



From: Martyn White <Martyn.White@arun.gov.uk>
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To: Planning.Responses <Planning.Responses@arun.gov.uk>
Subject: LU/151/21/PL

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25 River Road Littlehampton BN17 5BZ

Demolition of existing car garage and the erection of 2 no. two-storey residential buildings comprising 5 no. flats with associated works.

The application site is located within the Littlehampton – River Road Conservation Area. The River Road Conservation Area is situated to the west of Littlehampton town centre and runs parallel to the River Arun. It developed in several stages during the first half of the 19th Century. At the Surrey Street end the buildings as far as Hampton Court were originally known as Seaview and contains all the Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area. They were originally occupied by town dignitaries and those who had an interest in the sea and seafaring. This group are of two- and three-storey town houses built as semi-detached houses or in short blocks.

Of greater relevance to this application is the presence of a second distinct area to the west of Hampton Court and along lengths of Purbeck Place end Terminus Place. The buildings in this area are smaller and simpler than those to the east. They are predominantly of two storeys and front on to the carriage way. The elevations are treated with painted render. The application site is located within this area.

The Proposed Development

The application proposes the demolition of the existing car garage/workshop and the erection of two blocks of apartments, which collectively provide 5 residential units. One of the blocks will front on to River Road, whilst the other will front on to Terminus Place. Both of the buildings will be 2 storeys with semi-underground parking (with the parking being visible to the street). The proposed units are to be rendered with pitched roof elements.

New buildings are more likely to look as if they belong to an area if they are sited and arranged in much the same way as those already there. In this conservation area most of the traditional buildings front directly on to the pavement or have small garden areas in front of them, each telling something about their age, status and use. The buildings are very much part of the street scene and play a significant role in the character of the area. The application raises a number of issues which shall be discussed in turn below:

Change of use

Historically, the conservation area would have had a more diverse mix of uses, which have (to some extent) informed the development of the area. However, as of 2021 it is predominantly residential in nature with limited alternative uses present in the locality. The properties immediately surrounding the site appear to be purely residential, with modern development from the last 20 or so years having taken place in the location of former river wharfs. It is therefore considered that the change of use of the land from commercial to residential will not harm the established character of the road.

The loss of the existing garage building

As part of reviewing the application it has been necessary to review the historic mapping used by the LPA. A review has noted that a structure of similar dimensions appears on the 1911/1912 OS map. This indicates that a structure (possibly this one) was present during the 20C.

It is considered that whilst a reminder of the former use, the structure does not make an important contribution towards the established character of the street-scene. In-fact it can be considered to detract from the neighbouring properties when viewed from River Road. Further, the current condition of the building/site detracts from the conservation area and causes harm to it. Therefore, on balance, its loss and redevelopment can be considered to be an enhancement of the local area and is therefore acceptable. This is subject to details of the replacement development, which is expected to be of a standard appropriate for its historic context.

The design/appearance of the proposed apartment blocks/impact upon the surrounding area

The concept of redeveloping the site offers the opportunity to better reveal what is important about the site and local area. This concept should inform the proposed design of the development, as should an assessment of the local area.

The river road building appears to follow the building line of the neighbouring properties, which is positive, whilst the Terminus Place building is set back in order to accommodate two parking spaces. The concept of maintaining the River Road street frontage will ensure that the character of the local area can be reflected.

However, it is not clear how the proposed buildings are inspired by the various attractive, traditional properties within the conservation area. Whilst the idea of the semi-basement style car parking is understood in that it allows for the creation of off-street parking, it creates a raised ground floor, whilst also increasing the height of the buildings overall. It also results in the car parking area dominating what would normally be the ground floor area of any property. The fenestration pattern is also different from those in the immediate area where bay windows are present and limited, if any, Juliet balconies are seen. Therefore, the front elevations of both buildings appear out of character with those of a more traditional construction in the conservation area.

Whilst the proposed block of apartments in Terminus Place are now similar in height to the existing traditional properties, they have a more complex front elevation, which is out of character, this is enhanced by the undercroft car parking and the raised terrace area at the upper ground floor level.

The proposed use of render is positive and other materials and joinery would have to be of high quality in order to ensure that there are appropriate for the conservation area. Details of both materials and joinery should be provided for by way of condition, if you are minded to approve the application.

Conclusion

It is considered that the proposed development will not adequately reflect the character of the conservation area. As such it is considered that the impact can be described as causing less than substantial harm in accordance with paragraph 196 of the NPPF (2019). As such, you will also need to consider the public benefits that the development may achieve as part of your assessment of the application, along with the contents of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended).

Martyn White

Principal Conservation Officer,
Planning Services



Please note: I work on Conservation for half of the working week (all day Monday and Friday and Tuesday Afternoons)

T: 01903 737717

E: Martyn.White@arun.gov.uk or Conservation.officer@arun.gov.uk

Arun District Council, Civic Centre, Maltravers Rd, Littlehampton, West Sussex, BN17 5LF

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