

3/21/2821/FUL | Change of use from Class A1 (retail use) to create one four bedroom dwelling; alterations to openings and fenestration; new roof light to second floor; creation of new side entrance way; car-parking space to side and installation of railings and plinth walls to front and side. | 7 Cowbridge Hertford Hertfordshire SG14 1PG

7 Cowbridge is mentioned in the Bengeo Neighbourhood Area Plan as follows:

4.46 Some listed buildings have lain empty for a considerable time, including the former motorcycle shop on Cowbridge... Historic England's Guidance 'Vacant Historic Buildings: Guidelines on Managing Risks' says that historic buildings that are left vacant are 'at a greatly increased risk of damage and decay, as well as being a potential blight on their locality'.

This is particularly true of 7 Cowbridge which is in danger of falling into decay.

Although the application involves a change of use from retail to residential, the premises has been empty for so many years. So, while it is a pity to lose town centre commercial space, we judge that it is more important to preserve this beautiful, grade 2 listed building than to attempt to keep it as a commercial property. Furthermore, the conversion of the frontage will fit in well with the rest of the street.

Policy HBC2 of the Neighbourhood Plan states:

III. Proposals to bring empty listed buildings back into appropriate use, in line with Historic England's guidelines, will be supported when the benefits of development outweigh the disadvantages.

IV. Proposals for the development or re-development of listed buildings will be supported when they meet identified housing, community or business need and when they are consistent with other policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

We welcome the aim of the development to remove unsympathetic changes. The removal of the shop window to be replaced by a smaller one in the original historical position will enhance the frontage of the property.

We note that this building contains swift nests, a bird on the 'red' list of endangered species (BTO/RSPB). Swifts migrate back to the same nest each year and any disturbance is very problematic. We, therefore, strongly urge the developer to include swift bricks in any construction work and to take expert advice on the siting of these.

We do not consider the addition of railings at the front of the property to be necessary or desirable. We do not think that they add to the sense of history of the building as railings would not have been a historic feature, or that they are in keeping with the rest of the street. So, we would prefer to see this element omitted.

We note that the parking space would only be wide enough for a very small car but we also note that Highways have put in an objection to parking in that space. We wonder whether provision for cycle storage could be made in this area.

Overall, we agree with the developer's assertion that: *“bringing back to life a listed building that has been vacant for so long, with a viable use that is consistent with its conservation ... would make a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness”* paragraph 5.2.6

Therefore, on this basis we wish to support the application. We do not consider it in the interests of the building that it be allowed to fall into decay. But we hope that the developer notes our points on swifts, the front railings and cycle provision.

Chair

Bengeo Area Neighbourhood Plan