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DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE CONVERSION OF A REDUNDANT SHOP/RETAIL/WORKSHOP PREMISES at 1 JAMES STREET, LEEK ST13 8BQ INTO A SINGLE DWELLING



(photo obtained from Bing Maps)

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PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE CONVERSION OF A REDUNDANT SHOP/RETAIL/WORKSHOP PREMISES at 1 JAMES STREET, LEEK INTO A SINGLE DWELLING

INTRODUCTION / CONTEXT

The Design and Access statement has been prepared to accompany the planning application the change of use of 1 James Street, Leek into a dwelling.

The existing property is placed on the South side of James street on the Eastern extreme of a row of traditional terrace houses, occupying the corner plot with Cruso Street.

The existing buildings around the site on James Street and Langford Street consist primarily of traditional style 2 storey terraced housing set back from the pavement within small, walled front gardens. The terrace houses opposite side of the road of James Street, Leading East onto Cruso street are predominantly built on the back of the pavement without the small walled gardens as seen elsewhere.

Across the street to the Northwest is the recently demolished Slimma factory site, cleared for housing and further still the 5 storey converted Waterloo Mill building.

The terrace row of housing was originally flanked by an identical shop on the western end of James street, which has been converted into a dwelling in the early 1990's.



The property on the corner of James street and Cruso Street has some architectural and historic value but is not listed and it is outside the current Leek town Centre conservation area.

The current owner Peter Elkin has been operating his upholstery repair business from this premises for approximately 30 years, with plans to retire around 10 years ago that didn't go according to plan, however following the sad loss of his wife around a year ago, he has made the decision to cease trading.

PROPOSAL

To change the use of the current planning use of the premises from A1 to residential.



The existing timber features, signage boards, window surrounds and other external features would generally be retained to conserve the appearance of the property. However the large shop front windows would be taken out and the cills raised up to a height equating approximately 900mm above the floor level. The resulting window openings would be infilled with a pair of traditional vertical sliding timber sash windows separated by a central timber mullion.



Internally the two storey building is already generally laid out in a typical domestic floor plan having a front room, middle room and kitchen to the rear. The first floor would also convert readily into a three bedroom property with a bathroom although the internal fixtures and fittings would need to be stripped out and modernised.



SITE APPRAISAL

The premises occupies the corner plot of James Street and Cruso Street and is typical of local and national terrace properties having a corner shop, selling groceries and general household goods within a residential area.

It is understood that historically Cruso street, together with adjoining Picton Street, Garden Street, and onto Belle Vue road formed something of a rat run for vehicles travelling from Mill street to Broad Street and beyond avoiding Leek town centre presumably for those travelling to/from Macclesfield area to/from Stoke and surrounding areas.

Around ten or twelve years ago Crusos street was blocked off with a row of concrete bollards just outside Peter Elkins premises to prevent vehicles travelling down to Broad Street.

It is understood that Peter Elkins business and trading style changed in the late 1970's and he recognised that he was no longer attracting passing trade needing upholstery repairs, indeed on 19th December 1983, when he took over the premises on James Street, he operated there using it more of a workshop than a retail premises. The premises was owned by Mr & Mrs Cartledge who bought it on 26th September 1977 and ran it as a factory seconds shop, presumably purchasing the garments from local mills that fell below quality standards.

The site was once surrounded by numerous textile mills within easy walking distance, for which the housing was originally built for the workers dwellings. To include nearby Waterloo Mill a former silk Mill built in 1893, closed down and was converted into housing in 2005, redundant Big Mill on Mill Street, the recently demolished Slimma factory, Wellington, Albion, London mills to name but a few of the more prominent locally. Workers would pass by the end of the streets and call in the corner shop, chippy, greengrocer, etc to buy food weighed and measured by the corner shop patron. The demise of the mills, together with advent of larger self-service supermarkets and easier access to cars means the workers have to travel further afield to work, with many travelling into Stoke, Macclesfield or Congleton and therefore the shopping pattern has changed with it.

Small shops cannot benefit from the same economies of scale of big shops. Their wholesale price is higher, even with a smaller profit margin they may end up with higher prices. It is hardly surprising that consumers go to the cheapest place to buy goods. Internet shopping and home delivery groceries mean that grocery and shops selling general household goods are closing down nationwide. Many of the small corner shops have been bought out by larger chains such as the local Coop on Picton Street, or Premier goods on Southbank street where they have the buying power nationally to compete with larger supermarkets. It is only the best placed 'convenience shops' enjoying a steady footfall or passing traffic that are continuing to trade. Even many of the high street shops are struggling to retain regular custom.

Service stations where vehicles stop for fuel are increasingly becoming small convenience stores, opening early in the morning until late at night, selling groceries, confectionary, newspapers and tobacco products etc, and having ample space to park, many customers are calling in there during the daily commute regardless of whether they need fuel.

The location of the property for retail is a definite handicap, it is neither in a town centre setting, located on a main road frontage or located on an established trading estate. The site is hidden in a predominantly residential setting; it is only accessible by one way traffic directional side streets, with limited on site parking.

In the event 1 James street was to retain its commercial use as a retail outlet (on the assumption it did manage to generate custom) it is likely to create or exacerbate parking and access issues with delivery vehicle and customers.

The one way system of streets around that area would be a driver would need to travel from West Street, onto Picton Street which leads to Cruso Street then James Street. The driver (discounting the journey prior to West Street) would pass by the Premier Convenience store on the corner of West Street & Garden Street, and also the Coop Convenience Store, both of which are within no more than 5 minutes walk from 1 James Street.

The small post office formerly at 46 Picton Street next door to the chip shop, has moved premises onto West Street to sell a more diverse range in the larger premises, and the property has changed its use from A1 to single residential dwelling in a similar manner as proposed to 1 James Street.

On the basis that there is unlikely to be passing traffic with exception to local residents, and the fact to reach 1, James Street by car you pass by at least two convenience stores, not to mention either Sainsbury's or Morrisson's depending the direction taken from further afield it begs the question as to what type of shop would be needed in the area. West Street has a small cluster of shops and service premises all within a 5 minute walk of 1, James Street, including 3 or 4 hairdressing salons, 2 or 3 café's, a Laundrette, Post Office and Chip shop.

For the purposes of the Development Plan the site lies within the town's development boundary where there is a general presumption in favour of development.

To summarise historically small independently owned corner shops have suffered a demise over the past 20 – 30 years nationwide, many of which have closed and converted into dwellings and Leek is no exception. For the premises to retain its commercial use, the proprietor must have a business that doesn't particularly rely on passing trade but rather customers searching for a particular service using internet or yellow pages, such as an upholstery repair, which in reality may have been better placed in a workshop/lockup type building found on a business park, such as Town Yard on Station Road.

It would be unlikely that a commercial outlet would be welcomed or patronised by the local residents, whilst converting the building into a an additional house is unlikely upset the balance in that largely residential area

USE / AMOUNT

The proposed scheme would essentially make use of the existing layout, albeit modernised, new heating, plumbing and re-wired comprising lounge, dining room and kitchen, with the former flat entrance utilised as a WC.

On first floor, again the partitions for 3no bedrooms and a bathroom are already in place, subject to replacement in generally the same location, during the renovation and remedial works as required for the gable wall repair and modernisation.

The existing rear yard will provide an amenity area.

LAYOUT

There is no proposed extensions or alterations to the existing layout of the building

SCALE

The scale of the existing building shall not be altered as part of the proposal.

LANDSCAPING

There is only a rear yard which shall be tidied up to provide a suitable external amenity space with space for potted plants, etc

APPEARANCE

The alterations to the proposed dwelling shall be constructed using traditional high quality materials to match the existing appearance. The gable wall shall be carefully taken down in part and re-built using reclaimed brickwork to match existing as recommended by the structural engineer to stabilise the gable wall. Other features shall be retained to preserve the character of the building.

The rear of the property is less prominent, the existing windows shall be replaced with energy efficient double glazed windows with high quality white uPVC frames

ACCESS

The existing access to the property shall be retained which has a level threshold despite the road rising in both East and West direction, and falling in a Southern direction.

KEY PLANNING ISSUES

This is an application for the change of use of the existing building from a retail premises which for the past 30 years has been ostensibly been used as a workshop to a single residential dwelling.

The key issues are considered to be the general principle of development, loss of a community facility, impact on residential amenity and highway safety.

Principle of development

The site lies within a predominately residential area and the use of the building as a single residential dwelling would be in keeping with the established character of the area. The precedent for conversion of the redundant corner shop into a dwelling has already been set by the permitted change of use of the mirror image property on the Western end of James Street. Accordingly the proposed development is considered to be in accordance with Saved Local Plan Policy H4 and therefore acceptable in principle.

The application site is located within the town development boundary and is generally in accordance with Saved Local Plan Policy H4. The site comprises a sustainable location and is within close walking distance to shops and other services.

The Core Strategy Revised Submission Version identifies a net housing requirement of 5,500 additional dwellings during the period 2006 to 2026.

Loss of community facility

The premises have provided a bespoke service offered by Peter Elkin for the past 30 years for people in the area requiring upholstery repairs. The fact that Peter is retiring from business means that the service shall no longer be available.

Policy C1 in particular seeks to protect existing community facilities and ensure that there will be adequate infrastructure in place to serve new development, supports the relocation of uses no longer compatible with their surroundings and requires high quality design and layouts in new developments. An upholstery repair business cannot be viewed as a community facility. Indeed the premises at least since 1977 when it sold factory second clothing, have not been providing a typical community facility such as a grocery shop, or general household goods, therefore the lack of the commercial premises is highly unlikely to affect the local community.

It is difficult to predict with any degree of certainty that if the proposed change of use was not carried out, and the commercial premises retained for a viable business venture, just what type of facility is lacking in the local community that a business hidden in the back streets would fulfil.

Impact on residential amenity

It is not considered that the proposed change of use would be detrimental to any of the surrounding residential properties. The site is located within a predominately residential area and its conversion into a single residential dwelling would be in keeping with the local established characteristics of the area. The general appearance of the building is to remain as existing with exception of the changing the large shop windows with smaller sliding sash window to preserve the privacy of the occupants and will not result in any overlooking or loss of privacy to any neighbouring properties.

Highway safety

The proposed dwelling will not provide any off road parking and will rely on street parking. This situation is no different to any of the neighbouring properties. It has been noted that a number of convenience stores are located within 5 minutes walking distance from the property and the town centre is within easy walking

distance of shops, services and other facilities. The street is a one way direction with most commuters passing the proposed dwelling living locally. The street to the side of the premises used to be a rat-run, but changes to the road layout some 10 years ago has restricted access with a row of bollards forming a small parking area to the side to 1, James Street.

The alternative retention of the premises as a commercial business if it is to be a successful venture would need to attract visitors and customers, and with it an increase in local traffic, which in turn would exacerbate any traffic problems on the side streets leading to James Street. The successful business depending upon the service and goods provided it can be assumed would also require regular visits with delivery vehicles, bringing further disruption to the local area whilst these goods are dropped off.

Conclusion

It is considered that the proposed development is acceptable in principle and compliant with Staffordshire Moorlands Local Authorities Housing and Community policies. The proposed development will not result in the loss of a community facility because the premises necessarily provided a service to the community, and the proposed change of use is not prejudicial to the reasonable enjoyment of any of the neighbouring properties or detrimental to highway safety.

The alternative decision to retain the premises as a commercial retail outlet is more likely to have an adverse effect on the local community than the proposed change of use.