



## Objecting to Flats and Apartments in your Area

This is an introduction to objecting to proposals for flats or apartments in your area. For more detailed information and advice please contact us (see our contact details on page 4).

New planning applications for flats and apartments in your area are likely to fall into two categories:

- Conversion of existing houses to flats/apartments;
- New build flats/apartments (this may involve demolition of an existing property).

Objection letters may differ depending on which type of development you are objecting to.

### I. Policies that Apply to Both Flat Conversions and New Build Apartments

#### Design Issues

Planning policies that relate to good design will apply to both flat conversions and new build apartments.

Questions that you could raise about the quality of the design of flats in your area include:

- Does this design provide adequate amenity space?
- Does it provide adequate parking?
- Will it cause any loss of amenity to neighbouring properties – loss of light, overshadowing, overlooking or over dominance?
- Is the development in keeping with the surrounding area?

#### Character of your Area

Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7) is useful to refer to in backing up your objections. Policy QD 1 of PPS 7 states:

“in established residential areas proposals for housing development will not be permitted where they would cause unacceptable damage to the local character and environmental quality or residential amenity of these areas”.

The policy also lists a number of key criteria against which all proposals for residential development will be determined:

- (a) development should respect the surrounding character of the area;
- (b) protection for important natural or built heritage features;
- (c) provision of adequate private and public open space;
- (d) provision of neighbourhood facilities where appropriate;

- (e) adequate car parking;
- (f) design based on local traditions;
- (g) protection of residential amenity;
- (h) development designed to deter crime.

### **What is the established character of the area?**

Look at:

- is it residential?
- number of storeys;
- detached/semi detached/terraced;
- plot size;
- front and rear gardens?
- building line.

### **Is the new proposal in keeping with the area's character?**

Look at:

- height;
- scale;
- materials;
- windows/doors/other details;
- landscaping;
- amenity space available - has it decreased?
- views of the proposal.

### **Overdevelopment**

- Is the proposal overdevelopment of the site?
- Will the intensification of use of the site detract from the character of the immediate area and the wider area?

### **Loss of Amenity**

Will the development cause any loss of amenity to neighbouring properties?

- overlooking;
- overshadowing;
- loss of light.

***Recent planning appeal decisions have refused proposals for apartments based on overdevelopment of the site and design that is not in keeping with the character of the area.***

## 2. Flat Conversion Areas

Flat conversion areas form part of planning policy guidance (Development Guidance Note 4) that was introduced in 1992. This guidance has not been replaced and so is still relevant to proposals for flat conversions. These are areas that have been identified as suitable for flat conversions.

All flat conversions (both inside and outside flat conversion areas) are assessed against the parking and design standards. These are:

### Parking

- Adequate off street parking should be provided.
- One space per flat will usually be required but this may be reduced in flat conversion areas.
- Parking should not be in front gardens, unless screened from view, should not be on the road if it is a main route and will only be allowed in rear laneways if there is enough room to manoeuvre.

### Design

- Flats should be self contained (with their own bathroom, kitchen and wc) and should have some street frontage and adequate amenity space.
- Extensions should be in scale with existing dwelling and should not cause loss of amenity.
- External access eg fire escapes, bin storage and dormers should usually be to the rear of the property.
- Alterations and extensions should respect the character of neighbouring buildings and the area.
- Trees, garden walls and hedges should be retained.

Flat conversions **outside** flat conversion areas will be allowed if:

- The dwelling is considered no longer suitable for single family accommodation. This will be assessed by looking at the size, age and condition of the house and adjoining land uses.
- It does not adversely affect the character of the area.
- An exceptional need for flats can be demonstrated.
- The conversion is in between two other flat conversions or rounds off a street/terrace of flats.
- The property fronts an arterial route and the character of the area is appropriate.
- The conversion uses upper floors of commercial properties.
- Offices/commercial properties are being brought back to residential use and the conversion is in keeping with the character of the area.

This guidance is not strictly applied in all cases and decisions are based on the planners' evaluation of each individual scheme. In addition to this policy, they look at other relevant

policies, previous decisions, the results of planning appeals and whether or not the developer makes a good case for the proposed development.

If you want to object to flat conversions, possible points to consider might include:

- loss of housing stock which is still suitable for single family occupation;
- increased traffic generation;
- inadequate car parking provision;
- loss of amenity in existing single family residential neighbourhoods;
- overlooking/loss of privacy/overshadowing;
- large numbers of flat conversions leading to a change in the character of the area;
- negative cumulative effect of this and other approvals on the residential character of the area.

### **3. Objecting to New Build Flats or Apartments**

#### **Demolition**

- Proposals for new build apartments will often involve the demolition of an existing building.
- In objecting to the demolition of an existing building, you may want to consider the contribution that this building makes to the character of the immediate and wider areas.
- If you believe the building makes a significant contribution to the character of the area, you could argue that it should be retained.
- This point is particularly relevant if the building is located within a Conservation Area or Area of Townscape Character.
- If there are any significant or mature trees on the site you may wish to draw attention to these, and argue for their retention.

#### **New Building**

- Key issues will be if the design is appropriate, if this constitutes overdevelopment of the site, loss of amenity, parking and traffic etc.
- The most relevant policy is likely to be policy QDI of PPS 7 (see page 1).

### **4. Further Information and Advice**

For further information about any of the above and for advice on how to object to planning proposals in your area please contact us the address below.



2 Downshire Place  
Belfast BT2 7JQ  
T: 028 9023 9444 F: 028 9023 1411  
E: [info@communityplaces.info](mailto:info@communityplaces.info)