

Urban Design Comments

F/22/94436 – 20A High Street, Botley

From: Urban & Landscape Design Team to Development Management

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Date: 31 January 2023

Proposal: Construction of 3no. two bedroom terraced dwellings with ancillary amenity space and parking, following demolition of existing disused buildings

Summary:

- The submission lacks an adequate assessment of the site and its surrounding context, which has resulted in a lack of understanding as to the nature of development which would be suitable for the site.
 - The design and appearance of the development is not considered to be of an acceptable quality to enhance the visual amenity and character of the surrounding conservation area.
 - There appears to be little or no usable external amenity space for the proposed dwellings.
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These comments are made in relation to the plans and supporting information dated 28 December 2022 and should be read in conjunction with comments from the Landscape and Tree Officers.

1. Site Context

The site lies within the heart of the Botley Conservation Area and as such any scheme proposed would need to be respectful to the character of the area and the site's immediate surrounding context, as well as be of a high-quality design.

No contextual analysis of the area has been submitted to inform the design. One should be submitted as soon as possible to understand how the design has been arrived at.

The supporting Design and Access Statement focuses on the intention to develop an unused rear service area described as "a miscellaneous collection of refuse, occasional parking and a disused workshop" and makes little reference to why the design of the proposal is considered to be acceptable in relation to the conservation area. There appears to be a lack of any detailed assessment of the area to establish the importance of the site, the part it plays within its surrounding context, where it can be viewed from and how its redevelopment will impact upon its immediate setting and the wider character of the village and conservation area.

The applicant states that "there is no distinguishing character or architectural 'theme' and that "Botley has the charm of a Hampshire market town which has grown organically with a random selection of mainly two storey buildings, constructed of varying materials and textures." However, this does not seem to be supported by the expected evidence-based character assessment of the area.

Even if that proves to be the case, the National Design Guide states, on page 16: "Where the character of an existing place has limited or few positive qualities, then a new and positive character will enhance its identity". Any new development within this site is expected to review the merit of the existing conditions and contribute positively to the area. It also states, on page 10: "Creating a positive sense of place helps to foster a sense of belonging and contributes to well-being, inclusion and community cohesion."

Moreover, as the site is off the main road, a design which enhances the sense of place would always be required. Therefore, the proposed development should improve the relationship between the dwellings and the public realm, to define new street lines and enhance the character and identity of the place.

Whilst in principle there is no objection to developing the site, there are concerns with how it is proposed.

2. Siting & External Layout

The quantum of development seems to be more acceptable comparing with previous proposals.

However, outdoor amenity space is a fundamental part of all developments both in supporting residents' wellbeing and the ecology and biodiversity of the local area, as such new developments must provide adequate and usable external space.

There appears to be little or no usable external amenity space for the proposed dwellings.

It is considered that an alternative layout should be explored to take more advantage of natural sunlight by, for example, proposing the main entrance of the dwellings towards north, addressing the mews, in order to achieve an internal layout where all habitable rooms are south facing (living room/ kitchen and bedrooms). Moreover, by swapping the position of the rear gardens towards south, these would be a more pleasant and usable private amenity space with greater sun exposure whilst potentially overlooking a well-designed shared parking area.

Therefore, it would be encouraged to investigate if there is right of access to the site from Warner Mews.

Furthermore, a mature tree is located outside the site boundary and might result in shading the private amenity space for large parts of the day. The scheme should seek to minimise overshadowing on usable external and internal spaces. It is also recommended that this proposal is accompanied by robust sunlight study to ensure that it does not adversely affect the quality of these places.

The parking proposed should be a well-designed place that benefits future occupiers by promoting a sense of ownership and avoiding anti-social behaviour. It may be appropriate to study an alternative parking layout to incorporate an informal space with additional landscaping, well-designed and that will promote future use, such as, providing opportunities for children to play whilst allowing for a shared parking space.

Given the conservation area status of the site and its surroundings, as well as being directly onto Botley Square, we would not wish to see bins lined up along the frontage or deliver vehicles having to park on the road or footway causing an obstruction.

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3. Height, Scale & Mass

There are no objections *in principle* to this aspect of the scheme.

4. External Appearance & Materials

Regarding the design of the elevations, it is considered that the proposal does not go far enough to secure a design of high-quality standards. It would be preferable to propose simple and modest built forms to the proposed dwellings.

The proposed materials are vague, and it is not clear from the plans what materials are to be used where. More detailed information would be needed to provide comments on this matter.