



Planning Committee

Matchborough Ward

31 March 2009

2009/019/FUL CHANGE OF USE FROM A1 (RETAIL) TO D2 (ASSEMBLY AND LEISURE) USE
UNIT 1 MATCHBOROUGH CENTRE, MATCHBOROUGH WAY,
REDDITCH
APPLICANT: MR S MARSHALL (YOUR IDEAS)
EXPIRY DATE: 2 APRIL 2009

Site Description

(See additional papers for Site Plan)

Unit 1 is an existing shop unit measuring 250 square metres in area and is located within the Matchborough District Centre. It was formerly occupied by Martins Newsagents who vacated in March 2008. The Unit has been empty since then. The Unit is bounded by the Busway to the West; a car park to the South and Unit 2 (an occupied flooring shop) to the East. This Unit and numbers 2, 3 and 4 face towards the central courtyard area to the North.

Proposal Description

This is a full application to change the use of Unit 1 from Class A1 (retail) to Class D2 (assembly and leisure) use.

Relevant Key Policies

All planning applications must be considered in terms of the planning policy framework and all other relevant material considerations (as set out in the legislative framework). The planning policies noted below can be found on the following websites:

www.redditchbc.gov.uk

Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 3

E(TCR).9 District Centres
B(BE).22 Temporary Buildings and Uses
S1 Designing out crime

SPDs

Designing for community safety.

Relevant Site Planning History

None.

Public Consultation Responses

The application has been advertised by writing to neighbouring premises within the Matchborough Centre, and by display of public notice on site.

No representations have been received within the consultation period which expired on 9.3.2009.

Consultee Responses

County Highway Network Control

No objection.

Environmental Health

No objection.

Police Crime Risk Manager

No comments received.

Procedural matters

This application is put before the Planning Committee due to the fact that the landowner is Redditch Borough Council. Under the agreed scheme of delegation to Planning Officers, where RBC is land owner, planning applications should be reported to Committee, when the recommendation is one of approval.

Assessment of Proposal

The key issues for consideration are as follows:-

Principle of Change of Use

The relevant Planning Policy in this case is E(TCR).9 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan since the Unit falls within the Matchborough District Centre.

The Town Centre is the primary focus for major shopping needs. District Centres are the secondary level of shopping, meeting daily needs for basic items. Typically District Centres in the Borough accommodate a newsagent, a general grocery store, a sub-post office and occasionally a pharmacy, a hairdresser and other small shops of a local nature. It is important to protect and where appropriate, enhance District Centres particularly with regard to their useful retail function. Proposals that would undermine the retail and community function of the District Centre would normally be refused.

Under Para.5 of the reasoned justification for Policy E(TCR).9, it comments that the Council appreciates that in some circumstances there may be an over provision of units for retail. If during the plan period there is a problem of vacant units despite appropriate marketing and rent levels, then other uses may be acceptable in District Centres. Only developments that would not hinder the primary retailing function of the District Centre will normally be acceptable. Change of Use in District Centres should only be at a level necessary to overcome a problem of vacancy as the provision of retail and community facilities should continue to be the predominant District Centre function.

In assessing this application, it is important to determine if the unit in question is currently and likely to remain surplus to retail requirements. The previous tenant Martins Newsagents vacated in March 2008 when they sold the Post Office to Unit 7 (Costcutters – a grocers and general convenience store/supermarket). Without the Post Office, the store proved not to be a viable concern. The Unit has therefore been vacant for approximately one year. Redditch Borough Council's Property Services section have commented (as landlords) that the relatively large size of Unit 1 in comparison to other smaller units nearby means that the unit is not attractive to small traders, and that the goods which the newsagents previously sold such as sweets, stationery etc can be bought at the nearby 'Costcutters' supermarket. Property Services comment that it has proved difficult to find tenants for a unit of this size. Matchborough Centre is currently fully let, despite several of the tenants being in a precarious position owing partly to the current financial situation and partly due to inadequate signage indicating where the shops are.

Your Officers understand that occupation of the various units within the District Centre is currently as follows:

Unit 1	Currently vacant	
Unit 2	Flooring/ Carpet shop	(A1 retail)
Unit 3	Chemist	(A1 retail)
Unit 4	Hairdressers	(A1 retail)
Unit 5	Cafe and take-a-way	(A5 use)
(No Unit no)	The Old Sticky Wicket Pub	(A4 use)
Unit 6 &7	Supermarket and Post Office	(A1 retail)
Unit 8	Fish and Chips take-a-way	(A5 use)
Unit 9	Cafe	(A3 use)
Unit 10	Bookmakers	(A2 use)
Unit 11	Dentists	(D1 use)
(upstairs)		
Unit 12	residential flat	(C3 Use)
(upstairs)		
Unit 13	residential flat	(C3 Use)
(upstairs)		

Whilst it is regrettable that the newsagents use has been lost within the centre, the particularly important supermarket which includes a post office, remains. Given the other existing retail units which are currently operating, together with the non A1 units which add to the vitality and viability of the centre, on balance, your officers have concluded that the principle of losing a retail use at Unit 1 would not hinder the primary retailing function of the District Centre and would not harm its vitality and viability.

Policy E(TCR).9 comments that other non-retail uses may be acceptable in District Centres where problems of vacancy occur. The use proposed which is categorised as a D2 use is described as a youth and community organisation which works with members of the community (particularly the young) to identify projects or initiatives that will improve the quality of life for the community as a whole. The supporting statement states that 'your ideas' will provide support to community members to enable ideas to be transformed into successful projects. The organisation aims to:

- Provide and identify routes to funding
- Help community members access this funding
- Support and provide expertise to develop skills to plan and implement projects
- Develop community leadership and the aspirations of the community through successful projects

Security

At the time of writing no comments had been received from the Police Crime Risk Manager.

In their supporting statement the applicant states that the ethos and vision for 'your ideas' is that of individual and community empowerment and that by approving the proposal, young people will identify positive activities and deliver them for their community. This will, in turn, lead to safer communities. The applicant states that by allowing young people to participate in activities through 'your ideas' this will allow them to have greater aspirations, becoming stakeholders in their community, and reducing the likelihood of them becoming involved in anti-social activity.

The applicant also states that by increasing occupancy at the Matchborough Centre and allowing a vacant unit to be filled will help to reduce crime and at the same time increase footfall for neighbouring tenants.

Nothing in the application would suggest to your officers that approval of this application would lead to an increase in criminal activity within this District Centre.

Conclusion

From the information submitted, your Officers are satisfied that this application, which would bring a vacant unit back into re-use, would not undermine the retail and community function of the District Centre under the terms of Policy E(TCR).9. However, your Officers are minded to recommend that only a temporary permission be granted in this case in order that the merits of the proposal are re-assessed after a three year period. This is recommended due to the relatively large size of the Unit and the importance of ensuring that the retail and community function of the Matchborough District Centre is not undermined.

Recommendation

That having regard to the development plan and to all other material considerations, planning permission be GRANTED subject to conditions as summarised below:

1. Temporary and personal consent – 3 years
2. Hours of opening: 0730 to 2200 hrs Mon to Sat and 1000 to 1600 hrs Sundays / Public Holidays