

2 FEBRUARY 2021 PLANNING COMMITTEE

6b PLAN/2020/1124

WARD: Canalside

LOCATION: Units 1 and 2 Morris House, 34 Commercial Way, Woking, Surrey, GU21 6EN

PROPOSAL: Change of use of existing Class E (Commercial, Business and Service) to Class F1 (Performance Arts Library) for Unit 1 and 2. Alterations to the front elevation and 2x illuminated signage panels across both units (amended description).

APPLICANT: Mr Mark Welling

OFFICER: Emily Fitzpatrick

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE:

The agent is a member of staff at Woking Borough Council for development of land in its ownership of which the Council proposes to grant to a 3rd party (the charity).

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposal is for a change of use from a retail until (Class E) to a Performance Arts Library (Class F1 Learning and non-residential institutions). Under the *Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020* this would constitute permitted development for a temporary period of three years. However this application seeks a permanent change and would therefore require planning permission.

The proposal would comprise of a public library run by NewSPAL (New Surrey Performing Arts Library). NewSPAL is a charity organisation and oversees the collection of performing arts materials, comprising of more than 206,000 items including orchestra sets, choir sets, play sets, chamber music, scores, books, CDs and DVDs covering all the performing arts (music, drama and dance). It is widely used by choirs, orchestras, theatre groups, students and teachers. The proposal would comprise of a specialist lending and reference library for a nationally important collection of materials relating to the performing arts.

The proposal would see the amalgamation of Unit 1 and 2 serving the ground floor. The ground floor would accommodate a seating/study/browsing area, reception/ work area, WCs, kitchen, book stands, stair lobby and escape lobby. Unit 1 and 2 would have a GIFA of 592sqm on the ground floor. Part of the first floor would serve both units and would comprise of a storage and ancillary area to accommodate the vast collection of materials. The GIFA of the first floor would be 169sqm. Both units would occupy the ground floor area and part of the first floor area which gives access to the rear external service area.

Betfred also has access to part of the first floor and there is no change to this area. The second floor of the building would be retained in office use.

External alterations are proposed to the front elevation (north). Alterations to the existing enclosed porch area to finish flush. Two illuminated signage panels are proposed to both units.

PLANNING STATUS

- Primary Shopping Area
- Primary Shopping Frontage
- Secondary Shopping Frontage
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA Zone B (400m-5km)

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- Urban Areas
- Woking Town Centre
- Adjacent to Woking Town Centre Conservation Area

RECOMMENDATION

GRANT planning permission subject to conditions.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Morris House is a mid-terrace building located on the southern side of Commercial Way. The building is predominantly 3 storeys in height although there is an additional plant room on part of the roof of the building, making the building 4 storeys in this location. The application site is in close proximity to Woking Town Centre Conservation Area.

The rear of the building can be accessed for servicing via the service road from Chapel Street which serves the units fronting Commercial Way, Church Path and those fronting the High Street. The service road slopes upwards such that the service yard area for Morris House is at first floor level. Permission was granted in June 2017 for a change of use from A1 to A3 (Restaurant and cafes) prior to the *Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020* which saw Class A replaced with Class E from the 1 September 2020.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- PLAN/2018/1291- Change of use of part of the first floor from Class A3 (food and drink) to Class B1 (office) to enlarge the existing Class B1 (office) space and air conditioning unit to rear- Permitted 04.01.2019
- PLAN/2018/0361- Formation of external seating area to front of unit- Permitted 13.06.2018
- COND/2017/0083- Approval of details pursuant to condition 9 (external lighting) of PLAN/2017/0500 (Change of use of existing Class A1 (Retail) Unit to 2 no. Class A3 (Restaurant and cafes), improvements to Morris House office entrance, replacement windows to first & second floors, new render to building facades, new shopfronts to each proposed unit and replacement of rear door.)- Permitted 14.08.2017
- PLAN/2017/0500- Change of use of existing Class A1 (retail) Unit to 2no. Class A3 (Restaurant and cafes), improvements to Morris House office entrance, replacement windows to first & second floors, new render to building facades, new shopfronts to each proposed unit and replacement of rear dormer- Permitted 28.06.2017

CONSULTATIONS

- **Environmental Health:** No objection.

REPRESENTATIONS

None received.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

National Planning Policy Framework (2019):

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Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development
Section 7- Ensuring the vitality of town centres
Section 8- Promoting healthy and safe communities
Section 9- Promoting sustainable transport
Section 12- Achieving well-designed places

Woking Core Strategy (2012):

CS2- Woking Town Centre
CS18- Transport and accessibility
CS19- Social and community infrastructure
CS20- Heritage
CS21- Design
CS24- Woking's landscape and townscape
CS25- Presumption in favour of sustainable development

Woking Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (2016):

DM7- Noise and light pollution
DM16- Servicing Development
DM17- Public realm
DM18- Advertising and signs
DM19- Shopfronts
DM20- Heritage assets and their setting

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs):

Parking Standards SPD (2018)
Woking Design (2015)

PLANNING ISSUES

1. The main issues to be considered in the determination of this application are the principle of the change of use, the visual impact of the proposed external alterations, impact on residential amenities and impact on highway safety.

Principle of development

2. The NPPF (2019) and Policy CS25 of the Woking Core Strategy (2012) promote a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy recognises the town centre as the primary centre for economic development and that new development should deliver high quality, well designed public spaces and buildings, which make efficient use of land, contribute to the functionality of the centre and add to its attractiveness and competitiveness.
3. Policy CS2 states that *'the town centre will also be the preferred location for other town centre uses as defined in the Glossary including hotel and cultural and entertainment facilities. Proposals for such uses will be permitted where it can be demonstrated there is a need for the development and the proposals deliver the objectives of the Core Strategy and do not undermine the delivery of the specific proposals set out above'*.
4. Objective 1 enables a **diverse range of development** such as offices, housing, shops, leisure and cultural facilities in Woking Town Centre to enable its status as a centre of regional significance to be maintained. Development will be of high quality and high density to create an attractive environment for people to live, do business and visit.

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5. Objective 2 enables **attractive and sustainable development** of the **district and local centres** to provide convenient access to everyday shops and local services, local community facilities, parks and open spaces.
6. The proposal would comply with the above objectives taken from the Core Strategy (2012). The ground floor retail unit is currently vacant and whilst the proposal would result in the loss of this Class E (Commercial, Business and Service) unit, it is noted that there are a large number of Class E (shop, food and drink) units within the town centre as a whole (particularly the shopping centres). Given the current circumstances at the time of writing; the Covid-19 pandemic causing a series of long-term closures of non-essential retail and a recession demand for Class E (shops, food and drink) units has drastically fallen. The proposal would aid in the future recovery of the high street post Covid-19. The proposal would re-vitalise a vacant unit by virtue of the proposed intended use, a cultural facility in the town centre. Town centres need a variety of uses to support their overall function as a shopping destination and to improve their attractiveness and competitiveness. The change of this unit from Class E to Class F, a performing arts library is considered to support the primary shopping function and support the vitality and viability of this part of the town centre. Furthermore, Policy CS19 supports the provision of new community facilities in locations well served by public transport, pedestrian and cycle infrastructure which the proposal will achieve. The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle and would comply with Policies CS2 and CS19 of the Core Strategy and the policies in the NPPF.

Visual impact of the area

7. One of the core principles of planning as identified in the NPPF is securing high quality design. Policy CS21 of the Core Strategy states that *“proposals for new development should...respect and make a positive contribution to the street scene and character of the area in which they are situated, paying due regard to the scale, height, proportions, building lines, layout, materials and other characteristics of adjoining buildings and land”*.
8. Policy DM17 of the Development Plan Document (DPD) states that *“development should create or contribute to a safe, attractive, high quality, inclusive and legible public realm that contributes positively to local character and identify and encourages appropriate levels of activity and social interaction”*. Furthermore *“proposals for new development which impact upon the public realm should pay regard to the principles set out in the Woking Design SPD, and (i) ensure schemes, provide for or contribute towards an appropriate range of public realm features, including spill-out spaces for trade, events, relaxation and recreation”*.
9. The application site has seen modern alterations to the exterior with dark grey fenestration. The proposal would see alterations to the existing two glazed enclosed porch area to finish flush. The shopfronts would remain as existing, open street-facing windows. This would accommodate small performing arts groups to stage informal events (musical recitals, readings) within the library space but acceptable to passers-by in Commercial Way, contributing to the diversity of activity in the town centre.
10. The proposal would see the installation of two illuminated signage panels across both units advertising the proposed library and entrance along the front elevation. The proposed signage would be adjacent to existing illuminated fascia signage panels on either side of both units and therefore signage in this location would not appear out of

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character with the commercial Town Centre context, although the detailed design of the signage applied to these panels would need to be subject to a separate application for Advert Consent.

11. Given the minimal changes to the front elevation of the building and the nature of the service area at the rear of the site, it is considered that the proposed development would not have an adverse impact on the setting of the nearby Woking Town Centre Conservation Area.
12. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Policies CS20, CS21 and CS24 of the Core Strategy, Policies DM17, DM18, DM19 and DM20 of the DM Policies DPD, Woking Design SPD and the NPPF.

Impact upon neighbouring amenity

13. Policy CS21 of the Core Strategy advises that *“proposals for new development should achieve a satisfactory relationship to adjoining properties avoiding significant harmful impacts”*. The site is located within Woking Town Centre with existing restaurants and late-opening drinking establishments, shops and professional services nearby. The nearest residential occupiers are those on the other side of Commercial Way, although these occupiers are not located immediately opposite the application site.
14. Environmental Health have been consulted and comments as follows; there are no adverse comments/ concerns to raise on Environmental Health grounds. Given the proposal would accommodate a specialist lending and reference library and small scale events for public display, the operating hours of the proposal would not be considerably late into the night, and any breakout noise would be less than that of other nearby establishments, it is not, therefore, considered necessary to limit the opening hours through the planning process.
15. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Policy CS21 of the Core Strategy, Policy DM7 of the DM Policies DPD and the policies in the NPPF.

Impact upon highway safety

16. Policy CS18 of the Core Strategy states that *“The Council is committed to developing a well-integrated community connected by a sustainable transport system which connects people to jobs, services and community facilities, and minimises impacts on biodiversity. This will be achieved by the following steps: locating most new development in the main urban areas, served by a range of sustainable transport modes, such as public transport, walking and cycling to minimise the need to travel and distance modes”*.
17. Furthermore Policy CS19 states that *“The Council will work with its partners to provide accessible and sustainable social and community infrastructure to support growth in the Borough. The provision of new community facilities will be encouraged in locations well served by public transport, pedestrian and cycle infrastructure”*.
18. The site is located within a highly sustainable location in terms of access to various modes of transport. Whilst individual visitors to the library are likely to be mainly from Surrey and the surrounding areas, there is scope for the catchment area to go beyond this region. The railway station, bus stops and cycle parking facilities are all within close proximity to the site. The proposal does not include any car parking and staff will be able to utilise the town centre car parks for parking. Cycle stands sit in close

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proximity to the front elevation of the site as existing, with further cycle stands to the rear of the application site. The proposal is unlikely to exacerbate any existing on-street parking problems due to the availability of various modes of transport and the existing parking controls in the locality.

19. Policy DM16 of the DM Policies DPD relates to servicing and in this regard there is an existing service area for loading/unloading at the rear of the site. Given the elevated nature of the service area at the rear of the site the proposed library would have a first floor area within the building which would enable ease of access to the proposed storage and ancillary area for library materials. The servicing area would also be able to accommodate any bin storage requirements. The proposal therefore complies with Policies CS18 and CS19 of the Woking Core Strategy, Policy DM16 of the DM Policies DPD and the policies in the NPPF.

LOCAL FINANCE CONSIDERATIONS

20. The Council implemented the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on 1st April 2015. As the proposal relates to a change of use application for which no additional floorspace is proposed, the proposal is not CIL chargeable development.

CONCLUSION

21. Overall the proposal is considered to be acceptable in this town centre location and would make a positive contribution to the vitality and viability of this town centre. The proposed use would further stimulate and diversify the high street in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic and planning for the recovery. The proposal would contribute to the setting of the nearby Woking Town Centre Conservation Area by virtue of the modest alterations proposed. The proposal would have an acceptable impact on neighbouring amenity and highway safety. The proposals are considered to comply with Policies CS2, CS18, CS19, CS20, CS21, CS24 and CS25 of the Woking Core Strategy (2012), Policies DM7, DM16, DM17, DM18, DM19 and DM20 of the DM Policies DPD (2016), Supplementary Planning Documents Woking Design (2014) and Parking Standards (2018) and also the policies in the NPPF. It is therefore recommended that planning permission is granted subject to the recommended conditions as set out below.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Site visit photographs received 08.01.2021
2. Consultation responses

RECOMMENDATION

PERMIT subject to the following conditions:

1. The development for which permission is hereby granted must be commenced not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason: To accord with the provisions of Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

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2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans listed below:

DWG No: 712-P001 Existing Block & Site Location Plan received 8 December 2020
DWG No: 712-P002 Existing Ground Floor Layout received 8 December 2020
DWG No: 712-P003 Proposed Ground Floor Layout received 8 December 2020
DWG No: 712-P004 Existing First Floor Layout received 8 December 2020
DWG No: 712-P005 Proposed First Floor Layout received 8 December 2020
DWG No: 712-P006 Existing Second Floor Layout received 8 December 2020
DWG No: 712-P007 Existing Roof Plan received 8 December 2020
DWG No: 712-P008 Existing and Proposed Front Elevation received 12 January 2021
DWG No: 712-P009 Existing Rear & Side Elevations received 8 January 2021

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is completed in accordance with the approved plans.

3. The external finishes of the development hereby permitted shall be as set out on Section 9 of the application form and on the approved drawings.

Reason: To protect the visual amenities of the area.

Informatives

1. The Council confirms that in assessing this planning application it has worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive way, in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).
2. The applicant is reminded that prior to the implementation and installation of 2x illuminated signage panels hereby permitted Advertisement Consent must be obtained.