

9 May 2024
L240509 SAV Cover Letter



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SUBMITTED VIA PLANNING PORTAL REFERENCE: PP-13037398

Dear Sir or Madam,

**SECTION 62 OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
FULL APPLICATION FOR EXTERNAL ALTERATIONS TO THE WEST ELEVATION AND THE
INSTALLATION OF EXTERNAL TERRACE SEATING
UNIT 32, THE HOWARD CENTRE, HOWARDSGATE, WELWYN GARDEN CITY, AL8 6HA
COAL PENSIONS PROPERTIES LIMITED AS MANAGED BY DELANCEY**

Introduction

We write on behalf of the applicant, Coal Pensions Properties Limited ('CPPL'), as managed by Delancey, to apply for external alterations to the elevations and the provision of external terrace seating at Unit 32, The Howard Centre (the 'Site').

In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015, the documents which comprise the application include the following:

- This covering letter which comprises our Planning and Heritage Statement;
- The completed application forms;
- The following plans and drawings prepared by Bell Associates:
 - Drawing Ref: 325-002-108A – 'Site Location Plan';
 - Drawing Ref: 325-002-212 – 'Existing Ground Floor Plan';
 - Drawing Ref: 325-002-213 – 'Proposed Ground Floor Plan'; and
 - Drawing Ref: 325-002-305A – 'Existing and Proposed External Elevations ';

The application has been submitted and the requisite application fee (£293.00) paid electronically via the Planning Portal (**PP-13037398**)

The Application Site

The Site comprises Unit 32, which is located at ground floor level, at the Howard Centre, on the principal (west) elevation, facing out onto existing public space..

The Site is located within an area designated within Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Conservation Area (the 'CA').

The Howard Centre is a retail destination located in the centre of Welwyn Garden City, comprising a town centre location adjacent the train station and bus station.

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The Proposal

The existing unit is currently vacant and was last occupied by a fashion retailer. The intention is to subdivide the space into two separate units, Unit 32, subject to this application, and Unit 32A, which is currently vacant.

This application seeks planning permission for external works to the west elevation and the addition of external terrace seating, on existing hardstanding, in front of the Site.

The proposed minor physical works to the principal elevation are required in order to facilitate the refurbishment of the retail unit to enhance the overall appearance and enable the re-letting of a vacant unit to a new tenant, to be used as a coffee shop / café.

The proposed development does not seek any alteration to the permitted Class E use and internal changes are limited to works that do not require planning permission.

West Elevation

The proposed external changes are limited to the principal (west) elevation of Unit 32. The existing shopfront currently comprises glazing with no openings, covered with graphics which create a closed frontage.

As part of the subdivision of the unit, new entrance doors and glazing with metal framework and satin black stallriser are proposed, to open up and improve the appearance of the Site and wider principal elevation at The Howard Centre.

External Terrace Seating

The proposal includes the provision of an external terrace seating area, in front of the new entrance to the unit, which will measure 21.6 sq. m. The area will be enclosed with new metal balustrading with tenant branded fabric inserts to provide a small seating area, set out in a tidy, co-ordinated manner.

The addition of an outdoor area will enhance the offer at the Howard Centre, enabling people to sit outside and enjoy the existing public realm and landscape offer in front of the Site.

Relevant Planning Policy

The Development Plan

The adopted Development Plan for the Site comprises the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan (October 2023) (the 'LDP').

The relevant policies include:

- SP1 - Delivering Sustainable Development
- P5 - Quantity and Location of Retail Development
- SADM4 - Development in Designated Centres
- SP9 - Place-making and High Quality Design
- SADM11 - Amenity and Layout
- SP11 - Protection and Enhancement of Critical Environmental Assets
- SADM15 - Heritage
- SP15 - The Historic Environment of Welwyn Garden City

Supplementary Planning Guidance

The LDP is supported by Supplementary Guidance, which are material considerations.

The Shopfront Design Guide (2005)

This guidance acknowledges that an attractive and well-designed shopfront will create a good impression for potential customers.

The Site is noted as being 'individually designed', this categorisation recognises that some of the units in the town centre are part of buildings which are of a much more modern origin e.g. The Howard Centre and therefore contemporary designs may be more appropriate. It also confirms that stallrisers are a feature of traditional shop front design in the town centre.

Supplementary Design Guidance (2005)

This guidance requires new development to respect and relate to the context and character of the area. It acknowledges that well-designed street furniture can give a place an identity and enhance its sense of place, provided the design of the streetscape is co-ordinated to avoid clutter and confusion, this includes signage, lighting, railings, litter bins, paving and seating.

Assessment of the Proposals

As set out above, the proposed development would facilitate the letting of a vacant unit contained within the principal elevation of the Howard Centre, enhancing the appearance and offer at the Site.

The external changes will comprise a high quality design and materials which complement the wider area, including stallrisers, a key feature of the town centre. Other units along the west elevation of The Howard Centre, benefit from individual openings, so the introduction of new double doors is not considered to be a contentious addition and will positively open up the principal elevation.

The outdoor seating area will complement the existing public space located in front of the Howard Centre and will be neatly contained within a clearly defined balustrade boundary on existing hardstanding. The proposed area is small and well considered and all paraphernalia associated with the external seating can be removed.

Heritage Impact Assessment

Paragraph 196 of the NPPF states plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account:

- a) The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) The wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- c) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- d) Opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

The NPPF categorises criteria for when proposals have either 'substantial harm' or 'less than substantial harm' to a heritage asset at Paragraphs 206 and 207. However, Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723 of the PPG confirms that:

'Proposed development affecting a heritage asset may have no impact on its significance or may enhance its significance and therefore cause no harm to the heritage asset...'

Therefore, it is not the case that all proposals to heritage assets will have harm to them, and where this is the case, the tests at Paragraphs 206 or 207 in relation to types of harm would therefore not be engaged.

Nevertheless, if harm is identified, Paragraphs 206 and 207 set the approach for undertaking the balancing act required to decision-marking in respect of heritage matters. Paragraph 207 in particular stresses the importance for planning authorities to have a balanced approach when examining proposals which have less than substantial harm to heritage assets.

'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'

In addition, relevant Local Plan policies set out the importance of protecting and enhancing the Conservation Area and confirm at Policy SADM15, that,

'Proposals that result in less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset will be weighed against the possible public benefits of the development'.

The Site is located within Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Conservation Area but is not listed. The starting point is to assess whether there is harm to any designated heritage asset.

The proposed external alterations and introduction of an outdoor seating terrace do not seek to negatively impact the character and appearance of the CA, as they are of a suitable design, which would respect and relate to the adjacent frontages and wider existing units at The Howard Centre.

The introduction of outdoor seating brings public benefits, enabling customers to sit outside and providing a sense of place by encouraging the use of surrounding public realm and an appreciation of the wider CA and historic environment. All paraphernalia associated with the seating area can be removed and will not have a permanent impact on the CA.

In addition, the proposals will bring a vacant, town centre unit back into use and introduce a new occupier into a town centre location, bringing economic and social benefits, including increasing activity and footfall within the town centre and creating employment and wage generation.

Accordingly, we consider that the proposal will not cause harm on the CA. Therefore, the requirement to assess public benefits as a consequence of impacts on heritage assets is not engaged. However, as can be seen above the public benefits of the proposal are strong and favourable.

Summary and Conclusion


The proposed development seeks to improve and enhance the appearance and offer at the Site by updating the design of the elevations, utilising modern, high quality materials and installing an outdoor seating area.

The proposed changes relate to the character and context of the wider area, which comprises a mix of individually designed units. The proposals continue to accord with the specific policies and relevant supplementary guidance.

We trust that the details included above and on the enclosed drawings provide you with sufficient information to register and consider the application. We will endeavour to contact you within the next few days to establish your timetable for decision making.

In the meantime, should you require any clarification or additional information, please do not hesitate to contact either Sophie Moore or Matthew Sobic at these offices.

Yours faithfully

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