

**Application Number:** [23/02498/FUL](#)

**Estimated reading time:** 23 minutes

**Proposal:** Change of use of first floor to provide x4 one-bedroom residential units with new residential entrance and staircase with roof lights and associated alterations including removal of existing first floor wrap around window and insertion of windows on the front elevation **at** 69-71 Queensway Bletchley Milton Keynes MK2 2EX

**Applicant:** Mr Paraskevas Shiakallis

**Application type:** Full planning permission

**Ward:** Bletchley Park                      **Parish:** Bletchley and Fenny Stratford

**Statutory Target:** 21/03/2024                      **Extension of Time:** Yes – 24/04/2024

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## Summary

The application seeks permission for the change of use of the first floor of an existing office/retail unit, along with associated fenestration changes. The proposed 4 x 1 bedroom flats do not benefit from any private outdoor amenity space. However, given the town centre location in close proximity to public open spaces, on balance, this is deemed acceptable. The application is found to be acceptable in relation to all other relevant matters, subject to conditions, and is therefore considered that planning permission should be **granted**.

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The application has been referred to the Panel due to the proposal being materially in conflict with Policy D5 of Plan:MK by virtue of the lack of amenity space provided for the flats.

## **2.0 Background**

### The site and its context

- 2.1 The site comprises the former Barclays Bank building with an area of hardstanding to the rear with vehicular access at the rear.
- 2.2 The site is directly bounded by Queensway to the south and Cawkwell Way to the north. Further north are residential areas. Further mixed use properties along Queensway are located to the east, west and south, mostly with ground floor retail or other similar uses, and some with flats or other commercial uses above. Directly to the east and west are further commercial units, with Oxford Street immediately to the east.
- 2.3 The site is within Bletchley Town Centre and falls within the Central Bletchley Prospectus Area, and forms part of the Primary Shopping Area.

### The proposal (to be read in conjunction with the plans pack)

- 2.4 The application seeks permission for the change of use of the existing first floor office, formerly used in association with the bank (now closed), in to 4 one-bedroom flats including removal of an external staircase, insertion of side doorway, alterations to first floor windows at front and side, and insertion of rooflight windows.
- 2.5 The proposal has been amended during the course of assessment to revise the proposed parking layout to provide 6 spaces in total, and provide cycle storage facilities.

## **3.0 Relevant planning history**

- 3.1 None relevant.

## **4.0 Consultations and representations**

All responses and representations received can be viewed in full, online at [www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/publicaccess](http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/publicaccess) using application ref. 23/02498/FUL. The following paragraphs summarise those responses and representations.

### 4.1 Bletchley Town Council

Object on the basis of insufficient parking.

### 4.2 Councillor Waqas Ahmad (Bletchley Park Ward) (Member of Committee/Panel)

No comments received.

4.3 Councillor Mo Imran (Bletchley Park Ward)

No comments received.

4.4 Councillor Nigel Long (Bletchley Park Ward)

No comments received.

4.5 MKCC Highways Officer (Local Highway Authority (LHA))

*Initial comments*

Objection. The proposal creates 4 x 1 bedroom flats and includes 4 parking spaces. The town centre has good accessibility to sustainable transport options. No cycle parking store has been proposed and this is required at a rate of 1 space per unit. No EV charging is proposed. The car parking standard for Zone 2 requires 1 allocated space plus 0.33 unallocated per unit, requiring 5.32 (6) in total. Mindful of this, the provision of cycle parking and EV charging is important.

*Revised/additional comments*

No objection subject to conditions requiring bicycle parking and EV charging points.

4.6 MKCC Environmental Health Officer (EHO))

No comments received.

4.7 Representations from interested parties

No comments have been received.

**5.0 Relevant policies, guidance and legislation**

The Development Plan

5.1 [Plan:MK](#) (adopted March 2019)

- Policy DS1- Settlement hierarchy
- Policy DS2- Housing strategy
- Policy DS4- Retail and leisure development strategy
- Policy SD16 – Central Bletchley Prospectus Area
- Policy ER2 – Protection of existing employment land and premises
- Policy ER5 – Protection of small business units
- Policy ER9 – Character and function of shopping hierarchy
- Policy ER13 – Non-retail uses in local centres within the city
- Policy ER18 – Non-retail uses on ground floors in town centres
- Policy HN4 – Amenity, accessibility and adaptability of homes
- Policy CT2 – Movement and access

- Policy CT3 – Walking and Cycling
- Policy CT6 – Electric Vehicle charging
- Policy CT9 – Digital Communications
- Policy CT10 – Parking Provision
- Policy D1 – Designing a high-quality place
- Policy D2 – Creating a positive character
- Policy D3 – Design of buildings
- Policy D5 – Amenity and Street Scene
- Policy SC1 – Sustainable construction

#### Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPDs/SPG)

5.2 The following [topic-based SPDs/SPGs](#) are relevant:

- Parking Standards SPD (2023)
- Central Bletchley Urban Design Framework SPD (2022)
- Sustainable Construction SPD (2021)
- New Residential Design Guide SPD (2012)
- Transport and Sustainable Transport SPD (2009)

#### National planning policy and guidance

5.3 The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) and [Planning Practice Guidance](#) (PPG) are also material considerations.

#### Emerging policy

5.4 The Parish of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford is designated as a NP area but has no published draft policies.

#### Legislation

5.5 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) (TCPA) and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) (PCPA).

#### **Planning considerations**

6.1 Taking account of the application type, the documents submitted (and supplemented and/or amended where relevant), the site and its environs, and the representations received; the main considerations central to the determination of this application are:

- Principle of development;
- Highway capacity, safety and parking provision;
- Character and appearance;
- Residential amenity and living conditions;
- Sustainable construction and digital communications.

## 7.0 Appraisal

### Principle of development

- 7.1 Policy DS1 of Plan:MK sets out where development within the borough will be focused and requires that the provision of new homes and jobs takes account of the settlement hierarchy. Policy DS2 sets out how new housing will be focussed on, and adjacent to, the existing urban area of Milton Keynes as well as the three key settlements. It goes on to state other ways in which and locations where new housing developments will be delivered. Given that the site is located within the settlement boundary of Bletchley, within the High Street, the principle of the development for housing within this location is supported by Policies DS1 and DS2 of Plan:MK.
- 7.2 Policy DS4 and SD16 of Plan:MK requires the Council to prepare a Central Bletchley Prospectus to promote mixed-use development and intensify development in sustainable locations, close to the station with good transport links.
- 7.3 Policy ER18 seeks to maintain the vitality of local centres and reduce empty units. Part B of Policy ER18 states that residential use will be encouraged above ground floor level. As mentioned above, the existing class E unit would be retained at ground floor. The proposal therefore complies with the ambitions of Policy ER18, the change of use of the first floor of the site to residential is therefore considered appropriate for the site and its location.

### Employment/retail provision loss

- 7.4 The lawful use of the site is as a bank with ancillary office space above, last used by Barclays in 2021. Marketing information has been provided in support demonstrating that the site has been marketed since June 2022, as well as justification for the loss of the office use in association with the existing bank. The ground floor would remain in use under Class E and, as such, this employment provision would be retained. The marketing information states that no interest has been shown in the first floor office accommodation, given that many businesses opt for independent, bespoke, open-plan offices.
- 7.5 Information on the valuation of the site, including potential market rent, has been provided. The marketing exercise resulted in a total of 25 enquires, with 4 viewings undertaken and no offers received since June 2022. This is considered to show adequate marketing in excess of 6 months as required by Policy ER2. Policy ER2 is considered to be satisfied.
- 7.6 The change of use of the upper floor to residential use would result in the loss of approximately 95sqm of office floorspace, previously associated with the ground floor Class E use. This reduction in 'employment' floorspace would not equate to the loss of a small business unit, given that the functional part of the existing Class E unit would be retained as such there is no offence to Policy ER5.

### Highway capacity, safety and parking provision

- 7.7 Policy CT10 of Plan:MK seeks to ensure that development proposals are in accordance with the Council's Parking Standards (SPD) unless mitigating circumstances indicate otherwise. The application site is within parking zone 2, requiring the provision of 1 allocated space plus 0.33

unallocated per unit. The total requirement is therefore 6 spaces for the residential units. 6 spaces have now been shown on the proposed car parking layout following an amendment to the proposed parking plan.

- 7.8 Policies CT2 and CT5 of Plan:MK seek to ensure that development proposals possess links to public transport and are acceptable in regard to traffic generation and accessibility to all users of the highway. The site is within a town centre location with good accessibility to a range of transport links. An area has been denoted on the proposed plan for the provision of a bicycle storage shelter, with capacity for 8 bicycles, which exceeds the requirements set out in the SPD.
- 7.9 Policy CT6 requires development proposals to provide electrical vehicle charging points to support the use of low emissions vehicles. Whilst details have been requested by the Highways officer, the provision of EV charging points for residential properties is now covered by Building Regulations, satisfying the policy without the need for a condition.

#### Character and appearance

- 7.10 Policies D1, D2 and D3 seek to ensure that development relates well to the surrounding area and exhibits a positive sense of character. The external alterations would include the introduction of rooflight windows (to the existing flat roof) and the removal of the external staircase, both of which have a neutral or positive effect on character.
- 7.11 To the front elevation, the existing wrap around glazing would be removed and replaced with smaller windows, and walls subsequently finished in white render. Whilst this alteration would be highly visible within the streetscene, the existing wrap around window is not a common characteristic of the run of properties to this side of Queensway or the wider area and the alteration to the upper floors would not have a harmful impact on character. The scale and form of the building in the public realm is retained. The proposed materials would reflect materials used within the immediate streetscene, most notably the building on the adjacent street corner.
- 7.12 The local area comprises of a range of uses including commercial and residential, and therefore the residential use is not considered to raise to any further design implications. The proposal seeks to utilise existing parking arrangements and would not result in any other significant impact on the character of the local area. As such, the proposed development is considered to comply with Policies D1, D2 and D3 of Plan:MK.

#### Residential amenity and living conditions

- 7.13 Policy HN4 requires that residential units meet the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) as well as other criteria regarding accessibility and flexibility of homes. The proposed flats vary in size given the conversion of existing rooms. However, all 4 flats exceed the minimum space standard of 39 square metres for a 1-bed, 1-person dwelling, and would comply with the policy, with the smallest of the flats proposed measuring 43.7m<sup>2</sup>.
- 7.14 Policy D5 sets specific requirements to ensure levels of sunlight and daylight are acceptable, external private garden space meets the needs of its users, and privacy and overlooking impacts are limited.

- 7.15 The development is not considered to raise any adverse impacts in respect of loss of privacy, visual intrusion or overbearing impact on neighbouring properties, with the flats designed to make use of remodelled windows at the rear and replacement windows to the front. All habitable rooms are served by at least one window and would provide sufficient natural light to future occupiers.
- 7.16 Policy D5 also requires sufficient external amenity space and adequate cycle and refuse storage facilities. Cycle storage been identified on the submitted plans, with specific details to be conditioned. Bin storage is indicated within the site and considered to be of an acceptable size for the units.
- 7.17 The New Residential Design Guide SPD (NRDG) outlines that “*within flatted developments, each apartment must have access to private open space*”. The site cannot accommodate any outdoor amenity space given its size and position. The proposal is for a conversion and a requirement for balconies would mean them overhanging the public highway. As such, the flats would not have any access to any private amenity space.
- 7.18 Whilst conflicting with Policy D5, the NRDG does highlight that consideration should be given to locating family housing that has small or no private gardens close to public open spaces, in particular play areas. In this instance, the flats are not family housing and are located within Bletchley town centre, within reasonable walking distance of a number of open spaces, including Leon Recreational Grounds approximately 200 metres to the east. It is considered that, on balance, given the size of units proposed and their sustainable location, the lack of amenity space is acceptable given the accessibility of public open space nearby.

#### Sustainable construction and digital communications

- 7.19 Plan:MK Policy CT9 seeks that all new developments are served by at least superfast broadband. Developers must therefore ensure that broadband services are available, wherever practical, along with other forms of digital communications infrastructure. This is now covered by Building Regulations for residential properties and therefore the proposal is considered to comply with policy CT9 of Plan:MK.
- 7.20 Policy SC1 of Plan:MK requires all new development to demonstrate how sustainable construction principles will be implemented, including the minimising of waste, the sourcing of materials, energy reduction and water consumption. A sustainability statement has been provided outlining the sustainability principles of the proposal. The building would see the re-use of an existing, vacant building as well as improved external insulation and energy efficient lighting where possible.

## **8.0 Conclusions**

- 8.1 The proposed 1-bedroom flats meet the minimum space requirements for dwellings of this size, but do not benefit from any private outdoor amenity space. Given the town centre location and close proximity to public open spaces, on balance this is considered acceptable. All other material considerations are considered to be acceptable and compliant with Plan:MK.

8.2 None of the other matters raised through the publicity and consultation process amount to material considerations outweighing the assessment of the main issues set out above, noting that conditions or obligations are recommended where meeting the tests for their imposition.

8.3 Where relevant, regard has been had to the public sector equality duty, as required by section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and to local finance considerations (as far as it is material), as required by section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), as well as climate change and human rights legislation (including Article 8 and Article 1 of the First Protocol regarding the right of respect for a person's private and family life and home, and to the peaceful enjoyment of possessions).

## 9.0 Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that permission be **granted** subject to the conditions set out below (as may be supplemented/modified in any accompanying written or verbal update to the Panel).

## 10.0 Conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the plans/drawings listed below unless as otherwise required by condition attached to this permission or following approval of an application made pursuant to Section 96A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990:

*Received 7.11.23*

0619-3A Existing and Proposed Side Elevation and Details  
0619-4A Existing and Proposed Elevations - Option 2

*Received 23.01.24*

0619-2B Proposed Layout Plan  
0619-8A Existing and Proposed Roof Layout Plan

*Received 29.02.24*

0619-5C Proposed car parking layout

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of securing sustainable development.

2. The development hereby permitted shall begin before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To prevent the accumulation of planning permissions, to enable the Local Planning Authority to review the suitability of the development in the light of altered circumstances, and to comply with section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).



3. Prior to the first occupation of the development hereby approved details of the proposed bicycle parking shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved scheme shall be provided prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted. Reason: To ensure that adequate cycle parking facilities are provided to serve the development.
4. Prior to the first occupation of the development hereby approved, the vehicle parking area shown on the approved plans shall be permanently marked out and made available for resident use. The car parking area shall thereafter be retained for the life of the development and shall be used for no other purpose than vehicle parking and manoeuvring in association with the development hereby approved.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

5. No external construction works to the building shall take place until a Schedule of the external materials to be used have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Schedule shall include detailed specifications, photo examples, RAL numbers and/or samples, as appropriate. The development shall thereafter be carried out in full accordance with the approved details prior to the first occupation of the development.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not detract from the character and appearance of the area.