

Brierley Hill Area Committee – 28th June 2012

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Sandringham Place, Wordsley

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise the Committee on issues associated with vacant retail units at Sandringham Place, Wordsley

Background

2. At the 8 March 2012 meeting of the Committee, a Member requested that a report be presented on the powers available to the Council to address the adverse impact on the local environment of vacant shops in Sandringham Place, and on the opportunities for the Council to promote appropriate redevelopment. The request follows a number of representations made by local residents on the condition of the vacant units
3. The property is not in the ownership of the Council and currently comprises six shops of which four are void. The two occupied premises are a convenience store and a food and wine outlet.
4. Following representations from Ward Members, Officers from the Council's planning enforcement team have visited the site on a number of occasions to establish whether any action may be taken under environmental legislation to force the property's owners or occupiers to bring about improvements. In each instance, as the vacant retail units have been in a secure condition and have not presented a significant hazard to health and safety or the environment, no actions were taken. Subsequently, upon receipt of a complaint from a member of the public in April 2012 about the condition of one of the shop front windows the Council's engineers arranged for the boarding of one of the shop windows in order to make it safe. Whilst the retail units remain vacant, Officers will continue to monitor their condition in case their condition worsens to the point that enforcement action becomes a viable option.

5. Any proposals for redevelopment of this site would be required to meet the policy requirements of the Black Country Joint Core Strategy. The site is an individual parade of shops falling outside a local centre boundary designated in the Black Country Core Strategy and as such does not fall within any of the Priority Local Centres approved by Cabinet on 9th September 2009
6. It is understood that the site is in single ownership and that unfortunately the owner has recently passed away. The Council is currently in contact with the owner's Executors. Given the ownership status of the land, any proposals for redevelopment would need to come from its current or a prospective owner. The Council would welcome proposals for redevelopment, which could include residential and retail use, and would be willing to work with an owner given that single ownership of the site would potentially make a redevelopment easier to carry out than if it were in multiple ownership.
7. Given that this site is in single ownership and would not require any further assembly to facilitate its redevelopment, the use of Compulsory Purchase powers would not be necessary. However, the Council has a good track record in use of CPO powers to assist development where appropriate. In practice, use of these powers could only be considered where all reasonable efforts to acquire land by negotiation have failed and a development partner exists who is prepared to indemnify the Council through the CPO process.
8. The presence of occupied retail and residential units at the site presents a further complication to a comprehensive package of development, and a more acceptable and immediate option could be to seek improvements to the retail units that make them more attractive to potential occupants, whilst minimising disturbance to existing occupants.
9. A residential based redevelopment of in this area would be generally welcomed subject to the usual detailed consideration in terms of scale, design and appropriate context. Any retail development over and above the existing units would need to meet local needs and not be of a scale which would potentially harm any local district or town centre. Any loss of retail units which would result in the loss of convenience retail would also need to be addressed through the planning process in the consideration of any proposals.

Finance

10. There are no financial implications to the Council as a result of this report.

Law

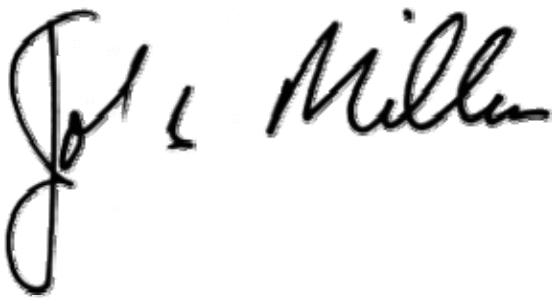
11. Pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 the Authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do.

Equality Impact

12. The contents of this report comply with the Council's equal opportunities policy.

Recommendation

13. That the Committee notes the content of this report

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John B Millar'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

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John B Millar
Director of the Urban Environment

Contact Officer:

Rupert Dugdale
01384 815538
Rupert.dugdale@dudley.gov.uk