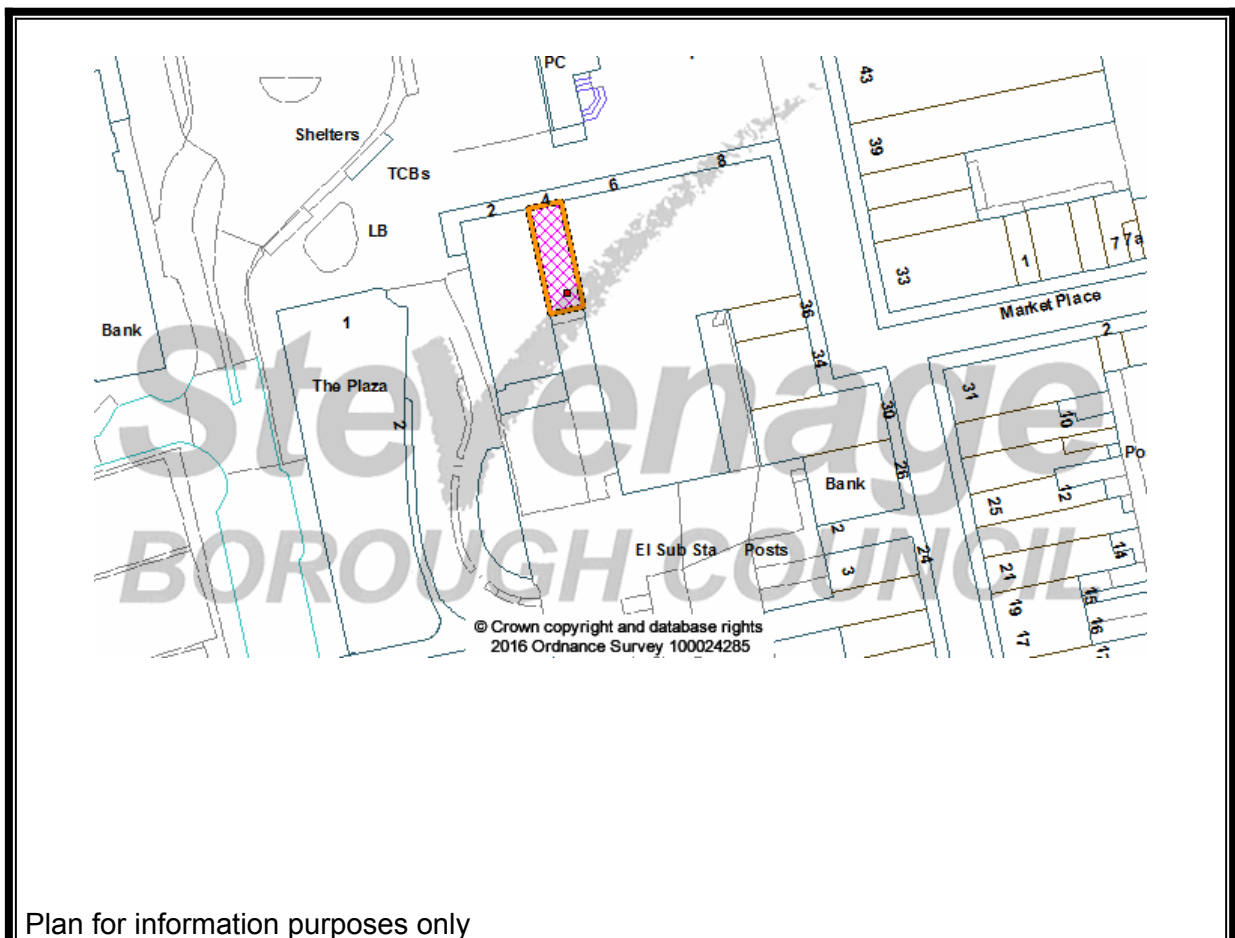


<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Planning and Development Committee</b>	<b>Agenda Item:</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>8 January 2019</b>	
<b>Author:</b>	<b>James Chettleburgh</b>	01438 242266
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Application No:	18/00725/FP
Location:	4 Town Square, Stevenage.
Proposal:	Change of use from A1 (shops) and A2 (Professional & Financial Services) to Visitor Centre D1 (Non-residential Institutions) and shop front alteration.
Drawing Nos.:	Site Location Plan; BS18070 – 001; Proposed Floor Plan; Proposed Visitor Centre Floor Plan v7; 1003N 02 A.
Applicant:	Stevenage Borough Council
Date Valid:	26 November 2018
Recommendation:	GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION



## **1. SITE DESCRIPTION**

- 1.1 The application site is located on the eastern side of Town Square within the designated Stevenage Town Centre and Conservation Area. The site comprises the former "Cash Generator" store which consists of a glazed shop frontage within a metal frame and associated perforated metal roller shutter. Located above the vacant store are two-storey offices which are also vacant. The building is constructed from brick with marble at ground floor level. The roof of the building is flat and is finished in felt.
- 1.2 To the front of the application site is the main Town Square which comprises the Grade II Listed Clock Tower and Surrounding pool. The clock tower is a 4 level above ground structure constructed in a reinforced concrete frame with a flat roof with Brazilian granite cladding. There is also the Grade II Listed Joy Ride which comprises a bronze mother and child sculpture set on top of a platform with stairs and railings to either side. The buildings which the application site forms part of, are generally uniform in design, being three-storeys in height with a shopping parade at ground floor level with the fenestration at first and second floor level comprising single-glazed crittall windows.

## **2. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 2.1 Planning application 01/00137/FP sought permission for the erection of a new shopfront and new air conditioning unit to the rear. This application was granted planning permission in May 2001.
- 2.2 Advertisement consent application 09/00036/AD sought consent for the installation of 1 no. illuminated fascia sign and 2 no. illuminated hanging signs. This application was not proceeded with.
- 2.3 Planning application 17/00668/FP sought permission for a change of use from A1 (shop) and A2 (financial services) to mixed use A1 (cycle hire shop), A3 (café), B1 (cycle repairs) and D1 art studio). This application was granted planning permission in November 2017.

## **3. THE CURRENT APPLICATION**

- 3.1 The current application seeks planning permission for a change of use of the premises from Use Class A1 (shop) and A2 (Financial Services) to Use Class D1 (Visitors Centre). The centre itself would be utilised as an exhibition displaying proposals for the wider regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre. The proposed development also comprises a minor alteration to the shop front whereby the main entrance is to be re-positioned to a central position on the front.
- 3.2 This application comes before the planning committee for consideration as the applicant Stevenage Borough Council.

## **4. PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS**

- 4.1 As a planning application within the designated conservation area, the proposal has been publicised by way of letters to adjoining premises, site notices and a press notice. At the time of drafting this report no comments or representations had been received.

## **5. CONSULTATIONS**

### **5.1 Council's Environmental Health Section**

- 5.1.1 The proposal is considered to be acceptable.

## **5.2 Hertfordshire County Council as Highways Authority**

5.2.1 No comments have been received.

## **6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES**

### **6.1 Background to the Development Plan**

6.1.1 In the determination of planning applications development must be in accordance with the statutory development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For Stevenage the statutory development plan comprises:

- Hertfordshire Waste Development Framework 2012 and Hertfordshire Waste Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted 2012 and 2014);
- Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan 2002 – 2016 (adopted 2007); and
- The Stevenage District Plan Second Review 2004.

The Council has now reached an advanced stage in the preparation of a new Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031. The Plan has been used as a material consideration in the determination of all planning applications registered on or after Wednesday 6 January 2016. The Plan has now been through the Examination process and the Inspector's Report was received in October 2017. This recommended approval of the Plan, subject to modifications proposed. The Plan is currently subject to a holding direction placed upon it by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), which prevents its adoption whilst MHCLG are considering whether or not to call it in.

6.1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out that decision-takers may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to their stage of preparation, the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies, and their degree of consistency with policies in the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.1.3 In considering the policy implications of any development proposal, the Local Planning Authority will assess each case on its individual merits, however, bearing in mind the positive Inspector's Report, significant weight will be afforded to policies within the emerging Local Plan.

### **6.2 Central Government Advice**

6.2.1 A revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in July 2018. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Annex 1 of the NPPF provides guidance on how existing local plan policies which have been prepared prior to the publication of the NPPF should be treated. Paragraph 213 of the NPPF applies which states that due weight should be afforded to the relevant policies in the adopted local plan according to their degree of consistency with it.

6.2.2 Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is itself a material consideration. Given that the advice that the weight to be given to relevant policies in the local plan will depend on their degree of consistency with the NPPF, it will be necessary in the determination of this application to assess the consistency of the relevant local plan policies with the NPPF. The NPPF applies a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

6.2.3 In addition to the NPPF, advice in Planning Practice Guidance must also be taken into account. It states that, where the development plan is absent, silent or the relevant policies are out of date, paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires the application to be determined in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development unless otherwise specified.

### **6.3 Adopted Local Plan**

Policy TW1: Sustainable Development;  
Policy TR1: Town Centre;  
Policy TR3: Retail Frontages;  
Policy TR4: Loss of Retail Floorspace;  
Policy T15: Car Parking Strategy

### **6.4 Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 Publication Draft (Emerging Local Plan)**

Policy SP1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development;  
Policy SP2: Sustainable Development in Stevenage;  
Policy SP4: A Vital Town Centre;  
Policy SP8: Good Design;  
Policy SP13: The historic environment;  
Policy TC1: Town Centre;  
Policy TC2: Southgate Park MOA;  
Policy TC5: Central Core MOA;  
Policy TC8: Town Centre Shopping Area;  
Policy NH10: Conservation Areas.

### **6.5 Supplementary Planning Documents**

Stevenage Town Centre Conservation Area Management Plan SPD (2012)  
Council's Car Parking Standards SPD (2012).

## **7. APPRAISAL**

7.1 The main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are its acceptability in land use policies terms, the visual impact on the conservation area, impact on residential amenity, car parking and highway implications.

### **7.2 Land Use Policy Considerations**

7.2.1 Policy TR1 of the District Local Plan (2004) and Policy TC1 of the emerging Local Plan (2016) identify the application site falling within the Town Centre. TR3 of the District Plan which relates to Retail Frontage states that this area is reserved for retail use (Class A1) and other uses would be refused. However, proposals for ground floor level Class A2 and A3 or other uses appropriate in a town centre retail street will be permitted in the secondary retail frontage as defined in the proposals map. Policy TR4 of the same document states that proposals which involve the overall loss of retail (A1), food and drink (A3) and service floorspace (A2) in the town centre will be resisted except for changes to social, community, leisure and cultural uses and residential uses at first floor level and above outside of the primary retail frontages.

7.2.2 Turning to Policy TC8 of the emerging Local Plan (2016), it states that within the spatial extent of the Town Centre Shopping Area (TCSA), uses appropriate to the town centre will be permitted at ground floor level which include Use Classes A1, A2, A3, A4, C1, D1 and/or D2. In regards to designation, the site does not fall within the primary retail frontage. Consequently, criterion b. of the aforementioned states that in these locations, the benefits

to the overall vitality and viability of the town centre would need to equal or outweigh those that would be provided by an A1 or A2 use in the equivalent location. This is considered having regard to whether:-

- The proposal will retain an active frontage;
- The proposal will generate footfall equivalent to, or greater than an A1 or A2 use in the equivalent location; and
- The unit has been unsuccessfully marketed for A1 or A2 use or has remained vacant for at least six months.

7.2.3 Separate to the above, the application site is located on the edge of Major Opportunity Areas as identified under Policies TC2: Southgate Park and TC5: Central Core of the emerging Local Plan (2016). These policies set out the overall objectives for delivering regeneration to Stevenage Town Centre.

7.2.4 The proposed development seeks a change of use from Use Class A1 (shop) and A2 (financial services) to Use Class D1 (visitors centre). Taking this proposed use into consideration, as it would be classed as a Main Town Centre use as defined in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2018 (NPPF), the proposal would classed as an acceptable use within the town centre. In addition, the proposed use is acceptable as defined in Policy TR1 of the District Plan (2004) and Policy TC8 of the Emerging Local Plan (2016). However, as the proposal results in the loss of A1/A2 floorspace, an assessment has to be made as to whether or not the proposal retains an active frontage, will generate footfall equivalent or greater than an A1 or A2 use and the unit has been unsuccessfully marketed for at least six months.

7.2.5 The proposed development, given the premises has remained vacant combined with the fact that the existing Barclays Bank (2 Town Square) has also remained vacant, means that the proposal would bring the premises back into use for a temporary period before the area is redeveloped as part of the wider regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre. Given this, the proposal would help to create an active frontage along this part of the Town Square. In regards to marketing, the property has not been actively marketed by the Council due to the planned regeneration of the area. However, the property has been vacant since March 2017 and therefore, the proposed development will help to bring the premises back into operation for a temporary period.

7.2.6 In terms of footfall, the proposed development as a visitors centre will be accessible to all members of the public, educational facilities such as local schools and the College as well as local businesses who wish to view the proposals for the wider regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre. Therefore, the proposed development in this regard would help to generate increased footfall which is currently limited in this part of the town centre and could help to create linked trips to other parts of the town centre generally.

7.2.7 Given the aforementioned assessment, the proposed change of use would be acceptable in land use policy terms.

### **7.3 Visual impact on the conservation area**

7.3.1 Paragraph 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018 stipulates that planning decisions should ensure development functions well and adds to the overall quality of the area, not just in short term but over the lifetime of the development. It also sets out that development should be visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping is sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. Paragraph 130 of the NPPF states that “permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to make opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions”. Paragraph 193 of the same document stipulates that when

considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 195 of the NPPF goes on to state that where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent.

- 7.3.2 Policy TW9 of the District Plan (2004) requires all forms of development to meet a high standard of design which includes form of built development, elevational treatment and materials along with how the development would integrate with the urban fabric, its relationship between buildings, landscape design and relevant aspects of sustainable design. Policy GD1 of the emerging Local Plan (2016) generally reflects the above policy. Policy NH10 of the same document states that development proposals affecting a conservation area should have regard to the relevant Conservation Area Management Plan SPD. The Town Square Conservation Area Management Plan SPD (2012) sets out that alterations and extensions to a building should not dominate an existing building's scale or alter the composition of its main elevations.
- 7.3.3 The proposed development seeks to install a new shop front with a centralised entrance and low level stall riser with ceramic tiles. In addition, the proposal also seeks to clean the existing black granite pilasters. It is considered that the proposed alterations would improve the visual appearance of the shop front as well preserve the historic character of this part of the Town Centre Conservation Area. This is because the design is sympathetic to the existing architectural characteristics of the building.

#### **7.4 Impact on the environment and amenity**

- 7.4.1 Due to the nature of the proposed development combined with the fact that there are no residential properties located in close proximity to the application site, it would not have a detrimental impact on the environment and amenities of residential properties or nearby business operators. This is supported by the Council's Environmental Health Section.

#### **7.5 Car parking**

- 7.5.1 The Council's Car Parking Standards SPD (2012) does not have a specific standard for Use Class D1 (Visitor Centres). However, the nearest relevant standard is for "miscellaneous cultural buildings" which sets out a requirement of 2 spaces plus 1 space per 30m<sup>2</sup> of public floorspace. In this regard, there would be a requirement to provide 7 parking spaces. However, the application site is located within non-residential accessibility zone 1, therefore, the Council would seek between 0% to 25% of the maximum number of parking spaces. Given this, the Council would seek a maximum provision of 2 parking spaces.
- 7.5.2 The existing building currently comprises of 4 parking spaces within the rear service yard. Given this, whilst there would be more car parking provided on site than what is required under the Parking Standards SPD, as this is an existing provision the level of parking available would be acceptable on this basis. In regards to cycle parking, there is a requirement to provide 1 long term space per 10 full time staff. Whilst it is not known how many staff will be employed at the visitor centre, cycles can be safely secured within the existing rear service yard. In addition, there is short-term cycle parking available opposite the application site. Therefore, sufficient cycle parking would be available to serve this development.

#### **7.6 Highway Implications**

- 7.6.1 The development site is currently served by an existing vehicular access positioned off The Quadrant. This is located to the rear of the site. The proposal does not seek to extend or alter this existing access including the highway which is owned by Stevenage Borough Council. In addition, the proposed development is not likely to generate a significant level of

traffic which would have a detrimental impact on highway safety. Moreover, due to the sustainable location of the site and the nature of the proposal, there is access to public transport as well as the extensive cycle network. Given this, it is considered that the proposed development would not prejudice the safety and operation of the highway network in this instance.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The principle of the proposed change of use would not have a detrimental impact on the function of the town centre and, therefore, is compliant with the policies in the adopted and emerging local plan. Additionally, the proposed development would preserve the historic character of the Town Centre Conservation Area. Furthermore, the proposal would not harm the overall vitality and viability of the town centre nor would it have a detrimental impact on the environment or the amenities of nearby businesses and residential properties which are located on Queensway. Moreover, the site is well served by public transport and surface car parking.
- 8.2 Given the above, the proposed development accords with the Policies contained within the adopted Local Plan (2004), the Council's Emerging Local Plan (2016), the Council's Supplementary Planning Documents, the NPPF (2018) and NPPG (2014).

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:-

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Site Location Plan; BS18070 – 001; Proposed Floor Plan; Proposed Visitor Centre Floor Plan v7.

**REASON:-** For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

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

**REASON:-** To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

- 3 The alterations to the shopfront hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the details submitted with this application.

**REASON:-** In order to preserve the historic character of the conservation area.

### **Pro-active Statement**

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. Discussion with the applicant to seek an acceptable solution was not necessary in this instance. The Council has therefore acted pro-actively in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

## 10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

1. The application file, forms, plans and supporting documents having the reference number relating to this item.

2. Stevenage District Plan Second Review 1991-2011.
3. Stevenage Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents – Town Centre Conservation Area Management Plan 2012.
4. Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 Publication Draft.
5. Responses to consultations with statutory undertakers and other interested parties referred to in this report.
6. Central Government advice contained in the National Planning Policy Framework July 2018 and Planning Policy Guidance March 2014.