

**WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL – DEVELOPMENT CONTROL**  
**DELEGATED REPORT**

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| <b>APPLICATION No:</b> | <b>N6/2008/1200/FP</b> |
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**NOTATION:**

The site lies within Welwyn Garden City in the Conservation Area as designated in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

**DESCRIPTION OF SITE:**

61 Howardsgate is sited at the heart of Welwyn Garden City Town Centre. It is a three-storey building, with a retail unit in the ground floor. The ground floor was up until recently an A2 use and the first and second floor were associated offices. These offices are no longer required and a separate application is being considered for the change of use of the first floor to residential.

Access to the site is gained through the service yard to the rear of the unit and a yard directly to the rear of the building provides a bin store. The front of unit faces out onto a pedestrianised area to the front of the main entrance to the Howards Centre.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL:**

It is proposed to erect a roof extension to provide two one bedroom self contained flats.

The roof extension would be to the section of the building that protrudes to the rear into the service yard. The roof extension would protrude 2.4 metres from the flat roof and would contain four dormers on the western side elevation. It has been designed with a half gable roof, so that rather forming a ridge there is a flat roof section between the pitch roofs on either side. It would span the full the full depth of this section of the building.

**PLANNING HISTORY:**

N6/2008/686/FP – Roof extension to provide two, one bedroom self-contained flats - Withdrawn

N6/2008/689/FP – Change of use of first and second floors to form eight self contained flats - Withdrawn

**SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES:**

National Policy  
PPS1: Delivering sustainable development  
PPS3: Housing  
PPS6: Town Centres  
PPG13: Transport  
PPG15: Historic environment

Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991 – 2011:  
None

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005:  
SD1 Sustainable Development  
GBSP2 - Towns and specified settlements  
TCR13 – Environment of the Town Centre  
R5 - Waste Management  
M5 – Pedestrian Facilities  
M6 – Cycle routes and facilities  
M14 - Parking standards for new developments  
D1 - Quality of design  
D2 - Character and context  
D5 - Design for movement

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, Supplementary Design Guidance, February 2005

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, Supplementary Planning Guidance, Parking Standards, January 2004

## **CONSULTATIONS**

HCC as the highway authority –

N6/2008/1199/FP is for a change of use to provide 8 self contained one bed flats and bedsits. The first and second floors appear to have been used previously as ancillary to the ground floor. The site is located in the centre of WGC and there is no parking on the site and the applicant does not intend to provide any. Although parking is a matter for the LPA and they will ultimately decide the appropriate level for this property, at this location, all on street parking in the vicinity is controlled and therefore Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority considers the lack of parking would not have an unreasonable impact on the safety and operation of the adjoining highways. I note that the applicant appears to be willing to provide a financial contribution towards infrastructure improvements in the area and this would be welcomed. In accordance with the Planning Obligations Toolkit approved by Cabinet in January 2008, the sustainable transport contribution for a development of this size would be £3000.

Contract Services – No official comments received

## **TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS**

None

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

None. Period expired 24/09/08.

## **DISCUSSION:**

**The main issues are:**

- 1) Whether or not the use of the site for residential purposes is appropriate in accordance with PPS6 and Policy H5 in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.**
- 2) Impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in accordance with PPG15 and Policy D2 in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 and Supplementary Design Guidance.**
- 3) Impact of the proposal on the residential amenities of neighbouring properties.**
- 4) Whether or not the proposed parking on site is sufficient in accordance with Policy M14 in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 and Supplementary Planning Guidance.**

## 5) Other material planning considerations.

1. Government Guidance supports residential use in the upper-floor space over shops particularly in town centres. Furthermore PPS6 supports conversions to residential providing that the proposal would preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area and not harm the amenities of neighbouring occupiers.

61 Howardsgate is not one of the new housing development site listed in Policy H1 and is therefore considered to be windfall residential development. This application proposes the conversion of an existing building no longer required for its existing purpose. Sited in WGC town centre services and facilities are within easy walking distance and the proposal would help increase footfall in the town centre both during the day and the evening. There is no evidence to suggest that the proposal would impact on existing or potential capacity of the local infrastructure and there are no physical and environmental constraints that would warrant refusal. The proposal would therefore comply with the criteria listed in Policy H2.

The application proposes two 1 bedroom units to be accommodated within the development. As such the scheme reflects the shortfall of smaller units within the area, which is supported by Policy H8 of the District Plan.

Given the above, the proposal in principle would be acceptable. The main issues for consideration in this application relate to whether the proposed alterations will result in harm to the character or appearance of the local built environment and Conservation Area; whether the development would lead to an undue loss of amenity to the existing occupiers of neighbouring properties; and whether the site makes an acceptable provision for future occupiers by means of amenity and parking provision.

2. This application proposes a roof extension to the section of the building that protrudes from the rear into the service yard. The extension has been design so as to minimise its impact on the surrounding area. A flat roof section would link the two pitch sections of the roof and the materials would match the existing. In addition the dormer windows would respect the fenestration on this section of the building.

The roof extension would only be readily visible in the service yard and would be screened from the wider Conservation Area. So whilst the proposal would undoubtedly increase the scale of this building, it would not form a prominent addition. Equally the service yard has no discernable character and its character is distinctly different to the wider Conservation Area. According it is considered that these minor alterations would preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

A bin store is also proposed in the service yard to the rear of the building. This section of the site currently provides parking for three vehicles and there are two large wheelie bins. Full details of the bin store have not been submitted. Sited to the rear of the building in the service yard it would not be visible in the wider area and subsequently would not harm the character and appearance of the conservation area. To ensure that this is the case this application will be subject to a condition to submit full details of the LPA before development commences.

3. Given the existing use of the first and second floor of 61 Howardsgate as office accommodation, it is not considered the conversion of the building to residential use will intensify the use of the site to an unacceptable extent. Access to the site would be through the service yard at the rear and a retail unit is sited below. In terms of overlooking, there are no residential properties within view of the application site.
4. A zoning process is outlined in the Supplementary Planning Guidance – Parking Standards, which is the recommended system by which reductions to the maximum car parking standards can be made. This supplementary guidance on car parking does indicate that residential development will generally be expected to accommodate all parking demand on site, but accepts that reduced provision may be acceptable for high density residential development proposals in appropriate locations (i.e. in areas of high accessibility and good service provision). Within this location a maximum standard exists of 0.75 spaces per one bedroom dwelling and subsequently a maximum provision of 1.5 parking spaces are required.

No parking provision is proposed on this site due to the confines of the site. The application site is within 200 yards of both the mainline train station and WGC Central Bus Station. It is also highly accessible to the town centre and all the necessary services. Accordingly it is considered that the provision of no parking is acceptable in this instance.

5. Welwyn Hatfield Supplementary Design Guidance outlines that residential development should incorporate amenity space for the use of residents. 61 Howardsgate is sited in the heart of the town centre and the confines of the site do not allow for any amenity space, with the front of the site facing onto a pedestrianised area to the front of the Howards Centre and the rear onto a service yard that serves all of the buildings in this terrace. In town centres, residential units above retail units rarely have private amenity space. This notwithstanding, all along Howardsgate there are public gardens with seating areas that the future occupiers could utilise and Sherrardspark Wood is within a 6-7 minute walk. Appropriate access to amenity space is considered therefore to be met for the future occupiers and given the location and quality of the amenity space in the immediate vicinity of the site. It is considered that the lack of amenity space would not be sufficient enough reason to warrant refusal on these grounds alone.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The proposed scheme is considered to have no unacceptable impact on the overall appearance of the existing building and will preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The development will not result in any harmful impact to the nearby residents and existing occupiers by way of loss of light, unacceptable overlooking or loss of privacy. With regard to amenity space, it is considered that given the location and the amenity space in the immediate vicinity of the site, it is considered that the lack of amenity space would not sustain a refusal in this case.

The provision of no parking spaces on site is considered acceptable in this instance due to the proximity of good passenger transport links and the developer providing the appropriate contribution to sustainable transport methods. As such the development meets the relevant requirements of Policy IM2 and the criteria as set out within the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

**RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS**

**CONDITIONS:**

1. C.2.1 – Standard Time Limit
  
2. C.13.1 - The development/works shall not be started and completed other than in accordance with the approved plans and details 07/185-01 & 07/185-03 B received and dated 11 JUL 2008 unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved drawings and any changes must be agreed in advance in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

3. C.5.1 – Sample materials, including windows
  
4. C.7.13 – Bin store recycling

**SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PERMISSION:**

The proposal has been considered against Planning Policy Statement/Guidance PPS1, PPS3, PPS6, PPG13, PPG15 and development plan policies SD1, GBSP2, D1, D2, and M14 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005, in addition to the Human Rights Act 1998, which indicate that the proposal should be approved. Material planning considerations do not justify a decision contrary to the Development Plan.

**INFORMATIVES:**

None

**Signature of author..... Date.....**