

Agenda Item A6	Committee Date 15 March 2010	Application Number 10/00066/CU
Application Site 81-83 Regent Road. Morecambe		Proposal Change of use from guest house/hotel to 8 no. two bedroom flats.
Name of Applicant Mr P Harrison Denholme, Crawley Road, Horsham, W Sussex RH12 4HF		Name of Agent N/A
Decision Target Date 31 March 2010		Reason For Delay Not applicable
Case Officer	Peter Rivet	
Departure	No	
Summary of Recommendation	Approval	

1.0 The Site and its Surroundings

- 1.1 This property consists of a pair of mid-terrace four storey houses on the south west side of Regent Road. Its authorised use is as a hotel/guest house (the Cranage Hotel) but it was last occupied, without planning permission, as a hostel for migrant workers.
- 1.2 It has been vacant for at least the last five years and its condition is poor. At the rear, several of the windows have been removed and this has encouraged pigeons to roost in it. The backyard has been used for fly tipping.

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1 The applicant's proposal is to convert it into eight self contained flats, each with two bedrooms, a living room/kitchen, and a bathroom. All the flats will be able to access a storage area in the basement, and from there to the yard at the rear.
- 2.2 Renovation work will involve only one significant change to the outside of the building; this is a new door at the rear. It will however be necessary to fit new gutters, fascia boards, windows, and rainwater pipes. The stonework at the front will require repointing, and the steps and railings will need to be refurbished.
- 2.3 The Design Statement accompanying the application argues that the previously approved conversion scheme involving maisonettes is not viable. It suggests that in the present economic climate, the two bedroom apartments proposed will provide accommodation which will be both affordable in the rental market, and suitable for the needs of first time buyers.

3.0 Site History

- 3.1 This is not the first application to be submitted for the conversion of the property into flats; an earlier one was refused consent in 2005. Subsequently a scheme for four maisonettes was approved, but not implemented.

Application Number	Proposal	Decision
05/00465/CU	Change of use of existing bed and breakfast with internal alterations to form eight self contained flats	Refusal
05/00951/CU	Change of use of existing bed and breakfast, with internal alterations, to form four maisonettes	Approval

4.0 Consultation Responses

4.1 Consultation replies are set out below.

Consultees	Response
County Council Highways	No highway observations on this proposal.
Housing Policy Officer	No objections to this conversion, but has reservations about the suitability of the second and third floors for family accommodation.
City Contract Services	Observations awaited.
Morecambe Town Council	Observations awaited.

5.0 Neighbour Representations

5.1 The owner of the Seashelt Hotel at 85 Regent Road strongly supports the proposal - she says that the property has been derelict for the last seven years, and is full of pigeons; and that now even the squatters have moved out. She points out that the Chatsworth Gardens scheme is no longer to go ahead, and asks that the City Council should encourage anyone wishing to invest in the future of the West End, both here and on the Chatsworth Gardens site.

5.2 Councillor Robinson has indicated that he opposes this application, on the grounds that policies for the area favour the creation of more family sized accommodation rather than the creation of additional flats. He points out that permission has been refused for a similar flat conversion scheme in the past, and the site is opposite the proposed "exemplar site" which the West End Masterplan recommends should be redeveloped with new housing and is anxious that its future should not be prejudiced.

5,3 Any other representations received will be reported orally at Committee.

6.0 Principal Development Plan Policies

6.1 "Saved" Policy H21 of the Lancaster District Local Plan requires that flat conversions should meet the space standards set out in Appendix 2 of the Plan.

6.2 The West End Masterplan seeks to secure the regeneration of the West End by reintroducing family housing, rather than encouraging more flat conversions.

7.0 Comment and Analysis

7.1 The scheme is a well thought out one. It meets the space standards set out in the Lancaster District Local Plan. The arrangements for access to the yard at the rear are satisfactory.

7.2 As Councillor Robinson has pointed out, approval of a scheme of this kind is contrary to the principles set out in the West End Masterplan. However consideration has also to be given to the circumstances surrounding this former hotel. Although consent has been granted for a maisonette conversion approximately five years ago, neither the then owner nor anyone else has been interested in implementing it.

7.3 During the intervening years the condition of the building has continued to deteriorate. If action is

not taken soon, its condition may reach the point where demolition and rebuilding is the only option. This would be expensive; it could also potentially give rise to structural problems for the terraced properties either side.

- 7.4 The current proposal is in many respects similar to the one which was refused consent in 2005, but the property market has changed since then. Indications are that it is now more difficult to attract investment and developers are less inclined to risk spending on schemes which may not offer them a good rate of return.
- 7.5 The two properties concerned are generally considered to be too big to function satisfactorily as single family dwellings, even if the outriggers at the rear were to be removed. The maisonette solution may appear attractive as a way of creating family sized three bedroom dwellings, but in practice accommodation of this type may also be likely to be let to a group of three single people sharing, rather than a family.
- 7.6 The choice therefore before Members is whether to accept the scheme as now proposed, despite it being contrary to the principles of the West End Masterplan, or refuse the application for that reason and hope that an alternative, viable scheme is submitted in the future.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 Taking these factors into account, it is considered that the current proposal represents the best way of securing the future of the building, which in its present condition is likely to discourage investment in neighbouring properties.

Recommendation

That Planning Permission **BE GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. Standard three year condition.
2. Development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.
3. Details of replacement doors and windows to be agreed.

Human Rights Act

This recommendation has been reached after consideration of the provisions of The Human Rights Act. Unless otherwise stated in this report, the issues arising do not appear to be of such magnitude to override the responsibility of the City Council to regulate land use for the benefit of the community as a whole, in accordance with national law.

Background Papers

None