

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT
UNIT 4, PORTHMELLON INDUSTRIAL ESTATE
September 2018

SCS/P4/PIE/006

Plot 4, Porthmellon Industrial Estate, is a substantial (by local standards), detached warehouse unit, located at the Eastern end of the Porthmellon Industrial Estate. The building is arranged in five principal bays, with an additional office/laundry facility positioned on the South West corner, in front of Bay 1.

The building is sub-divided and occupied on the following basis:

Bay One:	Occupied by Sibleys Fuel & Marine Services, largely redundant and under-utilised, for general storage.
Bay Two:	Occupied by Her Majesty's Coastguard and used as an Emergency Response Centre.
Bay 3:	Occupied by Her Majesty's Coastguard and used as an Emergency Response Centre.
Bay 4:	Recently refurbished, and available for letting.
Bay 5:	Recently refurbished, and occupied by Sibleys Fuel & Marine Services for vehicle & general storage, and for workshop use.
Office/Store/Laundry:	Occupied by Sibleys Property Management Services, and used as a management office, linen store, ironing facility, etc.

With the exception of the rear section of Bay 1, the entire building has recently been upgraded, including the installation of new automatic sectional doors, roof repairs & renewals, improved thermal & sound insulation, internal partitioning, installation of kitchens and wc's, improved services (including full re-wiring, fire alarm systems, etc) and disabled access.

Background to the Application

Sibleys provide a range of services on the islands, including:

- general fuel merchants, supplying petrol, diesel, bulk oils & bottled gas, as well as fuels to visiting yachts and local boats.
- the marketing and sale of residential & commercial property.
- the management of a range of self-catering properties.
- Cleaning and property maintenance.
- the provision of laundry and ironing services to our management clients, commercial businesses on the islands (including major hotels) and private individuals.

These business activities are labour intensive, and rely heavily on good, reliable staff to enable us to provide the high-quality service our visitors, and indeed local customers, deserve.

We endeavour to employ local staff wherever possible, who are already adequately housed. However, as our range of services increases, we have been unable to satisfy our staff requirements through the local market, and have had to employ staff from further afield.

These staff require housing, and to recruit and retain quality, reliable personnel, we need to offer them secure, adequate accommodation. It is a well-known “secret” that many staff on the islands are put up in sub-standard accommodation, such as converted garages and garden sheds. In common with most others, we understand why this happens but do not consider it to be an acceptable situation.

We believe there is a direct relationship between the quality of staff accommodation provided, and the quality of work those staff members produce. If you are fair to your staff, they will repay that in commitment, reliability and standard of work.

Sourcing quality accommodation is increasingly difficult, and whilst we endeavour to offer self-contained units to our personnel, inevitably we have had to revert to shared accommodation. For the 2019 season we are likely to lose access to the accommodation we currently provide; this will leave us with a severe staffing problem, such that we will struggle to offer the full range and quality of services we do currently.

Our Proposal

Our proposal for the creation of two units of staff accommodation will:

- increase the supply of modern, purpose-built staff accommodation on Scilly
- erode the need for sub-standard accommodation
- support the local economy by supporting local business
- allow us to recruit and retain quality staff
- support the businesses operating from the remainder of Plot 4 Porthmellon
- avoid the need for “green field” development to provide much needed staff units

Bay One at Plot 4, Porthmellon Industrial Estate (where the flats will be created subject to consent), is located to the rear of the warehouse, behind our existing management office / laundry). It is currently unused (other than rough storage), with no vehicular access, no external service doors and limited headroom to the rear. It is of little use, other than for the storage of small items.

The property in its entirety extends to approximately 350 sq m. The ground floor area required for the two staff units extends to approximately 48 sqm – just 14% of the total floor area, and comprising the least useful of the available accommodation.

Loss of Commercial Floor Space

Bay One at Plot 4, Porthmellon Industrial Estate, is of very little commercial use, located as it is to the rear of the property, with no vehicular access, limited head room to the rear, and no external doorways. It has sat empty for a number of years, and has contributed nothing at all to the economic well-being of the islands.

The proposed scheme is very modest, reducing the overall commercial space by just 14%. We would respectfully suggest that the change of use to residential, in support of the commercial activities in the remainder of the building, is a far better use of this small area of warehouse.

We understand members' concerns over loss of commercial floorspace, and make the following observations:

- following discussions with the planning authority, we have reduced the ground floor area required, compared with our previous application. This has been achieved by incorporating a first-floor bedroom to one of the flats under the apex of the roof, the small section of the property where the ridge height permits two internal floors.
- Of course it is essential to maintain commercial accommodation. But equally it is important to be able to recruit the staff necessary to work in the businesses that operate from that accommodation. Without access to these new staff units, we will not be able to run our business properly, and the commercial floorspace may well lay idle.
- We are encouraged that both the new Draft Local Plan, and the Islands Partnership's Destination Management Plan, acknowledge the need for quality, secure staff accommodation, and feel our proposal directly supports these policies.
- Whilst we note in the new Draft Local Plan the option to zone Porthmellon as an Employment Area, we feel this needs to be considered in the light of the true nature of businesses on Scilly. Many operate very successfully from farm sheds, residential properties, and peripheral locations such as Porthloo. We question whether it is really helpful to be too prescriptive about zoning areas, when business, employment and staff issues are so inter-related?

Residential amenity

The site enjoys a pleasant rear outlook over farmland, and it is our intention to ensure that the occupants of the proposed units enjoy a private and pleasant outside space. We propose the erection of a close boarded fence along the southern boundary of the property, with gated access from the front pavement.

We envisage only adult occupants, some of whom will be employed in the laundry/ironing facility at the front of the property.

There is already the precedent of residential occupation within the Industrial Estate, as well as the introduction some while ago of a commercial laundry within a residential area. This was approved by the Local Planning Authority and deemed an acceptable and compatible use.

In addition, the Gleaner House development at Porthcressa introduced new residential accommodation to what is primarily a commercial area, close to a filling station, commercial kitchen & launderette, and directly above offices, a barber's shop and a bakery. These developments show that residential & industrial uses can sit well together, if properly planned and detailed.

We feel confident that the addition of fencing & high-quality sound insulation on this scheme, will mean that other nearby commercial users can carry on their business without any adverse effects.

A bin enclosure will be provided adjacent to the access-way.

The units will be fully sound & thermally insulated and constructed to a high standard.

Under the previous planning application for staff units on this site, the Environmental Health Officer inspected and concluded that the accommodation was suitable and appropriate.

Sustainability

The proposed scheme will incorporate solar thermal panels for water heating, and rainwater harvesting & recycling.

Access

There will be only pedestrian access to the units, which will be through a gate at the front of the property.

Summary

We very much hope the members will feel able to support this modest application for staff accommodation, and ask for it to be considered in the wider context of the economic and social well-being of the islands. Securing this accommodation is critical for us to continue to provide an efficient and customer-focused service to the local and tourist communities.