

ALTERATIONS TO SHOP FRONT

THE FORMER POST OFFICE, 72 HIGH STREET, HODDESDON EN11 8ET

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Post Office in the High Street relocated in 2018, leaving the retail premises at 72 High Street vacant.
- 1.2 It comprises the shop and ancillary stores and offices on the ground floor. A Lawful Development Certificate for conversion of first floor ancillary offices and stores to 2 flats has recently been granted. Access to the shop is by a side pedestrian door and there is a small outside area to the rear via gates to the other side.
- 1.3 It is an attractive building, locally listed, situated in the conservation area. The properties to either side and opposite the application site are listed buildings.



The Old Post Office, 72 High Street, Hoddesdon

2.0 EXISTING SHOP FRONT

- 2.1 The building is locally listed and the assessment of its architectural and historic interest, taken from the Hoddesdon Conservation Area Appraisal, is attached (appendix 1). The Appraisal describes the '*exuberant off-centre projecting bay and*

gable’ and notes the broad rendered gable, coved cornice and broad oriel first floor window with unique glazing bar configuration.

- 2.2 Regarding the ground floor part of the projecting bay, which is relevant to this application, it is noted: *‘The ground floor portion of the projecting bay is topped by a deep sandstone lintel/coping which links to stone mullions and brick piers in a rather idiosyncratic manner.’*¹
- 2.3 Access is currently via the door to the side, which goes into a lobby from where customers turn right, through another door into the shop.

3.0 NEED FOR PROPOSED ALTERATION

- 3.1 The shop has been vacant since the Post Office relocated in 2018. Whilst its location, size and appearance are attractive to retailers, it has proved impossible to attract potential occupiers for retail use owing to the lack of entry directly into the shop. (Letter from estate agents – appendix 2).
- 3.2 The government recognises the need to respond to challenges resulting from changes in shopping habits and use of the high street:

Structural changes on high streets

High streets have been affected by major changes in the past decades, and the speed of this change is increasing. Online shopping in particular has become significantly more popular than it was 10 years ago. Between 2007 and 2018 online sales increased 6-fold while growth of in-store sales has lagged behind. In 2000 online retailing accounted for less than 1% of retail sales while in August 2018 almost a fifth of all retail sales took place online (Office for National Statistics).

The rise in online retailing has reduced barriers to entry in the retail market. Online retailers are able to offer competitive prices, more choice and greater convenience than many high street competitors. In turn, consumers are changing what they want from their local high street: there is an increased importance on the overall ‘experience’ of high street shopping. People want local high streets to provide convenience, a sense of community and to add value through services not offered online. ([Institute of Place Management](#))

As a result, high streets are having to evolve and adapt. Evidence shows that high streets with a wide choice alongside well designed and planned residential and office space are more resilient to these changes and are adapting more successfully. In contrast, high streets that rely heavily on traditional retail without sufficient office space and housing surrounding the high street have found it harder to adapt to these changes and tend to be the ones that are struggling ([Public Health England](#), [British Property Foundation](#)).

From gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund/

¹ Hoddesdon Conservation Area Appraisal 2011

3.3 According to the Retail Gazette, nationally, on high streets, the vacancy rate increased from 12.1% to 12.3% during the first quarter of 2020, highlighting the challenges faced by the sector even before the Covid-19 lockdown. It reports *'a consistent increase in the number of stores lying empty overall, which indicates that the UK now has more retail space than is necessary to meet our changing consumer habits'* and predicts that *'the vacancy rate will increase on a much steeper trajectory than originally anticipated this year'*².

3.4 Despite the difficult climate for retail, Hoddesdon town centre remains successful, and the estate agents are confident that a suitable retail tenant could be found if the customer entry arrangement could be addressed.

4.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Given the significance of the building, proposed alterations are kept to a minimum. It is proposed to replace the existing central window in the bay with a glazed door to enable direct customer access, and replace the windows to either side to enable views of goods for sale from the street.



Existing shop front

² Retailgazette.co.uk

- 4.2 The stone lintel, stone mullions, brick piers and brick stall risers would all be retained. New frames would fit within the existing stone and brick structure and would be white coloured aluminium or white painted timber, to be agreed.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY

- 5.1 Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require that special regard be paid to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their settings, and of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area, respectively.
- 5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development³. It seeks to ensure the vitality of town centres⁴, achieve high quality design by ensuring that developments function well, and are sympathetic to local character and history, while not preventing appropriate change⁵, and conserve and enhance the historic environment, including the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness⁶.
- 5.3 Local policies are provided in the Local Plan adopted June 2020. HOD1 supports proposals which protect and enhance historic buildings in the town centre. DSC1 provides General Design Principles and requires a high standard of design, to enhance local character and distinctiveness. DSC2 requires alterations to buildings to respect the character and design of that building, and DSC3, dealing with the public realm, requires development to address specified issues including the need to maximise legibility.
- 5.4 DSC8 specifically covers shop fronts. It requires that historic shop fronts be retained wherever possible and altered shop fronts must respect the scale, proportions, character and materials of the building and adjoining buildings. Shop fronts should sit within the framework of the existing building structure.
- 5.5 RTC1 defines the retail hierarchy. The site is within the defined town centre. RTC2 requires development in town centres to enhance the historic character of the centre and have regard to the town centre strategy. HE1 provides the General Strategy for the Historic Environment and HE2 requires that development affecting historic assets should conserve or enhance the historic environment.

³ NPPF paragraph 11

⁴ Ibid section 7

⁵ Ibid paragraph 127

⁶ Ibid paragraph 185

5.6 Hoddesdon Town Centre Strategy 2010 sets out the vision and objectives for the town. It seeks to ensure that the town centre continues to be a popular destination for shoppers, visitors, traders and other businesses.

6.0 PLANNING ISSUES

6.1 The determining issues are:

- impact on the character and appearance of the locally listed building, character and appearance of the conservation area and setting of neighbouring listed buildings, and
- contribution of the proposal to the vitality and viability of the shop itself and the shopping area generally.

6.2 The proposed alterations respect the proportions of the existing building, retaining all structural elements and replacing frames and glazing within the existing stone and brick structure. The profile of the existing shop front would remain, with the door and windows set back from the projecting brick stall risers with retention of mullions, lintel and piers.

6.3 Whilst the proposal represents a change to the existing, with central window to be replaced with a door, and new windows inserted in the existing openings to either side, with respect to paragraph 127 of the NPPF, it would improve the functionality of the building and remain sympathetic to local character and history, thereby representing appropriate change.

6.4 The proposal respects the scale, proportions, character and materials of the building and adjoining buildings, and sits within the framework of the existing building structure, in compliance with DSC8. It represents a high standard of design, having regard to the historic character of the building, adjoining buildings and area, in accordance with HOD1, DSC1, DSC2, HE1 and HE2.

6.5 The proposal preserves the setting of nearby listed buildings and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

6.6 The proposal is necessitated by needs of potential retailers. It is national and local policy to promote the vitality and viability of town centres, retaining '*a high proportion of retail uses*'⁷. To retain the retail use of the ground floor of the building, it has proved essential to make the shop front more attractive to customers by having a clear central access and view of goods for sale from the street.

⁷ Broxbourne Local Plan paragraph 23.3

6.7 Improving legibility and functionality of the shop, whilst retaining its historic character, would enable retail use to be retained. It would thereby contribute to the retail function of the town centre and towards its vitality and viability.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The proposal preserves the character and appearance of the locally listed building, the conservation area and the setting of nearby listed buildings. It enables retention of the retail use, thereby contributing to the vitality and viability of the town centre.

7.2 It complies with national and local planning policies and it is therefore requested that planning permission be granted.

Mrs G Davidson BA(Hons) MRTPI

June 2020

POST OFFICE*. HIGH STREET, EAST SIDE; BUILT 1893

Architectural Significance

A good example of a late Victorian public/commercial building in Domestic Revival style. This tall, two storey red brick building, with a broad front and tiled roof ridge parallel to the street, has an exuberant off-centre projecting bay and gable which contrasts with the relatively modest remainder of the façade. The broad gable is rendered, with a low relief royal crest at its base. It is supported by a coved cornice recalling 17th century precedents.

The broad oriel window on the first floor is dominated by three large sash windows with a unique glazing bar configuration, repeated in the paired sashes of the main elevation. The slightly shorter upper sash is a conventional 6 pane type, but the lower one changes from two to one vertical glazing bar within the same sash. The ground floor portion of the projecting bay is topped by a deep sandstone lintel/coping which links to stone mullions and brick piers in a rather idiosyncratic manner.

Otherwise the ground floor windows, door and cartway are unremarkable. All the openings in the main façade are formed in well constructed segmental arches with ornamental terracotta keystones. A deep terracotta string course with heavy mouldings ties together the composition of this very interesting if not quite scholarly elevation.

Historic Importance

"The building was designed by John Allen Tregelles, author of the 1908 History of Hoddesdon and built by the Hoddesdon firm of J.A. Hunt."
(David Dent)

Contribution to the Local Built Environment

The building is a landmark within the streetscape of the High Street, both in its appearance and in its function.



The Post Office, built 1893 to an individualistic design, providing an attractive accent in the High Street.



Tuesday, 16 June 2020

Dear Messrs. Trevor and Alex Barbrook,

RE: Former Post Office Building, High Street, Hoddesdon

Hope you're both safe and well in this current climate.

As promised, I am writing to you with an brief update of activity and feedback from those prospectors that have viewed the premises and those who have enquired only so far.

We have received a fair amount of enquiries and have conducted five viewings since our marketing commenced. Whilst every viewer thought the property was suitable in size, stature and of course location, four out of the five viewers would only consider the property further only with a point of entry on the front elevation and preferably centrally which makes complete sense. I think if we could somehow offer this, then I believe we could have a successful tenant already. By the way, the fifth viewer needed more space to the side so deemed it unsuitable very quickly.

We shall continue with the marketing but please do what you can regarding my access comment above.

Best Regards,

Enzo Giardina

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