

Alterations to form 6 flats on ground, first floor and new second floor (with Portland Town Council function relocated to lower ground floor), including parking provision at Hambro car park –Council Offices, Fortuneswell, Portland

(Weymouth & Portland Borough Council [Property Services])

FOR DECISION

PROPOSAL

This application proposes the conversion of the existing Council offices building into 6 flats with the retention of accommodation for Portland Town Council on the lower ground floor.

The accommodation for the Town Council comprises reception/waiting, store, office, meeting room/office and a conference chamber, which has room for a large table seating 16 as well as two rows of public seating. This area would be accessed from an existing door at the rear of the building.

The proposed flats would be accessed from the front of the building and the scheme proposes 2 one bedroomed and 1 two bedroomed flats on the upper ground floor and 2 three bedroomed and 2 two bedroomed maisonettes on the first floor, with their kitchen and lounge elements being accommodated within a new glazed roof extension on the existing flat roof.

One disabled car parking space is shown on the frontage and bin, cycle and other storage facilities are identified at the rear of the building.

The new second floor would be structurally self contained with a rigid base. It would rise approximately 1.7m above the existing parapet level and would be visually and structurally light. Corner treatments will be in Portland stone to match the original building and the remainder will be glazing some of which will have cladding behind.

To support the application, the applicant has advised that in their view this change of use to mixed civic and residential use would provide a new lease of life for this already developed site. They consider that it would provide an attractive and interesting place to live, reduce the need for development on other greenfield sites and prevent the building from further deteriorating into an “empty run-down eyesore”.

After moving the Portland Council function to the ground floor, they suggest that the scheme will secure six new dwelling units. Whilst the development is not large enough to trigger the requirement for ‘affordable housing’, it is their view that the addition of the new second floor would give the larger flats panoramic views of Lyme Bay and Portland Harbour which would enable the generation of the kind of financial return that would be required to fund the provision of the potentially ‘low cost’¹ (i.e. the one bedroomed) units which they consider would be attractive to newly forming households. They have advised that the involvement of any social housing provider will be the subject of a future decision by the Management Committee, in the light of

¹ As defined in the Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review (W&PLPR) 5.9.11

previous agreements that the Council will look at its own land holdings with a view to identifying and disposing of them as affordable housing.

It is their opinion that the needs of the residents of the development will be well supported within the existing infrastructure transport provision and local facilities of Fortuneswell. In their view, there is little opportunity to make changes to the external layout of this existing building and the movement of people through the site. In saying this they stress that it has good public transport links, is near a public car park and has very good local access to a range of shops and services. They also point out that there is ample exterior space for two secure stores, lockable storage for at least 16 cycles (to be shared between the residents and users of the council offices) and bin storage.

There is mention that one or two cars are often squeezed in at the front North side of the building. As part of the improvements to the accessibility of the building and in line with the requirements of the Building Regulations, a single accessible parking bay or drop off zone would be provided on this area, which they consider would reduce on site parking to very occasional use by disabled people only and thus reduce the likelihood of clashes between cars and pedestrians both on and while leaving the site.

They have looked at the current and potential use of the council offices building. In their opinion it is difficult to gauge and there are no specific guidelines in the parking policy for civic buildings. Reference is made to the fact that the full council (15 people) meets around eight times a year with some public attendance at these meetings. In addition there are other smaller meetings once or twice a month and ad hoc attendance of councillors on a more regular basis. They say that it would be unrealistic to judge parking on the same level as, say, that needed for a fully staffed office of the same size and in any case, due to the nature of the function, a large number of the participants are able to walk or use public transport to attend. However for the sake of comparison they have used the office use figures identified in Appendix 5 (Car parking guidelines) to the Weymouth & Portland Local Plan to calculate their assessment of the parking "credit" that the site currently has:

3 floors @ 230m ²	= 690m ²	
1 st 300m ² GFA @	1 space per 20m ²	= 15
Remaining 390m ² GFA @	1 space per 30m ²	= 13
Plus 10% visitor spaces		= 4
Total parking required		32 Spaces

Using the same appendix they have calculated that re-developing the building as residential accommodation would require:

2 x 1 Bed flats	= 2
2 x 2 Bed flats	= 2
2 x 3 Bed flats	= 3
Total parking for flats	7 spaces
G/F as offices @ 230m ² 1 space per 20m ²	= 12
Total parking required	= 19 Spaces

In conclusion, it is their view that if the building was re-developed as flats it would generate less parking demand and require 13 fewer spaces than if it was re-

developed as offices. Therefore, since the site does have the previously mentioned good public transport links, is near a public car park and has very good local access to a range of shops and services, they consider that it should be acceptable to allow for lower levels of off-street parking as set out in Policy T17. In addition however they propose to provide 6 additional spaces in the nearby Hambro Car Park.

Turning to the question of access, they suggest that one of the main reasons for moving the council function to the ground floor is to improve the access to the public facility for all disabled people including those with Physical, Sensory, Mental, Speech and language impairments and progressive illnesses. The approaches and entrances will be level, with level thresholds, a new external rain canopy to the rear entrance and improved surfaces and external lighting.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

This site falls within the development boundary identified in the adopted Weymouth & Portland Local Plan 2005, and consequently Policy D1 is appropriate to your consideration.

General development and general design criteria are covered in Policies D3 and B1 of the adopted Local Plan.

Policies T5, T6 and T17 of the adopted Local Plan, cover car parking and pedestrian & vehicular safety.

Flat development, including conversions, is specifically covered in Policy H5 of the adopted Local Plan. This indicates that such development will be acceptable subject to the following criteria-

- (i) *the proposed development would be compatible with the character of the area and the scale, massing, design features and materials would not adversely affect the privacy or amenity of nearby residents or result in a cramped form of development;*
- (ii) *provision is made for landscaping and amenity open space for the occupants within the site comprising at least 10% of the site area for conversions providing 4 or more flats, and 20% of the site area for all new build schemes, unless such provision is physically unachievable or undesirable in design terms;*
- (iii) *provision is made for drying areas, bin stores, recycling point, communal cycle parking in accordance with Policy T5, and an external sitting out and/or play area as appropriate;*
- (iv) *any conversion can be carried out without harming the intrinsic character of the building and its surroundings.*

The site falls within the Underhill Conservation Area and therefore Policy B8 of the adopted Local Plan is relevant to your consideration. In general this policy states that proposals will be permitted provided they preserve or enhance the character of the area.

Finally the proposed car parking at Hambro results in the loss of part of the Local Open Space area and therefore Policy C9 of the adopted Local Plan is appropriate to this scheme.

CONSULTATIONS

The Technical Services Manager has discussed this matter with colleagues at Dorset County Council and as a result of the applicant being able to provide additional car parking provision in the Hambro Car park, he has no objection to this proposal.

Portland Town Council object to this proposal as they consider the scheme to be directly contrary to Policy C9, that the design and materials of the 2nd floor are not in character with the existing building or the Conservation Area and they have concerns over highway safety because they consider that the conversion will increase on street car parking requirements in the area contrary to Policy T17 (iii).

REPRESENTATIONS

No representations have been received concerning this proposal to date and an update will be provided at your meeting.

CONCLUSIONS

The existing Council Offices building has been in use by Portland Town Council and this Authority since Local Government reorganisation in 1974. Whilst this Authority only now uses it for storage, other office uses have shared these premises in the past with Portland Town Council, including the cash office and architects sections.

Clearly the offices have virtually no car parking at present and its location on the steep hairpin on Fortuneswell makes the question of vehicle movements a major issue in considering proposals for alternative uses. You will see the applicants consideration of this matter above. I must advise you that in planning terms the use of this building is Class B1 office use and as such the building could be utilized by a range of other office uses without the need for further planning permission. Clearly these could involve uses that could potentially generate more traffic than the Town Council and this Authority's storage uses do at present. In saying this, the scheme provides for the retention of the Town Council use and so the use of part of the building will no doubt generate similar activity to that which exists now, or could exist in the future. The remaining floors could be put to further office use which would generate traffic levels which, as suggested by the applicants, using the Local Plan guidelines could generate significant levels of traffic. However, despite this argument, it is my view that, in considering this scheme, it is necessary to have regard to the fact that this site is on a bus route and is close by to the shopping and other facilities in Fortuneswell. You will be aware that recent Government advice mentions these as important material factors when considering proposals such as this. In this case the scheme incorporates a single disabled/dropping off space on site and the provision of 6 additional spaces at Hambro car park. You will note that on this basis the Technical Services Manager supports this scheme and I must advise you that I support his view, particularly given a recent appeal decision where

flat development was approved without any car parking. You will also note that the scheme provides 16 cycle spaces within a store, this being somewhat in excess of your normal requirement of 1 space per 2 units.

Turning to the roof extension, I have sought revisions to improve the design from a Conservation Area point of view. On this basis I am prepared to advise you that this element will be visually acceptable in terms of your Local Plan policy.

Finally, turning in particular to the question of the additional car parking in Hambro car park, the plan shows 9 spaces, 4 at a higher level adjoining the entrance and 5 off the lower level. The 5 lower level spaces involve the removal of 3 existing spaces to form the entrance and consequently there is a net gain of 6 spaces. This lower area is on a former play area that is designated as part of the Local Open Space in this area. This area which was laid out some years ago, has not been well used and is now run down and un-equipped which has led to a further lack of use and as such the loss of this area would not appear to be significant. Therefore as the applicant has offered a contribution towards other improvements in the locality, I believe that this approach is an acceptable alternative. The contribution is as usual based on the area of the lower open space that would be lost to form the car parking spaces using our normal formula of £38 per m². This provides a figure of £5016 and I have obtained an assurance from the applicant's agent that this would be paid on completion of any sale of the site.

On the basis of the above, I am prepared to recommend that this scheme be approved subject to conditions.

RECOMMENDATION

Grant permission subject to the following conditions:

- 1) 3YRFUL (Standard)
- 2) Z03E (Amended Plans – 808.001C received 25th October 2006)
- 3) Z09E (Materials: Samples)
- 4) The flats hereby approved shall not be occupied until at least 6 car parking spaces at Hambro car park, as shown on the submitted drawings, or any other alternative layout within the car park that may be agreed in writing, are constructed and made available for car parking purposes.

Reason: To ensure the provision of adequate off street car parking facilities, in accordance with Policy T17 of the adopted Weymouth and Portland Local Plan 2005.

- 5) Detailed drawings to show the precise design of the proposed roof structure shall be submitted to and be approved by the Borough Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved. Thereafter the development shall be completed in accordance with the agreed scheme.

Reason: In order that the detailing is of a sufficiently high standard, in accordance with Policies B1 and B8 of the adopted Weymouth and Portland Local Plan 2005.

REA3- D1, D3, B1, C10, H5, T5, T6, T17

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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CJM