



**REGULATORY
SERVICES
COMMITTEE**

REPORT

15 December 2011

Subject Heading:

**P1582.11: 44-52 Market Place, 1-14
Swan Walk & Unit 103 Liberty Square,
Romford**

**Extension of Time application: Partial
demolition of the Liberty shopping
centre and construction of new retail
floorspace, demolition of bridge to
existing service road and associated
works to alter servicing area
(application received 18th October
2011)**

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Policy context:

**Local Development Framework
London Plan, Planning Policy
Statements/Guidance Notes**

Financial summary:

None

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Championing education and learning for all | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing economic, social and cultural activity in thriving towns and villages | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Value and enhance the life of our residents | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SUMMARY

This application is for the extension of time of planning permission P1409.08, which expired on 30 October 2011 (the renewal application being received on 18 October 2011 prior to the date of expiry). The application is identical to that approved under planning permission P1409.08, save for some minor design alterations to the Market Place elevation of the development, which Staff consider to be an improvement on the original proposals. Staff do not consider that there has been any material change in circumstances or change in planning policy which would warrant a different decision to that taken on the previous application. The previous planning application was subject to a legal agreement requiring a contribution towards replacement coach parking and town centre improvements. However, it is now considered that the town centre contribution is no longer required in connection with this development. It is therefore recommended that permission be granted, subject to the applicants entering into a new legal agreement and planning conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the application is unacceptable as it stands but would be acceptable subject to :

A financial contribution of £50,000 to cover the cost of identifying a replacement location for coach parking and the provision of the replacement facilities.

The planning obligations recommended in this report have been subject to the statutory tests set out in Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 and the obligations are considered to have satisfied the following criteria:-

- (a) Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- (b) Directly related to the development; and
- (c) Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development

Upon completion of the Section 106 agreement that authority be delegated to the Head of Service to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:

1. Time Limit: - The development to which this permission relates must be commenced not later than three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of section 91 of the Town and Country Act 1990.

2. Accordance with Plans: The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out otherwise than in complete accordance with the approved plans, particulars and specifications.

Reason: The Local Planning Authority consider it essential that the whole of the development is carried out and that no departure whatsoever is made from the details approved, since the development would not necessarily be acceptable if partly carried out or carried out differently in any degree from the details submitted.

3. Wheelwash: Before the development hereby permitted is first commenced, details of wheel scrubbing/wash down facilities to prevent mud being deposited onto the public highway during construction works shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved facilities shall be permanently retained and used at relevant entrances to the site throughout the course of construction works.

Reason: In order to prevent materials from the site being deposited on the adjoining public highway, in the interests of highway safety and the amenity of the surrounding area.

4. Hours of Construction: No construction works or construction related deliveries into the site shall take place other than between the hours of 08.00 to 18.00 on Monday to Friday and 08.00 to 13.00 hours on Saturdays unless agreed in writing with the local planning authority. No construction works or construction related deliveries shall take place on Sundays, Bank or Public Holidays unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To protect residential amenity.

5. Construction Methodology: Before development is commenced, a scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority making provision for a Construction Method Statement to control the adverse impact of the development on the amenity of the public and nearby occupiers. The Construction Method statement shall include details of:

- a) parking of vehicles of site personnel and visitors;
- b) storage of plant and materials;
- c) dust management controls
- a) measures for minimising the impact of noise and, if appropriate, vibration arising from construction activities;
- b) predicted noise and, if appropriate, vibration levels for construction using methodologies and at points agreed with the local planning authority;

- c) scheme for monitoring noise and if appropriate, vibration levels using methodologies and at points agreed with the local planning authority; siting and design of temporary buildings;
- d) scheme for security fencing/hoardings, depicting a readily visible 24-hour contact number for queries or emergencies;
- e) details of disposal of waste arising from the construction programme, including final disposal points. The burning of waste on the site at any time is specifically precluded.

And the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme and statement.

Reason: To protect residential amenity.

6. Refuse Storage: Prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted, provision shall be made for the storage of refuse awaiting collection according to details which shall previously have been agreed in writing by the local planning authority. Unless otherwise agreed in writing these details shall include provision for underground containment of recyclable waste.

Reason: In the interests of the amenity of occupiers of the development and also the visual amenity of the development and the locality generally.

7. Restricted Use: All of the retail units within the development shall be used for purposes falling within Class A1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) or the equivalent class or classes in any subsequent amendment to the Order, and for no other purpose or use, unless otherwise submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To restrict the use to that compatible with this part of the town centre and to enable the Local Planning Authority to retain control over the extent of non-retail uses.

8. Hours of Use: The retail units hereby approved shall not be open to customers outside the hours of 08.00 to 20.30 hours on any day, unless otherwise submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order to retain control in the interests of amenity.

9. Materials/Samples: Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved details and samples of the following shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority:

- All external materials to the Market Place frontage
- Floor surfacing materials to Swan Walk
- Roofing across Swan Walk
- Shopfront to unit 1 facing on to Market Place

The development shall then be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed details and retained thereafter to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the development has a satisfactory appearance in the interests of local character and amenity and to maintain the character of the Romford Conservation Area and to accord with Policy DC68 of the LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document.

10. External works to Market Place: Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, details of proposed external works to Market Place, including details and samples of the extent of new external paving to Market Place and feature lighting, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall then be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed details and retained thereafter to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the development has a satisfactory appearance in the interests of local character and amenity and to maintain the character of the Romford Conservation Area and to accord with Policy DC68 of the LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document.

11. Works to Public Highway: Prior to the commencement of the development, detailed drawings of the proposed alterations to the public highway, including within the service road, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall then be carried out in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: In the interest of ensuring good design and ensuring public safety and to comply with Policies CP10, CP17 and DC61 of the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD.

12. Construction Noise: Prior to commencement of development details shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority demonstrating compliance with BS 5228: Noise Control on Construction and Open Sites, Part 1 Code of Practice for Basic information and Procedures for Noise Control and Part 2 Guide to Noise Control Legislation for Building Sites and in complying with the aforementioned legislation implement measures that demonstrate that all reasonable steps to manage vibration and reduce noise as much as possible at reasonable cost have been applied.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and to accord with Policy DC55 of the LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document.

13. Noise: With regard to fixed installations serving future uses/ occupiers; prior to commencement of development a scheme for any new plant or machinery shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority to achieve the following standard. Noise levels expressed as the equivalent continuous sound level LAeq (1 hour) when calculated at the boundary with the nearest noise sensitive premises shall not exceed LA90 - 5dB and the approved scheme shall be maintained thereafter to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To prevent noise nuisance to adjoining properties in accordance with the recommendations of Planning Policy Guidance Note 24 "Planning & Noise 1994

14. Ventilation/Extract Equipment: With regard to fixed installations serving future uses/occupiers; before the use commences suitable equipment to remove and/or disperse odours and odorous material should be fitted to the extract ventilation system in accordance with a scheme to be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter, the equipment shall be properly maintained and operated in accordance with the approved scheme during normal working hours.

Reason: To protect the amenity of occupiers of nearby premises and to accord with Policy DC61 of the LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document.

15. Noise and Vibration: With regard to fixed installations serving future uses/occupiers; before the uses commences a scheme to control the transmission of noise and vibration from any mechanical ventilation system installed shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and implemented prior to the permitted use commencing. Thereafter, the equipment shall be properly maintained and operated during normal working hours.

Reason: To protect the amenity of occupiers of nearby premises and to accord with Policy DC61 of the LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document.

16. Window Display: Before the development hereby approved is first occupied, details of the measures to be taken by the management company to control the nature of goods and signage displayed within the upper floor section of clear curtain walling fronting on to Market Place shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order that the development has an acceptable visual impact within the Romford Conservation Area and to accord with Policy DC68 of the LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document.

17. Firefighting Access: Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, detailed plans of the firefighting access arrangements shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority. These shall include details of:

- drive up access routes for fire appliances
- the location of firefighting access stairs
- the location of any dry rising/falling mains, and
- the location of fire hydrants

Reason: In order that fire fighting arrangements can be fully assessed taking into account hose runs, building access and appliance parking positions so that fire crews can respond to any fire incident within or near to the site.

18. Firefighting Access: The proposed firefighting access arrangements shall be designed so as to accord with Approved Document B (section B5) of the Building Regulations 2006 edition.

Reason: In order that fire fighting arrangements can be fully assessed taking into account hose runs, building access and appliance parking positions so that fire crews can respond to any fire incident within or near to the site.

19. Highway Agreements: The development hereby approved shall not commence until the applicant has entered into an appropriate agreement or agreements under Sections 38 and 278 of the Highway Act.

Reason: In order to ensure the adequate functioning of the development in the interests of highway safety.

20. Road Safety Audit: Prior to the commencement of the development a stage 1 & 2 road safety audit, as defined in HD 19/03 of the Design Manual for Roads & Bridges shall be carried out in relation to the proposed changes to the southern access junction on to Mercury Gardens and submitted to the Council. The access shall be designed and built in accordance with the recommendations arising from the road safety audit. Post-construction, stages 3 and 4 of the road safety audit shall be carried out and details of any measures required to adapt the access arising from the audit shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Authority. The development shall then be completed in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: In order to ensure the adequate functioning of the development in the interests of highway safety.

21. Land contamination - Prior to the commencement of any works pursuant to this permission the developer shall submit for the written approval of the Local Planning Authority (the Phase I Report having already been submitted to the Local Planning Authority):

a) A Phase II (Site Investigation) Report if the Phase I Report confirms the possibility of a significant risk to any sensitive receptors. This is an intrusive site investigation including factors such as chemical testing, quantitative risk assessment and a description of the site ground conditions. An updated Site Conceptual Model should be included showing all the potential pollutant linkages and an assessment of risk to identified receptors.

b) A Phase III (Risk Management Strategy) Report if the Phase II Report confirms the presence of a significant pollutant linkage requiring remediation. The report will comprise two parts:

Part A - Remediation Scheme which will be fully implemented before it is first occupied. Any variation to the scheme shall be agreed in writing to the Local Planning Authority in advance of works being undertaken. The Remediation Scheme is to include consideration and proposals to deal with situations where, during works on site, contamination is encountered which has not previously been identified. Any further contamination shall be fully assessed and an appropriate remediation scheme submitted to the Local Planning Authority for written approval.

Part B - Following completion of the remediation works a 'Validation Report' must be submitted demonstrating that the works have been carried out satisfactorily and remediation targets have been achieved.

c) If during development works any contamination should be encountered which was not previously identified and is derived from a different source and/or of a different type to those included in the contamination proposals, then revised contamination proposals shall be submitted to the LPA; and

d) If during development work, site contaminants are found in areas previously expected to be clean, then their remediation shall be carried out in line with the agreed contamination proposals.

For further guidance see the leaflet titled, 'Land Contamination and the Planning Process'.

Reason: To protect those engaged in construction and occupation of the development from potential contamination. Also in order that the development accords with the LDF Development Control Policies Development Plan Document Policy DC53.

INFORMATIVES:

1. The applicant is advised that the development appears to be in the vicinity of water mains and further information should be sought from Essex & Suffolk Water.

2. Reason for Approval:

The application is considered to be in accordance with the aims and objectives of Policies CP4, CP9, CP10, CP17, CP18, DC15, DC32, DC33, DC34, DC36, DC50, DC51, DC61, DC62, DC63, DC68 and DC72 of the LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document, as well as Policies ROM4, ROM6, ROM7, ROM9, ROM10 and ROM20 of the Romford Area Action Plan and the Designing Safer Places, Heritage and Sustainable Design and Construction SPD's.

It is also considered to comply with Policies 2.15, 4.1, 4.7, 4.8, 5.3, 5.21, 6.1, 6.3, 6.9, 6.10, 6.13, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.8 and 8.2 of the London Plan, as well as the provisions of PPS1, PPS4, PPS5, PPG13 and PPS22 (Renewable Energy).

REPORT DETAIL

1. Site Description

- 1.1 The application site is located within Romford Town Centre. It comprises the former Littlewoods store, which fronts on to both Market Place and Liberty Square, as well as a number of retail units fronting on to Swan Walk. The application site abuts but does not include the Debenhams store, which is situated to the eastern side of Swan Walk. The site also includes the existing service road to the Liberty shopping centre and nearby stores.
- 1.2 The former Littlewoods store has a two storey façade on to Market Place but appears higher owing to a raised parapet feature to the site frontage. There is a canopy projecting beyond the front façade of the building to Market Place. To the Swan Walk elevation, the retail units had a recessed frontage, set behind a colonnade, similar to the colonnaded arrangement to the Debenhams façade opposite. The shop units to the western side of Swan Walk have however been vacated and the site is boarded up. The Debenhams store is a three storey building. The northern end of Swan Walk accesses directly on to Market Place, whilst the southern end forms an entrance to the Liberty shopping centre.
- 1.3 The Market Place frontage of the development is within the Romford Conservation Area. There are a number of listed buildings within the Conservation Area, including St Edward's Church, Church House and Wykeham House, which are situated almost opposite the application site on the northern side of the Market Place.

2. Description of Proposal

- 2.1 The application seeks an extension of time of planning permission P1409.08, which was granted in October 2008 but has now lapsed. The application is almost entirely the same as the previously approved

development, save for some minor alterations which are described later in this section of the report.

- 2.2 The application involves some partial demolition of existing buildings at first and second floor to enable the refurbishment of the former Littlewoods store and retail units in Swan Walk to form new retail floorspace.
- 2.3 The proposal will create a total of nine retail units. Unit 1 will be a 'flagship' unit with a wrap-around façade on to both Swan Walk and Market Place. Additional new units will be created to the Swan Walk frontage (units 2-7). One unit (Unit 8) will have a new shopfront on to Liberty Square and one unit (Unit 9) is located at basement level. All shopfronts to Market Place and Swan Walk will be double height.
- 2.3 At first floor level, there will be floorspace for units 1-6, from where they can receive deliveries and accommodate storage. The existing service yard at first floor level of the Liberty is retained but will be altered by the demolition of the existing bridge, which currently extends across Swan Walk. The removal of the bridge will entail changes to the operation of the service road, with a two way system of operation from the southern access on Mercury Gardens and the northern access from Mercury Gardens operating as a cul-de-sac. An extended service yard for delivery vehicles is also proposed.
- 2.3 The proposal includes a new roof to enclose Swan Walk. The roof design includes double glazed rooflights to provide for natural daylight to enter Swan Walk. New entrance doors will be provided at the access to Swan Walk from Market Place. New flooring will be installed to mitigate existing levels differences.
- 2.4 The proposal includes a new glazed façade to Market Place. This was originally intended (in application P1409.08) to be supported by steel columns to Market Place but these have been omitted from the current application following discussions with the Council's Heritage Officer. The entrance to Swan Walk from Market Place will be formed through new glazed doors at ground floor level with glass curtain walling above. External materials are not yet confirmed although the application drawings indicate the use of applied colour changing film and reconstituted stone panels.

3. **Relevant History**

- 3.1 There are numerous previous applications for minor alterations to the application premises. Previous applications of direct relevance are set out below:

P2132.06 Redevelopment and extension of a predominantly vacant building to provide a modern multi unit A1 retail scheme including the covering over of Swan Walk to create an extension of the Liberty Mall and the realignment of the Debenhams façade - approved

P1129.07 Redevelopment and extension of predominantly vacant building to provide a modern multi unit retail scheme with new facades to Market Place and Swan Walk - approved

P0399.08 Partial demolition of the Liberty shopping centre and construction of new retail floor space – approved

P1409.08 Partial demolition of the Liberty shopping centre and construction of new retail floorspace, demolition of bridge to existing service road and associated works to alter servicing – approved

P1731.08 Extension and reconfiguration of existing Debenhams unit to provide additional retail floorspace, new retail units, new access arrangements, alterations to Swan Walk, façade and associated works – approved

P1587.11 Extension of Time application for extension and reconfiguration of existing Debenhams unit to provide additional retail floorspace, new retail units, new access arrangements, alterations to Swan Walk, façade and associated works – under consideration

4. Consultations/Representations

- 4.1 The application has been advertised on site and in the local press as a major development. Neighbour notification letters have also been sent to 7 local addresses. No letters of representation have been received.
- 4.2 English Heritage (archaeology) has confirmed there is no need for any archaeological measures to be undertaken.
- 4.3 Essex & Suffolk Water advise there are water mains in the vicinity of the development.
- 4.4 Thames Water has no objection on sewerage infrastructure grounds.
- 4.5 English Heritage (applications) do not wish to make any comments on the application.
- 4.6 The Borough Crime Prevention Design Advisor has no comments on the application.
- 4.7 The Council's Heritage Officer advises that the whole of the Market Place and much of the core of the town centre is on the English Heritage 'Buildings at Risk' register. Nos. 44-52 has a negative impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area, while the Debenhams store makes a neutral contribution. The principle of development is therefore welcomed. However, concern is raised with respect to the proposed external materials, which is considered to detract from the conservation area. Therefore it should be conditioned that all external materials be submitted for approval prior to commencement of works to

ensure that a suitable palette of quality materials are used within the development. The minor alteration to the scheme to remove the supporting steel columns is considered an improvement to the scheme.

5. **Relevant Policies**

5.1 National Planning Policy:

PPS1 (Delivering Sustainable Development), PPS4 (Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth), PPS5 (Planning for the Historic Environment), PPG13 (Transport) and PPS22 (Renewable Energy).

5.2 Regional Planning Policy:

Policies 2.15 (town centres), 4.1 (developing London's economy), 4.7 (retail and town centre development), 4.8 (supporting a successful and diverse retail sector), 5.2 (minimising carbon dioxide emissions), 5.3 (sustainable design and construction), 5.7 (renewable energy), 5.13 (sustainable drainage), 5.21 (contaminated land), 6.1 (strategic transport approach), 6.3 (effect on transport capacity), 6.9 (cycling), 6.10 (walking), 6.13 (parking), 7.2 (inclusive environment), 7.3 (designing out crime), 7.4 (local character), 7.5 (public realm), 7.6 (architecture), 7.8 (heritage assets and archaeology) and 8.2 (planning obligations) of the London Plan.

5.3 Local Planning Policy:

Policies CP4, CP9, CP10, CP17, CP18, DC15, DC32, DC33, DC34, DC36, DC50, DC51, DC61, DC62, DC63, DC68 and DC72 of the LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document.

The Romford Area Action Plan is a material consideration, specifically Policies ROM4, ROM6, ROM7, ROM9, ROM10 and ROM20.

In addition, Designing Safer Places SPD, the Heritage SPD and Sustainable Design and Construction SPD are material considerations.

6. **Staff Comments**

6.1 The issues arising from this application are the principle of the development, the impact on the retail function of the town centre, the design of the proposals and impact on the character of the town centre and the Romford Conservation Area, the detailed design, layout and function of the development, servicing arrangements, sustainability, community safety and environmental issues.

6.2 By way of background, Members are advised that there have been four previous planning consents (reference P2132.06, P1129.07, P0399.08 and P1409.08) for a broadly similar form of redevelopment, including the creation of a number of new, modern shop units, the remodelling of the façade to Market Place and the roofing over of Swan Walk. None of these

permissions have been implemented and the first three of these permissions have expired.

6.3 However, this application seeks an extension of time for planning permission P1409.08. The current application is essentially the same as that previously approved, save for an amendment to the design to remove the proposed support columns to the Market Place elevation of the development. Staff consider that there has been no material change in site circumstances since the previous consent, although it is acknowledged that the application site has remained enclosed by hoardings for the past few years.

6.4 In policy terms, there has been little change to the Council's policies as the previous application was also considered in relation to the LDF and Romford AAP. A new Heritage SPD has however been adopted, the implications of which will be considered in this report. Nationally, the key changes to planning policy have been PPS4, which relates to sustainable economic growth, and PPS5, which relates to preservation and enhancement of heritage assets. It is considered that neither of these policies materially change the planning principles in relation to this development. If anything, the changes to PPS4 and the recent Ministerial statement "Planning for Growth" seek to encourage proposals which will benefit the growth of the economy.

6.5 The London Plan was revised in 2011. However, this is not considered to materially change the planning principles in relation to this development. In particular, the London Plan encourages new commercial development within existing town centres and the proposed development would be consistent with the objectives of the London Plan.

6.6 Staff therefore consider that there have been no significant changes in policy or site circumstances since the previous approval to warrant a different decision on this extension of time application. However, the planning issues are discussed in more detail below.

6.7 Principle of Development

6.7.1 The application site is located within Romford Town Centre and is within the defined retail core. Policy ROM9 of the Romford AAP seeks to maintain and enhance the status of Romford as a metropolitan centre and sub-regional shopping centre through measures which would include intensification of the Liberty shopping area. Policy ROM10 of the Romford AAP encourages new A1 retail uses within the retail core of Romford town centre. The proposal would also accord with Policies 4.1, 4.7 and 4.8 of the London Plan, as well as PPS1 and PPS4.

6.7.2 The proposal would enable the provision of high quality, retail space within this core retail area of the town centre. The former Littlewoods store has now been closed for some time and the former retail units, which front Swan Walk, were of a poor standard and have also been vacant and boarded up

for some years. The proposals would represent an opportunity to significantly enhance the quality of retail floorspace within this part of the town centre and would accord, in principle, with the aims of PPS4. The development will provide an entirely retail scheme and the proposal would not require a sequential test to be carried out.

- 6.7.3 The development will create a linkage between Market Place and the Liberty shopping centre. The opportunity to do this would be further enhanced by the proposed demolition of the service road bridge, which currently creates a visual barrier between the central atrium of the Liberty shopping area and the Market Place. The removal of the service road bridge would create unimpeded views along the length of Swan Walk between the central atrium of the Liberty centre and Market Place, potentially enhancing retail viability and vitality. The development will provide an enclosed shopping area, with better access for shoppers, including new entrance doors and a level, resurfaced floor. It is therefore considered the proposal would provide significantly improved shopping facilities for the Borough and a more accessible form of development compared to what currently exists. The site is within a sustainable location, with excellent public transport links. The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle and consistent with the objectives of national and local planning policy.

6.8 External Design and Visual Impact

- 6.8.1 Externally, the principal elevation of the development is on to Market Place. The proposal will substantially alter the existing façade of the former Littlewoods store. Although the Littlewoods store is characteristic of development which took place during the Market Place in the 1960's, as is the adjacent Debenhams store, Staff do not consider that it makes such a significant contribution to the character of Market Place or the Romford Conservation Area that its removal would be unacceptable in principle. It is considered that this proposal therefore represents an opportunity to enhance the character and appearance of the locality and that the replacement of the existing façade is acceptable in principle.
- 6.8.2 The detailed design of the proposed northern elevation is a bold, glazed facade on to Market Place. The elevation will have a strong rectangular emphasis but this is considered to relate well to the overall form of nearby buildings. The height of the building is also proposed to be increased but this will bring the overall height to a more compatible relationship with the neighbouring Debenhams store. The new development and the adjacent Debenhams store, in terms of height and scale, would effectively 'book end' the proposed new entrance to Swan Walk. The scale, bulk and massing of the development is therefore considered to be acceptable.
- 6.8.3 The proposed new glazed facade is of a relatively simple form but is punctuated by a substantial section of clear curtain walling, which will form part of the upper floor of unit 1a and could be used for display purposes. In the scheme previously approved, the façade was supported by fabricated steel columns. Following discussions between the applicants and the

Council's Heritage Officer the steel support columns have been omitted from the proposals, so that the new glazed façade is effectively cantilevered out from the building. This is considered to give a much cleaner, sharper feel to the development, which will give it a more pleasing appearance and be more appropriate to the character of this part of the Romford Conservation Area.

- 6.8.4 It is proper for Local Authorities to seek to reinforce local character or distinctiveness however and to ensure that new development is compatible with surroundings in respect of bulk, scale and massing. Furthermore, given the location of the site frontage within a Conservation Area the proposal is required to preserve and/or enhance the special character of the Conservation Area.
- 6.8.5 Staff consider that the proposal respects its surroundings in respect of overall scale, bulk and massing. This is consistent with the requirements of Policy ROM7 of the Romford AAP. In respect of character, Staff take the view that the character of Market Place and this part of the Conservation Area is not drawn from any particular architectural style but rather from the continued evolution of built form throughout the ages, ranging from the historic buildings within the Market Place, to the 1960's architecture of the south side of Market Place and newer development taking place on the north side of the market. In this evolving context, Staff consider that the site is suited, in principle, to modern architecture.
- 6.8.6 The Character Appraisal indicates that the designation of Romford Conservation Area owed much to a desire to protect the historic buildings at the north-western side of Market Place and the extent of the Conservation Area boundaries resulted from the aim to protect the setting of this principal group of buildings. The evolution of shopping provision within the market has added to the character of Market Place. However, the Character Appraisal itself acknowledges that most of the later 20th century buildings within the Market Place are a mix of bland frontages and notes the Debenhams store as particularly domineering. Although the Character Appraisal recommends the extension of the Conservation Area to include more than just the façade of buildings fronting Market Place, the Littlewoods building is not considered to be of particular value to the character of the Conservation Area, even when considered against the criteria set out in Appendix A. Staff therefore consider the demolition of the whole of this building and those in Swan Walk would not materially detract from the aims of the Romford Conservation Area Character Appraisal and would not conflict with the provisions of PPS5.
- 6.8.7 Staff consider that there are no material grounds to object to the design of the proposed development and its impact on the Conservation Area given that there has been no material change in site circumstances and no material change to policy, which would indicate the development is no longer acceptable. It is however considered that the development has been improved from previously by taking the opportunity to further streamline the design of the development through removal of the steel supports.

- 6.8.8 In terms of external materials, the development is indicated to have a colour changing film applied to the glass curtainwalling, with a backdrop of reconstituted stone panels. The use of colour changing film would be carried across to the glazed curtain walling system across the frontage of Swan Walk and is the same material as has been approved for use to other main entrances to the Liberty centre.
- 6.8.9 In considering the previous application, Staff raised concern that the external materials proposed would be unlikely to be acceptable within the context of the Conservation Area. This was a view shared by English Heritage. Staff consider that, notwithstanding the details of materials shown on the drawing, alternative materials will need to be used to ensure the development has a satisfactory design and visual impact and to maintain the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The applicant is aware of the Council's concerns in respect of the proposed external materials. It is considered however that this is a matter which can be dealt with by condition.
- 6.8.10 The development will also include some resurfacing in Market Place and use of downlighting and lighting inset into the pavement. In order to ensure an appropriately high quality of development it is recommended that details of external materials, as well as proposed external works within Market Place, such as paving and lighting proposals be required by condition.
- 6.8.11 The existing planning permission (P1409.08) included a financial contribution of £30,000 towards town centre improvements. The Council's Regeneration, Policy and Planning Service has confirmed that the payment of this contribution is no longer considered to be justified, particularly having regard to the enhancement of the town centre which is considered to result from the proposed development. It is therefore considered that this contribution should not be sought in connection with the extension of time application.

6.9 Internal Layout

- 6.9.1 The internal space created by the development within Swan Walk will create double height glazed shopfronts to the western side of Swan Walk. Detailed design of the shopfronts are not submitted with the application but would be provided by individual tenants to a specification provided by the landlord. It is considered that this would however potentially create a stimulating retail environment.
- 6.9.2 To the eastern side of Swan Walk, the west facing elevation of the Debenhams store does not currently form part of the proposals. The development is designed so that the support structures of the new roof effectively rest against the Debenhams façade. However, there is not scope to remove the existing columns and canopy to the Debenhams façade or renovate this elevation as part of the development. This is a less satisfying aspect of the development as, under the current proposals, the Debenhams

façade will not be integrated with the more modern shopfront design of the western side of Swan Walk.

6.9.3 However, the development has been designed so that the new roof across Swan Walk is supported entirely from its western side. A roof upstand will be provided with cover flashing at upper floor level. Although it is regrettable that the development does not include alterations to the Debenhams façade, Members will note that planning permission has previously been given for works to the Debenhams store, which would complement this application. A separate application has been made to renew this permission and it is noted that the current proposals will not preclude alterations to the Debenhams façade in due course. As matters presently stand, given the overall benefits of the development to Romford town centre and as the opportunity still remains for the Debenhams façade to be remodelled in the future, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in this respect.

6.9.4 The proposal includes a new roofed area with substantial double glazed rooflights. The proposal also includes new flooring with a new slab finishes across the length and breadth of Swan Walk. The proposed internal design and layout of the newly enclosed Swan Walk is considered to provide a high quality shopping environment, with opportunity for natural light. The proposals will create level flooring and will include access doors which are DDA compliant. The proposals are therefore considered to create a welcoming and inclusive shopping environment. The proposal is therefore considered to achieve an acceptably high standard of internal design and layout.

6.10 Access and Servicing Arrangements

6.10.1 In respect of access and servicing of the development, the existing first floor service road is proposed to be retained. However, the proposal includes the demolition of an existing bridge which spans Swan Walk. This will entail modifications to the service yard. Presently the service road is predominantly one-way with access from the most southerly entrance on Mercury Gardens and egress via the northerly exit onto Mercury Gardens. There is also some limited two way traffic via the northerly access. The proposal will modify the service road so that traffic entering from the existing southerly access on Mercury Gardens (on the south side of Mercury House) will operate in a two way direction. The northern service road from Mercury Gardens (north of Mercury House) will operate as a separate cul-de-sac.

6.10.2 The application proposes various modifications to the layout of the service road in order to improve highway safety and control traffic speeds along the service road. Road markings and signage will be used to indicate that vehicles exiting the site must turn left onto Mercury Gardens. The southern access from Mercury Gardens will be widened and a central refuge island will be provided for pedestrians, together with other highway safety measures, such as coloured tactile paving. The proposal will not affect the existing bus lay-by on Mercury Gardens. The proposal will include a new

loading area. This includes five loading bays, including space for three 16.5m long articulated lorries.

- 6.10.3 The proposal alterations to the service road are considered to be acceptable in principle. The scheme has previously been subject of discussions with the Council's Highway Engineers, who are satisfied that the revised servicing arrangements are acceptable. The proposed alterations to the access road and the provision of a new loading bay will potentially create a more practical and safer servicing area and subject to measures aimed at improving highway and pedestrian safety the changes to the service road are considered to be acceptable.
- 6.10.4 The proposed access on the northern side, which will continue to provide two way access, mainly serves smaller retail units on the northern side of the Liberty shopping centre. These generally use smaller delivery vehicles, which can turn in the area provided. A scheme of signage, as agreed in principle with the Council's Highway Engineers, is proposed to control the size of vehicles using this access. The proposed servicing arrangements from the north access are therefore considered to be acceptable.
- 6.10.5 The proposal will affect the existing coach parking in this location, resulting in the loss of a parking area 47m long (approximately space for three coaches). The existing coach parking on the proposed two-way section of road will remain. The provision of coach parking facilities within Romford is considered to be important, improving the accessibility of the town centre and boosting retail viability. A contribution of £50,000 is therefore sought through a legal agreement so that alternative locations for coach parking can be identified and replacement facilities provided.
- 6.10.6 At the time of writing this report the Fire Brigade has not commented on the application. However, when considering the previous application (P1409.08) the Fire Brigade advised there were no objections to the proposal subject to the submission of detailed proposals for fire fighting access. It is therefore suggested that the same conditions as for P1409.08 be imposed. Furthermore, the applicants have indicated that following discussions with the Fire Brigade following the previous approval it is considered that these conditions could be complied with.
- 6.10.7 The site is situated within Romford Town Centre and effectively replaces and upgrades existing retail floorspace. Given the location of the site within Romford Town Centre it is not considered that there is a need for car parking to be provided specifically for this development, which would be met by car parking provision within the town centre as a whole. The site is also easily reached by alternative means of access, including walking, cycling and public transport. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with national and local planning policies in respect of accessibility and parking standards.

6.11 Impact on Amenity

6.11.1 The site is not immediately adjoined by any residential development and it is not considered that there would be material harm to neighbouring property by reason of loss of light, loss of privacy or noise and disturbance.

6.11.2 The nearest residential development to this site is on the northern side of Market Place and Staff are satisfied that there would be no material harm to residential amenity arising from the proposals.

6.12 Sustainability Issues

6.12.1 An energy statement forms part of the application. When the application was previously approved it was judged that in view of the nature of the proposal, which is in essence the conversion of an existing building, together with the partial location of the site within a Conservation Area, the inclusion of renewable energy within the development is not a feasible option. Staff are satisfied that the developer has reasonably compensated for this by increasing energy efficiency within the development wherever possible and, although not fully compliant with the higher energy efficient requirements of the London Plan, Staff nonetheless consider the proposal to be acceptable in respect of sustainability issues.

6.13 Community Safety Issues

6.13.1 The Borough Crime Prevention Design Advisor has been consulted in respect of the proposals and advises that the proposals do not raise any significant community safety or security concerns. The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable in this respect.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The application is for the renewal of a previous planning permission. The proposal will extend the existing Liberty shopping centre and will create new, modern retail floorspace in an enclosed environment. This is considered to be acceptable in principle within the retail core of Romford Town Centre. The proposed works are considered to result in a high quality internal environment and externally propose a form of development which is considered to respect the scale and character of development in Market Place. The detailed design of the proposed external alterations are further considered to preserve and enhance the character of the Romford Conservation Area, subject to the use of appropriate materials, and would not adversely affect the character or setting of nearby listed buildings.

7.2 The proposals are considered to be acceptable in respect of access and servicing arrangements, as well as amenity, community safety and sustainability issues. It is therefore recommended that, subject to a new Section 106 agreement to secure a contribution towards alternative coach parking facilities in the town centre and planning conditions, that planning permission is granted.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

None.

Legal implications and risks:

Legal resources will be required to complete the legal agreement.

Human Resources implications and risks:

None.

Equalities implications and risks:

The development will increase the range of retail facilities available within the Borough. The development will be carried out to the standards required by current Building Regulations and the Disability Discrimination Act and works will also take place in the Market Place to ensure equality of access to the proposed development. Alternative coach parking in lieu of that affected by the development will also be secured assisting in maintaining the accessibility of the town centre.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None