

18/06705/FUL

Consultations and Notification Responses

Ward Councillor Preliminary Comments:

Councillor Marten Clarke – I understand that you are minded to refuse the application to redevelop this site for 10 residential units. Would you please confirm if this is the case and set out the reasons for so doing. If it is easier for you to call me please do so on the number below.

If minded to refuse please bring to committee for determination.

Parish/Town Council Comments/Internal and External Consultees

High Wycombe Town Unparished

County Highway Authority

Comments: You may be aware that the Highway Authority has historically provided comments on two separate residential redevelopment schemes for this site (08/05885/FUL and 08/07650/FUL). In both cases this Authority did not object subject to conditions.

Upon reviewing the current proposals, I note that there are 11(no) spaces to be contained within the site. When reviewing the proposed level of habitable accommodation (i.e. less than four habitable rooms per unit) against the standards contained within the County Council's Buckinghamshire Countywide Parking Guidance policy document, the optimum provision for the quantum of development proposed would be one space per flat.

Even in the event that the parking requirement was taken by the amount of bedrooms, the parking survey submitted (carried out in accordance with the Lambeth Methodology) demonstrates that there is sufficient on-street capacity available during times of peak residential demand (i.e. late night/early hours of the morning). Ergo I am satisfied with the featured level of parking provision for this development.

I also note that the vehicle access can achieve the requisite visibility splays commensurate with the likely speeds on Rosebery Avenue. The width is relatively restrictive but, in consideration that the adjoining highway is an unclassified residential street and that the access has a relatively short length between Rosebery Avenue and the rear parking area, it should be sufficient to serve the development without detriment to highway safety and convenience of use.

Mindful of these comments, I do not have any objections to this application with regard to highway issues subject to conditions.

Control of Pollution Environmental Health

Comments: No objection.

Conservation Officer Spatial Planning

Comments:

Conclusion to the advice: The loss of a locally listed building is contrary to policy HE5 of the Wycombe Local Plan, policy CS19 of the Core Strategy, CP11 of the emerging local plan and advice in the NPPF.

Issues:

- Total demolition of a locally listed building
- Proposed redevelopment is not locally distinctive

Background:

The application site comprises a former furniture factory, yard and workshop. The site has evolved in phases; the two storey rear wing was built before 1925 adjacent to the open yard, and the three storey brick building fronting Rosebery Avenue between 1925 and 1934. The yard has since been covered and there are later accretions and alterations. By virtue of its use, height and appearance, it is a prominent building in a street that is otherwise developed with semi-detached housing.

The three storey block and rear workshop were added to the local list (the single storey element to the side covering the former yard is not of interest) because the factory is a locally distinctive building of character, a typical example of High Wycombe's Industrial furniture heritage, one of only a few remaining, and the association with Frank Hudson to High Wycombe. It also has communal and social value as an employer within High Wycombe.

The building is therefore a non-designated Heritage Asset which is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Significance:

Historic Interest: The furniture industry has been synonymous with the economic development of High Wycombe since the eighteenth century. The plentiful Beech woods that lined the sides of the valley provided an ideal source of wood for chair manufacture, and the River Wye which had in earlier times provided the power for milling was now used to power the first sawmills. These factors allowed Wycombe to quickly expand into a major furniture manufacturing town, its chairs exported all over the world. The industry moved from small workshops to modern factories in the last decades of Queen Victoria's reign and many of these remained in production until after the Second World War. By 1925 the area had taken on the basic form that is evident today. The development of the factory site is indicative of how the factories in the Wycombe area developed as the furniture trade prospered. Beginning as a modest workshop with a large yard in the early twentieth century, the factory site underwent additions and expansions, including the three storey building at the front of the site in the 1920s and 30s.

The factory has been associated with the furniture industry since its construction. Frank Hudson & Son, one of the leading chair and furniture makers in the twentieth century, and locally renown as the carver of the Red Lion in High Street, occupied the premises from 1964-66 until 2018.

Architectural Interest: The utilitarian building is typical of many of the buildings associated with the town's furniture industry in that it was constructed using cheap materials and functional form with few architectural pretensions. The smooth textured, pinkie-red common fletton facing brick was massively used in general building in the twentieth century. The bricks' ready availability and plain appearance meant it was used for multi-purpose internal and external applications as it can be painted, rendered easily, used for patching in or refurbishment works. The rear workshop is of traditional earlier form, and the boarded timber upper storey and trusses remain. It adjoins what would have been its large yard for the storage of timber. The three storey block is characterful and has large metal framed windows to optimise natural light. The central loading bay survives.

Communal Interest: The premises provided employment to local works within the furniture industry, a significant employer within the town and important to the town's prosperity.

Policy

The building was added to Wycombe District Council's List of buildings of local architectural or historic

interest on 28 June 2019 in response to the threat of demolition. The local list criteria are incorporated in the Wycombe Local Plan. In summary, a building / feature should meet some or all of the following criteria to be included on the Local List:

- (i) Be substantially unaltered and retain the majority of its original features;
- (ii) Be of good architectural quality or an example of a particular local building type;
- (iii) Play a significant role in the streetscape of a town or village;
- (iv) Be significant in the history of the area or be by an architect or designer of local note, such as Arthur Vernon of High Wycombe; or relate to the industrial heritage of the High Wycombe furniture industry.

The building was previously considered for local listing in 2012, but designation was not confirmed at that time because it was still in operational use and objections were received from the owners. The application now proposes the demolition of the entire site. In the several years that have passed since that original assessment a number of other buildings representative of High Wycombe's furniture industry have been demolished and it is a rare survival of an increasingly diminishing building type.

While designation does not confer statutory protection, the building's inclusion on the local list means that it should be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset and as such its significance is a material consideration in the determination of any application.

Para 184 NPPF 2018 states that Heritage Assets 'are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations'.

The applicant's heritage statement assesses the significance of the site as having 'some, limited heritage interest, primarily historical and to a much lesser degree architectural.... – with no archaeological or aesthetic interest'. It points to Historic England declining to list the building at national level as confirmation that it is not of architectural significance. This somewhat misses the point as buildings associated with the furniture industry were generally characterised by their rudimentary, utilitarian appearance. It is accepted that there have been alterations to the building. While the original roof covering was slate, it has now been altered to profiled metal sheeting but the essential form and appearance of the building remains substantially intact. Nevertheless, the factory is of significance to a town where the chair making industry had such a profound impact on its economic and social welfare and it continues to positively contribute to the historic environment of this part of High Wycombe.

Para 192 requires local planning authorities to take into account:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

In relation to a) and b), the condition of the building is such that it appears capable of conversion and re-use and no information has been submitted to suggest otherwise.

In regards to c) the site's redevelopment would result in the total loss of the locally listed building. The demolition of the factory would impoverish the historic environment within High Wycombe contrary to policies HE5 and CS19.

The factory is a local landmark building that stands out from the prevailing character of the street which is largely domestic-scale detached, semi-detached and terraced properties. The proposed replacement comprises a block of flats that does not reflect the scale, footprint or disposition of the heritage asset on site. Furthermore, the apartment block, which is accessed from a single entrance and is a full three stories in height and with a flat roof across the entire site frontage, would be of a different scale and conspicuously bulkier than the existing built form and at odds with the street scene. It is acknowledged that the proposed development is very similar to 2 other blocks of flats in the area. However, planning policies and advice have evolved since those blocks were built and it is not thought that a further block is necessarily of the landmark design quality that would justify the departure from the prevailing character. Consequently, the proposed replacement would also fail to reinforce local distinctiveness contrary to policy CS19 of the core strategy.

Planning Balance

In accordance with Para 197, a balanced judgement is required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. In appeal decisions concerning locally listed building, Inspectors will generally investigate the significance of the non-designated heritage asset; whether the building is capable of having a viable use in the future; and whether any public benefits or other considerations outweigh the loss of the building. It is recommended that this approach is adopted in determination of this application.

Should the public benefits of the proposal be considered to outweigh the harm arising from the demolition of the non-designated asset, Para 198 states that LPAs should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred. If the case officer is minded to approve the application, it is recommended that conditions are attached for the recording of the building and that demolition should not take place until a contract has been placed for the construction of the development.

Buckinghamshire County Council (Major SuDS)

Comments: The LLFA has no objection to the proposed development subject to the conditions.

The proposed surface water drainage scheme for this development relies on infiltration, via a soakaway. Falling head tests were completed in March 2018, rates of between 9.52×10^{-6} m/s and 1.43×10^{-4} m/s were recorded, indicating that infiltration is feasible on site. Due to site constraints the falling head tests could not be completed in the location of the proposed soakaway, therefore after demolition of the existing building we will require infiltration rate testing (in accordance with BRE 365) in the location of the proposed soakaway.

Groundwater mapping from Jeremy Benn Associates (JBA) show that groundwater levels on site are between 0.5 and 5m below ground level. The applicant must demonstrate a 1m freeboard between the base of the soakaway and the highest ground water level, by completing groundwater monitoring during the winter (November – March). If infiltration is found to be unfeasible the applicant will be required to investigate an alternative means of surface water disposal which follows the surface water drainage hierarchy.

Due to the slope of the site permeable paving is not suitable on site; however a reinforced grass will be used in the parking bays.

To provide amenity and biodiversity benefits to the proposed development we suggest that the applicant considers a green roof on the cycle store as plans show it to be flat. We also suggest rain gardens, rainwater downpipes can be disconnected from the main system and directed to depressions in the ground and allowed to infiltrate. Further information regarding rain gardens can be found within the UK Rain Garden Guide.

Bucks CC Archaeology:

The production of furniture was an important industry in High Wycombe and the Chilterns and furniture factories and former factories are worth recording prior to demolition and/or significant change. If planning permission is granted for this development then it is likely to harm a heritage asset's significance so a condition should be applied to require the developer to secure appropriate investigation, recording, publication and archiving of the results in conformity with NPPF paragraph 141. With reference to the NPPF we therefore recommend that, based on the advice in DOE Circular 11/95, any consent granted for this development should be subject to a condition to thoroughly investigate and record the building.

Representations

Amenity Societies

High Wycombe Society: We object to this planning application because the proposed new building would be out of keeping with its surroundings in terms of both design and scale, contrary to Policy G3 (General Design Policy) of the current saved Local Plan and Policy DM35 (Place making and Design Quality) in the evolving new Local Plan. This is a predominantly residential area made up primarily of traditional two-storey semidetached houses. At three storeys high and more than the width of two pairs of semi-detached houses, the proposed structure would dwarf everything else on the road. The featureless modern flat-roof design would also clash with its surroundings.

Letters have been received from 25 parties objecting to the proposal:

- Existing building has character and needs to be retained.
- The proposed building is of no architectural value.
- The existing building needs to be retained and converted.
- Proposal is too tall- will impact on light serving Riverlock Court to the rear and create shadow on the gardens.
- Industrial/ commercial sites should remain as such.
- The modern design will not fit in with the existing architecture, so it will be an eyesore.
- Traffic and pollution levels during construction will be horrendous.
- Would overlook neighbouring gardens and property.
- The proposal has a shortfall of 8 parking spaces when compared with requirements set out by the Wycombe District Council. This will dramatically add to the already minimal parking availability in the street.
- Traffic and Parking will be affected in the Pinions area, where this is already a problem.
- The large block would be far from in keeping and at the proposed size would dominate the road and be incongruous.
- The Flats at Pinions Court and Rivercourt when built did, at least, replace legacy eyesore buildings, but they dominate that corner of Pinions and Spring Gardens. To add a third in that triangle would entirely dominate and dwarf the surrounding houses.
- May lead too many flats in area.
- Would impact on the outlook and view for neighbours. Appear overbearing.