

Delegated Report

Planning Application

Planning Application No: 20250003

Location: B Beautiful, 12 School Lane, Higham Rochester

Description: Retention of the siting of InPost Parcel Locker

Applicant: InPost UK InPost UK

Site Visit Date: 16/10/2024

Submitted Documents/Plans

- Application form;
- Drawing no. L(01)101 Rev. P1 – Existing & Proposed Plan;
- Drawing no. L(02)101 Rev. P1 – Existing & Proposed Elevations;
- Drawing no. L(00)100 Rev. P1 – Block Plan;
- Drawing no. L(00)000 Rev. P1 – Location Plan;
- InPost UK document;
- InPost sustainability document; and
- InPost Parcel Lockers – Lighting Information Statement.

Relevant Planning History

None.

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale & Distribution of Development
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development & Design Principles

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards

Paragraph 34 of the NPPF (2024) sets out that policies within adopted local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years, and should then be updated as necessary. Such reviews are also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

The Council undertook such a review in September 2019 and found that the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy is in need of a partial review in terms of Policy CS02, due to the increased need for housing since the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted and the need to ensure that a sufficient land supply exists to meet this need. Whilst saved policies from the Local Plan 1st Review (1994) generally conform with the NPPF (2024), the Council will also seek to replace these.

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

- Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development
- Section 9 – Promoting Sustainable Transport
- Section 12 – Achieving Well-Designed Places

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- Design for Gravesham – Design Code (2024)
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

Consultees

GBC Environmental Protection

We have no comments with regards to this application.

Higham Parish Council

- The siting of this parcel locker now forces wheelchair users and those with restricted mobility onto an awkward camber of the pavement, which could be deemed unsafe to use;
- Additional traffic and dangerous parking along School Lane, whilst people collect parcels from this locker which is a danger to other road users as well as pedestrians;
- Bright lighting from the InPost Parcel Locker in the evenings, which is a nuisance to nearby residents that they didn't have to experience prior to the parcel locker installation; and
- Loss of business to existing local shops that already offer a parcel collection/drop-off service to the village.

Kent Highways – 19/03/2025 (First comment)

The application proposes the retention of the siting of the InPost Locker, as the locker has been in situ since October 2024, is the applicant able to provide data on the usage of the locker, and the peak times of use, as well as courier collection and deliveries.

I note that there are parking spaces to the front of the retail shops and 'keep clear' markings next to the locker

I look forward to further information regarding the locker usage being submitted to assist me in determining the application further.

Kent Highways – 17/06/2025 (Second comment)

I refer to my previous consultation response dated 19th March 2025 in which I requested further information regarding locker usage.

This information has now been submitted by the applicant and I note that the locker usage amounts to 50 visits per day, mostly not during the peak traffic and parking times. In view of the fact that the lockers already exist and I am not aware of any highway issues arising, I now raise no objection to this application.

Dickens' Country Protection Society

The Society is concerned that, placed in such a prominent location, depending on the advertising and finishes, the locker could be visually intrusive and detract from the street scene.

Ward Councillor

- Lighting at night time reflects into people's houses;
- Lessen's the pathway for the dropped kerb which enables disabled persons on their mobility scooters and pushchairs etc;
- Detrimental to the shops and post office who already offer a parcel drop-off in their premises, taking away their business;
- Vehicular congestion is also caused in this part of School Lane when drop-offs or pick-ups are undertaken due to the closeness of the junction; and
- Therefore, is against the retention of this locker.

Neighbouring properties

13 surrounding properties were consulted – overall consultation expiry date was 29.01.2025 – four responses received (objections) the comments of which can be summarised as follows:

Design, Character and Appearance

- Incongruous addition to the village and non sympathetic to the surrounding area;
- A blot on the landscape where it has been located;
- Unsightly

Neighbouring Amenity

- All they can see is this big yellow in-post box looking straight back at them;
- Should not be located near residential properties that could be adversely affected;
- The InPost box has lights on it all night long;
- Feel very strongly that this needs to be removed as when the people have dropped their parcel off they just go home and not have to look at it all day long thus is a massive blight on the village;
- The person that has opened happy tails is good for the village and is also doing a good job for they don't have to look at the InPost box all day and just go home to their houses and not see this;
- Gets woken up by the noise from courier drivers every morning dragging their large sacks across the pavement and slamming the door closed between 6am – 7am;

Parking and Highway Safety

- Delivery and pickups are causing further congestion on both School Lane leading to Hermitage Road. There is a substantial increase in traffic with parking on pathways, near and on junctions.
- So much bad parking when the courier people have been to pick up the parcel out of the lockers;
- Person in mobility scooter was trying to get on pavement but van that was picking up parcel wouldn't move and he had to go on road;
- Cars are parking on the corner to drop parcels off and also pick up making it dangerous for other road users where lorry can't get round the corner and unable to see what is coming down the road while they are pulling out of the junction;
- Dangerous corner as not noticeable until you walk into it;

Other

- Locker was required to be 3m away from the roadside; and
- There are 3 shops in the village where you can take your parcel back to and also pick them up which supports these local businesses and the community, when you can drop/pick up a parcel you may also buy something; and
- Encourages kids to break into it.

Officer's Analysis

The application site consists of no. 12 School Lane which is situated on the eastern side of School Lane. The site is located in the Rural Settlement Inset from the Green Belt of Higham and in the Higham Arable Farmlands Character Area.

The InPost parcel locker is already in situ and the proposal is for its retention.

Such click and collect facilities can be permitted development under Part 7, Class C of the GPDO subject to certain criteria and a prior approval process in respect of the siting, design and external appearance of the development. In this case as the locker has already been installed then planning permission is required.

The principle considerations in the assessment of the application are:

- Principle;
- Design, Character and Appearance;
- Neighbouring Amenity;
- Parking and Highway safety

Principle

The site is located in the Rural Settlement Inset from the Green Belt of Higham. Policy CS02 sets out that in the rural area, development will be supported within those rural settlements inset from the Green Belt. As such the parcel locker is acceptable in terms of the principle of the development but it now needs to be seen whether it is acceptable in respect of all of principle considerations.

Design, Character and Appearance

No. 12 School Lane is the end unit (the northern end) of a shopping parade which has six units. The majority of the parade has a flat roof with rendered front walls at first floor level with brick piers in between; at the southern end is a gable front element in brick. There are various shopfronts at ground floor level.

The north end wall of the parade which is the flank wall of no. 12 is all faced in brick. There is a tarmac forecourt in front of the shopping parade set behind segments of wall and the tarmacked pavement area extends round the north end of the parade in a curved shape, on which is positioned some bollards, a street sign, a traffic sign and a telegraph pole. The parcel locker has been located on this paved area against the north flank wall of no. 12 School Lane. Its footprint is 4m in width by 0.91m in depth and its height is 2.4m to the top of the highest point. It has a canopy over the central section to cover the area where the touch screen section is below and which also houses two CCTV cameras. There is a dark grey metal strip at the top which has downlights in it. On the front elevation the locker has white metal cladding and drawers with the graphics in black of 'InPost', '24/7' and 'SCAN TAP & GO'. On both side elevations there is metal cladding with graphics in black of 'InPost' and 'SEND RETURN COLLECT'. There is a power supply attached to the side of no. 12 School Lane. There are 78 individual lockers in total.



Although the shopping parade and the surrounding dwellings which are opposite and behind the parade are

modern development being from the second half of the twentieth century and the area is not part of the more historic core of Higham, the area still has a pleasant character. This is particularly due to its verdant nature with the front gardens of the dwellings opposite being laid to lawn as are the dwellings to the rear with a grassed verge in front of them also. A backdrop behind the dwellings to the rear is the tower of the listed St John's Church. This all creates a simple, pleasant character to this part of Higham village.

The parcel locker is located immediately adjacent to the northern end of the shopping parade and is widely visible due to this part of School Lane going behind the shopping parade creating a large gap in the streetscene. The locker is therefore very visible from a long distance to the south. It is a modern, functional and utilitarian structure and its overall size, form and both the nature and colour of the materials used ensure that it is a prominent feature when viewed directly outside the site and also in longer distance views from down School Lane. When viewed in the context of the brick north flank elevation of the shopping parade, the locker does stand out due to its white colour. The locker is not ancillary or complementary to the main function of no. 12 School Lane.

Research was carried out and it can be seen that some Inpost lockers are black in colour. It was felt that this would help the lockers merge into their background better as opposed to the current white colour. The agent was therefore asked if the locker could be changed to black in colour. The agent responded to state that this would not be possible as there is no stock of the black vinyl anymore. The agent was asked again if it was possible to use general black vinyl for the locker to change the colour but the agent has advised that a colour change would not be possible.

The white colour of the lockers with yellow ends as stated is considered to make the lockers more visible and prominent than would be preferred, however, on balance whilst it would be preferable for them to be in black it is not considered that the white and yellow colour is so unacceptable in terms of design, character and appearance to justify a refusal. It is not a facility that it out of keeping attached to an existing parade of retail units. On that basis it is considered that in respect of design, character and appearance the proposal is acceptable and compliant with Policy CS19 (LPCS) and section 12 of the NPPF (2024).

Neighbouring Amenity

There are no neighbouring dwellings in close enough proximity to the locker which would mean they would be impacted by it in respect of overshadowing, loss of light or loss of outlook. The comments from neighbours with regards having to look at the locker are noted but these relate more to matters of design and appearance which is discussed in the section above.

The matters relating to being woken up by the sound of sacks being dragged early morning and van door slamming are noted. GBC Environmental Protection have been consulted on the application and have no comment to make. It is noted the lockers are located at the end of a shopping parade where items being delivered and vehicle doors slamming could potentially at early hours could occur especially with the parking area in front.

The matters of lighting raised by residents, the Parish Council and the Ward Councillor are noted. The lighting is provided in the strip of metal along the top which runs the full width of the locker; the lights are downlights.

No details were given on the lighting with the application but the agent was asked for this and they have provided a Lighting Information Statement. It states how the lighting is a downward facing LED light strip which illuminates the lockers to ensure ease of use and safety for customers and in order to limit light spillage impacts the LED panel is directionally focused on the lockers. General Lux levels that are experienced are provided which show that the Lux levels reduce significantly with distance from the locker, due to the downward directional arrangement of the LED panels.

The lights are downward facing and it is stated that beyond 2m from the locker, the Lux levels are generally below street Lighting Lux levels due to the downward directional arrangement of the LED panels. The information demonstrates that beyond 2m from the locker, the Lux levels are generally below street lighting

Lux levels. The nearest properties to the west are 24m away from the locker and the nearest properties to the east are 23m away.

Given that the lighting is downward facing lighting that has limited spill beyond 2m from the locker, it is considered that the impact at the nearest properties would not be significant enough to justify a ground of refusal for the proposal. Furthermore, as a 24/7 locker facility where people can collect parcels at any time it is not unreasonable to expect that lighting would be provided for the facility. The applicant also advises this is for security purposes. GBC Environmental Protection have no comment to raise on the application.

Overall, in respect of neighbouring amenity it is considered that the proposal is compliant with Policy CS19 (LPCS) and paragraph 135(f) of the NPPF (2024).

Parking and Highways

The site is in a local shopping parade where there is parking provision in front of the shopping parade and on the opposite side of the road. The comments from the public, Parish Council and Ward Councillor regarding additional parking from people using the parcel locker and dangerous parking are noted however, there is as stated parking provision in the vicinity and individuals not parking correctly and parking in places they shouldn't is not a planning matter but a matter of responsibility for individual drivers adhering to the Highway Code, contraventions of which are enforced by local authority parking wardens.

Kent Highways requested data on the usage of the locker and the peak times of use, as well as courier collection and deliveries. They noted that there are parking spaces to the front of the retail shops and 'keep clear' markings next to the locker

The agent was asked for this information as well as confirmation on the number of lockers and this was provided. They note that from the information provided the locker usage amounts to 50 visits per day, mostly not during the peak traffic and parking times. Kent Highways advise that in view of this and that the lockers already exist and they are not aware of any highway issues arising, they now raise no objection to this application.

As such it is considered in respect of parking and highway safety the proposal is compliant with Policy CS11 (LPCS) and saved Policy P3 (LPFR) and section 9 of the NPPF (2024).

Other

Accessibility

The comments of the Parish Council, Ward Councillor and publicity regarding the parcel locker forcing wheelchair users and those with restricted mobility onto an awkward camber of the pavement which could be deemed unsafe to use are noted. However, it is noted that the whole of the pavement area to the side of no. 12 is on a camber. Furthermore, given the location of the dropped kerb at the rear of this area of pavement, the alignment for people on mobility scooters is not dissimilar to what it would have been before the locker was there; the locker does not prevent that route.



Loss of business

The comments of the public, Parish Council and Ward Councillor are noted however, points regarding the parcel locker potentially taking business away from local businesses because they offer the same service are non-material planning considerations; the planning system works in the public interest not personal interests.

Any Other Material Planning Considerations

None.

Conclusion

The retention of the parcel locker on balance, is considered acceptable in respect of principle of development, design, character and appearance, landscape character, neighbouring amenity and parking and highway safety and accessibility. It has been discussed how loss of business to other businesses is not a material planning consideration. Therefore, the proposal is compliant with local and national planning policy.

Recommendation

Permission

(For detailed conditions and informatives, see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Ms Rebecca Harrison	Team Leader:	Mrs Faye Walsh
Signed:		Signed:	
Dated:	30 July 2025	Dated:	01 August 2025