

38/2006/361

MR R CRIDDLE

DEMOLITION OF HOUSE & ERECTION OF 12 ONE BEDROOM FLATS AT 74 SOUTH STREET, TAUNTON

323482/124316

FULL

PROPOSAL

Permission is sought for the erection of 12 No. one bedroom flats on the site of an existing two storey residential dwelling. The site does not lie in a conservation area and the building proposed to be demolished is of no particular architectural merit. The existing building measures 8.0 m to the ridge. The proposed building would be three storeys high and measure 10.5 m at its highest point. The footprint of the building would be 12.8 m in width and 15.5 m in depth. The proposed building would extend beyond the building line of the existing dwelling, albeit set back from the terraced properties to the north. The footprint of the building would be within 0.5 m of the boundary with the adjoining dwellings and project significantly to the rear. The plans indicate fenestration in all elevations, with the side windows serving the kitchen area. Proposed materials are indicated to be agreed. The site is located within the designated Taunton Central Area and as such the site is well related to essential facilities and services. No parking is provided within the scheme.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY the site lies within the town centre and consequently the proposal not to provide car parking can be considered acceptable. However, with a new build and the extent of the site it ought to be relatively easy to provide adequate cycle parking. Therefore in the event of any permission being granted a condition require secure and sheltered cycle parking for 12 cycles should be imposed. WESSEX WATER the development is located within a sewered area and the developer will need to agree points of connection. In respect of water, there are water mains and connection point can be agreed at detailed design stage.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER subject to suitable tree planting it should be possible to soften the impact of the proposals within the street scene. LEISURE DEVELOPMENT TEAM MANAGER in accordance with Policy C4 provision for play and recreation must be made. As each dwelling in the proposed development consists of one bedroom a contribution of £859.00 per dwelling towards active recreational facilities and playing fields.

TAUNTON AND DISTRICT SOCIETY strongly objects to this application as a particularly poor example of over-development and overbearing infill, which seems to us to lack any architectural merit, to be insensitive to the location, and be potentially hazardous to its occupants. Specifically we consider that the application:- (A) Fails Policy S1(D) because it harms the character of the area. The height, scale and

overall design of the building are not in harmony with any of the properties on South St for more than 100 m in either direction. Reason: The predominant form northwards (on both sides of the road) is two storey terraced houses. Southwards on the same side there are three modern two-storey houses and then further earlier terracing. There is one three-storey terraced house to the north, but this is itself a bad feature and cannot be accepted as a precedent for a three-storey block. The plans show that the existing building, and the other modern houses, are set back from the building line of the terraces to either side, but that the proposed new building line will be in advance of the neighbouring modern houses, although behind the terraces to the north where the road narrows. Since the building is just about on the crest of the hill in South St, that advance, together with the height, will make it very obtrusive (especially when approaching the town centre). Because it is practically inconceivable that 12 flats will not contain at least several car owners, the proposal contributes to a cumulative effect of increasing pressure on street parking. South St itself is narrow (particularly just to the town side of the site) fast and busy. The side roads in the area are generally very narrow and easily choked. The proposal therefore works against the criteria set out in S1 (A). (B) Fails Policy S2 generally, and S2(A) in particular because (a) it does not reinforce local character and (b) is not well designed. Reason: Our comments re policy S1(D) above illustrate the failings as regards local character. There are some new three-storey flats in the street but these are on the corner of Queen Street, which is a long way down the slope towards the town centre. We consider that the access design is particularly poor with a single entrance positioned on the side that opens to an access lane little more than a metre wide. The central hall/stair space seems reminiscent of a rooming house, has no natural light yet offers the inhabitants inadequate privacy from each other. Taken altogether this design seems unacceptably hazardous in case of fire, and is awkward of access for delivery purposes. We are sceptical that the central flat roof is a good design feature. There are no details indicating any provision for bathroom ventilation. The street and rear elevations are asymmetrical and unattractive. The gables are quite untypical of the area, and look like overgrown dormers. Quite apart from any other reason, we feel this application should be refused for the poor quality of the design and lack of detail in the plans. (C) Fails Policy H2(G) because it causes privacy and loss of sunlight to neighbouring properties. Reason: the proposed building extends back beyond the outbuildings of the terraced house immediately to the north (No. 72), and more than half of the depth of the proposed building is beyond the rear house windows of number 72. As the proposed building is only about a metre from the site boundary, and is three-storeys high, number 74 will suffer a substantial loss of sunlight and a strong feeling of enclosure. Further, the kitchen windows overlook the neighbouring properties on each side and there is a loss of privacy for the rear of both neighbouring properties. (D) Fails policy M4 by making no provision for cycle storage. (E) It can be argued that the proposal meets Policy S2(H), "makes full and effective use of the site". We consider that it makes an overuse of the site. The plans do not appear to show adequate space to move communal waste bins to the street for collection. If the intention is that they should be located at the front of the building, then this is objectionable. A two storey development, with a design more sympathetic to the neighbouring terraces, that respected neighbouring properties privacy and access to sunlight, and had safer access, would be much more suitable. We would reiterate that we are concerned about the cumulative effects of the number of infill developments which offer no provision for car parking/storage, and which may easily

create access problems. We consider that the outcome of this trend will be the erosion of local character, increased parking and congestion issues and an impaired public realm.

WARD COUNCILLOR Richard Lees objects to the proposal on the grounds of loss of light to adjoining property; proximity of other buildings affecting privacy of neighbours; noise levels – especially due to the old peoples home in the vicinity; possible effect on the immediate area under the Crime and Disorder Section 17 Rules.

27 LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received, of which 17 have been submitted as standardised objections raising the following issues:- overdevelopment of the site; footprint of the built form getting physically closer to the road frontage and the boundary; significant increase in depth; loss of privacy with windows on the side elevation directly overlooking; loss of amenity due to lack of parking provision; east reach is below national air quality standards and the additional congestion would compound the problem; South Street is part of an environmental area; design is cold and characterless; little consideration for the people living next door; out of scale with surrounding properties; loss of light; overshadowing; inadequate parking; noise; reduce views; no need to demolish a family house; when originally built it was first proposed to be a bungalow but this was refused on the grounds of being out of character, so how can a block of flats be considered acceptable; it would be more appropriate to have a row of terraced houses at the same alignment and scale as the Victorian houses in the locality.

POLICY CONTEXT

PPS1 (Delivering Sustainable Development).

PPG3 (Housing), PPG13 (Transport)

RPG10 – Regional Planning Guidance for the South West Policy HO 5: (Previously Developed Land)

Somerset & Exmoor Joint Structure Plan Review STR1 (Sustainable Development), STR4 (Development in Towns), Policy 33 (Provision of Housing), Policy 48 (Access and Parking)

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 (General Requirements), S2 (Design), H2 (Housing in Settlements), M4 (Residential Parking Requirements), C4 (Open Space Requirements).

ASSESSMENT

It is considered the pertinent issues for consideration in the determination of the application relate to the visual appearance of the building and its impact upon the character and appearance of the area; impact upon residential amenity; and highway safety implications.

The size of the building represents a large increase over the existing development and it is considered the building would overdevelop the site. The predominant building pattern is of two storey dwellings of a smaller footprint and scale, in rectilinear form. The design pays little attention to the architectural design of buildings within the street scene. As such it is considered the proposal would be harmful to the character and townscape of the locality. It is accepted that the existing building is of little architectural merit, however, any new building should relate to the predominantly traditional vernacular. It is accepted that there has been some piecemeal development in the area, however, the proposal is considered to be a poor design solution being inappropriate to its context. It is out of scale and incompatible with its surroundings. The fourth key principle of (PPS1) states that 'design which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted'. Paragraph 37 refers, in turn, to a series of publications that set out good practice including 'By Design – Urban Design in the planning system: towards better practice'. Advice on page 20 of 'By Design' states that an important component in character is the need to respond to local building forms in the detailed layout and design of development. Terraced properties are characteristic of the area and it is considered the proposed building would be at variance with the established building pattern. It is considered therefore the proposal would erode the character of the area.

The application was submitted before the statutory requirement for a design and access statement came into force. However, in order to assess the visual appearance of the building a street scene analysis was requested on the 23rd October 2006, to show the relative height of the proposal in the context of the locality. A photomontage was also requested as a useful tool to assess the visual impact of the proposed building. This information has not to date been submitted.

The proposed new building projects 15.5 m in depth and would extend significantly beyond the building line of adjacent properties. Furthermore, the building would be located just 0.5 m from the boundary and given its three storey height sited on the boundary would give rise to an imposing and overbearing built form. The proposal would result in an overbearing visual effect as seen from the occupiers of adjacent properties and there would be a loss of light caused by shadowing from the development. In addition there would be a loss of privacy by reason of overlooking.

One of the recurring concerns from local residents is that of the lack of parking provision within the site and the knock on effect this will have on the locality. The Highway Authority considers that by reason of the location of the site close to the services and amenities of the town centre, it is acceptable to have zero parking provision on site. The site is therefore considered appropriate for car free development. However, as part of any consent a requirement would be imposed to provide safe cycle storage for twelve cycles within the site.

The provision of 12 flats requires a contribution towards off site play and open space provision in compliance with policy C4 of the Local Plan. In accordance with standard provisions this equates to £859 per one bed unit. Should Members consider the development to be acceptable then a Section 106 Agreement would be required to ensure that the required contribution was made.

It is recognised that national planning guidance seeks to make the best use of brownfield land, especially in sustainable locations such as the town centre. However, such development must not be at the expense of either good design (as required by PPS1) or result in a loss of amenity to existing residents. The proposal is considered to be an overdevelopment of the site incorporating a new building of excessive scale that would detract from the visual amenities of the street scene and would harm the residential amenities of adjoining occupiers.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be REFUSED for reasons of the lack of information submitted to assess the height of the proposed building in the street scene, and the scale, bulk and massing of the proposed built form is considered to be excessive and if allowed would be detrimental to the character and visual amenities of the street scene. As such the proposal is contrary to Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policy STR1 and the Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1, S2 and H2 and the proposal would cause harm to the residential amenities of adjoining occupiers by reason of its siting and scale would appear overbearing and result in a loss of light and privacy detrimental to the residential amenities of residents. As such the proposal is contrary to Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policy STR1 and Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1, S2 and H2.

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

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