

21/00162/FUL

38-40 WEST STREET, ROCHFORD

NEW SHOP FRONT ACCESS RAMP AND HANDRAIL

APPLICANT: **CLLR GEORGE IOANNOU**
ZONING: **CONSERVATION AREA/TOWN CENTRE**
PARISH: **ROCHFORD PARISH COUNCIL**
WARD: **ROCHE SOUTH**

1 RECOMMENDATION

1.1 It is proposed that the Committee RESOLVES

That planning permission be **APPROVED**, subject to the following conditions:

- (1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- (2) The external facing materials to be used in the construction of the development hereby permitted, shall match (i.e. be of an identical appearance to) those of the corresponding areas of the existing building unless alternative materials are proposed in which case details shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to their use.

REASON: In order to ensure that the development harmonises with the character and appearance of the existing building, in the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the Rochford Conservation Area.

- (3) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in complete accordance with the following approved plans: PO/BH/RCHFRD/003 REV E; 2988/01 REV A; Proposed Elevations.

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is completed out in accordance with the details considered as part of the planning application.

2 PLANNING APPLICATION DETAILS

- 2.1 Planning permission is sought for a new shopfront with access ramp and handrail to No. 40 West Street, Rochford. The proposed shop front would replace the existing timber framed windows. Signage is also proposed but is considered under a separate application reference 20/01060/ADV.
- 2.2 The resulting shopfront and door frame would use timber and would be finished externally in RAL 7021 satin paint, which appears as a black colour. As existing there is a minor step up into No. 40 West Street. The use of the shop will be a shared banking facility and customers of all ages are expected to use the premises. As such it is considered vital that safe and easy access into the shop is provided. The proposal therefore also includes a ramp to the main access door. The ramp would be finished with brushed concrete with a timber handrail along both flanks. The timber handrail would be hand painted in RAL 7021 satin black to match the framework of the shop.

3 MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Site and Context

- 3.1 The application site lies within the Rochford Conservation Area and is within the setting of several listed buildings adjacent to the site. The application site is located on the northern side of West Street. It is identified within the Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan as a primary retail frontage.
- 3.2 Market Square and West Street form the commercial centre of Rochford. Most of the buildings in this area are used as shops or offices. The architectural context of the buildings are mostly of the Victorian era with some later 1960s additions. Along West Street, the street narrows as do the pavements and the road becomes almost tunnel like, which has a striking contrast to the open market square.
- 3.3 The northern side of the street follows an on-street building line which adds to the urban, town centre character of the area. The buildings along the north side of West Street encompass a similar scale and bulk and for the most part, have been well-preserved and contribute to the high quality of Rochford's Conservation Area. The application site is a two-storey building with a shop front to both Nos. 38 and 40. The building hosts a hipped roof which is tucked behind a slight parapet. The Rochford Conservation Area Appraisal states that it is an old building with its front remodelled with Crittall windows and it is visible upon historic maps, thus it is considered a non-designated heritage asset.

Planning History

- 3.4 Application No. 20/01060/ADV – new externally illuminated fascia signage and non-illuminated fascia and hanging signage – PENDING CONSIDERATION.

Principle of the Development

- 3.5 The Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan identifies the site as within the primary shopping frontage. The Action Plan seeks to preserve the active shopping frontage particularly for former A1 retail uses but will also view former A3 and former A4 as acceptable. Given recent changes to the Use Classes order that has consolidated commercial uses into one new Use Class E, the change from shop to bank does not relate to a change of use but planning permission is still required for the new shopfront and access ramp. The main consideration of the application is its impact upon the Rochford Conservation Area.
- 3.6 Paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (NPPF) stipulates that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.
- 3.7 Paragraph 194 also goes on to discuss that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use (Paragraph 196).
- 3.8 The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset (Paragraph 196).

Impact upon the Conservation Area

- 3.9 The proposed shopfront would be made of timber, which is a traditional material and suitable for the Conservation Area. The window frames would be hand-painted black.
- 3.10 The appearance of the resulting shopfront would be considered to integrate well with Rochford's Conservation Area. The traditional materials would not detract from the sensitivity of West Street or Market Square and it would not be considered to harm the setting of the nearby Listed Buildings. The Historic

Building adviser has considered the shopfront to be acceptable and to be a good reflection of the character of the area.

- 3.11 However, the proposed ramp and timber rail are considered by the Historic Building Adviser as a visual intrusion upon the street scene that would negatively affect the character of the Conservation Area. The Officer takes the view that the harm would be a low level of less than substantial harm upon the Conservation Area and paragraph 196 is therefore relevant.
- 3.12 It is the Council's view that the low level of less than substantial harm that would result from the ramp would be outweighed by the public benefit of giving access to the bank to those who are with some physical impairment. The proposed ramp would provide easy access into the shop by removing the 20cm step, making the shop accessible to all disabilities and vulnerable groups. The proposed handrail would prevent accidents by giving support and it is advised by 'Better Home Access', a ramp installing company, that ramps to the front of a building should be provided with handrails. The Bank Hub would be used by the residents of Rochford of all ages and mobility, and it is essential that access is made easy for all customers. The shop would be deemed 'essential' especially given that there is no existing High Street bank in the town.
- 3.13 The proposed ramp and handrail have incorporated materials that are sensitive to the site's location. No. 42 West Street has a concrete ramp leading up to the access door, as does No. 29 West Street; though both of these omit a handrail. However, No. 32 (ref: 04/00315/FUL), 26-28 and No. 14 (Ref: 07/00364/FUL APP Ref: APP/B1550/A/07/2048400) also each benefit from a ramp and handrail. The access ramp with handrail to No. 14 (Martin's) was allowed on appeal by the inspectorate who took the view that the ramp would not be harmful upon the Conservation Area subject to the use of suitable materials.
- 3.14 The shop frontage to No. 40 is recessed in from the building line, meaning that the ramp would not project onto the public footpath and would be confined to the forecourt to the premises. Furthermore, it would be sheltered from the wider view of the Conservation Area due to the walls either side of the shop front and only visible directly in front of the building. The Historic Building adviser has identified the consequent level of harm to be low. Given the sensitive material of the ramp and handrail, the other examples of ramps within West Street and Market Square and that the shop front is recessed and the ramp would only be visible when in front of the building, the harm is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the Rochford Conservation Area. Additionally, any resulting harm would be outweighed by the benefit of the access to the unit that the ramp would provide.
- 3.15 On balance, the proposed shopfront, access ramp and handrail are not considered to have a significant detrimental harm upon the character and appearance of the Conservation Area nor the setting of the surrounding Listed Buildings. Whilst the shopfront is considered in its entirety to preserve the

Historic Environment, the low level of less than substantial harm of the ramp and handrail is considered to be outweighed by the public benefit that the scheme would provide. The proposal is therefore considered compliant with the NPPF.

4 CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

Place Services Built Heritage Advice

- 4.1 The proposals are largely acceptable; the hand painted timber fascia and the proposed signage is a good reflection of the character of the area.
- 4.2 The proposed ramp and timber rail will be a visual intrusion into the street scene and negatively affect the character of this section of the Conservation Area. Removing these elements would be more appropriate and is recommended.
- 4.3 The proposals will cause a low level of less than substantial harm to the Conservation Area, meaning that section 196 of the NPPF (2019) is relevant.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and found there to be no impacts (either positive or negative) on protected groups as defined under the Equality Act 2010.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The proposal is not considered to cause undue demonstratable harm upon the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. On balance, the low level of harm that would result would be considered to be outweighed by the overriding public benefit of the scheme by giving the local community access to banking in the town.



Marcus Hotten

Assistant Director, Place and Environment

Relevant Development Plan Policies and Proposals

National Planning Policy Framework 2019

Core Strategy Adopted Version (December 2011) – policies CP1

Development Management Plan (December 2014) – policies DM1

Supplementary Planning Document 2 (January 2007) – Housing Design

The Essex Design Guide (2018)

Rochford Conservation Area Appraisal (2007)

Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan (2015)

Background Papers

None.

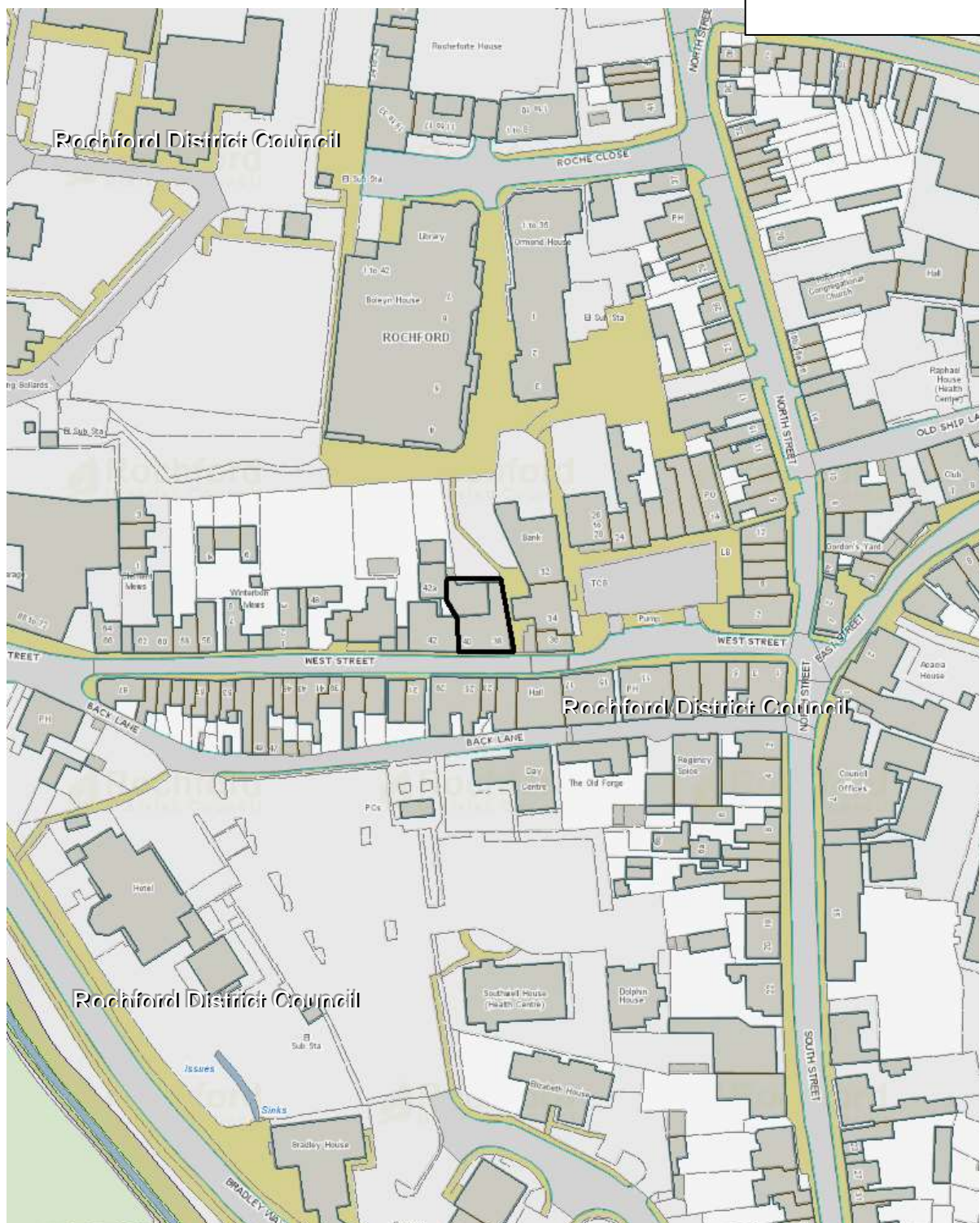
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