

Committee Report

Item No: 2

Reference: DC/18/05254

Case Officer: Mark Russell

Ward: Needham Market

Ward Member: Cllr Wendy Marchant, Cllr Mike Norris

RECOMMENDATION – GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION WITH CONDITIONS

Description of Development

Application for Listed Building Consent. Partial demolition works, internal and external alterations. Conversion and extension to form 12No apartments, partial demolition and repair works to boundary walls, including formation of a new pedestrian access to Barrett's Lane.

Location

Former Mid Suffolk District Council Offices & Associated Land, 131 High Street, Needham Market

Parish: Needham Market

Expiry Date: 24/01/19

Application Type: Listed Building application

Applicant: A. Bennett, Mid Suffolk District Council

Agent: Lawson Planning Partnership

PART ONE – REASON FOR REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE

The application is referred to committee for the following reasons:

- It is the Council's own application.

NOTE – This Listed Building application accompanies Full application DC/18/05104, which is also before Members for their consideration.

Details of Previous Committee/Resolutions and Member Site Visit

None.

PART TWO – POLICIES AND CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Summary of Policies

Relevant policies in the Core Strategy Focused Review 2012 and Mid-Suffolk Local Plan 1998:

HB01 - Protection of historic buildings

HB02 - Demolition of listed buildings

HB03 - Conversions and alterations to historic buildings

HB08 - Safeguarding the character of conservation areas

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Consultations and Representations

During the course of the application consultation and representations from third parties have been received. These are summarised below.

A: Summary of Consultations

Town Council

Needham Market Town Council objects to the planning application on the grounds it fails to meet the applicant's own Housing Policy H4 PROPORTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT.

OFFICER NOTE – *This point relates to the full, rather than the Listed Building, application and is covered in that report.*

Historic England

No comments, but advised that we seeks views from our specialists.

ECC Place Services - Heritage

Heritage did not object to the principle of the proposal, but voiced concerns about the loss of the historic redbrick garden wall on the south side of Hurstlea Road as this is the only surviving element of the former boundary, the roof extension to the annex of Number 131, concluding that there would be less than substantial harm to the listed building and conservation area.

OFFICER COMMENT – The wall (along with the memorial bench) will be preserved as requested, by being relocated elsewhere on site. The roof extension has now been set back a further 500mm. Heritage is supportive of this, but asked for a marked-up photograph.

Other detailed points were as follows (with subsequent amendment/revised responses):

- *The blocking of the ground floor hallway is harmful and I recommend this aspect of the scheme is altered;*

AMENDMENT - proposals have been revised to show an obscure glazed screen.

REVISED RESPONSE – *I am comfortable with this.*

- *It is unclear in the proposed plan where kitchen utilities will be placed and how these will be serviced, I recommend further information is sought;*
- *Further details are required pertaining to the partition/screen to the second-floor stair, as discussed at pre-app;*

AMENDMENT - This will be a replacement of the existing partially glazed screen in more modern, robust materials. An element of obscure glazing will be retained to allow daylight into the stairwell.

REVISED RESPONSE - *I am comfortable with this but would recommend the detail is conditioned.*

- *It has been assumed the windows will not be altered, this may need clarifying;*
OFFICER COMMENT – This matter will be conditioned so that a schedule of any required alteration is subject to application to discharge conditions.
- *The location of the new second floor stair would have been better located in the west bay as this intrudes on the original plan form.*

AMENDMENT - This room has had all of its historic features removed so while its original scale is still perceptible, its historic character is lost. To locate the stairs in the western room would require a new opening through the historic spine wall, which we consider would be more harmful than inserting the stair within the space.

REVISED RESPONSE - *Whilst this is still harmful (a new stair in the rear portion of the building would be more sympathetic)-Given the overall scheme I think this would be an acceptable compromise in the heritage balance.*

The concluding comments were: *Overall the changes to Number 131 present a significant improvement from previous iterations and in principle I support them. Further details are required pertaining to some items noted above.*

B: Representations

The Suffolk Preservation Society submitted a lengthy response. It welcomed the use of a brownfield site for housing, but voiced concern about the roof extension at Hurstlea House and also requested a reinstatement of the historical symmetrical façade.

A general disappointment about car domination and what it described as a “paucity” of public open space and landscaping – especially street trees.

These comments are taken to refer to both the full and listed building applications.

A neighbour at 135 High Street wrote in support of the application, also raising issues about parking, not relevant to this listed building application.

PART THREE – ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION

1.0 The Site and Surroundings

- 1.1 The site comprises the former Mid Suffolk HQ site, which houses the former offices, car park and gardens; and ii) the car park and landscaped area to the west of Hurstlea Road.
- 1.2 Most of the site is sensitively located, being within the Needham Market Conservation Area, fronting the town's main thoroughfare and containing the Grade II listed 131 High Street and its garden, as well as bordering further Grade II listed buildings at 129, 133 -135, 106-114 High Street and 2 Hawks Mill Street.
- 1.3 The property 131 High Street, known as Hurstlea, is a classical Georgian property, built at the end of the 18th century by Samuel Alexander. It was subsequently used as a bank from 1851 – 1904 before eventually being used as a headquarters by Gipping Rural District Council (GRDC).
- 1.4 GRDC added a two-storey extension to the south (left-hand-side as viewed from the High Street) between 1958 and 1968. This extension is of a lower quality and is blander than the original building, yet politely composed such that it reads as part of the building's evolution rather than a detraction from it. This is to be retained.
- 1.5 Following local government re-organisation in 1974, several local authorities merged to form Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC), which extended the building to the north and rear of the building. MSDC was fully operational from the site from 1985.
- 1.6 These additions are post-listing and therefore not curtilage listed or listed within their own rights. Whilst they are set back from the immediate High Street frontage, giving the building some breathing space as seen from the front, they are of no architectural merit, undermine the setting of the listed building and conservation area and are tabled for removal.
- 1.4 131 High Street originally had extensive grounds to the rear, some of which are still apparent today. These grounds were bisected by Hurstlea Road when it was laid down in the 20th century.
- 1.5 The more modern buildings were added in 1974 and subsequently, this was after the building's listing in 1955. Therefore these are not listed, either as part of 131 or as curtilage. The works to remove some of these additions, however, do have implications for the listed building in terms of making good where the additions butt against it.
- 1.6 There is also a fragment of garden wall, which is currently located on the south-western part of the site and which has a memorial bench with it. This appears to be the last remaining fragment of the historic garden wall of Hurstlea.

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1. The proposal is linked to Planning application DC/18/05104 for a mixed development including 94 units and a retail unit of 365m², including affordable housing and areas of public open space.
- 2.2 The application at hand, however, relates purely to the proposed works to the listed building. In essence, these are works that require Listed Building Consent, but would not require Planning permission.

These works are detailed in a schedule of works submitted with the application. The major features of this are:

- Re-instatement of the historic stair at basement level and subdivision to provide storage for the apartments above;
- Conversion of the ground floor (including the extension) in to four apartments;
- Removal of the single-storey, 20th century extension to the south-east;
- Conversion of the first floor (including the extension) in to four apartments;
- Four historic doors to be sealed shut (for fire precautions);
- Conversion of the second floor (including the extension) in to four apartments;
- Removal of spiral staircase to the west;
- Creation of new staircase to southeast;
- Removal of southern extension roof and provision of roof top extension to create two apartments and terraces;
- Conversion of the third floor in to the second storey of two duplex apartments;
- Removal of the north-western extension;
- Addition of a new, small, two-storey extension;
- Alteration to boundary walls, including part removal where necessary for access, repair and re-pointing.

3.0 The Principle of Development

- 3.1 The broad principle of use is explored in the Planning application DC/18/05104. Here, only the special interest of the listed building is for discussion.

4.0 Effect on Listed Building

- 4.1 Policy HB1 of the Local Plan seeks to protect the character and appearance of buildings of architectural or historic interest, particularly protecting the settings of Listed Buildings. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Listed Building or its setting.
- 4.2 Paragraph 192 of the NPPF states “In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of: a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable

communities including their economic vitality; and c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.”

- 4.3 Paragraph 197 of the NPPF states that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application.
- 4.4 Paragraph 196 states: “Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”
- 4.5 Consideration of the heritage merits of the proposal cover two sets of considerations: i) the effect on the historic fabric of the building and ii) the effect on its historic character, appearance and setting. These are two subtly different sets of considerations, although there is some overlap and the latter does bleed in to the general considerations visited under the Planning application. For this reason there is some repetition from that committee report in the following paragraphs.
- 4.6 The proposed works and the manner of their execution formed part of a pre-application by the applicant in the Autumn of 2018. Then, as now, no major concerns have been raised regarding the fabric of the building – namely any loss or undermining of the same.
- 4.7 The main issues which have been raised, however, relate to the effect on the character and appearance of the building.
- 4.8 Whilst parties have acknowledged the benefit of removing the newer additions, thus enhancing the setting of the building; concerns have been raised about the proposed roof extension to the west.
- 4.9 The Heritage advice received) raised these concerns, as did the Suffolk Preservation Society.
- 4.10 These concerns related to the form and materials. Specifically, the way the extension would sit “uncomfortably” under the cornice of the building was criticised for being cramped. The fact that this would also be visible from the High Street was also criticised.
- 4.11 Linked to this, the choice of materials (glazing and bronze cladding) was criticised for exacerbating the structure’s prominence.
- 4.12 The concerns are understood and amendments have been sought and secured in terms of the position of the roof extension. Whilst the amendments have affected the appearance of the building, in the context of all the other amendments the works are held to enhance the listed building and its appearance, as well as its enjoyment by the public.
- 4.13 paragraph 196 of the NPPF clearly instructs Local Authorities to weigh up the public benefits of a development where (as is the case here) less than substantial harm is identified.

- 4.14 The public benefit would be a significant contribution of 94 residential dwelling units to the housing stock of Needham Market and to deliverable housing land supply in Mid Suffolk as a whole. The viability of the site is marginal and the loss of units (which removing the roof extension over 131 High Street would entail) would affect on this viability. The scheme would moreover ensure that the building and curtilage returns to an active use rather remaining vacant and exposed to risk of deterioration in character and condition.
- 4.15 In addition, the listed building is to be repaired and reused and its setting is to be enhanced. Whilst the roof extension will be a visible element in the conservation area's skyline, the building will be given room to breath on the right-hand-side, where it is currently visually crowded and undermined by the series of unattractive 20th century accretions and additions with very slack pitched roofs clearly in view. These additions have had a functional justification in the past when this was a Local Authority building, but they have no architectural merit, are visually discordant and undermine the setting of the listed building and the conservation area. Their removal speaks in favour of the proposal.

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

5.0 Planning Balance and Conclusion

- 5.1 The broad Planning merits are discussed in the Planning application committee report. Here it is for Members to judge on the effect of the alterations on the listed building.
- 5.2 131 High Street as a heritage asset has been heavily undermined with the additions from the 20th century when it served as the administrative centre of Needham Market.
- 5.3 The application at hand seeks to remove this undesirable clutter and allow the building to breath as well as allowing the public to enjoy it and its setting better than they can presently.
- 5.4 Works to the building itself are largely to “make good” where elements are currently stuck to it. Other works such as the closing off of doors to avoid fire-spread are harmless intrusions in to the fabric and are reversible.
- 5.5 Whilst the roof extension and other elements will change the immediate setting of the building there are clear public benefits to be weighed in the planning balance. In the context of the public benefits and the other improvements, the balance weighs in favour granting consent .
- 5.6 Listed Building Consent is, therefore, recommended.

RECOMMENDATION

(1) That Listed Building Consent be granted, subject to conditions including:

- Standard Time Limit Condition (LB)
- Drawing Numbers
- A Scheme of archaeological building across the whole site commensurate with a 'Level 3 Record' as outlined in Historic England Guidance Understanding Historic Buildings;
- A schedule of repairs to the former orchard wall;
- Condition requiring details of materials (bricks and windows for new extension to Number 131);
- Details of service runs in Number 131;
- Details of interior fixtures, fittings and partitions to Number 131;
- Details of conservation roof lights to Number 131;
- Materials for new buildings to rear of Number 131;
- Details of landscaping and public realm around listed building;
- Existing doors within Number 131 will be locked shut, not removed
- Other details as flagged in the amended response.