

**Application number:** S/2019/1728/MAF

**Proposal:** Conversion of existing buildings to residential development of 15 No. dwellings.

**Location:** Towcester Conservative Club 152 / 154 Watling Street East Towcester NN12 6DB

### **Background**

Thank you for consulting the Planning Policy and Growth Strategy Team on this application.

The application site comprises existing buildings, on the eastern side of Watling Street, which were the recently vacated Towcester Conservative Club, and comprised office space and function rooms, along with a 4-bedroom apartment and a courtyard area to the rear of the site.

### **Policy Context**

The application site lies within the Towcester town confines. Saved policy H3 of the Local Plan supports proposals for residential development within the built-up areas of Towcester. Despite this, the site is also in a primarily commercial use and therefore saved policy E4 is engaged and resists the change of use of sites which remain suitable for industrial or commercial uses to non-employment uses, unless the existing use conflicts with the criteria of saved policy G3.

Policy S1 of the JCS sets out the spatial strategy for West Northamptonshire and seeks to concentrate development in the most sustainable locations. Policy S3 builds on this approach and explains that about 2650 new homes are required in Towcester town between 2011 and 2029 whilst policy T1 supports new housing development within the existing urban area of Towcester. Despite this, Policy E1 resists the loss of existing employment generating floor space unless it can be demonstrated that the site is no longer viable, there is a clear conflict with adjoining uses, or its release would offer significant benefits to the local area. In this instance, there is no information provided with the application to justify such an exception at this town centre site.

Within the emerging Local Plan Part 2, policy SS1 seeks to steer development towards the most sustainable locations within the district. Within this policy Towcester is identified as a Rural Service Centre - first category settlement. As such, settlement boundaries apply. Policy LH1 supports residential development within town and village confines providing it provides an appropriate mix of dwellings, would not harm the character of the area, does not require substantial new infrastructure and would not displace an existing viable commercial use.

In this instance, the site is currently in a primarily commercial use and therefore policy EMP2 is engaged. This policy resists the change of use of

sites which remain suitable for employment use unless it is demonstrated why such uses are not economically viable or the proposal can demonstrate long-term incompatibility with the surrounding area and its residents. It is also identified that new dwellings will not be permitted within employment, retail or commercial sites except where this is in accordance with site specific proposals and policies.

*(Note: In accordance with paragraph 48 of the NPPF it should be noted that whilst some weight may be applied to the emerging Local Plan Part 2 policies, following the public enquiry into the submission version of the plan, modifications are currently proposed).*

## **Conclusion**

The development lies within the town confines of Towcester where the relevant policies of the Development Plan support the provision of new homes.

However, the proposal will result in the loss of a primarily commercial property and therefore represents an unjustified loss of a commercial employment generating use which is resisted by saved policy E4 of the Local Plan, policy E1 of the JCS and Policy EMP2 of the Emerging Local Plan part 2.

Without a full justification for such a loss, in accordance with the requirements of these policies, the principle of the scheme would be contrary to current and emerging policy.

The Planning Policy and Growth Strategy Team offer the following comments in relation to the principle of the proposed development only. Silence in respect of other matters does not signify either the Policy Team's acceptance or rejection of those matters.

I trust the above assists. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

M Shaw  
Planning Policy  
1 October 2019