

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

At a meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held virtually  
on **Tuesday 21 July 2020 at 4.00 pm.**

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor CW Horncastle  
(Chair in the Chair)

#### **MEMBERS**

Armstrong E	Reid J
Bowman L	Renner-Thompson G
Dodd R	Stewart G
Flux B	Swithenbank ICF
Foster J	Thorne T
Hepple A	Webb G
Lang J	

#### **OFFICERS**

Blyth K	Principal Planning Officer
Bulman M	Solicitor
Dixon L	Democratic Services Apprentice
Little L	Democratic Services Officer
Murfin R	Director of Planning
Murphy J	Principal Planning Officer
Williams M	Team Leader - ICT Practitioner

#### **93. PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED AT A VIRTUAL STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Chair outlined the procedure which would be followed at the virtual meeting and of the changes to the public speaking protocol. He also advised Members that if their connection was lost during consideration of an application and it was not possible for a short recap to be provided then the Member would not be allowed to vote on the application.

#### **94. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gibson and Robinson.

#### **95. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the virtual Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 2 June, 2020, as circulated, were agreed as a true record and be signed by the Chair.

**96. DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The report requested the Committee to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**97. 19/04654/FUL**

**Part demolition of existing premises at rear of Lumsden's Lane and replaced with proposed mixed-use development for retail and residential units 26-28 Newgate Street, Morpeth, Northumberland. NE61 1BA**

There were no questions regarding the site visit videos which had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting.

R Laughton, Planning Officer provided an introduction to the application with the aid of a presentation stating that this was a very finely balanced application. R Murfin, Director of Planning provided more information on the wider strategic concerns regarding the proposals. He advised that whilst Morpeth was one of the more successful retail centres in the County, all the evidence throughout the Country even pre-Covid had suggested that that because of changing retail patterns there would be a 30% - 70% reduction in retail floorspace within town centres, depending on how successful they were seen to be at that time. This proposal was an opportunity for investment and could be assumed that it would have a positive economic benefit in Morpeth but already in Newgate Street there were increased vacancies and a once healthy street was starting to show some tensions. This scheme would clearly have benefits in terms of improving elements of the connectivity between the Sanderson Arcade, the bus station area and Newgate Street. However, if this application was granted, the relocation of businesses from Newgate Street into this development could not be prevented, which could in turn accelerate the number of vacancies on Newgate Street and could possibly have a snowball effect on other retailers due to the reduced footfall in that area. Balanced against that was that this was a new retail unit which could improve the overall offer in Morpeth. There were other issues with the application in planning terms, such as the overlooking of the neighbouring property, it did not meet standards that the local planning authority would normally look for in terms of privacy and massing and Lumsden Lane was not a main retail frontage. If Members considered that the overall benefit for Morpeth was likely then this could outweigh the other impacts but the Committee must be certain that there would be a net positive economic benefit.

As stated in the report, the recommendation to refuse the application was finely balanced. If the Committee's vision was that the benefits to the retailing offer in Morpeth would be enhanced then that could be used to outweigh the technical issues of it, or if it did not reach the level to drive enough economic benefits then it would not outweigh these issues. The Director of Planning advised that the Committee were entitled to make a decision to either approve or refuse the application, however he wished to maintain that there were technical issues to do with scale, massing, overlooking and effects on the conservation area which would not automatically allow this application to be approved. In respect of retailers moving from Newgate Street into this development, the Director of Planning advised that he had been in discussions with the applicant who had stated that it was hoped that the proposed development would not compete directly with Newgate Street as it would provide more of a niche specialist retailing offer and it would be complementary, however this could not be conditioned.

A statement in support of the application from Mr David Chambers, the applicant, was read out by L Little, Democratic Services Officer. The statement would be attached to the signed copy of the minutes and would be uploaded to the Council's website.

In response to questions from Committee the following information was provided:-

- It was clarified that the information provided in respect of the reduction of 30% to 70% in retail floorspace within town centres was based on pre-Covid estimations. Unsuccessful places could lose up to 70% and even the most successful could lose up to 30% in the next ten years and this could now change again. There were site specific issues in relation to this which could be argued were benefits.
- Morpeth Town Council (MTC) had been consulted twice in connection with the application and their comments were up to date. They were in support of the application as it would accord with the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan (MNP), however the Planning Officer also had to consider the NPPF and Local Plan in terms of conservation.
- The interpretation of the Neighbourhood Plan was more difficult when it was in the town centre. The MNP stated that the retail offer should be strengthened which is why MTC supported the application, but Officers needed to challenge this to see if there would be a net benefit to the Town.
- Whilst adequate car parking would always be a requirement, in town centre developments such as this then more flexibility was required. The development was next to a bus station and in a town centre location where other car parking was available nearby. There were many houses in Morpeth without car parking.
- The Conservation Officer had looked at the scale and massing from a conservation perspective which they considered was too much for the site. The applicant has said it was difficult to meet separation distances in historic towns and it was a question for Members as to whether the benefits of the development would outweigh these concerns.
- The extant planning permission for the neighbouring property was confirmed and a certificate of lawfulness had been provided to say that the works had in fact started. If that development was to be completed and this application was approved then it would affect that property up to the first floor bedroom windows, a point which needed to be taken into consideration. If Members were minded to approve the application,

then it would need to be delegated to the Director of Planning to agree conditions and have discussions with the applicant regarding the design in order to achieve a scheme that would work. It would depend on the results of these discussions as to whether a scheme could be conditioned satisfactorily and might need to be brought back to this Committee for a further decision.

- The active use of first floor space within retail premises would always be encouraged, as a reduced level of storage area was now needed for some retailers and, in some instances, it would be permitted development to convert these spaces. However there was a balance which needed to be met and this was not the case in every instance.

Councillor Thorne advised that Morpeth was the jewel in the crown as far as retail in the County, with the Sanderson Arcade giving the town a vibrancy and buzz and this would be another add on to push Morpeth's offer. He did take on board concerns, however he considered that the positive factors such as improving the retail experience and enhancement of the pedestrian access and existing walkway outweighed the harm to the conservation area and he therefore proposed that the Committee be Minded to Grant the application subject to conditions being required, with delegated authority being provided to the Director of Planning and Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee to agree such conditions with the applicant and if these could be agreed, then delegated authority be given to the Director Planning to issue the planning permission. If the conditions could not be agreed then the matter should come back to this Committee for further determination. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Stewart.

There were differing views expressed by Committee Members during discussion of the application. Those stating they would support the application gave reasons such as the welcome investment into the town centre and increased retail offer to help attract shoppers back to the high street following Covid-19. Other Members considered that the application should be refused in line with the Officer's recommendation as the development was too big, was an overdevelopment of the site, did not provide car parking spaces for the residential properties and it would impact on the neighbouring property. The Chair reminded the Committee that the Officers had stated that the application was finely balanced.

A vote was taken on the proposal that the Committee be minded to approve the application as outlined above as follows:- FOR 6; AGAINST 6; ABSTENTIONS 2, the Chair then used his casting vote to support the proposal.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee be **MINDED TO GRANT** the application subject to conditions being required, with delegated authority being provided to the Director of Planning and Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee to agree such conditions with the applicant and if these could be agreed, then delegated authority be given to the Director Planning to issue the planning permission. If the conditions could not be agreed then the matter should come back to this Committee for further determination.

## 98. PLANNING APPEALS

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

The virtual meeting closed at 5.02 pm

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_