

Comments from Highfield Residents' Association

20/01099/FUL 7 Brookvale Road

Conversion of existing 9-bed HMO into 8 self-contained flats

The Highfield Residents' Association has the following comments on this application and is surprised that the association was not a named Consultee in the Application process as would be the norm.

First, as to process. It is understood that the Notification was removed from the nearest lamppost quite early on in the consultation period. HRA suggests that (a) the notice is restored (b) that local residents are actually written to (in case the same thing happens again), and (c) that the consultation period is extended. The HRA Secretary has confirmed a message exchange with the Planning Officer, Mat Pigeon, to this effect.

The officer agreed to re-instate the notice and that the consultation period would be extended by a week or so.

HRA understands that the property has been used in the past as an HMO but is currently housing a family. The HRA Secretary has confirmed with SCC HMO department (Carol Freeman), that 7, Brookvale Road does not have an HMO licence but that 7A, Brookvale Road does have a 9-Bed HMO Licence, valid until 2022. This is confusing and it would be helpful to clarify the position especially as The Proposal (Planning Application Design and Access Statement, para 1) states that 7 Brookvale Road is a 16-bed HMO.

In principle HRA welcomes the removal of an HMO, subject to the points below. The Association is well aware of attempts by landlords using the conversion route to get round the HMO controls: it is not clear if this is what is happening here.

The Association further observes that the Notification is for 8 single-bed flats but that The Proposal refers to 2 x two-bed flats and 6 single-bed flats. The Proposed and Existing Plans Drawing, shows 9 bedrooms existing but only 7 bedrooms in the new layout (2 ground floor; 3 on the 1st floor and 2 on the 2nd floor) when 10 would be needed. This needs clarification.

In either case this would be a very intensive use of the property and it is very hard to see how it would meet proper housing standards. The following paragraph from the Planning

Application Design and Access Statement is particularly concerning, “The proposal provides all habitable rooms with at least one window introducing natural light to the living areas which are set back from the main apertures and therefore it is considered that this would provide acceptable living conditions. Furthermore, the layout of the subdivided units provides more opportunity for relief compared to the existing living arrangements and the relationship in terms of outlook which is considered to be an improvement”. This is in particular reference to the comments: the windows, where no size is described; acceptable living conditions – what might these look like?; and more opportunity for relief compared to existing – what might acceptable mean in practice?

The Planning Application form states that there are to be no changes to the external appearance of the property, but it is understood that the ground floor flat roof at the rear is intended to be changed from a flat roof and incorporate a skylight. If there are indeed any plans to change the external appearance of the property, then no doubt the Council would want to see and approve them (and HRA would certainly want to have the opportunity to comment, particularly given the property’s strategic position near the entrance to the flagship Waitrose store in Portswood Road).

There are many cars using kerb-side parking in Highfield at the moment and HRA considers that the statement, “Therefore, the shortfall of 5 on-site parking spaces can be absorbed by the local road network comfortably.” is not paying appropriate attention to car parking issues and that the addition of one cycle space per flat is paying lip-service to environmental impact.

Finally, the Planning Application Design and Access Statement states that the property has considerable amenity area (202sqm) to the rear which will be split to provide private semi private space for units 3 and 4 whilst providing ample communal area complying with Councils RDG (20sqm per unit required = 160sqm). The rear garden will be changed from what it is now – an unsightly heap of building rubbish and large ramshackled sheds covering most of the available space – to amenity use. Once again, it would be helpful to see the precise plans. They would need to cover the removal of the existing structures which are also unsightly from the entrance to the Waitrose store.

These comprise HRA’s comments. Whilst not opposed to the application, we do believe that there are some important issues to be resolved.

Barbara Claridge

HRAHonSec

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In either case this would be a very intensive use of the property and it is very hard to see how it would meet proper housing standards. The following paragraph from the Planning Application Design and Access Statement is particularly concerning, *"The proposal provides all habitable rooms with at least one window introducing natural light to the living areas which are set back from the main apertures and therefore it is considered that this would provide acceptable living conditions. Furthermore, the layout of the subdivided units provides more opportunity for relief compared to the existing living arrangements and the relationship in terms of outlook which is considered to be an improvement"*. This is in particular reference to the comments the windows, where no size is described; acceptable living conditions – what might these look like?; and more opportunity for relief compared to existing – what might this mean in practice?

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Third letter

26:03:21

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On behalf of Highfield Residents' Association

It is noted that a decision has yet to be made by SCC Planning on the Application 20/01099/FUL 7 Brookvale Road - Conversion of existing 9-bed HMO into 8 self-contained flats and that a decision determination should have been made by 14 October 2020.

HRA has been contacted by a member who is concerned that much building work was carried out during the autumn and that the premises are now occupied. Please could you update me on the current situation and expected determination date?

Many thanks

Barbara Claridge

HRAHonSec