

38/2006/047

STRONGVOX LTD & BENJAMIN-WESTROCK

**CHANGE OF USE AND CONVERSION OF BUILDING TO 75 APARTMENTS, RETENTION OF OFFICE SPACE TO FRONTAGE, ROOF EXTENSION, EXTERNAL ALTERATIONS AND ASSOCIATED FACILITIES AT TELEPHONE HOUSE, THE CRESCENT, TAUNTON AS AMPLIFIED BY AN ADDITIONAL DESIGN STATEMENT RECEIVED 15TH MARCH, 2006**

22562/24301

FULL

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**PROPOSAL**

The proposal comprises the conversion of this vacant building to 75 apartments, (31 2 bed and 44 1 bed) with the retention of 8,500 sq ft of office accommodation. This former British Telecom office building has three principal external elevations with frontages to The Crescent, Crescent Way and the Crescent Car Park. There are also three internally facing elevations forming a courtyard to this 'U' shaped building.

The site is partially located within the Conservation Area. However there are no proposed external alterations to the important west elevation facing The Crescent. Ten new windows are proposed in the external north elevation that are currently bricked up former openings. Similarly a bricked up window and a gas meter cover are proposed to be used as windows to the northern section of the external east elevation. The main external alterations are to the southern section of the external east elevation where all existing windows are proposed to be replaced. Furthermore the column surrounding the existing stairwell windows and the rooftop lift shaft is proposed to be cladded, with a new feature clock added to the top storey. At ground level an existing vehicle entrance, which is currently enclosed by doors, would be opened up to provide pedestrian and vehicular access to the internal courtyard. The ground floor southern section of the east elevation is currently boarded up or enclosed with metal railings that are proposed to be finished in banded render and new windows formed. Six parking spaces are also proposed to the southern end of this east elevation.

Similarly the internally facing ground floor elevations are currently boarded up or enclosed with metal railings that are proposed to be finished in banded render and new windows formed. The theme of the vertical section of cladding on the external east elevation is continued with a mirrored section on the westward facing internal elevation. Entranceways to the flats would also be provided from this internal courtyard area. A large metal chimney/piping system is also proposed to be removed. 32 parking spaces are proposed to be formalised along with some planting within the courtyard. A new bin store is proposed to be erected to the only unattached, south elevation, leaving a gap for an alternative pedestrian access to the internal courtyard.

The existing sixth floor covers only the eastern section of the building and this is proposed to be extended to form an 'L' shaped top storey. This rooftop extension

would not extend onto the western section of the building facing The Crescent. It is this western section of the building that is proposed to be retained as offices.

## **CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS**

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY there is no objection in principle to the proposed development. In detail, the access is to remain as presently exists, being served off The Crescent car park. The parking will be within the confines of the building and will in itself be a reduction as, at present, there are forty-four spaces within the site which will be replaced by parking for thirty-two vehicles. I do not think that provision for thirty-two vehicles will be a problem for the site as the adjacent public car park is available should it be required. In consequence, I propose not to recommend refusal to the application, subject to any details of access, parking and turning shown on the drawings accompanying the application being provided prior to the first occupation of any of the planning units or the office space. COUNTY COUNCIL PROPERTY SERVICES research recently carried out within the Property Services department into the numbers of school-age children living in flats in Somerset suggests that one primary school place will be required for each additional 13 additional flats, while one secondary school place will be required for each additional 24. This is likely to be a more accurate reflection of the numbers of school-age children living in this type of accommodation than the general standard of 30 primary places for each 150 dwellings and 30 secondary places for each 210. (However, in schemes comprising a mix for houses and apartments, the latter average standards should continue to be applied). The proposed development of the above site makes provision for 75 apartments and this would equate to 6 primary places and 3 secondary places. The site lies within the catchments of Parkfield Primary School and the Castle School, both of which are easily accessible from the site but already popular and these have little or no existing surplus capacity. Contributions will therefore need to be sought to provide additional re-modelled accommodation. The County Council is evolving the way in which educational contributions are calculated, with the use now of the DfEs "Basic Need Cost Multiplier", that is, the Government's estimation of the capital cost of providing a school place. These are updated annually and in Somerset, these are currently £10,165 per primary pupil and £15,531 per secondary place. Six primary and 3 secondary places would therefore total £107,583 and a contribution of this amount (BCI-Indexed) should be sought from the developer through a planning obligation. WESSEX WATER comments awaited.

TAUNTON VISION DELIVERY TEAM would want to support the principle of introducing a mix of uses into the town centre and this is consistent with the approved UDF Report which suggests a mix of retail and residential uses on the adjoining Crescent car park. I would hope that it will prove possible to achieve a mix of tenures in this location, together with an appropriate proportion of affordable units. I would specifically comment:- 1. that discussions should take place with the Vision Delivery Team about connection to services in general and surface/foul water sewers in the adjoining car park in particular having regard to the development proposals for that adjoining area and the potential need to realign/replace existing services in pursuance of the Vision proposals. 2. that regard should be had to the proposed construction of a new multi-storey car park on land to the south and east of Telephone House in connection with the retail redevelopment of land to the east and west of High Street. We would be concerned at any proposal which unduly

constrained or which prejudiced those proposals having regard to either rights to light or distances between Telephone House and any new building. 3. that the precise area of car parking on the existing Crescent car park and shown on the layout plan as being to the south and east of the eastern elevation of Telephone House should be the subject of more detailed discussions so as to ensure that the layout does not constrain the development of the adjoining land or, more particularly, restrict access to the proposed new multi-storey car park. Subject to these comments, I would raise no objection to the proposed application and would welcome the reuse of a large and prominent building which has been vacant for some time. DRAINAGE OFFICER no observations. HOUSING OFFICER fully supports this application. TDBC are currently in negotiations with current owners/developers and a Registered Social Landlord into the possibility of taking the whole building of 75 apartments for low cost/affordable housing. This is a prime site in the centre of Taunton that could provide homes for people in need either to rent or purchase close to local amenities. LEISURE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER in accordance with policy C4 provision for play and active recreation must be made. The site is within easy walking distance of Wilton Lands which could be improved for the benefit of new residents. I would therefore request a contribution of £1,785 per each 2 bed dwelling towards childrens play facilities at Wilton Lands and £777 per each dwelling toward borough wide outdoor recreation. In addition to the play and outdoor recreation contribution I would also request that in accordance with Local Plan Policy C6, which recognises the importance of sports centre to the population an additional contribution of £37,519 should be sought towards the additional demand for indoor sports facilities that will be generated by the development. A total contribution from this development for children's play, outdoor recreation and indoor sports facilities of £127,042.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review STR1 - Sustainable Development, STR4 - Development in Towns, Policy 9 - The Built Historic Environment, Policy 33 - Provision for Housing, Policy 35 - Affordable Housing, Policy 48 - Access & Parking, Policy 49 - transport requirements.

Taunton Deane Local Plan S1 - General Requirements, S2 - Design, H2 - Housing in Classified Settlements, H3 - Residential Conversions in Town Centres, H10 Affordable Housing, H19 - Designing Out Crime, EC9 - Employment Land, M4 - Residential Parking Requirements, C4 - Recreational Space Provision, C5 - Sports Centres, EN14 - Conservation Areas.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The site lies within Taunton central area, where a mix of uses is generally encouraged. The application proposes the conversion of a vacant office building to 75 apartments, with 8,500 sq ft of office accommodation retained. This use is considered to comply with Policy H1 of the Local Plan as this a central, highly sustainable site, located near amenities and services and would reduce the need to travel. This benefit is considered to outweigh any loss of the employment use of the site.

Telephone house is also included within the supplementary text to Policy T23 for The Crescent redevelopment that states residential use of the building would be suitable. The developer should be aware of the comments of the Taunton Vision Delivery Team with regard to the future re-development plans for The Crescent car park. The Taunton Vision Master Plan as well as Policy T23 has earmarked The Crescent area for major retail uses. Specifically in the vicinity of telephone house a multi-storey car park and bus station is proposed. The developer should therefore have regard to these proposed future uses and will be advised accordingly.

The impact of the appearance and character of the building is important here and it is considered that the approach taken by the developer does reflect the nature of the building and does not adversely affect its character or appearance. The new roof extension will be visible from public vantage points but given its design it will read as part of the building. In general the existing negative design elements will be improved and the architecturally important features retained.

The existing vehicular access to the central courtyard will be retained where 38 parking spaces will be retained. Given the central location of the site the Highway Authority are satisfied with the overall parking provision. The proposal creates a number units beyond the threshold for the provision of sport and recreation facilities and as there is no scope for on site provision a Section 106 is required to secure adequate provision. The proposal is also considered to generate a need for additional school places that the developer is also required to contribute towards through a Section 106. In accordance with the policy and at a rate of 25%, 18 of affordable housing units should be provided for within the scheme. However there may be the possibility of securing 100% affordable housing should a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) purchase the building, if the other contributions be waived.

In summary the re-use of this building for residential purposes is a sustainable town centre use that complies with policy and subject to conditions and a S.106 Agreement is considered acceptable.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- (1) Subject to the completion of a Section 106 Agreement relating to sport and recreation contributions, an appropriate level of affordable housing and an education contribution by 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2006 the Development Control Manager in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair be authorised to determine and permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, materials, sliding sash windows, timber windows and doors, landscaping, boundary treatment, surface materials, parking, cycle parking, details of cycle and refuse stores, removal of rights for satellite dishes. Notes re contact details of the Taunton Vision Delivery Team and provision of communal satellite dish.
- (2) Subject to the completion of a Section 106 Agreement relating 100% affordable housing to be secured through an agreement with an RSL by 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2006 the Development Control Manager in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair be authorised to determine and permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, materials, sliding sash windows, timber windows and doors, landscaping, boundary treatment, surface materials,

parking, discharge of water to highway, cycle parking, details of cycle and refuse stores, removal of rights for satellite dishes. Notes re contact details of the Taunton Vision Delivery Team and provision of communal satellite dish.

(3) Should the Section 106 not be completed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2006 the Development Control Manager in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair be authorised to REFUSE permission as contrary to Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies C4, C5 and H9.

**REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:-** The development subject to conditions is a sustainable town centre use that complies with Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1, S2, H2, H3, H10, H19, EC9, M4, C4, C5 and EN15 and material considerations do not indicate otherwise.

**In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.**

**CONTACT OFFICER: 356469 MR R UPTON**

NOTES: