

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2021/0123
Valid 06/04/2021

MILL HOUSE OAK STREET
CHEADLE

**CONVERSION OF EXISTING
STORE/WORKSHOP
BUILDING TO RESIDENTIAL
USE**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- The principle of the development in this town centre location
- The impact on the character and appearance of the area
- The impact on residential amenity
- The impact on highway safety

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site is in the town centre of Cheadle but outside of the Local Plan designated Town Centre boundary. It comprises a traditional two-storey red-brick mill building attached to the end of a row of Victorian terraced houses which front Oak Street to the west. The south side elevation of the building abuts Bank Street to the south. There is a small private parking area to the east of the building. There is a large car park to the back of a pub to the other side of Oak Street to the west. On the other side of Bank Street to the south lies Victorian terraced houses and "Hirst Yard" comprising a Victorian building directly opposite the application building which has an approval to be converted into apartments. The main shopping street and town centre boundary lies a short distance to the north. The site is in a Conservation Area and also within a High Risk former coal mining zone. The building was in use as for commercial storage purposes.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for the conversion of the building into two 2-bed dwellings. There would be no extensions and all existing openings would be re-used for new external windows and doors. The only significant works would be the insertion of internal walls (each floor is an undivided open plan space) and repairs with no re-use of finishing or roofing materials. A Building Survey Report has been submitted. There would be no proposed parking area.

The application also includes a Design and Access Statement and Heritage Statement.

Amended window plans were submitted for the east (rear) elevation and also additional doors and windows detail drawings.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted September 2020)

SS7 Cheadle Strategy
H1 New Housing

E3 Existing employment areas and premises
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Revised July 2021)

Sections 5 (Housing), 6 (Economy), 12 (Design) and 16 (Historic Environment)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 29.4.21
Neighbour letters expiry date: 29.4.21
Press Notice: 13.4.21

Public Comments

None.

Town / Parish Comments

No objection.

Local Highways Authority

No objection.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to conditions which require, amongst other things, an air quality assessment and a noise insulation scheme.

Conservation Officer

No objection providing the building maintains its industrial character. The windows are an important characteristic of the building and therefore further details of windows, doors and joinery will be required to be submitted and approved.

No objection was received in response to the additional window, door and joinery details submitted.

Coal Authority

No objection.

SMDC Waste Collection Services

No issues

SCC Public Rights of Way

No objection.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is within the central area of the town but outside the defined Local Plan town centre boundary. The proposed dwellings would be appropriate in this location and would not affect the vitality and viability of the town centre which priorities shopping and commercial uses. Most of the adjacent properties are in residential use with the shops and commercial premises mainly lying a short distance to the north. An increase in residents in the town centre can add to the vitality of the town centre. The main principle issue is whether or not the proposal would result in the significant loss of employment floorspace in the interests of the local economy. Policy E3 looks to protect employment premises.

The premises was in use for low-key commercial storage purposes with no staff, according to the applicant. I consider the building would be unsuitable for industrial uses due to the presence of adjoining and adjacent dwellings. I also consider the use of the building as offices would not attract an occupier due to the condition of the building and absence of a parking area and the restoration costs may be prohibitive for a small business. Although the Structural Report states the building is relatively stable and can be converted to other uses, new load-bearing walls, underpinning, new roof purlins and other works would be required and so it would appear that only a residential use for the building would be viable.

The limited size of the building would also be unlikely to attract an employment generating commercial storage use (the previous storage use did not have any additional staff) and there is no parking available for large storage and distribution vehicles. The site would also not work as holiday accommodation due to the location. Despite the Local Plan demonstrating that a five year supply of housing can be achieved via allocations, therefore reducing the pressure for further dwellings, I still consider the benefits of creating small units of accommodation (1 or 2 bed units are particularly in demand in the District) in a central and sustainable location would provide social benefits which would outweigh any economic harms of the loss of "employment" floorspace. Furthermore, I consider the proposal is potentially still likely to lead to some economic benefit via the works required to convert the building i.e. in the construction/building industry and also the small increase in town centre residents who would undoubtedly use local shops, pubs and restaurants due to their convenience.

I therefore on balance consider the proposed residential conversion is acceptable in principle and is also the best opportunity to sensitively restore the building to a high quality in the interests of the character and appearance of the building (which has maintained some considerable historic character) and also the Conservation Area as a whole. The works would not harmfully alter the building and the Conservation Officer considers the scheme to be acceptable. The window and door details are in keeping with the building (despite some earlier concerns over the partial blocking off of the ground floor east/rear elevation windows (to protect the privacy of the future occupants).

Despite the presence of adjoining dwellings and nearby dwellings on the other side of Bank Street, the residential amenities of the area would not be significantly harmed as all but one of the windows would avoid facing the windows of neighbouring dwellings and would not overlook any garden areas. The one window facing dwellings would be a large floor to ceiling window at first floor level in the side gable, facing the windows of converted apartments and terraced houses. However, obscured glazing can be inserted into this window (up to a min height of 1.8 metres) via a condition, as there are other windows serving the first-floor gable room (a proposed living room). With regard to the future occupants of the dwellings, the Environmental Health section was concerned about the

impact on the air quality inside the dwellings by virtue of the large gable opening abutting a busy town centre road and other openings also being close to other streets. However, a condition requiring an air quality survey before commencement of works is recommended and the applicant has agreed to this. The proposed residents can be protected from noise arising from the roads and nearby night time town centre uses via a noise insulation scheme also achieved by way of a planning condition. Both the dwellings accord with the floorspace thresholds set out in the governments Nationally Described Space Standards. Normally, residential schemes should provide a private outdoor amenity space. This cannot be achieved as there is no space within the property outside of the building. However, it must be pointed out that this is a conversion scheme rather than a new-build scheme. Furthermore, new residents of town centres would not necessarily expect any outdoor amenity space. The overall benefits of the scheme are still considered to outweigh the disadvantage of there being no private outdoor amenity. Overall, the proposal would, with that safeguard of conditions, not harm the residential amenities of the area and decent living conditions can be achieved for the future occupants of the site.

With regard to highway safety, although there is no parking spaces allocated, the site is in a very sustainable edge of town centre location and there is direct access to public transport when needed and therefore this removed the reliance on needing a car to be a resident of the site. The site is also adjacent to large car parks if parking is essentially needed. There are parking restrictions in the area and the proposal would therefore overall not affect highway safety. Furthermore, the existing lawful use as employment premises would result in some degree of traffic and parking generation.

With regard to other possible impacts, it is noted the site is in a High Risk historical coal mining zone where the ground could be likely to be unstable and affected by significant construction. However, no new foundations would need to be dug as this is a conversion scheme. The Coal Authority raises no objection to the proposal.

Although bats, a protected species, often roost in old redundant buildings, the site location in a town centre and the nature of the building, without a loft and comprising two open spaces well lit by several windows, would make the building unsuitable as a bat roost.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The principle of the change of use of the commercial storage building into dwellings in this edge of town centre location is acceptable as the building would appear to be unsuitable for any commercial re-use. It is a traditional mill building with historical interest and therefore a residential re-use would be in the best interests in terms of its character and impact on the Conservation Area. There are residential amenity disadvantages due to the proximity to the roads and noisy town centre uses and the absence of a private outdoor amenity area. However, the scheme complies with the floorspace standards and would provide decent homes and appropriate conditions can sufficiently reduce the impacts. Furthermore, the refusal of the scheme could lead to the long term vacancy of the building leading to the further degradation of its character and that of the Conservation Area. On balance, the benefits of the scheme outweigh the disadvantages. Overall, the proposal would comply with the Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 2.8.21

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council