

ITEM NO. 3

COMMITTEE DATE: 10/12/2007

APPLICATION NO: 07/1685/03

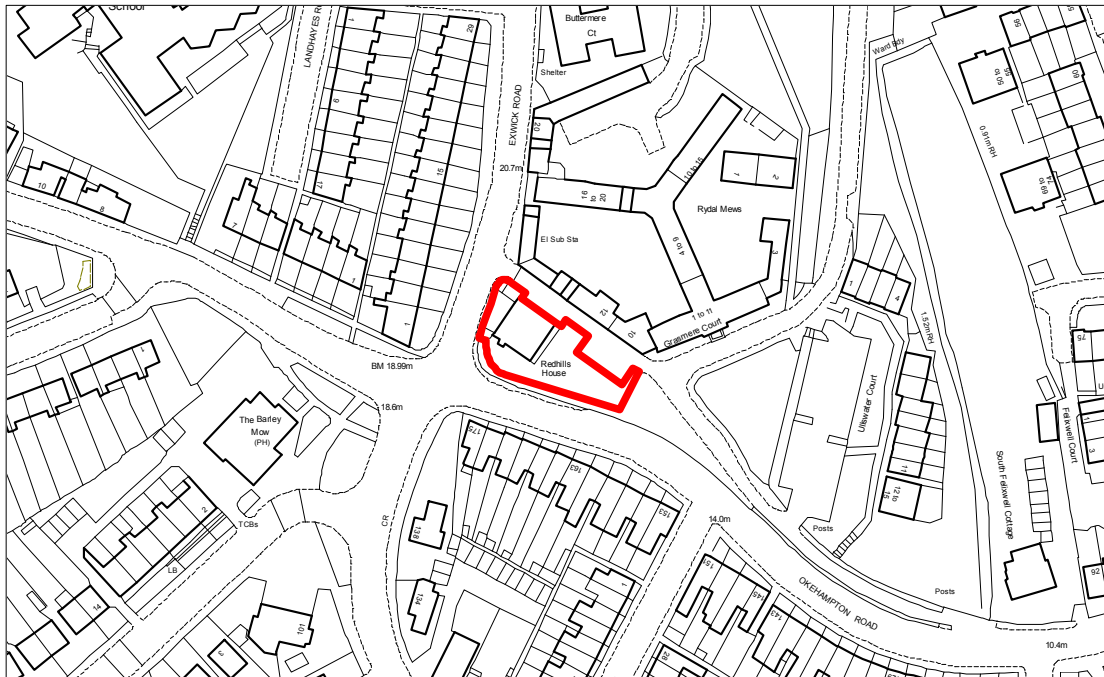
FULL PLANNING PERMISSION

APPLICANT: Ms E James
Amethyst Second Chance

PROPOSAL: Change of use from non-residential day centre (Class D1) to supported living units (Class C2)

LOCATION: Redhills House, Exwick Road, Exeter, EX4 2DA

REGISTRATION DATE: 11/09/2007



Scale 1:2000

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DESCRIPTION OF SITE/PROPOSAL

Redhills House is situated at the junction between Okehampton Road and Exwick Road in Exwick ward. It is a grade II Georgian plain square stucco house which has, until recently, been used by the NHS as a non-residential day centre. This planning application has been made by Amethyst Second Chance for change of use from non-residential day centre (Class D1) to supported living units (Class C2).

The proposal is to provide living accommodation for up to 11 residents, all of whom would have been recently released from HMP Dartmoor. There would be at least one member of staff employed by Amethyst Second Chance on site at all times. Internal alterations are proposed at the property (under the associated listing building application) to modify the building to provide additional washing/bathroom and kitchen facilities for the residents.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE APPLICANT

Information leaflet about the applicant, Amethyst Second Chance Trust:-

- Statistics show that during the past years that appropriate and accessible accommodation is the foundation of successful rehabilitation and management of risk of harm to others
- Research suggests that addressing severe accommodation problems can make a difference of up to 20% in terms of a reduction in re-offending.
- A significant proportion of ex-prisoners have less than adequate social and interpersonal skills which inhibits them in accessing services.
- The charity aims to provide short to medium term accommodation where ex-prisoners can receive support and guidance in obtaining access to benefits, college courses and work. It also aims to improve social skills and....ultimately to reduce the chance of re-offending. The charity will do this by employing three full time workers with a possibility of a fourth and aim to contract out additional services such as drug and alcohol advice.
- The long term aim is to help an individual to reach the point where they are able to re-integrate fully back into the community, i.e. to have accommodation of their own, to have a job, to have a future.
- Residents will be required to sign up to the following "House rules":-
 - To co-operate with drug testing whenever requested
 - To be clear that racist, sexist, violent, abusive, bullying or intimidating behavior is not tolerated
 - To understand that theft or damage is not allowed
 - To attend any agreed programme of activities, college course or work
 - To attend all appointments organised with other agencies
 - No visitors allowed in to private rooms
 - To observe a curfew
 - To allow searches to be undertaken of their rooms and personal possessions by staff

REPRESENTATIONS

27 letters of objection raising the following issues:-

- Proximity to schools
- Proximity to public house
- Concern about lack of information about the scheme and the proposed residents, inadequate public consultation
- Safety of local children
- Safety of elderly residents
- More suitable location elsewhere, not in a residential community
- There are already vulnerable adults living in the community
- Fear for own personal safety
- Fear of crime
- Capacity of local police and other agencies
- Overlooking of adjoining properties

One letter of support

Petition with 138 signatures in objection concerning:-

- Anxieties relating to potential re-offending and its consequences on the neighbourhood.
- The potential risk to the surrounding neighbourhood has been underestimated;
- The house benefits from an elevated position, with good vantage point overlooking surrounding roads and offering too many escape routes in the event of trouble;
- Concern about the crimes previously committed by the residents and the combination with mental health issues;
- Concern about the risk of re-offending;
- Initial occupants may be strictly vetted for suitability but would all future candidates be vetted in the same way?
- If local housing is sought for each resident on departure it is likely that an ever increasing community of ex-criminals could develop in the area;
- Concern about friends and family congregating outside the property;
- Wish to encourage young families into the area;
- Everyone has the right to feel safe and secure in his/her own home;
- Proximity to schools;
- Concern about rise in price of insurance policies.

CONSULTATIONS

County Director of Economy, Environment and Culture - comments are awaited.

The Devon and Cornwall Constabulary - comments are awaited.

WESTERN AREA WORKING PARTY

16 October 2007 - Members agreed to defer consideration of the matter until next Area Working Party.

20 November 2007 - Members were informed that the matter should be determined at full Planning Committee in December

PLANNING POLICIES/POLICY GUIDANCE

Devon Structure Plan 2001-2016

CO7 - Historic Settlements and Buildings

Exeter Local Plan First Review 1995-2011

C1 - Conservation Areas

DG1 - Objectives of Urban Design

DG7 - Crime Prevention and Safety

H5 - Diversity of Housing

OBSERVATIONS

Planning Policy Statement 1 sets out national policies on different aspects of land use planning and states that Local Plans should promote development that creates social inclusive communities, including suitable mixes of housing and should '*... address accessibility (both in terms of location and physical access) for all members of the community to jobs, health, housing, education, shops, leisure and community facilities.*' Policies H1 and H2 of the Exeter Local Plan state that acceptable residential environments can be provided through the

conversion of vacant buildings. Accordingly it is against these national and local policies that the application must be judged.

The proposed use seeks to establish a residential use into a currently vacant building which was formerly used as a non residential day centre. The surrounding area is predominantly residential in character and accordingly the principle of the use is acceptable. The accompanying listed building application indicates that the conversion can be carried out without detriment to the character and appearance of this Grade II listed building.

The application has attracted significant objection from local residents primarily due to the possible conduct of the future occupants of the building. Crime and disorder and fear of such issues are material planning considerations and should be considered as part of the determination of the current application. The applicants, based at Dartmoor Prison, are acutely aware of the perceived concerns such a facility can have on local residents. Accordingly the supporting statement outlines the aims and intentions of the scheme and the specific rules which occupants are obliged to follow to remain in residence. It is considered that the proposed management and supervisory arrangements will minimise the potential for crime and disorder especially in comparison with the alternative scenario whereby the facility is not provided and ex-offenders are released into the community without supervision. To substantiate a reason for refusal on the grounds of crime and disorder there must be clear evidence that such fears are justified. Whilst the comments from the Police Authority are still awaited it is not considered that such evidence exists. However in order to ensure that the use is managed appropriately and on the basis described by the applicant it is suggested that the imposition of a personal condition would be appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date on which this permission is granted.
Reason: To ensure compliance with sections 91-92 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 2) The use hereby permitted shall be carried on only by Amethyst Second Chance and shall cease at such time as the aforementioned person cease to occupy the site.
Reason: To enable the proposed use by the applicant to be monitored.

Local Government (Access to Information) 1985 (as amended). Background papers used in compiling the report:

Files of planning applications available for inspection from the Customer Service Centre, Civic Centre, Paris Street, Exeter: Telephone 01392 265223