

Report to Planning applications committee
Date 6 November, 2014
Report of Head of planning services
Subject 14/01108/U Rouen House Rouen Road Norwich NR1 1RB

Item
4C

SUMMARY

Description:	Change of use of the lower ground and ground floors from offices (Class B1) to clinic (Class D1).
Reason for consideration at Committee:	Objections
Recommendation:	Approve
Ward:	Thorpe Hamlet
Contact Officer:	Mrs Caroline Dodden Planner 01603 212503
Valid Date:	2nd September 2014
Applicant:	Norwich Practices Ltd.
Agent:	KLH Architects Ltd

INTRODUCTION

The Site

Location and context

1. Rouen House is a five storey office building situated on the southeast side of Rouen road, which was built in the 1970s, at the same time as Prospect House situated to the west, on the opposite side of Rouen Road. A number of residential blocks of flats, such as Raleigh Court, Scales Green, Morgan House and Paradise Place are located close to Rouen House.
2. The access road known as Normans Buildings lies directly to the south of the building and runs along its rear boundary. This road provides access to a vehicle workshop and garage, a small commercial unit and a number of residential flats. Stepping Lane forms a T-junction with Normans Buildings behind Rouen House, which provides access to a private car park, further residential dwellings and pedestrian access to King Street/ Mountergate.

Constraints

3. The building lies within the Ber Street character area of the city centre conservation area appraisal. Rouen House is identified within the appraisal as a negative building and negative landmark. In addition, the appraisal identifies negative vistas looking westwards from Mountergate and north-westwards along Rouen Road.
4. The building also falls within an area of main archaeological interest and an office priority area (under emerging policy DM19).

Topography

5. The land slopes down to the north-east, east and south from the building, where the gradient ranges from about 1:15 to more than 1:20.

Planning history

The majority of the recent planning history for Rouen House relates to the installation of telecommunications antennae and equipment.

Equality and diversity issues

Accessibility has been a key consideration of the assessment of the planning application and as such, this matter is discussed in detail at paragraphs 18 - 25 and 31 - 32.

The proposal

6. To change the use of the lower ground floor of Rouen House to a walk-in health centre and the ground floor to a doctors' surgery. This facility would replace the existing Timberhill Health Centre that is located in the Castle Mall shopping centre.

Representations received

7. Advertised on site and in the press. Adjacent and neighbouring properties have been notified in writing. Four letters of representation have been received citing the issues as summarised in the table below.

8.

Issues Raised	Response
Keen to see the walk-in clinic remain in a city centre location but feel that this application is currently not viable, as it does not address accessibility to the clinic.	Paragraphs 18 - 25
If Normans Buildings and Stepping Lane are used as an informal drop off /parking area for the clinic it will cause chaos and potentially accidents on these streets.	Paragraph 24

Lack of parking facilities for the centre will mean a dramatic increase in traffic to the area and as a consequence illegal and nuisance parking on Normans Buildings and Stepping Lane.	Paragraphs 21, 22 and 24
Concern about noise disturbance if the entrance to the clinic is proposed from Normans Buildings.	Paragraphs 27 - 30
There would be significant risk to the safety of pedestrians and vehicles on most of the routes of access to Rouen House and on adjacent roads	Paragraphs 18 – 25, 31

Consultation responses

9. Local Highways Authority: In highways terms, the proposal is acceptable in principle for its city centre location and would work operationally. A change to the traffic regulation order would be required for disabled parking, footway improvement measures adjacent to the property, pedestrian and directional vehicular signage in the locality and a Travel Information Plan to be submitted, all of which could be the subject of condition.
10. Norwich Society: concerned about access, dropping-off points and servicing of the proposal.

ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant planning policies

National Planning Policy Framework:

Statement 1 – Building a strong, competitive economy
Statement 2 – Ensuring the vitality of town centres
Statement 4 – Promoting sustainable transport
Statement 8 – Promoting healthy communities

Relevant policies of the adopted Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk 2014:

Policy 6 – Access and transportation
Policy 7 – Supporting communities
Policy 11 – Norwich City Centre
Policy 19 – The hierarchy of centres

Relevant saved policies of the adopted City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan 2004

AEC2 – Local community facilities in centres
TRA6 - Parking standards - maxima
TRA7 - Cycle parking standards
TRA8 - Servicing provision

Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance

City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal (September 2007)

Other Material Considerations

Written Ministerial Statement: Planning for Growth March 2011

Emerging Development Management Policies

The Joint Core Strategy and Replacement Local Plan (RLP) have been adopted since the introduction of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act in 2004. With regard to paragraphs 211 and 215-216 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), both sets of policies have been subjected to a test of compliance with the NPPF. Both the JCS and RLP policies above are considered to be compliant with the NPPF.

The Council submitted the Development Plan Policies local plan and Site Allocations and Site Specific Policies local plan for examination in April 2013. The examination process is now complete with the publication of the Inspector's report for each plan, dated 13 October, 2014 (available at <http://www.norwich.gov.uk/Planning/Pages/DMAAndSAPoliciesPlans.aspx>). Significant weight must now be given to all the following policies, as proposed to be modified by the Inspector's reports, pending formal adoption.

DM1 Achieving and delivering sustainable development
DM2 Ensuring satisfactory living and working conditions
DM19 Encouraging and promoting major office growth
DM22 Planning for and safeguarding community facilities
DM28 Encouraging sustainable travel
DM31 Car parking and servicing

Principle of Development

Policy Considerations

11. Paragraph 70 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should plan positively for community facilities and local services and guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where it would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs.
12. The proposed use as a health clinic comprising a walk-in centre and a GP surgery falls within use class D1. As such, it is not a defined main town centre use within the NPPF. The proposal is assessed against saved policy AEC2 of the Local Plan. This policy sets out a sequential approach to the location of facilities in centres where a need exists. In this case the City Centre is considered to be the most sequentially appropriate location for such a use, which services the wider Norwich Area.
13. Emerging Policy DM22 permits new or enhanced public or community facilities where they are located within or adjacent to the city centre or existing and proposed local and district centres. It continues that development resulting in the loss of an existing community facility will only be permitted where an adequate alternative provision exists or will be provided in an equally accessible or more accessible

location within 800 metres walking distance.

14. Emerging Policy DM19 relates to office priority areas. The policy does not permit the change of use of larger existing offices of 1500sq.m gross internal floor space unless it can be justified by a number of criteria including that the accommodation is no longer fit for purpose and that its upgrading is not economically viable, feasible or practicable.

Loss of office floorspace

15. The proposal would see a change of use of 628sq.m of office space (Class B1(a)) to a health centre (Class D1) over the two lower floors of this office building. Although the building lies within the Office Priority Area under emerging policy DM19, the proposal does not trigger the requirement to justify the loss of office space as it is below the 1500sq.m. threshold and the three upper floors of the building currently remain in office use.

Relocation of health centre

16. This site has been identified by the Applicants as a potential alternative location for the existing Timberhill Health Centre, which is currently located on level 4 at no.115-117 Castle Mall.
17. In planning terms, it is considered that the use of part of Rouen House for a health centre would satisfy both adopted policy AEC2 and emerging policy DM22 as being an adequate replacement, as the building is situated within the city centre, which is the most sequentially appropriate location for the facility.

Accessibility and servicing

18. Rouen House is located approximately 100 metres along Rouen Road from the four way junction with Cattle Market Street, Farmers Lane and Golden Ball Street. The existing Timberhill health centre is located approximately 200 metres away in Castle Mall.
19. The proposed doctor's surgery would be located on the ground floor, which has good accessibility by steps or a gentle slope from Rouen Road. The walk-in centre would be accessed from the southern side of the building, where a new entrance would be created adjacent to the existing fire exit doors. The details of the new entrance would be the subject of a further planning application.
20. The Transport Statement submitted proposes to improve the pedestrian access to the walk-in centre, as a minimum, by providing a handrail at the back of the footway in the immediate vicinity of the proposed walk-in centre entrance and by providing tactile paving to the pedestrian crossing areas of the pavement on either side of Normans Buildings. If Members are minded to grant planning permission, a condition could be attached to require the submission and formal agreement of a package of measures to improve pedestrian safety in the immediate vicinity of Rouen House.
21. The Transport Statement also gives details of the various modes of transport that can be utilised to access Rouen House. There are many bus routes that stop at Castle Meadow and the Bus Station. There are two car parks containing over 790

spaces within Castle Mall and a surface car park on Rouen Road (194 spaces) approximately 150 metres away to the south. In addition, there are on-street pay and display bays situated intermittently on both sides of Rouen Road. There is motorbike parking on Farmers Avenue and several cycle stands located outside the main entrance to Rouen House. In addition, the train station is about a 10 minute walk away.

22. There is an on-street parking bay directly outside the main entrance to Rouen House after which double yellow lines stretch around the corner on to both sides of Normans Buildings and Stepping Lane (apart from a small on-street parking bay in front of the flats at Scoles Green). Given that the proposal is a change of use application and not a new-build, it is considered unreasonable that a dedicated dropping off point is identified as part of the application, particularly when it is considered that the building is highly accessible and that no such facility is in operation at the existing Timberhill health centre.
23. It is understood that ambulances would rarely visit the health centre and such emergency vehicles are allowed to park temporarily on double yellow lines. Therefore, it is considered that if a convenient space was not available for an emergency vehicle within the on-street parking bays on Rouen Road, it would be acceptable for an ambulance to park on double yellow lines.
24. Objectors are concerned that some health centre visitors will park along Normans Buildings and Stepping Lane and that this would cause access and highway safety problems. It is considered that there is good access to Rouen House and a variety of parking facilities available close by. Bearing in mind the existing on-street parking restrictions on Normans Buildings and Stepping Lane, which are both narrow roads, it is considered that little more can be done to prevent any potential unneighbourly parking that may occur as a result of the proposal. However, it is proposed to attach a condition requiring the submission and formal agreement of a Travel Information Plan that would detail how the health centre would provide practical travel information to staff and customers to encourage sustainable travel.
25. The largest delivery vehicle would be a 7.5 tonne rigid vehicle that removes clinical waste. This is considered to be of a comparable size to office delivery vehicles. Servicing the health centre will utilise the existing arrangements from Normans Buildings. A gated access is available at the rear of the building to allow delivery vehicles to turn adequately.

Impact on living conditions

Noise and disturbance

26. Two nearby residents are concerned that the proposal could cause noise disturbance from vehicles and visitors, particularly at times of the day when the area is quieter.
27. The opening times required for the clinic would be 7:00am – 9:00pm Monday to Sunday. The pedestrian access for the doctors' surgery would be from Rouen Road and the access for the walk-in centre would be via a new entrance door situated on the corner with Normans Buildings.

28. The Rouen Road entrance is close to the flats at Raleigh Court. The main orientation of the nearest block of flats appears to be east-west and although there is one window on each floor that faces the entrance, it does not appear to be a principle window.
29. The proposed walk-in centre entrance is approximately 25 metres to the edge of Morgan House to the southeast and approximately 35 metres to the nearest flats at Paradise Place to the southwest. Both groups of flats are set within mature landscaping and sit lower than Rouen Road itself.
30. Although the building is within the city centre, Rouen Road is largely residential in character and as such, it is considered that a condition to control the hours of opening to those requested would be appropriate (7am to 9pm each day). This would ensure that nearby residents would not be subjected to significant noise disturbance late at night, when the background noise levels are generally much lower.

Equality and diversity issues

31. Disabled parking is provided within the Castle Mall and Rouen Road car parks and blue badge holders can also park for free in the on-street bays on Rouen Road. The Transport Statement also proposes four dedicated disabled spaces directly in front of Rouen House.
32. It is understood that many of the 8,200 people registered with a doctor at the existing Timberhill health centre are young people, vulnerable, people with special needs, or people who have difficulty engaging with a doctor. Also, there are a number of frail elderly patients who have difficulty with transport. Keeping the replacement health facility centrally located would ensure that such people would still have good access to health care.

Conclusions

33. Subject to conditions, it is considered that the proposed change of use from offices to a health centre, comprising doctors' surgery and walk-in centre, is acceptable. The relocation of the health facility within the city centre is considered to be of upmost importance in serving the local population. The proposals are considered to be consistent with the development plan and subject to conditions there are not considered to be material considerations which indicate that the proposal should be determined other than in accordance with the plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To approve application no 14/01108/U for the lower ground and ground floors of Rouen House, Rouen Road and grant planning permission, subject to the following conditions:-

1. Commencement within three years.
2. In accordance with approved plans and details.
3. The health centre, comprising a doctors surgery and walk-in centre, shall not be open to the public between the hours of 9pm and 7am hours on any day;

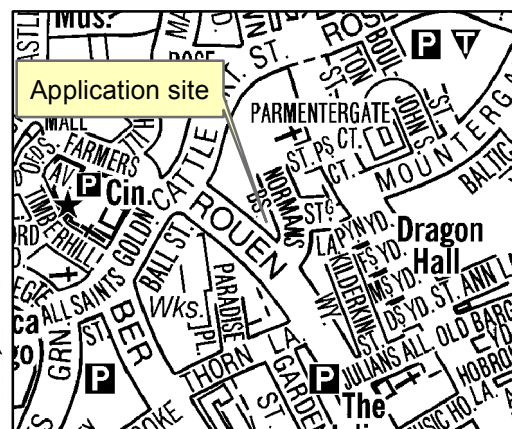
4. No development until measures to improve the pedestrian safety of visitors to the health centre, comprising a hand rail & improved pedestrian plaza to the Normans Buildings entrance;
5. Submission of a Travel Information Plan;
6. A scheme for the provision of pedestrian and vehicle signage;
7. Provision of on street disabled parking bays including dropped kerbs and associated amendments to extant restrictions;
8. Scheme for the provision of cycle storage facilities;
9. The premises shall be used as a health centre and for no other purpose (including any other purpose in Class D1).

Article 31(1)(cc) Statement

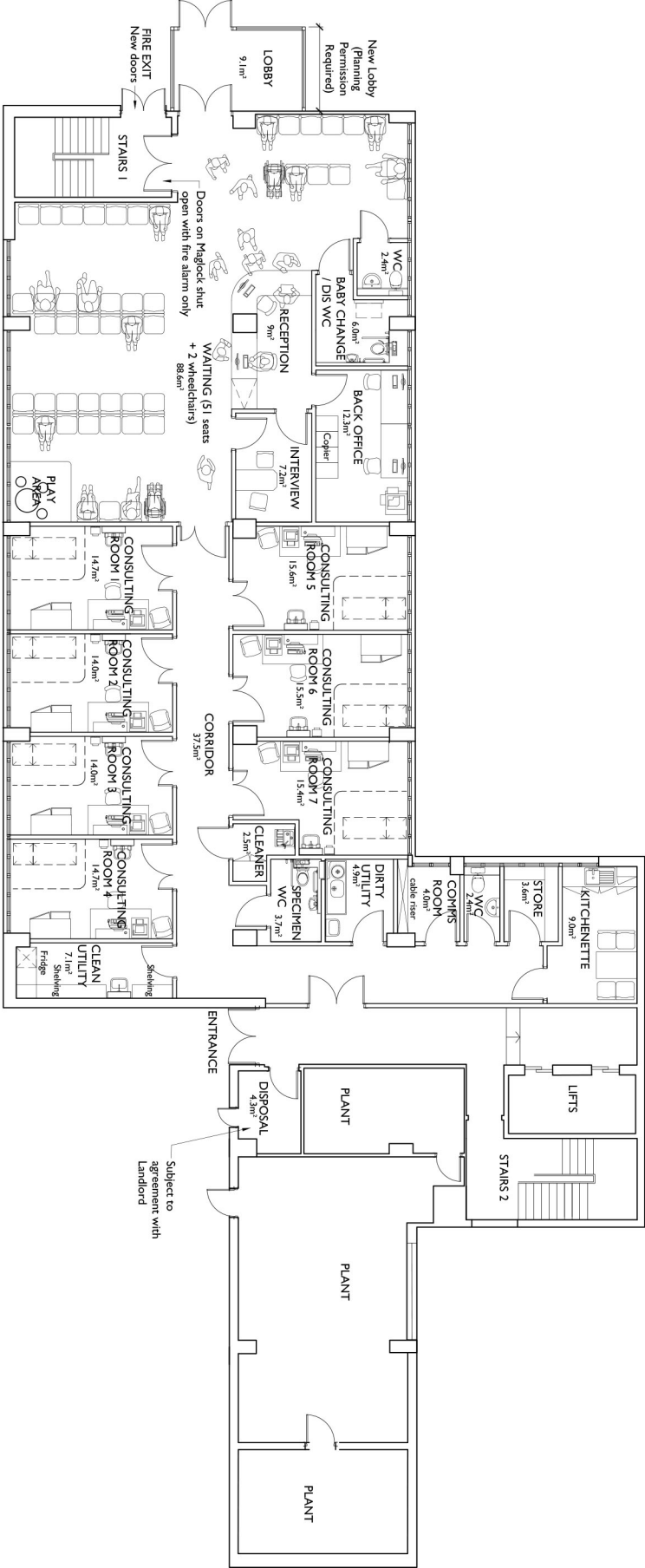
The local planning authority in making its decision has had due regard to paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework as well as the development plan, national planning policy and other material considerations and has approved the application subject to appropriate conditions and for the reasons outlined in the officer report.

Informative notes:

- This use would not be eligible for on street parking permits;
- Major changes to the junction and traffic management in the Golden Ball Street and Cattlemarket Street/Farmers Avenue area is planned for 2015/17; this will deliver improved pedestrian crossing facilities to the Rouen Road area of the city centre;
- Compliance with condition 7 will involve a traffic regulation order the costs of which will need to be met by the applicant.



- PL 30/07/14 REVISED TO CLIENT COMMENTS
P2 05/08/14 REVISED TO CLIENT COMMENTS
P3 07/08/14 REVISED TO CLIENT COMMENTS
P4 15/08/14 REVISED TO CLIENT COMMENTS
P5 15/08/14 DOORS TO INTERVIEW ROOM



PRELIMINARY

Client
MORGAN SINDALL

Project
ROUEN HOUSE
WALK IN CENTRE AND
GENERAL MEDICAL SERVICE

Title

WALK IN CENTRE
PROPOSED LAYOUT
LOWER GROUND FLOOR

Drawing Ref.
2996/01

Scale	Drawn	Date
1:100 @ A2	RC	JULY 2014
Drawing Status	Checked	
PRELIMINARY	GL	



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