

ITEM NO.

9

COMMITTEE DATE:

16/01/2012

APPLICATION NO:

11/2053/26

DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL
CONSULTATION

APPLICANT:

Mr M Skinner
Devon County Council

PROPOSAL:

Change of use and internal refurbishment of empty former
shop building to convert for new library use

LOCATION:

35 Church Road, St. Thomas, Exeter, EX2 9AZ

REGISTRATION DATE:

20/12/2011

EXPIRY DATE:

10/01/2012



Scale 1:1250

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HISTORY OF SITE

In 2006 a planning application (planning ref 06/1701/03) to provide 10 residential units was refused because of overdevelopment of the site and an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE/PROPOSAL

The application premises is located on the corner of Church Road and Cecil Road in St Thomas. This two storey building was previously used by St Thomas Stationers but has been vacant for several years.

It is proposed to convert the building into a library with access to the public on the ground floor with the first floor for staff use consisting of a small office, rest room and toilet facilities and an open plan area for the storage of books. There are no external changes proposed as part of this application with the existing shopfront, windows and entrance doors to be repaired, prepared and repainted only.

The premises is located within the Cowick Street Conservation Area and is identified as having a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE APPLICANT

The building is to be internally refurbished and fitted out to provide accommodation for a public library service. The public access will be limited to the main open planned ground floor area which has a ramped access to the main front door and the side double doors into courtyard area. It is the intention to make the front door fully automatic for ease of access for all users.

The first floor area accessed from single staircase is solely for staff use consisting of a small office, kitchenette/rest room and toilet facilities. The main open planned area is to be used for storage of books, etc.

There are no actual alterations proposed to the exterior of the building. The existing shopfront, windows and entrance door are to be repaired, prepared and repainted only.

New signage is required for the library, the intention is to provide new flat metal signs approx. 3 metres long by 300mm high saying "St Thomas Library". These would be mounted directly on the existing timber shop front canopy fascia to both front road elevations to cover up the existing painted signage "St Thomas Stationers".

The proposed refurbishment works do not involve any structural alterations to the building or drainage systems. Therefore, this together with the new use of the building will not have any material effect on the potential flood risk of the building. There are no specific flood proofing measures evident or proposed for the building except that there is a slight ramped access to the front entrance door, therefore the ground floor level is slightly higher than the pavement level adjoining the highway outside containing the mains drainage systems.

The lease for St Thomas Library at Exebridges expired in March 2011. DCC were unable to agree an affordable rent for library premises with the proposed development on Exebridges with the landlords and subsequently sought alternative interim accommodation to provide a continuation of service to the community whilst a more permanent location is sought. Terms have been agreed on the old stationers premises in Church Road which is close to the original Exebridges location and has nearby public parking. The library closed at Exebridges on 14 October and it is aimed to open on its new premises on 6 February.

The opening hours would be 9.30am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 9.30am to 1.30pm on Saturday.

A total of 4 full times employees would be created by this development.

PLANNING POLICIES/POLICY GUIDANCE

Devon County Structure Plan 2001-2016

ST1 - Sustainable Development
ST3 - Self Sufficiency of Devon's Communities
CO6 - Quality of New Development

Exeter Local Plan First Review 1995-2011

AP1 - Design and Location of Development
DG1 - Objectives of Urban Design
T3- Encouraging Use of Sustainable Modes

Exeter Core Strategy

CP10 - Meeting Community Needs

OBSERVATIONS

This is a County Council application for the conversion of the former St Thomas Stationers in Church Road for use as a public library. The application has been made to provide a continued library service in the West Exe area following the closure of the St Thomas Library last year. Whilst it was initially intended to provide a library facility within the first floor of the proposed new retail units which have been granted permission to replace the demolished former library building negotiating, regarding the lease arrangement have broken down. A detailed report on this matter can be found elsewhere on this agenda; planning application number 11/1533/03. Consequently alternative library provision is sought.

The Community Services section of the Exeter Local Plan First Review provides support for services which serve community needs and provides a focus for community life. Library provision clearly falls within this category and therefore the principle of such a use is to be supported. The emerging Exeter Core Strategy provides further guidance in Policy CP10 on this matter and states that '*facilities which serve neighbourhood needs should wherever possible, be located within or close to district centres or at locations easily accessible to the local community particularly by foot or bicycle*'. The site lies just outside the St Thomas District Centre and therefore satisfies this criteria. It is therefore considered that in terms of principle and location the premises represents a suitable site for this proposal and therefore is acceptable.

The premises is located within the Cowick Street Conservation Area and identified as a building which makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. The supporting information indicates that the proposal will result in the refurbishment and upgrading of the existing building's original external features. It is therefore considered that the occupation of the building and associated building improvement works will positively enhance the appearance of the building and is therefore to be welcomed.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council raise **NO OBJECTION** to the County Council's proposed change of use of the former St Thomas Stationers to a public library.

Local Government (Access to Information) 1985 (as amended).
Background papers used in compiling the report:

Files of planning applications available for inspection from the Customer Service Centre, Civic Centre, Paris Street, Exeter: Telephone 01392 265223