

*Braintree District Council*  
***Supplementary***  
***Planning Guidance***



***Development Brief***  
Conversion of Single Dwellings  
into Flats



**BRAINTREE**

**DISTRICT  
COUNCIL**

*Braintree District Council*

*Supplementary  
Planning Guidance*

Conversion of Single  
Dwellings into Flats  
1989

PLANNING COMMITTEE

27<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1989

Ref:

Conversion of Single Family Dwellings to Self Contained Flats

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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to look at the problems arising from the increasing number of applications for the conversion of single dwellings to flats (units of self contained accommodation within a sub-divided building each with their own entrance door) and to recommend policies for the control of such development and guidelines for applicants.

The question of houses in multiple occupation (accommodation where separate households share some or all of the facilities in the dwelling), is not considered in this report. Whilst some of the issues involved with them are similar, multiple occupation is a different type of accommodation requiring a different approach to its control.

Members' attention is drawn to two previous reports to the Committee; Houses in Multiple Occupation Standards 1987 (28 May 1987) and Sound Insulation to Dwellings (4 August 1988).

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Applications for planning permission to convert single dwellings to 2 or more self contained flats were, until 2 or 3 years ago, confined to areas on the edge of town centres and usually concerned larger late Victorian or Edwardian houses. However, an increasing number of applications have been admitted recently for the conversion of dwellings on inter and post-war estates, fronting through roads in the towns and in some villages such as Sible Hedingham and Cressing.
- 1.2 In considering the applications, officers and members have only limited policy guidance to judge proposals against and on occasions, this has led to inconsistent decisions being made. Similarly, without

such information, owners and developers have not been able to obtain proper guidance on their proposals.

- 1.3 The conversion of existing houses to 2 or more flats is an increasing source of new dwellings. The advantage of house conversions are that they often enable an old house to be physically improved and modernised, giving it a longer useful life. They also at a time of very high house prices offer a source of lower cost housing for the growing number of small households. The disadvantages are that without careful control, conversions can have an effect on residential amenity of an area; whilst one or two converted houses may not be noticeable in an area, there is a danger that a precedent will be set which would have a cumulative effect on the amenities of the area.
- 1.4 The amenity problems affecting the area are likely to arise from a number of factors, including;
- (1) Where houses in an area of similar age, type and design and have a cohesive character as a result, alterations and extensions to the building to enable the conversion could result in a hotchpotch appearance with each building being altered in a different way by different developers.
  - (2) The erection of normal telephone and radio aerials on a single house is not subject to planning control and not usually a matter of concern. The erection of aerials, possibly satellite dishes, to serve 2 or more flats would cause a profusion of aerials detracting from the appearance of the building and its setting in an area.
  - (3) The need to accommodate additional car parking could lead to the whole of the front garden to a house being paved and/or increased parking on the highway. The amenities of occupiers of neighbouring houses could be affected by the noise resulting from the additional parking activity, particularly if it extends into the rear garden area.
  - (4) Many of the proposed conversions involve houses on estates. Whilst the road may be adequate for the present level of use, the additional traffic and on street parking generated by the conversions could result in dangers to road users and possibly

obstruction of emergency services. Where the house fronts a classified or other through road, additional traffic entering or leaving the premises or stopping on the highway is likely to disrupt the flow of traffic and cause a hazard.

1.5 In looking at the effect of the proposals for conversion on the individual house, further problems must be considered.

- (1) Is the building of adequate size for conversion and will the resulting rooms be of adequate size for comfortable living conditions? Normally a double bedroom in an house will be of adequate size for use as a living room in a first floor flat but small bedrooms, kitchens, bathrooms and entrance areas can result from the conversion of the remainder of the floor.
- (2) Can adequate amenity area be provided where occupiers are able to hang washing or sit out and is it accessible from the entrance to the flats?
- (3) Will the proposed conversion cause noise problems to the occupiers of the flats and immediate neighbours? Where a semi-detached or terraced house is to be converted, the presence of a new living room on the first floor where conversation, televisions and radios etc. can disturb occupants of a bedroom in the next door house. The vibrations caused by occupants of a first floor flat walking around can be transmitted to the ground floor flat and cause disturbance.
- (4) Can the habitable rooms of the proposed flats be properly ventilated and have adequate daylighting?
- (5) Do roof spaces and cellars have adequate floor to ceiling heights and proper means of escape in the case of fire?

## 2. CONCLUSION

2.1 The conversion of single houses to flats provides small units of accommodation suitable for the growing numbers of single people, couples and retired people seeking an affordable home. However, not all dwellings are suitable for conversion. In cases where conversion may be possible, such conversions either by themselves or

cumulatively might affect the amenities of an area to an unacceptable degree.

2.2 To ensure that the conversion of houses to flats does not result in the problems referred to above, it is suggested that;

- (1) The conversion of houses having a floor area of less than 100sqm as originally constructed should not normally be permitted to ensure that the stock of small, single family houses is not depleted.
- (2) Normally, the conversion of a terraced or semi-detached house should be for no more than 2 flats.
- (3) The design of the building should not be changed in carrying out the conversion, save for the insertion of an additional entrance door on the front or side elevation where this does not significantly affect the external appearance of the building or the amenities of the occupants.
- (4) Permission should not be granted where it would be necessary to extend the building to facilitate the conversion, except where such extensions do not exceed those which would be permitted if the building were to remain as a single dwelling.
- (5) Kitchens and bathrooms should be of adequate size appropriate to the flat and to enable all fittings to be used without restriction. There should be no direct access from the kitchen to the bathroom. All habitable rooms, kitchen and bathroom, should have natural lighting and ventilation.
- (6) Sound proofing between flats should be provided and where the house is semi-detached or terraced, sound proofing should be provided to the party walls of the flats. A standard equivalent to or better than that imposed on new buildings by Building Regulations Approved Document E will normally be required. A report on soundproofing to dwellings was made to the Development and Planning Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1988 and guidance notes based on that report should be made available to applicants on request.

A scheme of soundproofing should normally be submitted with an application for planning permission for conversion.

- (7) Rooms having the same use should normally be above one another, that is the bedroom of a first floor flat should not be over the living room of a ground floor flat.
- (8) The front garden area should be retained and an area of rear garden not less than 50sqm per flat in area, provided either communally or individually.
- (9) A suitably screened area to contain dustbins should be provided, convenient to the road but not in front of the building.
- (10) Communal television (including satellite dish receivers) and radio aerials should be provided wherever possible.
- (11) Flat conversion proposals shall ensure that associated off-street parking and vehicular access arrangements are to the satisfaction of the local planning authority. The following matters will be particularly considered in relation to parking and access:
  - a) The local planning authority's parking standards for flats, that is, normally 150%.
  - b) The likely impact of parking on the street scene, private amenity space of the property, and residential amenities.
  - c) The prevailing local parking situation including the extent of on-street overnight parking, parking restrictions and other garaging provision in the area.
  - d) Highway safety including such matters as the status of the highway, visibility and highway width.
  - e) Whether parking spaces can be provided without having to locate spaces one behind another.
- (12) Permission should not normally be granted where:-
  - (a) Off street parking in accordance with adopted standards cannot be provided within the curtilage of the site.
  - (b) Parking within the curtilage will require the paving of a larger area of the front garden than is paved at present.

(c) Parking is provided within the rear garden of the building unless it is on a corner and access to parking can be provided from the side road. In such cases, the amenity area should not be reduced to an unacceptable area.

(d) A hazard to traffic would be created by a new access.

(13) Where in the opinion of the local planning authority, the character of an area would be adversely affected by either:-

(a) The individual proposal or;

(b) by reason of precedent for the conversion of similar property near by or by cumulative impact,

permission should not normally be granted.

(14) In some locations flat conversion proposals may also need to be considered in relation to other planning policies, such as within conservation areas. Outside defined settlements there will continue to be a general presumption against the provision of additional units of residential accommodation in the countryside unrelated to the needs of agriculture. This includes the conversion of residential properties into smaller, independent dwelling units.

(15) Where a building is listed as being of architectural or historic interest, special care will need to be exercised to ensure that the character and integrity is not eroded by the proposed conversion. The requirements of other legislation or statutory authorities (eg. Building Regulations, Fire Officer) should be carefully assessed and where such requirements will adversely affect the character or integrity of the listed building, planning permission and Listed Building Consent should be refused.

### RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the following policy is adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

Policy 1 The Local Planning Authority recognises the need for small units of accommodation and considers that these can be

satisfactorily provided in the form of self contained flats. Proposals for the sub-division of premises into flats within the defined development limits of settlements will be considered on their merits having particular regard to the following general matters:-

- (I) Size of property;
- (II) Character of Area;
- (III) Likely effect on the external appearance of the property and its maintenance;
- (IV) Car parking and access arrangements;
- (V) Private amenity space and its availability to the proposed flats;
- (VI) Noise transmission between flats and to adjoining dwellings;
- (VII) In the case of semi-detached and terraced houses, the local planning authority will not normally grant planning permission where it is proposed to convert the house to more than 2 flats.

In addition, guidelines based on the conclusions to this report should be published for the benefit of owners and developers.

R L Barrett  
Chief Development & Planning Officer

#### Background Papers

Approved Structure Plan for Essex  
Adopted and Interim Local Plans  
Reports to Braintree District Council Development and Planning  
Committee:  
Houses in Multiple Occupation Standards 1987 (28 May 1987)  
Sound Insulation to Dwellings (4 August 1988).

## EXTRACT FROM PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES 27.4.89

### Conversion of Single Dwellings to Flats

The Committee considered a report detailing proposals for the introduction of a policy for the control of planning applications in respect of the conversion of single dwellings to flats. Members recognised that a flexible approach to applications was appropriate.

#### Resolved:

- (1) That the proposed policy for the control of planning applications in respect of the conversion of single dwellings to flats, as detailed in the report of the Chief Development and Planning Officer, be adopted as supplementary planning guidance.
- (2) That the guidelines based on the conclusions of the Chief Development and Planning Officer's report be published for the benefit of owners and developers.