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Residential and Commercial Planning : Planning Applications, Appeals and Enforcement

SEQUENTIAL TEST AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**CHANGE OF USE FROM WAREHOUSE AND TRADE
COUNTER TO FUNCTION ROOMS AT HARRISONS
ELECTRICAL, HUDDERSFIELD ROAD, DEWSBURY**

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is produced in support of a planning application for a change of use of a warehouse and trade counter (Class B8/A1) at Harrisons Electrical, Huddersfield Road, Dewsbury to function rooms (Class D2), with associated alterations including amendments to the external appearance and increased parking provision.
- 1.2 The site is located off Huddersfield Road and was formerly an electrical wholesale goods warehouse with trade counter and is now vacant. It lies approximately 80m to the west of the town centre.
- 1.3 The site is unallocated on the Policies Map.

2. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

National Policy

- 2.1 Following the issuing of the revised and update National Planning Policy Framework in 2018, national guidance on development is contained within this document and in associated Planning Practice Guidance. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies and how these are expected to be applied. It is advised that the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 2.2 The NPPF identifies the presumption in favour of sustainable development as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.

- 2.3 Paragraph 80 advises that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.
- 2.4 Paragraph 86 advises that local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered.
- 2.5 Paragraph 87 says that when considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre. Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale, so that opportunities to utilise suitable town centre or edge of centre sites are fully explored.
- 2.6 Paragraph 89 advises that when assessing applications for, amongst other things, leisure development outside of town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500m²). This should include assessment of:
- a) the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and

- b) the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and the wider retail catchment (as applicable to the scale and nature of the scheme)

2.7 Annex 2 defines main town centres as including leisure facilities.

Local Policy

2.8 The statutory development plan consists of the Kirklees Unitary Development Plan. The draft Local Plan has passed the independent examination stage and is now proceeding to adoption so carries significant weight in terms of the assessment of planning applications.

2.9 Policy PLP13 of the draft Local Plan advises that main town centre uses should be located within defined centres as shown on the Policies and Town Centre Maps. Dewsbury is a Principal Town Centre. The policy goes on to say that main town centre uses shall be first located in the defined centres, then edge of centre locations, and only if there are no suitable sites shall out of centre locations be considered.

2.10 An Impact Assessment is required for proposals which include leisure developments, and which are not located within a defined centre where the proposal is located within 800 metres of the boundary of a Town Centre and is greater than 300m² gross. The policy says that the scope and content of any Sequential Test shall be agreed with the council and shall be reflective of the scale, role and function of the proposal.

3. APPLICATION SPECIFICATION

- 3.1 For the purposes of this report although the proposed change of use is significantly under the NPPF threshold of 2500m², an impact assessment is required having regard emerging Policy PLP13.
- 3.2 For the purposes of this sequential and impact assessment the proposed change of use comprises proposed function rooms (D2 use class) with 826m² floorspace.
- 3.3 The site is an edge of centre location as defined in the NPPF and is within 80m of Dewsbury Town Centre.

4. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

- 4.1 The Sequential Assessment is undertaken from the starting position that the application site is available, suitable and that the proposed quantum of commercial leisure use is viable.
- 4.2 As the proposal is located in an edge of centre location within 0.1 kilometres of Dewsbury town centre, the study area is restricted to Dewsbury.
- 4.3 The limitations to the assessment include a requirement to fit the business and logistical requirements of the applicant having regard this being a proposed change of use to serve the local community. Given that a floor area of 826sqm is proposed which is sufficient for the aspirations of the business, that is the comparison point in terms of looking at alternative locations.

- 4.4 It is acknowledged that the NPPF states that applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale and with that in mind we have considered whether there is the ability to reduce any of the operational requirements without affecting development viability. However, a reduced size of proposal would inevitably impact upon the aspirations of the business and the required turnover and viability having regard to this.

5. SEQUENTIAL APPROACH AND ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 As stated, for the purposes of sequential testing, the site is considered to be edge of centre.
- 5.2 The NPPF requires LPA's to allocate suitable sites to meet the scale and type of development needed in town centres, and to allocate appropriate edge of centre sites for main town centre uses that are well connected to the town centre where suitable sites are not available.
- 5.3 The application of the sequential approach is to consider whether there are any sequentially preferable alternative sites which can fulfil the role that the development would have. The Policies Map identifies the town centre boundary for Dewsbury where leisure developments will be acceptable in so much as being the first location to be considered.
- 5.4 Our search of sites includes checks on commercial property websites and a walkover assessment of the catchment area (i.e. Dewsbury town centre).

5.5 We have identified a number of potentially sequentially preferable available sites in our assessment, as follows:

5.6 *Field House, Wellington Road*

At 29,000ft² (2694m²) the building is too large for the proposed change of use but in any event, it appears to have recently been sold.

5.7 *9-13 Wellington Road*

Vacant office space but configuration over 3 floors and size makes it incompatible with the proposals.

5.8 *35 Union Street*

A1 and A2 accommodation over three floors. Configuration and total floor area (35m²) is significantly below the requirements of the proposed development and is therefore not suitable.

5.9 *17 Foundry Street*

Two storeys of accommodation totaling 166m² so below the requirements of the proposed development and therefore not suitable.

5.10 *Empire House, Wakefield Old Road*

Upper ground floor and fifth floor accommodation being marketed as offices. Both are below the requirements of the business being 351m² and 200m².

The accommodation being on upper floors together with the configuration and size does not fit the business model of the proposed development site.

5.11 *Princess of Wales Shopping Centre off Church Street*

4 separate retail units being marketed, with floor areas of 140m², 170m², 185m² and 590m².

All sizes are below the requirements of the business and also the units are on primary shopping frontages so change of use from retail would be difficult to achieve.

5.12 *25-27 Westgate*

Two storeys of accommodation totaling 648m² so below the requirements of the proposed development with the configuration not meeting the business model and therefore not suitable.

5.13 *12 Long Causeway*

Vacant retail unit with floor area of 90m².

The size is below the requirements of the business and the unit is on a primary shopping frontage so change of use from retail would be difficult to achieve.

5.14 *The Principal, Northgate*

Vacant pub with three floors of accommodation. Size in excess of the business requirements.

6. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 Paragraph 89 of the NPPF requires consideration of the impact of proposed edge-of-centre developments against two criteria, as follows:

- a) the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and
- b) the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and the wider retail catchment (as applicable to the scale and nature of the scheme)

6.2 It is worth noting that the proposals in this application are for a change of use and would not result in any additional floorspace for main town centre uses in an edge-of-centre location.

6.3 There is currently no existing, identified, committed or planning public or private investment in function rooms or similar leisure development within the town centre that would be affected by the proposals

6.4 It is not necessary to consider the impact of the proposal on other similar existing edge or out of centre uses, as these are not subject to any protection under

national policy. The proposal would though add choice and competition in the market which will provide enhanced opportunities for leisure related uses in the local community.

- 6.5 It is also considered that the proposal is a relatively modest one aimed at the local community, in close proximity to the town centre (just under 80m from it) and would not undermine the health and vitality of the centre. Dewsbury town centre has its key focus in retail floorspace and a leisure based use would have a complimentary impact in this regard.
- 6.6 The proposed development can be expected to compete with existing facilities in the town centre although any impact on trade will be distributed and it is considered unlikely that the proposals would impact on any existing facilities to the extent that it would threaten viability.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 This Sequential Assessment forms part of a planning application for a change of use to form function rooms.
- 7.2 The sequential test has identified that there are no existing units within the town centre that would meet the specific requirements of the proposed business.
- 7.3 The development would not have any adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre and is in a location that is highly accessible to the town centre.

7.4 The proposal therefore passes the sequential test and satisfies the requirements of the NPPF and local policy.