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Speen
Princes Risborough
Bucks HP27 XXX

Heather Smith (Case Officer)
Planning Department
Buckingham Council – Wycombe District
Queen Victoria Road
High Wycombe HP11 1BB

XX September 2020

Dear Madam

**Planning Application reference 20/07032/FUL
Change of Use of the first floor from Retail (A1) to a Residential flat (C3)
Speen Stores, Chapel Hill, Speen HP27 0SL**

We refer to an application made 6th August 2020 requesting planning consent for the conversion of the first floor of Speen Stores to a self-contained one bedroom flat.

We wish to object to the proposal, which was submitted by DP Architects on behalf of their client, Buckinghamshire Housing Association Ltd.

This objection is being lodged on behalf of the Speen Stores Working Group, a team of village residents who have been investigating the best way to secure the continued existence of this well-used and much valued amenity.

The reason for our objection to the proposal by the applicant is a simple one, but of enormous practical consideration. By way of background, the shop forms part of a larger scheme carried out in the late 1990s, comprising the development of low cost/affordable housing and the shop itself.

In this regard, we refer you to the Land Charges Register (title number BM209327) which records a restrictive covenant limiting the development to five dwelling houses and one shop.

We now refer you to the letter submitted by the Applicant's architects (dated 6th August 2020) and, more particularly, the plans attached to that letter. You will note that the shop, since the date of construction and as still arranged, comprises retail sales and storage accommodation at ground floor, with staff kitchen, food preparation, toilet facilities and additional storage at first floor.

Until recently the first floor was in shared use with a local hair dresser and, whilst this arrangement has now come to an end, we understand that there have been expressions of interest from other parties. In our opinion, the first floor is suited to a variety of commercial uses and is certainly not surplus to community needs.

The original and existing layout of the premises facilitated its optimum use as a fully functioning shop and post office with hair dressing salon above. This continues to be an essential and viable commercial property which will be rendered unviable if this application succeeds.

We now refer you to the proposed plans and elevations as submitted by the Applicant. You will note that the intention is to create a self-contained one bedroom flat at first floor. In order to achieve this, the kitchen and toilet facilities, which are fundamental to the retail operation, will be removed; as will an under-stair cupboard and important circulation space at ground floor.

We are concerned and disappointed that the Applicant's proposed plans identify a shop which is confined entirely to the ground floor, has less storage accommodation, no toilet facilities, no kitchen and no food preparation area.

The proposal will therefore result in a shop which is not only reduced in size but incapable of being used for its intended purpose. In other words, the shop would not be capable of beneficial use as, without essential staff facilities, it could not meet health and safety requirements.

We believe that the proposal conflicts with the stated intentions of the Council in terms of protecting and enhancing the local environment. This development would have a detrimental impact upon residential amenities and is contrary to the covenant in the Land Register.

In accordance with Section DM29 of the Wycombe Local Plan, any development must meet the full range of needs for community facilities; land or buildings currently occupied for community use must be retained unless the applicant has clearly demonstrated that those proposed to be lost are surplus to any community needs.

The Applicant is not proposing (at this stage) that the village shop be lost but the very act of removing the first floor will cause that to happen. A shop cannot operate without staff facilities and there are no public toilets in Speen!

The implications of losing our shop are very serious indeed. Speen has a population of over 650 people, many of whom are entirely dependent on the shop for their day-to-day needs. There are many elderly residents, there are residents who do not drive or own a car and, as noted earlier, the shop is part of a larger development including low cost/affordable housing directly behind the shop.

We are mindful of the fact that there is a very limited public transport service in Speen, buses into High Wycombe being limited to one only on a Tuesday and a Friday. The loss of our shop will cause a significant increase in private vehicle journeys into Wycombe and to our nearest shop, the Co-op in Walters Ash. You will doubtless be aware of the traffic chaos that occurs in the vicinity of the Co-op, a problem which will be exacerbated should the residents of Speen be rendered reliant upon that facility.

We therefore urge you to have careful regard to the objections we have raised and that these be taken into consideration when deciding the application.

In closing, we wish to make it clear that we fully understand and accept that people need decent affordable homes in a well-designed, accessible environment. However, the addition of a small one-bedroom dwelling at the expense of a viable commercial amenity makes no sense, particularly in a village that is so far removed from other shopping facilities.

We therefore invite you to refuse the application on the basis that it is impractical, unworkable and contrary to the provisions of the Local Plan.

Yours faithfully

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