

38/2006/033

STRONGVOX LTD

REDEVELOPMENT COMPRISING 74 APARTMENTS IN 3 BLOCKS, CONVERSION OF TWO LISTED BUILDINGS TO THREE DWELLINGS, PROVISION OF ASSOCIATED PARKING AND FACILITIES AND ALTERATIONS TO ACCESS, FORMER SCAT ANNEXE, STAPLEGROVE ROAD, TAUNTON

22132/25157

FULL

PROPOSAL

The site lies within the Staplegrove Road Conservation Area. It is for the redevelopment of the existing SCAT building and the development of the whole site for the provision of 3 blocks of flats containing 74 flats (37 No. 1 bed and 37 No. 2 bed units), two fronting Staplegrove Road and one fronting Linden Grove. The flats on the site of the existing SCAT building (block A) would be a mix of five and four storeys in height (5 storeys to the front) and constructed in a mix of buff brick and render with an artificial slate roof. Block C fronts onto Staplegrove Road and would be a mix of two, three and four storey and would be finished with render walls and an artificial slate roof. Block C adjacent to Linden Grove, would be three and four storeys in height and constructed with buff brick and artificial slate. The proposal would also convert three listed buildings to 3 dwellings. The existing access off Staplegrove Road would be used with new traffic lights to control the numbers of vehicles entering and leaving the site. 57 Parking spaces have been provided for the 77 residential units.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY views awaited COUNTY EDUCATION OFFICER the development will result in the need for 6 primary spaces and 3 secondary spaces. There are a number of surplus spaces in the local secondary school but no available space in the two local primary schools. Contributions should be sought for this provision. COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGIST views awaited. WESSEX WATER a combined foul and surface water sewer is available in the vicinity of the proposal but alternative sustainable drainage solutions should be explored. Water supply is available in the area. ENGLISH HERITAGE objection raised, the existing building is considered to have a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation area and the proposed replacement building is considered to be of a lesser quality.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER There is little scope for tree planting within the site and therefore little opportunity to enhance the Conservation Area; as a result trees would be very close to the proposed buildings. The new buildings are in close proximity with the existing trees at the front and rear of the site with significant private street trees nearby. The pine tree roots in the northeast corner of the site are at a higher level than the buildings but it is not clear what the final levels will be, the existing embankment should not be touched. Additional conifers should be included in the

planting mix to reflect the Victorian planting of the Conservation Area.

CONSERVATION OFFICER In line with my recommended refusal of the conservation area consent application, and for the reasons referred to below, I would recommend refusal of this application. It is difficult to comment on the merits of the scheme as the retention of the Technical College Annex building would fundamentally change the proposal. However, I would suggest that the following issues would need to be satisfactorily addressed in any subsequent proposal: a) Appropriate setting to the listed Summerhouse and former coach house b) Maximum retention of the Staplegrove Road front wall c) Removal of parking forward of any frontage buildings d) Need for development on the Linden Road frontage to reflect the terrace opposite and further up to act as visual terminal building to Birch Grove e) Avoidance of potential increase in local on-street parking that would affect the character of the conservation area f) Reduction in the height and number of storeys for the proposed buildings g) The design, architectural detailing and materials for the proposed buildings I have not been able to inspect inside the listed buildings, so cannot comment on their proposed conversions. These will need to be subject to listed building consent applications.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER no observations.

DRAINAGE OFFICER although soil conditions are impermeable, there is some potential for soakaways when the buildings are demolished. One possible way to reduce surface water run off would be to use a source control drainage pavement system in the parking areas.

HOUSING OFFICER a commuted sum is required for the provision of similar accommodation in the vicinity. It will contribute to the delivery of a larger scheme.

LEISURE AND RECREATION OFFICER Contributions are required to improve the quality of the existing play and outdoor recreation facilities. Contributions should also be sought towards the provision of indoor sports facilities in the area.

29 LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received raising the following issues:- the former Bishop's Fox school has formed an important part of the main route into the town since the beginning of the twentieth Century and is a good example of municipal architecture that should be retained and sympathetically converted; the existing building is a good visual centrepiece for the Conservation Area, the scale and mass of the proposed building is out of character with and lacking in empathy with the existing; The proposed building has a mediocre design; the number of flats on the site is too great for the character of the area which is largely family accommodation; the number of flats (70) will be equal to entire number of the Elms Estate and therefore over bearing on the character of the area the 5 storey building will be intrusive in the street scene and detrimental to the character of the area; it would be better if the scheme was reduced to 35/40 two storey apartments situated around a central green; the proposal would create an estate segregated from the local community; a traffic impact assessment should be submitted; the proposal would have a detrimental impact on a main approach road into Taunton contrary to policy T34; the disabled block has no car parking but disabled persons generally use a car; proposal is premature pending the provision of a Conservation Area appraisal; the local planning authority should guide development through a planning brief, taking full account of a conservation appraisal, the impact on the existing trees, impact on traffic, parking, urban design, architectural design, amenities, security and massing; the footpath to Linden Grove will encourage on street parking; there is insufficient parking for the proposed flats (56 for 77 flats) and this will lead to increased pressure for on street parking in an area where such spaces are already in

high demand; new residents should not be allowed to join in the overburdened parking permit scheme; the new junction and new residents of the flats are likely to result in an increased use of Elm Grove and The Avenue as a short cut during peak times when school children are walking to school resulting in an increased likelihood of accidents; a new vehicular access should be provided into Linden Grove rather than increasing the use of the Staplegrove Road junction and another set of traffic lights; accept that a sympathetic redevelopment scheme would be acceptable; the proposal may restrict the use of an existing right of way, used daily for our military vehicles and car

TAUNTON AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY 1. We are in favour of the redevelopment of this site. 2. We accept the contention of the applicants that the existing former SCAT Annexe building on the Staplegrove Road is unsuitable for economic conversion to apartments. 3. We consider that the former SCAT Annexe building does make (or would if sympathetically restored) a "positive contribution" (as defined in Local Plan Policy EN15) to the Staplegrove Road Conservation Area. 4. In view of this we feel that any replacement for the building must strongly "enhance the appearance or character of the conservation area" (Policy EN 14). If a scheme emerges that succeeds in this respect then we would not consider that the current buildings should be preserved. 5. The derelict land and the clutter of temporary classrooms etc. on the site currently defaces the conservation area, and for this reason alone any high quality scheme that replaces them is welcome. 6. We have no objections as regarding the preservation and redevelopment of the two listed buildings on the site, provided that the materials used to refurbish them, and particularly their exteriors, are entirely appropriate and conserve their appearance faithfully - we would stress the importance of this for the "new tiled roof" proposed for Block E. 7. We do not consider that 38/2006/033 enhances the appearance or character of the conservation area and we object to it on the grounds set out overleaf. 8. The proposed scheme fails to meet the Local Plan policy EN14 criteria for the following reasons: 8.1 In size and positioning Blocks A, B and C are all too large and visually dominant to fit within their context. Individually and collectively they will decrease the visual amenity of the Staplegrove Road conservation area on a major approach road to the town centre (ref. Local Plan Policy T34 in which para. 8.304 specifically mentions Staplegrove Road). Block A seems massive. Estimating from the drawings it appears to be 18.5m high although this may be from the level of the road (which is below the site ground level). Immediately to the north, Elm Park is 3 storeys high, the proposed Block A is 5, has a frontage 25% longer and is about twice the area. Elm Park is a strong and dominant structure - the visual impact of Block A would be much greater. 8.2 Block C, while close to the scale of Elm Park, is large and dominating in relation to the much lower and more modest buildings to the south and across the road. 8.3 Block B presents to Linden Grove (and Birch Grove) as a set of higher gable ends above a roof ridge (which steps up from south to north, so varying the visible extent of each gable). Remarkably unattractive. The 3 and 4 storey Block B is about twice the height of Swiss Cottage and the 20th century houses on the same side of Linden Grove, and considerably greater than the Victorian terraces on the other. This, in conjunction with the excessive closeness of the block to the Linden Grove boundary, seems overbearing. As several of the properties most affected in Linden Grove already have light from the east restricted by the buildings of Birch Grove, the height of Block B to their west may conflict with Local Plan policy H2 (G). Block B is also walled off from Linden Grove. This is hostile

to what should be the residential nature of this street (the footpath access to the side does not address this issue). If the existing temporary classrooms were replaced with buildings sympathetic to the terraces on the other side of Linden Grove then the conservation area would indeed be enhanced. The proposed block would destroy that possibility. 8.4 The position of Block C impinges on the setting for Block D (a listed building). We acknowledge that the setting of the other listed building (E) is somewhat improved. 8.5 The new blocks have busy and rather utilitarian elevations in a style that is very common to intensive apartment development. This has no clear relation to nearby buildings in the conservation area. The design harms rather than enhances the area. 8.6 The materials and colours proposed are not appropriate and should be improved. One of the best features of the former SCAT Annexe building is the way in which the tile, brick and render colouring acts as a bridge between the pale brick of Elm Grove and the Old Vicarage, perpetuated in the colouring of Elm Park, and the warmer brick and render tones to the south and across the Staplegrove Road. We would suggest that this transition should be continued in any development on this site. Given the size and visibility of the sloping roofs of the proposed blocks we would suggest that artificial slate should be avoided in favour of a warmer tile finish. If slates cannot be avoided, they should not be very dark. 9. The proposed traffic signals will obstruct the flow of traffic along Staplegrove Road and have the potential to divert traffic in a rat run manoeuvre around Elm Grove, Linden Grove and the Avenue. It may be better to provide an additional vehicular access via Linden Grove and omit signals on the Staplegrove Road. This alternative should be considered in any traffic impact analysis. While this would add to traffic in Elm Grove, Linden Grove and the Avenue, this would be probably be minor compared to the probable effect of motorists avoiding additional traffic lights. 10. While we accept that the provision of parking places is consistent with current planning guidelines, we consider: 10.1 the proposed allocation to be socially divisive (any affordable housing is to have no parking allocated) and 10.2 the excess of properties over parking spaces (at least 21 properties have no parking) to be likely to exacerbate street parking problems in an already congested area. 11. Quite apart from these objections we contend that to approve the application at this time is inappropriate as 11.1 no conservation appraisal has yet been published for this area. The absence of this material as a source of design guidance handicaps both the Council and the developer. We feel that the cumulative effect of several previous developments have already eroded the character of the area and we urge that the production of an appraisal be made a priority task. We note that there is a clear commitment to produce such assessments in paragraph 7.61 of the Nov 2004 Local Plan. 11.2 No traffic impact assessment appears to have been made and submitted.

POLICY CONTEXT

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Structure Plan Review the following policies are considered to be especially relevant:- Policy STR1 - Sustainable Development; 9 - The Built Environment; 49 - Transport Requirements for New Development.

Taunton Deane Local Plan the following policies are considered to be specially relevant:- S1 - general Requirements, S2 – Design, H2 – Housing, H9 - Affordable Housing, H19 - Designing Out Crime), M4 - Residential Parking Requirements, M5 Cycling, C1 - Education Provision for New Housing, C4 - Standards of Provision,

EN8 - Trees in and Around Settlements, EN14 - Conservation Areas, EN15 - Demolition Affecting Conservation Areas, EN16 - Listed Buildings.

ASSESSMENT

The site is located adjacent to the Town Centre where residential use is considered acceptable in principle. The site is located within the Staplegrove Conservation Area where there is a strong presumption against the demolition of buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of the area. The policy states that no such proposals will be considered unless an acceptable proposal for any redevelopment has been approved. The current application involves the demolition of the former Bishop Fox's school, built in 1904, regarded by the Conservation Officer as "a building of architectural merit retained in its own right and ...it represents the work of prominent local architectural practise". It is therefore considered that the building should be retained and that its demolition would be contrary to policies EN14 and EN15 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan. In addition it is considered that the building makes a positive and significant contribution to the Staplegrove Conservation Area. Taunton Deane Local Plan policy EN15 established a strong presumption against such demolition and, in the rare circumstances where proposals for the demolition of buildings making a positive contribution are allowed, details of an acceptable replacement building must have been submitted and approved. The proposed replacement building (Block A) is four and five storeys in height and situated on land elevated above the adjacent highway. As such it is considered that the building would overpower and dominate the scale and character of the existing Conservation Area to its detriment.

In addition to the above, the proposal is for the erection of two other blocks of flats (Block B and C) within the Staplegrove Road Conservation Area. Taunton Deane Local Plan policy EN14 requires all new development within Conservation Areas to preserve or enhance the appearance and character of the Conservation Area. I consider that the proposed buildings have a design, bulk and scale that are out of keeping and detrimental with the Conservation Area and therefore contrary to the above policy.

The application site is located in close proximity to the town centre in a location where off street parking would not normally be required. In the circumstances I have no objection to a reduced number of parking spaces being provided. I am however concerned that the amount of parking, combined with the number of units on site, results in an urban development that does not incorporate the same level of landscaping that is characteristic of this part of the Conservation Area and I therefore consider that the proposal represents an unacceptable over development of the site. (In any future submission I would wish to see less car parking and more landscaping within the site as well as more space between the proposed buildings and existing trees).

The proposal includes the conversion of 2 ancillary listed buildings into 3 dwellings. These buildings are located within the site and are currently surrounded by tarmac and modern temporary buildings. The proposed scheme would remove the temporary buildings and allow a limited space around the buildings for amenity with car parking spaces within 0.6 m distance of the coach house and 6m distance of the

summerhouse. I consider that this does not create a suitable setting for the listed buildings and would welcome further discussions on a suitable setting in any resubmission.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be REFUSED for the following reasons that the loss of an existing building making a positive contribution to the Staplegrove Conservation Area, design, bulk and height of the proposed development out of keeping with and detrimental to the Staplegrove Road Conservation Area, over development of the site contrary to the visual amenity and character of the area, inappropriate setting for existing listed buildings.

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

CONTACT OFFICER: 356467 MRS J MOORE

NOTES: