

Application Number	09/1198/FUL	Agenda Item	
Date Received	24th December 2009	Officer	Mr John Evans
Target Date	18th February 2010		
Ward	Market		
Site	Cambridge Post Office 9 - 11 St Andrews Street Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB2 3AA		
Proposal	Change of use from Class A1 (shops) to Class A2 (financial and professional services).		
Applicant	1 Church Place London E14 5HP		

1.0 SITE DESCRIPTION/AREA CONTEXT

- 1.1 This application relates to the existing Cambridge central post office, a 5 storey terraced property situated on the western side of St Andrews Street.
- 1.2 The building is constructed of red and grey brick, with a distinctive stone facade to the ground floor, which contains 3 prominent arched windows. It has a floor area of approximately 800 sq m. To the south, the premises abuts the old Cambridge Magistrates Court Building. To the north is a relatively narrow, 2 storey, Art Deco style building currently occupied by Thomas Cook travel agents.
- 1.3 The premises falls within the City Centre boundary and the Primary Shopping frontage.
- 1.4 The building is a Building of Local Interest (BLI) and falls within the City of Cambridge (Central) Conservation Area.

2.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 This application seeks consent for the change of use of the building to Use Class A2, (financial and professional services).

If the application is successful the building is intended to be occupied by a new branch of Barclays Bank.

- 2.2 The applicant has submitted floor plans for the new layout, although the application seeks permission for the change of use only and internal works do not require planning permission. A further planning application and application for advertisement consent is likely to be needed for alterations to the shopfront and fascia.
- 2.3 As an integral part of what is proposed, the existing post office is to move premises to a unit currently occupied by one of the Barclays branches in the City centre, at number 57/58 St Andrews Street. This premises has a floor area of approximately 270 sq m.
- 2.4 Barclays currently occupies 2 other premises in the City centre at 15/16 Benet Street and at 30 Market Hill. These premises are to relocate to the new flagship premises at 9 – 11 St Andrews Street. The future use of these respective premises is not currently known or related to this planning application.
- 2.5 The application is accompanied by the following supporting information:

1. Application supporting Statement

3.0 SITE HISTORY

Reference	Description	Outcome
09/0471/FUL	Change of use from A1 (retail) to A2 financial and procession services	Withdrawn

The previous submission was withdrawn to allow further legal negotiations, to find a mechanism for facilitating the 'use swap'.

4.0 PUBLICITY

- | | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 4.1 Advertisement: | Yes |
| Adjoining Owners: | Yes |
| Site Notice Displayed: | Yes |

5.0 POLICY

5.1 Central Government Advice

5.2 **Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005):** Paragraphs 7 and 8 state that national policies and regional and local development plans (regional spatial strategies and local development frameworks) provide the framework for planning for sustainable development and for development to be managed effectively. This plan-led system, and the certainty and predictability it aims to provide, is central to planning and plays the key role in integrating sustainable development objectives. Where the development plan contains relevant policies, applications for planning permission should be determined in line with the plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

5.3 **Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (2009):** sets out the government's planning policies for economic development, which includes development in the B Use Classes (offices, industry and storage), public and community uses and main town centre uses. The policy guidance sets out plan-making policies and development management policies. The plan-making policies relate to using evidence to plan positively, planning for sustainable economic growth, planning for centres, planning for consumer choice and promoting competitive town centres, site selection and land assembly and car parking. The development management policies address the determination of planning applications, supporting evidence for planning applications, a sequential test and impact assessment for applications for town centre uses that are not in a centre and not in accordance with the Development Plan and their consideration, car parking and planning conditions.

5.4 **Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994):** This guidance provides advice on the identification and protection of historic buildings, conservation areas and other elements of the historic environment.

5.5 **Circular 11/95 – The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions:** Advises that conditions should be necessary,

relevant to planning, relevant to the development permitted, enforceable, precise and reasonable in all other respects.

5.6 **East of England Plan 2008**

ENV6 The historic environment

ENV7 Quality in the built environment

5.7 **Cambridge Local Plan 2006**

3/1 Sustainable development

3/4 Responding to context

3/7 Creating successful places

3/15 Shopfronts and signage

4/11 Conservation Areas

4/12 Buildings of Local Interest

6/6 Change of use in the City Centre

5.8 **Material Considerations**

Cambridge Historic Core – Conservation Area Appraisal (2005): Provides an appraisal of the Historic Core of Cambridge.

Shopfront Design Guide (1997) : It aims to help designers ensure that new shopfronts and refurbished shopfronts fit into their contexts.

6.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

Historic Environment Manager

- 6.1 Object. Whilst the use as a bank branch is not dissimilar to that of a post office branch and much of the ground floor interior has been repeatedly altered, there is one extremely worrying statement in the “Flagship Design Concept” where the agents refer to ‘shopfronts with clear views into the branch’. This inevitably means an attempt to destroy the fine facade and replace it with a very poor quality ‘modern’ [ie : large plate glass] shopfront that would remove much of the character and quality of this BLI.

- 6.2 An associated problem is that the existing post office branch is clearly too small yet this 'swap' seems to be propelling it into an inappropriate alternative.

Head of Legal Services

- 6.3 In agreement with the independent legal advice that was sought, that the best way to proceed is by way of a Grampian condition. There is no 100% guarantee of the status quo of the new post office but the A1 use would be the new use for the premises 57-58 St Andrews Street.

Cambridgeshire County Council (Transport)

- 6.4 No objections.

Head of Environmental Services

- 6.5 No objections in principle, subject to noise conditions relating to plant facilities.

Cambridge City Council Access Officer

- 6.6 The internal alcove seating is too tight.
- 6.7 The above responses are a summary of the comments that have been received. Full details of the consultation responses can be inspected on the application file.

7.0 REPRESENTATIONS

- 7.1 The owners of the following address have made representations:

98 Balsham Road

The following points are made:

- Resiting the post office would be completely inappropriate as it needs its current size.
- The new post office would not be suitable for the disabled.
- Too many banks in that area already.
- Barclays already have enough space in their Market Street branch.

Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) who is a major investor in the Grand Arcade Shopping Centre.

7.2 The representations can be summarised as follows:

- Strong objection to the loss of the retail unit.
- It is important that the streets leading to the Grand Arcade maintain a high level of footfall.
- The bank frontage could break up visitor movement along St Andrews Street, which may result in a reduction in visitor numbers to this area.
- The application is located in the Secondary Shopping Frontage which states that A1 uses should not fall below 60%.
- If the application were allowed this would result in the frontage falling to 58% which is contrary to policy.

7.3 The above representations are a summary of the comments that have been received. Full details of the representations can be inspected on the application file.

8.0 ASSESSMENT

8.1 From the consultation responses and representations received and from my inspection of the site and the surroundings, I consider that the main issues are:

1. Principle of development
2. Context of site, design and external spaces
3. Disabled access
4. Refuse arrangements
5. Cycle parking
6. Third party representations

Principle of Development

8.2 The key issue relates to the impact of the proposal on vitality and viability of the City centre.

8.3 Local Plan policy 6/6 states that the change of use from A1 to A2, A3, A4 or A5 at ground level will only be permitted in primary frontages where the proposal would not harm the contribution the frontage makes to the vitality and viability of the

City centre. The existing post office is a prominent A1 retail unit within the City centre, and its loss to an A2 use would generally be resisted.

- 8.4 However, the proposal will retain the balance of A1 units on St Andrews Street and within the primary shopping frontage by ensuring the loss of the A1 unit is replaced. The 'use swap' will be facilitated by way of a Grampian condition attached to any consent granted which directs that number 57 St Andrews Street be occupied with an A1 retail unit before the development takes place.
- 8.5 Independent legal advice was sought by the applicant on the reasonableness and appropriateness of the suggested Grampian condition and its compliance with Circular 11/95. This legal view concurs with officers views that there is a case for the condition based on necessity and that it is consistent with Circular 11/95. It manages or mitigates the effect of the development, whereby the change of use would otherwise be harmful to the vitality and viability of the City centre.
- 8.6 The Council's Legal Team are satisfied with the robustness of the Grampian condition and while there is no absolute guarantee it will be the 'post office' that occupies 57-58 St Andrews Street, the balance of A1 units in the City Centre will be retained.
- 8.7 I recognise that the new A1 unit at 57-58 St Andrews Street is smaller in size than the current post office at 9-11 St Andrews Street. There will therefore be an overall loss of some 500 sq m of overall retail floorspace. However, in my view the kind of business and service which the new Barclays would operate has a significant draw in terms of footfall and general contribution to the City Centre. I do not feel that the use of the premises for banking would harm the contribution the frontage makes to the vitality and viability of the City Centre, especially given that the balance of individual retail units will be retained.
- 8.8 The concerns of USS are noted, but it is in my view difficult to attribute any harm from this proposal to the wider vitality of the City Centre. Policy generally aims to retain retail uses, which will be achieved here, and I believe that a bank is a wholly appropriate use in the City Centre which will generate significant footfall in its own right. The agents acting on behalf

of the Grand Arcade incorrectly identify the premises as falling within the Secondary Shopping Frontage, which has different policy implications. This premises does in fact fall within the Primary Shopping Frontage as does 57-58 St Andrews Street.

- 8.9 In my opinion, the principle of the development is acceptable and in accordance with policy 6/6.

Context of site, design and external spaces

- 8.10 The key design issue relates to the impact of the physical alterations to the frontage of the building on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

- 8.11 The application as submitted contains only a description of the nature of the changes which will be required to the shopfront itself. Whilst the Council's Conservation officer has strong concerns regarding the typical design and layout format for what will be a 'flagship' Barclays branch, approval of these details does not form a part of the application.

- 8.12 The applicant is aware that the detailed design of the shopfront will need to be sympathetic to the building and that standard, corporate formats are unlikely to be acceptable in the Conservation Area. The distinctive stone facade will need to be retained and any signage should comply with the principles of the 'Shopfronts Design Guide'. Any future proposals which seek to remove this facade will be strongly resisted.

Disabled access

- 8.13 The Council's Access Officer has considered this scheme and does not object to the internal layout subject to fixtures and fittings. Concerns over internal seating will be brought to the applicants attention. While I note that third party objections have been raised with regard to access to the new post office for the disabled, the Post Office are confident that queuing can be adequately managed and that the needs of disabled people will be met. The new post office will be refurbished internally in an inclusive, accessible manner.
- 8.14 In my opinion the proposal is compliant with Cambridge Local Plan (2006) policies 3/7 and 3/12.

Refuse Arrangements

- 8.15 Refuse storage arrangements will remain essentially unchanged from the post office use, with bins located to the rear of the building. In my opinion the proposal is compliant with Cambridge Local Plan (2006) policy 3/4.

Bicycle Parking

- 8.16 The position of the site in the City Centre means that cycle parking for customers is not practicable. In addition, there is no available space to the rear to provide staff cycle parking which would be unchanged from the existing situation. However, given the close proximity of the Grand Arcade bicycle park and the very similar bicycle parking requirements of A1 and A2 uses, the provision of addition spaces is not considered mandatory.

Third Party Representations

- 8.17 The comments received have been adequately covered in the above report.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The proposed change of use will retain the balance of A1 retail units in the City Centre and will not in my view harm the contribution the frontage makes to the vitality and viability of the City Centre. The design implications of any shop front alterations that will be needed will be scrutinised under a separate application. Approval is recommended.

10.0 RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE and subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. No part of the development hereby permitted shall take place until a use within Class A1 of the Planning Use Classes Order 1987, (or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification) has been implemented at 57/58 St Andrews Street, Cambridge.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not lead to a loss of Class A1 use in the City in accordance with Cambridge Local Plan 2006 policy 6/6.

INFORMATIVE: This permission relates to the change of use of the premises only and not to any physical external alterations to the shopfront or signage.

Reasons for Approval

1. This development has been approved, conditionally, because subject to those requirements it is considered to generally conform to the Development Plan, particularly the following policies:

East of England plan 2008: ENV6, ENV7

Cambridge Local Plan (2006): 3/1, 3/4, 3/7, 3/15, 4/11, 4/12 and 6/6

2. The decision has been made having had regard to all other material planning considerations, none of which was considered to have been of such significance as to justify doing other than grant planning permission.

These reasons for approval can be a summary of the reasons for grant of planning permission only. For further detail on the decision please see the officer report by visiting the Council Planning Department.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972, the following are “background papers” for each report on a planning application:

1. The planning application and plans;
2. Any explanatory or accompanying letter or document from the applicant;
3. Comments of Council departments on the application;
4. Comments or representations by third parties on the application as referred to in the report plus any additional comments received before the meeting at which the application is considered; unless (in each case) the document discloses “exempt or confidential information”
5. Any Structure Plan, Local Plan or Council Policy Document referred to in individual reports.

These papers may be inspected by contacting John Summers (Ext.7103) in the Planning Department.