

# **Design & Access Statement**

*For:*

Conversion of existing house to 5 No. Apartments

*Application Site:*

7 St Mary's Drive, South Benfleet, Essex, SS7 1LB



*Site Location Plan*

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Design & Access Statement has been drafted to support the conversion of the existing dwelling house at 7 St Marys Drive into 5No. Apartments.
- 1.2 The application site is a corner plot on St. Mary's Drive and High Road. The site is approximately 650m<sup>2</sup> in area. The site is currently occupied by a large house with an internal floor area of 275m<sup>2</sup>, which includes a 25m<sup>2</sup> room in the roof space.
- 1.3 The frontage of the house faces St Mary's Drive and is set back from the road by 4.8m. The frontage is hard paved with a two-way crossover and dropped kerbs for vehicle access.
- 1.4 The house is sited tightly on the eastern boundary and its west side aligns with the frontage of nos. 38-42 High Road to the north, which are set well back from the High Road. The position of the house on the site leaves a long tapering garden falling steeply down to the junction of St Mary's Drive and High Road. The total level change is 3.4 meters over 50 meters.
- 1.5 Permission was granted for conversion of the property into 4No Apartments (Planning Reference 21/0002/FUL) on 01<sup>st</sup> March 2021. This application only seeks to increase the number of apartments to 5No.
- 1.6 [Previous planning application \(Planning Reference 23/0598/FUL\) to convert the existing house was refused on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023. This application has addressed the reasons for refusal as follows.](#)
  - 1) [The previous application stated a reason for refusal as "Poor outlook for the occupants of Flat 1 from Bedroom 2". To overcome the outlook issue, we have swapped the bedroom and the kitchen, so the bedroom now looks out towards the front of the property.](#)
  - 2) [The previous application stated a reason for refusal as "The front dormers being designed with flat roofs" To overcome this we now propose pitched roofs to the front dormers.](#)
  - 3) [The previous application stated a reason for refusal as "The proposal fails to provide adequate levels of gross internal floor space" To overcome this Flat 2 has been increased in area by using up additional communal space to make it 51.2sqm. and Flat 3 has maintained the floor area but the bedroom has been reduced so it cant be used as a double.](#)

## 2.0 Planning History

This section details the planning history of the site, obtained from the Local Authority website:

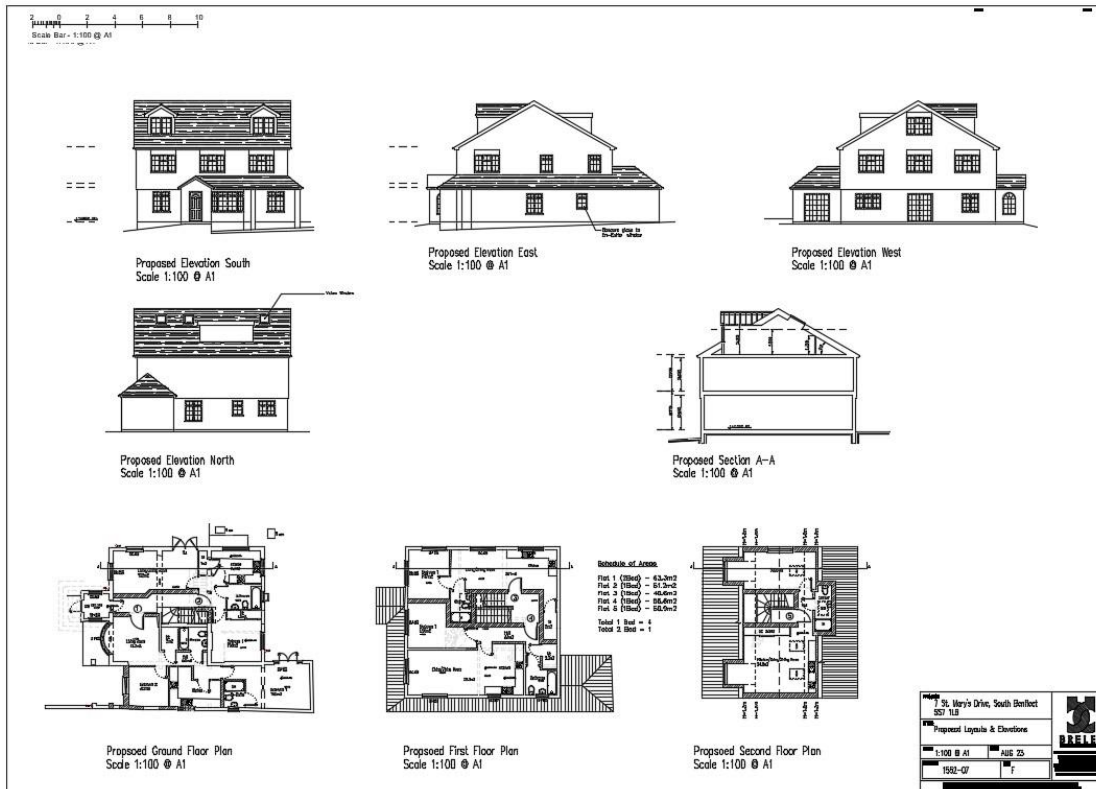
- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>23/0598/FUL</b> | Conversion of existing house into 5No. apartments including hip to gable loft conversion, dormers, and fenestration alterations (revised application following approval 21/0002/FUL)<br><b><i>Application Refused (05.12.2023)</i></b>   |
| <b>21/0002/FUL</b> | Alterations and extensions to convert single dwelling into 4No. flats and associated 4No. parking spaces.<br><b><i>Application Approved (01.03.2021)</i></b>   |
| <b>20/0384/FUL</b> | Conversion of existing two-storey house and roof storey and construction of three-storey extension to form seven apartments. Grading of external areas to form six new parking spaces.<br><b><i>Application Refused (25.08.2020)</i></b> |

### **3.0 Existing Site**

- 3.1 The site, 7 St. Mary's Drive, is a corner plot facing southwards over St. Mary's Drive and westwards onto High Road. The existing house is two storeys with a roof storey lit by rooflights. It has a white rendered ground floor with brown tile hanging to the upper storey, which are materials widely used elsewhere in the neighbourhood. On the east side, 11 St. Mary's Drive is a two-storey detached house, with prominent rendered gables and tiled roofs and dormers in garden village style. To the north, on High Road, are two pairs of semi-detached houses of typical mid-20<sup>th</sup> century speculative style with rendered frontages and curved window bays under simple pantiled hipped roofs. These are unusually deeply set back from the road – 33 metres in the case of no, 38 High Road – and at a slight angle to it. Their sites rise on the same gradient 7 St. Mary's Drive but have been excavated for about half this length to provide parking spaces directly accessed from the highway. Opposite the application site No 14 St Marys is a three-storey house. Opposite the site on the High Road, No 37-39 has recently completed an extension from a 3 storey property into a 4 storey property.
- 3.2 On the opposite side of High Road are groups of brick three-storey 1960s and 70s buildings including a flat-roofed block of flats and a row of pitched roof townhouses that overlook St. Mary's churchyard. On the opposite corner of St Mary's Drive and High Road is a mixed-use block comprising a retail ground floor with a Spar grocery store and three other single unit shops. And two floors of duplex flats above. These flats are accessed via individual front doors and stairs from the back of the building to Adelaide Gardens.
- 3.3 The existing house at 7 St. Mary's Drive is a large five-bedroom dwelling with three reception rooms, a large kitchen, a utility room, and a garage on the ground floor: there is a large recreation room in the roof space. The upper floors are almost square on plan with a shallow pitched pyramidal roof: they sit over the slightly larger ground floor which extends to the boundary with no, 11 and has a pitched lean-to roof.
- 3.4 The front of the house is set about 4.8 meters back from the footway on St. Mary's Drive. It is block paved and provides parking for five cars and access to the double-length garage. The paved area is separated from the garden by a curved brick screen wall, averaging 2.7 metres high as it steps down the sloping ground level. Most of the length of the garden on the St Mary's Drive side is fenced in close boarding between concrete posts and, at the corner and turning onto High Road, the boundary is a low brick wall with a 1.2 metre close boarded fence on it the bottom of the garden at this point is occupied by aging and overgrowing conifers. The boundary to 38 High Road is a two-metre close boarded fence and there are two more conifers beside it in the lower part of the garden. There is a single false acacia tree (or similar species) behind the St. Mary's Drive boundary, about 15m tall.

### **4.0 PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 The proposal is to convert the existing house into 5 flats.
- 4.2 The existing car port at ground floor level will be converted into habitable space.
- 4.3 Hip to gable roof alterations are proposed to the East and West elevations with associated dormers to form flat No. 5



*Proposed Layout Plan*

The residential mix put forward consists of:

Unit 1	2-Bed / 3-Person	63.3m <sup>2</sup>
Unit 2	1-Bed / 1-Person	51.2m <sup>2</sup>
Unit 3	1-Bed / 1-Person	40.6m <sup>2</sup>
Unit 4	1-Bed / 2-Person	56.3m <sup>2</sup>
Unit 5	1-Bed / 2-Person	50.9m <sup>2</sup>

## 5.0 SCALE AND MASSING

5.1 A previous pre-planning application undertaken on this site considered a three-storey scheme. It was noted that existing developments to the south and west were three storeys, and it was not considered that an objection to the principle of three storey development could be maintained for this site.

5.2 The proposed new building form will occupy the same footprint as the existing building. In this predominantly residential area, the conversion to flats and the improvements made to the existing dwelling will be a positive contribution to the street scene as it will provide continuity, definition, and identity to the street frontage.

## 6.0 LAYOUT

6.1 Set well back from its High Road boundary, the building is on a corner plot and its south and west elevations are visible from the public realm. The entrance to the building is on the street frontage and all the main windows are in the south and west elevations. The long, blank boundary fence and wall to St Mary's Drive will be removed and landscaped.

6.2 The existing entrance porch to the house is to be retained as the main entrance to the building, serving all five flats. It is currently approached from the exterior by steps, which will be reconfigured to a ramped approach to allow for wheelchair access to and within the two

ground floor flats. A common staircase serving the first floor and second floor is located at the end of the entrance hall serving the upper three flats, designed to access stair standards as required by the Building Regulations (part M) where no lift is installed.

- 6.3 On the ground floor there is one bedroomed flat and a two-bedroomed flat with part corridor and part party wall between them. On the first floor there are two one-bedroomed flats. On the third floor is an additional one bedroomed flat.

## **7.0 ACCESS AND PARKING**

- 7.1 The site is very well served by public transport. Benfleet railway station is 500 metres to the south a seven-minute walk or three-minute bike ride. Benfleet railway station has train services to London Fenchurch Street and Southend / Shoeburyness between 5.00am and midnight running seven fast trains an hour in the peak hour (<45 minutes to Fenchurch Street). Three primary First Essex bus routes, 21, 22 and 27, run along High Road connecting Southend, Canvey Island, Benfleet railway station and Basildon via several routes, Northbound the bus stop is 60 metres away opposite the site; southbound the bus stop is 120 metres away. Services run every 15 minutes or more frequently.
- 7.2 As noted, public transport is within easily walkable distance. A local supermarket is within 100 metres of the site and a comprehensive range of local facilities is available within a few hundred metres along High Road, these include church, social club, pubs, restaurants, shops and personal services.
- 7.3 Policy T8 of the adopted Local Plan requires the provision of car parking in accordance with adopted standards. This is consistent with paragraph 106 of the NPPF which requires local planning authorities to set such standards reflecting local circumstances. The current adopted standards are the 2009 County Parking Standards which require the provision of one space for one bedroomed property and two spaces for properties with two or more bedrooms, plus visitor parking at a rate of 0.25 spaces per dwelling, rounded up to the nearest whole space. However, in view of the central urban location of the site, the Council's assessment is that car parking on the basis of 1:1 is currently acceptable, and the spaces must be 2.9m by 5.5m.

## **8.0 AMENITY AND LANDSCAPING**

- 8.1 The present appearance of the site in the street scene is hard, dominated by block paved car parking in front of the house. And by a 2.7 metre brick boundary wall and 2.0 metre fence along the rest of the St Mary's Drive frontage. The proposal therefore needs to take every opportunity to soften the appearance of the site even though it will be providing a larger parking area, in fact four or more cars can currently occupy the existing forecourt and carport and have a very direct impact on the street scene.
- 8.2 The boundary wall to High Road is a low brick retaining structure with a metre-high fence on top. It is collapsing from the pressure of soil and tree roots behind it, and the trees themselves (Cupressus type conifers) are not good or attractive specimens. However, they do have some value in long views from St. Mary's churchyard, so it is proposed that tree planting be retained in this location. Instead of the present close-boarded fence set on top of the brick retaining wall, a new brick wall similar in height to the existing with box or privet hedge behind is proposed. Details could be dealt with by a landscape condition to any planning approval.
- 8.3 All existing trees on the site will remain. Of special importance are those on the boundary of 38 High Road and the False Acacia specimen near the St. Mary's Road boundary, which are specifically mentioned in the reasons for refusal a previous application on this site. These trees help to maintain visual separation between the application site and its neighbours and form an important townscape backdrop to views from St Mary's churchyard and the south.
- 8.4 The retaining wall described above will be rebuilt to a height similar to the existing, i.e. an average of about 0.8 metres above adjacent footway level and will continue along St Mary's

Drive. The close boarded fence and high brick wall that enclose the garden below the existing house down to the junction with High Road will also be removed and tree and hedge planting will follow the same approach as the High Road boundary.

8.5 The council's SPD2 Housing Design states that for new flats 25 square metres per flat of useable communal garden space should be provided.

2 No Ground floor flats that have direct access to the amenity space. Flat 1 has been allocated 59sqm of private amenity space. Flat 2 has been allocated 33sqm of private amenity space.

The remaining 3 flats have been provided with 166 sqm metres of shared amenity space which is well in excess of the councils SPD2 requirements.

## **9.0 AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

9.1 The development is under the required number of units to provide affordable housing as per the National Planning Policy Framework.

## **10.0 STRATEGIC MITIGATION MEASURES**

10.1.1 The applicant agrees to a financial contribution towards strategic mitigation measures within Special Protected Areas, should this be required by the council. Detail of which should be forwarded to the application in due course.

## **11.0 CONCLUSION**

11.1.1 The proposed redevelopment has been designed to optimise the use of the site which would contribute towards delivering needed housing in a highly sustainable location.

11.1.2 The design put forward would sit comfortably within the surrounding area and would not cause impact to existing neighbouring buildings. The layout would provide a high standard of living, offering good starter homes.

11.1.3 The use of the site as flat has previously been accepted under planning application Reference 21/0002/FUL on 01<sup>st</sup> March 2021. This application only seeks to increase the number of apartments to 5No.

11.1.4 The proposal has considered planning policy requirements, and the relationship with adjacent buildings has been carefully considered.

11.1.5 All reasons for refusal on the previous application have been address.