

Application Number

P/2011/0856

Site Address

Former General Accident Fire & Life
Assurance Plc General Buildings
Greenway Road
St Marychurch
Torquay
Devon
TQ1 4PN

Case Officer

Mrs Ruth Robinson

Ward

St Marychurch

Description

Demolition of building and erection of 7 retail units (for purposes within Use Classes A1, A2, A3, A4 and/or A5) and 4 residential dwellings with associated highways works, car parking and landscaping

Executive Summary/Key Outcomes

This application was considered by the Development Management Committee at its meeting of the 19th September and deferred for further consideration of Highway matters and design. The original report is appended.

In summary, the Highway concerns related to expenditure of SPD sustainable transport contributions, access to houses on Greenway Lane, the impact of the service bay on pedestrian movement and the practicality of its use, and the rationale for the public transport improvements (including the location of bus stops).

In relation to design, the comments from English Heritage were that their previous concerns had not been met. These related to the need to create a meaningful street frontage and to resolve height and boundary relationships. They also wanted to ensure that the residential units occupied the most comfortable and contextually suitable relationship with the retail building.

In response to these concerns, the proposal has moved forward as follows:-

The bus stop is to be relocated slightly closer to the vehicular entrance to the site and the kerb build out reduced to alleviate impacts on the free flow of traffic and on pedestrians. They have set back the give way markings to allow the bus to approach square on and have introduced raised kerbs.

In terms of the service bay it has been demonstrated through swept path analysis that this is practical. They are agreeable to conditions being imposed in relation to timings of servicing and size of vehicle.

The access to the mews houses is tight but workable based on swept path drawings. There will be a large forecourt to the properties to facilitate parking. This needs to be carefully detailed to ensure that it is acceptable in the street scene and revised plans are awaited.

Works to improve the attractiveness of the link through resurfacing in an appropriate material are to be submitted once considered in more detail by the landscape architect for the scheme.

In terms of the S106, a sum of £25,000 is offered to cover the cost of relocating the existing shelter and link enhancements. It will only be clear if this is sufficient once details of improvements to the link are agreed and costed.

In design terms, discussions have been held to improve the quality of the entire public realm and a more sympathetic response to the character of the site and to the treatment of the Greenway Lane link and beyond this to the precinct. Details are awaited.

The parapet detail and the treatment of the corner to the anchor store have been raised as needing more attention as has the window division in the glazed areas that form the main approach to the anchor store. An additional window to the flank of the mews cottage has been included to overlook the Greenway Lane link more effectively. Details of the frontage treatment of the properties on Greenway Lane are awaited.

It is felt that these amendments will overcome the concerns voiced.

Of particular importance is the need to fully address the quality of the public realm within the scheme and how this is carried through to link in a meaningful way with the precinct. Done well, this will create a real sense of place and facilitate and encourage linked trips. This will help overcome English Heritages concerns about creating a meaningful street frontage and Highways concerns about legibility and pedestrian activity.

Recommendation

Approval, subject to the conclusion of a S106 Agreement to secure developer contributions in line with the SPD, conditions as itemised at the end of the main report with the addition of further conditions in relation to a servicing plan, screening to Kingsbridge, replacement of timber fence on Greenway Lane and the submission of revised plans which address the matters highlighted above.

Executive Summary/Key Outcomes

Revised proposals have been submitted showing that a mixed use redevelopment of this redundant site in the centre of St Marychurch can be successfully integrated with the adjacent District Centre and can help support its retail function. The revised proposals overcome previous concerns expressed in the withdrawn report to Development Management Committee on the 31.03.11. and will result in a well designed scheme that delivers benefits to St Marychurch and Torbay.

Recommendation

Committee site visit: Approval, subject to the conclusion of a S106 Agreement to secure developer contributions in line with the SPD, conditions as itemised at the end of the report and the submission of revised plans which address the following matters:

1. Modifications to the design of the roof to pod unit and unit 5 and to entrance to main block.
2. Amendments to landscape proposals.
3. Reduction in height of the 4 dwellings, deletion of integral garaging and inclusion of windows to elevation overlooking link to Greenway Lane.
4. Screening to 'Kingsbridge'/design of service entrance.
5. Receipt of English Heritage comments.

Site Details

The GA building is a 2 storey office building which has been vacant for at least 10 years. It was constructed in the 1960s and now has a dated and neglected appearance that is out of character with the predominantly Victorian streetscape which typifies this part of the St Marychurch Conservation Area. The building fronts the busy junction of Greenway Road, St Marychurch Road and Fore Street and is adjacent to the boundary of the defined District Centre.

Vehicular access to the car parking area to the rear is found to the west of the building close to the no entry sign on Greenway Road. Bordering the car park is a narrow vehicular route at Greenway Lane, which is backed by a terrace of Victorian dwellings which directly overlook the site. The rear of shops within the nearby St Marychurch District Centre forms the eastern boundary to the site.

The existing frontage to the site comprises planting, pavement and a bus stop. To the west of the site is Kingsbridge, an attractive Victorian villa and to the east

the Corinthian Babbacombe Sailing Club and the Co op supermarket. Opposite the vehicular access to the site is Alderbourne, a Grade II listed building. The frontage to the opposite side of St Marychurch Road is an attractive 2-3 storey Victorian terrace which sympathetically addresses the corner into Fore Street.

Detailed Proposals

This is a revised application responding to design concerns identified in the previously withdrawn application, P/2010/1404.

It is a full application for the replacement of the existing building with a mixed residential/retail/commercial development, which comprises 1000m² of retail floor space in up to 7 units of various sizes and requested to be in classes A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5.

The submitted plans indicate a larger anchor unit of 370m² located adjacent to Greenway Road with a Sainsbury's Local store as the likely occupier. To the rear of this is a run of single storey retail/commercial units extending two thirds of the way into the site. A pedestrian route to Greenway lane separates this from a detached single storey retail unit that sits at the head of the site. A smaller 'pod' retail unit is located adjacent to the Corinthian Sailing Club and wraps into the site.

6 car parking spaces are provided parallel to the retail units. A servicing bay is incorporated into the extended footway adjacent to the anchor store.

The design approach is traditional, utilizing render finish, steeply pitched slate roofs with traditionally styled shop fronts.

The scheme includes 4, 3 bed houses facing the back of dwellings on Greenway Lane with off street car parking.

The footways along Greenway Road/St Marychurch Road are to be widened to provide a more extensive public realm. It is also proposed to relocate the bus stop from its current position closer to the junction with Fore Street, improve the bus shelter on Manor Road and provide a new stop on Fore Street. 4 on street car parking spaces are to be provided on Greenway Road.

Summary Of Consultation Responses

English Heritage: Observations awaited.

The previous withdrawn application was considered by the Design Review Panel on the 4th February. In summary its comments are:-

1. The use of separate parking and service accesses creates an interrupted street frontage and creates more 'edges' to the scheme.
2. The relationship to Greenway Lane needs to be improved and made more positive.
3. The linear nature of the parking creates difficulties of manoeuvring and access.
4. Concerns at long term viability of units to the rear of the site due to limited footfall.
5. A single retail occupier with residential may ease conflicts.
6. In order to relate to context and to avoid amenity issues, the scale of the scheme to the front should be increased and that to the rear reduced.
7. The flat roofed pod and views from the west are unresolved
8. Questioned the ability of planters to create a quality landscape scheme.
9. Felt that the scheme could benefit from a more profound urban analysis of its relationship to the town.

The full comments have been reproduced and placed in the Members Room and it will be explained in the body of the report how these matters have been addressed.

Highways: Observations awaited.

Summary Of Representations

It is appropriate to include the objections received in relation to the withdrawn application where these relate to matters of principal that are not necessarily overcome by the revised application.

A petition signed by 2000 people was received in relation to the withdrawn application objecting to a new supermarket being located on this site due to its impact on the shops within the existing centre.

Previous concerns from neighbours on matters of principal were:

Impact on existing shops and supermarkets within the District Centre

Increased traffic/congestion, impact on junction of Priory Road and Greenway Road

Lack of car parking

Arrangement of parking within the scheme which will be hazardous to vehicular and pedestrian safety

Concern at movement of bus stop

Impact on amenity from servicing vehicles/plant/noise activity/overlooking

At the time of writing, the following comments have been received in response to the current consultation.

Concern at pushing building and pavement out with landscaping whilst moving bus stop closer to Coop car park entrance.

Residents backing onto Greenway Lane claim that the Lane is in their ownership and used for parking. The inclusion of new houses that will use the lane for access will inhibit access to their parking spaces and create obstruction and congestion.

Concern at height and impact of new dwellings on privacy/light.

Any further comments will be reported verbally.

Sainsbury's are keen to occupy the site and have written explaining the benefits they will bring to the centre and that the scheme will create 20 local jobs and achieve significant regeneration

All letters of representation, the petition and supporting information from Sainsbury's have been placed in the Members Room.

Relevant Planning History

P/2006/1070: Demolition of building and construction of supermarket and 14 2 bed flats. Withdrawn.

P/2010/1404: Redevelopment to provide 7 retail units [for uses within classes A1,2,3,4,5]4 residential dwellings, highway works, car parking and landscaping. Withdrawn.

Principle and Planning Policy -

There are a number of key issues to consider as follows:-

1. Existing condition of the site.
2. Impact on the existing shopping centre.
3. Design and layout.
4. Highways/congestion/car parking.

1. Existing Condition of the Site.

The existing building is neglected and dated in appearance. It is prominent within

the St Marychurch Conservation Area. It's redevelopment is long overdue and is welcomed. The site is overgrown and subject to some tipping.

In terms of the impact on the existing shopping centre, the site is located at the edge of the defined District Shopping Centre and as such the relevant policies are nationally, PPS4 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth' and locally, policies SS, S6, S8 and S9 of the Saved Torbay Local Plan.

2. Impact on the St Marychurch District Centre.

The acceptability of the proposal has to be tested in terms of its impact on the retail function of the shopping centre, it has to be sequentially preferable and has to meet standards in terms of design and sustainability. A Retail Impact Study [RIA] has been submitted, even though at the proposed scale of use it is not mandatory, and this has been evaluated by officers. The study assessed the broad health of the centre, the likely impact on turnover and included shoppers surveys to establish shopping patterns and likely future behaviour. It concluded that the health of the centre was good, that the size and scale of the scheme was acceptable and that the impact on turnover was low at around 4%.

The shoppers survey identified that a high proportion of shoppers [48.4%] visited the centre on foot and that 67.5% would combine a visit to the proposed development with a trip to the existing facilities in St Marychurch. 90 per cent of those surveyed indicated that they would carry out these linked trips on foot. Given that the shoppers profile revealed a strong tendency to access the centre on foot and to carry out linked trips it is likely that the identified impact on turnover and existing shops will be mitigated if 'linked trips' can be secured through an appropriate design that achieves a more permeable relationship to the adjacent District Centre. A Sainsbury's store will exert a strong pull and be attractive to shoppers particularly for walk in 'top up' shopping as confirmed in their supporting information. If links to the existing centre are reinforced, this could significantly benefit the centre's long term future as shoppers will be able to easily carry out linked shopping trips.

Sainsbury's supporting information provides case studies in similar sized centres where they indicate an overall increase in turnover following their stores becoming established. It is likely, based on the information provided, that investment by Sainsbury's could result in an overall increase in turnover by other retailers in the area.

It is thus considered that the scale of development is such that it will not harm the centre and that the proposed regeneration of the site would be beneficial to the overall range and quality of the retail offer in St Marychurch if the scheme is integrated to the centre in a way that will support and encourage linked trips. The recent revisions to the design of the scheme focus on creating improved links to the centre and enhancing the public realm to facilitate pedestrian movement.

The application requests permission for A1,2,3,4 and 5. There needs to be some control over the location of uses that have the potential to cause nuisance such as A5 and a condition is suggested to deal with this.

3. Design.

In terms of design, PPS4 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth' is relevant. Policy EC10, whilst explaining that applications for economic development should be regarded favourably, requires LPAs to fully consider whether a scheme secures a high quality and inclusive design which takes the opportunities available for improving the character, quality and character of an area and how it functions.

This advice is reiterated in policy EC17 of PPS4, which relates to edge of centre retail developments such as this. The fact that the site is sensitive in terms of its prominence within the Conservation area and proximity to listed buildings supports the legitimacy of concerns about design.

The withdrawn scheme exhibited a range of design deficiencies which were reflected in the putative reasons for refusal. These were, in summary, that the scheme was self contained and not well integrated to the centre with disruptions to the frontages from the 2 vehicular accesses which would exacerbate its impact on the vitality and viability of the centre, that it related poorly to the form scale and appearance of the Victorian Town Centre, adversely affecting key views and adjacent listed buildings, that it created a poor pedestrian experience, that it provided a poor residential environment and adversely affected the amenity of neighbours. The scheme has been substantially revised to overcome these concerns.

The layout of the withdrawn scheme was a self contained 'cul de sac' and it would have operated as a 'stand alone' retail outlet with a consequent impact on the vitality of the centre. It was served by 2 vehicular access points which disrupted the frontages and the pedestrian footways. The approach in the revised scheme has been to delete the service access, to provide more space for pedestrian movement and for the arrangement of buildings and to treat the layout more as a natural extension to the centre through opening up links from the rear of the site via Greenway Lane to the centre, reinforcing pedestrian links along Greenway Road by extending the footway and enhancing the public realm.

In terms of its relationship to the character form and appearance of the town centre and its impact on listed buildings/ key views, the design is improved through an increase in scale of the buildings to the front of the site, by announcing the corner more effectively and by modifications to the style of the roof design to the main building and to the 'pod' building to create a more consistent and sympathetic roofscape. There are some minor amendments to the overall design of the scheme needed but these are itemised in the recommendation section and have been agreed in principle by the applicants.

The concerns about the quality of the proposed residential environment has been met by the deletion of flats in a 2/3 storey block to the rear of the site and the construction of 4 family sized homes with gardens overlooking Greenway Lane. In the submitted plans these are shown as 3 stories with integral garages which would relate poorly to the scale of buildings to the front of the site and be too imposing on the Victorian terraces they overlook. The applicants have agreed to reduce this to 2 stories and to include curtilage car parking. This will result in a better scale relationship across the site, a more active frontage with better overlooking of Greenway Lane and a lessening of the impact on the amenity of existing dwellings.

It is important that the flank elevation to the terrace which overlooks the pedestrian link to Greenway Lane is redesigned to include windows to provide greater surveillance and that the boundary treatment is properly resolved. These details are awaited and if received in time will be reported to Committee.

There were concerns in the withdrawn scheme about the quality of the pedestrian experience created. Pedestrian areas were tight, poorly designed, disrupted by vehicular accesses and by the pedestrian space within the scheme being dominated by the backdrop of the rear of the shops on Fore Street. These concerns have been overcome reducing disruptions to footways and frontages through the deletion of the service access, enhancements to the pedestrian realm through rationalising and extending footways fronting the site, the provision of more space within the site for pedestrian movement and the use of a landscape architect to look at the treatment of spaces and linkages to create a 'sense of place' that will tie it into the character of St Marychurch. The modification to the pod building has helped screen the backdrop to the public space and planting proposals have been supplied which will in time complete the softening. These proposals, whilst welcomed, do need to be upgraded to ensure a quality public realm is achieved and extended in scope to include the treatment of the Greenway lane link and the applicant has agreed to this.

In terms of the impact on existing residential amenity, this has been mitigated as a consequence of the new layout, by improved roof design to the main anchor store which fully encloses plant and by improved design to easily visible parts of the building. The revised proposals provide an opportunity to screen, via a landscaping scheme, the outlook from 'Kingsbridge'. The applicants are working on this which can, in any event, be secured through a condition.

It is felt that in design terms the scheme is now satisfactory and importantly delivers a scheme that is integrated with the existing centre and has developed a sense of place through improved design and a high quality public realm.

Concerns about the ownership of Greenway Lane and the ability of the new dwellings to use this for access will be investigated and reported verbally.

Highways/congestion/parking -

This is a matter of general concern to residents who consider that there is insufficient parking that it is poorly arranged, and that the location of the access will jeopardise vehicular and pedestrian safety. Residents also consider that traffic will back up at the junction to the site and that the relocation of the bus stop should be resisted. This revised scheme provides for a similar level of car parking for customers but is improved from the previous scheme in that the parking to serve the residential elements of the scheme is now not accessed from the main entrance to the site.

It is evident from the RIA that a large number of shoppers [almost 50%] will walk to the proposed store/retail centre and a higher percentage, 67.5% would make linked trips. In terms of the Local Plan, Policy T25 specifically states that car parking standards in relation to retail developments will not apply to schemes in Town and District Centres as the LPA will want to encourage the use of existing off street parking. If on site car parking is minimised, this will reduce congestion around the proposed access, encourage use of nearby public car parking and thus increase the likelihood of linked trips. On this basis and taking into account the District Centre location of the development and the proximity of public car parking, the level of car parking is considered acceptable

Comments from Highways in respect of the revised scheme and particularly the works to extend the footways and works to bus stops are awaited and will be reported verbally.

Economy -

This application does result in the loss of employment floor space contrary to policy EC6 of the Saved Torbay Local Plan. However given that it is of poor quality, has not been occupied for over 10 years and that the proposed use will create alternative employment it is considered that the redevelopment of this building will have a positive effect on employment opportunities. The scheme will provide around 20-25 jobs within the anchor store, and up to 50 across the site as a whole with around 70 jobs during construction. . There are significant regeneration benefits arising from the loss of the current building which is in a poor state and of an unattractive design. The value of the scheme in terms of investment is around £4 million.

Closing the gap -

Providing improved retail facilities adjacent to existing centres will assist those who are less mobile, the redevelopment of a redundant site will reduce opportunities for vandalism and anti social behaviour, the provision of new homes will help meet the shortages in supply and will secure New Homes Bonus.

Climate change -

The scheme is to be constructed to BREEAM Good standard. A Sustainability

Audit can be requested to ensure that the development operates to best practice.

Environmental Enhancement -

These matters are detailed in the body of the report.

Accessibility -

These are largely detailed in the body of the report. In addition, parking for disabled customers is to be provided and secure lit cycle parking.

Vibrant Town Centres -

This will have a beneficial effect on the vitality and viability of the Town Centre as links to the existing centre are now reflected in the design.

S106/CIL -

A S106 Legal Agreement would be required in relation to this scheme and would be in line with the SPD 'Planning Contributions and Affordable Housing'. This will cover Waste, Sustainable Transport, Greenspace and Lifelong learning in respect of the dwellings and sustainable transport contributions will be required to meet the impact of the retail element of the scheme. This will partly meet the costs of relocating and enhancing bus stops.

Conclusions

The site has been vacant for over 10 years and redevelopment for a retail scheme of this scale is acceptable and welcomed. PPS 4 indicates that applications for economic development should be supported where locational criteria and design concerns are met. The recently published Draft National Planning Standards advises that planning permission should be forthcoming where sustainability criteria have been met and where proposals accord with policy. It is felt that the revisions to this scheme will deliver a more pedestrian friendly experience, will increase permeability and improve integration. This will act in a way that reinforces the District Centre through facilitating the high level of top up shopping and promotion of opportunities for linked trips highlighted in the RIA and in the supporting letter from Sainsbury's.

The revisions have produced a scheme that is sympathetic to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and to the neighbouring occupiers and buildings.

Conditions

1. 1:20 details of key features.
2. Samples of materials.
3. Implementation of approved landscape scheme including treatment of widened footways, links, boundary treatments and screening proposals.
4. Implementation of modifications to bus stops.

5. Details of waste collection.
6. Identification of use class for each unit.
7. Removal of PD in respect of residential dwellings.
8. Implementation of BREEAM Good/Sustainability Audit.
9. Details of plant/ventilation/extraction.
10. Measures to ensure that shop fronts remain open and not obscured by internal displays.
11. Submission of Travel Plan.
12. Implementation of car parking/cycle parking and retention for customer use.
13. Provision and retention of link via Greenway Lane to the District Centre.

Relevant Policies

- PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development
- PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment
- PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth
- SS Shopping strategy
- S6 Retail development outside identified To
- S8 Hot take-away food
- S9 District Centres
- ES Employment and local economy strategy
- E6 Retention of employment land
- HS Housing Strategy
- H9 Layout, and design and community aspects
- H10 Housing densities
- BES Built environment strategy
- BE1 Design of new development
- BE5 Policy in conservation areas
- BE6 Development affecting listed buildings
- TS Land use transportation strategy
- T1 Development accessibility
- T2 Transport hierarchy
- T25 Car parking in new development
- T26 Access from development on to the highways
- CF6 Community infrastructure contributions
- W7 Development and waste recycling facilities