



Committee Report

Planning Committee North - 9 November 2021

Application no DC/21/4219/FUL

Location

Former Post Office
51 London Road North
Lowestoft
Suffolk
NR32 1BJ

Expiry date 7 November 2021

Application type Full Application

Applicant East Suffolk Council

Parish Lowestoft

Proposal 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.

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Summary

- 1.1 The application seeks planning permission 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 proposed works will enhance the special interest of the Grade II Listed Building, with the restoration and renovation works better revealing its significance as a designated heritage asset, enhancing the Conservation Area. There would be no adverse impacts arising, and the scheme accords with the Development Plan. The application is recommended for approval.

2. Site description

- 2.1 The Old Post Office is a Grade II Listed Building dating from the 19th century. The building is three storeys high with a cornice above ground floor level. The first floor has moulded architraves around sash windows with horns and pediments above while the second floor has the same sash windows but with aprons and eared architraves. The ground floor aluminium framed windows are set below a heavy moulded cornice and within deep reveals. The building is constructed of buff brick with stone facing which lends the building a grander appearance than the Grade II Natwest Bank adjacent to it, which is constructed of buff brick with stone window architraves and partly rusticated ground floor.
- 2.2 The Old Post Office sits within the South Lowestoft Conservation Area which is formed by the core of the 19th century expansion of the town once the railway arrived and a new harbour was constructed. 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 ESC.
- 2.3 The building has been vacant for approximately four years. The former post office building is at the south end of London Road North, adjacent to its junction with Surrey Street to the north. The building faces London Road North and is bounded by the Grade II listed NatWest Bank to the north and the unlisted Lloyds Bank to the south. London Road North is a pedestrian street which runs in a north-south direction, parallel to the harbour from the railway station in the south to the High Street in the north.
- 2.4 To the rear of the main (front) Post Office building are a number of ancillary structures and buildings that are within the same ownership, but not subject of this application.
- 2.5 The Lowestoft Post Office site benefits from the following extant planning permission and listed building consent:

- 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.

- 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.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 The application seeks planning permission for works to the Grade II Listed Old Post Office building. The majority of the scheme only requires Listed Building Consent, which is to be considered under tandem application DC/21/4220/LBC.

- 3.2 The scheme is primarily one of repair and refurbishment. Some elements, however, require planning permission (in addition to LBC) because the work relates to a principal elevation/location in the Conservation Area, where permitted development rights have been removed.
- 3.3 This report only covers those elements of the scheme that require planning permission; so, to understand the scheme in the round, this report should be read in conjunction with the report for tandem Listed Building Consent application DC/21/4220/LBC.
- 3.4 The applications do not include any change of use of the building. The applications relate only to conservation repairs and refurbishment, to draw on grant funding profiled in the Heritage Action Zone programme to be spent on the Lowestoft Post Office site, and that funding has to be spent this year. It is for this reason that the scheme has come forward solely for external works/conservation repairs at this stage. Any change of use/conversion scheme would be subject to further applications that may come forward in 2022.

4. Consultations/comments

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Lowestoft Town Council	16 September 2021	6 October 2021
Summary of comments: The Town Council's Planning Committee considered this application at a meeting on 5 October 2021. It was agreed to recommend approval of the application.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC Highways Department	N/A	13 October 2021
Summary of comments: As long as no public utilities are affected and can easily be accessed in the adopted highway, then I would have no objection to this application in principle. I note there is a BT cover very close to the proposal and this should be investigated and relocated if needed at applicants expense.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Essex And Suffolk Water PLC	16 September 2021	No response
Summary of comments: No comments received.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Environment Agency - Drainage	16 September 2021	No response
Summary of comments: No comments received.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC Cycling Officer	16 September 2021	No response
Summary of comments: No comments received.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Suffolk Preservation Society	16 September 2021	No response
Summary of comments: No comments received.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Waste Management Services - East Suffolk Norse	16 September 2021	No response
Summary of comments: No comments received.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Design And Conservation	16 September 2021	1 October 2021
<p>Summary of comments:</p> <p>This application will result in an improvement to the frontage of the Former Post Office which will serve to preserve or enhance the South Lowestoft Conservation area. The reinstatement of the frontage by restoring the original symmetry of the fenestration of the building and installing timber windows and doors benefits the character of the conservation area by restoring the building's traditional appearance.</p> <p>This application should be looked at "favourably" as it meets paragraph 206 of the NPPF; <i>"206. Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably."</i></p> <p>Therefore, I do not object to this application receiving Planning permission. I do not wish to add</p>		

any conditions.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Disability Forum	16 September 2021	No response
Summary of comments: No comments received.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Historic England	16 September 2021	No response
<p>Summary of comments:</p> <p><i>Historic England consider that this proposal has the potential to enhance the significance of the Grade II Listed Old Post Office through the restoration of historic features. Although the details of this restoration are lacking within this application, they can be considered through conditions relating to the items listed above and therefore we consider that the scheme is in accordance with paragraphs 199 and 200 of the NPPF.</i></p> <p><i>This scheme will represent change to the historic fabric of the Old Post Office but, subject to conditions concerning the details of the changes listed above, they will not amount to harm and therefore we consider that paragraph 202 of the NPPF does not apply in this instance.</i></p> <p><i>Recommendation</i></p> <p><i>Historic England has no objection to the applications on heritage grounds.</i></p> <p><i>We consider that the applications meet the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 199 and 200.</i></p> <p><i>In determining these applications you should bear in mind the statutory duty of sections 16(2) and 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 and section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.</i></p>		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
National Amenity Societies	16 September 2021	07 October 2021
<p>Summary of comments:</p> <p>The Council for British Archaeology</p> <p><i>The CBA would like to offer our full support for this application. We believe the proposals are based on an understanding of the significance of this building, its fabric and its contribution to the street</i></p>		

scene. We welcome the proposed renovation of the historically significant windows. We also appreciate the informed approach to the removal of unsympathetic later additions, like the current access ramp, and the replacement of those components that detract from the building's aesthetic values with high quality building materials.

5. Publicity

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

Category	Published	Expiry	Publication
Conservation Area	24 September 2021	15 October 2021	Beccles and Bungay Journal

Category	Published	Expiry	Publication
Conservation Area	24 September 2021	15 October 2021	Lowestoft Journal

6. Site notices

General Site Notice	Reason for site notice: Conservation Area Listed Building Date posted: 23 September 2021 Expiry date: 14 October 2021
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7. Planning policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF)

WLP8.21 - Sustainable Transport (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.29 - Design (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

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

8. Planning considerations

Planning Policy and Legislative Background

8.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) sets out that *“If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.”* This is reflected in paragraph 12 of the NPPF which affirms the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making.

8.2 The development plan comprises the East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan (“The Local Plan”) and any adopted Neighbourhood Plans. The relevant policies of the Local Plan are listed in the section above and will be considered in the assessment to follow. It is important to also note that NPPF paragraph 11 requires that planning decisions apply a presumption in

favour of sustainable development and that means, for decision-taking, approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.

- 8.3 The South Lowestoft Conservation Area and the Grade II Listed Post Office building are designated heritage assets. The starting point for heritage considerations is the statutory duties under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ("The Act").
- 8.4 For Conservation Areas, the statutory duty under s.72 of The Act is to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area.
- 8.5 The NPPF identifies conservation and enhancement of the historic environment as an important element of sustainable development. Paragraph 184 of the NPPF makes clear that heritage assets are *"an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations."*
- 8.6 Paragraph 194 says that when determining planning applications, *"local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance."*
- 8.7 NPPF paragraph 197 sets out that, *"in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:*
- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
 - 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."*
- 8.8 The NPPF at paragraphs 199 and 200 requires planning authorities to place 'great weight' on the conservation of designated heritage assets, and states that the more important the asset the greater the weight should be. It also recognises that significance can be harmed by development within the setting of an asset. It is also clear that *"any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification."*
- 8.9 The statutory duties of The Act, and heritage objectives of the NPPF, are also reflected in the Historic Environment section of the Local Plan - policies WLP8.37 (Historic Environment); and WLP8.39 (Conservation Areas).

Heritage and Design Considerations

East Elevation Ground Floor

- 8.10 The removal of the existing entrance doors to the left and right of the building and the reinstatement of the main doors centrally in the facade is a positive proposal, together with the new timber windows.

Replacement Windows

- 8.11 Four new timber sash windows are proposed, two to go in the location of former doors and replace the existing metal windows. This is acceptable subject to large scale joinery details being secured either by condition or prior to decision issue.

Treatment to the Far-Right Opening

- 8.12 The doorway here is shown on the plans in 1907 and officers have no objections to this being reversed; however, the stonework below should reflect the history of the building's changes over time, perhaps by having the infill stonework retain a vertical joint to the old opening rather than a toothed in reinstatement. This can be secured either by condition or prior to decision issue.

Treatment of the Left-Hand Opening

- 8.13 This opening was created later than the one created at the other end. Removal of the existing doors and frame is acceptable as these are later 20Cth insertions. The former opening is to be blocked up at lower level in matching stone to the existing with a new window above. This is all acceptable. Details of window and the replacement stonework is required and can be secured either by condition or prior to decision issue.

Central Opening

- 8.14 The removal of the safes/letter boxes and the window above and the reinstatement of central doors is acceptable and welcomed.

Treatment to Far Left Passageway Opening

- 8.15 The removal of the existing door and screen to this passage is not resisted. It is not of historic fabric or significance. The proposal is for a boarded door and a multi paned window screen above to secure the once open passageway. The boarded door is acceptable subject to large scale joinery details being secured either by condition or prior to decision issue.
- 8.16 Officers provided some feedback on the treatment of the opening above, and that element of the scheme has been amended to a simpler/more discrete treatment of the fenestration for this opening which is now acceptable.

Blocking up of Doorway Accessing Cupboard, off the Side Passageway

- 8.17 The opening has been formed using a concrete lintel post 1907 and the existing door is a multipaned pattern not of high historic significance. This proposal is therefore considered acceptable.

Reroofing

- 8.18 The replacement of the artificial slates with natural slates is welcomed. It is presumed that the detailing to eaves will remain the same. The renewal of existing lead flat roofs/the covering over of concrete flat roofs with lead is acceptable and supported.

Access Ramp/Steps

- 8.19 Removal of the existing pedestrian ramp/steps which are located on the pavement to London Road North, is not resisted. This is a relatively modern addition designed to allow level access into the building.
- 8.20 The proposal is to install a new ramp and steps to serve the newly restored central access doors, this is of a much less heavy design and is welcomed, subject to detail which can be secured either by condition or prior to decision issue.

Heritage Conclusions

- 8.21 The proposed works to the Listed Building will significantly improve the external appearance of the building, enhancing the designated heritage asset that is the Conservation Area. The scheme therefore accords with the Historic Environment objectives of the Local Plan (WLP8.37 and WLP8.39), the NPPF, and The Act.

Highways Safety and Accessibility

- 8.22 In highways safety terms, the new ramp access will be an improvement over the existing situation and will allow level access for all. The new ramp access will not restrict pedestrian movement along the high street in any way. The County Council Highways Authority raise no objections to the application. The proposal accords with the sustainable transport objectives of the Local Plan (WLP8.21) and the NPPF.

Residential Amenity

- 8.23 In terms of residential amenity, the works proposed are largely repair, renovation or replacement of existing features at the site. Accordingly, there are not deemed to be any materially significant impacts on local residents or adjacent land uses. The improvement of the external appearance of the building would only be of benefit for the visual amenity of the area. The scheme accords with WLP8.29 (Design).

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 The proposed works will be a positive outcome for the Conservation Area, because the Old Post Office is a prominent and important building in the CA and the restoration of its frontage and the improvements to its fenestration, materials and detailing will all improve its external appearance. The works will also preserve the building because it will ensure the structure is in a weathertight condition going into the future, ensuring its continued positive contribution to the CA. The works to the ramp access are acceptable in terms of highways safety/accessibility, and in all other respects the scheme is acceptable.
- 10.2 The proposal accords with the Development Plan and will enhance the Conservation Area, and therefore planning permission can be granted.

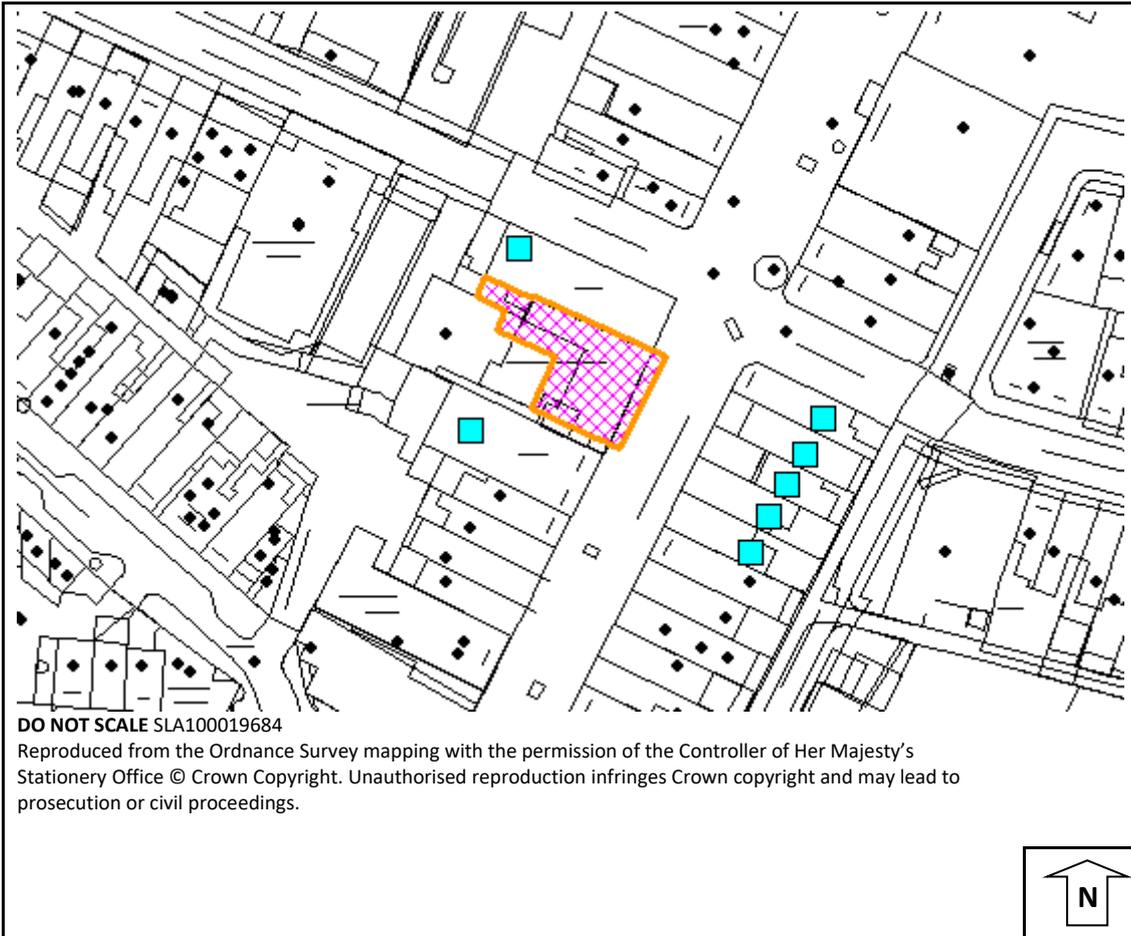
11. Recommendation

11.1 Authority to Delegate Determination to the Head of Planning and Coastal Management to approve with conditions.

Background Papers

See application reference DC/21/4219/FUL on [Public Access](#)

Map



Key



Notified, no comments received



Objection



Representation



Support