

I7169 Gillies, Inverness

Application for detailed planning consent Design Statement

1.0 Background

- 1.1 This statement refers to an application for detailed planning consent for the alteration and extension of Gillies Furnishings showroom at Chapel Street, Inverness.
- 1.2 Gillies are a well established Scottish furnishing retailer with a long established branch in Inverness and require significant additional showroom/sales space together with an approved customer offer.
- 1.3 This proposal meets the brief through a two-storey rear extension to the existing showroom building involving part alteration/remodelling of the existing building to provide a clear through link to showroom space at each level.
- 1.4 The plan, massing and elevational treatment is as indicated by application drawings and specifications.

2.0 Pre-application Summary/Issues

- 2.1 The project was subject to a detailed feasibility study and was submitted to the Highland Council for pre-application advice in March 2020 (check date). The pre-application submission proposed an extension of two floors of a generally similar scope and floor area to this application.
- 2.2 A pre-application advice/report was issued 12 January 2021, reference 20/03451/PREAPP.
- 2.3 The key points of advice issued were:
 - The project generally conforms to provide a FLDP policy one in as much as it enhances and supports the vitality and viability of the city centre.
 - Is sited within the Inverness City Centre conservation area and its design, placing and relationship to the existing building and adjoining buildings, particularly the adjoining church to the rear, will require to be addressed in the submitted design.
 - The development is to be constructed within the large rear service yard and carpark for the existing store and the proposal will require to demonstrate that proposed parking provision is either in accordance with the council's guidelines (one parking space per 20² metres GFA equating to 55 spaces) or provide justification to support any shortfall.
- 2.4 The above advice/observations have been addressed in this application.

3.0 Brief

- 3.1 As noted in 1.0 above, the brief comprised the enlargement of Gillies existing furniture / carpeting showroom to increase/maximise showroom and retail space on two floors directly linked to the existing building. Additionally, new or replacement office, storage and staff / sanitary facilities, a new public entrance direct from the rear carpark and related servicing, fire exit and related building standards provision to be met.

4.0 Design Approach/Parameters

- 4.1 Both in design development and acknowledging advice from the pre-application exercise, the extension is of lesser height and mass than the existing building, and of more appropriate contemporary appearance reflecting both the business and quality aspirations of the applicant.
- 4.2 Key parameters are considered as follows:
 - Maximising possible floor area while protecting the site boundaries to prevent over development and an acceptable proximity or overlooking of residential properties to the west.
 - Maximising setback from the south boundary to reduce proximity to and visual impingement of the adjoining church building, notwithstanding that there is no open aspect to the church currently and its main entrance approach elevation is from the south (see block/location plan).

- 4.3 Accordingly, the design approach adopted utilises a minimum pitch portal construction approach with a low regularised parapet to significantly reduce the bulk of the extension relative to the existing building.

The proposed design is of a contemporary elevational approach with varied fenestration avoiding overlooking the adjoining residential properties, and an articulated pitched roof entrance portico from the customer carpark.

Materials are standing seam steel cladding with expressed projecting window surrounds and high levels of glazing to the entrance feature. Colours are RAL Cobalt Blue cladding with uniform Anthracite Grey aluminium patent glazing throughout and contrasting colours to the projecting entrance portico (Grey Blue) and support columns (Ochre Yellow) etc, all as per elevations submitted.

The overall aesthetic approach being to clearly express a contemporary addition to the site but minimise overlooking or overpowering adjoining properties and provide Architectural quality in what is albeit a “back lands” and somewhat concealed site.

5.0 Parking

- 5.1 We are mindful of the pre-application comments of Transport Planning. However the existing site has a capacity of 49 parking spaces and the development will result in a revised and reduced parking capacity of 17 spaces.

The Council’s guidelines (1 parking space per 20² metres GFA) is acknowledged but it is contended that this form of retail is “high volume/low footfall”! Products being sold are relatively large but the market is well defined and significant numbers of customers in the store are a rarity.

In anticipation of parking queries, the applicant undertook a basic survey and has historical information on relevant parking demand on their site. Generally, there are between 2-6 staff vehicles and between 3-10 customer vehicles at any given time.

The site is city centre and, in comparison to the vast majority of adjoining and city centre retail outlets, is extremely well served for onsite parking and will remain extremely well served, with greater capacity than normal or likely demand.

6.0 Summary

This development is essentially a large scale retail showroom on two levels with, as stated above, high volume/low footfall demand, and on a site which is accessed to the rear of the existing building.

Notwithstanding the low visibility site, the applicant wishes to create a building of quality and contemporary appeal.

The development acknowledges the adjoining properties and the design has been developed to (a) avoid overlooking and (b) minimise height and mass so as to avoid any significant loss of utility to adjoining developments.