

PLANNING STATEMENT
DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

SITE:

131-133, Crockhamwell Road,
Woodley,
RG5 3JP

Proposal:

Subdivision of existing former bank (Class E)
to create multiple Class E commercial units,
including installation of new shopfronts,
external shutters, and metal railings
to secure the parking area.

PREPARED BY:

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1. Introduction

This statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the subdivision of the existing former bank building at 131-133 Crockhamwell Road, Woodley, into Five commercial units within Use Class E. The proposal also includes new shopfronts, external security shutters, and metal railings to secure the associated parking area.

The statement addresses relevant Wokingham Borough Local Plan objectives, national planning policy, and provides design, access, and retail justification to demonstrate that the proposal represents sustainable development.

2. Site Context and Existing Use

The application site comprises a vacant former bank located within an established local shopping frontage on Crockhamwell Road. The property has remained unoccupied, resulting in an underutilised building that detracts from the vitality and economic activity of the local centre.

The surrounding area is characterised by a mix of commercial, retail, and service uses that serve the day-to-day needs of the local community, consistent with the role of Woodley as a district centre.

3. Planning Policy Context

3.1 National Planning Policy

The proposal aligns with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), particularly:

- Supporting economic growth and productivity
- Ensuring the long-term vitality and viability of town and local centres
- Promoting the effective use of previously developed land and buildings
- Encouraging development that creates active frontages and footfall

3.2 Wokingham Borough Local Plan (Core Strategy & Managing Development Delivery)

The proposal accords with the Local Plan's objectives to:

- Support town and district centres and protect their commercial function
- Encourage the re-use of vacant commercial premises
- Promote flexible commercial accommodation suitable for small and independent businesses
- Improve the quality of the built environment through appropriate design

The proposal remains within Use Class E, and therefore does not represent a harmful change of use.

4. Retail and Economic Justification

The former bank is a large single commercial unit, which is increasingly difficult to re-occupy due to changes in market demand and operational requirements. The subdivision into Five smaller Class E units will significantly increase the attractiveness and viability of the premises.

The proposal will:

- Better meet current market demand for smaller, flexible commercial units
- Support local businesses, start-ups, and independent operators
- Reduce vacancy and underuse of commercial floorspace
- Increase the number of active businesses, resulting in greater footfall
- Enhance the vitality and vibrancy of the local high street

By creating multiple active frontages instead of a single vacant unit, the development will strengthen the commercial function of Crockhamwell Road and contribute positively to the local economy, fully aligning with both local and national planning objectives.

5. Design Statement

5.1 Design Principles

The design approach seeks to:

- Reinstall the building as an active and attractive commercial frontage
- Respect the character of the surrounding shopping parade
- Provide clear and legible entrances to each unit

The proposed shopfronts will improve visual appearance, provide transparency, and create a more engaging streetscene.

5.2 Shopfronts

New shopfronts are required to serve the newly created units. These will be proportionate, visually consistent, and appropriate to the scale and character of the building and surrounding area.

5.3 Security Shutters

External security shutters are proposed to protect the units from vandalism and unauthorised access, particularly given the history of vacancy and the introduction of multiple units. These measures are common within the locality and are necessary to ensure the long-term viability and safety of the premises.

6. Access Statement

The proposal does not introduce any changes that would adversely affect access. Each unit will have direct access from the public frontage, maintaining permeability and ease of movement for customers.

The subdivision improves accessibility by allowing a range of businesses to operate from appropriately sized units, increasing choice and convenience for local residents.

7. Parking and Security

The existing parking area will be secured with metal railings to:

- Prevent unauthorised access and misuse
- Improve safety for occupiers and visitors
- Ensure parking availability for legitimate users

This represents a practical and proportionate response to site security considerations.

8. Conclusion

The proposed subdivision of the vacant former bank into Five Class E units represents a sustainable, policy-compliant, and economically beneficial development. It will:

- Bring a long-vacant building back into active use
- Support local businesses
- Increase footfall and vitality
- Enhance the appearance and function of the local centre

The associated shopfronts, security shutters, and parking railings are justified, necessary, and appropriate. The proposal accords with the objectives of the Wokingham Borough Local Plan and the NPPF, and planning permission should therefore be granted.