment of safety of all highway users and the free flow of traffic.
- iii. The proposed bin store area would be sited directly adjacent to the highway at the junction of Park Street and Cyrch-y-Gwas Road with no footway provision. Consequently future occupants would have to enter the busy highway to use the communal bins to detriment of their safety and that of highway users.
- iv. It would be extremely difficult to enforce the control of the building's secondary access at the junction of Park Street and Cyrch-y-Gwas Road to that of 'use of the communal bin store only' which would result in occupants using this entrance as their primary means of access with no footway provision, to the detriment of pedestrian and highway safety in this area.