

SECTION '2' – Applications meriting special consideration

**Application No :** 12/02499/FULL1

**Ward:**  
**Chelsfield And Pratts  
Bottom**

**Address :** Hadlow House 9 High Street Green  
Street Green Orpington BR6 6BG

**OS Grid Ref:** E: 545623 N: 163886

**Applicant :** Brewster Estates Ltd

**Objections :** YES

**Description of Development:**

Conversion of first and second floors from offices (Class B1) to 8 two bedroom self-contained flats (Class C3) including elevational alterations and provision of balconies to first and second floor rear elevations, together with reconfiguration of the existing car park and rear courtyard area to provide additional amenity space, cycle storage and bin storage/collection

Key designations:

Biggin Hill Safeguarding Birds  
Biggin Hill Safeguarding Area  
London City Airport Safeguarding  
London Distributor Roads

**Proposal**

Permission is sought to convert the existing first and second floor office accommodation comprising an area of approximately 8000 sq ft (760 sq metres) into 8 two-bedroom flats. Some minor elevational alterations are proposed and balconies will be provided to the 4 rear-facing flats. In addition it is proposed to provide some outdoor amenity space within the existing rear parking area, whilst 12 parking spaces (together with 2 visitor spaces) will be retained for the flats.

A Planning Statement (incorporating marketing information), Design and Access Statement and Transport Statement accompany this application.

**Location**

The site is situated along the eastern side of High Street Green Street Green with the ground floor comprising of retail units and the upper floor comprising office space. The surrounding area is characterised by its mixed use with a number of retail units situated within the adjoining parade along the High Street, whilst the surrounding roads are predominantly residential in character. The site

encompasses an outdoor car park to the rear of the building with space for approximately 30 cars. Access to this car park is via an access drive off Glentrammon Road.

### **Comments from Local Residents**

Nearby owners/occupiers were notified of the application and representations were received which are summarised as follows:

- proposed balconies will overlook neighbouring dwelling at No. 4 Glentrammon Road
- area is well served by retail services and is close to 2 railway stations
- plans do not accurately show existing site layout or access arrangements to No. 4
- residential use would not be in keeping with the area
- building work will inconvenience surrounding businesses
- loss of commercial parking provision will harm adjoining businesses
- inadequate parking provision to serve the development

### **Comments from Consultees**

No technical Highways or Refuse objections have been raised, subject to conditions. Environmental Health (Housing) comments have been noted.

### **Planning Considerations**

Relevant London Borough of Bromley Unitary Development Plan (UDP) policies are: BE1 (Design of New Development); H1 (Housing Supply); H12 (Conversion of Non-Residential Buildings to Residential Use); EMP3 (Conversion of Offices); EMP5 (Development Outside Business Areas); T3 (Parking Provision); and T18 (Road Safety).

The NPPF (in particular paragraphs 22 and 51) sets a strong emphasis on market signals as an evidence base for commercial allocations. These factors are to be taken into consideration in assessing this scheme.

The London Plan (2011) sets out the Mayoral vision and strategic policy regarding the economy and business growth. The following London policies are relevant: Policy 2.6 (Outer London: Vision and strategy); Policy 2.7 (Outer London: Economy); Policy 4.1 (Developing London's Economy); Policy 4.2 (Offices (supporting managed conversion of surplus capacity to more viable, complementary uses))

### **Planning History**

Planning permission was granted in April 1982 for a three storey block comprising three retail units together with a surgery at ground floor level, plus self-contained offices at the first and second floors. Although there have been some changes of use at ground floor level, these units have retained their function in serving visiting members' of the public.

## Conclusions

The main issues for consideration relate to the impact of this proposal of office provision in the locality; its contribution to housing supply; its impact on neighbouring amenity; and the level parking provision associated with this development.

### Loss of Office Space

The premises at Hadlow House provide quite sizeable modern office accommodation with a combined first and second floor Gross Internal Area of 8000sq ft (760sq m). Pre-application advice (November 2011) made it clear that further evidence was necessary in order to justify the loss of office floorspace. Since that time the applicant has continued to market the property and has provided additional information on the demand and supply of office stock in the vicinity. The applicant has provided further evidence from Linays commercial property agents and a 'Focus' report prepared by Savills.

The first floor of the property became vacant in 2003 and remained unoccupied for a period of approximately two and a half years, until November 2005, when it was let to Braemar Financial Ltd. Braemar remained at the premises for just over five years. The first floor has been available for let and marketed since January 2011 to the present day (one year and 10 months).

The second floor was occupied for some five years between 2004-2009, then became vacant for 9 months before being let to the present occupiers MyHobbyStore Ltd in December 2009. My HobbyStore Ltd currently occupy the second floor (having been tenants for three years); however they have decided to vacate the premises when their lease expires on 31st December 2012. Appendix 4 of the Planning Statement provides evidence that MyHobbyStore Ltd had given notice to vacate the premises in May 2012 and a subsequent investigation by way of checks on the property agent's website has revealed that the second floor has not been actively marketed. This has been confirmed by Savills. This therefore gives rise to concerns that the second floor has not been actively marketed for nearly six months, thus reducing its chances of being let.

Policy EMP3 states that the conversion or redevelopment of offices for other uses will be permitted only where there is evidence of long term vacancy despite marketing of the premises. Officers are satisfied that the first floor has been actively marketed; however it appears that this has not been the case for the second floor, which does not show characteristics of long-term vacancy.

Appendix 5 of the 'Focus Report' gives evidence of other vacant office properties in the vicinity and it is duly noted that there appears to be a range of office stock available for let. However, it is in the borough's long-term interests to retain office floorspace given the future projections for office demand and so significant consideration should be given to the long term requirements of the forecasted demand.

If approved, the scheme would result in a total loss of approx 8000 sq ft GIA of office floorspace. Whilst it may be argued that the site is not a key employment site and makes a relatively small contribution to the amount of employment land in the Borough, the inability to demonstrate long-term vacancy in respect of the entire office space, and the recent history of the premises suggests that it has been a useful asset to the area's local economy. Such an argument could in fact be applied to numerous sites within the Borough, and the cumulative effect of such an approach would be detrimental to the area's economy. Furthermore, based upon marketing information attached to the application it appears that there is no other comparable office accommodation to let in the immediate vicinity – around this part of south Orpington/Green Street Green. The supporting Planning Statement provides a critical assessment of this location, although it may be argued that the offices benefit from generous parking provision, good access to the M25 and rail connections (at Orpington and Chelsfield), frequent bus services, and a diverse range of retail establishments providing a range of goods and services. Indeed the Transport Statement concludes that the site is well served by public transport.

It is therefore considered that the proposal conflicts with the Council's aim to safeguard a supply of land in the Borough to provide for the growth and development of business and industry. Of relevance, the findings of a study undertaken on behalf of the London Borough of Bromley by GVA Grimley in 2010 – "Economic Development & Employment Land Study" – and the Mayor of London's projections for job creation in the Borough emphasise the importance of ensuring a supply of business sites to meet future need.

The UK economy has been in recession and is currently characterised by sluggish growth. If residential development of the site is permitted then the business opportunities offered by the site will be lost permanently. It is Council policy to safeguard a supply of business land for the future growth and development of business industry.

### Housing and Amenity Issues

The UDP advises that the Council will seek to ensure the efficient use of the existing stock, including re-use of vacant buildings and conversion of existing buildings. However, this will be subject to achieving a satisfactory a high quality residential environment within the constraints of the existing building, and to generally comply with the other housing policies of the plan. The UDP also recognises that buildings formerly in non-residential uses, including accommodation over shops and vacant offices, can be important potential sources of additional housing. This requires a flexible approach to planning standards, particularly regarding density, car parking, amenity space and overlooking.

With regard to the nature of the proposed housing it is considered that the 8 flats sought will provide an adequate residential environment. The proposed balconies and outdoor amenity space will enhance the living environment, and the overall layouts of the flats may be considered acceptable (subject to Building Regulations approval). Furthermore, the revised landscaping and parking scheme should reduce overlooking in the direction of neighbouring dwelling at No 4 Glentrammon Road which is situated to the east of the site, although it has been calculated that

the distance from the balconies to this property would be approximately 60 metres. The provision of 1.5 spaces per unit (together with 2 visitor spaces) is considered acceptable.

However, the merits of converting existing uses to residential accommodation are qualified elsewhere in the UDP. In particular, policies EMP3, EMP5 and H12 advise that the conversion or redevelopment of offices for other uses will be permitted only where it can be demonstrated that there is no local shortage of office floorspace; there is no likely loss of employment resulting from the proposal; these are genuinely redundant; and full and proper marketing of the site confirms the unsuitability and financial non-viability of the site or premises for those uses.

Although it is accepted that this proposal will contribute toward local housing provision and will not adversely affect neighbouring amenity, it is considered that this does not outweigh the loss of the existing office floorspace particularly in view of the inability to demonstrate long-term vacancy in respect of the entire office floorspace, the reasonable occupancy level of these premises in recent years, and the loss of potential employment opportunities in the local area.

Background papers referred to during production of this report comprise all correspondence on file ref. 12/02499, excluding exempt information.

as amended by documents received on 26.10.2012

### **RECOMMENDATION: PERMISSION BE REFUSED**

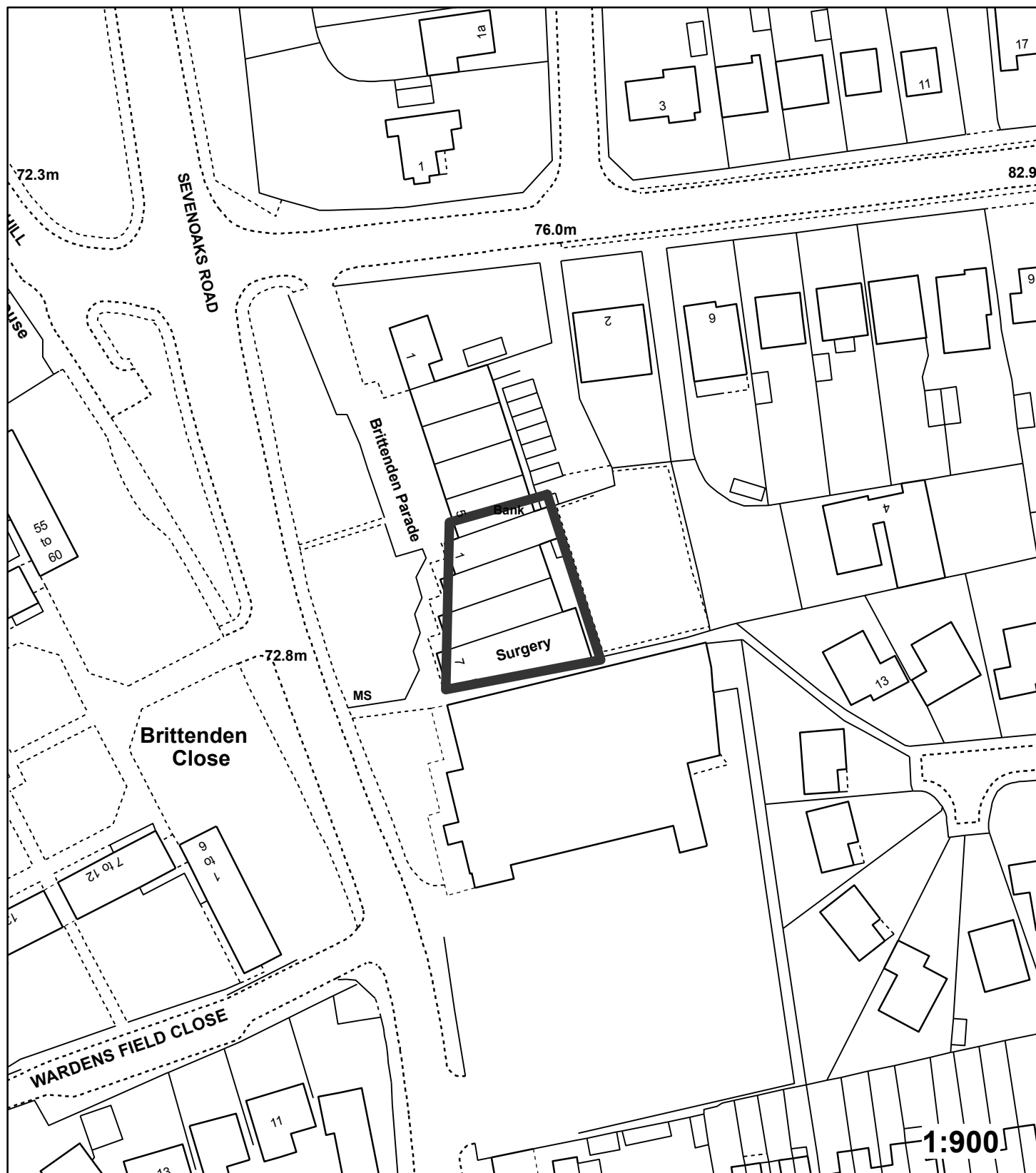
The reasons for refusal are:

- 1 In the absence of being able to demonstrate long-term vacancy, the reasonable occupancy level of these premises in recent years, and the loss of potential employment opportunities in the area, this proposal will lead to a loss of useable office floorspace within the Borough and would be contrary to Policies EMP3, EMP5 and H12 of the Unitary Development Plan which seeks to safeguard sufficient supply of office space in the Borough.

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"This plan is provided to identify the location of the site and should not be used to identify the extent of the application site"

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