

SECTION '2' – Applications meriting special consideration

Application No : 13/00389/FULL2

Ward:
Bromley Town

Address : Lancaster House 7 Elmfield Road
Bromley BR1 1LT

OS Grid Ref: E: 540487 N: 169009

Applicant : Bromley Conservative Club

Objections : NO

Description of Development:

Change of use of ground floor from office (use class B1) to a private members club (sui generis). Formation of new entrance to Elmfield Road and the installation of new ventilation and extract system.

Key designations:

Biggin Hill Safeguarding Birds
Biggin Hill Safeguarding Area
Bromley Town Centre Area
Local Cycle Network
London City Airport Safeguarding
London City Airport Safeguarding Birds

Proposal

It is proposed that the ground floor of the property change use from office space to a private members club. As part of this change of the use the entrance

Location

The application site lies on the eastern side of Elmfield Road and encompasses a four storey semi-detached corner property. The surrounding area is mainly commercial and is characterised by large properties. The site does not fall within the boundaries of any designated conservation area, but is within the Bromley Town Centre Area.

Comments from Local Residents

Nearby owners/occupiers were notified of the application and one representation was received. The comment received enquired about the consultation process and the relevant dates for submitting comments by.

Comments from Consultees

Environmental Health Officer – No objections.

Planning Policy and Town Centre Development – Business/Employment Policy Implications

From a policy point of view it is noted this site falls within the Bromley Town Centre area boundary and is within the designated Business Improvement Area as per the Bromley Town Centre Area Action Plan proposals map.

It is noted that the site does not fall within a designated Business Area as per the UDP.

The key issues to consider in assessing this application from a business/employment perspective are the loss of office space and the projected future demand for B1 office in the borough.

The site is currently used as a reception area and meeting/conference space for Baker Tilly (who occupy the rest of the building). The D&A states that “there is no office floorspace at ground floor level”. The proposal therefore involves the loss of prime B1 office floorspace in a Business Improvement Area. This conflicts with the aims and objectives of the Bromley Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP).

Existing gross internal floorspace:

B1(a) Office = 240 sq.m

Net loss of office floorspace proposed for change to sui generis = -240 sq.m

The building is in use-class ‘B1 office’ and therefore the ground floor is capable of supporting an office use. Hence there is a ‘loss’ of office floorspace.

The applicant states that the development results in no loss of employment because Baker Tilly will retain a reception area and post room on their remaining floors.

Employment on site is currently 1 full-time employee. The proposals do not affect the number of jobs on the site as this job will be relocated within the building. The proposed scheme is estimated to generate 10 FTEs, albeit it these are not 10 new jobs, but relocated from an existing site within the town centre. The proposal would therefore safeguard these 10 jobs.

English Partnerships Guidance states that one general office worker requires approximately 12sq.m. The loss of 240sq.m would therefore equate to the loss of approximately 20 full time jobs with the office use it currently has permission for. The proposal would result in the net loss of 10 jobs, thus it does not fulfil criteria (ii) of EMP3 (“there is no likely loss of employment resulting from the proposal”).

The applicant has also failed to demonstrate that there is no local shortage of office floorspace and provide evidence of long term vacancy despite marketing of the premises. There is no evidence to suggest the ground floor could not be used for

offices purposes and the applicant offers no advice to show that marketing for office use was undertaken.

Paragraph 5.15 of the Adopted AAP states that the designation of Business Improvement Areas will assist in creating a high quality business environment for the retention of existing businesses and new business development in the Town Centre. The letter from Baker Tilly states they intend to extend their lease on the 2nd and 3rd floors – a decision has already been taken to remain on site and so the proposed change of use of the ground floor does not support the retention of an existing business. Hence it is inaccurate to claim that a change of use will assist a local business to remain in the town centre.

Furthermore, Policy IA2 of the AAP states that the Council will not permit development proposals resulting in the loss of B1 office floorspace in the business improvement areas. Policy BTC5 further qualifies that development proposals resulting in the loss of B1 floorspace will only be acceptable if the office floorspace is re-provided as part of the redevelopment on the site. The applicant has not satisfied this requirement.

Policies EMP3 and EMP5 of the UDP set out criteria which must be fully met in order to satisfy the test of the reasonable likelihood of the resumption of the previous use and provide clear evidence of a genuinely redundant office and thus is surplus to requirements. The applicant has failed to meet these criteria.

The thrust of the UDP policy is reflected in the NPPF aims and objectives. Paragraph 22 of the NPPF requires LPAs to avoid the long term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. The site is currently in use and the applicant has failed to demonstrate that there is no reasonable prospect that the site could be used as an office. There is no evidence that the applicant has marketed the site for office use and therefore there is a lack of evidence to suggest the site is genuinely redundant and thus surplus to requirements.

The NPPF sets a strong emphasis on market signals as an evidence base for commercial allocations. It is essential to consider the vacancy and occupancy levels in order to ascertain whether the premises are genuinely redundant. No evidence is supplied on these fronts. These factors are to be taken into consideration in assessing this scheme.

The proposal conflicts with the Council's aim to safeguard a supply of land in the Borough to provide for the growth and development of business and industry. The findings of the GVA Grimley study, DTZ study and the Mayor of London's projections for job creation in the Borough emphasise the importance of ensuring a supply of business sites to meet future need.

The UK economy has recently been in recession and is currently characterised by sluggish growth. It is Council policy to safeguard a supply of business land for the future growth and development of business industry.

Planning Considerations

The application falls to be determined in accordance with the following policies of the Unitary Development Plan and the London Plan:

BE1 Design of New Development
EMP3 Office Development
EMP5 Development outside Business Areas
ER9 Ventilation

Supplementary Planning Guidance 1 General Design Guidance

Bromley Town Centre Area Action Plan Policies:

Policy BTC5 - Office Development

With the exception of changes of use which may be permitted in the Bromley North Village Improvement Area under Policy IA1, development proposals resulting in the loss of B1 office floorspace will only be acceptable if the office floorspace is re-provided as part of the redevelopment of the site.

The Council will achieve these policy aims through promoting the development of the Opportunity Sites identified in the Plan and improvements to existing premises and facilities in the Business Improvement Areas identified on the Key Diagram to create a high quality business environment.

Policy IA2 Business Improvement Areas

The Council will seek to support existing businesses and promote new business development through the designation of Business Improvement Areas as shown on the Key Diagram. Development proposals resulting in the loss of B1 office floorspace will not be permitted in the Business Improvement Areas. The Council will work with businesses to secure improvements to premises and facilities and the appearance of the public realm to create a high quality business environment.

London Plan Policies:

The London Plan (2011) sets out the Mayoral vision and strategic policy regarding the economy and business growth. The following London Policies are considered relevant:

Policy 2.6 Outer London: Vision and strategy

Policy 2.7 Outer London: Economy (The Mayor will, and boroughs and other stakeholders should, seek to address constraints and opportunities in the economic growth of outer London so that it can rise above its long term economic trends.)

Policy 4.1 Developing London's Economy

Policy 4.2 Offices (supporting managed conversion of surplus capacity to more viable, complementary uses.)

Policy 2.6 Outer London: Vision and strategy

Policy 2.7 Outer London: Economy

Policy 4.1 Developing London's Economy

Policy 4.2 Offices

NPPF (particularly paragraphs 22 and 51.)

The above policies are considered consistent with the objectives and principles of the NPPF.

Planning History

91/02190/ADV - Non-illuminated sign on rear elevation, application permitted.

95/01036/ADVILL – Wall mounted flag pole over main entrance, application permitted.

96/00724/ADVILL - Internally illuminated wall mounted sign, application permitted.

01/02058/ADV - Non illuminated letter sign and internally illuminated logo sign, application permitted.

Conclusions

The main issues relating to the application are the loss of a commercial unit, the effect that it would have on the character of the area, the impact that it would have on the amenities of the occupants of surrounding properties and whether the relocation of the front entrance and installation of ventilation and extract system is appropriate.

The ventilation and extract system is proposed to be positioned at the rear of the property. It will run up three storeys of the building and will ventilate gases away at roof level. It is large in size and would not be in keeping with the character of the existing building. However, due to the system being sited at the rear of the property the system would not be that visible to the main streetscene. It would also run past upper floors that are occupied by office space, however, no gases would be released near the upper floor windows and the ventilation system would not detrimentally affect outlook from the office windows. The rear of the building is clearly used for deliveries and services and an extract system would not appear so out of place, however, it is proposed for the ventilation system to be positioned in a place where it would be tucked away out of site from most viewpoints when looking at the building. Therefore the installation of the extract system would not affect the visual amenity of the area or the amenity of any neighbouring properties and is considered acceptable.

The application also seeks to create a new entrance at the property. There is currently an entrance that is positioned on the western elevation, and it is proposed to add another on the same elevation. It will be positioned within a section of glazing and the doors themselves will also be glazed. The new entrance therefore will be in keeping with character of the property and the surrounding area. It is not considered that the new entrance will affect amenity in any way to neighbouring properties.

The Bromley Conservative Club is currently located at a different property further down the street from the question site. The club aims to move the club to the property and change the use of the ground floor from office space to a sui generis use class for the club. The Policy and Town Centre Development team have objections to the loss of the office space at the property. The area has been designated for the long term protection of employment use and the proposed change of use is therefore contrary to policy.

Having had regard to the above it was considered that the development in the manner proposed would represent the loss of needed office space in the Bromley Town Centre Area, thus contrary to the objectives of policies EMP3 and EMP5 of the UDP.

RECOMMENDATION: PERMISSION BE REFUSED

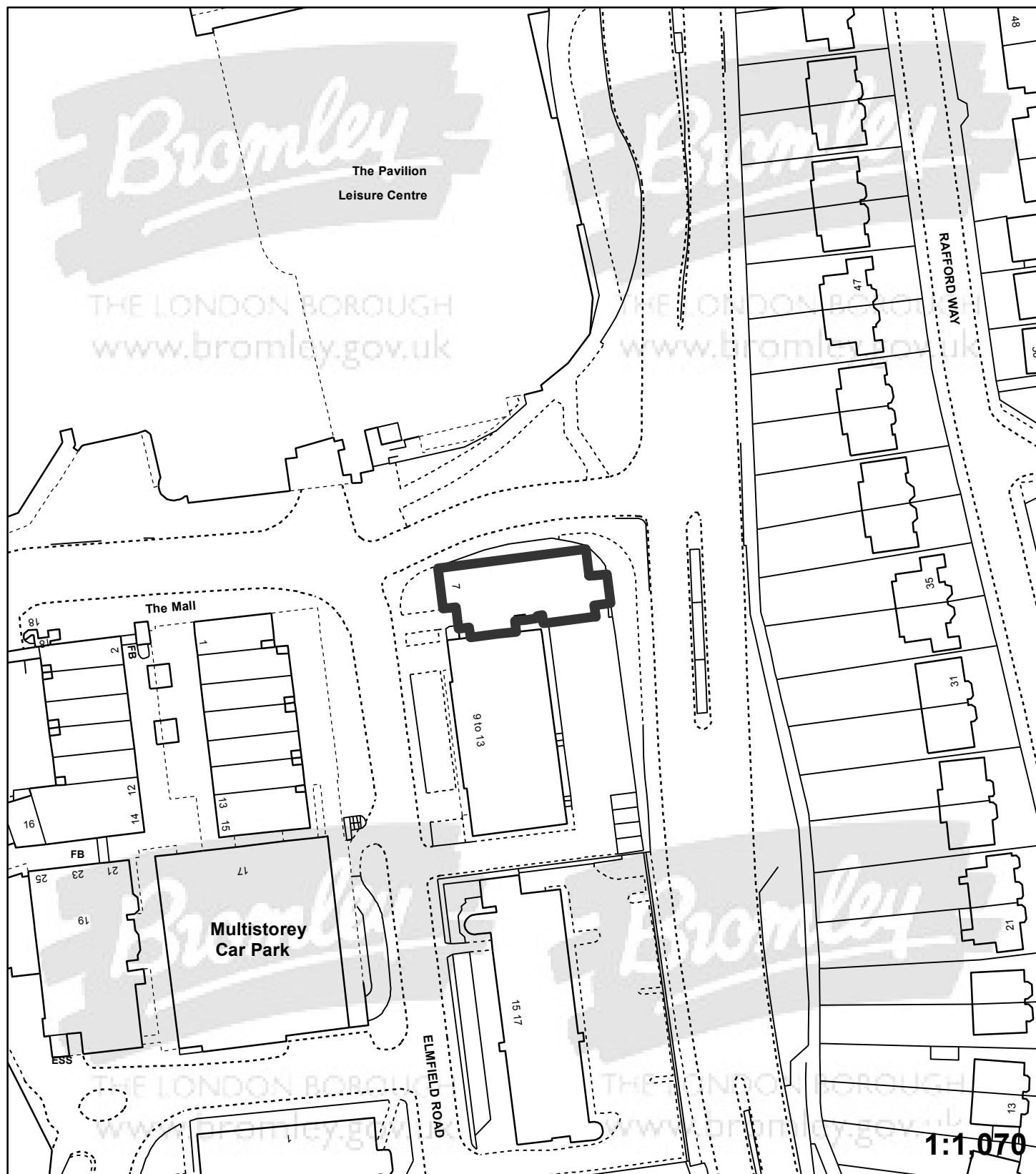
The reasons for refusal are:

- 1 The change of use of ground floor from office (use class B1) to a private members club (sui generis). Formation of new entrance to Elmfield Road and the installation of new ventilation and extract system, by reason of the loss of office space that would occur within the designated business improvement area would be detrimental to the Council's aim to safeguard a supply of land in the Borough to provide for growth and development of business and industry, contrary to policies EMP3 and EMP5 of the UDP.

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"This plan is provided to identify the location of the site and should not be used to identify the extent of the application site"

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