

Planning statement – East Boldre Village Post Office & Shop

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1. Introduction

From February 2022, East Boldre Village Post Office and shop will be run by a “not-for profit” organisation comprised of local residents, on a 125-year lease, following the upcoming sale of the premises. The shop was sold (subject to contract) in April 2021 as part of the whole property (Barton Villa) to a residential buyer. For the last 6 years the owner has tried and failed to sell it as a commercial property. This is because for 6 out of the last 8 years the business has declared a loss. The main problem is that the shop has a very limited amount of floorspace.

In order to make the village shop and post office viable, the new owners need to increase turnover by at least **27%**. This can be best achieved by increasing the floorspace of the shop, and therefore the amount of produce on offer. ‘East Boldre Community Stores Limited’ aims to bring drive and community support, together with extra floorspace, to enable a broader range of goods and services will return the business to profitability.

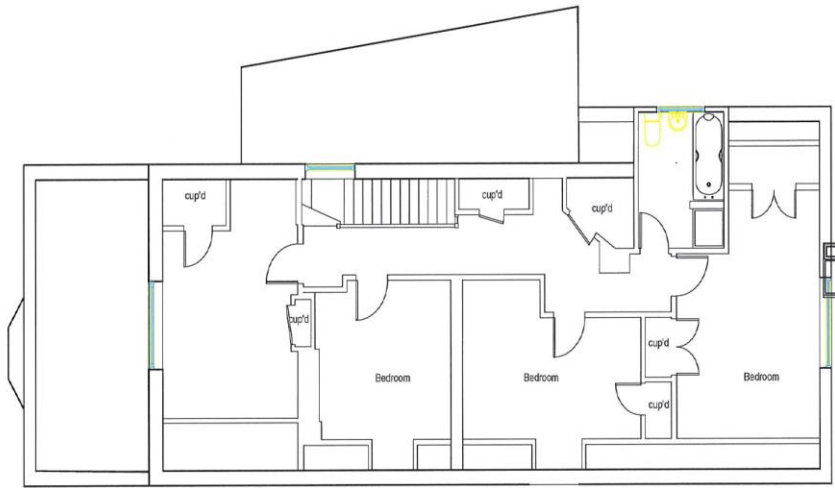
The existing planning unit is a mixed-use unit of shop and residential. The proposed development would be to alter the proportions of shop use and residential use, but the overall use of the unit would remain as shop and residential. It is debatable as to whether planning permission would even be required for this, as there would not really be any material change of use of the planning unit. Nonetheless to keep the community involved in the project, planning permission is hereby sought.

2. The post office and shop unit

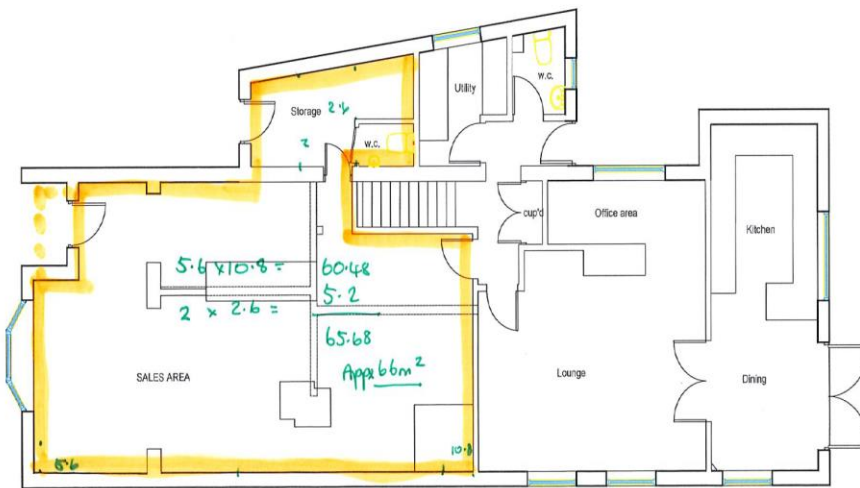
The existing shop floorspace amounts to approximately **66** square metres, with residential floorspace to the rear of the ground floor as well as the first floor. The residential unit comprises 3 bedrooms. At present, the shop floorspace occupies around **25%** of the overall floorspace of the unit, as shown below. The existing shop is cramped, and not easily accessible by anyone with mobility impediment.

It is proposed that this would be altered to **114** square metres of shop/ post office floorspace, or to around **50%** of the overall unit; so an increase of around **48** square metres (or approximately **25%**). The first floor would remain a residential unit, the only difference being a decrease in scale from 4 bedrooms down to 2 bedrooms. The exact configuration of the first-floor space would be down to the residents, but the enclosed plans show how there would be sufficient floorspace for a 2-bedroom unit to be achieved.

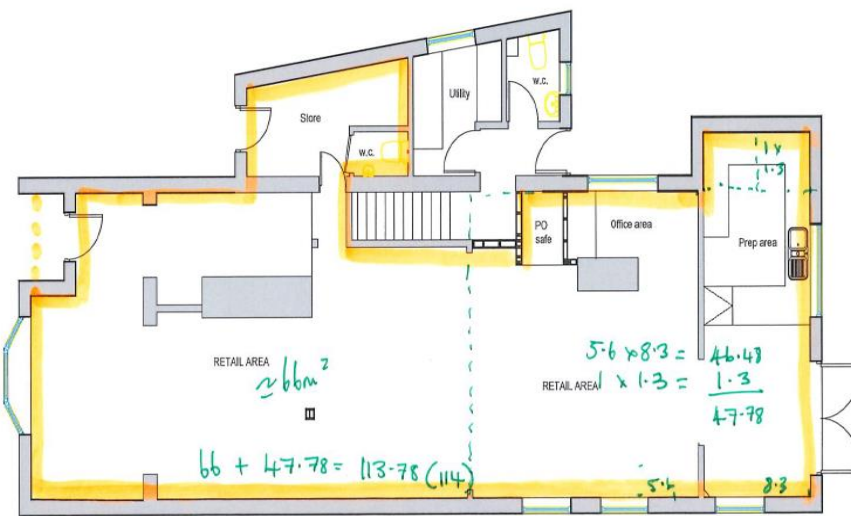
Minimal physical alterations would be required to achieve this new arrangement, as shown on the floorplans; almost all would be internal works (and therefore not comprise ‘development’). The new shop layout would be much more accessible, with better circulation space as well as a wider choice of local produce.



EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN 1:50



Existing floorplans



Proposed ground floor plan

3. Planning policy

In considering this application, several of the policies of the National Park Authority's Local Plan will apply.

The most applicable policy may be **DP41**, which **states that:**

Outside the Defined Villages, small-scale convenience shops within rural settlements that serve local needs, and farm shops that are part of a farm diversification will be permitted, together with small-scale extensions of existing shops.

This is indeed a small-scale and a most convenient shop for the residents of East Boldre, a high percentage of whom do not own a car. The scale of the extension here is considered to be small; it would constitute a **+25%** increase in shop/ post office use of the overall planning unit, and no physical extensions would be required in order to facilitate it.

The policy goes on to require that...

Any development should not extend into the open countryside or have impacts on adjoining land uses

As noted above, there would be no physical impacts, as there would be no extension or change in the character or nature of the use; it would still remain as a local shop, which does not incur any significant noise, emission or other potential planning 'impact'. In terms of parking and vehicle movements, there are 6 parking spaces outside the shop; this would not change. There is unrestricted on-street parking, however it is strongly encouraged that users of the shop would walk or cycle; this is, after all, a local convenience shop which aims to serve the immediate community within a couple of miles radius. In order to achieve this method, the new community owners have conceived a Sustainable Travel Plan for the shop, which is included with this application. Overall, it is therefore considered that there will be no material impact upon adjoining land uses by way of additional car traffic movements.

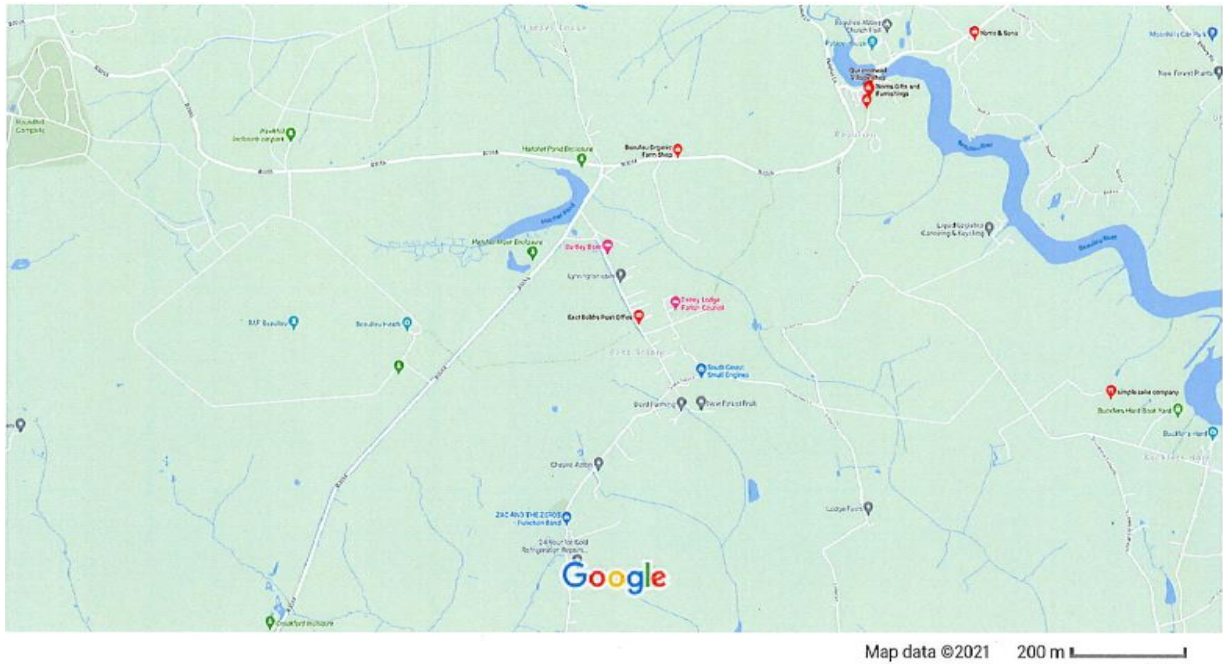
Finally, the policy sets out how...

The potential effects of farm shops on other shops in neighbouring villages will be assessed.

As there are no other shops nearby, this only serves to heighten the need for the village shop to remain viable here, into the future. Undertaking a google maps search of shops near East Boldre, it is clear that the nearest other premises are in Beaulieu, with nothing at all to the west, south or east of the application site.

Therefore, it is considered that this proposal is wholly compliant with Policy DP41. In addition, the proposal meets with other Local Plan policy objectives, such as:-

- Policy SP42 business and employment development
- Policy SP43 existing employment sites
- Policy DP44 re-development of existing employment sites
- Policy DP45 extensions to existing non-residential buildings and uses.



A google maps search highlights the lack of alternative facilities

A further important policy to consider in this case is **SP39** regarding local community facilities.

This policy sets out how:-

The Authority will support the retention of existing community facilities throughout the National Park and prevent their loss or redevelopment where they contribute to the sustainability of local communities. The Authority will support the development of essential local community facilities where the proposal is of clear and direct benefit to the local village or rural community; the scale of the proposed facility is proportionate to the local areas; and they are accessible to the local communities they will serve.

In this case, we have a local community facility in the form of the sole shop and post office. We need to improve it, to prevent its loss through lack of viability. It is of clear and direct benefit to residents of East Boldre, so much so that the village has set up a not-for profit benefit society to take it on. It is of particular benefit to those without a car, and East Boldre has a surprisingly low level of car ownership. 9% of households have no vehicle, and there is only a very limited bus service 2 days a week. The scale of the proposal is considered to be proportionate to the catchment served; it will be the size of a local village shop, contained in one ground-floor unit of a residential-scale building.

As such, the proposal is considered to wholeheartedly meet with this policy.

4. Conclusions

The proposal is advanced by a community benefit society, to keep the existing shop and post office alive in East Boldre, in direct accordance with Policies DP41 and SP39. No physical extension is required, and there will be no material change of use. It is therefore hoped that the proposal can be supported on this basis.