



Architecture
&
Development
L i m i t e d

129-131 High Street Rickmansworth WD3 1AN
Design & Access Statement

6th May 2021

1819/B1



129 – 131 High Street Rickmansworth WD3 1AN

This Design & Access Statement has been prepared in compliance with the guidelines prepared by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

1.00 The Site

1.01 The site comprises numbers 129 & 131 High Street Rickmansworth and the yard immediately to the south. The site is generally flat with only modest level changes. The site is located in the Rickmansworth Town Centre conservation area although neither building is listed. Number 129 High Street is currently occupied by a retail unit, number 131 was formerly occupied by the HSBC Bank but was vacated some time ago and remains vacant. The application covers the ground floor of number 131 High Street and the first floor of both properties with a proposed second floor above both properties. The existing single storey extension to the rear (which is the enclosure to the former bank safe) will be removed and be replaced by a new stair serving the proposed first floor development.

1.02 The rear yard is enclosed by a 7 feet high substantial brick wall which is obviously contemporaneous with the buildings at 129-131 High Street and forms an important element of the site when approached from Bury Lane.

The overall site area is 406m²

2.0 Evaluation

2.01 The site lies within the Rickmansworth Town Centre conservation area but neither of the existing buildings are locally nor nationally listed. The properties are both retail units but in neither case is the upper floor used, the upper floor to both being linked and only accessible from number 131 High Street, formerly the HSBC Bank. The proposal is to utilize the existing upper floors of both buildings and create an additional floor to provide residential units. The existing yard will maintain the existing parking together with the bin store for the proposed flats.

Number 133 High Street is Grade II listed and is therefore a building of importance within the Conservation Area. A previous application proposed a three storey extension to the rear which then returned at approximately right angles to join the roof of numbers 129-131 High Street. The conservation officer felt that this solution, whilst improving the approach to the High Street from Bury Lane dominated the Grade II listed building and detracted from its' setting which, when viewed from the High Street, was of a diminution of scale towards Bury Lane.



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There is no in principle objection to the construction of the rear extension and all parties are in agreement that the replacement of the existing flat roofed extensions would enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as noted in the Pre-App report.

- 2.02 The site is located in Rickmansworth Town Centre which is the principal town in the district and as noted in the Local Development Framework Core Strategy *'It is therefore appropriate that a proportion of future development should be located within the town. There is scope for continued infilling within the urban area, primarily on previously developed land, subject to the protection of existing residential and historic character and amenities'*. Policy PSP1 states *'...development in Rickmansworth will maintain and enhance the vitality of the town centre by promoting a range of town centre uses including housing...'*.

The site is located in a highly sustainable location being situated in the centre of the Rickmansworth Conservation Area. Rickmansworth is served by 8 bus routes:

- 103 High Wycombe – Beaconsfield – Amersham - Watford
- X103 High Wycombe – Watford
- 320 Hemel Hempstead – Railway Station – Rickmansworth
- 520 Maple Cross – Hemel Hempstead
- 724 Harlow – Heathrow Airport
- R1 Mount Vernon Hospital – Maple Cross
- R2 Watford - Mount Vernon – Chorleywood
- W1 Garston – Watford – Maple Cross

and frequent train services to London Marylebone and Aylesbury Vale Parkway. In addition the town is also served by the Metropolitan Line providing services to Amersham, Uxbridge (via Harrow on the Hill) and Aldgate in the City.

- 2.03 The National Planning Policy Framework states that when setting local parking standards for residential developments local planning authorities should take into account:

- The accessibility of the development
- The availability of and opportunities for public transport
- An overall need to reduce the use of high-emission vehicles.

The Local Development Framework, Policy PSP1 states that the vitality and viability of the town centre should be promoted by a range of uses including housing, and conserve and where possible enhance the distinctive and historic character of the centre, particularly within the area



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defined by the Rickmansworth Town Centre Conservation Area through appropriate and well designed development.

The site is currently provided with 4 car parking spaces one of which is used by the tenants of number 129 High Street. The disposition of parking with this application will be: one space each for the retail units at numbers 129 & 131 High Street and 2 spaces for the residential development.

Appendix 5 of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy sets out a range of parking standards. The retail unit at 129 High Street has a gross internal area of 47m² whilst the proposed area of the retail unit at 131 High Street has an area of 68m². The car parking provision for the retail units falls slightly below the indicated standard but given the highly sustainable location the provision is considered acceptable.

The parking provision for the 4 residential units will be 2 spaces, this is below the standard indicated in Appendix 5 however Appendix 5 states that in areas of high accessibility and good service provision a reduction in levels of parking may be appropriate. Lesser parking standards have been accepted before within the town centre (refer to planning application 16/2676/FUL and earlier applications on this site where a development of 55 units provided parking at a ratio of less than one per unit) Public parking is available in close proximity to the site and is free to use from 6.30pm until 8.30am, this is considered a modest compromise and we believe this is a reasonable compromise in bringing to the town centre necessary residential accommodation by bringing into use the previously unused upper floors of 129 & 131 High Street.

- 2.04 The principle design constraints when considering the development of this site were a) the recognition of the importance of the conservation area, b) resolving the complexities of the irregularity of the footprint of the properties to the rear of the site and the importance of incorporating the resultant design solution into the texture of the conservation area and c) the juxtaposition of the other buildings to the rear.
- 2.05 The proposal is for the redevelopment of a site located within the town and as such it brings into use a large part of an existing building which has been unused for many years. It therefore accords precisely with the thrust of the Local Development Framework in terms of new development within the town Centre. Developing such sites within the conservation area does require some compromise to facilitate beneficial development. In this case no amenity space is provided on site. This is not unique for developments within the town centre. Planning application 16/2676/FUL and earlier applications on that site provide for 55 residential units with no on - site amenity space. Similarly Swan Field House & George Field



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House Northway provide amenity space (balconies) for the top floor of one of the units only.

The Pre – App report made reference to a recent planning appeal where the lack of amenity space was felt to be sufficient reason for refusal. We have reviewed that application and the principle reason that the lack of amenity space was felt to be problematic in that case was the distance to the nearest open space that could be used for amenity. In the case of the site in question – 16-18 Lower Road Chorleywood – the nearest amenity space is some 700 metres distant from the application site. In the case of this application the distance to Rickmansworth Aquadrome is 500 metres, to the area to the north of Park Road (north of Waitrose supermarket) the distance is 290 metres and the nearest amenity space, south of Bury Meadows, is 160 metres. We would maintain therefore that there is ample and adequate amenity space within perfectly reasonable proximity to the application site.

3.0 Design

- 3.01 The primary consideration was to ensure that any changes to the High Street elevation should be minimized. To this end the proposal ensures that the new development does not exceed the height of the existing building so that the roof, as seen from the High Street, remains unaltered, although it is apparent from internal inspection (and external inspection from the rear) that the original roof has been significantly altered. The only changes proposed to the front elevation are the introduction of new windows at first floor level and the refurbishment of the two existing dormers, which will remain as two casement dormers. During the virtual design meeting held on the 15th October 2020 the conservation officer agreed to review proposals for the introduction of new windows at first floor level since there was general agreement that the design of this element proposed in the Pre-Application was unsatisfactory. An alternate proposal was forwarded to Three Rivers on the 15th December 2020. A response was eventually received which suggested that the modest introduction of smaller windows may be acceptable and whilst the conservation officer suggested an ideal solution would be no new windows this would not be acceptable as there is a minimum requirement for daylight in habitable rooms which the existing windows are too small to provide on their own. It is our view that the modest scale of the proposed new windows will not detract from the simplicity of the front elevation and maintains the symmetry of the glazing within the elevation.
- 3.02 The extension to the rear sits, in part, over what is currently a large flat roofed area and floor levels are designed so that the new pitched roof to this element is lower than the existing roof ridge to 129 & 131 High Street. The adjoining properties have a mix of flat roofs and small pitched roofs.



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- 3.03 An objection was raised against the previous application because the additional storey to the existing flat roofed element which is to the rear of number 133 High Street, which is a Grade II listed building, would be overbearing on the Grade II building even though the relationship can only be viewed obliquely along the alleyway linking the High Street to Bury Lane. The existing rendered, flat roofed, element has been reduced in height and as a result the proposed pitched roof shown in this application is reduced in height too from that shown in the previous formal application and is now more closely related to the height of the roof to the Grade II listed building which fronts the High Street.

The new roof that projects from the rear of the existing roof to numbers 129 – 131 High Street has a ridge height lower than the existing roof. The Pre - application showed a roof form which was described as a crown roof but this is in our view misleading. A crown roof, as usually constructed, is a roof that has side slopes (pitches) which are divided by a flat roofed element. This is not the case here where the ridge to the roofs that join the main roof to 129 – 131 High Street divides a pitched roof on either side, one of which then drops down to a flat roofed well which is lower than the ridge. The roof well is neither visible nor can it be determined or deduced when viewed from any aspect. Similarly the lantern light that is referenced in the Pre-App report as ‘... a highly visible feature...’ would in fact not be visible from any aspect. The reference to the ‘crown roof’ exacerbating the bulk and massing of the development to an unacceptable degree is in our view misleading, since as noted above, the new pitched roofs to the extension to the rear of 129 – 131 High Street would appear, visually, precisely as they would if the roofs were constructed as two rear projecting pitched roofs linked by a valley.

- 3.04 It is acknowledged that the site is in the conservation area, however neither building is listed, either locally or nationally. Care has been taken to acknowledge the setting in the conservation area both in the size of the proposal and in style and scale and as noted in the Pre-App report ‘...the rearward facing elevations would be a positive outcome...’ whilst the front elevations remain virtually unchanged.
- 3.05 The proposed flats, with the exception of the ground floor flat, are designed with double aspect with bedrooms being located to the rear. The ground floor flat is single aspect and is south facing. It was a design consideration that where possible all flats should be dual aspect and with the exception of the ground floor flat this has been achieved.
- 3.06 Two small areas of planting are proposed to provide separation between the ground floor flat and the proposed parking area.



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3.07 Four car parking spaces are provided, as this is a shortfall over Three Rivers standards my client is prepared to enter into a Section 106 Agreement which would prevent future residents from obtaining car parking permits. A large bin area is provided.

3.08 Satisfactory access is provided for refuse operatives and the fire brigade.

4.0 Size

4.01 The site area is 406m² the proposed building ground floor footprint is 148m² gross internal area and the overall gross internal area of the proposed building is 435m². The height of the building, when viewed from the High Street has not changed, the height at the rear is 9.3 metres.

5.0 Access

5.01 Access to the site is from Bury Lane.

6.0 Security

6.01 The scheme will be designed in accordance with the recommendations and principles of 'Secured by Design'.

7.0 Conclusion

7.01 The proposal is for the beneficial re-development of the unused upper parts of existing retail units in the town centre and will provide additional housing within an existing town centre location in accordance with the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. Advice and observations contained in the Pre-App report have been incorporated where this seemed appropriate and the design has been amended accordingly. It is our view that this extension would be a positive addition to the conservation area providing additional housing whilst also preserving viable retail units to the High Street and improving the conservation area by re-invigorating the rear elevation to the site.