

THE MOUNT VETERINARY HOSPITAL

CHANGE OF USE FROM A1 RETAIL TO MIXED USE A1 RETAIL AND D1 VETERINARY SURGERY AT 4-6 NORTH STREET, WIVELISCOMBE (RETENTION OF WORKS ALREADY UNDERTAKEN)

Grid Reference: 308066.127858

Retention of Building/Works etc.

RECOMMENDATION AND REASON(S)

Recommended Decision: Conditional Approval for the following reason:

The proposal is considered to be an acceptable use in this central location not impacting unreasonably upon the vitality and viability of the town centre, local highway network or character and appearance of the conservation area. It is, therefore, considered to be in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 4, Planning Policy Statement 5, Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 (General Requirements) and S2 (Design); Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policies STR1 (Sustainable Development), 9 (The Built Historic Environment) and 49 (Transport Requirements of New Development); and Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

RECOMMENDED CONDITION(S) (if applicable)

1. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

(A4) Location Plan
(A4) Existing Ground Floor Plan
(A4) Plan of Internal Layout

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

Notes for compliance

PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of an existing retail unit to a mixed use veterinary surgery and shop. No physical changes to the external appearance of the building are proposed. The change of use has already occurred.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The site is situated in the centre of Wiveliscombe, on North Street, just to the north of the Square. It adjoins The Bear public house to the north and the NatWest bank to the south. Access to White Horse Mews and a shared parking area to the rear exists to the south via a tunnel under the first floor of the building.

The premises were historically an A1 retail unit, in recent years having been the 'North Street Garden Shop'.

CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSES

Consultees

WIVELISCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL – Objects – the Parish Council understands that there needs to be two dedicated parking spaces for this type of business, therefore until the planning application has this added, the P.C. objects.

SCC - TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT GROUP – No observations to make.

Representations

6 letters of objection have been received raising the following issues:

- This is an inappropriate location for a vet.
- There is no on-site parking – customers will monopolise the four spaces outside the premises which are only available for 30 minute slots and are heavily used; deceased animals and rubbish will have to be carried around the town to the collecting vehicle.
- The expectation that people will carry sick pets from the North Street car park is extremely unrealistic.
- Wiveliscombe already has a perfectly good vet, there is no need for another.
- A more useful business could be found for the premises.
- The parking space noted on the application form does not exist, it belongs to 'The Bear' public house – there are only 4 on street parking spaces which are generally full.
- There is a shortage of on-street parking in the centre of Wiveliscombe. More traffic will lead to more chaos on North Street – the 'school run' is already difficult and North Street is treacherous for children and parents.
- Surgery is already being carried out at the premises so there will have to be deliveries of oxygen cylinders etc.
- The use should not have been allowed to start without planning permission. Applying retrospectively puts the Council in a difficult position, daring it to close down an existing business.

1 Letter raising no objection has been received making the following comments:

- This is a good position for a veterinary surgery and can only benefit other retailers in the town.

1 letter has been received from the site owner confirming that she does own a parking space and has granted a right of access to it.

PLANNING POLICIES

EN14 - TDBCLP - Conservation Areas,
S4 - TDBCLP - Rural Centres,
S1 - TDBCLP - General Requirements,
STR1 - Sustainable Development,
S&ENPP49 - S&ENP - Transport Requirements of New Development,
S&ENPP9 - S&ENP - The Built Historic Environment,
PPS 5 - PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment,
PPS4 - Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth,
EC15 - TDBCLP - Associated Settlements/Rural Centres/Villages,

DETERMINING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The main issues in the consideration of this application are the principle of the development, highways and parking, and impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Principle

The site is within settlement limit and defined 'central area' of Wiveliscombe. Policy EC15 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan indicates that proposals to provide new rural services, including surgeries will be permitted within the defined settlement limits, with the caveat that proposals which would result in the loss of shops will not be permitted where this would damage the viability of the settlement.

Planning Policy Statement 4 is the national policy for economic development and town centre proposals. It does not include surgeries as 'town centre uses' as such, rather focussing on retail, leisure, office and arts/cultural development. However, it does explain that existing centres should aim to offer a wide range of services to communities in an attractive and safe environment, and encourage competition between retailers and enhanced customer choice. Policy EC2 of PPS4 promotes a mix of uses and encourages new uses for vacant buildings. Policy EC4 of the PPS states that customer choice should be promoted by supporting a diverse range of uses

In considering the relevant policies and guidance, it is considered that the provision of a veterinary surgery within the town centre is an acceptable use provided that the loss of the A1 retail use does not affect the vitality and viability of the town centre. In this case, the site sits between a public house and bank and, accordingly, there would be a significant length of non-retail units on this stretch of frontage. However, this tends to be more of a problem when it would significantly discourage footfall beyond the non-shop uses. In this case, there is only one further retail unit along North Street, with the main retail premises in Wiveliscombe concentrated around The Square to the south which would be unaffected by the proposals. Rather, it is considered that the use would add to the mix of uses within the Town Centre, providing an additional facility that could draw people into the centre. Furthermore, an element of retail use would remain within the premises, so there would not be a total loss of such a use.

Also weighing in favour of the proposal is the proximity of the site to the bus stop. Whilst it is unlikely that many customers would visit a vet by public transport, the facility would, nevertheless, be accessible to those who did not have access to

private transport. It may also be attractive to those who live centrally and could walk.

Taking the above into account, it is considered that the development is acceptable in principle.

Highways and parking

Members of the public and the Parish Council have objected to the application on the basis that no parking has been provided. It is also contested that the space declared by the applicant to the rear of the building is not available to them.

In terms of the space to the rear, the owner of the premises (who is leasing to the applicant) has written to confirm that she does have ownership of the space and that it is available. In any case, the applicants are not reliant on this space, with staff parking in the nearby public car park. They have confirmed that this is a branch surgery – the main hospital being in Wellington – and that the visiting consultant would take supplies with him/her as necessary, rather than specific deliveries being made to the Wiveliscombe branch. It should be noted that the Local Highway Authority have raised no objection to the proposal, raising no question over the availability of the parking space and, instead, assuming that there will be reliance on on-street parking and the public car parks. Whilst road space outside the premises may be precious, the veterinary surgery would not have the absolute right to use them and would have to assume that many of its customers would have to use the car parks. Given the town centre location, such a reliance on car parks is considered to be acceptable. In light of the Highway Authority's comments, it is considered that the proposal would be acceptable in this location with no parking so the availability, or not, of the private space to the rear is not considered relevant. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to be acceptable on highway grounds.

Conservation Area

The site is within the conservation area of Wiveliscombe. Accordingly, in line with Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council must have regard to whether the character and appearance of the conservation area would be preserved or enhanced through the grant of planning permission. As noted, there would be no external changes to the premises and an active frontage would remain with an element of retail onto North Street. Accordingly, it is considered that the character and appearance of the area would be preserved.

Conclusions

With regard to the foregoing, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in principle and would not harm highway safety or the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is, therefore, recommended that planning permission is granted.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1988.

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