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Application to seek a change of use of part of the ground floor area from commercial, (financial services) to a self-contained apartment.



View from the Market Place of the south elevation of the application building, showing the current vacant commercial entrance.

Introduction:

We are instructed by the applicant, (Strong Family Holdings Limited) to seek full planning consent for a change of use of part of the ground floor area of the application building from commercial space to a self-contained domestic dwelling in the form of a one-bedroom apartment.

This application is a new submission following the refusal of application ref: PL/2025/05719 in October 2025.

The application proposal:

- 1) Retention of the front part of the ground floor area for use as commercial premises.
- 2) Change of use of the rear part of the ground floor to become a self-contained domestic apartment.

The proposed apartment would have a gross-internal floor area of 75m², leaving 73m² for commercial use utilising the existing, Market Place entrance. The resulting commercial floorspace is guided by the accompanying professional opinion in the form of a letter prepared by Huw Thomas of Loveday, (Chartered Surveyors and Property Consultants).

It is a material consideration for this application that the upper two floors of this building have been granted prior approval consent for change of use to 2no. self-contained domestic apartments.

Background to the application:

As outlined earlier This application is a new submission following the refusal of application ref: PL/2025/05719 in October 2025.

The two reasons for refusal were stated on the decision notice as follows:

- 1. The proposed part conversion of the ground floor commercial unit to residential use would significantly reduce the available commercial floorspace of the unit, located within the Primary Frontage Area of Chippenham Town Centre. This reduction raises significant concerns about the long-term viability of the unit and potential for vacancy, which could undermine the vitality and viability of the town centre. In the absence of*

evidence demonstrating otherwise, the proposal is contrary to saved Policy R1 of the North Wiltshire Local Plan (June 2006) and is unacceptable in principle.

2. *Insufficient information has been provided regarding the arrangements for waste storage and collection for the retained commercial unit. In the absence of a clear strategy, the proposal risks causing obstruction, visual harm and operational issues, contrary to policies CP57, CP58 and CP61 of the WCS (Jan 2015) and Policy TC4 of the CNP (May 2024).*

This resubmission is made on the basis that the two previous reasons for refusal have been addressed through, (in the case of refusal reason '1') obtaining additional professional information from a reputable local specialist in commercial property; and also, (in the case of refusal reason '2') through the further consideration of the practical arrangements for the collection of refuse.

This further information will be set out later in this statement, and it is also important to explain that, since the determination of the previous application, the applicant, (Strong Family Holdings Ltd) have demonstrated their commitment to the commercial viability of the application property by submitting a separate planning application, (ref: PL/2026/01822) which has now been approved and which proposes the installation of a new, higher quality shopfront in a traditional style appropriate to the setting of the Market Place, to replace the rather bland and 'tired' existing modern metal-framed recessed shopfront.

This has been welcomed by officers and should help to reassure the council that a significant investment is being made by the applicant in order to help maintain a commercial presence within the front part of the ground floor.

Commercial viability:

The amount of retained commercial floorspace is guided by the submitted professional opinion in the form of a letter dated 10th April 2026, prepared by Huw Thomas of Loveday, (Chartered Surveyors and Property Consultants).

The letter confirms that demand exists in that part of Chippenham for only smaller self-contained retail units. The letter states:

“ The recent take up of stand-alone (not in a shopping centre) units in Chippenham town centre has been good. Smaller size, self-contained shops have been taken recently by

Lux Nails at 58 Market Place; TMM Games at 5b New Road and Fabric Forest at 3 -4 New Road.

All these types of occupiers do not require a large floorplate store and require minimal storage space. They usually seek no more than a maximum of 750 - 800 sq.ft in total, comprising mainly display and sales space with a small ancillary area for staff welfare facilities to include a single toilet.

Key considerations for any retailer are the overhead costs of rent, service charge and business rates. There is a preference from most independent retailers for units not located in a shopping centre as the service charge overhead in them can be quite high. They wish to limit their rental outlay to space that they can fully utilize, so they do not want any surplus space that they have to pay both rent and business rates for. “

Taking this professional opinion fully into account, this has guided our proposal to retain 785 sqft of commercial space as advised by Lovedays.

In addition to the above, it is important to consider the configuration of the existing unit. Whilst the premises benefit from a prominent Market Place frontage, the depth of the unit results in a significant proportion of floorspace being located to the rear, beyond the primary retail area. This rear accommodation has limited visibility and reduced footfall, and is therefore less attractive to modern retail and service occupiers who typically prioritise compact, efficient and well-configured units with a strong and active frontage.

The retention of the full existing floorspace would result in an oversized unit with a substantial element of secondary accommodation which does not contribute effectively to trading use, but which nevertheless attracts rent, business rates and other occupational costs. This can act as a disincentive to potential occupiers and increases the risk of prolonged vacancy.

By contrast, the proposed retention of approximately 785 sqft of commercial floorspace aligns with the market evidence provided by Lovedays and reflects the scale of units currently being taken up within the town centre. The proposal therefore represents a rationalisation of the commercial accommodation to a size and configuration which is more likely to be actively occupied.

The proposal has also been developed in conjunction with a separate application, (now approved) for an upgraded shopfront (ref: PL/2026/01822), which will enhance the quality and attractiveness of the commercial frontage. This further supports the continued commercial use of the retained unit and demonstrates the applicant's commitment to maintaining an active presence within the Primary Frontage Area.

Accordingly, the proposal does not represent a loss of effective commercial use, but rather an optimisation of the existing unit to reflect current market conditions, thereby supporting its long-term occupation and contributing positively to the vitality and viability of Chippenham town centre.

Impact on primary frontage:

The proposal has been carefully designed to ensure that the primary frontage to Market Place remains in active commercial use. The retained unit will continue to operate from the existing frontage, maintaining visual continuity, pedestrian engagement and the overall character of the Primary Frontage Area.

Importantly, the proposal is supported by a separate application, (now approved) for the installation of a high-quality replacement shopfront (ref: PL/2026/01822), which will enhance the appearance of the building and reinforce its commercial presence within the streetscape. As such, the proposal does not result in a loss of active frontage but instead represents a reconfiguration of internal floorspace to better reflect modern commercial requirements, whilst preserving and enhancing the town centre environment.

Access:

Access into the proposed apartment would be via the existing private doorway in the Market Place elevation and the existing protected passage through to the rear half of the ground floor.

Sound insulation:

The existing wall and floor construction shall be assessed and upgraded to comply with Building Regulations, Approved Document 'E': *Resistance to the Passage of Sound*.

For the existing separating floors, the use of double-layers of plasterboard is the assumed solution in order to achieve a fabric mass of at least 20kg/m².

Separating walls shall be upgraded to resist airborne, impact and flanking sound transmission between the apartments and the commercial space. The guidance contained within part 'E' is to be followed in this regard.

Secondary glazing or double-glazing is to be installed for all existing windows.

Parking:

The location of the proposed apartment within the main part of Chippenham town centre ensures that the occupant would have good access to public transport and local facilities. This sustainable location means that the occupant and their visitors would not be reliant on the use of the private car and would not require an allocated parking space. This is consistent with the council's guidance on the provision of car parking in the main service centres.

Amenity space:

The proposed ground floor apartment would have direct and level access to a private garden area of approximately 52m².

Refuse & Recycling:

In the previous application submission it was explained that refuse and recycling from the proposed rear apartment could be stored within the private amenity space and then put out for collection at the front of the property using the council's established refuse collection measures for town centre premises. However, this has been reconsidered and it is now proposed that the right of access at the rear of the property can be utilised such that refuse and recycling would be taken out for conventional collection alongside the other properties in Chapel Mews.

The second reason for the previous planning refusal stated that:

"Insufficient information has been provided regarding the arrangements for waste storage and collection for the retained commercial unit....."

We have therefore given this matter further consideration and the submitted floor plans now show a provision in the form of a dedicated cupboard for the storage of waste and recycling relating to the commercial unit. This provides an appropriate and practical internal storage solution, ensuring that waste is contained within the unit and does not give rise to visual or operational issues.

Waste from the retained commercial unit will be stored within this dedicated area and presented for collection at the front of the property on designated collection days, consistent with established town centre practice. Residential refuse and recycling will be managed separately and will be taken via the rear access to Chapel Mews, where it can be presented for collection alongside neighbouring properties in accordance with existing arrangements.

This approach ensures that commercial and residential waste streams are appropriately segregated and that waste storage and collection can be undertaken in a clear, practical and sustainable manner without obstruction to the public realm.

Summary:

This proposal represents a well-considered opportunity to utilise underutilised secondary commercial floorspace within the rear of the ground floor, whilst retaining an active and appropriately scaled commercial unit at the primary Market Place frontage.

By aligning the retained commercial accommodation with current occupier demand and improving the quality of the frontage through the proposed shopfront upgrade, the development supports the continued occupation of the unit and reduces the risk of long-term vacancy.

The introduction of a high-quality self-contained apartment at the rear makes efficient use of the building, exceeds the National Space Standards and contributes to the delivery of much-needed housing within a sustainable town centre location.

Overall, the proposal preserves and enhances the vitality and viability of Chippenham town centre and represents a balanced and policy-compliant form of development.

Howard Waters *RIBA*

BA; B.Arch; MSc. (Conservation of Historic Buildings)

6th May 2026