

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Application Number:	260165
Site Address:	131-133, Crockhamwell Road, Woodley, Wokingham, RG5 3JP
Expiry Date:	7 April 2026
Site Visit Date:	20 March 2026
Proposal: Full application for the proposed subdivision of existing former bank (Class E) to create 5no. commercial units (Class E), including installation of new shopfronts, external shutters, an access ramp and metal railings.	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP13 – Town Centres and Shopping
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking TB15 – Major Town, and Small Town/District Centre development TB16 – Development for Town Centre Uses TB20 – Service Arrangements and Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	The JMWP does not apply to the scale and type of development proposed within the site's location.
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU) (N.B. the LPU is deemed to overall hold	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS3 – Development within or adjacent to major and modest settlements C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging ER5 – The hierarchy of centres

limited weight at this time).	ER6 – Town, district and local centres and shopping parades ER7 – Strengthening the role of centres ER9 – Woodley town centre and Lower Earley district centre NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH3 – Shopfronts
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Woodley Design Statement

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
231600	Full application for the proposed removal of ATM & Night Safe Bezel, existing signage and reinstate materials where required.	Conditionally Approved – 23/08/2023
A/2015/0145	Advertisement application for the proposed erection of 3No fascia signs, 1No hanging sign, 2No atm surround signs, 1No nameplate panel and 1No entrance sign.	Conditionally Approved – 19/03/2015
25798	Change of use of first floor flat to office use.	Conditionally Approved – 31/07/1986
177/58	Two Flats Bank and Shop at Crockhamwell Road, Woodley.	Conditionally Approved – 11/11/1958

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health: No comments received
WBC Highways: No objections subject to conditions
WBC Public Rights Of Way: No comments received

External

None consulted

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Woodley Town Council considered the application and felt clarification was needed on the following in order to make a determination: - Proposed use of the first floor area. <i>Officer's Comment: The proposal does not include the change of use of the first floor. The applicant has advised that this will be retained as office space.</i>
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	- Arrangements for deliveries. <i>Officer's Comment: This is discussed in the 'Highway Access and Parking Provision' section of the report.</i> - Provision of toilet facilities within the new units. <i>Officer's Comment: Where applicable, this is a matter for Building Regulations compliance and is not a material planning consideration.</i> - Requirement to remove exterior footway and wall & accessibility to unit 1. <i>Officer's Comment: This is discussed in the 'Design and Character of the Area' section of the report.</i>
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Local Residents	One comment received objecting on the following grounds: - Works carried out prior to the application. The application should be refused due to failure to follow correct procedures. <i>Officer's Comment: The application has been assessed against relevant planning policies and material considerations. Procedural concerns relating to past works do not override the requirement to determine the application on its own planning merits.</i> - Missing ground-floor windows pose a risk to public safety. <i>Officer's Comment: Issues relating to building safety and site security fall under other regulatory regimes, such as Building Regulations and health and safety legislation, and are not material planning considerations for the determination of this application.</i> - Works took place late at night causing disturbance to neighbours. <i>Officer's Comment: This would be controlled through separate Environmental Health legislation and is not a material planning consideration for the determination of this application.</i> - No planning notice was displayed when works took place. <i>The LPA has undertaken consultation on this application in accordance with statutory requirements, displaying a site notice is not a requirement where notification of neighbours has taken place.</i>

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is a vacant mid-20th century building located within Woodley Town Centre. The site was formerly occupied by a bank (NatWest) up until the branch's closure in 2023, with the main public floorspace located at the eastern end of the building. The existing main frontage fronts the pedestrianised area on Crockhamwell Road which comprises the retail centre with primary shopping frontages on both sides. A side passage which runs adjacent to a Public Right of Way between Lytham Road and Crockhamwell Road provides pedestrian access to the private car park to the rear

of the site. A low wall on part of the southern boundary defines the private and public access routes.

Proposal and Preamble:

This application proposes the installation of new shopfronts to facilitate the subdivision of the vacant ground floor unit (Use Class E) into 5no. separate retail (Use Class E) units. The proposed external alterations are relatively minor in scale comprising the insertion of new fenestration and changes to the existing including the installation of external shutters. The erection of 1.8m high metal fencing on the perimeter of the car park area to the rear is also proposed. Following discussions with the applicant, revised plans were submitted to include the proposed raising of the existing site passage to create a disabled access ramp serving units 2-5.

The proposed occupiers of the five units are not known at this stage. However, the applicant has advised that unit 1 would comprise a supermarket/grocery store while units 2-5 would comprise smaller retail units. The existing and indicative proposed uses of the ground floor fall under Use Class E, as defined by the Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended). Class E permits a broad range of commercial, business and service uses including retail.

Section 55(2)(g) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) provides that, where land or a building is used for a purpose within a Use Class, a change to another purpose within the same Use Class does not constitute development. The proposed subdivision would enable up to five separate units to operate within Use Class E and, on that basis, does not in itself require planning permission. This application therefore relates to the associated operational development (the external works), namely the new shopfronts, fencing and access ramp, which do require planning permission.

As the subdivision can be implemented without the need for planning permission, it represents a realistic fallback position. It is therefore a material consideration when assessing this application, as the site could lawfully operate as multiple Class E units irrespective of whether permission is granted for the external works. The assessment below has regard to that fallback position, particularly in relation to the principle of development, neighbouring amenity and highway safety.

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Policy CC02 of the MDD Local Plan defines settlement development limits on the Policies Map. The site lies within the defined settlement area and within the Major Development Location for Woodley. In locational terms, the site is therefore an appropriate and sustainable location for town-centre commercial development, subject

to compliance with other relevant Development Plan policies and material planning considerations.

Retail Development

The site lies within a designated Small Town/District Centre under Core Strategy policy CP13 and within the Primary Shopping Area identified under MDD Local Plan policy TB15. The eastern elevation fronting Crockhamwell Road also falls within the defined Primary Shopping Frontage. These policies seek to maintain the vitality and viability of centres by supporting proposals that are of an appropriate scale and form, compatible with the retail character of the centre, and that contribute to a mix of uses. In this case, the proposal would support the town centre's day-to-day role by bringing a prominent vacant unit back into active Use Class E use and increasing the choice of smaller commercial units; it would not prejudice the centre's overall function or character.

The proposal would constitute an efficient use of land through facilitating the return of a vacant building to its established town centre use and increasing the number of units available to support a variety of retail uses within the centre. Although the creation of five separate units within the site would intensify its use, the amount of floorspace available is not increasing and the proposal would provide greater choice for local residents and prospective commercial tenants within the town centre.

The proposal would contribute to the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre through enhancing the provision of day-to-day shopping facilities and other retail/commercial uses and facilitate the return of a vacant Use Class E building back into use. The proposal therefore complies with Core Strategy policy CP13 and MDD Local plan policy TB15.

Design and Character of the Area:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high-quality design. R1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area. SH3 & SH4 of the Borough Design Guide SPD states that proposals for shopfronts should respond positively to the design of the building as a whole and fit well into the street scene and relate to those on adjacent buildings in particular.

In addition to alterations to the existing main shopfront, the proposal would create a small parade of shopfronts on the side elevation facing the pedestrian route (the side passage/public footpath) that links the retail centre to Lytham Road and residential areas to the west. Introducing an active frontage in this location would improve natural surveillance along the route, which currently has a more service-like character. The additional shopfront detailing would also add visual interest to this secondary façade, which is presently relatively inactive. These aspects are considered to be significant benefits of the scheme.

In terms of design, the proposed shopfronts are well proportioned in relation to the existing fenestration and previous signage. The proposed use of aluminium frames

would also be in keeping with the existing appearance of the building and the wide range of materials used in the construction of shopfronts within the shopping area. The proposed external shutters would be a new addition to the building. However, their housing would be flush with the external wall to minimise any projection from the façade and mitigate their visual prominence when in use. There are also other examples of external shutters within the shopping area and the proposal would not be out of character in this respect.

During initial discussions with the applicant, concerns were raised about the indicated loss of the existing access ramp serving proposed unit 1 and the lack of level access for proposed units 2-5. Subsequently amended plans were submitted showing the retention of the existing ramp and the raising of the existing side passage within the site's boundaries to create an access ramp for units 2-5. These improvements to the scheme ensure a functional and inclusive design and use of the building to serve all users of the town centre in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP2. A condition is recommended to ensure that the new access ramp is delivered prior to the first occupation of units 2-5.

The proposed 1.8m high fencing to the rear of the site would be a significant change from the existing low boundary treatment. However, it would not harm the character of this section of Lytham Road which essentially functions as a service road for the town centre facilitating deliveries and parking. The proposed use of vertical metal posts and railings would also retain a sufficient degree of permeability so that it is not visually oppressive when traversing the street scene.

As discussed in the 'Principle of Development' section above, the proposal would bring a vacant commercial building back into use and would enhance the provision of day-to-day shopping facilities and other retail/commercial uses that are well suited for a defined town centre. Although the subdivision of the existing retail unit would intensify its use it would not significantly affect the character of the area. It is also important to note that the LPA has little control over the type of business premises that could potentially operate from the unit in the future, partly due to the flexibility of the Use Classes Order and Permitted Development rights.

Overall, the proposal would enhance the visual amenity of the existing building and would support the retail character of the town centre in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP3 and the Borough Design Guide SPD.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Due to the nature of the proposal, there are no concerns in relation to overlooking, an overbearing impact or loss of light. The scheme does not involve any increase in the building's height or footprint, and the works are limited to ground-floor shopfront alterations and associated external access/boundary treatments.

Noise and Odour:

Policy CC06 and Appendix 1 of the MDD Local Plan requires that development protect noise sensitive receptors from noise impact. While located within the town centre there are several neighbouring residential properties in close proximity to the site.

The relationship between the proposed retail units with neighbouring residential units is acceptable in principle as Class E uses are generally considered compatible with residential development and this is a pre-existing relationship within Woodley Town Centre. Other town centre uses including drinking establishments and hot food takeaways, which are likely to have a larger impact on neighbour amenity, are *Sui generis* and as such could not occupy any of the new units without additional consent.

However, as the exact nature of the proposed units is unknown at this stage, conditions restricting the hours of operation and deliveries are recommended to prevent neighbouring occupiers from being subject to an overly harmful level of noise and disturbance from the retail use. Opening hours of 08:00–20:00 are recommended, as these mirror the operation of other convenience stores and supermarkets within the shopping precinct and would prevent noise/disturbance impacts at antisocial hours.

No extraction equipment or other plant is proposed as part of this application. If any future occupier requires externally mounted plant, ducting or extraction equipment, this would be likely to require separate planning permission and would be assessed at that time having regard to amenity impacts. Internal fit-out works would also need to ensure compliance with Building Regulations where applicable.

Overall, subject to conditions the proposal would mitigate any potential adverse harm to the amenity of neighbouring occupiers in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP3 and MDD Local Plan policy CC06.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD Local Plan set out the parking standards for development, noting that these should be regarded as a starting point with each site assessed on its own merits. Policy CP6 states that development should not have an adverse impact on the highway and alternative modes of transport to the private car should be encouraged. A private parking area at the rear of the site accessed from Lytham Road currently provides 11 parking spaces and the applicant has advised that this area will accommodate any deliveries to the proposed units. Lytham Road is double yellow lined.

The Council's Highways Officer has noted that, if the ground floor were to operate as multiple occupied Class E units, it could generate a higher parking demand than the former single bank use. However, the subdivision and occupation of the unit(s) within Use Class E can be implemented without planning permission. This application is therefore limited to the external operational works. In considering highway impacts, the assessment has regard to the credible fallback position and whether the proposed operational works would give rise to, or exacerbate, any unacceptable highway safety issues.

In response to an initial request for further information the applicant has clarified the proposed parking and deliveries arrangement, stating that deliveries can be accommodated within the parking area. The Highways Officer has subsequently raised no objection subject to the submission of a Delivery & Servicing Plan and a Parking Management Strategy prior to the first occupation of the development. The Delivery &

Servicing Plan is considered to be necessary due to the limited space within the site, the potential for five occupied units requiring deliveries and parking on Lytham Road being restricted.

Having regard to the town centre location, the availability of nearby public car parks, and the site's accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, it is considered that a detailed parking management strategy is not necessary in this instance. It is understood that when the site was previously occupied, the rear car park operated for staff parking only. It is considered appropriate to retain this arrangement for the development, with the on-site spaces used for staff parking and servicing/deliveries only (and not made available for general customer parking). This can be secured by condition. On this basis, and given the scale of the proposed units, the development is unlikely to result in a level of additional parking demand that would lead to highway safety harm.

Subject to the submission of and agreement to a Delivery & Servicing Plan prior to first occupation the proposed development is acceptable in relation to Core Strategy policy CP6 and MDD Local Plan policy CC07.

Other:

Due to the scale of the proposed development and the site's location, there would be no impact on biodiversity, trees, or landscape matters. The proposal is also exempt from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, as it would not impact any priority (or any other) on-site habitats.

Conclusion:

Overall, the proposal would facilitate the re-use of a prominent vacant building within Woodley Town Centre, with no adverse impact on any identified material planning considerations. The application is therefore recommended for **approval** subject to conditions.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application, the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics, as identified by the Act, have or will have different needs, experiences, issues, and priorities in relation to this particular planning application, and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	2 April 2026
Earliest date for decision:	6 March 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	2 April 2026

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

- *Major Development Location – Woodley*
- *Retail Centre – Woodley Town Centre*
- *Primary Shopping Area*
- *Primary Shopping Frontage*
- *Adjacent to a Public Right of Way (Footpath)*
- *Landscape Character Assessment Area – Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay*