

MC/13/2334

Date Received: 19 September, 2013

Location: 133 High Street, Strood, Rochester, ME2 4TJ

Proposal: Change of use from shop (A1) into Strood Library and Community Hub (D1)

Applicant: Medway Council

Agent: Mr N Mumby Design Quarter UK Ltd. B6-B7 The Admirals Office  
Main Gate Road The Historic Dockyard Chatham, Kent ME4  
4TZ

Ward Strood South

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**Recommendation of Officers to the Planning Committee, to be considered and determined by the Planning Committee at a meeting to be held on 4 December, 2013.**

**Recommendation - Approval with Conditions**

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

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 500/PL/05a, 500/PL/06a and 500/PL/07 as received on 4 October 2013 and PL/SK/03-04 as received on 13 October 2013.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

- 3 Notwithstanding the submitted plans and details no development shall take place until details and samples of all materials to be used externally have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These details shall include revised details of the composite cladding, details of all material junctions, details of the relationship with the existing structural frame and details of the relationship with the concrete frame. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and shall thereafter be maintained.

Reason: To ensure that the appearance of the development is satisfactory and without prejudice to conditions of visual amenity in the locality, in accordance with Policy BNE1 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 4 The building shall only be used as a Library and associated community hub under Class D1 and for no other purpose (including any other purpose in Class D1 of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended), or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification).

Reason: In order to confirm the nature of the permitted use and to regulate any alternative uses in the interests of amenity and highway safety with regard to Policies BNE2, T1, T2 and T13 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 5 The use shall not be commenced, nor the premises occupied, until the area shown on the submitted layout as vehicle access from Commercial Road, parking, loading and off-loading and turning space has been provided, surfaced, drained and demarcated in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter it shall be kept available for such use and no permanent development, whether or not permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order amending, revoking or re-enacting that Order) shall be carried out on that area of land or in such a position as to preclude its use.

Reason: Development without provision of adequate accommodation for the parking, loading, off-loading and turning of vehicles is likely to lead to hazardous conditions in the public highway and to accord with Policy T1, T2 and T13 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

**For the reasons for this recommendation for approval please see Planning Appraisal Section and Conclusions at the end of this report.**

## **Proposal**

The proposal is for the change of use of the property from a retail unit (Class A1) to a library and associated community hub (Class D1). The opening times are proposed to be 09:00 – 19:00 hours Monday to Friday and 09:00 - 17:00 on Saturdays with approximately 7 full time and 8 part time members of staff working on site. The building will be primarily accessed by the public on foot from the High Street , although an access is provided from the rear and this will primarily serve staff and those arriving by car due to disability. The area adjacent to this rear access is shown as being set aside for vehicular parking.

Internally, the hub will comprise an IT zone to the front of the building at ground floor, with a children's library being located to the rear. The main reference library is located on a mezzanine floor over the IT zone, and the lending library is situated to the rear at first floor. The application includes alterations to the external appearance of the building. The front elevation is proposed to consist of a mixture of coloured glazing and composite panels. The panels are also proposed to the rear elevation in combination with a render finish.

## Relevant Planning History

83/547                                      Change of use from furniture shop (Class A1) to sale of motor vehicles, parts and accessories  
Refused 16 September, 1983

## Representations

The application has been advertised on site and by individual neighbour notification to the owners and occupiers of neighbouring properties.

**13 letters** have been received raising the following objections:

- The High Street is not an appropriate location for the library;
- The loss of the Strood Community Project (SCP) from the unit will harm the area and elements of the library and community hub could be merged with the SCP;
- The property has an unsuitable pedestrian access, and vehicular issues (both traffic congestion and parking) will be exacerbated;
- A central Medway library would be more appropriate;
- The existing library is suitably located in Bryant Road for residents and local schools;
- Other units within the locality are more suited to the proposed use;
- The loss of the retail use will be of detriment to the retail function of the High Street;
- The service road is dangerous and is subject to a poor access and egress;
- The loss of the existing library for potential residential purposes would not be acceptable,
- The services and facilities available at the existing library cannot be provided in this unit.

Any other matters raised are not material considerations and cannot be considered.

**City of Rochester Society** have written outlining their support for the proposal.

**Strood Town Centre Forum** have written with the following observations:

- The existing Strood library provides for a number of functions and there is no clear reasoning to remove the existing community facility from the present location;
- The new hub does not provide for a community hall nor does it provide the functions associated with community services;
- The service road is not of appropriate standard for users of the hub nor is the access / egress onto Commercial Road acceptable
- Disabled and emergency access to the rear of the building will be difficult;
- The building does not lend itself to an easy conversion;
- The proposed use achieves little for the people of Strood or the vitality and viability of the Town Centre,

## **Development Plan**

The Development Plan for the area comprises the Medway Local Plan 2003. The policies referred to within this document and used in the processing of this application have been assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework, 2012 and are considered to conform.

## **Planning Appraisal**

### *Background*

The application property is a two storey building located within Strood town centre and is presently occupied by the Strood Community Project who are operating a retail (Class A1) use. The building has been identified by Medway Council as being suitable for the Strood Community Hub, a project which sits inline with the objectives of the Council's Draft Cultural Strategy 2010 - 2014 in increasing community access to Council services and activities.

### *Principle*

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises that town centres are located at the heart of the community and that Local Authorities should ensure policies and decisions support the vitality and viability of the centres. Furthermore, Local Authorities should allocate town centre sites to meet the community and cultural needs of urban areas. Indeed, ensuring that local services are made accessible to the needs of local residents is one of the fundamental social requirements set out in the NPPF.

This approach is reflected in Policy R4 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 which states that within the Core Area of Strood "Use Classes other than A1, A2, and A3 uses will be permitted provided they support the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole". (Note: This policy was adopted prior to modifications to use classes, therefore, A3 includes A4 and A5 uses). Furthermore, community facilities are considered under Policy CF2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 which requires the provision of these facilities to be of an appropriate scale, have minimal impact on neighbouring amenity and be accessible by a variety of means of transport.

The High Street maintains a strong concentration of Class A1 uses and the function of the area is still relatively strong with a good presence and quality of retail / professional uses. The introduction of the D1 use at the expense of a retail use is not considered to detrimentally impact upon the retail functioning of the Core Area. Indeed, the introduction of the Library and associated community use would add to the vitality of the town centre and is appropriate for this town centre location. Accordingly the proposal is acceptable in terms of matters of principle and in accordance with Policies CF2 and R4 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 and the NPPF.

## *Design*

The proposal seeks a radical alteration to the front and rear elevations that could 'lift' the character of this part of Strood. However, there are some concerns over the practicality of the design.

The new front façade is composed of infill panels set between the existing cross walls of the building. The panels consist largely of glass strips of alternating colour spanning the full height and most of the width of the building. The use of glass in this way was not technologically possible back in the 70's and its proposed use will bring the building right up to date. The transparency that results from the use of glass is appropriate for a community building and the pattern to be created, rather like an oversized bar code, will be striking.

However, the design of the front façade has not been fully thought through:

- The portion of the façade that surrounds the entrance to the building is to be clad, not in glass, but in timber effect composite panels. This dilutes the overall design concept. In addition, the junction between the solid panels and glass may well be awkward.
- The façade will be fixed in front of the existing concrete structural frame at first floor and roof level. This will potentially require the facade to sit proud of the existing front elevation (and of neighbouring front elevation) and this will again appear as an awkward relationship.
- The concrete frame that holds up the building will be visible through the glass façade. This could spoil the intended sleek look of the building.
- The signage of the building is to be painted on the concrete frame member that supports the roof. This may not be visible behind the dark blue glazing strips that are intended.

The rear façade is also to be altered and reclad as a part of the scheme proposals. The façade will have a timber effect composite panel finish on one side and render finish on the other. The two sides are at a 45-degree angle to each other with the proposed timber clad element dominant on the facade that faces the car park. This element will be heightened to further emphasise this dominance and to make this civic building stand out. Once again, however, the precise details of the design have not been thought through and the intended quality may not be achieved.

To ensure that the appearance of the development will benefit a building of this importance to the community, an appropriately worded condition is recommended. Subject to this, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of design and in accordance with Policies BNE1, BNE9 and CF2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 and the NPPF.

### *Amenity*

The scope of the external alterations are such that there would be no detrimental impact on neighbours' amenities in terms of outlook, privacy or light. The surrounding area has a mix of shops and other commercial uses. As such it is considered that the proposed opening hours and operations would not cause harm to residential amenity. Accordingly the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of amenity considerations and is in accord with Policies BNE2 and CF2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

### *Highways*

The site has vehicular access to the rear, which links to Commercial Road by means of a narrow track which will be used for servicing and car parking. The track is in a poor state of repair and significant ponding occurs in wet weather. The track is in Medway Council ownership and, although used to service other buildings within the locality, is considered fundamental for the acceptability of the development. Accordingly it is recommended that a condition be imposed requiring the track to be resurfaced and upgraded.

In addition to the pedestrian access from the High Street, the internal layout plans and elevation drawings detail a pedestrian access to the building will also be provided at the rear of the site, which would link to the adjacent public car park and Commercial Road. No details are provided of the rear area and it is therefore recommended that a condition be imposed requiring such details to be provided.

Whilst the proposed development is likely to generate a higher demand for car parking than the previous use, the town centre location increases the likelihood of linked trips and it is considered that existing public car parks within the town centre would accommodate any additional demand. The site is also highly accessible by non-car modes from the High Street. Accordingly, the proposed is considered acceptable in terms of highway considerations and is in accordance with Policies T1, T2 and T13 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

### *Local Finance Considerations*

None relevant to this application.

### **Conclusions and Reasons for this Recommendation**

The proposed development would result in an important community facility being located in a sustainable location that will meet the needs of the local population and will promote the vitality of Strood town centre. Subject to the recommended conditions, the development complies with the objectives of Policies BNE1, BNE2, BNE9, R4, CF2, T1, T2 and T13 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

The application would normally be determined under delegated powers but is being referred to Committee for determination due to the letters of objection which have been received contrary to the officer recommendation.

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## **Background Papers**

The relevant background papers relating to the individual applications comprise: the applications and all supporting documentation submitted therewith; and items identified in any Relevant History and Representations section within the report.

Any information referred to is available for inspection in the Planning Offices of Medway Council at Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR and here <http://planning.medway.gov.uk/dconline/AcolNetCGI.gov>