
APPLICATION NO.	20/02408/FULLS
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL APPLICATION - SOUTH
REGISTERED	05.10.2020
APPLICANT	Mr Brett Hibbitt, Aster Group
SITE	Mount Pleasant, Tadburn Green, Berthon House, Ashley House and St Mary's, off Broadwater Road and Banning Street, Romsey, SO51 8GP, ROMSEY TOWN
PROPOSAL	Addition of steel staircases to provide a secondary means of escape from upper levels to the following blocks of accommodation: Mount Pleasant; Tadburn Green; Berthon House; Ashley House and St Marys
AMENDMENTS	Amended plans and additional information received 18 January 2021
CASE OFFICER	Mrs Sarah Appleton

Background paper (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The application is presented to Southern Area Planning Committee because it is contrary to the provisions of an approved Development Plan, adverse third party representations have been received and the recommendation is for permission.

2.0 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

2.1 The site is centrally located in Romsey and consists of a number of blocks of flatted accommodation. The site is separated from the Bypass Road to the south by Tadburn Lake, a watercourse which runs from west to east along with an area of mature vegetation. Crosfield Hall and its associated car park is located to the north of the building known as Mount Pleasant. The site is outside of, but adjacent to Romsey Conservation Area.

3.0 PROPOSAL

3.1 The proposals involve the erection of external fire escape staircases to the following buildings. The staircases in all instances would be fabricated from galvanised mild steel and will include a canopy roof over. The staircases would include enclosures at ground floor level to ensure that they are only used as an emergency escape and not for general access to the buildings.

- Mount Pleasant – staircase to be located on the north east gable adjacent to the watercourse.
- St Marys – staircase would project from the north east facing elevation of the building.
- Ashley House – staircase would be located on the south west gable of the building directly adjacent to Banning Street.

- Berthon House – staircase would be located on the south east gable of the building.
- Tadburn Green 1 – staircase would be located on the north east gable of the building directly adjacent Banning Street.
- Tadburn Green 2 – staircase would project from the north east facing elevation of the building adjacent to Tadburn Lake to the south.

4.0 **HISTORY**

4.1 None

5.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

5.1 **Archaeology** – No comment

5.2 **Ecology** – No objection

5.3 **Design and conservation** – No objection

5.4 **Trees** – No objection subject to condition

6.0 **REPRESENTATIONS** Expired 12.02.2021

6.1 **Romsey Town Council** – Object

“RTC does not object to all the staircases only to two of them which block the windows of residents of the flats in St Marys and Tadburn Green 2.”

6.2 At the time of writing no further letters of representation had been received. Any additional representations will be reported in the update paper.

7.0 **POLICY**

7.1 Government Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

7.2 Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan (2016)(RLP)

COM2 – Settlement hierarchy

E1 – High quality development in the Borough

E2 – Protect, conserve and enhance the landscape character of the Borough

LHW4 – Amenity

T1 – Managing movement

CS1 – Community Safety

8.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 The main planning considerations are:

- The principle of development
- Impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area
- Impact on residential amenities
- Trees
- Heritage

- Ecology
- Highways
- Other material planning considerations and the planning balance

8.2 **The principle of development**

The site is situated within the Romsey settlement boundary and as such the proposals are considered acceptable in principle under policy COM2 of the Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan 2016 (RLP) provided they comply with the other relevant policies of the RLP.

8.3 **Impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area**

The surrounding area is mixed residential in its character interspaced with landscaping. The proposed staircases are utilitarian and industrial in their design both in terms of their form and the materials used. Whilst the existing buildings are of no great architectural value the staircases, particularly those serving Mount Pleasant, Tadburn Green 1 and 2, Brethon House and Ashley House would be very prominent within the surrounding area seen from surrounding roads and footpaths. Therefore, as a result of their scale, industrial design and as a result of their prominence, the proposed staircases would result in adverse harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area contrary to policy E1 of the RLP.

8.4 Whilst the proposals would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area, this harm needs to be balanced against the benefits of the proposals. The planning balance is discussed at paras. 8.17-8.30 of this report.

8.5 **Impact on residential amenities**

The staircases proposed for St Marys and Tadburn Green 2 would result in the loss of light and outlook from windows adjacent to them. In addition, for further safety, the windows would be required to be fixed shut. The applicant has confirmed that these rooms serve primary living accommodation. The proposals would therefore result in harm to the amenities of the occupiers of the effected properties contrary to policy LHW4 of the RLP.

8.6 The balance of the above identified harm with the benefits of the proposed development is assessed at paras. 8.17-8.30 of this report.

8.7 In relation to the impact the proposals would have on other surrounding residential dwellings, due to the separation distances between the staircases and neighbouring properties, it is not considered that the proposals would result in any further adverse impacts.

8.8 **Trees**

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Appraisal (AIA – Treework Environmental Practice Arboricultural Impact Appraisal 200930-1.0-BSR-AIA-PM). Trees in proximity to work areas have been subject to survey and report. The Council's tree officer is satisfied that this presents a fair reflection of the trees present, that this presents realistic details of likely impact

to trees and presents a reasonable schedule of tree works necessary to facilitate the development. The report also presents appropriate measures for the physical protection, for the prevention of harm, to those trees to be retained during implementation works.

8.9 The proposals would result in the loss of some trees and this would collectively have a detrimental impact on public amenity. Replacement planting in mitigation of this harm would be appropriate. Conditions relating to tree protection and replacement planting are recommended. Subject to such conditions, the proposals are considered to comply with policy E2 of the RLP.

8.10 **Heritage**

Archaeology

The site lies to the south of the historic core of Romsey off Banning Street, the original route south from the town, and so is an area where archaeological evidence may shed light on the role of this route and when it was occupied and what trades and industries took place in this part of Romsey. However, it is noted that the proposals would result in limited ground impact and thus no archaeological objections have been raised.

8.11 Impact on conservation area and listed buildings

Heritage assets that are impacted by the proposed development include 64 Banning Street (Grade II listed) and Romsey Conservation Area.

8.12 *64 Banning Street*

The proposed staircase to Tadburn Green 1 would be directly opposite No.64 which is the sole remainder of the former traditional buildings in Banning Street and its original setting was fundamentally changed with the construction of the flats and maisonettes. Notwithstanding this, due to the design including the form and materials of the staircase and its greater proximity and visibility it would result in harm to the setting of the Grade II listed building. The Council's conservation officer has confirmed that such harm would be 'less than substantial'.

8.13 Policy E9 of the RLP states that where a development would result in a less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be considered against the public benefit of the proposal. In this instance, the proposals would result in a second means of fire escape (see para.), a significant public benefit that would outweigh the harm to the listed building. As a result, the proposals are considered to comply with policy E9 of the RLP in this regard.

8.14 *Conservation Area*

Only the staircases proposed for Berthon and Ashley Houses would be likely to be visible from within the conservation area. Given the size of the proposed development and the distance from the conservation area, the Council's conservation officer is clear that there will be no impact on the significance, harmful or otherwise, of the conservation area. The proposals are therefore considered to accord with policy E9 of the RLP.

8.15 Ecology

Whilst some of the staircases would be located adjacent to a watercourse, the areas affected consist of existing hardstanding and/or existing areas of mown lawn. As a result, it is not considered that the proposal would result in any adverse impacts on ecology. The Council's ecologist has confirmed that they have no concerns that the proposals would adversely affect any statutory or locally-designated sites of wildlife importance, or any legally or notable habitats or species. The proposals are therefore considered to comply with policy E5 of the RLP.

8.16 Highways

The staircases for Ashley House, Berthon House and Tadburn Green 1 would result in the loss of a section of footpath adjacent to the gable ends of these buildings. The applicant has however proposed that these pathways would be re-routed either around or under the stairs. As a result, it is not considered that surrounding pedestrian accessibility would be effected by the proposals which are considered to comply with policy T1 of the RLP.

8.17 Other material planning considerations and the planning balance

Paragraph 2 of the NPPF states that, "Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise." In this instance, the proposals are considered contrary to policies E1 and LHW4 of the RLP in that the proposed staircases would result in harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area and harm to residential amenity. Notwithstanding this, there are other considerations which need to be balanced against the identified harm.

8.18 The applicant has been advised by Hampshire Fire and Rescue of a number of deficiencies in relation to the construction and means of escape arrangements at the accommodation the subject of this application. The blocks include a mixture of ground floor flats and maisonettes at upper floor levels. The maisonettes are accessed via external, linear walkways running the full length of each building. Each walkway is accessed off a primary staircase located at the far end of each block.

8.19 The main concern that has been raised is that in the event of a fire or other incident that leads to an obstruction of the external walkway there is no other means of escape available. The applicant has considered alternative options to resolve this. These options and their advantages and disadvantages are outlined below.

8.20 Option A

Option A considered by the applicant involves the upgrading of all surface finishes and elements of construction within the external walkways including soffit material, facing to existing elevations of flats, windows, replacement fixed glazing adjacent flat door and the flat door entry itself.

Option A	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower visual impact • Some improvement in thermal performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesser provision with regards to fire safety in comparison with the provision of a secondary means of escape – residents would still be left without a second means of escape and would potentially still have to walk towards the source of a fire in the event of an evacuation. • More lengthy duration of works – longer before fire safety improvements are in place. • Significant disruption to residents during construction • Significantly more expensive than a secondary escape stair option.

8.21 *Option B*

Option B involves the erection of external staircases to provide a secondary means of escape.

Option B	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater level of provision – occupants would be provided with a full second means of escape, enabling them to escape from the source of a fire. • Minimal disruption to residents during construction. • Shorter duration of works – fire safety improvements can be put in place more quickly. • Significantly less expensive than Option A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater visual impact • Some overshadowing of existing windows will result. • Some of the fabric directly adjacent to the stairs will need to be replaced with fire rated and sealed shut.

8.22 On considering the options, the applicant considers that providing a secondary means of escape (external staircases) would result in better outcomes for the safety of residents.

8.23 As discussed in preceding paragraphs, it is recognised that the proposed staircases would result in a negative impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and on neighbour amenities, particularly those staircases that are shown to come forward of the ‘face’ of the buildings. This is the case in 3 of the buildings, Mount Pleasant, St Marys and Tadburn Green 2. The case officer has been in discussions with the applicant to explore alternative design options for the staircases in an attempt to limit these impacts as far as possible. These options included the following:

- Exploring the use of spiral staircases
- Moving the staircases onto the side/gable end of the building

A summary of the practicalities of these options is discussed below.

8.24 *Spiral staircases*

Spiral staircases can, in accordance with Building Regulations, be used as a means of fire escape from flats in certain circumstances. Whilst it is recognised that spiral staircases would reduce the overall projection of the stair from the block, it will also increase the width relative to that of rectilinear stairs. Where the staircases need to project from the 'front' of the blocks, the increased area would enlarge the area overshadowed by the stair, having greater impacts on the occupiers of the adjacent flats.

8.25 In addition to the above, the applicant has sought the advice from Pentrevion Fire Ltd who are specialist fire engineers. They have advised that whilst spiral staircases could be considered for a low number of people being evacuated in a controlled manner, the use of spiral stairs would not be appropriate for the uncontrolled evacuation of larger numbers of people e.g. the simultaneous evacuation of the block or spontaneous self-initiated collective evacuation driven by fear – this cannot be ruled out due to the age of the accommodation blocks. The ability of occupants to safely negotiate a spiral staircase also needs to be considered. Some occupants e.g. parents with young children and the elderly may not be able to navigate a spiral staircase safely under emergency circumstances.

8.26 As a result of the above, the applicant has determined that the use of spiral staircases in lieu of straight staircases would not be appropriate.

8.27 *Moving the staircases onto the side/gable ends of the buildings*

- **Mount Pleasant** – The applicant has considered alternative options for the secondary staircase as originally submitted. Moving the staircase so that it sits adjacent to the gable end is possible and amended plans have subsequently been submitted. This reduces the visual impact of the staircase but would involve the loss of an adjacent tree.
- **St Marys** – It is not possible to move the staircase to the gable end of the building due to space constraints and the location of the existing public footpath adjacent to the block. The only possible option to providing a secondary means of escape is for the staircase to project from the face of the block. In addition, the applicant has considered moving the staircase to prevent it blocking adjacent windows however, moving the stair would increase the extent of existing windows that would need to be changed to fire rated windows and remove the option to provide some natural ventilation to existing rooms. This option was not therefore further pursued.
- **Tadburn Green 2** – The location of the staircase of this building is complicated by the proximity to the adjacent waterway. There is insufficient space between the waterway and the building to locate the staircase on the gable end. In addition, a gable end location would likely clash with below ground drainage. The only viable option therefore would be locate the staircase on the face of the building.

8.28 The proposed staircases for Tadburn 1, Berthon House and Ashley House would be located on the gable ends of the buildings. Whilst they would still be prominent in the surrounding area, this positioning is more discrete due to the staircases being seen with the backdrop of the buildings.

8.29 The planning balance

The proposals would result in a hugely significant benefit to the occupiers of the existing buildings. They would offer an alternative means of escape should their main escape route be blocked. The proposed development could ultimately prevent the loss of life. Whilst the development would result in adverse harm to both the character and appearance of the area and on residential amenities in terms of loss of light and outlook, the applicant has considered alternative options and has submitted amended plans where visual amenity can be improved (e.g. with the staircase at Mount Pleasant). The applicant has demonstrated that there are no alternative, viable options that would offer the same public benefits.

8.30 As a result of the above, whilst the development would result in harm, this is significantly outweighed by the public benefits of the proposals. Permission is therefore recommended.

9.0 **CONCLUSION**

9.1 It is not considered that the proposed development would result in adverse harm on trees, ecology, heritage or on highway safety. The proposals would however result in adverse harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area and on the residential amenities of some of the occupiers of the existing buildings. The proposals are therefore considered to be contrary to policies E1 and LHW4 of the RLP.

9.2 Notwithstanding the above, the proposals would result in a significant public benefit which could ultimately prevent the loss of life. This carries significant weight which overrides the identified harm. The applicant has demonstrated that there are no alternative, viable options that would offer the same public benefits. Permission is therefore recommended contrary to the Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan 2016.

10.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

PERMISSION subject to conditions and notes:

1. **The development hereby permitted shall be begun within three years from the date of this permission.**

Reason: To comply with the provision of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. **The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out except in complete accordance with the details shown on the submitted plans, numbers:**

Site Location Plan - 200421 1100 P3

Site Plan - 200421 1110 P2

Ashley House Proposed Elevations 200421 3004 P5

Berthon House Proposed Elevations 200421 3003 P5

**Mount Pleasant Proposed Elevations 200421 3002a P5
St Marys Proposed Elevations 200421 3005 P5
Tadburn Green 1 Proposed Elevations 200421 3000 P5
Tadburn Green 2 Proposed Elevations 200421 3001 P5
Proposed Plan and Elevation Fencing 200421 3010 P3**

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

- 3. The development hereby approved shall be undertaken in full accordance with the provisions set out within the Treework Environmental Practice Arboricultural Impact Appraisal reference 200930-1.0-BSR-AIA-PM**

Reason: To ensure the enhancement of the development by the retention of existing trees and natural features during the construction phase in accordance with Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan policy E2.

- 4. Tree protective measures installed (in accordance with the tree protection condition) shall be maintained and retained for the full duration of works or until such time as agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. No activities, nor material storage, nor placement of site huts or other equipment what-so-ever shall take place within the barrier.**

Reason: To ensure the avoidance of damage to existing trees and natural features during the construction phase in accordance with Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan policy E2.

Note to Applicant:

- 1. In reaching this decision Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) has had regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions. TVBC work with applicants and their agents in a positive and proactive manner offering a pre-application advice service and updating applicants/agents of issues that may arise in dealing with the application and where possible suggesting solutions.**
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