

Report to: **Planning Applications Committee**
Date: **16th December 2020**
By: **Director of Planning**
Local Authority: **Lewes District Council**
Application Number: **SDNP/20/00497/FUL**
Applicant: **Lewes District Council**
Application: **Construction of emergency exit ramp to rear of library.**
Address: **Lewes House Site
Friars Walk
Lewes
East Sussex**

Recommendation: **Recommendation: That the application be approved for the reasons and subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 10 of this report.**

Executive Summary

The development relates to the construction of a rear exit ramp and railings behind Lewes Library, to allow safe emergency exit from the first floor of the library building. This application is being presented to the Planning Applications Committee as the applicant is Lewes District Council.

1. Site Description

The application site is a small piece of land, currently occupied by a shrub/flower bed, which sits directly behind Lewes Library, and adjacent to the emergency exit located to the rear of the first floor of the library building. It is not within the curtilage of a listed building but is within the Lewes Conservation Area and South Downs National Park.

2. Proposal

It is proposed to install an emergency exit ramp with associated railings to facilitate the safe exit of the library building from the first floor.

3. Relevant Planning History

SDNP/14/01199/FUL - Redevelopment to provide 25 residential units and associated open space, car parking, access and landscaping - Approved

4. Consultations

Lewes CAAG

This helpful facility seems to be entirely within the modern library and residential development and not visible from the historic street scene or All Saints.

Group has no objection to the ramps but Members believe the proposed Key

Clamp handrail is inappropriate in the CA (tends to look like scaffold poles). The boundary fence and gate is not adequately explained or illustrated. The boundary should either match the character of the adjacent walls or be iron railings to allow a view of the original garden space.

Additional Member comment: The heritage statement is totally inadequate for such an important building in the town and provides no clarity of the important historic and architectural considerations. The applicant should also be required to reinstate the footway with matching materials at the entrance to the development from Friars Walk removing the temporary tarmac.

LCAAG Rec: No Objection to ramp. Object to proposed railings.

LE - Design and Conservation Officer

Extensive discussions have been had for these applications which were primarily focused on the introduction of a new boundary fence and new gate to the opening in the grade II listed Church Twitten wall. These two aspects have now been removed from the application. The proposed new ramp to the rear of the library is considered to have no negative impact on the Conservation Area and is a reasonable response to fire safety and accessibility issues. The application based on the proposed ramp only is not objected to.

Parish Council Consultee

Members consider that the proposed ramp affords improved disabled access. No objection.

5. Representations

Friends of Lewes - Friends of Lewes comment that details showing the design of gates have not been submitted with the application and are required. The design of the fencing proposed is not in keeping with the period of Lewes House or appropriate in the Conservation Area. Alternatives, including railings, should be considered.

Public - 9 objections from the public received regarding the siting of the proposed gate and fencing. Some objected to the erection of the fencing on grounds that access to Lewes House should be maintained, whilst others didn't disagree with the principle of the fencing, but to the choice of materials proposed. They also predominantly objected to the principle of gating the access to Church Twitten, and stated that maintaining a throughway was preferable.

6. Planning Policy Context

Applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The statutory development plan in this area is the **South Downs Local Plan 2014-2033** and any relevant minerals and waste plans. Other plans considered:

- Lewes Neighbourhood Plan

The development plan policies and other material considerations considered relevant to this application are set out in section 7, below.

National Park Purposes

The two statutory purposes of the SDNP designation are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage,
- To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas.

If there is a conflict between these two purposes, conservation takes precedence. There is also a duty to foster the economic and social well-being of the local community in pursuit of these purposes.

7. Planning Policy

Relevant Government Planning Policy and Guidance

Government policy relating to National Parks is set out in English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010 and The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated February 2019. The Circular and NPPF confirm that National Parks have the highest status of protection, and the NPPF states at paragraph 172 that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in national parks and that the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations and should be given great weight in National Parks.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The following National Planning Policy Framework documents have been considered in the assessment of this application:

The development plan policies listed below have been assessed for their compliance with the NPPF and are considered to be compliant with the NPPF.

The following policies of the **South Downs Local Plan** are relevant to this application:

- Strategic Policy SD5 - Design
- Strategic Policy SD12 - Historic Environment
- Development Management Policy SD15 - Conservation Areas

Partnership Management Plan

The Environment Act 1995 requires National Parks to produce a Management Plan setting out strategic management objectives to deliver the National Park Purposes and Duty. National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) states that Management Plans "contribute to setting the strategic context for development" and "are material considerations in making decisions on individual planning applications." The South Downs Partnership Management Plan as amended for 2020-2025 on 19 December 2019, sets out a Vision, Outcomes, Policies and a Delivery Framework for the National Park over the next five years. The relevant policies include:

8. Planning Assessment

The application proposes to erect an exit ramp to the rear of Lewes Library, on land that was part of the separate development to the rear of Lewes House, known as Styles Field. Due to the change in ground level, the exit ramp would be located adjacent to the emergency rear exit on the first floor of the library. It would provide an emergency exit for disabled persons wishing to leave the building

The original proposal was submitted with plans to erect a fence between the Styles Field site and Lewes House, and also to erect a gate on the access between the site and Church Twitten. Significant objections from local residents, the Design and Conservation Officer, Lewes CAAG and Friends of Lewes were received relating to the location, style and necessity of the fence and gate. Following discussions with the developer, it was decided to withdraw this aspect of the proposal, to allow for the determination of the exit ramp only. A revised application will be submitted at a later date for any gate/fencing required.

Policy SD5 (Design) of the South Downs Local Plan states that proposals should adopt a landscape led approach and respect the local character. As the proposed site is located within an urban setting, it is important that any proposal does not impact negatively on the appearance of the immediate vicinity or on neighbouring residential amenity.

The location of the ramp, and railings necessary to provide safety, can only be seen from the new development of Styles Field, taking up a relatively small area, measuring approx. 18 sqm, currently occupied by shrubs etc. Although the design of the ramp and railings could only be described as 'functional', there would be minimal impact on visual amenity. Therefore, the proposal would comply with Policy SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan.

Policies SD12 (Historic Environment) and SD15 (Conservation Areas) of the South Downs Local Plan states that proposals will only be permitted where they conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the historic environment/conservation area. Similarly, Policies HC3 A and HC3 B of the Lewes Local Plan aim to support applications that contribute to the preservation of the conservation areas of the town, including through use of appropriate materials etc.

As the application site would not be visible from the wider conservation area, and is, in effect, part of the new development at Styles Field, there would be no adverse impact on the conservation area. The Design and Conservation Officer is content that the application would not be harmful to the existing historic environment.

The construction of a rear emergency exit ramp and railings is essential to enable those with disabilities to exit the library building from the first floor in an emergency. Whilst the design and railings are basic, the small site area, and limited public visibility means that the proposal would not have a negative effect on visual amenity or the wider conservation, in accordance with Policies SD5 (Design), SD12 (Historic Environment) and SD15 (Conservation Areas) of the South Downs Local Plan, and Policies HC3 A and HC3 B of the Lewes Local Plan.

9. Conclusion

It is recommended that planning permission be granted.

10. Reason for Recommendation and Conditions

It is recommended that the application be Approved for the reasons and subject to the conditions set out below.

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 (1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)./ To comply with Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

2. Approved Plans

The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the plans listed below under the heading "Plans Referred to in Consideration of this Application".

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

11. Crime and Disorder Implications

It is considered that the proposal does not raise any crime and disorder implications.

12. Human Rights Implications

This planning application has been considered in light of statute and case law and any interference with an individual's human rights is considered to be proportionate to the aims sought to be realised.

13. Equality Act 2010

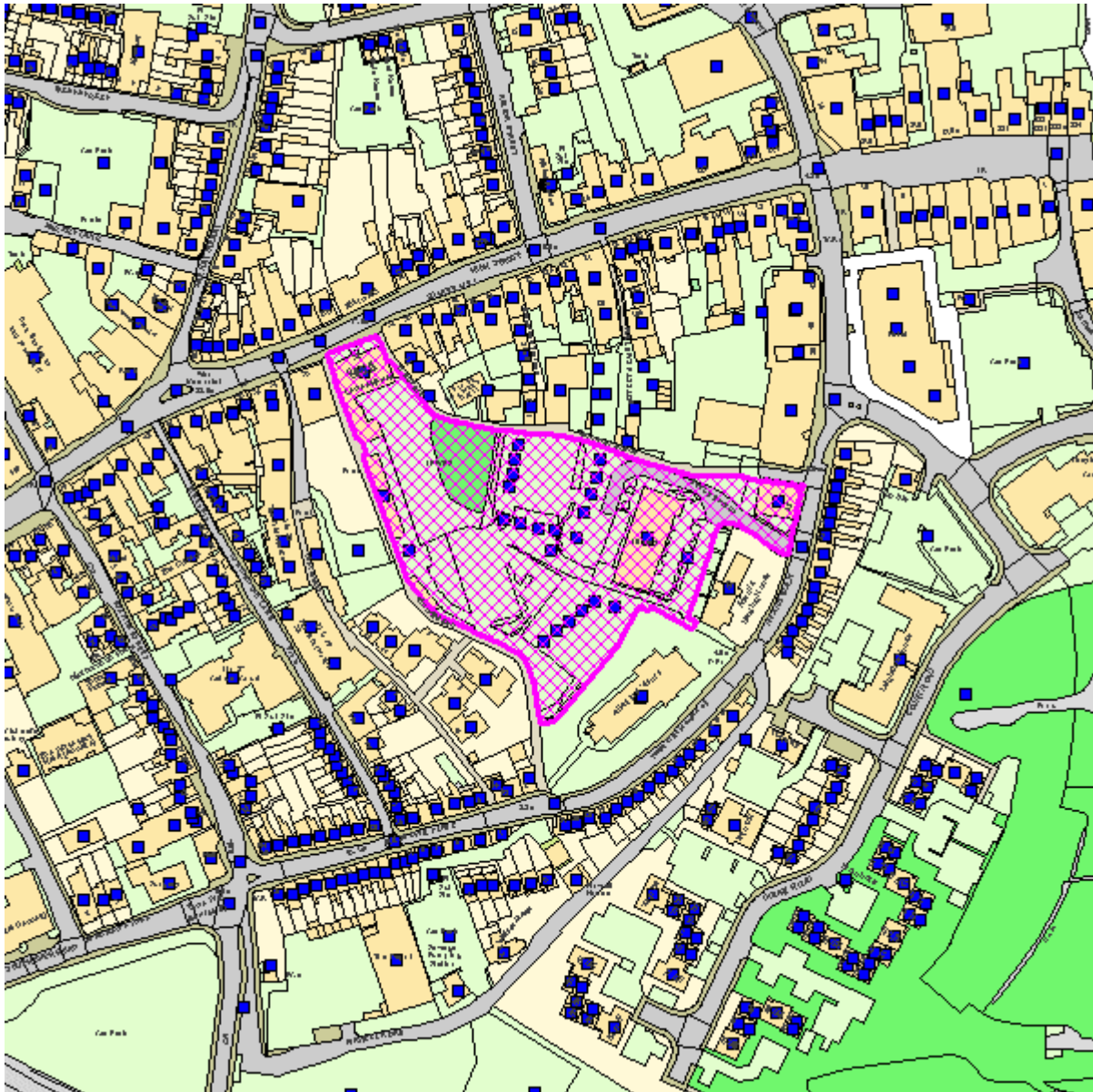
Due regard has been taken of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010.

14. Proactive Working

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by identifying matters of concern within the application (as originally submitted) and negotiating, with the Applicant, acceptable amendments to the proposal to address those concerns. As a result, the Local Planning Authority has been able to grant planning permission for an acceptable proposal, in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Appendix 1

Site Location Map



This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. South Downs National Park Authority, Licence No. 100050083 (2019) (Not to scale).

Appendix 2 – Plans Referred to in Consideration of this Application

The application has been assessed and recommendation is made on the basis of the following plans and documents submitted:

Plan Type	Reference	Version	Date on Plan	Status
Plans - BLOCK PLAN AND EXISTING AND PROPOSED RAMP PLANS	19121-001-A		03.02.2020	Approved
Plans - LOCATION PLAN	19121-005		13.07.2020	Approved
Plans - RAMP PLANS (ELEVATION AND SECTION)	19121-301		25.02.2020	Approved
Application Documents - HERITAGE STATEMENT			10.03.2020	Approved

Reasons: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.