DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT incorporating Planning Statement and Heritage Statement

Erection of 24 apartments.

Warminster Police Station
Station Road
Warminster
BA12 9BR

For Gainsborough Group Construction Ltd

1. Introduction

Apex Planning Design Ltd has been instructed to submit a planning application for the erection of 24 apartments in two 4 storey blocks and a separate two storey building at the rear of the former Police Station on Station Road in Warminster.

The Police Station was sold by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Wiltshire in 2022. The site was put up for sale with the benefit of a pre-application response from Wiltshire Council that considered favourably a development of up to 50 flats on the site.

The site currently contains the former Police Station and offices as well as former police dwellings, that have latterly served as offices for DHSS and the Ambulance Service. These buildings form a row of two terraces along Station Road, an important group of properties within the Warminster Conservation Area. The pre-app response supported the demolition of these buildings and replacement with modern flats.

However it is the opinion of the current owner that these buildings form a valuable contribution to the estate in their own right and therefore should be retained and converted to residential use. That process has been ongoing, with 2 applications for conversion to residential on the two separate blocks.The former ambulance office has recently received prior notification approval for conversion to 4 dwellings. The Police Station is awaiting the decision on a similar application.

This application therefore does not concern the existing buildings on the site, other than the former clubhouse, but only the yard to the rear.

Pre-application enquiry response

A pre-application enquiry was undertaken on behalf of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Wiltshire for 50 flats. The response was generally favourable. The scheme included the demolition of the existing Police Station and adjacent buildings to make way for the new build scheme. It should be highlighted that the current proposal seeks to retain those buildings, in line with comments received from conservation at the pre-application stage.

Conservation comments:

Whilst the police houses are unlisted I consider them to be undesignated heritage assets which are an important element of a designated heritage asset (the conservation area). They were built probably in the 1930s (British History online says 1932) and are of an attractive appearance utilising good quality materials (an attractive brick, portland stone detailing, local stone front wall with attractive metal railings, good eaves detailing, quoining, stone porches, articulation of the street facing elevation etc). I consider that they make a strong positive contribution to the character of this part of the conservation area. Indeed, the adopted Warminster Conservation Area appraisal identifies the terrace as of 'local interest':

[Buildings of this character and nature should be retained and 'converted' to residential (they are already set up as residential units so this should involve limited work). Given their embodied energy, and the limited works likely to be required to rehabiliate them for residential, it cannot be sustainable to demolish them and replace them with something new (setting aside the loss of a heritage asset issue).]

We agree with the Conservation Team that these buildings provide a fine introduction to the eastern side of the conservation area. For this reason they are not part of this application for redevelopment. Two separate applications have been submitted to change these offices to residential use. The 4 units to the northeast of the site have been given approval for this conversion and works are underway to make these readily available to local tenants. The application at the Police Station itself is still underway.

Urban Design Officer comments:

Supports the idea of conversion over replacement.

Additionally the UDO asks for consideration of pedestrian connections through the site. As the Station Road buildings will now be retained this severely restricts the opportunities for pedestrian access along this frontage, due to the necessity to retain some occupant privacy. The two blocks are close together. Any public pedestrian access to the south of the row would impact on privacy for the residents at that end of the development.

Additionally the UDO asks that the solid vertical boundary wall along the street be retained. This is the intention as much as possible. Where it cannot be achieved the enclosure created by the wall will be supplanted by the two blocks of flats themselves.

It was suggested that private gardens would be useful. It is intended that private gardens will be provided for the former police station buildings where possible.

Adequately sized cycle and bin stores should be provided on the site. We are currently investigating options for secure cycle parking provision including cycle hangars and dedicated storage areas within the flats for those who consider their cycle too valuable to leave in public parking.

Highways
The original scheme developed by the Police's agent proposed 50 new build flats with 86 bedspaces. 30 parking spaces were proposed and this was accepted by the highway department as adequate in the circumstances:

[The proposal] *would result in a total of 30 car parking spaces being proposed for a 50-unit development, which is far below the normal minimum car parking standard. However, the officer does note that the site is located in area where access to facilities, services and employment opportunities is extensive. Furthermore, the opportunities for the use of public transport are good and whilst he would prefer to see at least 1 car parking space provided for each unit, he would accept a minimum of 30 spaces for these proposals in this instance.*
This equates to 35% of bedspace provision and 60% of provision per unit.

The current scheme proposes 24 flats, and 16 parking spaces. This is a 66% provision of parking spaces per unit, comfortably within the minimum considered appropriate at the pre-app stage.

2. Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF is framed as a positive, responsive and enabling document, seeking to facilitate sustainable development and growth, supporting and securing, rather than impeding, sustainable economic growth and ensuring the planning system operates to this end; indeed, significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system. Applications for sustainable development should be approved wherever possible, consistent with an overarching approach that demands 'a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It advocates a proactive, creative and solution-seeking approach to planning.

This proposal optimises the development potential of the site, whilst taking into account the density of the site surrounds and will provide a well-designed scheme that sits comfortably within the plot and will be in keeping with the appearance and massing of surrounding buildings and as such, is considered to be consistent with National Planning Policy.

Warminster Neighbourhood Plan

Section 7.0 of the WNP is concerned with the town centre and the fundamental question of what is the future of the large car park open space and adjacent areas. One of the sites mentioned in the Section 7.0 is the old police station and yard, the subject of this planning application.

POLICY TC1 – TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The regeneration of the town centre, including the area of the Central Car Park and the site of the old police houses along with their service yard, will be supported.

Justification:
Wiltshire Council initiative
Revitalisation of town centre
Aids economic regeneration of surrounding area
Makes best use of central site in support of an expanded population.

Policy TC1 is concerned with the regeneration of the town centre, including the old police houses and service yard, which will be supported. Central to the ambitions that the neighbourhood plan has for the area is the revitalisation of the town centre, aiding economic regeneration of the surrounding area and making best use of the central site in support of an expanded population. The town centre should retain its position as the retail hub of the town and be enhanced so as to provide a range of facilities that draw a wide demographic into the town centre.

This proposal should be considered in accordance with the WNP and its ambitions for the town centre of Warminster. The applicant has already taken the step of retaining the existing police houses and police station with the intention of providing quality local housing for local people. This alone will provide more footfall for retail units and facilities in the town centre. The additional flats proposed in this application will further enhance the viability of the local area. The applicant feels this approach provides the town with the best of both worlds by combining the benefit of regeneration of an area of local historic interest with the need to tackle the national housing shortage.

Wiltshire Core Strategy

Of particular relevance to this application are the following local policies;

CP1: Settlement Strategy identifies the settlements where sustainable development will take place. The proposal sits within the centre of Warminster, within the development boundary and on a brownfield site. It is therefore considered to be in accordance with this policy.

CP2: Delivery Strategy outlines how development within the life of the pan will be spread throughout the sustainable settlements. Again, considering the location and nature of the site it is considered that this proposal is policy compliant with regard to CP2.

CP31 Spatial Strategy for the Warminster Community Area requires commitment to developer contributions for local community facilities such as fire and ambulance services, schools and the wider environment.

CP41: Sustainable Construction and Low Carbon Energy. As per latest building regulations requirements the development will be constructed using sustainable techniques and materials, which can be first referenced in the retention of the existing police housing buildings, thus negating the loss of captured energy from their construction.

CP50: Biodiversity and Geodiversity; Due to the brownfield nature of the site there is very little by way of geo- and bio-diversity. However this does not mean that the situation cannot be improved and effort will be made to do so.

CP51: Landscape; Efforts will be made to negate any negative impacts on areas covered by this policy.

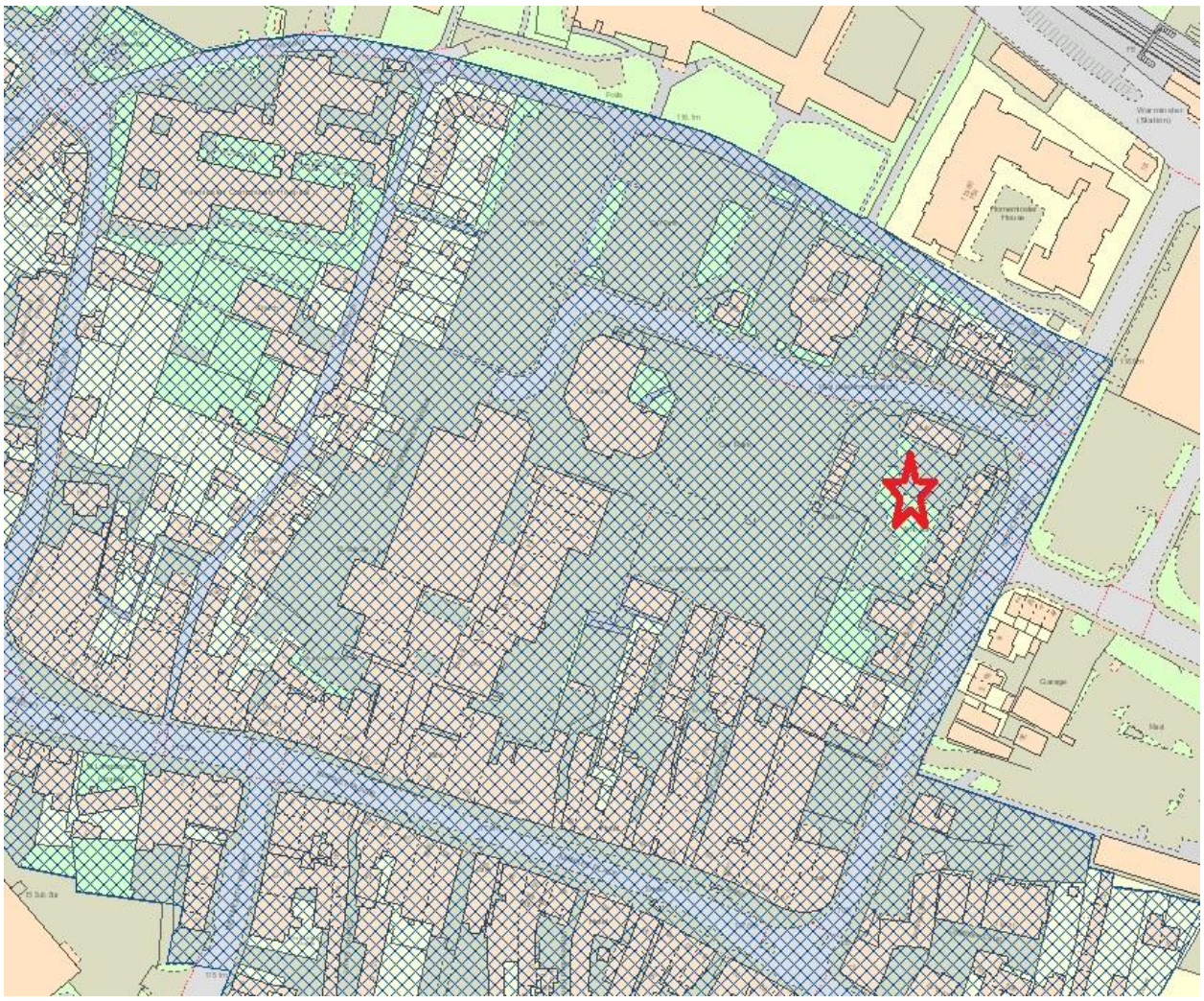
CP57: Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping requires a dialogue with the local context in order to ensure that development will make a positive contribution to the character of Wiltshire. This is covered in more detail in the relevant section further on in this document.

CP58: Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment; '*Distinctive elements of Wiltshire's historic environment, including non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity will be conserved and where possible enhanced*'. Unlike the original pre-app, this proposal seeks to work with the existing police house and station to retain this excellent set of buildings for the future.

CP60: Sustainable Transport. The site is located in close proximity to local facilities and the Warminster railway station, providing public transport opportunities practically from the doorstep. In addition the provision of cycle storage both within and outside the flats will offer a range of options for those who prefer to get about under their own power.

3. Heritage Statement

The former police station yard is situated on the edge of the Warminster Conservation Area.



Summarise the situation in this area

The conservation area covers the historic town core, including the area that was typified by burgage plots, as discussed in the Archaeological Desktop Appraisal that accompanies this application.



Currently the eastern end of the conservation area is characterised to the south by the eastern end of Market Place with its listed buildings with retail units on the ground floor.



The north east area has been taken over by modern residential development in the form of a terrace of five dwellings from the early 90s, 5 townhouses and the doctors surgery, all in local brick.



In between these two areas sits the former police station. The existing station building and police houses form a fine and important element of the conservation area. Applications are progressing for the retention of these buildings in residential use, so conserving the view of the entrance to the conservation area from this direction.



Behind the station yard, which appears to respect the burgage boundaries in this area, one is faced with a large area of open tarmac in the form of the central town car park. Surrounding the car park are various communal facilities such as retail units and the library. These structures are typically hip roofed

brick buildings of a modern utilitarian nature. It is considered that this area provides little of value to the setting of the heritage asset.



From the car park looking east the existing police station buildings provide a definitive bookend to the conservation area and provide a feeling of enclosure for the open space. Views toward this area, whilst being of the less formal and more private rear of the buildings, are perhaps some of the most favourable in this sector of the conservation area.

This view will be largely retained from the southern area of the car park open space. Most of the proposed development will be generated at the northern end of the site and will have less impact on the setting of the conservation area as a result, being further from the historic central core of the town and respecting the last of the existing burgage boundaries found in this area.

The demolition of the poor quality clubhouse for the police station and the garages within the service yard, plus the retention of the existing police houses and station and the erection of new contemporary interpretations of the existing large brick buildings that can be found in this area of the conservation area, to the rear of Market Place, all contributes to an enhancement in the setting of the heritage asset.

A four storey scheme was acceptable at the pre application stage and it is considered that the design that has been brought forward accords with requirements to align with local tradition whilst still providing a high quality modern interpretation of local vernacular.

Retention of the existing station houses and the erection of the proposed flats will screen the interior of the conservation area from the large commercial expanse that sits immediately adjacent to it on the eastern side.

On balance we consider the proposal to enhance the setting of the conservation area.

4. Layout, Scale & Appearance

Two separate blocks of flats will flank the existing entrance to the Old Police Station yard, where a central common area of soft landscaping will be framed by access roads and car parking.

The two blocks are similar in intent, to provide 11 flats over 4 storeys, in a modern contemporary style that reflects the existing built form both within the perimeter of the former Police Station and surrounding traditional and more modern development.

Both blocks will be constructed from traditional brick, reflecting the material's ubiquitous nature within Warminster. The brick will be coupled with metal cladding, to both walls and roof, reminiscent of slate tiles on the latter.

Both blocks provide 3 flats on ground, first and second floors, with 2 flats within the roof style third floor. The blocks differ in layout due to the topography and layout of the site while the style remains uniform.

In addition a smaller building to the southern boundary of the site will provide 2 more 1 bedroom flats in structure that presents as a detached dwelling.

A total of 24 flats will provide a mixture of 1, 2 and 3 bed properties that will provide modest urban homes for individuals and young families alike. The large proportion of bedsits and subdivided properties within easy reach of the town centre highlights the need for modest accommodation in this area and this proposal answers a clear need.

The interiors of the flats have been designed to provide the most efficient use of space with open plan living/dining/kitchens, large bedrooms, en-suites where possible and family bathrooms. Also there are a number of flats with study facilities that are a core requirement in the modern age of working from home. These rooms can also provide storage facilities for cycles for those who do not wish to rely on the shared facilities outside.

Lifts are provided to make all flats easily accessible for all mobility levels

5. Access

Highway access to the site is proposed to continue from the existing access. This will be designed as a pedestrian crossover rather than a bellmouth as per the comments provided by highways on the pre-app for 50 apartments.

Due to the reduction in housing numbers from that proposed in the original pre-app enquiry for the site it is considered that the existing access will be appropriate for the level of traffic that will be created by this development.

Visibility can be achieved to the right whilst exiting at the required level of 43m for a 30mph zone. To the left visibility can be achieved to the exit road from the car park and other units at the same level. It should be noted that the car park operates a one way system, so that there should be no traffic exiting the car park from the immediate left of the existing access, negating a need for visibility to cover this area to the normal required 43m.

Parking is provided for 16 vehicles. This provides a 66% of parking space per apartment and surpasses the accepted minimum standard from the advice given at the original pre-app enquiry of 60% provision. All spaces are the standard size of 2.4m x 4.8m and turning can be achieved from all spaces to allow vehicles to access and exit the site and the immediate proximity of the space in forward gear.

Swept path analysis for refuse vehicles shows that the layout is acceptable.

Cycle parking at a rate of 1 per bed space has been provided within the site. Considering that 20% of spend on cycles is for e-bikes, which retail for in excess of £3000 it is considered that in-home storage options will prove popular and will dovetail with ground floor secure parking proposals to cover more of the cycling demographic.

6. Landscaping

The current site is made over to hardstanding and a small area of grass. It is proposed to enhance the biodiversity of the area surrounding the hard landscaping and the proposed as best we can.

Space is limited due to parking and turning requirements, however these have been kept to a minimum and should allow for more soft landscaping to be provided on site.

7. Conclusion

It is considered that this proposal provides an excellent opportunity to provide a number of modest homes on a brownfield site at the centre of the town within easy walking distance to local facilities and public transport in a sustainable location to the enhancement of the local conservation area and retention of historic buildings, namely the police houses.

Affordable housing provision will be made in accordance with local policy to be discussed with the LPA.

This scheme will provide a quality modern housing development that will fit well within the existing context and provide a timely adjunct to local housing provision and the town centre built environment as the dialogue over the future of this area of Warminster enters a new phase.