

The westbury on trym society

Comment on behalf of the Planning Group of the Westbury on Trym Society

for Application Number 14/03519/F: 69 High Street Westbury on Trym BS9 3ED

Retention of the existing commercial unit, alterations to the existing maisonette above and construction of 4 no apartments on land to rear of the building

The Planning Group (8) of the Society wish to make the following observations:-

Generally-

We are not against development of new housing units in principle, especially where plots previously used for housing or commerce become redundant or lie neglected. However we wish to see precious land used for affordable and sustainable homes, that will simultaneously enhance the area to which they belong, providing good architecture and viable design-rather than creating utilitarian, over dense use of space, with all the associated problems of degraded views, unacceptable massing, cramped living space and increased traffic congestion- the aim being only to maximise profit from sale or rental. We do not wish to see the mistakes of post war building repeated today!

In the case of this application No 14/03519/F a majority on our committee believes it to be, overall, a poor design of over development for an unusual and potentially interesting, but difficult plot.

1 The Plot

There is no doubt that in its present state this area, behind a row of shops in Westbury High Street, is an eye sore for all who live around it. It comprises mainly the last remains of older cottages or farm buildings that existed there until the 1950s, when, as in many other parts of Westbury and Bristol, they were cleared away as uninhabitable for modern living. The plot has been successively neglected, being unused for garden purposes or horticulture and is now substantially overgrown with ivy and bramble. We do not therefore oppose its redevelopment in principle but we would like the architecture to complement what is in the area already and to provide a more gracious and sustainable living space of two or three units maximum.

2 Overdevelopment of the plot with four flats at the rear-

-The design at present presents four very small and cramped domestic living spaces with bedrooms that are barely adequate and 'galley' kitchen areas that open out of the main living rooms or 'lounges'! The surroundings and amenity space are limited to a tiny shared courtyard and a long passage connecting the four properties to the outside pathway via a row of waste bins. In fact it resembles the same cramped living space that existed there in the 19th century, which is now regarded as undesirable for sustainable modern living.

-The depth, height and massing of the complex of proposed new buildings housing the four units, is overbearing in its context: it will detract from the view of Westfield Road with its impressive and innovative arched block of modern apartments in Bauhaus style, seen from the direction of the White Lion Hotel and the approach to the village in Passage Road. Space is at a premium at this corner of the rear plot next door to another house at No 26 and very close to the flats themselves (Llewelyn Court).Space is needed to set off the strength of the existing arched building; this

development will clutter that part of the view with un-necessary walls and roofs all juxta-positioned against each other.

-The design is too complicated visually for that corner, presenting as it does too many surfaces and levels concentrated into a comparatively small area. Simplicity and smoothness should be the key for any additional building there.

3 Sustainability for living

We do not think that this cramping will provide sustainable conditions for pleasant and healthy living-

-There will be cooking smells concentrated into a very small space behind the properties fronting the main street and also within the flats themselves-such as are not allowed for commercial café premises backing on to residential units (eg: Eateries in Canford Lane)

-There may well be odours and flies from the concentration of bins for four households, all crammed into a small corridor lying below the windows of the flats and the rear window of the maisonette behind the computer shop. This is surely against principles of health and safety?

In relation to Policy BCS 13: 'Climate Change and Energy Efficiency'

We may legitimately question whether there will be permanent over heating in this cramped corner if and when the climate temperatures increase as they are forecast to do, making living in this small and unaired space unpleasant, as it was in the old slums that were cleared away from Westbury!

-A and H Energy Ratings Ltd, who present the Sustainability statement (16th May 2014) accompanying this application, actually state on page 9 (under 'passive ventilation and cooling') that the ground floor flats may well have to open their windows and keep them open-especially in the summer- because of over- heating. They recommend specialised security windows to allow for this, to prevent break-ins. This indicates a belief that the lower flats are going to be enclosed and stuffy in the present design.

Conclusions

We think that the number of living units should be reduced to two-at the most three, to allow for more living space, privacy from each other, greater air space and perhaps some greenery, around each domestic unit

We believe that the waste management should be placed to the rear of the living accommodation-out of sight and range of windows and accessible for the local collectors without the owners having to put them outside every week onto the pathway-a comment made by some local residents too.

Policy BCS 13 states that developments should mitigate climate change and reduce carbon dioxide emissions

While the Sustainability statement on energy efficiency and carbon dioxide emissions maintains that this development will not exceed its necessary constraints at present, there is no guarantee that as temperatures rise in future, that this will remain the case. We think that the potential number of people, as well as boilers and heaters, using the area, should therefore be reduced for the sake of decent living, health and clean air considerations in the future.

4 Access

The main access for these four flats and the maisonette above the shop is proposed to be an archway- cut into the façade of the retail unit at the front of the plot (formerly a Chinese food take away café). Notwithstanding that the present retail unit is degraded and in need of renovation to its frontage, justification for this design is cited by quoting the gates into Casamia on the opposite side of the street. However it should be known and noted that this entrance has existed since the 19th century and originally there were two large wooden doors there to cover the passage entrance. The passage connected workshops at the rear to the street. (It was Wally's bicycle store and an adjacent corn merchant.) It is certainly not a recent innovation to be copied for that reason.

-We do not wish this type of entrance to become a precedent for access to buildings at the rear of High street premises, so altering the character of the main street.

-The rhythm of the shop and residential facades from Mealing's yard (now a laundry shop) along to the former Drew's Stores-(now the computer shop) should remain unbroken.

- A further point we would like to make is that given the restricted access from both front and side in the present plan and the densely packed nature of the plot, **it is going to be very difficult for building maintenance, decoration and repairs-especially to roofs, in the future; and not only to these new properties, but to existing ones hemmed in by the new development Where and how will scaffold be erected and brought into the building complex. Likewise the matter of fire safety seems to be compromised for similar reasons. Has this vital matter been taken into consideration?**

Conclusions

-Details of views and building rhythms have all been noted in our recent work on the conservation area, now before the City Planning department for approval-so please note the work we have done to maintain the character of the village along lines suggested by design and planning experts

-Accordingly, we think that the access to any flat or flats should be to the side or rear of the development-opening onto Westfield road.

5 Transport and Car Parking

Traffic congestion and parking problems have increased exponentially in Westbury during the last decade, as indeed they have everywhere. In this locality however it has come about for two main reasons:-

-The use of the village as a rat run from Cribbs Causway, by all types of vehicle, to avoid the series of traffic lights on Falcondale Road and to reach the top of the hill via the village more speedily.

- Many small businesses have moved out into the suburbs to gain from cheaper accommodation in old shops now converted to offices and to houses used for the same purposes. Free on street parking is a great attraction for employees of all kinds as well as the commuters who now drive into Westbury and take the bus or cycle into Bristol centre.

-All of this has combined to create misery for residents who have lived in and around the village for many years, in terms of use of their own local parking space plus constant dangers from temporary parking on corners and speeding traffic.

The Society is aware that parking problems are universal and that the planners do not take account of these in general, when viewing the potential of a building plot for housing. However we would like to point to a recent application to erect 9 flats at the corner of Shipley Road where we made various recommendations. We were very pleased to see that one of them, to place car

spaces underneath the building, was taken up. This contributed to the success of the application we are sure and many nearby residents were very pleased as they cannot access their own drives on frequent occasions because of office workers using the road.

-The High Street in Westbury is always densely parked with taxis using the street for their business and people coming to shops and banks all day long. Adjacent side roads are crammed with residents' own cars in front of small Victorian terrace houses. Henbury Road, particularly, has problems with random parking so that buses often have problems in getting through.

Conclusions

We would like to see the provision of a few spaces in conjunction with this development under discussion. If only three units are built, would it not be possible to provide three small spaces at the rear or side, underneath a shelter or cantilevered first floor of one of the flats? If the flats are small in space terms they are going to appeal to young professional people buying their first property, who will have cars without doubt and elderly people, who have 'downsized' may well have motorized buggies.

6 Other Waste Management

-We would like to see stone and rubble that exists on site at present, incorporated into the building rather than discarded to a skip.

-Residents have raised concerns as to how the building works will be managed in a very restricted area adjoining other flats and properties all around the site. The application is not specific about how this will be handled.

-The Sustainability statement indicates that waste water will be limited by regulation and run off will be into the ground or into tanks. Given that this has been a high risk flood area in decades gone past, we assume that Wessex Water has been consulted as to flood risk and management-especially because increases in water flow are expected in the future, due to run off from the extensive housing developments to the north of Henbury and on Filton airfield which will spill into the River Trym and its tributaries.

7 Points in favour

-We like the mix of render and traditional rubble walls proposed, that fits with vernacular styles in the area. However we are not in favour of the weather boarding because it degrades very quickly and becomes tatty in appearance; given the frequency of rain in this district, it will not retain a pristine appearance for very long. It also does not sit well within the traditional styles of Westbury.

- We are pleased to see that photo voltaic panels have been proposed for south facing roofs at the rear and may be east/west too if needed. However we wonder if panels that resemble tiles could be used in preference to cheaper options, to retain a more historic style behind 18th and 19th century properties.

8 Archaeology

We note that the archaeology department of Bristol has shown an interest in excavations during the building phase. This part of Westbury is very close to the original early medieval centre of the village and 17thC pottery has also been found on the banks of the Trym in the past. We trust therefore that

any finds will be treated with respect, not covered up for the sake of saving time and money during the building phase and that signs of previous civilisation will be investigated.

Hilary Long, Chairman: on behalf of the Westbury on Trym Society Planning Group. August 30th 2014

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