

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT CULTURE & SPORT
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 19 July 2006

ITEM NO.

Ward: : Caversham

App No.: 06/00539/FUL/PJH

Address: Land between Abbotsmead Place and School Lane, Caversham

Proposal: Erection of 57 flats for those aged over 55 plus one flat for on-site warden.

Applicant: T.A. Fisher and Sons

Date received: 12 May 2006

Major Application: 13 week target: 11 August 2006

RECOMMENDATION

Subject to the receipt of comments from the Environment Agency, **REFUSE** for the following reasons:

The proposal, by virtue of its height, bulk and massing in relation to adjacent residential properties would be visually intrusive, overbearing and out of scale with its surroundings and would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area. This would be in conflict with Policies HSG5, HSG9 and CUD 14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (1998).

The development, by virtue of its height and close proximity to the northern and north-eastern boundaries, would result in an unacceptable level of overlooking into and overshadowing of private internal and external amenity areas of adjacent residential properties. This would be in conflict with Policy HSG9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (1998).

The building, due to its long unbroken massing and increase in height from south to north, would appear contrived in appearance and unbalanced contrary to Policy CUD 14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (1998).

The south facing elevation of the proposed building lacks adequate fenestration and would thus present a poor quality appearance to Abbotsmead Place contrary to Policy CUD 14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (1998) and Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1).

The proposed development, by virtue of its large footprint and siting would result in inadequate usable amenity space which would be detrimental to the amenities of prospective occupiers and the physical and visual character of the area contrary to Policy HSG5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (1998) and the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance note 'Space Around Dwellings' (1994).

The proposed development does not comply with the Local Planning Authority's standards in respect of vehicle turning and, as a result, is in conflict with Policy TRN11B of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

The proposed development fails to make provision for affordable housing and financial contributions to offset the impacts of the development on local transport and leisure facilities. This is contrary to policies HSG2, TRN1, KEY3 and LEI3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (1998).

1. INTRODUCTION

The application site is formed by the rear gardens of nos. 3 - 25 Wolsey Road and is bounded by Abbotsmead Place to the south and School Lane (a narrow service road) to the west. The site lies adjacent to the commercial centre of Caversham with Waitrose and associated car parking land to the west. The Adult Community College and some temporary pre-fabricated buildings adjoin the site to its western boundary with School Lane.

The site, occupying an area of 0.35 hectares, slopes slightly to the south and is generally cleared of vegetation. There are a small number of dilapidated buildings on the north-western part of the site.

The site lies within the floodplain, mostly within Zone 2, however, the south-west corner of the site extends into Zone 3 as indicated by the Environment Agency on their Floodplain data.

Garden lengths of approximately 15 - 20 metres would be retained to the rear gardens of nos 3-27 Wolsey Road. The application proposes a density of approximately 163 dwellings per hectare.

The immediate area to the south and east is generally characterised by uniform housing design of predominantly two storey terraced and semi-detached dwellings. There are a number of three and four storey buildings to the north and north-west of the site including the Waitrose supermarket. Immediately to the north of the site is the Waterhouse Development, a complex of 10 apartments converted from the old Baptist church and Sunday school. The old church building is listed and this development ranges from single storey with loft to two storey with loft.

The site is located close to Church Street and the main commercial centre of Caversham. The proponent states that within 10 minutes walk of the site are a doctors' surgery, several dentists, Post Office, chemist and library, together with an extensive range of shops and other facilities with several bus stops in Church Street.

2. PLANNING HISTORY

97/01000/OUT - Erection of 3x3-bed houses with integral garages and 4x2-bed houses with parking spaces on land to R/O 17-27 Wolsey Road - Consent 26/08/99.

00/00148/OUT- Erection of 3x3-bed dwellings with integral garages on land to R/O 11-15 Wolsey Road - Consent 24/05/00.

01/00071/OUT - Erection of 4x3-bed dwellings with integral garages on land to R/O 3-27 Wolsey Road - Consent 24/04/02.

02/01061/REM - Approval of Reserved Matters for 97/01000/OUT - No decision or date available on record.

03/00443/REM - Approval of Reserved Matters from 00/00148/OUT for erection of 2x3-bed houses with integral garages and 1x2-bed house with parking space on land to R/O 11-15 Wolsey Road - Consent 10/06/03.

04/00529/VARIAT - Extension of time by two years for commencement of development permitted by 02/01061/REM - Withdrawn 31/03/05.

Officer comment: The above application (04/00529/VARIAT refers) was withdrawn following receipt by the Council of a letter from the applicant stating that works did commence on site pursuant to the approval of reserved matters under 02/01061/REM before the deadline of 19 November 2004.

3. PROPOSAL

The application proposes a building comprising of two blocks linked by a glazed stairwell effectively creating a single building incorporating 56 one and two bedroom flats for people aged 55 and over plus one flat for an on-site warden.

The proposal would provide for 15 dwellings, equating to a provision of 25%, to be subsidised by a discount to purchasers nominated by Reading Borough Council. It is proposed that these units would be sold at 75% of open market value. 6 of the subsidised units would be 2-bedroom.

The building would be sited along a north-south axis and proposed as two storey to the southern end, rising up to three storeys with a four storey element to the northern end of the site. In order to comply with current Environment Agency guidance for developments in the floodplain, the southern two storey element would be raised approximately 1 metre above the level of the ground where this grades up to account for the north to south slope of the site.

As proposed, the overall height to the southern elevation would be approximately 9 metres to the ridge with the northern elevation standing at approximately 13 metres to the ridge.

To the north elevation, the width of the building would be approximately 26 metres and would incorporate a centrally located protruding element extending out by approximately 2.4 metres at a width of approximately 7 metres and incorporating bay windows to the four floors. It is noted that the north elevation also contains 'Juliet' type balconies over the four floors.

The northern 4 storey element would be set back from the northern boundary by approximately 7 metres and would be slightly skewed to the axis of the main building. This element would also be slightly skewed to the western boundary with School Lane where the setback would vary from approximately 2 - 1.4 metres. The 4 storey element would be setback approximately 13 metres from the eastern boundary adjoining the properties along Wolsey Road.

The setback to School Road for the main two and three storey element would vary from approximately 5 - 6 metres and would be approximately 20 metres to the eastern boundary. The southern elevation would be setback approximately 3.6 metres to Abbotsmead Place.

The application proposes a total of 17 communal car parking spaces as well as provision for 6 'motorised buggy' parking spaces and 12 cycle stands.

The application proposes an access off of Abbotsmead Place and was submitted with a Flood Risk Assessment and Transport Statement.

4. CONSULTATIONS

The application was advertised in the local press on 24 May 2006 and a site notice was erected on 20 May 2006.

The applicant also undertook a public consultation exercise on the 17 February 2006 stating that of 325 local households, businesses and local community groups invited 58 residents attended. The applicant states that the response to the proposals were generally positive, but there were concerns over the height of some elements of the building. It is further stated that a design review has considerably reduced the height of the building as now proposed.

Neighbour consultation letters were sent to 1-7 & 9, 18, 19, 20 Gosbrook Road (odds & evens); 20-26 Gosbrook Road (evens); 1-17 Wolsey Road (odds & evens); 19-27 Wolsey Road (odds); The Arthur Legge Centre, Wolsey Road; 1-11 and 21-29 The Willows (odds & evens); 1-60 Abbotsmead Place (odds & evens); 19-63 Church Street (odds); Reflex Health & Fitness, Archway Road; Adult Community College, Archway Road; Flat 6 Archway House; 14 Brill Close; 5 Derby Road.

12 letters were received objecting to the proposal and summarised as follows:

- Appalled that not informed of development earlier than 18 May 2006. We have since gathered from neighbours that there was an earlier meeting where residents could express their concerns. *Officer comment: There appears to be some confusion here with the consultation exercise undertaken by the applicant.*
- The Council have just informed people of fortnightly refuse collections, this development will only increase waste and vermin infestation.
- The original two storey plans have altered to four at one end where our bedroom, garden and living room will now be directly overlooked.
- The sheer size of the development will block out a large amount of sun currently received in our home and garden.
- We do not believe 17 car parking spaces is sufficient for the current ridiculous proposal.
- Provision of a 'buggy park' will not solve the problem of parking - where do visitors park?
- This is an already congested area and together with other developments, Gosbrook Road and George Street for example, there will be no room left on the roads for all the cars.
- Understand the need for affordable housing and homes for the elderly but is it wise to provide this in an already congested area and should it come at the detriment of local residents?
- Unlike Priory Court, this development is some way from local facilities such as doctors surgeries and bus stops.
- Assuming 'elderly' is meant to indicate people above normal retirement age, a high rise block of flats appears an inappropriate form of development but will maximise profits for the developer.
- Given limited availability of additional parking in the area, the development must contain adequate off-street parking for each flat as well as additional parking for visitors and for doctors etc who might be called.
- I have previously written to Cllr Steve Waite regarding the danger to pedestrians crossing Abbotsmead Place and the need for adequate signage advising of the potential dangers. This potential danger remains and will be exacerbated by the proposed development.
- There is an existing footpath that leads from the river up to Abbotsmead place and this is constantly used by pedestrians including the elderly and mothers with prams, adequate signage must be put in place.
- Objection on behalf of Gosbrook Road Association where the properties forming this association are sited directly to the north of the proposed development.
- The 4 storey element would directly affect the above properties in terms of loss of light and overlooking from 34 north facing windows.
- Apartments 6 & 7 of the above properties would be most affected in terms of loss of light to habitable rooms given height of the proposal and the travel of the sun.
- Concern that an existing party wall and fence to the northern boundary should be retained intact together with existing vegetation.

- The original plans for 10 houses on the site did not cause me any concerns.
- There are already disputes over parking in the area which have, at times, turned violent when the clampers are in operation.
- The proposal is overly dominant in relation to existing houses and is not in keeping with the existing scale and density of the surrounding environment.
- The new buildings would be sited close to the adjacent College premises and any building works would cause considerable disruption unless done out of term time.
- Building in the floodplain is surely irresponsible.
- Access to the development is via a mainly single track road and within a few hundred yards of the local primary school presenting issues of congestion and childrens safety.
- I must inform you that I have not been invited to any public meeting and as the owner of No. 5 Gosbrook Road I consider I should have been.
- The proposed development would devalue my property.
- The proposed density is profiteering at its highest level - the more flats the more profits.
- There should be a guarantee that the flats will be occupied by 'over 55's' at all times and not for short term lets.
- If a footpath is to be provided will the road still be of an adequate width for vehicles.
- Street lighting should be upgraded along School Lane.
- The proposal has not altered significantly to that which we objected previously. 4 storeys is too high and the development should relate in scale more to the adjacent houses than the commercial developments.
- Existing infrastructure cannot cope at the moment.

Housing Development

No comments have been received in relation to the provision of affordable housing at the time of writing and members will be updated verbally at your meeting on comments received.

Building Control

The Council's Building Control section have no objections subject to an Informative notifying the applicant that Building Control approval is required.

Leisure Services

Have requested contributions as below:

£1,500 per unit = £85,500.00 towards recreational open space improvements locally.

Further to the above, it is noted that a public right of way identified on the planning application form as running adjacent to the site appears to be an adopted highway (School Lane) and therefore there are no comments in respect of this highway.

Archaeological Consultant

The above application is proposed in an area which has indicated the potential for the survival of archaeological remains. There are a number of references on the Berkshire SMR including a probable ring ditch (prehistoric enclosure?) at the recreation ground off Westfield Road and the site of the medieval chapel of St Anne off the northeast corner of Caversham Bridge. Both of these sites are located within approximately 250 metres of the proposal site. Additional findspots are also indicated showing activity from the prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval

periods. The site's proximity to Caversham Bridge indicates some potential on its own merit. Given these issues and the reasonable size of the development in relation to the approximate 0.32 ha site, it is recommended that the proposal be subject to an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching which can be secured by condition as it is not reasonably expected that any remains present will be of such significance as to warrant preservation in situ.

Planning Section Tree Advisor

Outbuildings to be removed should be checked for the presence of bats.

A condition survey and schedule of works is required for the existing trees on the site. All retained trees should be protected to BS5837:2005.

Landscape principles based on the applicant's submitted details to date are required prior to approval of the application to ensure landscape proposals can be realized. A strategic landscape drawing is described in the planning and design statement, but nothing has been submitted.

The applicant should consider incorporating vertical landscaping into the design to allow residents to care for their own window boxes as well as possibly tend small areas within the grounds.

The applicant should also consider incorporating a wildlife pond into one of the communal areas in the scheme, as well as bat and bird boxes, which could be fixed to the building.

Maintenance/aftercare and management details are required.

Officer comment: Revised details have been submitted pursuant to the above and are currently being assessed by the Councils Tree Officer. Members will be updated verbally at your meeting on further comments received.

Environmental Health

Identified Environmental Protection issues relevant to Planning:

- Noise during demolition/construction
- Air Quality (Construction Site Dust)
- Contaminated Land
- Lighting

Noise

There are concerns about noise from the construction works being carried out on the site, disturbing the surrounding businesses/residents, therefore a restriction on hours is recommended.

Dust

The developer should ensure that a scheme/procedure for controlling dust on and emanating from the site during the demolition and construction phases.

Lighting

Due to light becoming a statutory nuisance (April 2006), any proposed lighting scheme should be approved by the Environmental Protection Team.

Contaminated Land

Due to the fact that the site is close to a Land Fill Buffer Zone and also close to the site of some former Engineering Works, there is a potential for the land to be

contaminated. Therefore it is recommended that further investigative works be carried out.

Recommended Conditions if approved

- Limit on hours of construction - standard hours
- Control of Construction Site Noise
- Construction Site Dust
- Lighting to be approved
- Contaminated Land
 1. Contaminated Land - Desk Top Study and Site Investigation
 2. Contaminated Land - Remediation Measures
 3. Contaminated Land - Closure Report
- Landfill gas - scheme to be submitted

Council's Access Officer

No comments received at time of writing. Members will be updated verbally at your meeting on comments received.

Environment Agency

No comments received at time of writing. Members will be updated verbally at your meeting on comments received.

Fire Services

No comments received at time of writing. Members will be updated verbally at your meeting on comments received.

Royal Berkshire Ambulance Trust

No comments received at time of writing. Members will be updated verbally at your meeting on comments received.

Caversham and Districts Residents Association

It is suggested that the land formed part of the riverside meadows and has only since been used as allotments during the second world war. It therefore should be considered as undeveloped land within the floodplain.

We are concerned with the height and particularly the four storey element which appears to rise above the existing buildings thus changing the character of the area.

Car parking provision seems inadequate and there is concern with overflow parking on the surrounding streets.

Access through Wolsey Road will increase congestion and restrictions should be placed on the times construction traffic can access the site.

GP provision in Caversham is already limited and 57 units of sheltered housing would increase the demand.

5. COMMENTS FROM TRANSPORT STRATEGY

This development has been subject to a pre-application consultation in May 2006.

The application site is situated in a sustainable location, immediately adjacent to central Caversham and Waitrose car park. It is therefore close to local shops and amenities and benefits from a frequent bus service to and from Reading town centre. A public car park is available in nearby Chester Street.

This application proposes the erection of 57 1-bed units of sheltered accommodation for over 55's. Proposals are to provide a total of 17 car parking spaces and 6 electric buggy spaces which has been previously agreed and considered acceptable for the location of this development.

The application is supported by a Transport Assessment which indicates that the proposed scheme uses the same form and access position as the previously approved scheme (para 3.2). However, as it is intended that the access will remain private and the anticipated traffic generation of such development is expected to be low, a dropped kerb crossover access would be preferred.

On matters of detail, the following points should be addressed;

- It has previously been stated that an on-site turning area should be provided so that all vehicles can enter and leave the site in forward gear including delivery vehicles. The proposed layout could not accommodate these requirements.
- The application indicates that 12 cycle storages spaces are proposed. However the plans I have received are not clear enough to determine whether these provisions are acceptable.

In respect of off-site works, independent discussions have taken place with the Council's Senior Highways Engineer with reference to pedestrian improvements in the vicinity of their site, including streetlighting upgrading. The applicant is required to enter into a S278 agreement with respect to works affecting the existing highway as approved by the Council's Senior Highways Engineer (drawing numbers 205.2064.302 Rev.C and 205.2064.303).

Suggested reasons for refusal if refused

The proposed development does not comply with the Local Planning Authority's standards in respect of vehicle turning and, as a result, is in conflict with Policy TRN11B of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

S.106 heads of terms

To deposit a contribution with the council towards RUAP before occupation of the dwelling. The transport contribution would be 57 units x £1,500 = £85,500 according to the SPG adopted by Reading Borough Council in September 2004.

Officer comment: Revised details have been submitted pursuant to the above and are currently being assessed by the Councils Transport Section. Members will be updated verbally at your meeting on further comments received.

6. ACCESS FOR THE DISABLED

The proposal is for occupation by 'over 55's and would be required to conform to Part M of the Building Regulations.

7. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The site makes use of previously developed land within the urban area and, as residential back garden, is defined as 'brownfield' land.

Furthermore, the site is located close to shops and community facilities and is within close proximity to public transport facilities providing access to the town centre.

8. APPRAISAL

The application is assessed against Policy HSG9 (Location of Residential Development), HSG5 (Residential Design Standards), HSG2 (Affordable Housing), CUD14 (Standards of Design in Development), KEY3 (The Role of Development in Improving the Town), TRN1 (A Balanced Transport Strategy), TRN11A (Location of Development), TRN12 (Car Parking) and LEI3 (The Provision and Improvement of Leisure and Recreation Facilities),

Principle of Development

PPG3 (Housing) encourages making best use of land to provide for housing demands whilst maintaining the character of the area. It encourages a greater intensity of development in areas with good accessibility to public transport and advises that Local Planning Authorities should encourage high quality design.

The site has an area of approximately 0.35 hectares and the application proposes a density of approximately 163 dwellings per hectare. While the site may be in an accessible and sustainable location such a density would be inappropriate if the proposal was unacceptable with respect to the existing character of the area and the amenities of adjoining neighbours.

The principle of residential development on the site has been set with the extant consents for ten houses.

The application proposes to provide 15 subsidised housing units equating to a provision of 25%. Policy HSG2 (Affordable Housing) states that the Council will seek to secure affordable housing wherever possible. The Council's adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance note on Planning Obligations states that the Council will generally seek 50% of the dwelling provision on all housing sites in the form of affordable housing.

The applicant claims that the 25% proposed is based on negotiations with the Council's Property Development Officer but has not submitted any justification for the deficiency and has not proposed any off-site provision or commuted sums as part of the application.

Comments from the Housing officer are not available at the time of writing and members will be updated verbally on comments received in respect of this.

However, the proposed provision clearly falls short of the requirements of the SPG and it is considered reasonable that this would form a reason for refusal of the application.

Impact on the Character of the Area

Policy HSG 5 of the Local Plan lists criteria that residential development will be expected to meet; these include that the character, density and design of the proposals will not normally be permitted if they would have a detrimental impact on the physical and visual character and quality of the surrounding area. Policy CUD 14 of the plan again requires development to be compatible with the scale and character of the surrounding area. Policy HSG9 states, *inter alia*, that development should not prohibit the development of adjoining land. PPG3 (Housing) encourages more efficient use of land and promotes good design.

The area to the south and east of the application site is of a scale distinctly 2 storey residential. There are a number of commercial premises along Wolsey Road, however, these also tend to be single to 2 storey.

The applicant argues that the site forms a transition between that residential scale and the more commercial four storey scale to the north-west and west of the site and also points to the 4 storey residential development to the western end of Abbotsmead Place adjacent to the St. Martins Centre and the Telephone Exchange.

The application under consideration here proposes a long and unbroken mass of building at approximately 52 metres in length to the southern 2 and 3 storey element and a further 14 metres of four storey building linked by a glazed stairwell. It is considered that the scale and mass of the building should relate more to the residential scale of the surrounding area where, although sited some 40 metres from the rear of nos.11-27 Wolsey Close, the building would be sited only approximately 20 metres from the adjacent houses on Willow Close to the south and approximately 10 metres from the Waterhouse Buildings immediately to the north.

The four storey residential development to the western end of Abbotsmead Place consists of separate discreet pavilion blocks unlike the proposal's continuous building mass and are somewhat distant from the application site. The higher commercial buildings to the north and north-west are considered to relate more to the Gosbrook Road/Church Street frontage and the car park. The application site is set back some distance from the car park and the lower Adult College intervenes.

Given the above, it is considered that the proposal should relate more to the residential scale to the south and east of the site rather than the commercial scale to the north and north-east.

As proposed it is considered that the development would be detrimental to the physical and visual character of the area due to its height and massing in relation to adjacent residential properties.

The applicant has submitted sections through the site as well as site layout showing the previously approved and extant schemes in relation to that proposed here. The extant scheme allows for 2-2 ½ storeys with accommodation contained within the roof space. It is considered that the extant consent would sit more comfortably within the wider area due its lower height and its general layout where it has a more staggered building line and much greater setbacks to the boundaries.

Design/site layout

Planning Policy Guidance 3: Housing (PPG3), advises, *inter alia*, that design should be influenced by a sites wider surroundings not just the immediate neighbouring buildings.

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1) states that good design ensures attractive usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development. It is further stated that good design is indivisible from good planning and that design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted.

In the submitted design statement, the applicant argues that the four storey buildings to the north and north-west of the site contain a range of commercial uses with ceiling heights considerably greater than for residential buildings and that, as a result, they are equivalent to five storey residential buildings. In addition to this, the applicant argues that these buildings do not have an active frontage and do not create a positive enclosure to the adjacent car park.

The building is considered to be reasonably well articulated to the western and eastern elevations with a series of gables, balconies and bay windows which help to soften the unbroken mass of this length of wall. The applicant states that, on the western elevation,

'the vertical subdivision and roof profile create the appearance of a terrace of houses or street that front onto School Lane. The flats on this elevation have balconies that reinforce this sense of a street and also provide an active frontage'.

However, the 4 storey element to the north is considered to appear particularly dominant in relation to the southern three storey section and within the immediate context. Also the 2 ½ storey element at the southern end is considered to be weak and lacking in 'presence' by comparison and lacks adequate fenestration facing Abbotsmead Place. Abbotsmead Place provides access to the site and should be considered as an important elevation in terms of the character and quality of the area and the appearance of the building. The treatment proposed to the southern elevation is considered contrary to the advice given in PPS1 with respect to good design and improving the overall quality and character of the area.

While the proponent states that the proposal is designed to form a transition from the residential to the commercial scale within the area, it could be argued that the transition should be on an east to west axis rather than south to north. In this way, it may be that the adjacent site to the west, currently occupied by the Adult College and a number of temporary buildings, would be more appropriate for a four storey building. The south to north transition as one long building mass would appear contrived and result in an unbalanced building which seems to fall between 'two stools'.

The applicant has submitted a plan indicating how this land to the west could be developed where this would provide for parking and open space adjacent to School Lane so as to provide separation from the development on the subject site.

This is not being assessed here and neither is the proposition that the adjacent site could form the 4 storey transition. However, it is considered reasonable to say here that the development proposed is sited too close to the western boundary and would be of excessive bulk and mass in relation to the existing area context and would be inappropriate in its current form.

The proponent argues that the site is appropriate for maximising heights and densities and that other issues, such as its sustainable location and the potential to release other family sized homes in the Borough, should carry significant weight in the decision making process.

While this is accepted, it is not considered sufficient justification where the development is considered to be of excessive height, bulk and massing and would be detrimental to the physical and visual character of the area. While, as advised in PPG3, the sites wider surroundings should be considered, PPS1 advises that development which is inappropriate in its context should not be accepted. In this regard, it is considered here that the proposed development is inappropriate in its context.

The proposed mix of housing includes 1 and 2 bedroom apartments with communal parking provided to the eastern boundary behind a 3 metre wide buffer strip to the adjoining properties along Wolsey Road. The parking area is considered to be

reasonably softened by proposed planting and is kept to a minimum with the provision of only 17 parking spaces.

Amenities of surrounding residents

Local Plan Policies HSG5 and HSG9 state that residential proposals should not be permitted if they have a detrimental impact on the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

In terms of the privacy of surrounding residents the back to back distances of the main 3 storey section to the rear of properties along Wolsey Road would be approximately 40 metres. This distance is reduced, however, to approximately 28 metres from the 4 storey section to the rear of nos. 3 and 5 Wolsey Road and to approximately 10 metres to the rear of the Waterhouse Building immediately to the north.

The Waterhouse building is arranged around a courtyard parking area with the building extending to within approximately 2metres of the northern boundary of the subject site. There are a number of windows at ground floor level and within the roof space to this building which could be affected by overlooking from the proposed development. While existing vegetation and new planting to the common boundary may provide some screening, it is considered that the limited setback of the 4 storey section with the views afforded by the 'Juliet' type balconies would be unacceptable in terms of overlooking to the houses immediately to the north of the site.

The applicant argues that on the eastern elevation 'the fenestration is defined by a series of gables with bay windows that help discourage overlooking of the distant properties in Wolsey Road'.

While this may be acceptable with respect to nos. 7-27 Wolsey Road, notwithstanding the proposed screen planting along the eastern boundary, the proposed 4 storey section has the potential to afford views into private external and internal amenity areas to the rear of nos. 3 & 5 Wolsey Road and is considered to be detrimental to the privacy of the residents of those houses.

Given the height and orientation of the proposed development, together with its proximity to some neighbouring properties, it is considered that there may be the potential for the building to cause an unacceptable degree of overshadowing to those properties.

The applicant has been requested to submit a shading assessment indicating the level of shadowing from the proposed development. However, this has not been submitted at the time of writing and members will be updated verbally at your meeting with respect to this.

Due to its height and massing, however, the proposed building, particularly to the northern 4 storey section, is considered to be visually intrusive and overbearing on adjacent properties and detrimental to the outlook of those properties.

Amenities of prospective residents

There is concern that the provision of amenity space falls below the standard set in the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance note 'Space Around Dwellings' where the minimum space requirements for 1 & 2-bed flats is 25m². Including the proposed balconies the usable amenity space is calculated as approximately 20m² per flat.

The above SPG states that where most flat developments provide communal or shared open space it is particularly important that it is usable space which is fully accessible, private and of a pleasant aspect.

There is concern that the space provided to the western side of the 3 storey section, including the proposed balconies and the space provided to the front of the residents lounge, would not be sufficiently private especially given the restricted width of this space due to the close proximity of the building to School Lane. The restricted width of this space and close proximity to the boundary would also result in a poor outlook from the flats to the detriment of residential amenity of prospective occupiers. Furthermore, it is considered that the area of space proposed to the north of the 4 storey section would be unduly shaded by the building itself for much of the day.

This is considered to be representative of an over-development of the site and would not comply with the Council's supplementary planning guidance 'Space Around Dwellings'

Transport/parking

The Council's Transport section are satisfied that the proposed access is acceptable and, if approved, the proponent would be required to enter into a S278 Agreement with respect to works affecting the existing highway.

Notwithstanding that, however, there is an objection in respect of vehicle turning on site and this would form a reason for refusal of the application. Revised plans have been received pursuant to this concern, which are currently being assessed by Transport, however, at the time of writing the application is considered unacceptable on Highways grounds.

Members will be updated verbally at your meeting with respect to this.

Provision in relation to local infrastructure

Transport:

The applicant has indicated a willingness to provide a contribution to local services and infrastructure. A financial contribution of £85,500.00 to the Reading Urban Area Package, to offset the impact of the additional dwellings on transport infrastructure in the area has been requested but no formal agreement has yet been entered into.

Leisure:

As above, the applicant has informally agreed to make a contribution of £85,500.00 towards the improvement of recreational open space in the local area but no formal agreement has yet been entered into.

9. CONCLUSION

It is considered that, by virtue of its height, bulk and massing in relation to adjacent residential development the proposal would be unduly prominent and would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area.

The proposal is assessed as unacceptable with respect to overlooking into private internal and external amenity areas of adjacent properties and would cause undue overshadowing to those properties. Furthermore, due to its height and massing and close proximity to boundaries, the proposed building, particularly to the northern four storey section, is considered to be visually intrusive and overbearing on adjacent properties and detrimental to the outlook of those properties.

The proposal does not comply with the Council's standards with respect to space around dwellings where this is considered indicative of an over-development of the site to the detriment of the amenities of prospective residents and the character of the area.

The proposal does not comply with the Local Planning Authority's standards in respect of vehicle turning and the proponent has failed to make reasonable contributions in relation to affordable housing and local infrastructure.

For the above reasons, it is assessed that the application should be refused.

Plans: (23885/A-02-001 G, 02-002 A, 03-001 D, 03/002 D, 03-003 D, 03-004 D, 03-005 D, 05-001 G, 05-002 F, 05-003 A).

Case Officer: Patrick Haran