

Delegated Report

Planning Application

Planning Application No: 20211051

Location: Units, 18, 19 And 20 At 28, 29 And 30 St Georges Square Gravesend
Kent DA11 0TB

Description: Application for change of use of Units 18-19 from Retail (Use Class E) to Art Gallery (Use Class F1) , Co-Working Space (Use Class E) and external alterations to Units 18-19 and Unit 20.

Applicant: Reef Group

Site Visit Date: Desktop Assessment

Submitted Documents/Plans

Application form;
Drawing No.PL.18.01 – OS Plan;
Drawing No.PL18.05 – Existing Elevations;
Drawing No.PL18.04 – Existing Serving Deck Level Plan;
Drawing No.PL18.08 – Proposed Elevations;
Drawing No.PL18.06 – Proposed Mall Level Plan;
Drawing No.PL18.07 – Proposed Servicing Desk Level Plan;

Relevant Planning History

20190360 - Display of 2no. internally illuminated archway signs above pedestrian entrances and 2no. externally illuminated wall-painted graphic signs. **Permitted 05.06.2019**

20190958 - Display of 7no. non-illuminated fascia signs. **Permitted 01.11.2019**

20180903 - Refurbishment of St. George's Centre, to include: the removal of internal canopies; refurbishment of internal canopies; alterations to entrance canopies; replacement of flooring; update and refurbishment of soffits, blank walls, fascias, shop fronts, undercroft areas; and an updated lighting scheme. **Permitted 20180903**

19770445 - Outline application for development for shopping and office purposes together with a car park and all necessary servicing. **Permitted 10.11.1977**

19790100 - Details of redevelopment for shopping purposes together with a car park and all necessary servicing outline site only. **Permitted 13.02.1979**

19790101 - Redevelopment for shopping purposes the erection of a public house and restaurant formation of a pedestrian hall and construction of an extension to the proposed car park and ancillary works. **Permitted 05.04.1979**

19790740 - Approval of reserved matters. **10.09.1979**

19810615 - Details of entrances at 13-14 · & 32-34 New Road and Princes Street · & bridges over malls and materials for mall pavings · & planters · & underside of mall canopies · & covered areas. **Permitted 31.07.1981**

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (September 2014):

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale & Distribution of Development
- CS05 – Gravesend Town Centre Opportunity Area
- CS07 – Economy, Employment and Skills
- CS08 – Retail, Leisure and the Hierarchy of Centres
- CS10 – Physical and Social Infrastructure
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 - Design & Development Principles

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards
- S3 – Maintenance of Shopping Frontages
- S4 – Non-shopping Uses in the Shopping Areas

Paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2021) 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 (2021), the Council will also seek to replace these.

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

- 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development
- 6 – Building a strong, competitive economy
- 7 – Ensuring the vitality of town centres
- 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 12 – Achieving sustainable development and well-designed places

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- SPG 4 - KCC Parking Standards (2006)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

Consultees

Environmental Protection

The application does not include information as to the nature of the cooking that will take place in the cafeteria, nor does it provide any information on cooking odour/fume mitigation measures. It is therefore not possible for our service to provide suitable comments on preventing cooking odour/fume nuisance.

We therefore request that prior to a planning determination that the following information is provided by the applicant for consideration by our service;

- Nature of the foods that will be cooked at the premises.
- Times/days when cooking will occur.

- Details of ventilation extraction system, in particular odour/fume abatement and likely noise emissions.

Neighbouring properties

11 surrounding properties were consulted and a site notice displayed on site with an overall expiry date of 8.10.21. No comments were received.

Officer's Analysis

Site context

The application site comprises Units 18-19 and Unit 20 of St. George's Shopping Centre, which lies within the designated Primary Shopping Area of Gravesend Town Centre. The Site is currently vacant and comprises 470 sq. m. of Use Class E floorspace. Units 18-19 has been vacant since the April 2019. The Units are split over two floors, with retail space at the ground floor 'Mall' level, and back of house space at first floor 'Servicing Deck' level. Unit 20 has been vacant since August 2020, and wholly sits at ground floor level. St. George's Shopping Centre comprises 37 retail units (falling under Use Class E), and has an overall floor area of 20,766 sq. m.

The Site fronts onto the internal pedestrian walkway of the St. George's Shopping Centre, it adjoins Unit 17 to the east which is occupied by "Goatcher Chandler" and to the south by Units 21 – 22 which are currently vacant. The Site is also located adjacent to Units 26 – 29 which are occupied by "Anytime Fitness"

St. George's Shopping Centre is broadly bound to the north by St. George's Church; to the east by Princess Street; to the south by New Road; and to the west by Bath Street.

The proposal is for a change of use of Units 18-19 from Retail (Use Class E) to Art Gallery (Use Class F1) , Co-Working Space (Use Class E) and external alterations to Units 18-19 and Unit 20.

Unit 20 comprises 177 sq. m. of Use Class E floorspace, given its proposed use as a café/event space (Use Class E), a formal change of use is not required.

The art gallery and café/event space will be located at ground floor 'mall' level and will be linked by a new set of double doors set into the adjoining wall between the units - allowing them to be used separately or as single space. The flexible co-working space will be located at the first-floor level of Unit 18 – 19.

In order to facilitate the change of use, a number of small-scale shopfront alterations are required. Firstly, the three existing sets of entrance doors within the shopfronts will be replaced with new aluminium framed powder coated doors in white finish (to match the existing shopfront). This will not result in a change to the shopfront layout and the doors will remain in the same locations as existing.

Loss of retail

The proposal would result in the loss of one retail unit. Saved Policy S3 states the Council will resist changes of use to alternatives other than shopping (formally use Class A1) at ground floor level or the principal trading level. The proposal would therefore see the loss of retail use in a primary shopping frontage and would therefore be contrary to Saved policy S3. Notwithstanding this it is relevant to consider the nature of the use proposed and the impact the proposed use would have in terms the character of the shopping centre/town centre as well as the benefits of the proposed leisure use and any associated benefits.

The following table (updated 20th October 2021) shows the current occupiers of the centre.

Name	Use	Unit No.	Address
Vacant		K1a	1a Kempthorne St

Top Gifts	Retail and Services	K1b	1b Kempthorne St
Hertz	Retail and Services	K1c	1c Kempthorne St
St George's Flowers	Retail and Services	K1d	1d Kempthorne St
Sie's Pie n Mash	Café	U-1	1 Kempthorne St
OK Bags	Retail and Services	U-2	2 Kempthorne St
Pet Attractions	Retail and Services	U-3	3 Kempthorne St
Rose Petals	Retail and Services	U-4	4 Kempthorne St
Vacant	Retail and Services	St-3	5 Kempthorne St
Marie Curie	Retail and Services	U-5	6 Kempthorne St
Vacant	Retail and Services	U-6	7 Kempthorne St
Holland & Barrett	Retail and Services	U-7	8 Kempthorne St
Boots	Retail and Services	St-2	9 Kempthorne St
Clarks Shoes	Retail and Services	U 8-9	10/11 Kempthorne St
Poundland	Retail and Services	St-1b	12a Kempthorne St
Sports Direct	Retail and Services	St-1	12 Kempthorne St
Vacant		U-32/33	14/15 St Georges Sq.
Saver	Retail and Services	U-30/31	16/17 St Georges Sq.
St Georges Restaurant	Restaurant	Café	18 St Georges Sq.
MCCH /Pathways	Retail and Services	U-35	18a St Georges Sq.
Anytime fitness	Gym / Leisure	U-26/29	19 -22 St Georges Sq.
Venesta	Retail and Services	U-19/23	19 -22 St Georges Sq.
PML	Clinic Health Centre	U-25	23 St Georges Sq.
Panic room	Sue Generis	U-25a	25a Princess St
Vacant		U-24	24 Wakefield St
Vacant		U-23	25 Wakefield St
Poundstretcher	Retail and Services	Unit 21/22	26/27 Wakefield St
Vacant		U-20	19/20 St Georges Sq.
Vacant		U18/19	29/30 St Georges Sq.
Goatcher Chandler	Retail and Services	U-17	31 St Georges Sq.
Vacant		U-16	32 St Georges Sq.
Bbs	Café	U-15	33 Kempthorne St
Vacant		U-14	34 Kempthorne St
Don't Panic	Retail and Services	U-12/13	35/36 Kempthorne St
WH Smiths	A1 Retail and Services	St4	37 Kempthorne St
Rymans	A1 Retail and Services	U-11	38 Kempthorne St
Vacant		U10b	39 Kempthorne St
Timpson's	A1 Retail and Services	U10a	40 Kempthorne St
Coffee Republic	A1/A3 Café and Retail	12 New Rd	12 New Road
Kiosk Mall 4	A1 Retail and Services	RMU 4	RMU Mall 4

As the above table shows the shopping centre has 11 vacant units out of the 40 units and one existing leisure use (which is anytime fitness and this is located to the north of the application site). This results in just over 25% vacancy rate.

When 20180726 was approved the survey showed the centre in having 4 vacant units. Due to Covid 19 and the economic challenges the vacancy rate has almost tripled within the shopping centre.

The loss of both Marks & Spencer and BHS has resulted in St Georges Square (the area with play equipment) having the appearance of an underutilised part of the centre. It should be noted both the former BHS store (Now partly vacant and consisting of a job centre with gym in the basement) and the former Marks & Spencer building (now B & M Bargains) have secondary doors into St Georges Centre.. It is unfortunate that B&M Bargains and the former BHS store do not use their rear doors which open into the St. Georges Centre which would vastly improve the footfall in this part of the centre.

In addition there is large amount of dead advertising frontage which presents from B&M Bargains and the former window displays of BHS building.

The shopping centre maintains a high proportion of range of Retail and Service Shops and a small Restaurant and Cafes.

Main town centre uses are defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and include the art and culture and the office use is an appropriate town centre use.

Therefore although the proposed uses would result in the reduction of floor space in a retail unit in the town centre, the proposed use is also a suitable use in the town centre according to the NPPF.

The office use complies with Policies CS07 and CS05 (LPCS) which supports under-used sites/buildings within Gravesend town centre. It should be noted that whilst the offices have external windows there are no guidelines requiring offices to have natural light or outlook.

The proposals will bring two vacant units into an active use to this relatively quiet corner of the St Georges Shopping Centre. While the operations of the tenant will not involve retail aspects the services provided will increase footfall and circulation in terms of visitors and would therefore have positive impact on the shopping centre and wider town centre as visitors and employees use facilities within nearby shops and services.

The application form indicates that the new use would employ 6 full time employees which is a further advantage of the scheme.

On balance the reduction of the retail floor space through change of use is considered acceptable in this instance as it would bring two vacant units into use; there remains a number of unoccupied retail units within the adjacent St George's Centre for retail opportunities; and, the proposed openings hours of 7am to 11pm are acceptable as the leisure use and office use needs to offer flexibility.

Overall no objection is raised in respect of Policies CS01, CS02, CS05, CS07, CS08, CS10, or CS19 of LPCS.

Character and Appearance

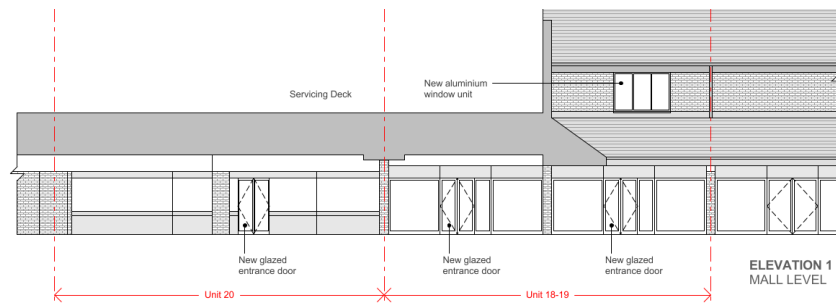
Policy CS19 (LPCS) states that the design, layout and form of new development will be derived from a robust analysis of local context and character and will make a positive contribution to the street scene, the quality of the public realm and the character of the area. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development.

It also states that permission should be refused for development for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning

documents.

As the submitted plans and application form shows there are changes related to doors and windows which are deemed acceptable.

Proposed Elevations



The proposed changes to the shopping centre are acceptable and the development complies with Policy CS19 (LPCS) and Section 12 of the NPPF.

Amenity of Future Occupiers/Visitors

Policy CS19 (LPCS) requires that all development should be 'fit for purpose' and be 'adaptable to allow changes to meet the need of users'. At the same time, the NPPF seeks high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants.

Under this proposal the changes are cosmetic and long term there will be no impact on the amenity of users of the shopping centre.

Neighbouring Amenity

Policy CS19 (LPCS) requires new development to safeguard the amenity, including privacy, daylight and sunlight, of its occupants and those of neighbouring properties and land.

Environmental Protection raised concern about the café (even though its use does not require planning permission) and the agent has confirmed the following on 20.10.21.

In regard to the queries from your Environmental Health colleagues, the client has notified me that cold and some hot food will be served in the cafeteria, the hot food will be reheated only (i.e. by microwave/oven) and as such there is no extraction equipment proposed / required. It is proposed that the serving of food may occur at any time during the opening hours.

Due to the proposed alterations being within the shopping centre and there being no adjacent residential properties there will be no impact on the amenity of surrounding properties. No conflict with CS19 (LPCS).

Suggested Conditions

The following conditions are suggested:

- Time Limit
- Approved Plans
- Use class
- Hours of use

Any Other Material Planning Considerations

No other material planning considerations arise which warrant further consideration.

Conclusion

Subject to the above suggested conditions the proposal can be supported as it complies with local and national planning policy.

Conclusion & Recommendation

(For detailed conditions / reasons for refusal and informatives, see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Mr Richard Hart	Team Leader:	Miss Faye Hobbs
Signed:	<i>R Hart</i>	Signed:	
Dated:	20th October 2021	Dated:	21 October 2021