

Planning & Environment

Date:	2 March 2021
Title:	Units 1-4 and 6-8 Goodson Industrial Mews Wellington Street
Contact Officer:	Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer

Background

1. Goodson Industrial Mews is an “L” shape-plot that holds 9 units in employment use. It sits behind housing and offices fronting Wellington Street. Access is available onto Wellington Street from points in the north-west and north-east corners of the site. Most of the existing units are in Use Class E and 2-storey in height with pitched rooves. Units 1-4 are located on the western edge of the site. Unit 1 is functionally three-storeys in height, with enlarged gables enabling use of the roof space. Unit 5 is free-standing and, like Unit 1a, has a frontage to Wellington Street. Units 6,7 and 8 are attached and aligned along the southern boundary; Unit 8 is a single-storey warehouse unit. Unit 9 is a detached building near the eastern boundary.
2. Members will recall that Goodson Industrial Mews was covered by an expired, full planning permission for a mainly residential, mixed-use scheme. It was proposed through permission P15/S3848/FUL that Units 5 – 8 would be demolished and replaced with 25 residential units, with four flats also provided above the employment uses in units 1 – 4.
3. Unit 5 has via prior approval notification the right to be converted to ten, one-bedroom flats, application P19/S0204/N1A. Units 6 and 7 have similar rights to form 12 units between them, application P19/S0206/N1A. Both permissions remain extant until 28 March 2022.
4. In March 2020 permission was granted for the redevelopment of Unit 5 for eight, 2-bed apartments, and associated landscaping and parking, application P19/S2720/FUL. This moved away from merely converting an existing use as the proposal included the remodelling and extension of the unit.
5. In April 2020, application P20/S1355/FUL was submitted to redevelop Unit 8 to provide a single 1-bed, and seven 2-bed apartments with associated works. At Full Council on 2 June 2020, the Town Council recommended that the permission be refused on the grounds that it was contrary to Policy WS12 in that no evidence had been submitted that showed the unit had been marketed for at least one year and was no longer economically viable for either its original, or alternative, B-class employment use. This application has now been subject to an amendment which is before the Town Council this evening as agenda item 6.
6. Units 1 and 1a were granted prior approval under permitted development rights to be converted to two studio and three, 1-bed flats on 1 October 2020, under P20/S2901/N1A.

Proposed Development

7. The proposed scheme, P21/S0056/FUL, consists of a site of approximately 0.49ha in area and covers Units 1 – 4 and 6-8. It should be noted that this application primarily deals with changes to Units 6 and 7 and minor changes to Units 1 -4. Other applications of relevance to this application are those covering Units 8 and 1 and 1a above, P20/S1355/FUL and P20/S2901/N1A, respectively. They have some significance in deciding this application; it is advised that the officer report covering the proposed amendments to P20/S1355/FUL, Agenda Item 6, is read alongside this application.

8. Within a covering letter, the applicant states that it is proposed that Goodson Industrial Mews will be redeveloped through employing the granted permission covering Unit 5, for 8 apartments; the amended scheme for Unit 8, which would provide another 8 apartments; and the conversion and redevelopment of Units 6 and 7, for 10 units, detailed through this application.
9. It is also proposed that Units 1 – 4 will be retained in employment use and subject to minor external alterations to refresh them and provide a better fit against the redeveloped units. There will also be energy efficiency upgrades. These changes are aimed at keeping the units viable and attractive to the market. It is proposed that solar panels will be fitted to Units 1 – 5. It appears this will be the main means of providing the energy efficiency upgrades to Units 1 – 4, although it is intended that the existing wooden cladding will be replaced with black-painted, insulated timber cladding. The proposed changes to the large loading bay doors may also offer a fabric upgrade.
10. Under an earlier application, it was proposed that the detached office block Unit 9 would receive similar exterior treatment and energy efficiency improvements. This does not now appear to be happening.

Units 6 and 7

11. It is proposed that a 3-storey stairwell atrium will be added to the front elevation of Units 6 and 7, while some of the rear elevation has been pushed back into the building to provide external amenity space. Internally, the conversion would provide ten, 2-bed apartments. These range in size from between 68.48 – 105.33 sq.m. and consist of eight, 2-bedroom, 4-person apartments and two, 2-bedroom, “executive” 2-person apartments with studies. It is noted the latter should perhaps be described as 2-bedroom, 3-person homes. This may only have significance in terms of parking provision and standards.
12. Criteria such as bedroom widths, storage, etc. required by the technical housing standards appear to be adhered to. Three units do not quite meet the required national space standards. For two of these, apartments G and H, this is marginal. For unit F, the shortfall of 1.5 sq. m. is relatively significant. All three of these apartments do, however, have well-proportioned and practicable outside amenity space. Given the constraints of the site most of the flats are served well in terms of usable garden, terrace or balcony space. Roof apartment J has the smallest outside amenity area of just 5.5 sq. m. Its dimensions make it just usable for the proposed occupancy level of the apartment. It is notably similar in size to the smallest balconies serving Unit 5, which has been granted permission.

Employment

13. The extant permitted development allowed through prior approval application P19/S0206/N1A has regrettably enabled the applicant to submit a scheme that can remove the 763 sq. m. of office space within Units 6 and 7 from Thame’s employment land and floorspace supply.

Housing

14. All of the proposed units offer two bedrooms and most are 4-person units. The exceptions are the two largest units which offer 3-person accommodation, the smaller of the bedrooms just failing to meet the criteria for floor area to be considered a double. The studies that are

indicated on the plans for the “executive” apartments meet the criteria from the national space standards to enable their use as single bedrooms. This means they could house 4 persons. The applicant argues that this, together with the range of unit sizes on offer, means that they have provided an adequate mix in terms of type and size, in accordance with TNP Policy H9 and Local Plan Policy H11. The supporting text of Policy H11 is linked to the ageing SHMA, which explains that the District is short of 2 and 3 bedroom homes. This is, however, still believed to represent a gap in Thame’s existing provision. It appears that the properties have been designed to appeal to those willing to house-share. Although one-bedroom flats would be welcome in Thame, the pre-existing forms of Unit 6 and 7 may well lead to some of them being single-aspect, compromised through the need to provide extra corridors or stairwells, or provide two that would just meet standards in return for the loss of the most flexible unit of accommodation in the scheme, ground floor Unit A.

15. Although the site would qualify for the delivery of affordable housing units, the use of empty building credits means the scheme may not have to provide a significant quantum.

Design

16. The brick elevations of the existing building will be retained and painted white as per the approved scheme for Unit 5. The greatest change will be brought by the removal of the pitched roof from the front and side elevations. The rear, slate-covered pitch roof will be retained from the east elevation to where it meets the wholly flat-roofed western elevation.
17. Other materials shown are similar to those used in the permitted Unit 5 and proposed Unit 8, such as timber cladding for the entire second storey walls and blackened timbers for cladding of stairwells and balconies. Windows and doors will be similarly metal-framed. The first floor balconies will have their new, inset walls detailed with black bricks. As within Unit 8, rooflights will provide natural light and ventilation to the first and second floors.
18. The rooflights, balconies and stairwells proposed for Units 6 - 8 are a matter of great concern to the residents of East Street and the applicant has a detailed section within their Planning, Design and Access Statement devoted to addressing these concerns. Notwithstanding this, building control regulations stipulate that only rooflights that are at least 1.7 metres above the internal finished floor level can open and can be clear-glazed. At this height, they are not believed to cause problems with overlooking. If lower than this, rooflights are supposed to be both obscure-glazed and non-opening.
19. The case officer has helpfully provided annotated plans for Units 6 and 7 showing that all of the rooflights serving the first floor will be high level and will not pose a threat of overlooking. The rooflights serving the bathrooms of the second floor, roof flat are low and will have obscured glazing secured by condition. There are also some low-level windows serving a kitchen that are not currently shown as obscured; the case officer is requesting further information on these as she believes there is a risk of overlooking at oblique angles.
20. The balconies, due to their heights and obscuring materials are not considered to threaten the privacy of either the occupants or neighbouring residents.
21. The privacy of future occupants of the apartments should also be considered. The careful management of the rooflight arrangements will protect the occupants as much as neighbouring residents. The ground floor apartments at the western end of the building will, however, be overlooked by occupants of the offices at 30a Upper High Street. The windows directly facing the proposed apartments A and B are shown on ground floor plan 2504-PWH 01-LG-DR-A-0113-P3.pdf. They are described as high-level, meaning it is possible that office workers will not be able to overlook the units when seated but may when standing.

22. Within the applicant's Planning, Design and Access Statement it is explained how this concern has been addressed. Firstly, one window in each of Plots A and B that will be overlooked will be serving kitchens, non-habitable rooms. Secondly, the south-facing bedroom of Plot A has had a small extension built to enable a west-facing window to help light and ventilate the room. Views into the amenity spaces of both Plots A and B are proposed to be mitigated by boundary treatments and planting. Given the proposed window arrangement into the bedroom of Plot A, the greatest harm in terms of amenity may be suffered by Unit B. The private amenity area and southern bedroom could both be overlooked, albeit the latter at an oblique angle. Even though the offices are likely to be only occupied during normal working hours, the proposed planted screening, even if evergreen, may not be sufficient to ensure adequate privacy for the occupants.
23. Although the eaves have been squared, the slight lowering of the ridge (approximately 40 cm) and the set back of the front and side elevations will help in preventing the building becoming too dominant in the Mews. The retention of the pitch at the eastern end of the building will lessen the impact of the squared eave as seen from the rear; however, the new, slightly lower ridgeline will "grow" around 3.5m eastward. The nearest habitable room in East Street will be approximately 43 metres away from the nearest point of the extended pitch, and it is not considered that neighbouring amenity will suffer harm from this element in isolation.
24. This amended ridgeline should, however, be considered alongside the proposals for Unit 8. The two buildings will be separated by the width of their shared stairwell. There is a risk that from some properties in East Street Unit 6 and 7 will appear as one with the western element of Unit 8. This may be mitigated by it being well illuminated, as a south-facing elevation, and through the slight offset to the rear ridge line shown between Units 6, 7 and 8 in site plan 2504-PWH-01-SI-DR-A-0107-P1.pdf. The separate permitted scheme, P19/S1371/FUL, for the two-storey, flat-roofed dwelling (the "East Street Cube") that is under construction to the rear of 4 – 8 East Street, will also help mitigate this by screening much of the rear roof section from view.
25. Regarding Units 1 – 4, the proposed changes include lightening the brickwork (it is not clear how), replacing concrete coping stones with stone and replacing the loading bay doors. The windows and doors will be replaced with unspecified materials; brown UPVC is noted on the north-west elevation windows. As noted in the previous section, the timber clad elements will be replaced with similar (insulated) materials. The other main change to these employment units will be the provision of reorientated allocated parking bays to their frontages, including Wellington Street, and planted landscaping.

Waste

26. Bin storage areas are shown on the plans. They are not enclosed like those at Unit 5 but are instead described as being concealed through soft landscaping. The submitted plans suggest those provided for the use of Units 6 and 7 will be very visible to those arriving from the north-west entrance, and for all those travelling past Units 6 and 7.

Highways.

27. The covering letter describes the parking as follows:
- 20 allocated spaces for Units 1 – 4, with 10 made available out of office hours for use by visitors, secured through a condition;
 - 26 allocated across the 26 apartments:

- 8 car, 16 bicycle and 10 visitor bicycle spaces to Unit 5
 - 10 car, 22 secure bicycle and 8 visitor bicycle spaces for Units 6 and 7
 - 8 car, 26 secure bicycle spaces for Unit 8
- 8 visitor parking spaces shared across the apartments, increasing to 18 during out-of-office hours.
28. It is notable that the bicycle stores are not overlooked, especially those serving Unit 8. The residents' bicycle store is described as "secured" but there are no details as to its type or construction. They are, however described as being concealed by soft boundary treatments – presumably, planting – but again, this has not been detailed.
29. Paragraph 7.61 of the applicant's Planning, Design and Access Statement declares that "EV chargers are to be provided at the parking spaces to encourage the transition towards electric vehicles – the provision of EV chargers are typically secured by condition". No further details in terms of numbers or type are given. It is noted that the Thame Green Living Plan group has submitted a representation on this issue. Given that the former office / industrial units required a significant electric supply, the group believes that a very good opportunity exists to go above normal levels of provision, at no cost to the developer. Should the development be permitted, the GLP Group are ready to offer advice and provide to the applicant a range of providers who work in the South Oxfordshire area.
30. It is stated within the covering letter that secured parking controls will reduce on-street parking pressures. This may refer to the offer to contribute to the cost of providing parking restrictions on the nearby road network.

Discussion.

31. Given that the employment land has been lost through office – residential permitted development, a scheme to convert Units 6 and 7 through partial redevelopment is welcome in comparison to simply changing the use within the existing structure. The reuse of much of the existing fabric and materials represents a more efficient means of providing housing than removing the whole building and starting from scratch. Such recycling is supported by the Local Plan 2035 Policy DES7 iii) and viii) in re-using materials and re-using vacant buildings, respectively.
32. The housing mix suggested is not varied in terms of absolute bedroom numbers. All of the units now proposed across Goodson Industrial Mews have two bedrooms, bar one, although two within Unit 6 are arguably three-bedroom. When considering this matter it would be normal to look to Policy H9 of the TNP, which advises that on schemes of more than six dwellings, a mix of dwelling types and sizes are required to provide choice for Thame households. The scheme is not in compliance with this policy. Given the site and its constraints, it would be inappropriate to provide family accommodation. The only dwelling that could also be provided within Units 6 and 7 are, therefore, single bedroom units.
33. The reuse of much of the floorplate and walls of the existing structure, a practice that should be encouraged, is likely to lead to compromises in terms of ensuring private means of access, external amenity space, etc. when trying to further sub-divide the form. The proposed units are, therefore, considered acceptable. It is noted that this would not be the case if all four of the proposed dwelling units (5, 6, 7 and 8) were brought forward under a single application.
34. Although the site does not have to provide for affordable housing in isolation, new housing floorspace is being provided through the addition of stairwells, atria and a second storey to Units 6 and 7. Some floorspace has also been gained through the forming of Unit 5 and new

floorspace at Unit 8. Given that Policy H9 2. vii) of the Local Plan 2035 seeks to avoid the artificial sub-division of sites it could be that when considered as a whole, a greater, collective provision may be due.

35. It is recognisably difficult to successfully deliver mixed use sites and the proposed form, as seen from within the Mews, will offer a distinct form that demonstrates that the site is not a traditional housing development. The proposed design follows the general approach approved through the grant of permission for Unit 5. Although the changes proposed for Units 1-4 are less significant, the lightening of the brickwork and higher quality detailing and retained black timbers will help link the proposed residential units to the remaining employment ones and perhaps avoid them looking “left behind”. It is regrettable that Unit 9 looks set to retain its current form but that is believed that unit is outside of the control of the applicant.
36. From the rear, the retention of the pitched roof form on the southern elevation will help mitigate the forming of a squared gable to allow for the second storey. The cube-shaped two-storey dwelling behind 4-8 East Street will also help mitigate the impact of the development. What is perhaps less successful is the relative proliferation of grouped rooflights. Alternative solutions would most likely involve projecting dormer windows or a loss of floorspace through recessed dormers, and an introduction of additional overlooking concerns. It is considered the proposed approach is a compromise that could be improved through the use of fewer, larger rooflights.
37. Overall, it is felt that the design meets the requirements of TNP Policies ESDQ16 in relating well to its site and surroundings. Although it is not clear how the design incorporates principles that reflect the most successful parts of the Town, it is not necessarily contrary to TNP Policy ESDQ17. The design is felt to make a positive contribution towards the Town’s distinctive character; Wellington Street is comprised of an eclectic range of built forms.
38. The design is in compliance with TNP Policy ESDQ20 in being appropriate to the historic context. The proposal will be reasonably neutral when viewed from the adjacent conservation area and does not propose development that would harm views into the conservation area. The building also introduces changes in materials at breaks in the building’s form, in compliance with TNP Policy ESDQ26.
39. It is suggested that the lack of details around the treatment of bicycle parking and bin provision are noted, and a request be made that they are appropriately dealt with through a planning condition. Similar absence in detail is noted in terms of the “boring bits” of the development; it is not clear how, for example, rainwater will be drained from the roof. The compliance with Policy ESDQ27 is, therefore, partial.
40. Regarding highways matters, Members will recall that the proposed car and bicycle provision per apartment is in line with that proposed for Unit 5. The applicant states that they have listened to local concerns in offering an extra 10 car parking spaces that can be secured through a condition for out of hours use by visitors. The County’s Highway Officer notes in his response to the application that this will provide an adequate level of provision. It is also stated that the change from office to residential use is likely to result in less traffic entering and leaving the site, to the benefit of the wider road network. The car parking that is provided appears to meet the necessary standards in terms of size and all of the parking spaces relating to Units 6 and 7 are overlooked and shown bordered by soft landscaping. For this application, the requirements of TNP Policy ESDQ29 have been met in that the car parking fits with the character of the development.

41. Notwithstanding the applicant's hope that this application will be seen as part of a whole alongside the permission granted for Unit 5 and sought for Unit 8, this proposal is, on its own merits, considered acceptable.

Recommendation:

42. It is recommended that Thame Town Council approves this application subject to appropriate detail regarding bin and bicycle storage, the noted rooflight and ground floor overlooking concerns and the site's collective potential for yielding affordable housing contribution.