

Design + Access Statement

Proposed Flatted Development, 181 Union Street, Aberdeen

The scheme subject to this application is for the redevelopment of an existing vacant office building into 15 no. flats for affordable rent. These flats will ultimately be owned and managed by Hillcrest Housing Association Ltd. with whom our client has an already ongoing successful relationship with.

As such, the layout of the flats and their level of amenity has been arrived at after much detailed discussion with Hillcrest Housing Association Ltd. directly and therefore meets all their detailed requirements. This includes for 2 no. flats specifically designed for the use of a wheelchair user to take advantage of the existing lift provision.

This application is essentially a resubmission of a previous application (200474/DPP) which saw 17 no. flats being approved and so this application sees a reduction in the amount of development proposed within the same site area. As such this will see all flats achieving a greater level of amenity than the previously approved, otherwise all other aspects pertaining to the flats are as previously approved.

Some differences to the previous approved application are the replacement window proposals, new windows to the North elevation, car parking removal, and changed bin store location. Otherwise, all other aspects pertaining to the flats are as previously approved.

Existing building

The property is a three storey and ground floor property on Union Street, Aberdeen. The ground floor is currently occupied by a branch of Coral Bookmakers and very recently Merkur Slots. The upper floors were previously occupied by NHS who we understand carried out the complete rebuild of the property leaving only the Union Street facade as original. The upper floor offices have been vacant for a number of years. The entire interior is constructed of concrete slab and columns with none of the original features in evidence. Of the exterior only the front facade was retained as the rear elevations are finished in an exposed aggregate block.

The applicant owns the areas subject of this planning application. The ground floor retail areas are now in separate ownership as shown on the plans.

This property is unique in that whilst it presents as a three-storey property to Union Street, due to the considerable change in level between Union Street and Windmill Brae, the rear of the property has a further two floors at lower ground and basement.

Notwithstanding the fact that the original interior no longer exists and only the front facade has been retained, the property is B listed and is within the Union Street Conservation Area

Proposed Development

The proposed development will see the change of use of the vacant office areas in to 15 flats as follows.

- 10 x one bed flat
- 5 x two bed flat

All these flats will be accessed via Union Street and Windmill Brae with the exception of two of the one-bedroom flats which will be accessed solely via Windmill Brae via a separate entrance. The flats will be spread over four floors: lower ground floor and then first to third. The detailed layouts of flats can be seen in the associated drawings

In designing the flats, the designers needed to be mindful of the space standards set by Hillcrest Housing Association and their detailed design guide. This also requires flats to meet the requirements of Housing for Varying Needs [HfVN] as well as the recommendations of the AQA, NIA and to meet the current Building Standards,

In addition, flats will have additional storage off the access corridors. In terms of circulation all flats will have access to stairs to the front which lead to the ground floor access to Union Street. The stairs to the rear lead to rear access to Windmill Brae.

All flats have access to a lift off the common corridors which rises from the basement level making all flats fully accessible and therefore suitable for wheelchair access. Flats 6 & 10 are designed to meet the higher wheelchair standards of [HfVN].

The existing car park, accessed from Windmill Brae does not form part of this planning application. Our client will agree to make the appropriate contribution towards Car Club

There is no provision for amenity space, and we note that having investigated similar developments on Union Street, that few if any have made provision for amenity space. This is a hard city centre location where one would not expect to have the benefit of amenity space. In pursuit of the living city and the desire to reintroduce people back into the city, there has to be an appreciation that city living is not for everyone, and that the convenience of a central location has to be offset against certain amenity considerations and that one cannot expect the same level of amenity as might be reasonably expected in a less suburban location.

As the current world health crisis eases the need to adopt a flexible and imaginative approach to regeneration will be paramount and many of the traditional methods of assessment will need to be dismissed or radically re-thought, as per the guidance from the Chief Planning Officer where the need to adopt a more pragmatic way of working will be essential if we are ever to see our high streets recover. If ever there was a time for the planning profession to take the helm and drive the agenda, it is now and that means setting much of the development plan aside in favour of just getting things done, it is now.

Promoting and enabling development in the high streets is paramount to re-energising city centres and the development being proposed is at the very heart of this agenda, getting people back into the city centre, creating the demand for all the services we have taken for granted for so long. Many of these will have been lost due to the crisis and now we must look to re-establishing them, shops, bars, diners etc all the uses essential to the enjoyment of our special places.

Assessment Against Policy

In determining an application, the local authority is required to assess it in the context of the latest approved and adopted local development plan which in this case is the Aberdeen City Development Plan 2017. Within that plan there is a host of policies/guidance which may to a greater or lesser degree have relevance to the proposed development. These are:

- Policy D1-Quality Placemaking by Design
- Policy D4-Historic Environment
- Policy D5-Our granite Heritage
- Policy NC1- City Centre Development-Regional Centre
- Policy NC2- City Centre Retail Core
- Policy T4- Air Quality
- Policy T5- Noise
- Policy H2- Mixed Use Areas
- Affordable Housing

These policies are further refined by Supplementary Guidance:

- Replacement Windows and Doors
- Union Street Frontage
- Planning Obligations
- Affordable Housing
- Transport and Accessibility
- Air Quality
- Noise

Plus, Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan

Collectively all these policies/guidance provide a framework which guides and directs development according to a number of prescribed requirements and regulations with a view to ensuring economic, social and physical well-being of the community.

A number of these policies provide a context and establish the aims and objectives of the plan and provide a broad context within which more specific guidance is set, the most relevant guidance in respect of this application is to be found in:

- Policy NC2- City Centre Retail Core and Union Street
- Supplementary Guidance; Harmony of Uses
- City Centre Masterplan
- Affordable Housing Waiver
- Policy D4- Historic Environment
- Policy D5-Our Granite Heritage
- Noise
- Air Quality
- Replacement Windows and Doors

All these policies have been assessed in the process of the Planning application ref 200474/DPP for 17 flats and were all found to be acceptable. This application for 15 flats does not raise any new or give rise to any differing assessments of these policies and we outline the detailed changes as follows.

Noise

We are re-submitting the NIA [Noise Impact Assessment] prepared by GES for the previous approval and our proposals incorporate the conclusions and design solutions contained in this report. Specifically, secondary glazing will be fitted to original windows to Union Street and all windows to the rear /Windmill Brae elevations are to be replaced to meet the requirements of this report

Air Quality

The conclusion of the AQA [Air Quality Assessment] prepared for the previously approval by Envirocentre is that there is *no requirement for mechanical ventilation at any of the Union Street facing windows of the development in order to meet National Air Quality targets for future residents*. On this basis flats will be served by conventional mechanical extract fans.

Replacement Windows and Doors

To Union Street it is intended to replace existing windows with new single glazed timber sash and case windows as 8-over-12 to first floor and 8-over-8 to second floor. To the third floor the existing rooflights are replaced with new conservation style as three pairs of rooflights aligned to the windows to the lower floors exactly as previously approved.

To the rear Windmill Brae elevations, it is intended to replace the existing poor quality aluminium windows with replacement sash and case look-a-like windows. Details can be provided.

Car Parking

The car park to the basement level does not form part of this application. Access to stairs and the lift for future occupants is maintained

Refuse Storage

To location of the refuse store has been changed from within the basement area to the open area to the west of the building. In the knowledge of the requirement for a specified number of bins from the previous technical consultations with the Waste Team; this has been met and has an equal if not improved access to Windmill Brae and equal access by occupants of the flats

Additional Window Openings to West Elevation

To meet the requirements of the Building Standards for the conversion of this existing building to residential use, the overall height of this building requires there to be a fire lobby to one of the stairs. This fire lobby requires to be ventilated and the most effective method to deliver this is by a window opening to the required area. As a result, new window openings are proposed to the west elevation. These windows will match the replacement windows to the rear elevations

Summary

The building to which this application relates is in essence a new structure behind a retained facade, the demolition of the interior having been approved in an earlier planning consent. Accordingly, there was no architectural or historic details or fittings and fixtures to consider.

The proposed development of this vacant office building will see the creation of 15 affordable flats. They will enjoy good space standards and be fitted out to the highest standards and all flats will be wheelchair accessible.

The development will contribute greatly to the creation of the living city and the making of "place" and in the process enliven and energise the town centre. The increased activity generated by city centre living will also contribute greatly to the sense of well-being and security which the presence of people can bring to the local environment.

The Local Development Plan and the City Centre Masterplan collectively outline and inform the aims and objectives of the local authority and the proposed development will contribute to these development documents and assist the local authority in delivering the living city