OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 24/01995/FUL

Proposal: Proposed change of use from Use Class E (hair salon) to sui generis (nail bar) retrospective

Location: 64 High Street, St Neots

Applicant: Mr James Doan

Grid Ref: 518515 260318

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The site is located on the southern side of Main Street, occupying a corner location with the B1043. The site accommodates a two-storey, brick, flat roof building, attached to a three-storey building on High Street and is detached to the rear. The ground floor was previously used as a hair salon and the current nail bar use commenced in December 2023.

This application seeks retrospective permission for use of the ground floor from a hair salon to a nail bar. The first floor remains in use as a separate flat.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social, and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. It further states so that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The NPPF also sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):

* Making effective use of land
* Achieving well-designed, beautiful, and safe places;
* Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)

LP 2 Strategy for Development
LP 7 Spatial Planning Areas
LP 11 Design Context
LP 12 Design Implementation
LP 14 Amenity
LP 17 Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP 21 Town Centre Vitality and Viability

LP 34 Heritage Assets and their Settings

Neighbourhood Plan

Policy A3
Policy PT1
Policy RD1
Policy SS1

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

0001870FUL approved the change of use from D1 (non-residential institution) to A1, A2 and/or B1 together with alterations to the shopfront and formation of a new first floor.

CONSULTATIONS

St Neots Town Council had no comments to make.

REPRESENTATIONS

One representation received raising concerns over the signage erected without consent.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:

- Principle of the proposal
- Design and visual amenity including impact on heritage assets
- Residential amenity
- Parking provision and highway safety

Principle of Development

The proposal is retrospective and comprises the change of use of the ground floor from a hair salon to a nail bar. This use has operated since December 2023.

The site forms part of the primary shopping frontage and primary shopping area and is a town centre location. Policy LP2 in part seeks to direct development to St Neots and policy LP7 supports main town centre uses within the built-up area of an identified spatial planning area settlement.

Policy LP21 supports retail/food and drink uses within a primary shopping frontage to encourage uses which support the vitality and viability of the location whilst maintaining its essential retail nature. A proposal for any other main town centre use at ground floor level may be supported where it will make a positive contribution to vitality and viability by enhancing the existing quality, diversity and distribution of retail, leisure, entertainment, arts, heritage, cultural facilities, community facilities or tourist attractions and continue to provide an active frontage where there is an existing shopfront.

Policy RD1 of the Neighbourhood Plan supports economic development throughout St Neots and policy SS1 supports new town centre uses.

The proposal comprises the change of use of the ground floor from hair salon to nail bar. As such, the previous use was not classed as retail and therefore the proposal to use the premises as a nail bar would not reduce the retail offer within the primary shopping frontage. The proposal would replace one non-retail use with another but both provide economic benefits to the town centre. It is

therefore considered that the proposed use is acceptable in land use terms and accords with the thrust of the town centre/primary shopping frontage policies and can be supported.

Design and Visual Amenity

Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan state, amongst other matters, that proposals will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context and has drawn inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings, including natural, historic and built environment, contributes positively to the character and identity of the area and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings, the routes and spaces between buildings, topography and landscape. Policy LP34 states great weight and importance is given to the conservation of heritage assets and their settings. It also states a proposal within, affecting the setting of, or affecting views into or out of, a conservation area should preserve, and wherever possible enhance, features that contribute positively to the area's character, appearance and setting. Policy A3 of the Neighbourhood Plan refers to design.

The NPPF at Section 12 refers to design. Section 16 relates to heritage with paragraph 212 stating "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".

Paragraph 215 states "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".

Section 66 of the Planning Act 1990 states that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the Local Planning Authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Section 72 of the Planning Act 1990 states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

The proposal comprises the change of use of the building. The change of use has commenced with no external alterations taking place. As such, the use of the building has had no impact on the building, on the character or appearance of the conservation area or on the setting of the adjacent listed buildings. The proposal therefore is visually acceptable and complies with the above policies and Act.

It is acknowledged that an objection has been received; this relates to the signage on the building which is beyond the scope of this application.

Amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

The proposal comprises the change of use of the building from hair salon to nail bar. The uses are similar in nature, in terms of hours of operation, number of visitors etc. and would have a comparable impact on occupiers of neighbouring properties as each other.

Overall, having regard to the above matters, it is considered that the use would not be harmful to the residential amenities of occupants of neighbouring properties and is therefore in accordance with Policy LP14 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

Highway Safety and Parking Provision

The proposal comprises the change of use of the ground floor from hair salon to nail bar. The building occupies a town centre location and has no separate parking. It is considered the two uses would generate a comparable amount of parking demand, which can be adequately catered for within the town centre and that the site occupies a sustainable location, accessible by various means of transport. As such, the development is considered to accord with Policy LP17 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

Conclusion

The proposed development is considered acceptable in principle and on the grounds of visual amenity including on heritage assets, residential amenity and parking.

Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is recommended that planning permission be approved.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
Enquiries about this report to **Nigel Reeves**