

CENTRAL AREA COMMITTEE 20.04.2023

The Planning Officer introduced the application and highlighted the pertinent issues of the proposal.

Members asked the following questions of the planning officer at this stage:

- Is there a S106 agreement already in place?

The planning officer responded to advise that the application has been assessed for viability, and the conclusions are that right now, the development would not be viable if contributions to affordable housing and open space were provided. Therefore, there would be a S106 agreement attached to any approval, but this would be to deal with the need for a reappraisal at a later date due to changes in market conditions etc during the 3 year life of a planning consent.

There were no members of the public present speaking against the application.

The agent for the application spoke in support of the proposals and outlined as follows:

- Building was last utilised as office space;
- Overall design in relation to scale and massing has been developed in close liaison with Planning and Conservation officers to ensure the proposals are high quality and respect the existing building, neighbouring buildings, residential properties and the surrounding Conservation area and associated heritage assets;
- This has included changes to the proposals during the life of the application to improve the relationship with the building and the adjacent Marsland House;
- Due to the highly sustainable location of the site, this is a car free development;
- There are a number of on-street and private car parking facilities in close proximity to the site with a good level of existing capacity;
- Technical assessments have been completed and submitted with the application and there have been no objections to the proposals from any statutory consultees;
- Positively engaged with the local community, distributing leaflets in May 2022 inviting feedback on the proposals;
- Unfortunately the development is not able to make a contribution to affordable housing and open space, the applicant is happy to agree to the S106 agreement including a claw back position;
- Applicant is committed to the delivery of this development and have worked positively with officers to bring forward a well-designed scheme that will make use of a vacant underused building and will contribute to the Council's regeneration aims for the area;
- The development will make a meaningful contribution to the Council's housing supply.

Members asked the agent the following questions:

- How long has the building been untenanted for?

The agent confirmed that he did not have the exact date to hand, but it was a couple of years.

Members then debated as follows:

Councillor Stewart expressed his surprise that so many of the town centre development are unviable if we try and have a S106 for open space or affordable housing, especially with the description of high end developments. It is not understood why they are not viable.

The planning officer responded to state that this has been through a detailed viability appraisal and there is a significant gap in this case. Officers do not just take the submitted reports on face value, these are carefully scrutinised. Land values are based on existing uses of the site and not future proposals.

Councillor Wynne outlined that would love to see more affordable housing here. Looks to be an underused building on this stretch of Wellington Street that doesn't have that much activity. Like that the original building is being retained. New residents will know that they are moving into a development with no parking. Area is heavily covered by TRO's so there wouldn't be problems from parking. Viability is disappointing but nothing that would result in a vote against the application on those grounds. Happy to recommend approval.

Therefore, on this basis, Committee agreed to recommend to PHR that the application be granted.