

Committee: **Regulatory  
Planning Committee**

Date: **15 December 2021**

Report by: **Head of Planning & Environment**

Proposal: **Temporary change of use from Class E(f) day centre  
to mixed use Class E(f) & F1(d) Library.**

Site Address: **Peacehaven Youth Centre, Roderick Avenue,  
Peacehaven, BN10 8BL**

Applicant: **Mr Nick Skelton, Assistant Director Communities**

Application No. **LW/3445/CC**

Key Issues: **Principle and impact of change of use.**

Contact Officer: **Miss Kiran Sajjan**

Local Member: **Councillor Chris Collier**

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## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**1. To grant planning permission subject to conditions as indicated in paragraph 8.1 of this report.**

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## **CONSIDERATION BY HEAD OF PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT.**

### **1. The Site and Surroundings**

1.1. Peacehaven Youth Centre (known as the 'Joff') is a day centre used for various activities including dance, support groups and other activities for young people. It is situated opposite the junction of Balcombe Road and Sutton Avenue and is located in a central location in Peacehaven. The Joff is built on relatively flat ground surrounded by housing to the north and west, and to the south by a car park and the Meridian Centre which includes shops and the local library.

1.2. It occupies a large site that is exposed and visible from the surrounding area. It is arranged with the Joff fronting Sutton Road, with a car parking area to the south-west and a large grassy area to the east. The building is mainly two-storey with brick walls and a mixture of tiled and flat roofs. It has white uPVC windows and wooden doors.

## **2. The Proposal**

2.1 Planning permission is sought for a change of use of the Joff building from a day centre to a mixed use of a day centre and public library for a temporary period of four years.

2.2 The public library would be relocated from the Meridian Centre, which is located approximately 160 metres to the south, into an area in the eastern part of the Joff building which is currently used for storage. A range of library services would continue to be provided such as public access computers. The library has a total of 4 existing employees, all part time. This equates to 2.5 full time equivalent employees. All staff members would be retained and would transfer to the Joff.

2.3 The library would have a dedicated access on the south-eastern elevation of the building, separate from the access to the youth centre. To facilitate the proposed change of use, some external changes are proposed including replacement doors from white timber doors to aluminium framed glazed doors. The replacement doors would be power assisted to ensure ease of access. New signage indicating the location of the library would also be installed. Some minor internal alterations are also proposed which comprise the reconfiguration of an existing W/C and provision of staff welfare facilities.

2.4 The planning consideration of this application solely relates to the acceptability of the change of use of Peacehaven Youth Centre and the associated works detailed above. It is not for this application to consider any proposals that may emerge for changes to, or the redevelopment of the Meridian Centre, which contains the current library.

## **3. Site History**

3.1 The most recent planning permission for the site dates back to 2008 (ref. LW/2681/CC) when permission was granted for replacement windows and doors. There are no permissions of relevance to this proposal.

## **4. Consultations and Representations**

4.1 Lewes District Council – No comments received.

4.2 Peacehaven Town Council – Objects to the proposal on the following grounds: i) There is no sound reason for the relocation of the library; ii) access for people with disabilities, pedestrian access and parking is poor at the Joff; iii) ventilation in the proposed space is poor, iv) detailed plans have not been submitted and the space is inadequate and represents a degradation of public services in Peacehaven.

4.3 Telscombe Town Council – Objects to the proposal on the following grounds: i) the site is too small to provide the required services and meet the needs of the community; ii) the site does not meet disabled access requirements and iii) it is overdevelopment of the site.

4.4 Highway Authority – Raises no objections to the proposal.

4.5 Local Representations – A total of 160 objections have been received from members of the public objecting to the proposal. In summary, these objections refer to the following matters:

- The downsizing of the service would not be suitable for the needs of the community.
- The negative impact on access to facilities such as computers.
- The closure of the library in the Meridian Centre.
- The negative impact on community and wellbeing.
- Poor disability access and unsafe access through the car park.
- The need for the relocation of the library is unclear as there are no plans for the redevelopment of the Meridian Centre.

Other issues include: the lack of public consultation and poor ventilation.

4.6 The Local Member, Councillor Chris Collier, raises concerns around safeguarding as a result of the youth centre and library service sharing a space and also considers the access to the site is unsuitable and unsafe.

4.7 Saltdean Residents' Association objects to the proposal on the grounds that the relocation of the library to the Joff would be inadequate to meet the needs of residents.

## **5. The Development Plan policies of relevance to this decision are:**

5.1 Lewes District Local Plan Part 1 Joint Core Strategy 2010-2030 (2016): Core Policy 7 (Infrastructure); Core Policy 11 (Built and Historic Environment and High Quality Design) and Core Policy 13 (Sustainable Travel).

5.2 Lewes District Local Plan Part 2 Site Allocations and Development Management Policies 2020: Policy DM25 (Design)

5.3 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021:

The NPPF does not change the status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making but it does constitute guidance as a material consideration in determining planning applications. Part 8 (Promoting healthy and safe communities), and in particular paragraph 93, is of relevance to this proposal.

## 6. Considerations

### Principle and impact of change of use

#### *Principle of the development*

6.1 Core Policy 7 of the Lewes Local Plan Part 1 states that the creation of sustainable communities in the district where residents enjoy a high quality of life will be achieved by, *inter alia*, protecting, retaining and enhancing existing community facilities and services, including facilities which serve older people. The Policy also states that proposals involving the loss of sites or premises currently, or last, used for the provision of community facilities or services should be resisted unless an alternative facility of equivalent or better quality to meet community needs is available or will be provided in an accessible location within the same locality. Similarly, paragraph 93 of the NPPF states that decisions should guard against the unnecessary loss of valued community facilities and services.

6.2 The applicant has indicated that the current location of Peacehaven Library, which is the Meridian Centre, is due for redevelopment and is under contract to a developer. Under the lease agreement, the County Council is subject to six months' notice and therefore in order to prevent the total loss of library provision in the locality, it is proposed to temporarily relocate the library to the Joff whilst an alternative permanent location is sought.

6.3 The library use would co-exist alongside the existing use of the Joff as a day centre. The space that would be occupied by the library service is currently an underutilised storage area, measuring approximately 40m<sup>2</sup>. The loss of this floorspace would have a negligible impact upon the function of the youth centre. The library would be served by its own point of entry which would enable both uses to function without any significant disruption to the operation of either service. Activities, events and uses that are provided by the existing library will continue to be provided and this will include through the utilisation of areas of the Joff outside the aforementioned library floorspace. However, this would not be to the detriment of existing activities and uses that take place in these areas. In this regard, the applicant has confirmed that all bookings for these uses will be honoured going forward. It is considered that the proposal would not adversely impact the existing use of the youth centre and the services it provides, therefore the proposal accords with Core Policy 7 of the Lewes Local Plan Part 1 and complies with the provisions of paragraph 93 of the NPPF.

#### *Design & effect on amenity*

6.4 Core Policy 11 of the Lewes Local Plan Part 1 requires the design of development to, *inter alia*, respect and positively contribute to the character of the area and respond sympathetically to the site and its local context. It also requires development to be accessible to all. Policy DM25 of the Lewes Local Plan Part 2 supports development which incorporates, *inter alia*, high quality, durable and sustainable materials of an appropriate texture, colour, pattern and appearance that will contribute positively to the character of the area. The

proposed external works to the south-eastern elevation of the building would create an inviting entrance to the library and have a small beneficial effect on local townscape and landscape character and views. Moreover, the installation of the glazed doors would improve natural lighting in the east of the building. The proposed external alterations therefore comply with Core Policy 11 and Policy DM25.

6.5 As the library would be located within an existing community facility and the access to it would front onto the Meridian Centre car park, it is considered the proposal would not result in any unacceptable adverse impact upon the visual and residential amenity of the occupiers of neighbouring properties to the north and west.

6.6 The building benefits from multiple level accesses, one of which is an existing ramped access leading directly into the space proposed for the library use. The ramped access would be retained and this, along with the power-assisted doors, would ensure it is accessible to wheelchair users and people with impaired mobility. The proposal therefore accords with Core Policy 11 of the Lewes Local Plan Part 1.

#### *Traffic impacts*

6.7 Core Policy 13 of the Lewes District Core Strategy supports development which encourages sustainable travel. The site benefits from 9 car parking spaces one of which is a disabled bay. It is well served by footways and public transport with regular bus services and a bus stop situated approximately 30 metres to the south. Staff members would continue to travel to work in their usual way and it is unlikely that there would be changes to travel modes used by customers given the close proximity to the current location. Although the site itself has relatively limited car parking, it is noted that there is public car and cycle parking available at the Meridian Centre. It is considered that any traffic impact would be negligible. Despite this, concerns have been raised relating to the need to cross a car park to gain access to the library. However, vehicles using the car park would be slow moving, and due to the size of the car park there is unlikely to be a significant amount of traffic.

#### *Other matters*

6.8 Whilst the applicant has not provided any firm details of the proposed arrangement of the library, this is a matter for the service to decide on how to use the space in terms of the provision of the service, its activities, and facilities. However, the applicant has indicated that they seek to ensure a full range of services would continue to be provided including access to computers. Other rooms within the Joff e.g. the main hall would be hired by the library service to allow community activities and events to continue to be delivered.

6.9 The focus of many of the representations received, is on the closure of the existing library located in the Meridian Centre. This matter falls outside the remit of the planning process and the subject of this application solely focuses on the suitability and acceptability of the proposed change of use of the youth

centre. The Town Council and a number of other individuals have raised objections to the proposal on the grounds that there would be a reduction in library space in comparison to the existing library. Although these concerns are recognised, a balance has to be struck and given that this would be a temporary change of use to allow time for a permanent location to be found, it is considered that the proposal is appropriate. The premises in terms of its design, layout and location are considered suitable and easily accessible for a library.

6.10 Overall, it is considered that there is a need for the development and any impact upon the youth centre as a result of the change of use would be minimal. The site is well served by public transport and ample parking is available. Moreover, the proposed external works would improve the outlook of the southern elevation of the building in the street scene. It is therefore considered that the proposal accords with the above Policies.

## **7. Conclusion and reasons for approval**

7.1 In accordance with Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the decision on this application should be taken in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

7.2 Planning Permission is sought for the change of use of Peacehaven Youth Centre (known as 'The Joff') to establish a mixed use of a day centre and library for a temporary period of four years. The change of use is considered suitable in terms of its impact on the existing use, traffic and design and therefore complies with Core Policies 7, 11 and 13 of the Lewes District Local Plan Part 1 and Policy DM25 of the Lewes District Local Plan Part 2. The proposal also accords with provisions of the NPPF 2021.

7.3 In determining this planning application, the County Council has worked with the applicant and agent in a positive and proactive manner. The Council has also sought views from consultees and neighbours and has considered these in preparing the recommendation. This approach has been taken positively and proactively in accordance with the requirement in the NPPF, and as set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

7.4 There are no other material considerations and the decision should be taken in accordance with the Development Plan.

## **8. Recommendation**

8.1 To recommend the Planning Committee to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions: -

1. The mixed use hereby permitted shall cease on or before 15 December 2025 and the building shall revert back to its previous use solely as a day centre, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Head of Planning & Environment.

Reason: To ensure the use of the day centre is retained in accordance with Core Policy 7 of the Lewes District Local Plan Part 1 Joint Core Strategy 2010-2030 (2016) and to enable continuation of library provision while the applicant assesses permanent library locations.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the plans listed in the Schedule of Approved Plans.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

#### Schedule of Approved Plans

DR/B/1001/S4/P01 - Site Location Plan, DR/B/1000/S4/PO1 - Block Plan, DR/B/2003/S4/P01 - Existing Ground Floor Plan, DR/B/2004/S4/P01 - Proposed Ground Floor Plan, DR/B/2200/S4/P01 - Existing and Proposed Elevation, Supporting Statement

EDWARD SHEATH  
Head of Planning & Environment  
7 December 2021

#### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Application file LW/3445/CC  
The Development Plan