

Design and Access Statement

Re-submission of application 19/02888/F

Number 1 Troy Lane is currently in use as a two bedroom flat (on two floors) although until its closure in January 2020 most of the ground floor in use as a small village shop and post office. This application seeks to change the use of the retail space into residential, to create a larger four- bedroom dwelling.

This property has been in use as a small village shop for many years, and has been owned and run by the current occupiers since 2003. The operation of the business has always been a struggle, as a very small shop it depends upon a combination of mainly passing trade plus patronage of local people in the village.

In common with many small shops it had been under pressure for many years but has benefited from assistance of members of the local community to help it survive. There have been enough volunteers to enable one additional person to work in the shop almost every day.

Unfortunately, in September 2019 a Co-op food store opened in nearby Bletchington, less than 1.5 miles from this shop. In addition a Sainsbury's Local, offering a wide range of products including bakery, has opened at Heyford Park approximately 3 miles from Kirtlington.

The consequence in terms of passing trade has been devastating, and overall trade inevitably reduced significantly: to the point that this small shop was losing money every day that it continued to trade. Unfortunately the business ceased trading in early 2020.

The most relevant, saved policy is found in the 1996 Local Plan – Policy S29 – as follows:

Policy

S29 – proposals that will involve the loss of existing village services which serve the basic needs of the local community will not normally be permitted.

Supporting text – The District Council recognises the importance of village services, particularly the local shop and pub, to the local community and will seek to resist the loss of such facilities whenever possible. However, it is also recognised that it will be difficult to resist the loss of such facilities when they are proven to be no longer financially viable in the long term.

This policy reflects the period in which it was made over 24 years ago. It refers to village services which serve the “basic needs” of the local community, this is a policy drafted before the invention of the internet, online shopping and all that goes with it. Therefore, the policy needs to be given appropriately reduced weight. Notwithstanding this, the supporting text of the policy acknowledges that local facilities can be rendered redundant and unviable.

In relation to the current application the basic shopping needs of the local community do not in any way depend upon this shop; there is a new significantly better provision of local convenience shopping less than 1.5 miles to the south. In this context it is self-evident that this small village convenience shop has no future.

The change of use of the ground floor shop accommodation into additional residential accommodation results in no material external alterations other than the provision of two roof lights within the rear elevation and a change to the fenestration to replace the shop window

with a more domestic scale opening matching windows in this terrace. This element is not an essential change.

The shop has no off street parking, with limited on-street parking available directly outside. This is a very busy road and finding a parking space close to the Kirtlington shop is a challenge, particularly at peak times.

This application represents a material reduction in parking demand compared to the use of this building as a shop. The change from a two-bed flat into a four-bed house does imply on additional parking space, but this still represents a significant reduction in demand compared to the use of the property as a shop, even at its now reduced level of commercial activity .

The property has a large rear garden, the kitchen is already on the ground floor, therefore, as a single dwelling, it has perfectly acceptable residential amenities. This change of use of the ground floor retail floor area has no impact upon this situation.

The idea of the existing premises being used as a community shop whilst retaining the current flat has been explored but the layout of the building does not lend itself to this solution. There is no access to the rear of the property and the flat cannot be separated from the shop without major internal and external changes which reduce the retail area even further in order to create this access.

The decision has now been made within the village that an alternative location for a community shop should be identified and planning application for change of use will be submitted in the near future.

Conclusions

The change of use of the shop will have benefits in terms of the residential amenities of its neighbours, in reducing the frequency of cars parking directly outside their properties.

The small struggling village shop has been devastated by the opening of the new £520K convenience food store in Bletchington.

That large new convenience store is less than 1.5 miles (3 minutes drive) to the south, and renders this shop redundant in terms of possible passing trade, and it is therefore now loss making.

The current shop has very limited on street parking, on a busy and hazardous road. The ease of accessibility and ample parking provision at the new Co-Op are demonstrably more attractive.

The incorporation of the retail element of this building into the existing dwelling create a larger dwelling of four bedrooms, rather than two, has no adverse planning consequences.