

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 This application seeks permission to change the use of 9 Newbury Street, Wantage from a Bookshop (A1 retail) to Tea Rooms (A3 café). The unit is located on the corner of Newbury Street and Post Office Lane within the Wantage Conservation Area.
- 1.2 The unit would be occupied by Madisons Tea Rooms who currently occupy a unit within the Arbery Centre adjacent to the Market Place.
- 1.3 The proposal does not require any external alterations to the building but will require the installation of a kitchen/food preparation area internally to the rear of the property.
- 1.4 Extracts from the application drawings are at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.5 The application comes to Committee as the Town Council fully supports the proposal.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 Planning permission was granted in 1975 for the change of use of part of the showroom to a customer coffee bar. (This was an ancillary element to the main retail use of the building).
- 2.2 Various applications were approved between 1976 and 1983 for alterations to the building.
- 2.3 Planning permission was granted in 1994 for a change of use of the rear of the property to D1 use (consulting room).
- 2.4 Planning permission was granted in December 2000 for the change of use of the first floor showroom to living accommodation.
- 2.5 A further application was approved in December 2001 for the change of use of the first floor showroom to living accommodation and the rear section of the ground floor showroom to living accommodation.

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 9 Newbury Street forms part of the Primary Shopping Frontage as defined in the adopted Local Plan Proposals Map. This is covered by Policy S2 of the Local Plan which states that proposals which involve a net loss of Class A1 shopping floor space at ground floor level will not be permitted.

4.0 Consultations

- 4.1 Wantage Town Council fully supports the application stating: “No objection. The application is supported, but we would like confirmation that adequate ventilation is being installed. The inclusion of A1 retail in the application is welcomed. Please note that the correctness of paragraph 3 of the attached document has been challenged.” (Paragraph 3 of the covering letter submitted with the application refers to comments of support made by 2 of the local Members).
- 4.2 The Council’s Environmental Health Officer has raised no objection subject to conditions relating to a restriction on opening hours and the submission and approval of a scheme of ventilation and acoustic treatment for the building.
- 4.3 A further submission has been received from the applicant stating that they have to vacate their current premises within 3 months due to a significant rent increase.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 The main issues to consider in relation to this application are whether the proposal complies with current adopted policies for this area, and if not whether there are any material considerations which outweigh the policy objections.
- 5.2 Policy S2 of the adopted Local Plan resists the loss of A1 retail space at ground floor level within the defined Primary Shopping Frontage of Wantage Town Centre. The proposed change of use from A1 to A3 would result in a loss of such floor space, therefore the proposal is contrary to Policy.
- 5.3 Your Officers acknowledge the difficulties that the applicants face in their current premises due to increased rental requirements and the need for more space to expand the business. However, this does not outweigh the general policy presumption in favour of retaining retail space in the town centre.
- 5.4 It is also acknowledged that the new Sainsbury's and other associated retail developments to the north of the Market Place may have an impact on the vitality of the southern parts of the town centre and it could be argued that the Primary Frontage in this location restricts the potential for other uses in this area. Nevertheless, the application must be determined in accordance with policy as it currently stands.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *It is recommended that the application be refused for the following reason:*

1. *In the opinion of the District Planning Authority, the loss of retail floor space at ground floor level in the Primary Shopping Frontage of Wantage Town Centre, would have a harmful impact on the vitality and viability of this part of the town which cumulatively with other non-retail uses would alter the prevailing character of the area. As such the proposal is contrary to the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan, in particular Policy S2.*