

Notes of the Design Surgery at Gravesham Borough Council on 24th November 2021

Gravesham Borough Council attendees: Peter Price, Ethan Bonthron

Design South East attendees: Richard Portchmouth, Ross O'Ceallaigh, Afreen Patel (observer),
Bridie Lebdiri (observer)

18-22 Queen Street, Gravesend, DA12 2EE

Officer present: Peter Price

Planning application ref: 20211111

Background:

The application site comprises three properties that front onto Queen Street, including a shared rear yard, in the town centre of Gravesend. Summary of proposals as follows:

- Partial demolition of existing rear extension, which houses two self-contained flats.
- Erection of a one and a half story detached building in the rear yard to accommodate 6 self-contained studio flats.
- Additional storey at second floor level to no.22 and frontage alterations.

The local authority is seeking advice on overall design, layout, appropriateness of access to the rear block of flats and suitability of living accommodation.

Comments:

- The proposed additional storey and frontage alterations of no.22 is supported as it would improve the character of the streetscene.
- The principle of intensifying the site and providing residential units in this town centre location is accepted. However, the form of the proposed block of flats does not successfully respond to the highly constrained site or character of the surrounding area.
- A fundamental issue with providing residential accommodation to the rear of this site is the single access point via no.18. The long, dark, narrow alley would be uninviting and uncomfortable for residents and visitors. It would also be challenging to bring bikes and bins through this access point due to the narrow width.
- The proposed bike store is located at the rear of the site meaning that residents would have to carry their bikes down steps and along the front entrance of the ground floor flats. This is convoluted and inconvenient.
- There are concerns that on bin collection day, the pavement outside the properties will be cluttered and result in a poor quality street environment.
- The lack of provision for deliveries and the impact on the pedestrian and traffic movement in the street is also of concern.

- The quality of life and amenity of residents within the proposed six flats to the rear of the site is likely to be poor. The proposed flats would be single aspect with no windows in the bedrooms or bathrooms. This will result in dark and poorly ventilated spaces.
- The outdoor communal amenity space is likely to be poor quality and underused.
- The gallery access to the upper storey flats will result in significant overlooking to gardens and properties on Berkley Road. A privacy screen would partially mitigate this but would also further reduce the outlook of residents in these flats and so would not be an ideal solution.
- The proposed block of flats would not be wheelchair accessible due to the way it is set below ground level and accessed via steps.
- The architectural approach of three gable ended properties in this back-land location does not relate to the character or grain of the surrounding Conservation Area.
- An alternative, more appropriate design response to explore could be two or possibly three bespoke mews houses. These could provide naturally lit bedrooms and bathrooms at ground floor with living areas and kitchens at first floor, which could also be top lit. This approach could provide improved living conditions and resident amenity, while reducing the impact on neighbouring properties. A more appropriate roof form to explore would be a traditional butterfly roof with parapet.
- The applicant could also consider a more comprehensive scheme by including properties to the south. This would provide greater scope for a more appropriately scaled and cohesive design approach.