
50-54 WEST STREET, ROCHFORD (Min 423/00)

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This reports updates Members on progress towards achieving a suitable renovation and redevelopment scheme on this site in the centre of Rochford.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 50-54 West Street comprises a modes brick house (No.54) and a larger building at 50-52 that for much of the twentieth century (according to photographic evidence) had two shops on the ground floor with living accommodation over.
- 2.2 The buildings are not subject to a statutory listing, despite several attempts to convince the Secretary of State of their merits.
- 2.3 In the last few years, the Planning Authority refused consent for a redevelopment scheme and the subsequent Appeal was dismissed by the Secretary of State. The scheme that was considered to be unacceptable was for:
- the retention and renovation of No.54 (agreed after submission)
 - the demolition and replacement of Nos. 50-52
 - the provision of three small dwellings to the rear.
- 2.4 One of the key issues considered unacceptable by the Inspector in dismissing the Appeal, was the scale of the proposed new building intended to replace Nos. 50-52.

3 PROGRESS UPDATE

- 3.1 Officers have been in discussions with the site owners and Southend Building Preservation Trust to see if it might be possible to undertake a redevelopment scheme in partnership.
- 3.2 The owners have allowed the Preservation Trust to undertake a detailed survey of the buildings and the resultant project report was discussed at a meeting sponsored by Rochford Council on the 19th July 2001.
- 3.3 Unfortunately, the conclusion of the discussions between the owners and the Trust was that a partnership working arrangement did not seem to be a realistic possibility, given the different ambitions each had for the site and the projected costs.

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- 3.4 Following that meeting, Officers continued discussions with the owners and a meeting took place on the 9th October 2001 involving the owners, their Architect and the Specialist Advisor on Historic Buildings from the County Council. At that meeting, the owners indicated their willingness to explore options for a suitable renovation/redevelopment scheme for the site. A further meeting to continue discussions is planned for November.
- 3.5 The starting point for the preparation of a revised scheme for the site must be the comments made by the Inspector in his decision letter. Taking these into account, there are several options open to the owners in preparing an alternative scheme.
- 3.6 The owners continue to confirm their willingness to retain and renovate No.54 West Street. In addition, since the Inspector did not seem to be opposed to development to the rear, the owners have also suggested they would most likely wish to continue to include three small units in this location.
- 3.7 Therefore, the crucial debate centres on the future of the building at 50-52 West Street. At this stage, the owners have provided no advice on their willingness or otherwise to retain part of the building and that issue will need to be discussed further at the next officer meeting. However, there are two options open to them to consider.
- 3.8 Given the concerns of the Inspector regarding the scale of the building previously proposed, any building on the site of Nos.50-52 must closely follow the scale of the existing, whether part of 50-52 is retained or not. The Inspector concluded that a drop in scale in this part of the Conservation area was important in order to protect the setting of the listed building at the Hollies.
- 3.9 A scheme for this part of the site could take one of two forms. Firstly, the front range of 50-52 could be retained with new build to the rear of a suitable scale. This arrangement would certainly satisfy concerns about the demolition of old buildings within the Conservation Area. The extent of the part of the building to be retained in this option would need to be subject to discussion, though it is clear that the previous fire damage has limited the options and that only the front range can realistically be considered for retention. The inspector pointed out in his decision letter that the modern shopfronts in the building are out of keeping with the Conservation Area. On that basis, it is really only the first floor front elevation that makes any meaningful visual contribution.
- 3.10 The second option would be to demolish 50-52 West Street and replace with a new building. The Inspector who considered the previous appeal concluded that the proposed development scheme would be harmful to the character and appearance of the Rochford Conservation Area and that given there was no acceptable

redevelopment scheme it would not be right to permit the demolition of the appeal buildings. He also concluded that the existing buildings do make a contribution to the Conservation Area. However, since in his view the scheme proposed at that time was not acceptable in its scale, bulk or appearance, it was right that demolition of the buildings should not be contemplated. However, if a replacement building is proposed that matches the existing building in scale and bulk, then the objection to the demolition of the existing buildings becomes more difficult to sustain as an argument.

- 3.11 It could be that the developer will propose a new building on the site that 'copies' the central features of the existing building, in much the same way as the replacement building on the Brooklands site in Rayleigh copied the original. It is considered such an arrangement could certainly provide an acceptable solution for the Conservation Area, though a new build of different design to a suitable scale might also be acceptable.
- 3.12 Whether or not part of 50-52 is retained, it is understood that the owner would be seeking to develop the site for residential occupation, with the removal of the ground floor shops. Given the challenge of achieving a suitable scheme for the site, such an arrangement is, in principle, not considered unacceptable. However, it should be borne in mind that the loss of the shop frontages would require a new build at ground floor level whichever redevelopment option is followed.
- 3.13 It should be noted that any views provided by Members on these matters cannot seek to undermine the planning process, but an in principle view on the way forward is not unacceptable, particularly given the history of the site and its key location within the Rochford Conservation Area.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This is a key site within the Rochford Conservation Area.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None if the owner prepares a scheme that proves to be acceptable to the local planning authority. £75,000 has been identified in the budget for this site, but it is not considered appropriate to consider a contribution towards scheme costs if this is undertaken by a private developer.

9 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

That, subject to a planning application, in principle acceptance be given to the change of use of the shops at 50-52 West Street to residential, and that Members give their views on the redevelopment options for the site as outlined in the report. (HPS)

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