

# place services

Ref: Urban Design assessment of development opportunity sites  
Title: Post Office Car Park Site, High Street, Great Dunmow, Essex  
Client: Uttlesford District Council  
Date: December 2012

**Place Services at Essex County Council working in partnership with Uttlesford District Council**

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## **Executive Summary**

Following consultation on the proposals for a draft Local Plan in June/July 2012 the Post Office car park site in Great Dunmow was identified as a development opportunity site. Through a process of viability testing, context analysis and urban design appraisal, the future development potential of the site has been explored and development principles established.

This document sets out the principles for the future development of the site, ensuring that any development fits into the surrounding context, while providing the town with a suitable mix of uses which meets the needs and requirements for the future growth of Great Dunmow.

The follow summary sets out the key development principles future development proposals will need to address:

- Principles of the indicative layout and site analysis should be adhered to
- Any development proposals linking to the listed building (48b High Street) needs to carefully detailed and sensitive to its setting
- Existing access to remain for on site parking and access to the adjacent retail unit
- A single storey 200-350sqm retail development linked to the rear of a High Street fronting unit
- On street loading via a loading bay needs to be carefully considered in regard to public realm and traffic flows, existing signals, signs and other street utilities will need to be reviewed
- Up to 5no. on site parking spaces could be provided with turning head (within the current site constraints)
- The proposals need to be sensitive to both the surrounding residential properties and views into the site
- Conservation principles need to be at the heart of any proposal
- A very limited proportion of residential could be included into a development proposal providing parking was satisfactory integrated on site and over looking issues to the surrounding residential properties were designed out
- The annex building attached to the Post Office could still function as a commercial use
- Regraded site levels would minimise the visual intrusion of the proposals

## **Purpose of this report**

Uttlesford District Council is assessing the viability of a number of development opportunity sites in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet. This report follows on from another commissioned report undertaken by Carter Jonas titled; 'Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites' November 2012. The Carter Jonas report sets out the future viability of development options for each of the identified sites. This report takes the findings of the Carter Jonas document and begins to establish urban design development principles and options for each site including future uses.

## 1. Local Context

Great Dunmow is a small market town of some 9,000 inhabitants situated midway between Braintree and Bishops Stortford. The retail centre of the town comprises the High Street and Market Place together with White Street where the Cooperative Store and main car park are situated. There is a mixed retail offer but this is provided almost exclusively by private traders or small local multiples with the exception of the main Banks who are represented. The centre serves the needs of the immediate community and tourists but otherwise shoppers will visit the Tesco store on the western side of the town for food shopping or the adjoining centres. Rental levels in the centre are insufficient to provide an economic return on the development costs and retail space will generally only be provided as part of a more profitable residential development.

### Location

This site is within the town centre of Great Dunmow with access onto the High Street but without its own frontage on the street. This poses issues for the site's potential use and access into it. There are good public transport links close to the site and it is located close to other retail uses.

The car park to the rear of the Post Office at the southern end of the High Street comprising some 680 sq metres (0.17 acres) has been identified in the draft allocations policy.



## 2. Policy and Viability Context

### Emerging Site Allocation Policies (LDF Working Group Oct 2012)

#### Great Dunmow Policy - Development Opportunity Sites

The Council will support development and redevelopment opportunities for town centre uses in the following town centre locations.

- Council Depot, off New Street
- Post Office Yard

Development should form part of a comprehensive development or not prevent the development of any other part of the site. Development will need to be implemented in accordance with design guidance approved by the Council and other Development Management policies. Implementation of the proposals will be regulated by legal obligation in association with the grant of planning permissions.

### Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites report (Carter Jonas Nov 2012)

Speculative development on the Post Office site would only be viable for residential purposes but an ancillary town centre use looking for suitable premises, possibly within Use Class D1, could find the site attractive for a design and build solution. Such a user could struggle to find appropriate premises within the existing stock and be prepared to build their own premises designed for the use either as a owner occupier or be prepared to take a lease and pay a rent to justify development by others.

#### Viability

Development on the land at the rear of the Post Office will not be viable on a speculative basis but if one of the premises on the frontage were part of any scheme development will potentially become viable.

#### Summary

- Speculative development only suitable for residential
- D1 design and build would be viable
- Development would provide an alternative to the current stock
- Owner occupier or lease out arrangement
- High Street frontage desirable as part of a land assembly

### Summary of Great Dunmow Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals (Approved November 2007)

The site lies within the Great Dunmow Conservation Area. It does not contain any listed buildings, though 3 are identified as of relevance given they adjoin.

These are:

- 46 High Street (C19, Grade II)
- 48a and 48b High Street (C17, Grade II)
- 48 High Street (C16, Grade II)

The Great Dunmow Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy also identifies the adjoining Post Office as being of architectural/historic value, making it protected from demolition without prior consent unless otherwise stated. The Post Office is described as a tall and elegant 20th century building, though notes advertisements signs on the front of the building detract to a small degree.

There are no trees affecting the site which are either protected by tree preservation orders or identified as important.

### 3. Historical Context

#### Archaeology report

The site lies within the Roman and medieval town area of Great Dunmow. The Roman town was occupied throughout the Roman period with the town developing along Stane Street. Widespread small scale excavation has shown occupation sites throughout the central part of the present town with a range of cemeteries on the edge of the Roman town.

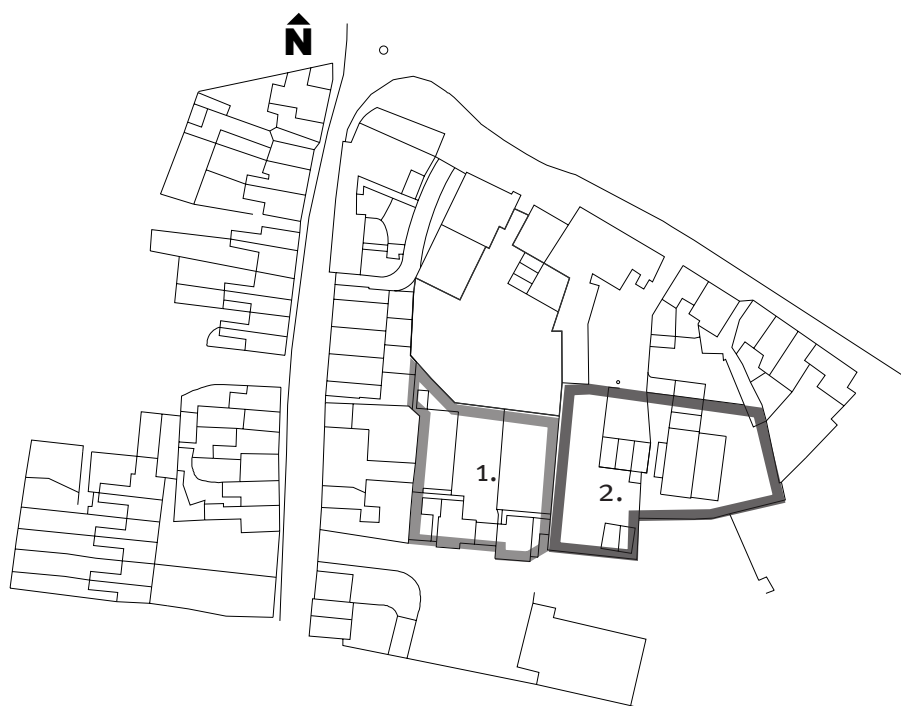
The study area is located on the northern side of the Colchester to Braughing Roman Road (Stane Street), upon which the town of Great Dunmow developed from the later part of the first century AD. It has been postulated that a Roman fort was originally constructed at the road junction of Stane Street and the Chelmsford to Cambridge Road which lies to the west.

Evaluation to the rear of 46 High Street (1) identified significant Roman deposits on the area of land immediately adjacent the access road to the present car park. These deposits comprised potential structural deposits, which would have fronted onto Stane Street and other larger pits relating to rubbish, domestic or industrial activity in the area. Occupation dated from the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. The archaeological deposits on this site were located at a minimum of 70cm below the concrete surface.

Further evaluation to the rear of 52 High Street (2) found no archaeological deposits of significance.

Evidence of medieval or Saxon occupation is absent from the evaluations described above, however, work on the western side of New Street has recovered quantities of both Saxon and medieval pottery indicating its presence in the immediate vicinity.

The archaeological requirements if development proceeds will comprise an initial phase of trial trenching followed by open area excavation of significant deposits identified. The trenches will be positioned to identify depth of the archaeological deposits across the area so that preservation in situ can be achieved where possible.



## 4. Site Analysis

The plan below highlights the principle context surrounding the Post Office site, including the opportunities and constraints for the future use of the site. The site, currently an open yard, provides customer parking for the Aubrey Art Gallery and other nearby shops. Post Office vans still use the site to collect and drop off mail. The entire site is located within the town centre boundary and conservation area.

Access to the site is through a small entrance point between the Post Office and adjacent shop. The site area gradually slopes towards the High Street and is set at a lower level to the surrounding development on each side. Opportunities to connect the site with any adjacent land have been lost with the recent development of sites to the west, east and south.

The site area is 680sqm.



Photographic survey with annotation



The site as viewed towards the northwest. Existing levels create a bowl within the courtyard space, that gradually slopes towards the High Street road level. The Aubrey Art Gallery currently utilises the rear building of the Post Office. Post Office vans and customer parking spaces for the Aubrey Gallery and other town centre retail units take up the remaining area of the site. The site is over looked from the west by the recently completed residential units and to the south by another recently completed residential development.



The entrance point to the site is narrow and restricted. Large vehicles would find it difficult to access the site. The site is overlooked from the south by the first floor windows of the recent residential development. The sites sloping topography makes the surroundings residential development seem elevated above the boundary fencing. Opportunities for the future use of the site will need to address site access issues, as well as the impact development will have on the neighbouring properties.



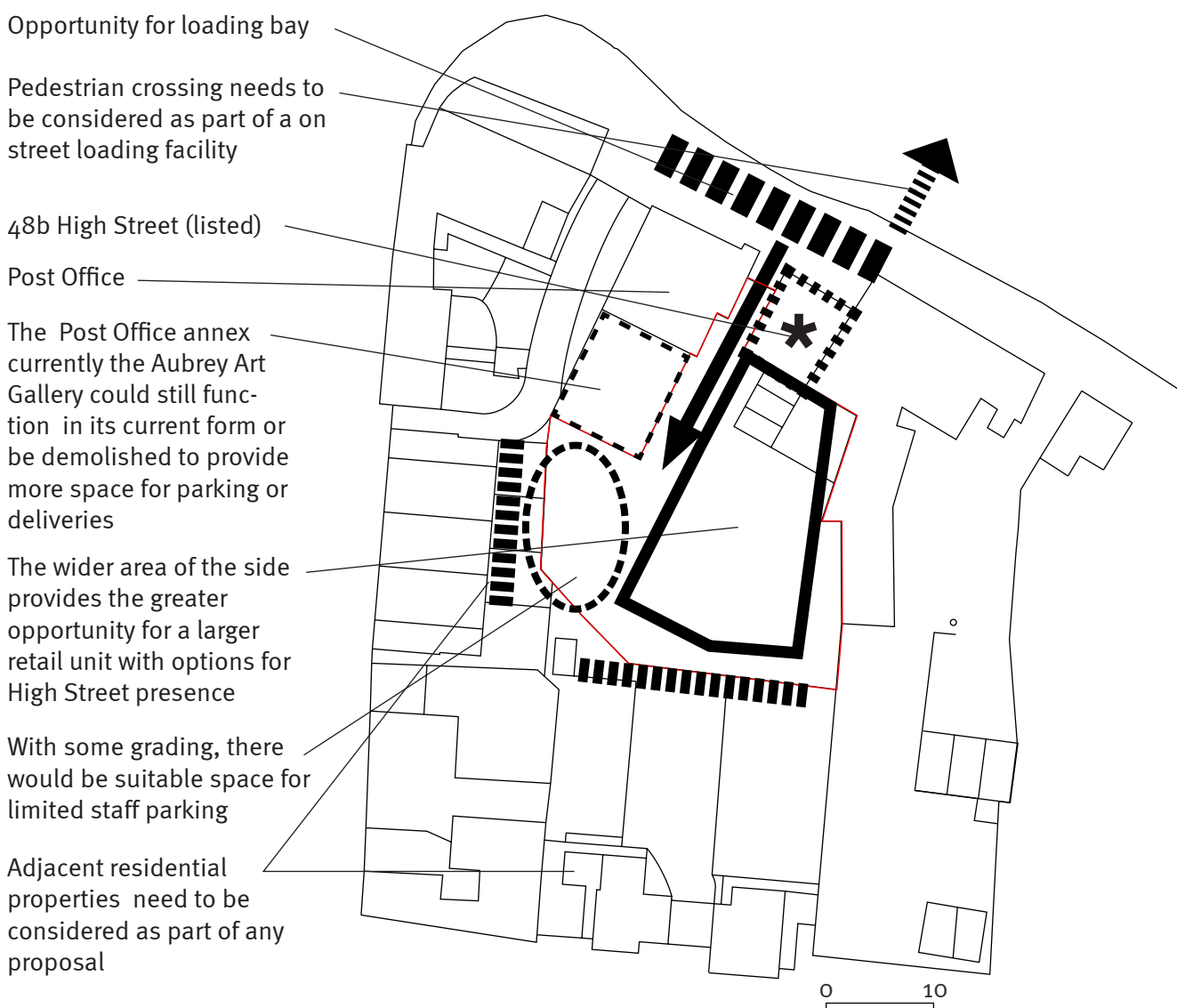
Entrance to the site from the High Street is via a narrow access road. The building line is set back from the road edge creating a wide public realm. Access to the site over the public realm is has been sensitively designed to include materials suitable in a conservation area. The currently vacant listed property to the left of the site entrance could provide the street frontage/presence for a larger store which could accommodate the larger part of the site. The Post Office building has a larger form and, although not listed, is highlighted as a building which has an positive architectural presence to the Great Dunmow conservation area.

## Key Principles

The development principles plan below highlights the key criteria for the future development of the site to follow. This plan represents the main development opportunities of the site while indicating the constraints of the site and the neighbouring properties.

Development principles:

- Retail development on the site would need to utilise either the Post Office or 48b High Street
- Carefully designed and detailed public realm could allow space for a delivery loading bay
- Consideration for the pedestrian crossing point
- A restricted amount of parking would be required
- The preferred development of the site would be to the eastern boundary allowing for a larger development area and access while avoiding the neighbouring residential units
- The development of the post office unit (currently the Aubrey Gallery) would not necessarily be required
- Access for staff, emergency access or side access to store would be maintainable through the current access
- The site topography would make any 1 or 2 storey development seem quite discrete
- Any development adjacent to listed buildings needs to consider the implications on its setting and street scene





## Indicative Outline Proposal

The site would be suitable for a small neighbourhood convenience store or similar, stocking mainly higher-margin products (due to small store size, and the necessity to maximise revenue per square foot) alongside everyday essentials. They are found in busy city centre districts, small shopping precincts in residential areas, small towns and villages.

### Development breakdown

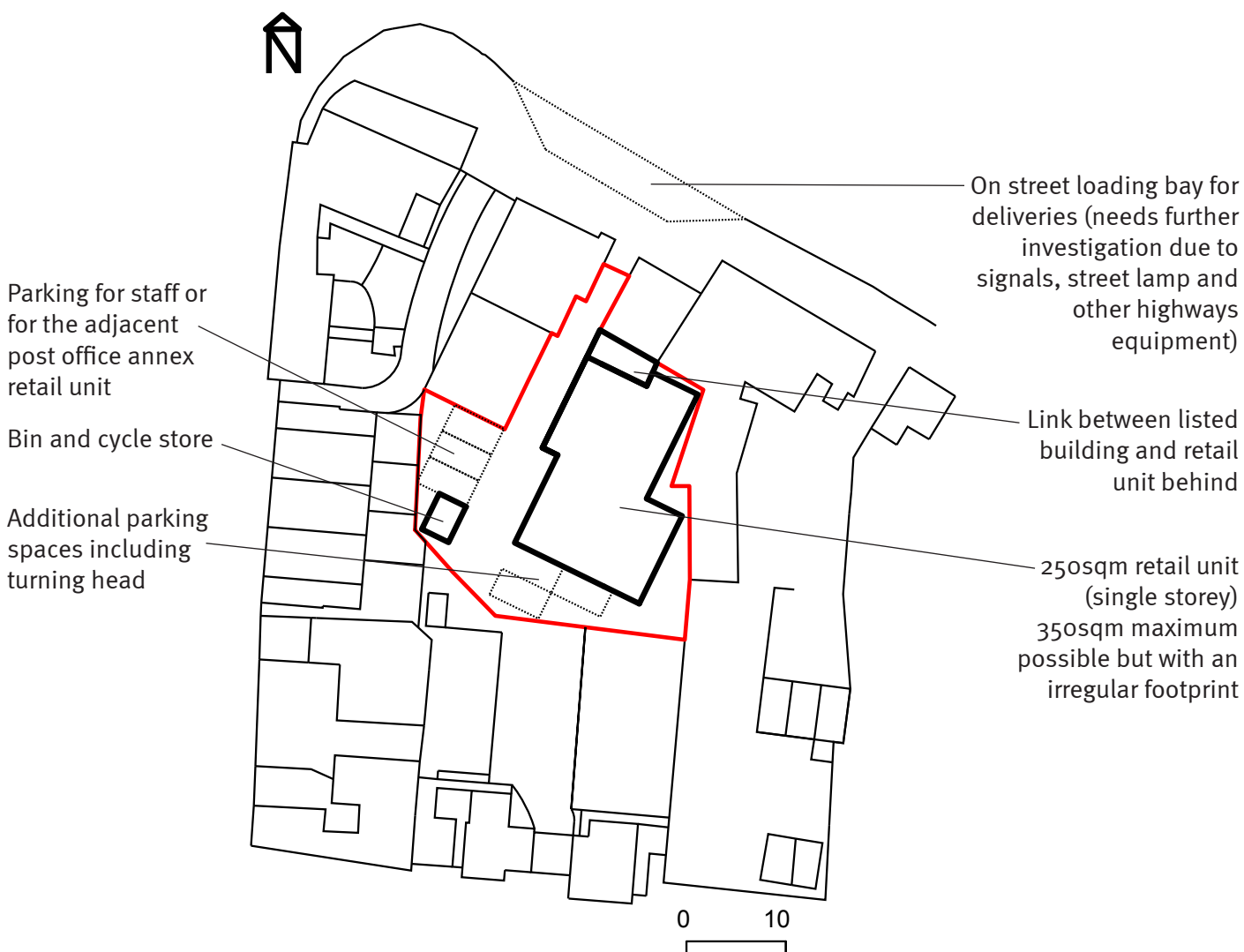
storey	units	type	car parking	garden/terrace
1	1no.	Retail unit (250-350sqm*)	5no. + on street delivery bay	na

\* depending on the regularity of the shape of the retail unit footprint

A 20sqm link to the High Street fronting unit would need to be sensitive in its design and use of materials to be justifiable in conservation terms.

Cycle parking and waste/recycling area are also accommodated on site.  
 Pedestrian and vehicle access from the High Street.

Options for residential units above the parking in a cart-lodge arrangement maybe viable but would put pressure on the parking for the proposal and existing businesses. Also overlooking and outlook may rule out any residential on this site.



## Consultation

As part of the preparation of this report the following groups were consulted on in regard to the future development of the site;

- Strategic Development Management, Essex County Council Highways
- Conservation Officer, Uttlesford District Council
- Tree Officer, Uttlesford District Council
- District, town and parish councillors
- Historic Environment Specialist, Place Services

Relevant district, town and parish councillors were invited to a 'walk and talk' meeting on site to walk around the site and discuss key issues including setting out their aims objectives for the site. The 'walk and talk' day was held on Tuesday 11th December 2012. A summary of the comments are included below as well as any additional thoughts the councillors provided.

### Strategic development highways comments

- Potential for on street delivery/servicing bay on the High Street
- The location of a delivery bay will be in the middle of a signal controlled area and adjacent to a pedestrian crossing; this issue will need to be carefully addressed
- Detailed parking survey would be needed for the town to access parking provision

### Walk and Talk summary

- Development to the rear of 48b High Street will make the best use of the site
- The surrounding residential uses need to be carefully considered
- Some on site parking needs to be sustained for employee use
- The small business unit currently occupied by the Aubrey Gallery could be sustained
- Post office building should be explored for community uses

In addition:

As there is no Town/District ownership then we can only suggest what might be allowable rather than anything by way of a definite scheme. The pity is that we have lost the ability to be able to provide a pedestrian link from the Council car park to the High Street. An artisan quarter could be encouraged if the use classes permit. We already have the Gallery and Orange street Photography in place. The vacant shop (ex William Hill) and the ground floor of the ex Council Offices could provide additional floor space for that type of use. Almost immediately opposite is "Picture This" which has a graphic design element and we also have Architects in the immediate vicinity.

There maybe scope to have a bridging element to the first floor rear, which could create a "coach house" effect viewed from the front, not entirely out of keeping with a post office. This could extend the first floor of the Post Office or the Gallery on one side, provide additional commercial space or residential on the other side, or indeed be wholly residential.

Councillor's invited to contribute:

Caroline Fuller Town Clerk, Cllr Davey, Cllr Davies, Cllr Barker, Cllr Mackman, Cllr Ranger

## **Contacts**

This document has been prepared on the request of Uttlesford District Council and has been produced by Place Services, a trading company of Essex County Council.

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### **Reference Documents**

Uttlesford District Council Local Plan (2005)  
Uttlesford District Council  
2005

Parking Standards: Design and good practice  
Essex County Council  
2009

Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites  
Carter Jonas  
November 2012

Great Dunmow Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals  
Uttlesford District Council  
Approved November 2007

Retail Site allocation policies  
LDF Working Group  
October 2012