

Urban Design Observations

To: Development Management

From: Anna Kramarczyk-Dillon, Architect/Urban Designer, Mid Sussex DC

Application ref: DM/23/0140

Date: 13/04/2023

Address: 68/70 Church Walk, Burgess Hill, RH15 9AS

Description: DM/23/0140

Planning Application for the redevelopment of the existing building 2 storey building to create a 4 storey building with 10 No. flats over three floors above the existing retail use at Ground Floor.

The submitted proposal for the redevelopment of the existing 2-storey building to 4-storey building presents a design that greatly improves the blank brick wall frontage facing pedestrianised Church Walk. Disappointingly elevation facing Crescent Way is only properly addressed at levels above the ground floor, when in fact ground level should be treated with equal attention.

Open, active frontage that could engage and provide public face onto the street is designed poorly and not in compliance with principle DG40 of the Mid Sussex Design Guide (MSDG). Furthermore, residential access to the building is not clearly visible and easily identifiable. For that reason, the legibility of the residential entrance is being compromised.

The Ground floor access entry zone to flats and too narrow corridor leading to communal staircase does not provide safe, accessible entry from Crescent Way and through the building.

The building layout shows internal 'light/ventilation well', which is not properly executed on 1st and 2nd floor and should be improved. It's questionable if any sun penetration would be possible to space of this width and dept. Habitable rooms with windows opening to the 'light well' are concerning. Also, to ensure privacy: any windows placed within the 'light well' should be staggered if clear glass is used.

Proposed apartment plans on 1st and 2nd floors look cramped, too deep and with rooms at minimum (or possibly even below minimum) widths allowed. The deep-planned, narrow flats on the southern side will necessitate artificial light in the kitchens, and flats on the north side of the buildings will necessitate artificial light even more. Sunlight assessment for each habitable room would be beneficial.

Considering possible insufficient light in the flats, acoustic issues arising in the 'light well', residential entrance issues (internal and external) I would be concerned about standard of amenity for future users.

Paragraph 130 of the NPPF sets out six criteria against which planning policies and decisions should meet to deliver well-designed places. This includes criteria (f) namely: "create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promotes health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine that quality of life or community cohesion and resilience."

Therefore, I cannot support this scheme without significant changes to plans and layout and some changes to elevations.

Some suggestions for smaller changes:

- In places the submitted drawings are sketchy and do not provide enough information (dimensions, descriptions etc.) and should be improved. Consequently, the scope for comment can only be limited.
- All elevations should be presented, including internal light well elevations; more sections should be provided.
- Staircase would benefit from being better lit, possibly by a proper oversized roof light.
- Introduction of a passenger lift should be considered to allow for better accessibility.
- Setbacks balconies are presented with glass balustrades which would not allow for enough privacy to the flat user or prevent a street user from seeing items often stored on the balconies; dense modern-looking railing that would resemble the pattern of vertical lines on the windows would be more suitable.
- Maintenance strategy for the internal light well needs to be explored and explained in the proposal.
- Drainage plans for apartments and water collection from balconies need to be shown better. RWDP rainwater discharge arrangements together with the layout of channels redirecting the water from balconies and leading to RWDP should be presented for approval.
- RWDP pipes plan needs to be submitted to make sure shown elevations – which suggest rainwater pipes will be hidden behind the front brick will be executed that way. If rainwater removal is to be internally incorporated, the drawings should show hidden gutters on the roof (and where they are accommodating the drain holes) and the internal pipes on the ground floor.
- All drainage and ventilation pipes needed for the building need to be incorporated into the building layout – none of them should be running outside on the elevations – firstly that would be aesthetically unacceptable on front and back elevations. Secondly, on side elevations, there is a need to safeguard future development possibilities.
- Sustainability elements of the scheme should be explored further.

Access from Crescent Way notes for improvements notes:

- The residential entry which provides access to the main staircase does not need to be separated from the bicycle storage; in fact, creating one big sufficiently glazed lobby that serves as an entrance and bike storage would be far more beneficial for this scheme; also corridor linking main door to the staircase should be widened to allow for 2 people passing – that would create a safer space with better visual link to the entrance
- External boundary wall facing the street should be lowered, also aligning the opening in the external wall with the front door would allow for residents to land on the public pavement instead of the car parking bay (this would require as well slight relocation of the existing street sign)
- The back entrance to the commercial unit should be designed to create active frontage to the street it faces. The back door to retail also should have a glass panel above the doors. The staff room should have a row of full-size windows. All to improve natural surveillance.
- Details of lighting around the residential entrance should be provided.