

Planning Committee

Meeting Date: 20 August 2024
Contact Officer: Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer

St Andrews Court, Wellington Street

[P24/S2464/FUL](#)

Two proposed 3-bedroom new-build dwellings and associated car parking and amenity including bike and bin stores.

Reason for report:

- The application is a FUL, Outline or Reserved Matters application
- The officer recommendation is to object due to non-conformance with TNP/TNP2 policies, Local Plan, or national standards
- There has been (or is expected to be) local objection
- The amendment changes the Town Council's original recommendation.

1. Officer Recommendation:

OBJECTS:

- The proposal is contrary to Local Plan 2035 Policy ENV8 in failing to conserve or enhance the special character, setting and appearance of the Thame Conservation Area (TCA). It fails to identify and protect important views of the TCA and respect the existing character in terms of form, scale, height and grain.
- The proposal risks harm to the setting of 26 Upper High Street, contrary to Local Plan Policy ENV7. It would also harm the ability to view the individual and collective character of Numbers 27, 27A, 27B and 28 Upper High Street, all buildings of local note.

Call-In

If the recommendation is to object, or likely to be contrary to SODC's recommendation, the Town Council must agree whether to request that SODC Councillors call the application into SODC's committee. Thame's District Councillors are not bound to this request.

2. Key Issues:

- **Impact on Neighbouring Amenity**
There are residential properties at 27, 27A, 27B and 28 Upper High Street. Number 27B and its curtilage is sited behind the @ 1.7m high brick wall surrounded by the parking and pedestrian access of St. Andrews Court. A mix of mature and semi-mature trees would act as a screen to 27 and 27A but this would not adequately screen the new development from view in winter months. The back-to-back distance between the first-floor rear elevation of the proposed development and the rear of the existing 27 and 27A Upper High Street does exceed the minimum required by South Oxfordshire Design Guidance.

The relationship with 27B is less clear. Number 27B does not have any windows on its eastern flank but does have a prominent, full-height oriel window with panes that face onto the rear of the proposed development. It is possible that overlooking into and from the window of 27B could happen at both first and second floor level, at a distance of between 14 and 15 metres. Overlooking between the oriel window and the rear amenity area of at least one of the proposed dwellings will occur and at a distance of less than 12 metres. The external amenity of 27B could similarly be harmed.

Members will be aware that St. Andrews Court is in the process of being converted to residential use. Part of these works involve the placement of balconies at first floor level on the Court's south elevation and four new sizeable dormer windows on the second. The approximately 15 metres distance between the proposed new frontage and the balconies and dormers exceeds the minimum required by Design Guidance (10 metres). There is, however, no alternative private amenity space for the first-floor residents and none provided for the ground and one of the second floor flats. The amenity of St. Andrews Court residents, particularly for the first-floor occupants with balconies would be harmed by the proposal.

- **Parking and Access**

At least 12 parking spaces would be lost through the development, and a 13th (adjacent to and seemingly partly using land outside of the applicant's control) could be compromised. The applicant has claimed many would be "surplus" given town centre car ownership levels. They have based this assessment on 2011 Census data but do use a much wider geographic area than the Town Centre. This could over, rather than under estimate true town centre vehicle ownership levels.

The applicant's Transport Statement states there are currently 22 spaces reserved for employment use during the day and snooker club after 6pm at night, with 3 spaces also available for the club's daytime use. The proposal would appear to leave the permitted 23 flats of St. Andrews Court with just 12 spaces. The County Highways Team have not, however, objected to the proposal.

One parking space is proposed for each of the dwellings with secure bicycle parking provided within their rear gardens to County's standard of 2 per bedroom.

- **Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area**

The site is partly within the Thame Conservation Area while the proposed built development would immediately adjoin it on its southern boundary. The Snooker Club and St. Andrews Court that are accessed off Wellington Street were built on similar footprints (and massing and height) to for the woodyard buildings that previously occupied the site. Its use prior to the woodyard being built there was either as or part of the Town's pound, and it is likely that no permanent structure has ever been built within the centre of the site.

The Thame Conservation Area Character Assessment particularly notes the view available from the rear towards number 27 and 27A/B Upper High Street, which are described as an "imposing pair". The proposal would reduce the ability to appreciate this assemblage of buildings that make individual and collective contributions to the Thame Conservation Area. There has been relatively little separate development away from the buildings fronting Thame's high street, with the original burgage plot layouts mostly remaining coherent. The height and massing would, therefore, be unusual features in the setting of the Thame

Conservation Area; the ridge line, at 9 metres in height would exceed that of the adjacent Goodson Industrial Mews.

The Thame Conservation Area Management Plan is complimentary of the existing urban grain in the Town Centre and notes this should be protected. It states “*This is particularly important on "backland" sites where new development potential is very limited and must always be secondary in character to the more important primary buildings facing the main street*”. This proposal would represent backland development that would fail to respect the local character and distinctiveness in terms of form, scale, height and grain of the TCA.

- **Impact on the Special Architectural and Historic Interest of the Listed Building.**

The site is also adjacent to 26 Upper High Street, a Grade II Listed townhouse. The Character Assessment focuses on the view of number 27 from St. Andrews Court and describes its descending roof lines and oriel window that it speculates would have originally overlooked burgage plots to the west at least. The proposal would not directly impact the oriel window but would sit behind and adjacent to numbers 27, 27A, 27B and 28 Upper High Street, all buildings of local note.

The introduction of two prominent buildings and a new, atypical, punctuated “frontage” would detract from both the buildings of local note and the setting of number 26 Upper High Street.

3. Planning History:

Application history relates to St Andrews Court building. No applications relate to the land in question.

Application Number	Description	TTC Decision	SODC Decision
P13/S1586/FUL – No.5 only	Change of use to dental practice (D1)	Approved	Granted
P21/S0957/N1A – Part Ground and First Floors	Change of use of the existing Class B1(a) (office) floorspace to 22 Class C3 (residential) self-contained flats. (amplified by further information received on 16th, 20th and 21st April 2021)	Noted – raised concern about impact on Snooker Club parking.	Granted 05/05/2021
P21/S3022/N1A	Change of use of the existing Class B1(a) (office) floorspace to 18 Class C3 (residential) self-contained flats.	Noted/No Comment	Granted 25/08/2021
P23/S4371/FUL (as amended)	External alterations to existing office buildings including to existing windows, incorporation of new terraced and inset roof balconies, roof lights, replacement of car parking spaces with external amenity area and new and additional cycle parking for occupiers and visitors (second floor south-facing terraces and one second floor west-facing	Supports & has a response	Granted 19/04/2024

	terrace replaced by dormer windows and second floor terraces added to north and east elevations and additional privacy screening as shown on amended plans received 26th March 2024).		
P24/S1588/N5D	Proposal to change the use of part of the ground, and the full first and second floor to 23 apartments comprising 4 x studio, 7 x 1-bed and 12 x 2-bed flats.	Noted	Agreed 05/07/2024

4. Risk Appraisal

Dependent on the Town Council's recommendation to SODC is it likely that there would be a contrary decision by SODC? If so then a councillor should be nominated at the meeting to represent the views of the Town Council at the planning committee.

5. Policies Relevant to the Application

The following policies are of particular relevance when considering this application.

Thame Neighbourhood Plan

- H5 Integrate windfall sites
- H6 Design new development to be of high quality
- GA6 New development to provide parking on site for occupants and visitors
- ESDQ15 Developers must demonstrate in a Design and Access Statement how their proposed development reinforces Thame's character
- ESDQ16 Development must relate well to its site and its surroundings
- ESDQ17 Development must make a positive contribution towards the distinctive character of the town as a whole
- ESDQ18 New development must contribute to local character by creating a sense of place appropriate to its location
- ESDQ19 The Design and Access Statement and accompanying drawings must provide sufficient detail for proposals to be properly understood
- ESDQ20 Building style must be appropriate to the historic context
- ESDQ26 Design new buildings to reflect the three-dimensional qualities of traditional buildings
- ESDQ27 Design in the 'forgotten' elements from the start of the design process
- ESDQ28 Provide good quality private outdoor space
- ESDQ29 Design car parking so that it fits in with the character of the proposed development

SODC Local Plan 2035 Policies

- DES1 Delivering high quality development
- DES2 Enhancing local character
- DES3 Design and access statements
- DES5 Outdoor amenity space
- DES6 Residential amenity
- DES7 Efficient use of resources
- DES8 Promoting sustainable design
- ENV6 Historic environment
- ENV7 Listed buildings
- ENV8 Conservation areas
- ENV12 Pollution – impact of development on human health, the non-strategic natural environment and/or local amenity (potential sources of pollution)
- EP3 Waste collection and recycling
- H3 Housing in the towns of Henley-on-Thames, Thame, and Wallingford
- H9 Affordable housing
- H11 Housing mix
- H16 Backland and infill development and redevelopment
- INF1 Infrastructure provision
- STRAT1 The overall strategy
- STRAT5 Residential densities

- TH1 The strategy for Thame
- TRANS2 Promoting sustainable transport and accessibility
- TRANS4 Transport assessments, transport statements and travel plans
- TRANS5 Consideration of development proposals