

4.1 – SE/13/02683/FUL Date expired 19 November 2013

PROPOSAL: Change of use of ground floor offices to showroom and alterations to fenestration to include a glazed opening to west/east elevation, glazed openings to south elevation, new entrance to north elevation with wheelchair ramp access and three new roof lights.

LOCATION: Darenth House, 60 High Street, Otford

WARD(S): Otford & Shoreham

ITEM FOR DECISION

Councillor Lowe has referred the application to Development Control Committee as it is considered that the development would detract from the character and appearance of the area, increased vehicular traffic raising highway safety concerns and the alterations to the fenestration would harm the amenities of residential occupants opposite the site.

RECOMMENDATION: That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:-

1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

In pursuance of section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2) No development shall be carried out on the land until all door and window details, at a scale of not less than 1:20 have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Council. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

To ensure that the appearance of the development is in harmony with the existing character of the building and surrounding area as supported by Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

3) The ground floor of the premises shall be used for a showroom only and only to be occupied by the applicant. The ground floor of the premises hereby permitted shall not be used for any other purposes in the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, (or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order).

In order that any other proposal for the use of the premises can be considered on its individual merits having regard to the impact of any additional traffic generation and the amenity of residents and the area as supported by Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

4) The use hereby permitted shall only be carried on between the hours of 0730hrs and 1730hrs Monday to Saturday and not on Sundays and Bank/Public Holidays.

To safeguard the amenity of the area as supported by Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

5) Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General

Permitted Development) Order 1995, no development shall be carried out within Classes F, G, J Part 3 of Schedule 2 of that Order (or any Order revoking and re-enacting that Order), without prior approval of the Local Planning Authority.

To safeguard the amenity of the area as supported by Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

6) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 1 unnumbered 1:1250 location plan and dwg no: DHA/9802/03/A

For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

Note to Applicant

In accordance with paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals. SDC works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner, by;

- Offering a duty officer service to provide initial planning advice,
- Providing a pre-application advice service,
- When appropriate, updating applicants/agents of any small scale issues that may arise in the processing of their application,
- Where possible and appropriate suggesting solutions to secure a successful outcome,
- Allowing applicants to keep up to date with their application and viewing all consultees comments on line (www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/environment/planning/planning_services_online/654.asp),
- By providing a regular forum for planning agents,
- Working in line with the NPPF to encourage developments that improve the improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area,
- Providing easy on line access to planning policies and guidance, and
- Encouraging them to seek professional advice whenever appropriate.

In this instance the applicant/agent:

- 1) Was updated on the progress of the planning application.

Description of Proposal

- 1 This proposal involves the change of use of the existing office building at ground level only to form showroom.
- 2 The proposed change of use will retain the overall commercial use of the site. Approximately 140m² of floor space will be used as a showroom and the remaining floor area will be made up of circulation space, kitchen and toilet facilities.
- 3 The change of use will involve alteration to the existing five windows in the southern elevation of the building that fronts on to Otford High Street. The

existing window openings will be replaced with full glazed openings which will be formed of timber frames.

- 4 Three rooflights are also proposed to be added to the northern roof slope of the building as well as a 1:10 gradient wheel chair access ramp, at ground level to the northern elevation of the building.
- 5 No additional floor space is being created, as a result of the proposal.

Description of Site

- 6 The application site relates to a two storey building known as Darenth House, located on to the northern side of Otford High Street. The building itself was constructed in the 1970s and has a mansard roof that provides office accommodation over two floors. To the rear of Darenth House is Otford Builders Merchants that is a three storey building that accommodates a warehouse, sales counter and offices. Further to the north of the Merchants Buildings is land that forms an ancillary yard area. Land between Darenth House and the Merchants buildings and yard is a turning area for vehicles and vehicular parking provision for 36 cars, for both Darenth House and the Builders Merchants.
- 7 Currently Darenth House is vacant and has a lawful B1(a) office use.
- 8 Vehicular access into the site can be gained from an existing access from Otford High Street. Bus stops are located on the High Street in front of the Library and a station approximately 800m to the east of the site.
- 9 The building is situated upon a ground level that is approximately 1-2m higher than the roadside. To the west of the site is The Horns Public House and opposite, 59 and 61 High Street of which all are Grade II Listed Buildings.
- 10 The site is within the designated Otford Conservation Area and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Constraints

- 11 Area of Special Advertisement Control
- 12 Otford High Street Conservation Area
- 13 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Policies

Sevenoaks District Local Plan

- 14 Policies – EN1 and VP1

Sevenoaks Core Strategy

- 15 Policies - SP1, SP8, L07

Other:

- 16 National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 14, 23, 24, 25, 28, 115, 131, 132, 133
- 17 Otford Village Design Statement 2008 and Otford Parish Plan 2012
- 18 SDC Otford Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2010

Planning History

- 19 76/01557 - Demolition of buildings erection of two storey administration block and single storey storage building incorporating workshop and covered loading bay construction of car park and erection of 2.5 metre high boundary fencing – GRANTED

Consultations

SDC Conservation Officer

- 20 No objection raised but the glazing frames should be timber.

Parish / Town Council

- 21 Otford Parish Council –Raises objections on the following grounds:
 - The changes to fenestration will further detract from this position and are not in character with the adjoining buildings;
 - The size of the windows and the lighting within will impact adversely on the amenities of the houses opposite.

Representations

- 22 4 neighbour representations received, objecting on the following grounds:
 - Increased traffic generation
 - Increased noise and disturbance
 - Overlooked
 - Design not in keeping
 - Highway safety concerns
 - Increased light pollution
- 13 1 rebuttal statement received by the applicant's agent.

Chief Planning Officer's Appraisal

- 14 The main considerations of this application are:
 - Principle of the development;
 - Impact upon the character and appearance on the street scene;
 - Impact upon the existing residential amenity;

- Highways.

Principle of the development

- 15 The proposal involves the change of use of the existing ground floor (vacant) B1(a) office unit to a bathroom showroom for use of Otford Builders Merchants.
- 16 Policy SP8 of the Core Strategy states that sustainable development of the District's economy will be supported through the retention, intensification and regeneration of existing business areas. Policy L07 supports the retention and regeneration of suitable employment sites in rural settlements.
- 17 Being located within existing village centre, the site is home to a mix of uses, from which a number of local businesses operate. The addition of a showroom is considered entirely appropriate, particularly given that the conversion works to the building will be minimal and that the site is indeed vacant.
- 18 Paragraph 24 of the NPPF ensures that main town centre uses, should be located within town centres and should apply a sequential test if a site/premises cannot be found within a town centre location. No sequential test has been submitted in this regard; however paragraph 25 of the NPPF states that a sequential approach should not be applied to small scale rural development. As such this proposal would accord to the aims and objectives of supporting a prosperous rural economy as prescribed by the NPPF, by creating a use that would attract visitors/footfall within Otford Village, encouraging a prosperous local economy and possible local job creation/retention.
- 19 It is noted that Otford Builders Merchants submitted an application under planning reference SE/12/00496 for a first and second storey extension to the existing office opposite Darenth House. This application was withdrawn as the case officer had determined that the proposal would cause harm to adjacent neighbouring properties. That application intended to create further floor space for offices and to make improvements to the existing showroom. That option for the applicants is no longer viable due to the impact of such a proposal upon neighbouring properties; hence the submission of this application to overcome this problem. The change of use of the ground floor of Darenth House would allow the retention of Otford Builders Merchants to continue to occupy the site and make a positive contribution to the local economy by providing employment and a service to the local community. It would also bring existing vacant commercial premises back into use.
- 20 Overall the principle for the change of use of the building would accord to the aims and objectives of paragraphs 23, 28 of the NPPF and policies L07 and SP8 of the Core Strategy. Additionally the Otford Parish Plan refers to the parish council's commitment to support and help promote business and shops in the parish.

Impact on the character of the area

- 21 Policy EN1 of the Local Plan states that the form of the proposed development, including any buildings or extensions, should be compatible in terms of scale, height, density, and site coverage with other buildings in the locality. This policy also states that the design should be in harmony with adjoining buildings and incorporate materials and landscaping of a high standard.

- 22 Policy EN23 of the Local Plan relates to development within Conservation Areas and requires that alterations to existing buildings should respect the local character.
- 23 Policies SP1 and LO7 of the Core Strategy, seek to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the area. Development should respond to the local character of the area in which it is situated.
- 24 Paragraph 115 of the NPPF requires ‘great’ weight to be given to conserving the landscape and natural beauty of AONBs.
- 25 Paragraphs 131-133 seek to preserve or enhance Conservation Areas that are designated heritage assets.
- 26 With regard to the Conservation Area Appraisal, it is noted that Darenth House is highlighted as an example of poor design within the Conservation Area. However it does not specify the particular attributes which have led to this assertion, but it is expected that is due to the 1970 architectural design of the building and in particular it’s ‘top heavy’ appearance and the mansard roof.
- 27 The building is located on the periphery to the High Street, where it has been noted that there is a variety of commercial units and other facilities that provide a wide range of services to the community and that generally the units are interspersed between residential developments. This demonstrates that the character of this part of the High Street is significantly mixed. Within this mix, the principle of shop front windows is appropriate and will add character in a way that enhances the character and appearance of the area by providing an ‘active frontage’. This creates visual interest by initiating a visual engagement between users in the street and those within/on the ground floors of a building(s). Furthermore, large windows were also used in the recent planning permission to demolish the Church for a modern replacement church building with full height windows to its frontage. This was permitted under planning permission SE/13/02045/FUL.
- 28 Upon considering the above, existing ground floor fenestration to Darenth House is poorly proportioned in relation all other buildings within the locality. The alteration of the ground floor windows to proportions which are appropriate for shop front windows, would enhance the character and appearance of the building, by relieving the dominant expanse of the existing ground floor brickwork and ensures that the proposed fenestration matches the typical proportions of shop front display windows. Therefore the alteration to the existing fenestration would be acceptable in this instance.
- 29 The proposed rooflights will be installed to the northern rear elevation of the building. The rearrangement of the roof fenestration would improve the appearance of the roof plane. As the rooflights would be to the rear of the building, the impact of the change to the appearance of this roof plane would preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 30 The Council’s Conservation Officer raises no objection to this proposal.
- 31 Overall, the proposed alterations to Darenth House would improve its character and consequently enhances this part of Otford Conservation Area in accordance

with Policies EN1 and EN23 of the Local Plan, policies SP1, LO8 of the Core Strategy.

- 32 The site is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it is not considered that the proposed development would change the semi rural character of the area. The site would be seen in the context of the adjacent built form, and the development would not materially affect the landscape character of the locality and accords with Policy LO8 of the Core Strategy and paragraph 115 of the NPPF.

Impact upon existing residential amenity

- 33 Policy EN1 from the Sevenoaks District Local Plan states that the proposed development should not have an adverse impact on the privacy and amenities of a locality by reason of form, scale, height, outlook, noise or light intrusion or activity levels including vehicular or pedestrian movements.
- 34 It is acknowledged that there are residents adjacent and opposite the site and that objections have been made. To the existing southern elevation of Darenth House, are five existing window openings that already overlook the properties opposite. By allowing the alteration of the glazing to increase the size of the windows, it is not considered that the degree of overlooking into the opposite properties is sufficient to raise an objection, as overlooking is an existing situation.
- 35 A further objection has been raised by all parties in relation to the impact of light pollution affecting the resident's habitable rooms opposite the site. Darenth House is set back approximately 4m from the street frontage but shop windows are a normal aspect mixed village high street locations and would not normally provide light intrusion into habitable rooms of those residential dwellings opposite the site. The showroom is proposed to currently close early in the evening and lights can be switched off after that time. An hours-of-use condition is proposed.
- 36 Overall upon considering the third party representations and the comments made above, it is considered that the development would not impact upon neighbouring amenities to an unacceptable degree. As such, the proposal would not be contrary to Policy EN1 of the Local Plan and Policy SP1 of the Core Strategy.

Highways

- 37 The development comprises the change of use of an existing floor area with no extension to it. Currently the site has approximately 25 vehicle parking spaces available within the site. No additional floor area is proposed, together with the translocation of the showroom from one part of the site to the ground floor of Darenth House, it is considered that no additional parking spaces would be required as no additional jobs are being created as a result.
- 38 Third party objections have raised issues with regard to the existing highway situation and the problems occurred by the use of delivery vehicles using the access onto the site. This is an existing situation and it is expected that deliveries to the site would be no greater than at present. It would be reasonable to restrict the use and occupation of the building to ensure strict planning control is in place should Otford Builders Merchants decide to vacate the premises, by the imposition of necessary planning conditions, so that the showroom was not operated independently from the existing business.

- 39 Overall, it is considered that the change of use of Darenth House would not create conditions that would be prejudicial to highway safety and that there is adequate parking provision in place. This scheme would accord to Policies EN1 and VP1 of the Local Plan.

Access issues

- 40 There are no adverse access issues associated with this proposal. The proposal will introduce a new disabled access into the rear of the building by the creation of a 1:10 gradient wheel chair access ramp.

Other issues

- 41 The comments raised by the third parties and Parish Council have been taken into consideration.
- 42 The Otford Village Design Statement and Parish Plan have been considered. As it is determined that development enhances its character and appearance of the building, this proposal would be compliant with the aims and objectives of these documents.

Conclusion

- 43 On considering the above, it is recommended that this application should be approved as it conforms to the relevant Development Plan policies and there are no other overriding material considerations to suggest otherwise.

Background Papers

Site and block plans

Contact Officer(s):

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Link to application details:

<http://pa.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=MSUJGWBK8V000>

Link to associated documents

<http://pa.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=MSUJGWBK8V000>



