

## COMMITTEE REPORT

**Date:** 5 March 2020                      **Ward:** Westfield  
**Team:** West Area                              **Parish:** No Parish  
**Reference:** 20/00033/FUL  
**Application at:** 29 Gale Farm Court York YO24 3DR  
**For:** Change of use of ground floor flat (use class C3) to local area housing office, installation of external ramp and modification to existing boundary wall and railings  
**By:** City Of York Council  
**Application Type:** Full Application  
**Target Date:** 18 March 2020  
**Recommendation:** Approve

### 1.0 PROPOSAL

1.1 This application seeks permission for the change of use of a ground floor apartment (sheltered accommodation) to a local housing office (use class B1).

1.2 It is proposed to convert no. 29 Gale Farm Court, a ground floor flat in a sheltered accommodation block, to be used as a local Housing Office for the City Council to serve local residents. Currently the Council's Housing team holds a surgery on a weekly basis for Housing tenants at the Gateway Centre on Front Street. The works involved in the conversion would be minimal, although to improve external access it is proposed to create a ramp from Gale Lane up to the newly created public entrance on the corner of the building.

1.3 The site was constructed in the 1980s as a sheltered housing complex comprising 38 two storey flats with a frontage onto Gale Lane. The site is situated in the Acomb Conservation Area.

1.4 The application has been called to committee by Cllr Waller due to concerns raised by the residents of the accommodation block.

### 2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

#### The National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) sets out the Government's overarching planning policies and at its heart is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

2.2 Paragraph 38 advises that local planning authorities should approach decisions

on proposed development in a positive and creative way and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

2.3 Paragraph 127 states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments will achieve a number of aims including:

- function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development
- be visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping
- are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting
- create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and promote health and well-being with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

2.4 Chapter 16 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment) requires local authorities to identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by the proposal. Paragraph 193 states that considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 196 states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

#### Publication Draft Local Plan 2018

2.5 The Publication Draft City of York Local Plan 2018 ('2018 Draft Plan') was submitted for examination on 25 May 2018. In accordance with paragraph 48 of the NPPF the Draft Plan policies can be afforded weight according to:

- The stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced the preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
- The extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and
- The degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the previous NPPF published in March 2012. (NB: Under transitional arrangements plans submitted for examination before 24 January 2019 will be assessed against the 2012 NPPF).

2.6 The evidence base underpinning the 2018 Draft Plan is capable of being a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

2.7 Relevant Policies:

D1 Placemaking

D11 Extensions and Alterations to Existing Buildings

D4 Conservation Areas  
EC1 Provision of Employment Land

### Development Control Local Plan 2005

2.8 The York Development Control draft Local Plan was approved for development control purposes in April 2005. Its policies are material considerations in the determination of planning applications although it is considered that their weight is limited except when they are in accordance with the NPPF.

2.9 Relevant Policies:

HE3 Conservation Areas  
H9 Loss of Dwellings

## **3.0 CONSULTATIONS**

3.1 No consultee responses have been received.

## **4.0 REPRESENTATIONS**

4.1 Three letters of objection have been received including a letter of objection from Cllr Waller on behalf of the residents of Gale Farm Court. The following issues have been raised:

- the loss of a flat may affect the viability of the care of existing residents
- lack of parking for staff and visitors resulting in parking on Gale Lane
- the residents feel there has been insufficient consultation regarding the proposals
- work appears to have already started on site
- there is a waiting list for accommodation and other more suitable sites in Acomb for a housing office
- the residents of Gale Farm Court are vulnerable, the proposed use may pose a security risk
- impact on privacy for existing residents
- why is there a need for this when officers can work from West Offices?
- space at Acomb Explore would be better suited to the office

## **5.0 APPRAISAL**

KEY ISSUES:-

Visual impact on the building and the conservation area  
Impact on neighbouring property  
Loss of dwelling

## Visual impact on the building and the conservation area

5.1 The only external change proposed to the building would be the replacement of the existing double doors to the front elevation with a solid entrance door with side panels to provide the main entrance to the office. Wider changes to the site would involve the creation of a ramped access up to the entrance, with changes to the existing boundary wall and railings. The hard landscaped areas would remain largely as existing with the grassed areas replaced by the ramp.

5.2 The site lies on the boundary with the Acomb Conservation Area, however this section of Gale Lane is considered to be fairly unremarkable in terms of architecture and comprises a mix of 1960's development opposite the site and the 1980's development of Gale farm Court.

5.3 Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of that area. The alteration to the building is minor, and the changes to the boundary wall and railings have been designed to replicate the existing design of the development. Overall the proposed alterations are not considered to appear incongruous or have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

## Loss of residential use

5.4 Draft Local Plan (2005) policy H9 states that planning permission would not be supported for development that would result in the net loss of dwellings or housing land and the loss of individual residential properties should be considered in light of the individual site circumstances and the character of, and desired uses of the site in question. The status of the 2005 Plan means that this policy has limited weight.

5.5 The proposal would create a locally based housing office to enable tenants to be able to access a range of information and support in relation to their benefits, other Council services and also to meet health and wellbeing and social needs. Since the closure of the Acomb Housing office a few years ago (due to large ongoing rental costs), a local Housing service is provided on a weekly basis at the Gateway Centre and through drop in sessions at West Offices. Neither facilities offer the same benefits as a dedicated local housing office however, as the Gateway Centre does not provide the required back office facilities required for Housing staff and incurs rental costs. The facilities at West Offices do not allow tenants to speak with their specific Housing Management Officer (as it has a rota based system) and the office itself is considered to be located too far away as it is understood that generally residents prefer the convenience of seeing their own Housing Management Office nearer to home or within close proximity to local shops/amenities. Given the large amount of Housing stock in the west of the city, and that specific advice could be given to tenants based on the officers knowledge of the area, the customer and their personal circumstances, an Acomb base within

close proximity to local amenities and within a central location for the majority of tenants is considered important.

5.6 Other locations have been considered for the facility however they do not meet the criteria as fully as the Gale Farm flat, and there are no other premises owned by the Council in Acomb other than residential properties for the purposes of providing a rent free office. The principle of converting an existing Independent Living scheme flat was supported at a 2019 decision session for senior managers meeting based on the need for such a community facility in the local area.

5.7 In a supporting statement put forward by the Housing Team Leader, it states that the flat in question was chosen due to its location and because the most recent lettings show that the property was let within the “bronze band” which indicates that it was let to an occupant who was not in housing ‘need’. The flat is located within the outer section of housing on the southern corner of the site. It is understood that apartments on the outer side of the development facing Gale Lane are less popular as they are more difficult to adapt to stair lifts and other additions and do not appear to be as inclusive as the flats within the more central areas of the complex. This is an important issue for residents who require sheltered and extra care accommodation. In addition the flat itself could be easily converted back to residential use should circumstances change in the future.

5.8 A need for a dedicated housing office in the west of the city has been identified as being needed now as the current base at the Gateway centre is not fit for purpose. Given that the flat has not been used most recently by tenants who have a housing need or require adapted or emergency housing it is considered that the loss of one 1no. bedroom flat would, on balance, be outweighed by the benefits of the provision of a dedicated housing office to serve all the residents within the west of the city.

#### Impact on neighbouring property

5.10 The location of the proposed office has been carefully chosen to minimise disruption to existing residents within the building. The office would be open for pre-arranged drop-in appointments between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, although staff may occupy the office from 7am-7pm. It is not envisaged that there would be significant numbers of people utilising the office at any one time due to the appointment system and therefore there would be a limited impact on neighbouring residents.

5.11 With regard to privacy and security, the proposals would introduce further planting and fencing which would screen the office from the ramp and immediate outside areas adjacent to neighbouring properties. Clear signage would be displayed to direct people to the office and there should be no requirement for tenants to try to use the main entrance to the site, rather than the new ramped

access. It is not envisaged that an office use in this location would cause significant issues with regard to privacy and security of existing residents.

5.12 Concern has been raised that the loss of a flat would affect the viability of the care of the remaining residents, however it has been confirmed that this is not the case and the care of residents would not be affected by the change of use.

### Parking

5.12 There is no dedicated parking provided for the new office as it is envisaged that local residents will walk or cycle to the office as they will be local to the area. There is some parking on Gale Lane itself, although it is not expected that significant numbers of tenants would come by car given its sustainable location. With regards to staff it is also envisaged that they would walk or cycle to the office too, or make use of the local transport links.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

6.1 Whilst there is a presumption in favour of retaining residential units, in this instance the benefits of providing a housing office for use by the local community in a sustainable location, close to existing facilities and Council owned housing stock would outweigh the loss of a 1 bedroomed flat. The location of the unit is such that there would be limited impact on existing residents. The proposals would have a neutral impact on the appearance of the conservation area. As such the proposal is considered to comply with the relevant guidance and policies outlined above.

## **COMMITTEE TO VISIT**

### **7.0 RECOMMENDATION:** Approve

1 TIME2 Development start within three years

2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans:-

Existing and Proposed Plans and Elevations - Drg. No: 190066.02

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out only as approved by the Local Planning Authority.

3 VISQ1 Matching materials

## **8.0 INFORMATIVES:**

### **Notes to Applicant**

1. STATEMENT OF THE COUNCIL`S POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE APPROACH  
In considering the application, the Local Planning Authority has implemented the requirements set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 38) in seeking solutions to problems identified during the processing of the application. The Local Planning Authority took the following steps in order to achieve a positive outcome:

Sought additional information on the need for a new housing office

#### **Contact details:**

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