# HELEN GAGAN SOLICITOR

# PLANNING STATEMENT

Application for Change of Use of Shop Premises to A2 Financial and Professional Services

Property: Felpham Chambers, 60 Felpham Road, Felpham, Bognor Regis, West Sussex PO22 7NZ

18th May 2017

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL FP/128/17/CLP

**Introduction and the Application**

This planning statement is submitted in support of Helen Gagan Solicitor's Application for the change of use of the premises which has become known as Felpham Chambers, 60 Felpham Road, Felpham, Bognor Regis, West Sussex PO22 7NZ from A1 (shop) to A2 (Financial and Professional Services) under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, as amended. The premises is registered at the Land Registry in the sole name of Helen Gagan under title number WSX259789. A location plan is submitted with this Planning Statement marked "Appendix A".

Helen Gagan Solicitor purchased the said premises in December 2014 and, following a six-month period of substantial refurbishment and decoration, the ground floor of the premises has been occupied as a solicitors' office since 22nd June 2015, pursuant to the Flexible Uses A1/A2 Policy under Class D, Part 4, Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, as amended. Two photographs of the outside of the premises are attached to this Planning Statement marked "Appendix B".

The application for change of use relates to the ground floor only. The first and second floor of the premises is a maisonette, the subject of a long term lease.

**The Need**

The Solicitor's firm known as Helen Gagan Solicitor is operated by sole practitioner, Helen Gagan Solicitor, who has been running the business successfully as a sole practitioner in Felpham for over four years. Originally, the business was operated from a rented office situated on the main road known as Felpham Way. The firm now has over 1,200 new clients since it's commencement providing a much-needed service for the local community who have very much welcomed the fact that the village now has a Solicitor to call on for legal advice and assistance.

There are no other solicitors' offices situated in Felpham village, nor any of the immediately surrounding villages of Middleton on Sea, Elmer, Yapton, Walberton, Barnham and beyond. The population of Felpham village alone, according to the latest census information (2011) is around 10,000 people, with an average age of 50 years. There has however, in recent years, been substantial development and building of new houses within the village increasing the population substantially.

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The nearest alternative solicitors' firms for local residents are the few solicitors' offices situated in Bognor Regis town centre or Littlehampton, which is 6 miles away.

The type of legal service provided by Helen Gagan Solicitor has been specifically tailored to meet the needs and demands of the local community in the preparation of Wills, Lasting Power of Attorney documents, together with providing advice on mental capacity issues, inheritance tax and dealing with the administration of estates following a death, whether there is a Will in place or not. Although Helen Gagan Solicitor does not practice in all areas of law, the local residents have welcomed the fact that she is available, often without appointment, to chat about a potential legal problem and, where appropriate, she is able to refer the individual concerned to a specialist solicitor who practises in the specific area of law needed.

The office is situated on the ground floor of the building with one small step to enter. Wheelchair users are able to access the premises with relative ease. The interior layout has been specifically designed to accommodate individuals with walking aids or wheelchairs.

Home visits are accommodated by Helen Gagan Solicitor regularly for those individuals that would find it difficult or impossible to get into the office.

Although there is limited free parking spaces situated directly outside the office, all clients are encouraged to use the public carpark situated across the road at St Mary's Centre.

**Historical Acceptance**

Local residents and business owners have informed the Applicant that Felpham village used to have a Solicitors' office providing legal services to the village. The firm in question was Chamberlain Martin Solicitors and they were certainly in the village in the 1970's. It is thought the said firm closed its Felpham branch approximately 30 years ago.

**Economic Benefits to Other Shop Owners**

Helen Gagan Solicitor's office is very busy. Clients and non-clients pop into the office all the time. Client appointments slots are usually booked for at least two weeks in advance. Often, clients will make comment of the fact that either before or after their visit they are taking the opportunity to pop into the local cafes or browse the local charity or clothes shop and thus, because of the increased need

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to come into the village for legal advice and assistance, it is proposed that this has a positive knock-on effect for other local businesses.

**Planning Policy Consideration**

The local Planning Policy (DEV 30) notes that change of use from retail should not be permitted for shops located outside the defined principal shopping areas unless it can be demonstrated that there is a need and that retail is no longer a viable use of the building. The last business operating from the premises prior to it becoming empty was a gift shop business. The unit was rented from the freehold owner. The business ceased trading about six months before the premises was sold.

It is submitted that the need for retail shops in Felpham village has declined over recent years. The Chocolate Box newsagents sadly closed a couple of years ago after many years in the village and the local greengrocers shop has been closed and unoccupied for over 18 months. There are at present two shop units unoccupied on the same row of shops where the premises, the subject of this Application, is situated. Photographs of the unoccupied units in the village are attached to this Planning Statement marked "Appendix "C. It is submitted that the decline is due to the attractiveness of the out of town shopping centres nearby offering a large range of choice and retailers and goods. Specifically, the big retailers such as Tesco moving into the village on the main Felpham Way, with their long opening hours and special offers on pricing has meant that the need for a local general stores has declined. The ease, flexibility and cost effectiveness of being able to buy practically anything online and have it delivered to your front door within a day or two has also made it increasingly difficult for small independent retailers to attract shoppers.

The Felpham Neighbourhood Plan 2014-29 states that the local shops are being used mainly by those residents within walking distance of the village centre. Many business owners are worried about the future viability of their businesses due to the increase of out of town shopping facilities.

**Conclusion**

It is submitted that Helen Gagan Solicitor's office fills a much-needed gap in the provision of legal services for the local community of Felpham village and beyond. The business should be seen as an asset to the village. There is still very much a need for small independent professional offices providing a personal one-to-one bespoke service to the Felpham community.

[redacted]

18/5/2017

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