

38/2006/400

WARWICK HOUSE MEDICAL CENTRE

CHANGE OF USE OF BUILDING FROM COMMUNITY HALL (D1) TO OFFICE (B1) AT DODSON HALL, UPPER HOLWAY ROAD, TAUNTON.

324427/123690

FULL

PROPOSAL

The application site is located adjacent to the north eastern edge of Upper Holway Road, within the settlement limits of Taunton. Vehicular access is gained from Warwick Gardens on the north east boundary of the site. The area is predominantly residential.

The site consists of the doctors surgery and Dodson Hall which is a detached building located adjacent to the north elevation of the surgery.

The current use of the hall is for community use. The application seeks change of use to provide office accommodation. The office accommodation is to be provided for the Somerset Local Medical Committee which is the statutory representative organisation for general practitioners within Somerset. As such it appears that the use of the building would operate separately from the Medical Centre.

Dodson Hall occupies a floor area of approximately 113 sq m (footprint of 10.4 m x 10.8 m). The use of Dodson Hall as a community use was not a requirement through condition or legal agreement at the time of the original planning permission (38/2006/036).

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY no objection.

PLANNING POLICY the only policy I can see which looks relevant is EC11 - Local Service Provision in Taunton and Wellington, which includes the sentence:- 'Beyond the town centres, the vitality and viability of local service provision within Taunton and Wellington will be maintained and enhanced and the level and diversity of such facilities improved'. In the supporting text, paragraph 4.75 refers to 'area community centres' being permitted adjacent to existing local centres; while 4.76 states that individual shops and public houses in residential areas (i.e. outside defined local centres) will be allowed subject to conditions. In other words, the need for local facilities other than shops is implicitly recognised, and in some cases local facilities might be established outside defined local centres.

14 LETTERS/E-MAILS OF OBJECTION have been received from 10 objectors raising the following issues:- the hall is a valuable community facility used for a range of activities such as pre-school group, yoga, baby massage classes, fundraising activities, other social events etc; the proposed change of use should be postponed

until alternative accommodation can be found for these activities; the hall is located within a large residential estate and its loss would be a loss to the community; the hall replaced a larger community hall on the site of the current medical centre; there should be sufficient space on the Blackbrook Business Park for provision of offices; office workers will tie up limited car parking spaces causing upset for local residents; the proposed use is not NHS and will not serve the local community.

POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that determination of planning decisions must be made in accordance with the plan (Local Plan) unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1, 2005): Delivering Sustainable Development.
Planning Policy Guidance 17; (PPG17, 2002): Planning for open space, sport and recreation

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 – General Principles, EC11 – Local Service Provision.

ASSESSMENT

The application is considered against the backdrop of Local Plan policy and national planning policy.

Planning Policy Statement 1 sets out the overarching principles and aims of the planning system. The overall thrust of the document is to promote both social and environmental sustainability. In the interests of social sustainability it aims to promote social cohesion and inclusion.

Section 16 of PPS 1 states that Local Plan Policies should (amongst other things):-
“address accessibility (both in terms of location and physical access) for all members of the community to jobs, health, housing, education, shops, leisure and community facilities.”

The status of local community and leisure facilities are also covered by PPG17; Planning for open space, sport and recreation.

The Local Plan does not explicitly support the retention of community facilities within Taunton. Policy EC15 refers to the protection of community facilities within associated settlements, rural centres and villages and as such it does not cover community facilities within Taunton. Policy EC11 refers to local service provision within Taunton but it does not refer to the protection of existing community facilities. The policy supports the provision of additional or enhanced local services such as ‘shops and public houses’. The supporting text (4.75) only mentions ‘community centres’ in terms of supporting their development in principle. Community centres are specifically defined within the policy as ‘a group of local shops usually comprising of a newsagents, general grocery store, sub-post office, and occasionally a pharmacy, hairdresser or other small shops of a local nature’. The site is not a defined local centre in terms of the Local Plan.

This policy is therefore not considered sufficient to justify refusal of planning permission as it only refers to supporting the development of defined local centres and does not refer to protecting existing community facilities within local centres or outside of local centres.

The proposal is therefore considered to accord with the Taunton Deane Local Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be GRANTED subject to condition of time limit.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:- The existing community hall is located within the existing settlement limits of Taunton, out side any defined local centre. There are no specific planning policy restrictions relating to the use of the hall and as such a change of use to business use is considered in accordance with the Taunton Deane Local Plan.

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

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NOTES: