

From: Clerk Knebworth Parish Council <clerk@knebworthparishcouncil.gov.uk>
Sent: 13 March 2025 14:49:46 UTC+00:00
To: "Planning Control" <Planning.Control@north-herts.gov.uk>; "Tom Rea" <Tom.Rea@north-herts.gov.uk>
Subject: 25/00255/FP - 150-152 London Road, Knebworth, Hertfordshire, SG3 6EY

Dear Planning

With regards to: **25/00255/FP - 150-152 London Road, Knebworth, Hertfordshire, SG3 6EY -**
Change of use first floor office space to create two flats and conversion of second floor to create one flat including roof extension and alterations to fenestration.

The Parish Council met to discuss this application on Wednesday 12th March.

The Parish Council objected to this application on the grounds of the below found within the Knebworth Neighbourhood Plan :

The Neighbourhood Plan supports the viability of local businesses and their expansion, and the establishment of new businesses where this is proportionate and appropriate in the individual circumstances. The intention is to avoid Knebworth becoming even more of a “dormitory” settlement which is over dependent on outward commuting. This issue was highlighted in the AECOM Report (AECOM, Feb 2019, p. 13) which states that ‘Facilities and offices to stimulate local businesses should be developed around the high street’. This is consistent with emerging NHDCLP Policy SP4 21Town and Local Centres2

1. Loss of Retail and Service Provision

- Policy KBLE3 Retail Area and Existing Businesses explicitly states that development requiring planning permission should retain retail or service uses.
- The policy further specifies that existing premises with ground-floor access should retain an active retail frontage, and new buildings should create new active retail frontages [OBJ].
- The KNP highlights that the village aims to avoid a decline in retail businesses, which would impact the local economy and accessibility of services for residents.

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2. Economic Impact on Local Businesses

- The KNP Consultation Statement (2019) found that the local community strongly supports maintaining a diverse mix of businesses to ensure that the retail area remains viable [OBJ].
- Converting commercial properties to residential reduces foot traffic, leading to lower sales for existing businesses and discouraging new businesses from opening.
- The AECOM report (2019) notes that businesses in Knebworth are already restricted by limited parking provision for staff and customers. A shift to more residential use without additional infrastructure could further strain parking availability and impact business viability [OBJ].

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3. Decreased Employment Opportunities

- Policy KBLE1 New Businesses aims to reverse the loss of businesses from Knebworth, especially around the village centre and railway station [OBJ].
 - The plan notes that several businesses have already vacated commercial spaces, leading to a reduction in local employment opportunities.
 - The shift toward residential use makes Knebworth more of a commuter town, increasing reliance on travel to nearby cities for employment, which contradicts sustainability goals.
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4. Impact on Village Identity and Community Cohesion

- The Neighbourhood Plan prioritises maintaining Knebworth's distinct identity as a vibrant village rather than a purely residential commuter area [OBJ].
 - A loss of commercial spaces to residential use could lead to a bland, dormitory-style village, where local amenities no longer serve community needs.
 - The importance of retaining community-focused spaces such as pubs, shops, and services is a key policy objective of the plan [OBJ].
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5. Increased Strain on Infrastructure

- The plan recognises that Knebworth has already seen significant growth in housing, but without equivalent improvements in facilities, amenities, or infrastructure [OBJ].
 - The conversion of commercial properties to residential increases demand for schools, healthcare, and transport services while removing spaces that could support local employment or businesses.
 - The plan encourages multi-use developments where new housing includes space for small businesses, rather than replacing commercial properties entirely [OBJ].
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6. Alternative Solutions Encouraged by the Plan

- Instead of full conversion to residential, the plan supports mixed-use developments that include:
 - Flexible business spaces for local entrepreneurs.
 - Shared workspaces to encourage home-based businesses [OBJ].
 - Small commercial units integrated into new housing developments [OBJ].
 - The plan also discourages the closure of community assets unless proven unviable after at least 12 months of active marketing [OBJ].
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Conclusion

The proposed change of use from commercial to residential contradicts key policies in the Knebworth Neighbourhood Plan and threatens:

1. The viability of the village centre as a retail and service hub.
2. Local employment opportunities and the ability to support new businesses.
3. The identity of Knebworth as a community rather than a commuter town.
4. Existing infrastructure, which is already under strain.

Recommendation: Any development should prioritise mixed-use spaces rather than full commercial-to-residential conversion, ensuring long-term economic sustainability while meeting housing needs.

The Council also wished it noted that this property should have been openly marketed for commercial purposes but remain unconvinced that this has been the case.

Regards

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