Development Control – Delegated Officer Report

Application Number: AWDM/1441/24 Recommendation – APPROVE

Site: Suite 12C Chapel House Business Centre 3A Chapel Road Worthing

Proposal: Change of use to Taxi office (Sui Generis)

Date of site visit: 12/11/2024

Neighbours checked: Y

Additional neighbour notifications: N

Site and Surroundings
The site is located in Chapel House to the northern side of Liverpool Road, in the town centre of Worthing. The unit is located on the second floor of a three storey property. The building is comprised of a number of uses with retail units on the ground floor and mainly offices on the first and second floors. The application unit is currently vacant but was previously occupied by offices.

The site is not a listed building, however, the site is within the South Street Conservation Area.

Proposal
Planning permission is sought for a change of use from Class E – Office to Sui Generis – Taxi Offices.

There would be no changes to the existing layout or external elevations and access would remain via the front door.

Relevant Planning History:
None relevant

Consultations:

Environmental Health – No comments

WSCC Highways - The application seeks permission for the change in use of an existing office unit to form a taxi office. The site is located on Chapel Road, an A-classified road subject to a speed restriction of 20 mph.

From reviewing the submitted plans and information, limited information has been providing regarding the function of the proposed taxi office. Will the application site

operate as a hub for taxis to wait and pick up fares, or will it function more like a typical office? The following information would be requested:

• Proposed function of the taxi office
• Number of taxis that will be used by the office and where their main point for parking will be whilst waiting for fares. (If relevant)
• The location as to where taxis will pick up customers waiting at the taxi office to determine whether any intensification is likely to occur on the nearby roads. (If relevant)

Please reconsult…

WSCC in its role as Local Highway Authority (LHA) has been reconsulted for the above application, following the applicant's submission of additional information. The LHA previously provided comment on this application, dated 27/11/2024, requesting details relating to the function of the proposed taxi office.

The applicant has confirmed that the proposed taxi office will function much like a normal office, for the receiving and booking of calls. The office will not function as a base for taxis waiting for or collecting fares. Considering this, the LHA does not anticipate that the proposed change of use would give rise to a material intensification of movements to or from the site.

Access and parking arrangements would operate as existing, with staff parking on-street or within nearby paid-for provision. The site is situated in a sustainable location that is well accessible on foot, by cycle or by public transport.

In summary, the LHA does not consider that this proposal would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or result in 'severe' cumulative impacts on the operation of the highway network, therefore is not contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 116), and that there are no transport grounds to resist the proposal.

WSP - Following a review of the submitted information, we have no objection on surface water grounds. Due to the site, size, location, and type of development we would recommend the approval of the application.

Southern Water - Southern Water requires a formal application for a connection to the public sewer to be made by the applicant or developer.

Worthing Society: Given that this is a sensitive location within the South Street Conservation Area, we consider that the application needs careful consideration.

Representations:
None received.

Relevant Planning Policies
Worthing Local Plan policies (WBC 2023): SP1, DM5, DM13, DM15, DM22

National Planning Policy Framework (DLUHC 2023)
National Planning Practice Guidance

Planning Assessment

Principle

The unit is located within the town centre of Worthing. The preamble to Policy DM13 of the Worthing Local Plan states:

The efficient and effective use of the upper floors within the centres can add to the vitality and viability of the centres. Appropriate main town centre uses will be considered, particularly retail and residential uses. However, consideration will be given to the nature of the proposed use, hours of operation, intensity of use, accessibility and impact on nearby uses. The assessment will include a consideration as to whether the change of use of the upper floors would undermine the viability of the unit at ground floor level.

Policy DM13 - a) The Local Plan will support the vitality and viability of Worthing's town centres by seeking to meet the identified floorspace needs for retail and other town centre uses up to 2026.

b) Changes of use and redevelopments within town, district and local centres will be carefully controlled to ensure that they support, rather than detract from, the successful functioning of the centres and their ability to meet local needs, according to their function in the hierarchy.

The unit is located within the Town Centre. There is a variety of shops and services within the centre as a whole including retail, cafes, restaurant/pub, micro pub, takeaways etc. as well as several vacant units.

The change of use to a taxi office would result in the change of use from one office type to another. The applicant has confirmed that the site will not operate as a base for drivers or customers and is therefore considered to be an acceptable office use similar to the existing.

The change to a taxi office is not considered to result in the loss of a unit that would reduce the viability of the town centre with taxis being a common use within the modern lifestyle. The proposal is considered to make a positive contribution to the vitality and long term viability of the area and would not harm the character of the town centre.

The proposal would be consistent with the aims of policy DM13.

Visual Amenity

There are no physical changes to the proposed unit that would alter the appearance of the building from the outside. As such it is not considered to change the visual amenity of the unit.

As such there would be no harm to the visual amenities of the locality or conservation area as a result of this application.

Residential Amenity
The proposal results in the office space being altered to another form of office space. The existing use as an office is not considered to be altered resulting in an intensification of the use. The town centre location for this also assists in the unit not being out of character within the locality, with any impact being mitigated by the existing noise and other uses and units within the area.

To ensure that the site will only be used as an office a condition will be added to restrict the office use only rather than to act as a waiting room etc for taxi drivers and any customers.

There would be no detrimental impact on residential amenity as a result of this application.

Access and parking
As set out above the proposal is for an office use only with no vehicle or pedestrian movements to or from the office except for staff. No vehicular parking is proposed. As such, parking would have to be accommodated on-street or within the nearby car parks, as per the existing arrangement. Traffic generation and demand for parking is unlikely to differ significantly from the former office use and the Local Highway Authority has raised no objection.

Recommendation

APPROVE subject to Conditions:-

1. Drawing Numbers
2. Standard time limit
3. Office use only

Informative

1. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by identifying matters of concern within the application (as originally submitted) and negotiating, with the Applicant, acceptable amendments to the proposal to address those concerns. As a result, the Local Planning Authority has been able to grant planning permission for an acceptable proposal,

in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Is recommendation contrary to letter(s) of representation? N

Case Officer: Finlay Gardner Date: 05.03.2025

Authorised by: Louise Prew Date: 05/03/2025