



Bath Heritage Watchdog

contact@bathheritagewatchdog.org

APPLICATION NUMBER: 16/05950/FUL

ADDRESS: Rising Sun, Lymore Avenue, Oldfield Park, Bath

PROPOSAL: Erection of 7no. apartments following demolition of existing converted public house

CASE OFFICER: Chris Griggs-Trevarthen

DATE: 4 March 2017

COMMENT: OBJECTION

Bath Heritage Watchdog objects to this application.

The Rising Sun was opened as a beerhouse by James Tanner in the 1870s and remained as a public house until recent times. Whilst the building looks a bit run down, it could be argued, given its age and position in the locality, to be a mature undesignated heritage asset.

PRINCIPLE OF DEMOLITION & REBUILD – DESIGN

The existing building is modest and sits well in the area and adheres to the local vernacular. Although it could do with some care and attention, neglect is not a reason for demolition.

The Design & Access Statement states that ‘*the location of the existing internal walls makes the building particularly difficult to convert*’. The former pub has already been converted under permission 13/01485/FUL and is in use: currently the building has 5 apartments housing 9 individuals (who will have to be accommodated elsewhere in order for the demolition to be possible). Therefore the only reason that someone would give this “*difficult to convert*” reason as a problem is if they want to gain further from increasing the number of tenants. The applicants have not provided any information showing that the building is showing signs of structural distress and we therefore do not consider the case for vacating it for demolition has been proved.

The design proposed is alien in what is a purely residential area. There are no blocks of flats nearby and the structure would therefore, with its height and mass, be monolithic, would overshadow the adjacent housing and be over-dominant in the streetscene, especially given its position at the brow of the hill. Condition 4 of permission 13/01485/FUL is specific about the appearance “*in the interests of the appearance of the development and the surrounding area*”, so the streetscene must be a material consideration for this application too. Not only is the scale and mass at odds with the local vernacular so is the detailed design. The main windows are oversized with no glazing bars and with dominant frames and projecting rectangular boxes similar to the ones installed at Western Riverside. The others are the now standard underscaled design which leaves the ratio of solid to void being incorrect and not of the Bath pattern. There is the potential of increased light-spill from the larger units and from the skylights of the central stairwell.

The roof also is overbearing and dominant particularly the North West elevation. Should permission be granted we would ask that all elevations are finished in ashlar (as the drawings state) and not a mix of ashlar/render as mentioned in the Design and Access statement. Render quickly becomes stained and grubby without regular maintenance.

As is also now standard the drawings show no provision of rainwater goods.

The drawing claiming to show the proposed streetscene is a clever mix of not showing the actual road level, the inclusion of very mature trees (taller than those actually growing there) and a fence that is dwarfed by the structure. That drawing is from 14/05259/FUL and shows the area (currently garages) to the rear of the former Rising Sun. It also does not show the true gradient of the hill. Lymore Avenue is not shown but is a road perpendicular to the paper at the right hand edge of the drawing. There are residents in 2-storey houses opposite who would be looking at the historic pub at present, a 3-storey façade with its lower floor partly below the road level, and would be looking at the over-dominant north west elevation with its four rows of windows some of which protrude towards them, if this application is approved and built.

No parking is proposed for the development which will clearly make it undesirable for key workers and professionals, some of which may work unsocial hours and therefore need a car. Indeed despite assertions in the documentation the site is not well served by buses: only the number 20 bus runs close by, using minibuses because of the narrow streets along the route, has no service after 8pm, and which only serves Bath University on a scant basis.

The documentation also states that ‘*The shopping and service facilities in Twerton are a level walking distance from the site*’. In fact they are a fair walk away down and up a substantially steep hill.

It appears that much of the application is designed to mislead those not familiar with the locality.

PRINCIPLE OF USE

The ability for residents and families to live within Bath will help support the predicted employment growth in the city and help reduce traffic congestion with employees not having to travel into the city from outside to get to their jobs. The demographic of the city needs to be balanced for the World Heritage City to thrive.

We remain concerned, and object, to the continual practice of just about every available brownfield site being utilised for Purpose Built Student Accommodation, or fronting schemes purporting to be for mixed or residential use, with an underlying desire or future intention for student use. The tactic of describing this application as ‘7 apartments’ is deplorable when it is clearly a front for a student block: we do not believe that the layout is such that it would be attractive to (or indeed suitable for) young professionals or key workers. Permanent residents would require better facilities than this one has, with a space labelled “*Bathroom*” in each apartment despite the fact that it doesn't contain a bath, a kitchen area not designed for the preparation of full meals, and bedrooms containing a double bed and a wardrobe but precious little space anywhere else for the level of storage necessary for the clutter accumulated by permanent residents.

We feel this site is a prime location for residential accommodation, preferably low cost and aimed at young professionals, key workers or local families, particularly when the Core Strategy expects additional student accommodation to be built on campus; and while the council ignores its own strategy there will be no incentive for the universities to deliver what is expected of it. We also believe such schemes are in conflict with the ‘realisation of objectives for housing, affordable housing and employment space’ in the Draft Placemaking Plan.

The current use of the building is for 5 apartments housing 9 individuals, so technically an HMO, though with ample space for permanent residents. The proposed new build is for a minimum of 24 individuals. Examination of the floor plans does show, on the face of it, accommodation for 24, yet bearing in mind the drawings appear to show double beds in each room, there is potential for this to be up to 48.

Although the documentation is full of the words ‘*young professionals*’ and ‘*key workers*’ it is evident from the statement ‘*although not limited to young professionals or key workers this proposed lends itself to single room occupancy*’ and the floor plans show that the intent is to cash in on the current rush for student accommodation, especially in areas where the Article 4 Directive restricts (or bans) the conversion of the normal housing stock to HMOs. If this is not the case then why has the word ‘student’ not been included in the documentation? Also, why has the demolition of housing stock to build 7 Apartments not been recognised as being equivalent to converting existing housing stock, when that is exactly what is planned? The documentation also includes the standard ‘*this will relieve the pressure on local housing*’ which is totally untrue. The Oldfield Park/Southdown/Twerton communities have progressively become fragmented by the proliferation of HMOs in those areas and we cannot see how any more student numbers in these communities thus increasing the population density, can be accommodated from an infrastructure point of view.

We would suggest that any build permitted on this site has a planning condition on it preventing use as student lets. This application despite suggestions to the contrary, is only suitable for student lets and therefore it should be refused.

It is contrary to Policies WHS Setting SPD, Core Strategy B1. Local Plan ET3, CP6, D2 and D4 and fails to meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework NPPF and should be refused.