

**WAN/1645/10 – Andrew Jackson**  
**Change of Use from Class A1 (Retail) to Class A3 (Tea Room).**  
**9 Newbury Street, Wantage, OX12 8BU.**

**1.0 The Proposal**

- 1.1 This application seeks permission for the change of use of 9 Newbury Street from a book shop (A1 retail use) to a tea room (A3 use). The application does not propose any external alterations to the building.
- 1.2 The application is the re-submission of a previous application which was refused by Committee in May this year. The current application is the same as the previous refusal, and has been submitted with some additional supporting information and a petition signed by local residents.
- 1.3 The unit is located on the corner of Newbury Street and Post Office Lane within the Wantage Conservation Area.
- 1.4 It would be occupied by Madisons Tea Rooms who currently occupy a unit within the Arbery Centre adjacent to the Market Place.
- 1.5 Extracts from the application and additional supporting information are at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.6 The application comes to Committee at the request of the local Member, Cllr Bill Melotti.

**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.
- 2.6 Planning permission was refused in May 2007 to change the use of the property from Use Class A1 to A3. The decision notice is attached at **Appendix 2**.

**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. The intention of this Policy is to preserve the retail function of the town centre.

3.2 PPS6 (Planning for Town Centres) emphasises the need to retain the vitality of town centres.

#### 4.0 **Consultations**

4.1 Wantage Town Council has no objections.

4.2 The County Engineer has no objections.

4.3 The local Member has requested that the application be considered by Committee. His comments are attached at **Appendix 3**.

4.4 The Wantage Chamber of Commerce supports the application stating that whilst they would be disappointed at the loss of retail space, on this occasion the Local Plan should be “overridden” to make use of an empty unit.

4.5 10 Letters of support and comment have been received raising the following points:

- Why should a popular business be thwarted on “a technicality”?
- There are too many empty shops already in Newbury Street.
- The Local Plan should be a guide which can be overridden.
- Businesses use the tea rooms and its loss will make Wantage unviable for business as there are few alternatives to Madisons.
- The tea rooms bring an element of tranquillity to Wantage.
- The tea room is an asset to the town and should not be lost.
- The move to Newbury Street would draw customers to that end of town benefiting retail outlets in the vicinity.
- The application will enhance the vitality of this street.

4.6 A petition in support of the application has been submitted with 765 signatures. This can be viewed on the application file.

#### 5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 Policy S2 of the adopted Local Plan seeks to resist the loss of A1 retail space at ground floor level within the primary shopping frontage of Wantage town centre as defined in the Local Plan Proposals Map. No. 9 Newbury street falls within this defined area. The proposed change of use from A1 to A3 therefore would result in the loss of such floor space and, as such, the proposal is contrary to policy.

5.2 The purpose of this policy is to preserve the retail function of the town centre around the Market Place which is the retail heart of the town. To achieve this purpose and in the interest of equity to all applicants, the policy needs to be applied consistently. Cumulatively, the loss of a large number of retail uses to other uses can result in a “dead frontage” which would harm the vitality of the town centre. Once a retail use is lost to an alternative use, it is very rarely, if ever, re-instated therefore relaxing the policy would only erode the character and vitality of the town centre.

5.3 PPS 6 relates to planning in town centres and seeks to retain retail uses in town centres to preserve their vitality. The Local Plan policy has been adopted in

accordance with this recent Government advice and was the subject of extensive public consultation through the Local Plan preparation process.

- 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 southern areas of the town centre, and it could be argued that the primary frontage needs to be adjusted accordingly. However, this is a matter to consider when the policy is reviewed and is not a reason to justify making ad hoc decisions on individual applications contrary to policy.
- 5.5 The applicant's agent refers to the fact that the unit has been vacant for some time. However, the fact that a unit is vacant does not justify permitting an alternative use contrary to policy. There may be a variety of reasons why a unit is vacant, and there is always a number of vacant units in any town centre as retail businesses expand and contract.
- 5.6 This application is the re-submission of a previous application which was refused by Committee. The re-submission has been accompanied by a petition containing 756 signatures, indicating a significant level of local support, and additional supporting information explaining the difficulties in letting the unit for A1 use. Whilst Officers acknowledge this it is not considered that it overrides the previous reason for refusal and the policy requirement protect retail uses in the town centre.

## 6.0 **Recommendation**

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

1. *In the opinion of the District Planning Authority, the loss of retail floor space at ground floor level in the primary retail 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 and the advice contained in PPS6.*