



## Committee Report

**Planning committee** - 12 March 2024

**Application no** DC/23/1407/LBC

**Location**

Old Lowestoft Post Office  
London Road North  
Lowestoft  
Suffolk  
NR32 1AA

**Expiry date** 21 June 2023

**Application type** Listed Building Consent

**Applicant** East Suffolk Council

**Parish** Lowestoft

**Proposal** Listed Building works as part of proposals for adaptive reuse of grade II listed post office (and auxiliary buildings) for multifunctional art based centre.

**Case Officer** Katherine Rawlins  
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### 1. Summary

- 1.1 The application seeks listed building consent for works to the Grade II Listed Lowestoft Post Office. The application is made by East Suffolk Council, on council-owned land, therefore the application has been brought direct to Planning Committee (North) for determination.
- 1.2 The proposal will enable an important Grade II Listed Building to be brought back into a viable use within the High Street and South Lowestoft Conservation Area. In conjunction with the tandem planning application (DC/23/0792/FUL), the proposal will deliver on a number of key regeneration and town centre enhancement objectives.
- 1.3 Officers consider that the detailed works to the Listed Building will facilitate bringing it back into a viable use, which is an important conservation and public benefit of the works. Harm to the significance of the Listed Building would be limited and outweighed by the benefits

arising. Officers therefore positively support the proposals and recommend that listed building consent be granted.

## **2. Site Description**

2.1 The application site is located to the west side of London Road North, and to the south side of Surrey Street, within the South Lowestoft Conservation Area. The Old Post Office is a Grade II Listed Building dating from the 19th Century - three storeys in height and constructed of buff brick with stone facing, fronting onto London Road North. It has been vacant for approximately seven years. There is a side access to the site, from Surrey Street. London Road North is a pedestrianised high street. At the point of site access from Surrey Street, this transitions from a highway to pedestrianised street where it then joins London Road North.

2.2 To the rear of the main (front) Post Office building are a number of ancillary structures and buildings comprising: The Sorting Office and the Three-Storey Building (which are both constructed of gault white brick); a glass roofed rear lean-to extension; a covered way attached to the three-storey element; and the concrete framed/corrugated cement roofed structure to the rear.

2.3 The site has the following planning history:

- o DC/81/1000/FUL - renewal of canopy to loading bay - permitted.
- o DC/90/0647/FUL - disabled persons ramp access - permitted.
- o DC/09/0328/LBC - replace 2no. existing projecting illuminated lozenge with 1no. new projecting sign. Carry out various internal decoration works including replacement flooring, posters and queuing system - permitted.
- o DC/12/0027/FUL - replace defective sorting hall roof with new felt covering and general repairs and improvements - permitted.
- o DC/14/0799/FUL & DC/14/0800/LBC - removal of external stamp vending machine and formation of two internal rooms - permitted.
- o DC/20/0653/FUL - Demolition of existing shed buildings and 3/4 storey brick building to rear of Post Office, including adjoining structures to rear of Post Office. Repair & adaptation to the ground floor of the Post Office building including a new extension to the west and re-fenestration at ground floor level. Erection of flats and houses comprising 9 dwellings, with associated landscaping works -permitted.
- o DC/20/1783/LBC - Listed Building Consent - Repair & adaptation to the ground floor of the Post Office building including a new extension to the west, new roof to ground floor extension and re-fenestration at ground floor level - permitted.
- o DC/21/4219/FUL - Conservation repairs to the former post office, New ground floor fenestration & entrance doors. Removal of external ramp, installation of new ramp to front entrance. Repairs & replacement, to external building fabric. Permitted.
- o DC/21/4220/LBC - Listed Building Consent - Repair & refurbishment of timber sash windows, stone repair & infill at ground floor, new windows & doors at ground floor, new rainwater goods to replace existing, replacement of roof tiles, flat roof covering in lead, stone cleaning on front facade. Minor internal strip out to facilitate repairs & refurbishment and repair & replacement of roof access lantern. Permitted.

2.4 The site is located within the Lowestoft town settlement boundary and falls within Environment Agency flood zone 2.

2.5 Although not a formal planning designation, the site falls within the South Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) which is a heritage-led regeneration project led by Historic England in partnership with East Suffolk District Council.

### **3. Proposal**

3.1 The proposal seeks to bring the Post Office and associated ancillary buildings back into a mixed commercial, retail and leisure use, with gallery, ancillary artists' studios, workshops, and café, including new build element towards the rear of the site. The original scheme has been subject to considerable revision, with final amended plans submitted for re-consultation on 9 January 2024.

3.2 The arts space would be run by Messums, who are recognised for revitalising old buildings and embedding them within communities through artistic enterprise, and sculptor Laurence Edwards who began his art education in Lowestoft and subsequently developed an international reputation for large scale public works from his base in East Suffolk. The hub, known as Messums East, would provide a working studio for Laurence Edwards, in addition to spaces for a revolving residency of international, national, and regional artists, as well as exhibition spaces and screening room, and a café/restaurant. Laurence would also be working to create a large-scale bronze landmark sculpture for Lowestoft, casting it at his foundry in East Suffolk.

3.3 The proposed development therefore relates to both the Post Office building and its associated land to the rear, including the adaptation and re-use of the Gault building, into a multi-functional arts-based centre with new retail unit, artists' studios, including artists accommodation within the Gault building, and new build elements to the rear of the site, to include the provision of a new café with covered seating area. In total 7 artists' studios are proposed across the site. In terms of work studios there are up to 6 studios in the main listed building element. One of which may be used as a teaching space. Then there is a resident artist wax studio and workshop at ground level in the new build element opposite the café. Within the main post office building, there is a local artists gallery, teaching space and private exhibition space, in addition to the main gallery within the former post office sorting office, and four studios as short-term living accommodation for artists within the Gault building. A tandem application for full planning permission is submitted as part of proposals for adaptive reuse of grade II listed post office (and auxiliary buildings) for multifunctional art based centre (DC/23/0792/FUL).

3.4 Works to the main Post Office building:

Adaptation of the former post office to ground floor retail unit with entrance to London Road North and local artist display area; first and second floor artists work studios with ancillary office space, communal meeting space, incorporating private gallery, local artist gallery, classroom space and teaching galley; new external stair core and lift access at ground-third floor level (cargo and wheelchair accessible lift);

3.5 Works to the sorting office and Gault building:

Adaptation and re-use of the former Post Office sorting office hall to art gallery, with gallery entrance; adaptation of Gault building to create four artists accommodation units (studios), incorporating 2 DDA compliant studios at first floor level, accessed via existing stairwell with new internal platform lift; and ancillary staff areas at third floor level.

### 3.6 Development to the rear:

Demolition of all unlisted adjoining structures and buildings to the rear of the Post Office and the Gault building, and the construction of ancillary café space, incorporating covered outdoor seating area, plant rooms, storage buildings, work, and wax studio, with cycle storage and ancillary plant roof, and new service yard. Secure cycle storage would be provided within the new build element for the proposed artists' studios and refuse/recycling storage, covered outdoor seating associated with the ancillary café and plant room.

## 4. Consultations/comments

### Response to Original Scheme and First Round of Consultation

4.1 No third-party representations.

### Response to Second Round of Consultation

4.2 1 third party representation from CBRE Planning and Development on behalf of Lloyds Bank plc:

- Request a structural survey, demolition method statement and construction method statement be prepared and submitted to East Suffolk Council ahead of determination to address concerns relating to the implementation of the proposals. If this not possible, request the conditions relating to these matters are attached as planning conditions and Lloyds Bank is notified of the discharge of conditions.

### Response to Third Round of Consultation

No further third party representations.

## 5. Consultees

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Lowestoft Town Council	11 May 2023	7 June 2023
Summary of comments: It was agreed to recommend approval of the application.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Historic England	11 May 2023	31 May 2023
Summary of comments: Historic England has no objection to the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the application meets the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 7, 8, 199, 200 and 202. In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Design And Conservation	11 May 2023	9 June 2023

Summary of comments:

Further information is required before the proposals can be fully considered and the relevant NPPF tests applied.

Summary of additional information required:

o Details relating to fire should include: compartmentalisation, fire suppression, and surface and structure upgrades.

o Details relating to thermal upgrading should include: location, depth and type of any new insulation.

o Details relating to M&E should include: what provision is necessary in each space, how much and what type of plant is necessary and where it would be located and indicative service run locations.

o Advice should be sought on whether the scheme as proposed conforms with all the relevant building regulations

o Lean to covered storage - section drawing and materials details

o The current condition of the rooflight should be surveyed at this stage to allow us to understand whether works would be repairs, like for like replacement or replacement with a different design.

o Studio 6 - either retained as two smaller spaces or a internal partition that can be opened.

o Information on any suspended ceilings proposed

o Confirmation is required that all the plant associated with the lift can be accommodated within the structure shown

o Any changes to the design of the lift/stair tower to ensure that it is structurally sound

o Confirm internal finish in Sorting Office

o Indicative signage details for café.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Private Sector Housing	11 May 2023	7 August 2023

Summary of comments:

No comments.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
The Council For British Archaeology	N/A	1 June 2023

Summary of comments:

The CBA is delighted to offer support to the application. The use of the Post Office as a publicly accessible Art Hub is in keeping with its significance as a public building and open plan gallery spaces are sympathetic to its historic plan form, requiring minimal alteration. Happy to see the sensitive way in which auxiliary ranges will be retained and repurposed as part of the site's adaptive re-use. This will conserve the legibility of its previous use whilst ensuring its sustainable future.

## Re-consultation consultees

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Design And Conservation	20 October 2023	28 November 2023 09 February 2024
28 November 2023 Additional information is awaited.		
09 February 2024 Recommend approval with condition.		

## 6. Publicity

The application has been the subject of the following press advertisement:

Category	Published	Expiry	Publication
Conservation Area	5 May 2023	30 May 2023	Lowestoft Journal
Category	Published	Expiry	Publication
Conservation Area	5 May 2023	30 May 2023	Beccles and Bungay Journal

## Site notices

General Site Notice	Reason for site notice: Conservation Area; Listed Building Date posted: 12 May 2023 Expiry date: 5 June 2023
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## 7. Planning policy

WLP8.37 - Historic Environment (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.39 - Conservation Areas (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF)

## 8. Planning Considerations

### *Impact on Designated Heritage Assets*

8.1 Policy WLP8.37 requires development proposals to conserve or enhance heritage assets and their settings; and WLP8.38 Non-designated Heritage Assets and WLP8.39 Conservation Areas

set out specific criteria relating to proposals affecting each of these types of heritage asset. The adopted Historic Environment SPD provides further guidance on a range of topics including conservation areas, listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets, and sustainable construction and renewable energy.

- 8.2 The above policy objectives are consistent with the policies contained in chapter 16 of the NPPF which recognises the importance of heritage assets and the subsequent importance of sustaining and enhancing their significance. Notably, paragraph 203 states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, alongside recognising the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality. It concludes by emphasising the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- 8.3 Paragraph 205 of the NPPF indicates that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation irrespective of whether any potential harm is considered to be substantial or less than substantial.
- 8.4 Paragraph 209 of the NPPF sets out that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In doing so, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
- 8.5 The Council also has statutory duties, under s.66(1) and s.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the significance of listed buildings and the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas.
- 8.6 The former Post Office building that fronts onto London Road North is a Grade II listed building, the former sorting office and the gault building have been identified as non-designated heritage assets. The whole site is situated within the South Lowestoft and Kirkley Conservation Area. As the building is listed in part due to its group value with the adjacent Grade II listed bank, consideration also needs to be given to potential impacts on the significance of this building.
- 8.7 The Council's Senior Design and Heritage Officer is supportive of the proposals and the design approach. The repurposing of this important landmark building will ensure that it remains a feature of the community; ensures the long-term conservation of this building; and improves the building's accessibility. These amount to a significant conservation benefit of the proposal.
- 8.8 The principle of conversion of the building into a multi-functional arts centre is supported and welcomed (albeit dealt with in the tandem planning application). The proposed uses provide a very good fit to the existing building in terms of its character, layout, and detail, with the result that little significant change is required (other than beneficial reversal of modern subdivision) and this is very welcome. The proposals are therefore strongly supported as they are both ambitious but also respectful of the character of the building, helping to preserve its special interest and revitalise it.

- 8.9 The reinstatement of the cornice around the whole main ground floor room and renewal and replacement of the timber panelling would be a substantial conservation benefit of the scheme as would the conservation repair of the large, glazed roof lantern to the rear.
- 8.10 Changes in layout have been restricted to areas of modern fabric where neither the fabric nor the layout contribute to the special interest of the listed building. Following Officers' request, the removal of a historic partition at first floor level has been omitted from the proposals.
- 8.11 Extensive discussions took place relating to the plant requirements associated with the gallery use of the space. An M&E strategy has now been provided and further details relating to the external appearance of the plant and the specific plant to be used internally can be sought by condition. The level of plant provision required has been reduced, due to a reduction in area of the specialist gallery space required. This is an important change as it allows the external appearance of the former sorting office to be conserved, with plant located/concealed far better than the original proposals.
- 8.12 The exterior of the main listed building has already been subject to extensive conservation repair and renovation as part of Phase 1 of this project permitted under DC/21/4220/LBC. This has been a very successful first stage of the project winning multiple awards including in the conservation category of East Suffolk Council's own Quality of Place Awards. No changes to the principal elevation are proposed within this current application.
- 8.13 Throughout the process the Senior Design and Heritage Officer sought a number of clarifications and alterations to the proposals which resulted in the provision of additional information relating to fire protection, the structure of the lift tower and the mechanical and electrical provision as well as minor changes to internal layouts. As concluded within the design section of the report for the full planning application, the proposed new build elements represent a high standard of design. There would be a very minor loss of historic fabric as part of the proposal, but this is considered to have a neutral impact on the significance of the listed building. There would be substantial heritage benefits from the renovation of the listed building which includes the repair and reinstatement of important historic features such as corning and panelling.
- 8.14 The Senior Design and Heritage Officer concludes that the overall impact of the proposals on the Grade II listed former Post Office would be beneficial, leading to the preservation and enhancement of its special interest and group value. Bringing this important, landmark building back into a viable use is a significant heritage benefit of this scheme, ensuring that it can be used and enjoyed by the wider community. Officers also conclude that the proposals would both preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, bringing vitality back into the High Street and incorporating high quality contemporary design through the new build elements of the site. There would be very limited change to the external appearance of the gault building and sorting office and therefore their significance as non-designated heritage assets would not be impacted by the proposals.
- 8.15 Historic England has been consulted on the proposals due to their previous involvement at pre-application stage following their position as a key partner in the London Road, Lowestoft High Street Heritage Action Zone. Historic England's response outlines support of the application on heritage grounds and confirms that the matters raised in their pre-application response have been addressed.



- 8.16 In the absence of harm to any heritage assets, the relevant balancing tests set out at paragraphs 207, 208, and 209 of the NPPF are not engaged. Notwithstanding this, even if harm were to be identified to any of the affected heritage assets, it would be 'less than substantial' and the extensive public benefits arising from the proposed development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh any such harm. Therefore, in either scenario the scheme is acceptable in heritage terms.
- 8.17 To summarise, the proposed development would preserve the special interest and group value of the Grade II listed former Post Office and preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the South Lowestoft and Kirkley Conservation Area, thereby complying with Policies WLP2.9 and WLP8.37, in addition to the heritage policies and objectives contained within the NPPF. The local planning authority could therefore grant listed building consent in accordance with its statutory duties under s.66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

## **9. Recommendation**

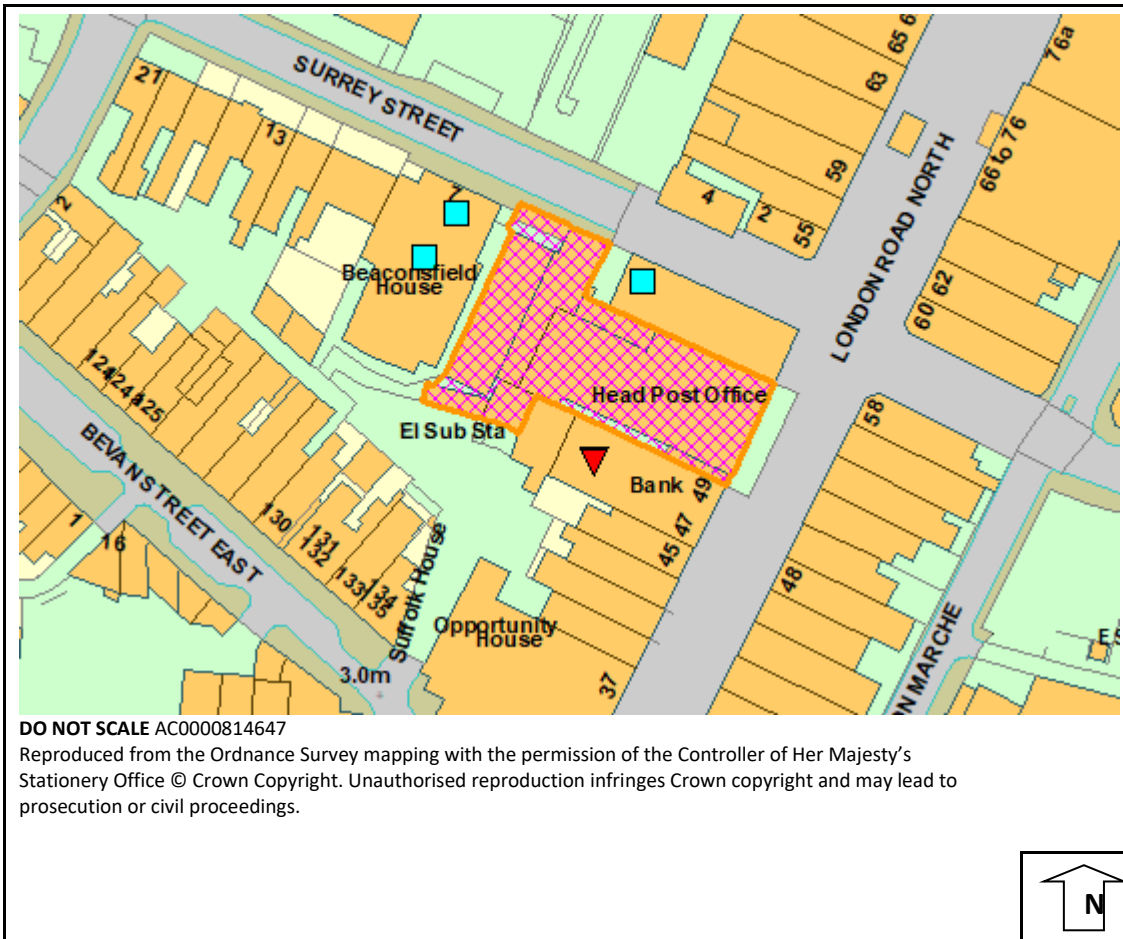
9.1 Grant listed building consent, subject to conditions summarised below:

1. Three year time limit;
2. Standard compliance condition;
3. All new external and internal works, and works of making good to the retained fabric, shall match the existing original work adjacent in respect of methods, detailed execution, and finished appearance unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority;
4. Prior to their installation to agree the finalised floor and wall finishes throughout the building;
5. Prior to their installation full details of the service runs for the toilets in the listed building including soil pipe and any external ventilation should be submitted and agreed by the Local Planning Authority;
6. The glazed rooflight should be repaired like for like, if any changes are proposed these should be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority prior to work starting on this element;
7. Prior to their installation full details of all new ventilation, extract and heating and cooling plant to be installed in the listed building should be submitted to and agreed with the Local Planning Authority; and
8. Prior to their installation full details of any works required within the listed building to meet fire regulations should be submitted to and agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

## **Background information**

See application reference DC/23/1407/LBC on [Public Access](#)

## Map



## Key



Notified, no comments received



Objection



Representation



Support