

P/2010/1404/MPA

St Marychurch Ward

Former G A Insurance Building, Greenway Road/St Marychurch Road, St Marychurch Torquay

Demolition of former G A building; formation of up to 7 retail units for purposes of use classes A1,A2,A3,A4 and/or A5 with 6 residential units above with associated vehicle and pedestrian access and associated highway works, car parking and landscaping

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.

Relevant Planning History

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 Withdrawn.

Relevant Policies

PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment

PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth

Saved Torbay Local Plan 1995-2011

SS shopping Strategy

S6 Retail development outside identified town, district and local centres.

S8 Hot food takeaways

S9 District Centres

ES Employment strategy

E6 Retention of Employment land.

HS Housing Strategy

H9 Layout, 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

T26 Access to the highway

CF6 Community infrastructure contributions.

Proposals

The application is submitted in detail for the replacement of the existing building with a mixed residential/retail development, which comprises 1000m² of retail floorspace in up to 7 units of various sizes and requested to be in classes A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5. The scheme includes 6, 2 bed flats in a second storey of accommodation to the rear of the site. The submitted plans indicate a larger anchor unit of 370m² located adjacent to Greenway Road with a Sainsburys Local store as the potential occupier. 12 car parking spaces are provided parallel to the retail units, 6 to serve the anchor unit and 6 the flats. It is also proposed to relocate the bus stop to Fore Street.

Consultations

English Heritage: Consider that further attention needs to be applied to the creation of a meaningful street frontage and that height and boundary relationships need to be resolved if a successful scheme is to be achieved.

This letter has been reproduced and placed in the Members Room.

The application was referred to the Design Review Panel meeting of the 4th February. In summary their 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.

Highways: Some concerns have been raised about backing up of traffic at the junction, proximity of the service access to the junction of Greenway Road, concern at relocation of bus stops and the need to improve pedestrian safety/facilities.

Representations

There are many objections from local residents. Concerns raised are:-

- * Impact on existing shops and supermarkets within the District Centre
- * Need to integrate the site more sympathetically to the 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
- * Visual impact of boundary to Greenway Lane

Sainsburys 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 have been placed in the Members Room.

Key Issues/Material Considerations

There are a number of key issues:-

1. Existing condition of the site
2. Impact on the existing centre
3. Design and layout
4. Impact on amenity
5. Highways/congestion/parking
6. Loss of employment land
7. S106 contributions

Each of these issues is addressed in turn below.

1. Existing condition of the site

The existing building is neglected and dated in appearance. Its redevelopment is long overdue and is welcomed, subject to a suitable use and design being achieved.

2. Impact on the District Centre

This is a matter of significant concern to local people.

The site is located at the edge of the defined District 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.

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 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%.

Officers consider that the trade draw could be higher than suggested in the report, as the scheme is more likely to draw expenditure from the centre than larger stores at the Willows, even so it is not thought that the impact would be significant. Any impact will also be substantially mitigated by the linked trips associated with the pull factor of the new Sainsburys store, which could significantly benefit the centre's long term future. 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.

It is therefore important that the scheme is designed in such a way as to reinforces links between the site and the existing District Centre. The impact on the centre could be greater if it operates more as a stand alone outlet than as a natural extension to the centre.

In conclusion, it is thought 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. This is provided that a satisfactory design and good integration of the scheme is achieved in order to support and emphasise linked trips.

3. Design and Layout

The scheme is arranged in an L shape cul-de-sac overlooking a shared space with parallel parking for 12 cars. The larger (convenience store) unit has a frontage to Greenway Road as does a small flat roofed 'pod' abutting the sailing club. The site is served by 2 vehicular entrances one for servicing and

one for parking. The scheme is single storey to the front of the site with a part pitched roof and 2 stories to the rear where the smaller retail units and flats are located.

The service yard is located to the rear of the site adjacent to Greenway Lane and a 2.4 m high timber fence is to be erected on the boundary. The Design and Access statement anticipates that the parking area will be treated in a manner that will create a high quality public space. The edge of this space is defined by the rear of the shops on Fore Street.

This layout has raised concerns with English Heritage, the Design Review Panel and Officers, as it creates a self-contained scheme with interrupted frontages that is isolated from its context and relates poorly to both the character of the conservation area and to the wider shopping area. The inclusion of 2 vehicular accesses creates difficult edges both within the scheme and to its neighbours. It also creates a poor public realm and introduces more potential conflicts between shoppers and vehicles. Although the scheme has the ambition to deliver a quality space for the shops and flats to overlook, achievement of this is questionable given the dominating backdrop to the space formed by the rear elevations of the shops on Fore Street.

In response to the DRP comments, the applicant has:

1. Reduced the height of the 2 storey element to the rear of the site by around 600mm,
2. increased the height of the retail unit to the front of the site by a similar amount,
3. introduced a pitched roof to the flat roofed pod,
4. enlarged windows and juliet balconies to the rear of the flats overlooking Greenway Lane, and;
5. included low level planting to the Greenway lane side of the close boarded timber fence which will enclose the back of the site.

The detailed response of the applicant to the DRP comments is attached at appendix...

Officers do not consider that these amendments fully address the fundamental problems arising from the layout of the site. The specific concerns are as follows.

The revised scheme remains self-contained and isolated from the adjacent centre with a lack of a continuous frontage. This is exacerbated by the location of the car parking within the cul-de-sac which is limited and designed for short stay use. The opportunity for pedestrian links via Greenway Lane to the centre and the neighbourhood beyond would enhance integration and permeability. The relocation of car parking to the rear of the site, with the building pushed to the front would allow such linkages to be better exploited.

The scheme relates poorly to the character of the conservation area in terms of form, scale and appearance. The location of buildings of the greatest scale to the rear of the site is counterintuitive. A more substantial frontage building is needed if it is to satisfactorily relate to its context. In terms of form, the design is more typical of a suburban housing estate than a Victorian town centre. Views from the west are dominated by the rear elevation of the anchor store, and from the east by its failure to relate to its context.

The separation of customer car parking and servicing seems to be a key driver in determining the layout and this raises functional and aesthetic concerns as well as generating many of the concerns highlighted above. It creates a poor public realm to the existing frontage dominated by hard surfacing and car parking. The quality of the internal space is also compromised by the backdrop of the rear of the shops and there is a lack of turning space which will make leaving the site difficult in the event of all spaces being full. Cumulatively this will inhibit pedestrian movement and safety.

The location of the flats to the rear of the site will result in a poor quality environment for future occupiers of the site with a constrained outlook across the car park to the rear of the shops. The scale and location of the block will impact on the amenity of neighbours through overbearing impact and loss of privacy. This impact is exacerbated by the visual intrusion of the timber fence in place of the

existing stone wall.

In terms of the design and layout of the scheme, PPS4 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. 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.

4. Impact on amenity

This has been touched on in the previous section. The size and position of the block to the rear will have an impact on properties backing onto Greenway Lane through overbearing impact, loss of privacy and overshadowing. The outlook from Kingsbridge will be affected by views of the rear of the store. The servicing arrangements and roof design which will not enclose proposed plant are likely to raise concerns about noise and nuisance.

5. 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 accesses 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 to Fore Street should be resisted.

A Transport Statement has been submitted and Highway officers do have some concerns about servicing and access, but consider that making Greenway Road two way for more of its length would help resolve this. There are concerns about how the junction will operate. There are also concerns from Highways that the site layout reduces the quality of the pedestrian experience and that improved linkages should be encouraged if the site is to be effectively integrated with the centre.

6. Loss of employment floorspace

On the basis that the floorspace is of a poor quality and has not been occupied for over 10 years and that the proposed use would create alternative employment, it is considered that the loss of this building would have a significant positive effect on employment opportunities. The scheme would not limit the range and quality of available sites for employment purposes, but would positively contribute to employment opportunities in the area.

7. S106 requirements

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'. Terms have not been agreed in the absence of an acceptable scheme.

Sustainability – The scheme would make effective use of a brownfield site, but at a clear cost to the local environment.

Crime and Disorder – No obs received.

Disability Issues – The site is level and there are no concerns in terms of meeting mobility needs

Conclusions

The site has been vacant for over 10 years and redevelopment for a retail scheme of this scale is acceptable and welcomed. However, for the scheme to act in a way that reinforces the District Centre it does need to be better integrated and designed in a way that makes it more pedestrian friendly, in this way it will encourage the high level of top up shopping and promote opportunities for linked trips highlighted in the RIA and in the letter from Sainsburys.

It is also important that it is sympathetic to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and to the neighbouring occupiers and buildings. The applicants are emphatically of the view that this is the only viable option for the site. However it is considered that there is a better solution for the site that will deliver longer term benefits to the operation of the centre and if this cannot be delivered in the current market it may be better to wait until a more sympathetic solution is achievable rather than accept one that has demonstrably harmful impacts.

Recommendation

Committee Site Visit; Refusal

1. The design of the scheme, comprising an L shaped block extending from single to two stories to the rear of the site and arranged around a cul-de-sac of parallel parking with separate service access, results in a form of development that:-

A] Is self-contained and not well integrated with the adjacent District Centre as evidenced by disruptions to the frontages by vehicular accesses, the location and design of the car parking and the lack of linkages to the shopping and residential areas to the north of Greenway Lane. As such it will operate more as a stand alone outlet than as a natural extension to the centre with consequent impacts on its character and function.

B] Relates poorly to the Victorian town centre character of the surrounding Conservation Area in terms of scale, form, appearance, and design and will adversely impact on key public views and on the settings of adjacent listed buildings.

C] Provides a poor pedestrian experience both to the frontage of the site and within the scheme, due to likely conflicts with vehicular traffic and to the backdrop of the public space being dominated by the rear elevations of the shops on Fore Street.

D] Adversely affects the amenity of adjacent occupiers through loss of privacy, outlook, overshadowing and overbearing impact from the size and position of the building and boundary treatments and creates a poor quality residential environment for future occupiers of the site due to a constrained and limited outlook.

As such the scheme does not offer a high quality inclusive design that would improve the quality of the area or the way it functions and is contrary to policies EC10 and EC17 of PPS4 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth'. It also fails to comply with guidance in PPS5 'Planning for a Historic Environment' and PPS1 'Delivering Sustainable Development'. It further fails to comply with policies BES, BE1, BE5 BE6, S9, T26 and H9 of the saved Torbay Local Plan 1995-2011.

2. The scheme does not provide for developer contributions in line with the adopted SPD 'Planning Contributions and Affordable Housing' and is thus contrary to the provisions of that document and to policy CF6 of the saved Torbay Plan 1995-2011.

Recommendation:

Refusal