

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

27th September 2023

Planning Application 23/00818/FUL

Subdivision of the former Debenhams Unit 2 (19 for the postal address) Level 01 & 02 to form a Police Station (Sui Generis) use. The unit is currently vacant, falling within Class E (Shops) formerly use Class A1. No external changes to the building.

Unit 19 Walford Walk, Redditch, B97 4HJ

**Applicant: Mr Tom Johnson
Ward: Abbey Ward**

(see additional papers for site plan)

The case officer of this application is Steven Edden, Principal Planning Officer (DM), who can be contacted on Tel: 01527 548474 Email: steve.edden@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk for more information.

Site Description

The site is the former Debenhams retail unit within the Kingfisher Shopping Centre (KSC). Debenhams ceased trading in May 2021 and the Unit has remained vacant since.

The existing unit has a floorspace of 3813.7 sqm over level 1 and 675.3sqm over level 2.

Proposal Description

The application seeks planning permission to change (part) for this unit from Class E (formerly use Class A1) to a Police Station. In Planning terms, a Police Station use is referred to a 'Sui-Generis' use, that is, a 'unique' / one-of-a-kind use which does not fall within any of the other Use Class Categories set out within the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended). Planning permission is always required to change from or to a Sui-Generis Use.

Under the proposals, approximately two thirds of the first-floor level 1 (2713.7 sqm) would be retained for retail use with the eastern third (1091.6 sqm) to be converted to the proposed Police Station use.

All of the second-floor level 2 space (675.3 sqm) would be converted and would form part of the proposed Police Station. This space was formerly used by Debenhams staff as offices, which also contains a kitchen and staff toilets would be used by the Police primarily for staff office / meeting room space.

A total of 1766.9 sq. metres would be changed over both floors.

The applicant states that the Police Station would be active 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week and that access would be via mall level or ramped access to the existing stairs and lifts within the building.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

27th September 2023

Relevant Policies:

Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4

Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Policy 19: Sustainable Travel and Access

Policy 20: Transport requirements for new development

Policy 30: Town Centre and Retail Hierarchy

Policy 32: Protection of the Retail Core

Policy 33: Use of Upper Floors

Others

NPPF National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Relevant Planning History

None

Consultations

Worcestershire County Highway Authority

No highways objections raised subject to conditions regarding the submission of a Construction Environmental Management Plan and an Employment Travel Plan.

Comments summarised as follows:

The intended use of part of the (former) Debenhams building is for a temporary period only. There is an existing Police Station at Grove Street, some 250m from the application site. It is understood the Grove Street building has to be vacated by the end of October 2023 and a temporary alternative location is required. A new combined Blue Light Hub at the A441/Middlehouse Lane site will become the new permanent location for the Police Station. This facility is currently under construction but will not be available for occupation in the short-term. Use of part of the existing Debenhams building is seen as a suitable temporary solution.

Current information advises the target completion for the new combined hub is October 2024. Relocation and occupation of the new site will follow after that, dependent on lease obligations. Based on this current programme, it is envisaged the temporary Police Station facility, within part of the Debenhams building, is not likely to be much more than one year.

The existing vehicular and pedestrian access is well established. Vehicles would enter and exit via the road network associated with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, as operational and staff vehicles will make use of multi-storey Car Park 2. Pedestrian access is via the Shopping Centre pedestrian access routes. The site is also accessible by cycling.

The site is well served by nearby bus stops, with a number of bus services available.

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

27th September 2023

In addition, Redditch Railway Station is within a 450m walking distance of the site. Hence, staff will be able to access the site by sustainable modes of transport if they choose to do so.

Operational (Blue Light) Police vehicles would not be using the public section of Car Park 2 at the Kingfisher Centre. All non-blue light traffic and staff will utilise the existing public accesses within the shopping centre in terms of parking and access into the building. No spaces within the public parking areas are to be set aside for exclusive use and will not, therefore, result in increased capacity. At any one time, a maximum of 60 staff could potentially be parking at the centre. Whilst the Shopping Centre is offering a discounted rate for staff parking, due to the personal cost involved it is anticipated that the majority of staff will make use of their existing parking provision elsewhere in Redditch as they do at present.

Not all of the staff currently located in the existing station at Grove Street are relocating to the Kingfisher Centre. The Major Investigation Unit, comprising of 27 operational staff, are not relocating to the Kingfisher site but are, instead, relocating to an alternative WMP location. This, in itself, would result in fewer traffic movements at the Kingfisher site than there are currently at the existing site. Furthermore, should there be a major investigation in Redditch, additional support staff would now support from Headquarters rather than from the existing station, further reducing the traffic impact.

There will be no public counter at the temporary facility, resulting in four fewer staff than at the current Grove Street location.

It is understood that the four shopping centre car parks provide capacity of 2,250 spaces. The use of 50-75 spaces by the temporary Police Station facility represents 2.2-3.3% of the overall capacity, which is a minor amount and unlikely to have any significant detrimental impact on public use of the car parks during most of the year. Given the minimal impact on parking and the temporary nature of the site use, the Highway Authority is of the opinion that car parking availability will not be an issue.

It is considered that there are no good reasons to justify a recommendation of refusal, in relation to the capacity or effective operation of the local highway network and consider that there is unlikely to be any significant impact on highway safety.

Whilst the Highway Authority have concluded that there would not be a severe impact and no adverse highway consequences in terms of Paragraph 111 of the National Planning Policy Framework, conditions are recommended pertaining to a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and a Travel Plan. In terms of the CEMP, whilst no external changes to the existing building are proposed, some internal changes will be required for the temporary facility. However, no details have been provided at this time. The proposed hours of operation, routing, access proposals and site details, associated with conversion of the building will have some impact on the local highway network. Hence, without further information being provided, it is recommended a Construction Environmental Management Plan be a condition of any planning consent.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

27th September 2023

Public Consultation Response

One representation received neither objecting nor supporting the application but making the following comments which are summarised below:

*The submitted planning documents aren't very detailed and do not show where public kiosks will be located

*No signage details have been submitted

Background

The Police currently operate from the Grove Street site and are due to vacate the building by the end of October 2023. Members will be aware that planning permission has been granted for a combined Blue Light Hub which is located at the corner of Middlehouse Lane and the A441, adjacent to the existing Fire Station. Works are currently underway in constructing this facility although this site will not be ready for occupation until approximately October 2024. The Police are seeking accommodation within the Kingfisher Centre, for a temporary period until the combined Blue Light Hub site is completed.

Assessment of Proposal

Principle of change of use

The site is located within a Retail Core area, as identified in the Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 (BORLP4) Policies Map. Therefore, Policy 32: Protection of the Retail Core is of particular relevance.

The purpose of Policy 32 is to ensure the vitality of the Town Centre. Other uses complement the retail offer and enhance the vitality; however, there is a need to ensure that these uses do not stifle thriving shopping areas.

Policy 32 (Protection of the Retail Core) comments that planning permission for change of use from retail uses to alternative uses will only be acceptable if the proposed use does not result in a continuous frontage of more than two non-retail units. In this case, the former Debenhams unit is attached on its northern side to PoundStretcher and to its Southern side by Clintons Cards (two further retail units). Further, it is important to note that the ground floor area of the unit would not be lost to change of use and would retain its retail status, albeit that space is currently vacant.

For the avoidance of doubt, the ground floor area of the (former) Debenhams (which will not be affected by the proposals) contained (amongst others) goods including menswear and perfumes / cosmetics including a small café. The first-floor area which would be (part) changed to the Police Station use includes that which was previously used to retail homewear amongst other goods when Debenhams was in operation.

All of the second-floor level 2 space which was formerly used by Debenhams staff as offices would be converted and would form part of the proposed Police Station.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

27th September 2023

Your officers have concluded that the principle of the proposed change of use of the first and second floors of this former retail space would be acceptable since the proposal would not conflict with Policy 32 of the BORLP4. Your officers have also had regard to Policy 33 (Use of Upper Floors) which comments that proposals which bring into use the vacant upper floors of buildings within the Town Centre will be encouraged providing that the existing use of the ground floor is safeguarded. Within the reasoned justification for this Policy, 33.3 comments that the under use of upper floors can lead to deterioration of the fabric of the building which can remain undetected until the floors become unusable. Furthermore, it comments that vacant upper floors also represent a waste of resources which could have potential for other uses.

Other matters

No highway safety impacts have been identified and members will note that WCC as the Highway Authority are raising no objection subject to the inclusion of a Construction Management Plan condition and a condition to cover a Travel Plan. No proposals have at this stage been advanced in terms of signage. Any application for signage would be considered separately under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007. A public counter within the Police Station is not proposed although a digital, touch-screen public kiosk would be located adjacent to the access area in order to enable customers to make contact with the Police. The location for the digital kiosk is shown within the presentation pack document.

Conclusion

In conclusion, your officers have found no technical or material considerations which indicate that the development should not be determined in accordance with the development plan and on this basis, it is recommended that planning permission should be granted subject to the conditions set out below.

RECOMMENDATION:

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

Conditions:

- 1) The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of the grant of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans and drawings:

Drg 050_00 Location Plan

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

27th September 2023

Drg 050_01 Site Block Plan
Drg 050_20 Proposed Level 01
Drg 050_21 Proposed Level 02

Reason: To provide certainty to the extent of the development hereby approved in the interests of proper planning.

- 3) This permission grants permission for use as a Police Station only and for no other use

Reason: to define to the consent

- 4) The Development hereby approved shall not commence until a Construction Environmental Management Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall include but not be limited to the following:-

- Measures to ensure that vehicles leaving the site do not deposit mud or other detritus on the public highway;
- Details of site operative parking areas, material storage areas and the location of site operatives' facilities (offices, toilets etc);
- The hours that delivery vehicles will be permitted to arrive and depart, and arrangements for unloading and manoeuvring.
- Details of any temporary construction accesses and their reinstatement.
- A highway condition survey, timescale for re-inspections, and details of any reinstatement.

The measures set out in the approved Plan shall be carried out and complied with in full during the construction of the development hereby approved. Site operatives' parking, material storage and the positioning of operatives' facilities shall only take place on the site in locations approved by in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure the provision of adequate on-site facilities and in the interests of highway safety

- 5) The Development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until the applicant has submitted a Travel Plan using Modeshift STARS Business. The Travel Plan must meet green level accreditation before occupation and bronze level accreditation within 12 months of occupation.

Reason: To reduce vehicle movements and promote sustainable access

Procedural matters

This application is reported to Planning Committee for determination because the application is for major development (change of use involving more than more 1000 sq. metres of commercial floorspace), with the recommendation being one of approval. As such the application falls outside the scheme of delegation to Officers.