

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT

Application Ref: F/24/96888

Site Address: 70 Station Road, Netley Abbey, Southampton, SO31 5AF

Case Officer: David Huckfield

Description: Conversion of first floor area of church meeting facility to a two-bedroom self-contained flat with associated elevational alterations and extension to existing access ramp

Particular Site Constraints?	Yes ☒	No ☐
Within the Urban Edge Existing Community Facility		

Relevant Planning History?	Yes ☒	No ☐
Z/32989/000 – Alterations to entrance to provide access for the disabled – PERMIT (1993)		

Site Visit:	Yes ☒	No ☐
Publicity:	Letters ☒ Site Notice ☒ (Advertised in the Public Interest)	Newspaper ☐

Representations Received:

None received

Consultation Responses:

Hound Parish Council	No objection.
Ecology	There are records of bats very close to this site. I have reviewed the photo of the building on Google maps and do not see any obvious potential bat roost features which would be affected by this proposal. The loft is not proposed to be affected by this work. Please could you add the following informative to the decision notice: In the unlikely event of any bats being found during demolition or construction, all work must stop immediately, and Natural England must be called. Additional information is available on the Bat Conservation Trust website at https://www.bats.org.uk/advice/im-working-on-a-building-with-bats/ive-found-a-bat-during-works Biodiversity enhancements will be required. A bat brick and a swift brick may be appropriate for this building. The Bat Conservation Trust recommends installing a bat brick/box at least 4 m above the ground, away from artificial light sources, sheltered from strong winds and exposed to the sun for part of the day, facing south, south-east or south-west. (https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/putting-up-your-box). Swift nest boxes are best positioned under the eaves or on walls facing north, northeast or north-west out of direct sunlight, five metres above the ground, with clear adjacent airspace so swifts can access them in a high-speed direct flight. (https://www.swiftconservation.org/Nestboxes%26Attraction.htm)
Hampshire County Council Highways	In regard to application F/24/96888, having reviewed the information contained within the application pack, there would be no objection to the proposals from a highway perspective.

	Access into the site for vehicles is proposed to be via an existing vehicle crossover, facilitated by the removal of site perimeter railings, heading into site via the existing driveway. Once on site, parking is afforded for several vehicles, with a turning head area provided to enable forward gear access and egress. This is acceptable, although the applicant may wish to extend the parking / turning area (that runs across the frontage of the dwelling) to create a bigger turning area and also facilitate visitor parking - i.e. make the area 3 spaces wide (7.2m) rather than the 2 spaces wide (4.8m) as shown.
Southern Water	Southern Water requires a formal application for any new connection to the public foul sewer to be made by the applicant or developer. To make an application visit Southern Water's Get Connected service: developerservices.southernwater.co.uk and please read our New Connections Charging Arrangements documents which are available on our website via the following link: southernwater.co.uk/developing-building/connection-charging-arrangements. The Council's Building Control officers or technical staff should be asked to comment on the adequacy of soakaways to dispose of surface water from the proposed development. It is possible that a sewer now deemed to be public could be crossing the development site. Therefore, should any sewer be found during construction works, an investigation of the sewer will be required to ascertain its ownership before any further works commence on site. For further advice, please contact Southern Water, Southern House, Yeoman Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN13 3NX (Tel: 0330 303 0119). Website: southernwater.co.uk or by email at: SouthernWaterPlanning@southernwater.co.uk
Natural England	Objection on the basis that they consider that the proposals would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site. There is a significant level of uncertainty as to the effectiveness of the proposed in-borough measures to address recreational impacts on the New Forest. We advise it would not be currently possible to conclude no adverse effects on the integrity of the New Forest designated sites. Natural England's further advice on designated sites/landscapes and advice on other natural environment issues was provided and, it was highlighted, that mitigation is also required for recreational disturbance and the additional nutrient burden arising from the development upon the Solent protected complex.

Policy:

Legislative Background:

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan:

The Development Plan comprises of the Saved Policies of the adopted Eastleigh Borough Local Plan 2016-2036. The following policies are of relevance to the application: DM1 (General criteria for new development), DM2 (Environmentally sustainable development), DM3 (Adaption to climate change), DM8 (Pollution), DM11 (Nature conservation), DM13 (General development criteria – transport), DM14 (Parking), DM23 (Residential development in urban areas), DM30 (Internal space standards for new residential development), DM36 (Community, leisure and cultural facilities).

Other material considerations:

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs):

The following SPDs and Background Papers are of relevance to the proposals:

- Quality Places (adopted 2011)
- Residential Parking Standards (adopted 2009)
- Character Area Appraisal for Bursledon, Hamble and Hound (BHH7). The guidance within this document sets out the following criteria for new development:
 - *Mitigate the effects of the heavy vehicular traffic on Station Road in new development using measures such as boundary planting, setbacks, transition spaces and orientation of internal spaces.*
 - *Retain/reinforce the continuity in building line between the two intersections with Denzil Avenue.*
 - *Maintain the predominant brick wall/fence plot boundaries.*
 - *Ensure that new development relates effectively with the proportions and form of the earlier development which gives the area its distinctive character.*

National Planning Policy/Guidance:

The latest iteration of the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF or Framework) was published in December 2023 and, as set out within paragraph 224, the policies contained within it are material considerations which should be taken into account in dealing with applications from the day of its publication. The Planning Practice Guidance provides additional guidance in support of the policies within the Framework and is also a material consideration in the determination of the application.

Assessment:

Principle of development:

The site lies within the urban edge where the basic principle of development is considered to be acceptable. As a church premises, the site is also deemed to constitute a community facility in accordance with the provisions of policy DM36 of the Local Plan. This policy states that the loss of existing community, leisure or cultural facilities to other forms of development will not be permitted unless: a) alternative provision is made which is more appropriate to the needs of the community, or is more accessible; or b) the existing facility can be shown to be surplus to local needs. Any facilities surplus to requirements should where possible be re-developed/re-used in a way that maximises benefits to the local community.

The building is currently predominantly utilised as meeting space for the adjacent church and is thereby ancillary to the principal use of the site. The conversion of the upper floor of the building to a self-contained flat would therefore, in the strictest terms, result in the loss of community floorspace. The applicant has, however, explained that the first floor of the building has not been utilised for a period of time and that it is surplus to requirements as ancillary church space, for either meetings or any other associated purpose, with the ground floor of the application property and the adjacent church building itself being more than sufficient to meet the required need in this regard.

The proposals would therefore see this area bought back into an active use and, whilst this wouldn't in itself be directly for a community purpose (as it has been indicated that the flat may be rented on the open market), the applicant has confirmed that the income generated would be used to support the church function on the site and the activities that this encompasses. It can therefore be argued that the proposals would, in this respect to at least to some degree, meet the criteria within Policy DM26 of seeking to maximise the benefits of re-development for the local community. The principal use of the overall site as a church facility would also remain unaffected and taking account of these factors, it is considered that in this particular instance, the development is acceptable in principle.

Layout, design and impact on the character of the area:

The physical works that are proposed to be undertaken as part of the proposals are relatively modest in terms of their extent, with these being limited to internal and external changes to provide separate entrances to the ground and first floor of the building and the appropriate subdivision of the residential and church related uses. Externally these changes encompass the replacement of a window on the building's western elevation with a door to serve as the new entrance to the ground floor, as well as the extension of the existing exterior ramp to provide level access to this. These works will have minimal impact on the external appearance of the building and would be in-keeping with its existing character and that of the surrounding area. The application therefore complies with Policy DM1 of the Local Plan in these respects.

Residential amenity:

In this regard, there are two main considerations, with these being the impacts of the development on the amenity of existing neighbouring properties and the appropriateness of the residential environment that would be created for the future occupier(s) of the development.

In terms of the latter first of all, the proposed flat would provide for an adequate residential environment for its future occupiers to live comfortably. The level of floorspace proposed meets the requirements for a two-bedroom flat as stipulated within the Nationally Described Space Standards and all rooms will be well served by light and outlook. It is also considered that the residential use would be compatible with the continued use of the ground floor for church meeting purposes, with the applicant confirming that these are relatively low key in nature and, as such, are deemed to be unlikely to result in an undue level of disturbance for the occupiers of the flat.

The Council's Quality Places SPD requires the provision of an external amenity area of a minimum of 25sqm for an apartment/flat. The building is served by a large garden space to the rear which, it was initially indicated, would be shared between the church use and the residential property. In order to ensure that there is always a reasonable external area available for the occupiers of the apartment however, the site layout plan has been updated to include an identified space which would be assigned to the flat and enclosed for their usage. Whilst not directly adjoining the building owing to the nature of the access arrangements (which from the rear of the property are from the church meeting space only), it would nonetheless provide useable unit specific space and allow future residents to enjoy the outdoor environment and, in this instance and based on the particular circumstances of the case, this is considered to be acceptable.

There are no concerns in relation to the impacts of the development upon the amenity of existing neighbouring occupiers. There are no external alterations proposed to the south-eastern side of the building and no side facing windows within this elevation to serve the first floor flat and, as such no undue overlooking towards No. 72 Station Road would occur, nor would the development impact upon the light received to or outlook available from this property. The provision of a flat in this location is also considered to be compatible with the adjacent residential uses and the immediate surrounding area which, notwithstanding the Church itself, is substantively residential in character.

The proposals thereby comply with Policy DM1 of the Local Plan in respect of the matter of residential amenity.

Highway matters:

As the proposals are for a dwelling within what is an established and predominantly residential area, there are no concerns raised in terms of the location of the development or its connectivity. In terms of parking, the Council's Residential Parking Standards SPD requires that, for a 2-bedroom property as is proposed in this case, 2 car parking spaces be provided. These would be available on the site frontage and whilst the comments of the Highway Authority are noted in terms of increasing the level of parking further, it is not considered that this would be justifiable in this case given that the requisite standards would be complied with.

From the Case Officer's site inspection, there would also be adequate turning space available on the site frontage to enable vehicles to enter and egress the site in a forward gear. Access from the public highway would be by way of an existing gated entrance from Station Road with a vehicle crossover (dropped kerb) already in place. This access would be separate from the main entrance to the church from the public highway and no objection has been raised by the Highway Authority to the arrangement proposed. Finally, the submitted plans show suitable bin and cycle storage for the proposed residential use and these can be secured by condition. Waste storage and collection arrangements for the Church remain unchanged.

Taking account of these factors, the application is acceptable in highway terms and accords with the provisions of Policies DM13 and DM14 of the Local Plan.

Ecology:

The Council's Ecologist has considered the proposals and has raised no objection. Whilst it has been noted that there are records of bats very close to the site, there are no obvious bat roost features which would be affected by the development and the loft area and roof of the building would remain unaltered. The informative recommended by the Ecologist in this respect will, however, be added to the decision notice. In terms of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the application was submitted prior to the 10% requirement becoming mandatory for smaller sites and therefore this is not applicable in this case. There remains a local plan policy requirement, however, for BNG to still be achieved and, as such, a condition will be imposed to require the installation of a bat or bird box on the building to secure this.

In terms of the potential off-site ecological impacts of the development, the Council has a responsibility under the Habitats Regulations to ensure that, as part of a planning application, a development will not have an adverse impact on any European protected sites and specifically in this case upon the European designated Solent Complex and New Forest SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites. The site falls within the zone of impact whereby new residential development can result in increased impacts upon these sites both from additional recreational pressure (from an increase in population) and through nitrogen generated by increased levels of sewage and nitrogen leaching from new housing (which has the potential to undermine water quality and restrict the growth, distribution and variety of food available for species designated under European law).

In this particular instance, however, and following receipt of further information from the applicant and a review of the planning history, the local planning authority are satisfied that, in planning terms, the development would not result in a material increase or intensification of residential use on the site (whereby the requirement for the aforementioned mitigation would be triggered). The application building has historically and, up until recent years, served as the Presbytery for the Church where the priest and their family would have resided. Whilst the priest has ceased to live in the building, the accommodation has remained in situ, and it can therefore be argued that the lawful planning use of the premises remains as ancillary to the church use with an element of

residential accommodation. On this basis, it is not considered that the seeking of the aforementioned mitigation measures would be required or justifiable and, as such, HRA screening is not deemed to be necessitated.

Climate Change:

In July 2019, the Council declared a Climate Change and Environmental Emergency. In doing so it agreed, among other things, to: (a) put in place measures to ensure the Council's own operations and functions achieve carbon neutrality by 2025; (b) work with partners to aim for all projects and services delivered in the Borough to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030; (c) ensure that the Council's procurement policy recognises carbon neutrality as one of its primary considerations; and (d) recognise the urgency of action to mitigate and adapt to climate change in every decision taken by the Council. This is underpinned by the Climate and Environment Emergency Strategy 2020–2030 and the supporting Climate and Environmental Emergency Action Plan – Update June 2020.

The declaration of the Climate Change and Environmental Emergency demonstrates a strong commitment from the Council to achieve net zero. The NPPF, development plan and emerging plan policy do not set this as a specific target, but it is a material consideration to be considered alongside all other material considerations. In any case addressing climate change is a core part of the NPPF and emerging plan policy. The need to support the economy is part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Emerging Local Plan, as is an assessment of climate impacts.

The NPPF aims for the need for housing to be met, and Policy S2 of the Adopted Local Plan sets a target for 14,580 dwellings to be provided by 2036. The NPPF, Saved, Policies S1, DM2 and DM3 of the Adopted Local Plan and energy and water elements of the adopted Environmentally Sustainable Development SPD require development to be sustainable in terms of resource use, climate change and energy use. When considering the impact of climate change, the proposed development is expected to be resilient to the potential effects of climate change and is expected to reduce/limit impacts on climate emissions as a result of the development or its use.

Equalities Implications:

Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 created the public sector equality duty. Section 149 states:

- A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

When making policy decisions, the Council must take account of the equality duty and in particular any potential impact on protected groups. It is considered that this application does not raise any equality implications

Recommendation:	PERMIT ☒	REFUSE ☐
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