

Committee Report

Item No: 3

Reference: DC/19/00259
Case Officer: Mark Russell

Ward: Needham Market

Ward Member: Cllr Wendy Marchant, Cllr Mike Norris

RECOMMENDATION – GRANT ADVERTISEMENT CONSENT WITH CONDITIONS

Description of Development

Application for Advertisement Consent - Erection of solid hoarding to the South and Western elevations of the caretaker's cottage. A-Frame (triangular) sign board on the corner of Barretts Lane/ Hurstlea Road and panel facing onto High Street.

Location

Former Mid Suffolk District Council Offices & Associated Land, 131 High Street, Needham Market

Parish: Needham Market

Expiry Date: 28/02/19

Application Type: Advertisement application

Development Type:

Applicant: Mid Suffolk District Council

Agent: Hamson Barron Smith

PART ONE – REASON FOR REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE

The application is referred to committee for the following reasons:

- It is the Council's own application.

Details of Previous Committee/Resolutions and Member Site Visit

None.

PART TWO – POLICIES AND CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Summary of Policies

Relevant policies in the Core Strategy Focused Review 2012 and Mid-Suffolk Local Plan 1998:

HB01 - Protection of historic buildings

HB08 - Safeguarding the character of conservation areas

Consultations and Representations

During the course of the application consultation and representations from third parties have been received. These are summarised below.

A: SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS

Town Council

Needham Market Town Council objects to the planning application and is astonished a Planning Authority (aided it appears by a Planning Consultant) could propose the siting of large advertising boards in locations that will clearly distract vehicle drivers, in total contradiction of advice included in the 'Adverts and signs' advisory information on the Planning Portal that advertisements must:

'not obscure, or hinder the interpretation of, official road, rail, waterway or aircraft signs, or otherwise make hazardous the use of these types of transport;'

The advertising board proposed for the High Street is within a few metres of a well-used pedestrian crossing which is subject to a busy road junction within close proximity and, is a known risk to pedestrian safety. That proposed board is also totally inappropriate in scale and design for locating in a prominent position in the town's Conservation Area. The concern regarding the distraction of vehicle drivers applies equally to the placing of the large advertising board proposed for location close to the junction of Hurstlea Road with Barretts Lane.

Heritage

This application is for the erection of signage in the form of hoarding and sign boards located to the front and rear of the former Council Offices, Needham Market. The issues of heritage concern relate to the potential impact of the proposals on the setting of the 'host' Grade II listed building, 131 High Street, and nearby listed buildings including 133 & 135 High Street and 110 & 112 High Street, as well as the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The proposed sign board standing to the west, on the corner of Barrett's Lane and Hurstlea Road, and the sign board to the east, fronting the High Street, would appear gaudy and excessively large. The sign to the east seems particularly incongruous positioned on the High Street between two Grade II listed buildings and out of character with the broadly historic streetscape. The hoarding to the west on Hurstlea Road would also be overly dominant. Whilst in some aspects, it is partially sympathetic to its surroundings by replicating the profile of the brick wall it flanks, its scale is also excessive and would appear obtrusive in an area which contains buildings at a low level; its prominence would therefore conflict.

It is recommended that in all instances the scale is reduced to minimise the visual impact of the signage in this sensitive location. The hoarding could be reduced in height as well as length, wrapping around and rising above the currently unassuming – albeit modern – low level, brick boundary wall. The sign boards should be considerably reduced and perhaps a modest landscape arrangement would provide a more sympathetic approach to reflect the character of the area.

As such, the Heritage Team considers the proposals in their current form would cause a low level of less than substantial harm to the various heritage assets. The application therefore does not accord with the requirements of s.66 and s.72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the principles of the NPPF and the policies of the Local Plan, as such, amendments are recommended.

OFFICER RESPONSE – These matters have been addressed and amendments have been received. This is discussed in the relevant section below.

SCC – Highway Authority

No objection.

B: REPRESENTATIONS

Two letters of objection have been received from neighbouring properties. These covered the following points:

- Unacceptable that Mid Suffolk District Council applied for advertisement consent prior to permission being granted for the residential development;
- Signage is over-large, especially the boards on the High Street and Hurstlea Road corner;
- High Street sign will block my right of way;
- High Street sign will block light to my house;
- Will produce a space, behind which people could hide and will encourage anti-social activities;
- Detracts from the setting of the Listed Building.

PART THREE – ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION

1.0 The Site and Surroundings

- 1.1 The application site incorporates the former Mid Suffolk HQ site, which houses the former offices, car park and gardens.
- 1.2 This is sensitively located, being within the Needham Market Conservation Area, fronting the town's main thoroughfare and containing the Grade II listed 131 High Street and its garden, as well as bordering further Grade II listed buildings at 129, 133 -135, 106-114 High Street and 2 Hawks Mill Street.
- 1.3 Deeper within this parcel are the newer Council buildings, some landscaped gardens and extensive car parking around to the west and south of the site.
- 1.4 The site, together with the western parcel of land across Hurstlea Road (with car parking, a treed area and ponds) was the subject of Planning application DC/18/05104 for 94 residential units and a retail store. Members resolved to grant Planning permission for this scheme on 27th February 2019.

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1. The proposal is for a suite of advertisements linked to the upcoming development of the site following the above resolution. These are as follows:
 - A hoarding 2.4 metres in height, extending for 31 metres around the old caretaker's bungalow near to the Barrett's Lane/Hurstlea Road corner. It is intended that this will have a light grey background and carry the maroon and white Mid-Suffolk District logo, visuals of the new development and the phrase "COMING SOON A Selection of Contemporary

Apartments and Houses in the Heart of Needham Market” and the contact details www.midsuffolk.gov.uk 0300 123 4000. NOTE – following comments from our Heritage Officer, this has now been reduced in height, see below.

- The second proposed item is close to the hoarding, on the grassed area in front. This is an “A”-frame signboard, facing up Barret’s Lane and along Hurstlea Road. This repeats the above logo and wording and will also include the partner logo (to be confirmed). Set on a darker grey/stone background, the sign is surrounded by a light-grey trim to match the hoarding. This is 3 metres high and set 600mm from the ground, thus reaching 3.6 metres in total. NOTE – following comments from our Heritage Officer this has now also been reduced in height, see below.
- The third element is a flat board sign on the High Street, whose contents are identical to the A-frame sign. The proposed position of this is at the entrance to the former access-way in to the old HQ building, just to the right of building and next to the listed 133 High Street which is a residential property. The dimensions of this are as per the above item. NOTE – following comments from our Heritage Officer and to protect neighbouring amenity, this has now been repositioned closer to 131 High Street. A reduction in height has also been requested.

2.2 For all of the signs, the proposed lettering does not exceed 400mm.

3.0 The Principle of Development

3.1 As an advertisement application, the two key considerations are: Public Safety and Visual amenity.

3.2 On the first of these, public safety (particularly the safety of pedestrians, drivers and other road users) requires careful consideration. To that end the Highway Authority’s views were sought and that body did not object. An argument along the lines of any potential highway danger would, therefore, be difficult to defend.

3.3 Still under the heading of safety, the occupier of a neighbouring property has raised concerns about anti-social behaviour arising due to the presence of the High Street sign. Whilst this concern is understood, your Officer does not feel that this is sufficient reason to turn the application away.

3.4 The issue of visual amenity requires serious consideration. The hoarding is held to be a fairly modest affair which, whilst if it were in place for the long-term would be unacceptable, appears as a transient feature and speaks of a development which is underway and will be completed in a short space of time. The logos and visuals are also acceptable and there is no reason for turning away that part of the proposal. Our heritage officer has requested a drop in height and it is felt that two metres, as opposed to 2.4 metres, is a more acceptable scale. A reduction in length has also been requested. The applicant has reduced the height, although the length will be retained at 31 metres.

3.5 The proposed boarding, does raise more concerns. At 3 metres x 2 metres (and standing 600mm off of the ground) the A-frame advertisement does present itself as a very large offering and is too visually dominant in the streetscape. Your Officers have asked for this to be reduced to 1500mm, with more of a horizontal emphasis and for some modest landscaping around it to enhance the setting. The applicant has agreed to this and made amendments.

3.6 The High Street sign, whilst not as large, could be similarly described as being over-scaled. Again, the applicant has been asked to scale this down. This amendment is awaited at the time of writing (11/03/19). The sign also requires repositioning and the applicant has agreed to this. The matter is explored in the sections below.

4.0 Heritage Issues

- 4.1 Policy HB1 of the Local Plan seeks to protect the character and appearance of buildings of architectural or historic interest, particularly protecting the settings of Listed Buildings. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Listed Building or its setting.
- 4.2 Paragraph 192 of the NPPF states “In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of: a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and.....b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.”
- 4.3 Paragraph 196 states: “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.”
- 4.4 The site at hand has heritage issues which require close attention. It is within the Needham Market Conservation Area and contains the Grade II listed former HQ building at 131 High Street. Also within the conservation area and forming a boundary with the site are the Grade II listed buildings of 143, 137, 133 and 129 High Street. Amongst these is also the undesignated heritage asset the Old Methodist Church which dates from the 1840s.
- 4.5 The hoarding to the rear would surround a 1960s bungalow which is of its time and utilitarian in nature. The setting of this is not held to raise any concerns. However, the gardens to the rear of the old HQ building would, temporarily, have their setting undermined. That said, this setting is currently harmed by the jumble of accretive buildings which tell the story of Mid Suffolk District Council’s tenure from 1974 – 2017. Given the transient nature of the signage, it is not held to cause any harm such that refusal could be recommended. It has now been reduced in height, if not length, and this is held to be acceptable.
- 4.6 The A-frame sign, however, as first submitted, was held to undermine the greater setting of the listed building and its grounds, failing to properly respect the scale of surrounding development, hence the request for smaller signage and landscaping, which has now been secured. This is now held to be acceptable.
- 4.7 The harm to the above-identified heritage assets is, however, greater from the proposed board on the High Street.
- 4.8 Regarding any harm, this is less than substantial and Paragraph 196 of the NPPF (July 2018) instructs us: *“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.”*
- 4.9 Unlike the full and Listed Building applications for the residential development (which secured 94 residential units), the public benefit of a sign-board in this location would appear to be more difficult to argue, albeit that it does form part of the narrative of the redevelopment.
- 4.10 Given that the signage would only be temporary, any harm would be transient, although it could potentially endure for several years. However, improvement was still required, so the applicant was advised to reduce the size of the sign, to relocate it nearer to the HQ building and to improve its structural appearance. The relocation has been secured. This does take it closer to the heritage asset 131 High Street, but it is set back slightly from the public realm, interferes less with the

neighbouring listed building (133 High Street) and is less visually intrusive in the conservation area. The issue of the height still requires resolution and the applicant has advised that this will be undertaken, with precise details to be agreed, This matter can be dealt with in the resolution.

5.0 Impact on Residential Amenity

- 5.1 Policy H16 of the Local Plan seeks to protect the existing amenity of residential areas.
- 5.2 Whilst residential amenity does not often arise in relation to advertisement applications, a specific concern has been raised by the occupiers of 133 High Street, in terms of lost light and view.
- 5.3 No adopted guidance exists to advise your Officers. However, the standard Building Research Establishment (BRE) guidelines are seen as an industry standard. No Daylight and Sunlight assessment has accompanied the application, but on assessing this matter, your Officer feels that the window in question (south-southeast facing) already suffers from a fair amount of shadow. The proposal, however, would increase this incidence and may be seen as un-neighbourly. With the sign's reduction in height and its movement southwards, the proposal is now seen as acceptable.

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

6.0 Planning Balance and Conclusion

- 6.1 The proposal is for a temporary suite of advertisements. The proposed hoarding is held to be acceptable at its reduced height and length. The proposed boards, as amended, are also acceptable.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That authority be delegated to the Acting Chief Planning Officer to secure a reduced height to the sign-board on the High Street;
- 2) That advertisement Consent be approved, subject to conditions as summarised below:
 - Standard advertisement conditions
 - Advertisements to comply with submitted/amended drawings
 - No illuminations

Highway informatives