

ITEM NO.

5

COMMITTEE DATE:

16/01/2012

APPLICATION NO:

11/1737/03

FULL PLANNING PERMISSION

APPLICANT:

Mr J Kennard

PROPOSAL:

Change of use from hotel to hostel

LOCATION:

Red House, 2 Whipton Village Road, Exeter, EX4 8AR

REGISTRATION DATE:

20/10/2011

EXPIRY DATE:

15/12/2011



Scale 1:2000

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DESCRIPTION OF SITE/PROPOSAL

2 Whipton Village Road, otherwise known as The Red House Hotel, is located near the junction of Whipton Village Road and Pinhoe Road. The building occupies a large, prominent site measuring approximately 1250 sq.metres in area. The locality is essentially residential in character with a mixture of flats, traditional dwellings and a care home all located in close proximity to the application site. The site is within walking distance of a designated local centre which benefits from a variety of commercial units including shops, pubs, hairdressers and take-aways. The building itself, although somewhat tired in appearance, benefits from some impressive detailing with tile-hung gable features and imposing two storey bay windows.

Planning Permission is sought for a change of use from hotel (Use Class C1) to a hostel (Use Class Sui-Generis). The proposed use is almost identical to the Trailways facility located at Venny Bridges in that it will serve the young vulnerable homeless in need of emergency accommodation. The hotel currently has a total of eleven bedrooms with associated bar and restaurant areas. The proposed change of use would allow for a total of eighteen self-contained en-suite bedrooms with kitchen facilities including one emergency room and one staff bedroom, a large communal room, an office and interview room and a laundry room. No extensions or external alterations are required to facilitate the proposed change of use.

The users of the proposed facility will be identified by the City Council Housing Department and Devon County Council Social Services. However, no formal arrangement or contract has yet been agreed. In essence accommodation will be provided for a limited period whilst referrals are completed and more suitable permanent accommodation is identified. It is believed the City Council will utilise six bed-spaces and Devon County Council will utilise ten bed-spaces, with the average length of stay being approximately six weeks, although this could be shorter or longer depending on personal circumstances. It is worth clarifying that the accommodation is not secure but supported in that the facility will be managed 24 hours a day with two on site staff employed throughout the night. No element of care will be provided.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE APPLICANT

The application is accompanied with a Planning Statement. Key points raised include:-

- The hotel currently has a bar (24 hour licence), restaurant and eleven rooms. The applicant advises the proposed change of use will drastically reduce the number of vehicles entering and leaving the hotel during the day and night.
- The owner has a standing contract with Exeter City Council to provide supported accommodation for homeless households at Trailways, 1 Venny Bridge, Pinhoe. Should planning permission be forthcoming, the same management methods and procedures used at Trailways will be implemented.
- The hostel will be managed by the applicant and his wife. However, two overnight waking managers will be employed together with a team of support workers to ensure the premises are staffed 24 hours a day. The site will also benefit from a comprehensive CCTV system.

REPRESENTATIONS

76 objections have been received. The principal planning issues raised are:

- Detrimental impact on the character of the area.
- Wrong location.
- Increase in anti-social behaviour.
- Heightened perception of fear of crime.
- Lack of social cohesion.
- Loss of community asset.
- Increased traffic.
- Reduction in trade for local businesses.
- Out of keeping with the residential area.
- Quality of residential amenity reduced.
- Loss of employment.
- Inappropriate drainage.

A 41-signature petition against the proposal has also been submitted, citing similar issues to those above.

2 letters of support have been received, on the grounds that more accommodation to support vulnerable people is required, and such a change of use will enable disadvantaged people to receive support and live independent lives.

CONSULTATIONS

The Executive Director of Environment, Economy and Culture has no objection to the proposed development.

The City Council's Projects and Business Manager recommends a single condition with regard to the provision of secure cycle storage.

The Head of Environmental Health raise no objection to the proposed development.

A response from the Police Architectural Liaison Officer is awaited.

PLANNING POLICIES/POLICY GUIDANCE

Central Government Guidance
PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development
Devon County Structure Plan 2001-2016
ST1 - Sustainable Development
CO6 - Quality of New Development
Exeter Local Plan First Review 1995-2011
H1 - Search Sequence
H2 - Location Priorities
T3 - Encouraging Use of Sustainable Modes
H5 - Diversity of Housing
DG1 - Objectives of Urban Design
DG4 - Residential Layout and Amenity

OBSERVATIONS

The demand for special needs housing has and continues to increase. Policy H5 of the Exeter Local Plan states that the conversion of dwellings to flats, self-contained bedsitters or houses in multiple occupation and the development of special needs or student housing will be permitted provided that:- a) the scale and intensity of use will not harm the character of the building and locality and will not cause an unacceptable reduction in the amenity of neighbouring occupiers or result in on-street parking issues, b) The proposal will not create an over-concentration of the use in any one area of the city which would change the character of the neighbourhood or create an imbalance in the local community, c) Special needs housing is located close to local shops and services, community facilities and bus routes, and d) Student accommodation is located so as to limit the need to travel to the campus by car.

Within the last 18 months the City Council have seen an increase in households approaching the Housing Needs service facing homelessness. As a result of cuts in services, the economic downturn and specific changes to welfare benefits single people under 25 have been particularly impacted. When no better alternative is available Bed and Breakfast accommodation is provided to homeless young people. This is not satisfactory as the accommodation has shared facilities, does not provide a kitchen area and provides no support. Additional self-contained supported accommodation would therefore provide safer, better managed and cheaper accommodation for homeless young people.

It is considered that the best location for a hostel is within an established residential area where an existing community and infrastructure already exists. Whipton Village Road and the immediate surroundings fall into this category and therefore could absorb the proposed use without difficulty. No objection in principle to the proposed use can be raised as a residential use in what is essentially a residential area is considered acceptable. Other associated issues are explored below.

Central Government guidance advises that planning is concerned with the use of the land and not the identity of the end user. Consequently the question of who is to occupy the proposed hostel is only relevant if there is an obvious link between the identity of the occupiers and the likely impact of the hostel on the surrounding area.

It is clear from the representations received that there is much concern among local residents about the possibility of anti-social or criminal behaviour associated with the prospective residents of the hostel. The courts have established that public fear and apprehension about the impact of a development is capable of being a material consideration, and therefore regard must be given to these concerns. However the weight

attributed to these concerns will depend in part on a judgement as to how realistic and well-founded the residents' concerns are.

The officers' view is people in need of temporary accommodation whilst they may face a range of problems do not inevitably have a propensity for crime or anti-social behaviour. Consequently it is considered that the apprehension of crime/anti-social behaviour in this instance is not sufficient reason to refuse the application.

If planning permission is forthcoming the applicant has agreed to accept a condition relating to the submission and agreement of a management plan prior to occupation.

A number of traffic and parking generation objections have been received. Given the nature of the proposed use it is unlikely that the residents of the hostel would be car owners. It is probable that some may be below the legal driving age. Consequently the only likely traffic generation/parking implication of the use would stem from staff and visitors cars. Should the position arise where a number of residents do have cars, the Executive Director of Environment, Economy and Culture at Devon County Council has confirmed that the existing 20 on-site parking spaces are considered adequate to accommodate this change of use without detriment to highway safety.

Whilst a number of internal alterations are proposed, no structural works to the external appearance of the building are required to facilitate the proposed change of use. The only works to the external facade relate to the removal of existing hotel signage and the removal of the existing vinyl canopies associated with the established hotel use. In context the removal of both features will improve the overall appearance of the building by ensuring the property is more in keeping with its residential surroundings. A number of objectors highlight the prominence of the host building and its importance within the street scene. Allowing the proposed change of use will not alter its prominence or importance within the immediate vicinity.

The physical relationship between the application site and adjacent properties will not change. The property most affected by the proposal is the bungalow at the rear of the site. The bungalow benefits from its own curtilage and apart from access is not dependent on Whipton Village Road in any other regard. The bungalow will retain existing privacy levels and offer an acceptable amenity standard. With regard to the amenity associated with the applicants property the site benefits from a large curtilage which could easily accommodate the proposed number of occupants.

It is acknowledged that a reduction in amenity can also result from additional comings and goings, noise, activity and loitering. In order to establish any potential harm a comparison needs to be drawn between the existing and proposed uses. In this instance a hotel with publicly accessible bar and restaurant facility will by its very nature generate a high a number of visitors. This view is consistent with a number of objectors who claim to visit the premises regularly. It is considered that the proposed use, a 16 bedroom hostel, by reason of its residential nature, will not generate the same level of activity therefore protecting the level of residential amenity currently enjoyed.

Concern has also been expressed with regard to the impact of the proposal on a local district centre and the direct loss of employment as a result of the closure of the hotel. With regard to the former, given the distance between the property and the shops towards the eastern end of Whipton Village Road and the nature of the proposed use it is difficult to quantify how a residential use will have implications on viability of established shops and other commercial premises. With regard to the latter, the applicant has confirmed the existing use benefits from twelve employees whereas the proposed use will benefit from nine employees. The net loss of three employees is not a justification to withhold consent.

The loss of an established hotel needs to be considered carefully as its loss may result in harm to the local tourist industry. Given the location of hotel, its attraction for tourists would

appear to be somewhat limited. The applicant has confirmed the number of bookings has reduced considerably since a number of national hotel chains have established themselves within the city. At the time of writing two separate applications for new hotels are under consideration by the Local Planning Authority. This would appear to suggest that the loss of the Red House will not have implications on hotel provision throughout the city.

NORTHERN AREA WORKING PARTY

Members were advised the application would be presented at planning committee on the 16/01/2011 (14/11/2011).

Members were provided an update with regard to level and type of representation received. Members were reminded the application would be presented to the Planning Committee in the New Year (12/12/2011).

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 development hereby permitted shall not be carried out otherwise than in strict accordance with the submitted details received by the Local Planning Authority on the 20 October 2011 (*dwg. no(s). 1026/01, 1026/02 and 1026/03*), as modified by other conditions of this consent.
Reason: In order to ensure compliance with the approved drawings.
- 3) The Development shall not be occupied until the City Council has approved in writing a Management Scheme submitted by the applicant and the agreed measures have been put in place. The Management Scheme shall include the following: (a) details of any managing agent to be engaged by the applicant; (b) details of the management arrangements for the use; (c) procedures for dealing with (i) management problems, (ii) anti-social behaviour, (iii) noise, (iv) fire or security alarms sounding and (v) other emergencies; and (d) safety and security measures and controls.
Reason: To help protect the existing residential amenity standards currently enjoyed by neighbouring properties.
- 4) Prior to occupation of the development hereby permitted, secure cycle parking shall be provided in accordance with details previously submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, and the cycle parking shall be maintained thereafter.
Reason: To ensure that cycle parking is provided, to encourage travel by sustainable means in accordance with Local Plan policy T3.

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