

**Justification report into loss of Class A use  
within Swaythling Local Centre**

**10/00181/OUT**

Following several months of pre-application discussions and site visits, a planning application for the demolition of the existing restaurant and flat above and replace with residential accommodation was submitted on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010.

Officer's comments were taken on board and implemented at design stage. However, several issues were flagged during the consultation period that were not advised during pre-application stage.

It has been advised that in order to address the Policy Team comment, a report must be submitted to demonstrate;

- **The justification of a loss of Class A unit**
- **The justification of loss of an active frontage within the centre**

**Introduction**

The number of empty shops across England and Wales has risen from 4.5 percent to 12 percent a year ago according to a comprehensive researched report by the Local Data Company that covers every area of the country.

Southampton as an area has a vacancy rate of 14 percent; above the national average. The economic climate and recession has a large impact on city areas.

Swaythling has not been immune to this downturn and in recent years, the application site has seen the previous tenants fold. The current tenants have served a break clause to leave the unit by August 2010.

The economic climate cannot be blamed in its entirety for the areas' lack of popularity in recent years;

- The area has excellent transport links into the City Centre
- Out-of-town supermarket developments at Hedge End and Chandlers Ford
- The area has a high population of students

## High Road

High Road has an eclectic mix of commercial units and residential accommodation. There are several commercial units vacant and boarded up.

- Loss of Class A unit

Our drawings C10/37.18 and C10/37.19 illustrate the current uses and vacant units on High Road. [see below for thumbnail and attached]



Figures 1 and 2. Plan showing use / vacancy at High Road

Empty units attract crime and degeneration of the area.

The proposal (10/00181/OUT) seeks to eliminate the inevitable vacancy at 51 High Road, by creating residential accommodation in an area that has high demand for this.

It is clear from our attached plan that other units of same size and use are vacant; 88 High Road is currently advertised to let as vacant and shows no sign of tenancy (see below)



Figures 3 / 4. 88 High Road / 100-102 High Road

100-102 High Road also remains vacant, also in a key location; these sites are a reflection of both the economic climate and fast turn around of the area.

The proposed scheme eliminates the possibility of another site within the immediate area becoming vacant and boarded up.

To refuse a proposal for the sites viability would lead to its vacancy and further detriment to the local centre.

- **Loss of an active frontage**

Policy comments on the potential loss of an active frontage if the scheme is approved.

The current unit gives the appearance of a boarded up unit with its lack of windows. The adjacent units rollers remain closed and this contributes further to a definite inactive frontage.

The proposal seeks to address this by offering a planted frontage, gated access typical to this in the area and a formal residential façade of windows and door.



Figures 5 and 6. Application site frontage

Our street elevations (figures 7 and 8) clearly demonstrate there is no loss of active frontage.

The frontage proposed links to the neighbouring dwelling at 49 High Road. The stone bulk that exists overbears on the pavement and its proximity to the main road does not lend itself to 'street eating'



Figures 7 and 8. Existing and proposed street elevation

## Conclusion

The current owner has advised that the tenant have issued a break clause to leave the unit in September. This would certainly lead to its vacancy.

Our submission in February 2010, given an estimated 3 month timescale for determination and further 3 month period for discharge of conditions and building regulation approval guides August as target date for the owner to start works if the proposal is permitted in the first instance.

Should the application be refused, we would seek to go to appeal on the original application rather than re-submit addressing further Policy comments on refusal.

Appeals are a lengthy and costly process and this would lead to the site being vacant whilst any appeal is running.

This proposal enables the site to be generative rather than degenerative for the Local Centre and we would look for this to be recommended for approval.