

Heather Smith (Case Officer)
Planning Department
Buckingham Council – Wycombe District
Queen Victoria Road
High Wycombe HP11 1BB

XX September 2020

Dear Madam,

BHA Amended Planning Application – 20/07032/FUL – Change of Use 1st Floor Speen Stores, Chapel Hill, Speen HP27 0SL

I wrote to you on 31 August objecting to an application by BHA to convert the first floor of Speen Stores to a one-bedroom flat. I now write to object to the amended plans (under the same application) submitted on 3 September 2020. This objection is lodged on behalf of the Speen Stores Working Group, a team of village residents committed to securing the continued existence of this well-used and much valued amenity.

The amended proposal is to install toilet facilities on the ground floor of the shop in what is currently the principal storage area. This will lead to a loss of some 20% of *gross* storage space. However, because of the need to provide a rear entrance/fire escape route, the ***net useable storage space will be only 50% of that which currently exists.***

Furthermore, the amended plan also sees the removal of the under-stairs cupboard, which provides critical storage space.

There will be no replacement kitchen and therefore no food preparation area. The store room will not be capable of being used for food preparation because there is no ventilated lobby between it and the WC.

If this amended application is approved, the shop will no longer be able to provide freshly prepared hot or cold food, or drinks as freezers which support this operation are located in the existing storage space which will subsequently be unable to accommodate them.

The amended plan still shows the front forecourt area being converted to parking for three vehicles. This will therefore mean the external (very attractive) seating and display area will be lost. This area also acts as an important community hub for the village.

The inability to provide a comprehensive range of services will impact heavily on turnover and will undoubtedly render the shop unviable.

The reason why the shop has operated successfully for the last 20 years is because:

- a) it has essential ancillary accommodation on the first floor;
- b) it has been able to provide freshly prepared hot and cold food; and
- c) it has been able to generate important income from the hair-dressing salon.

The hairdressing salon has been an important community asset and its use can be retained if the entire building remains demised to the shop operator. The loss of this commercial use of the first floor is contrary to the Wycombe District Local Plan and BHA are in direct contravention of Policy DM 29. This states that “Land and buildings currently or last used for a community use must be retained unless the applicant has clearly demonstrated through an

exhaustive needs assessment that the land and/or buildings proposed to be lost are surplus to community needs". Policy DM29 makes clear that it "applies to the full range of facilities required for communities to meet their day to day needs and includes post office and shops etc...." This stipulation requires BHA to demonstrate through an exhaustive needs assessment that it is surplus to community needs. No such needs assessment has been undertaken by BHA.

The amended application is as unworkable as the original application and will deprive the residents of Speen not only of the commercial use of the first floor, but also of the shop and post office.

In addition to this, the provision of three car parking spaces at the front of the shop would create a serious traffic hazard and considerable danger to pedestrians. It should be noted that the pavement along Chapel Hill is on the shop side of the road only; there is no pavement on the other side of the road. This is a busy pedestrian route, well used by parents and toddlers en route to and from the pre-school/infant school in Flowers Bottom Lane.

Cars parked in front of the shop will have to reverse into Chapel Hill, creating danger for both pedestrians and other motorists. The top of Chapel Hill has particularly poor sight lines and, in the immediate vicinity of the shop, which sits at the busiest crossroads in the village, we have traffic emerging from Dairy Mede, Laurel Close and Hampden Road. This is a very busy junction and the drivers of cars reversing into Chapel Hill from the front of the shop will be faced with pedestrian and vehicular traffic coming from several directions. The application should be rejected out of hand by the Highways Authority.

Can the addition of a one bedroom flat to the village housing stock really be justified at the expense of Speen's commercial and community wellbeing and the safety of its residents? We do not believe that it can and object to the amended plans in the strongest possible terms.

The CEO of the BHA is on record as stating to Caroline Green, the Senior Caseworker to Mr. R. Butler, our local MP *"I would like to confirm the Association's support for the village shop and Post Office to continue to operate after the current leaseholders have relinquished their lease" ... "We do acknowledge that the plan initially submitted with our planning application did not specifically incorporate a WC or emergency exit for the sole use of the ground floor shop and we have therefore submitted revised drawings including these altered provisions. I hope this will alleviate any concerns that our planning application is, in any way, intended to frustrate the feasibility of the ground floor of the building continuing to operate as the local village shop/post office"*.

Very sadly, the inept manner in which both applications have been made by BHA, without any understanding of the needs of running a shop or the courtesy of discussing it with the current tenant Bob Templeman, demonstrates a total disregard for the needs of the village and this amended application must be rejected on the basis that it is impractical, unworkable and is contrary to the provisions of the Local Plan.

The shop has served the community well for over twenty years; it was designed to fulfil its purpose and can only continue to do so if kept as one commercial unit.

Yours faithfully

On behalf of the Speen Stores Working Group