



Epping Forest District Council



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Application Number:	EPF/0832/23
Site Name:	Civic Offices, EFDC, 323 High Street Epping CM16 4BZ

OFFICER REPORT

Application Ref: EPF/0832/23
Application Type: Listed building consent (Alt/Ext)

Applicant: Mr Manny Singh
Case Officer: Caroline Brown
Site Address: 323 Civic Offices, Epping Forest District Council, High Street, Epping, CM16 4BZ
Proposal: Grade II listed building consent for brushed stainless steel letter to display "Regus" below the "Epping Forest District Council" signage and brush stainless steel sign wall mounted on the original building adjacent to the bridge entrance to the car park.
Ward: Epping Lindsey and Thornwood Common
Parish: Epping
View Plans: <https://eppingforestdcpr.force.com/pr/s/planning-application/a0h8d000001VytN>
Recommendation: Approve with Conditions

The application is before this committee since the recommendation is for approval contrary to an objection from a Local Council, material to the planning merits of the proposal, and they have confirmed in writing their intention to attend and speak at the meeting. (Pursuant to The Constitution, Part 3: Scheme of Delegation to Officers from Full Council).

Description of Site & Surroundings

The Civic Offices building of the Epping Forest District Council is located at the north-eastern end of the High Street of Epping. The building was statutory listed at grade II on the 18th December 2017 as a fine example of post-modernist architecture, and in particular for the following reasons (taken from Historic England's listing description).

The Civic Offices is an important landmark which stands within the Epping Conservation Area. Alongside the Water Tower and St John, the Baptist's Church, also statutory listed, their three prominent towers act as focal points for the views along the High Street and across the Green.

Over the last few years, the Civic Office building has undergone extensive external and internal reconfiguration and refurbishment to create a more agile, collaborative work environment and improve the usability of the building which has not altered the significance of the building. Part of the upgrade and internal reconfiguration of the building has been the leasing out of the second floor.

Description of Proposal

The proposal seeks Listed Building Consent for 2 signs:

- A 'Regus' sign displayed below the existing EFDC signage to the front elevation of the Civic Offices. Brush stainless steel letters with 15mm returns and reverse fitted nickel plated stud fixings.
- A wall mounted brush stainless steel sign, 0.9m wide X 1.2m, sited on the east elevation of no. 323 High Street, adjacent to the bridge entrance to the car park.

Planning History

The Civic Offices site has an extensive history of external alterations prior to the listing of the building in 2017. These works, listed below, have not altered the significance of the building, as stated in the Historic England's listing description.

- EPF/0842/23 - Advertisement consent for brushed stainless steel letter to display "Regus" below the "Epping Forest District Council" signage and brush stainless steel sign wall mounted on the original building adjacent to the bridge entrance to the car park - Approved 12/07/2023
- EPF/2423/20 & EPF/2486/20 – New front external public access entrance door within an existing window frame to the existing café area of the Civic Office building and offices involving steps and ramp as a link to the existing public footpath - Approved 07/12/2020.
- EPF/2737/19 & EPF/2738/19 - Grade II Listed Building Consent & Planning Permission for internal and external alterations to the Civic Offices, to provide greater flexibility within the building. Work includes like for like replacement of glazed roof elements, addition of PV solar panels to the roof, and repairs and maintenance of existing features. Granted Permission

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Section 38(6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Epping Forest District Local Plan (2011-2033) (March 2023)

On 9 February 2023, the council received the Inspector's Report on the Examination of the Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011 to 2033. The Inspector's Report concludes that subject to the Main Modifications set out in the appendix to the report, the Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011 to 2033 satisfies the requirements of Section 20(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and meets the criteria for soundness as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and is capable of adoption.

The proposed adoption of the Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011 to 2033 was considered at an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council held on 6 March 2023 and formally adopted by the Council.

The following table lists the relevant policies to the determination of this application.

DM7 Heritage Assets
DM9 High Quality Design
DM13 Advertisements

NPPF, 2021

The revised NPPF is a material consideration in determining planning applications. The following paragraphs of the NPPF are considered to be of relevance to this application:

paragraphs 136, 189, 194, 195, 196, 197, 199, 200 and 202

Consultation Carried Out and Summary of Representations Received

Site Notice displayed and advertised.

Epping Town Council - Object and confirm they will attend and speak at Plans East to object to the proposal.

- Committee agrees with the EFDC Conservation Officer's comments, i.e., 'the proposed Regus sign, positioned to the main frontage, directly below the existing sign of the EFDC, would visually compete with the original and primary use and function of the Civic Offices, eroding its special character as a municipal building'.

Epping Society - Objection

- signage should be subsidiary to EFDC sign.

Main Issues and Considerations

The main issues for consideration are:

- Impact on the historic significance of the listed building

The upgrading and refurbishment of the offices along with the introduction of agile working and the leasing out the second floor has enabled the Council to secure its optimum and viable use and support its primary function. The building requires to be able to support the specifications of the new occupants and has been in discussion with the Council over the detailing of signage to the building.

Whilst there are doubts as to whether listed building consent is required for the signage on the wall of 323 High Street, adjacent to the bridge entrance to the car park, it should be noted that the conservation officer has not raised any objection to this proposed sign. However they have raised concern for the :

"Regus" sign, positioned to the main frontage, directly below the existing sign of the EFDC, would visually compete with the original and primary use and function of the Civic Offices, eroding its special character as a municipal building.

Notwithstanding their comments, 'Regus' are now sharing the building and in partnership with the Council are entitled to have their name displayed alongside the EFDC.

Clearly its function and the way the building is used has changed over the past few years, but it is not considered that this undermines its status as a municipal building and where some flexibility in the signage is justified. The proposed front 'Regus' signage is sited below the Councils signage and considered subsidiary, minimal, discreet in relation to the building and necessary for modern office use.

Subject to minimisation of any physical harm to the building, and removal and any necessary repair works once the sign is no longer required, the proposal is not considered to cause any significant harm to the historic fabric, interest or setting of the grade II listed building.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, having regard to all matters raised, the signage will preserve the special historical character and appearance of the Listed Building, and is supported by the policies in the adopted Local Plan, (2011-2033), 2023 and the NPPF, 2021. In light of the above considerations, it is recommended that listed building consent is approved.

Should you wish to discuss the contents of this report item please use the following contact details by 2pm on the day of the meeting at the latest:

Planning Application Case Officer: Caroline Brown | cbrown@eppingforestdc.gov.uk or if no direct contact can be made, please email: contactplanning@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Conditions: (4)

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out and retained strictly in accordance with the following approved plans: Site Plan; Building Letters

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure the proposal is built in accordance with the approved plans.

- 3 Details of fixtures, including information on how damage to the listed building will be minimised, shall be submitted for the approval in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the instillation of the signage hereby approved.

Reason: To ensure the proposed works preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the building, in accordance with Policy DM7 of the Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033 (2023) and the NPPF.

- 4 Should the signage hereby approved no longer be required then this shall be removed and a schedule of repairs for the building shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, including a timescale for any repair works. The removal and repairs shall be completed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure the proposed works preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the building, in accordance with Policy DM7 of the Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033 (2023) and the NPPF.

Informatives: (1)

- 5 The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received and subsequently determining to grant planning permission in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.