



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

15 OCTOBER 2020

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to determine the planning application outlined below:

APPLICATION NO: 20/0118/20 (KL)
APPLICANT: Mr S John
DEVELOPMENT: Change of use of building from Council Offices to 20 no. self contained residential student flats (Sui Generis), including demolition of part of existing building, construction of new block and associated works (Bat Survey & Nesting Bird Survey Rec. 15/07/2020)
LOCATION: THE OLD COURTHOUSE, COURT HOUSE STREET, GRAIG, PONTYPRIDD, CF37 1LJ
DATE REGISTERED: 05/08/2020
ELECTORAL DIVISION: Graig

RECOMMENDATION: Approve

REASONS: The proposal is considered to preserve the character and appearance of the Pontypridd Conservation Area, in accordance with the requirements of Policy AW7 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

REASON APPLICATION REPORTED TO COMMITTEE

- The proposal is not covered by determination powers delegated to the Director of Prosperity & Development

APPLICATION DETAILS

Conservation Area Consent is sought for the conversion of the Old Courthouse in Court House Street, Pontypridd to 20 no. self-contained residential student flats (Sui Generis).

The proposal would include partial demolition of the original building (central section) however, the majority of the structure, including the principal elevation and features considered to be of architectural merit, would be retained. The main entrance to the building would be via an existing entrance door on the right-hand side of the principal elevation. This would open into an internal lobby and an internal secure bike store which would then open onto an external courtyard within the centre of the site.

The proposed accommodation would be arranged in three blocks:

- Block A would form the front of the building facing onto Court House Street. It would consist of 10 units arranged over three floors (4 units at ground floor, 4 units at first floor and 2 units at second floor) with access being via the central courtyard, off the main entrance. The principal elevation of the building in this location would remain unchanged however, new openings would be provided within each of the 4 existing leaded windows. Due to the partial demolition of the central part of the building, the newly exposed rear elevation of this section would be finished with smooth render. A total of 5 single dormers (3 first floor and 2 second floor) and 4 roof lights (all on second floor) would also be inserted into the rear roof space to create openings for the units on the first and second floors;
- Block B would form the north-western section of the existing building. It would consist of 4 units, all at ground floor level. Two of the units would be accessed via a secondary entrance off the existing projection off the principal elevation whilst the remaining two units would be accessed via the central courtyard, off the main entrance. The existing lobby area at the side of the existing projection would be demolished along with a small central section which would provide a further external courtyard (accessed via the secondary entrance point). A further external courtyard would be created between the 4 units.
- Block C would form the rear of the building. It would consist of 6 units that would be arranged over two floors (4 at ground floor, 2 at first floor). These units would all be accessed off the central courtyard, off the main entrance. Two new windows would be inserted into the newly exposed external wall, which would be finished with smooth render. A further external courtyard would be provided to the north-western side of this block, which would be accessed via the communal laundry room between Blocks B & C.

The proposal would also include the provision of 7 off-street car parking spaces to the front of the building which would be directly accessed off Court House Street. A secure but external bin storage area would be provided to the side of the main entrance (gates to the front of the building and to the central courtyard).

The application is accompanied by the following:

- **Heritage and Design Appraisal** – indicates that the proposal would preserve and utilise as many of the existing buildings as practically possible. However, it is noted that the building layout is deep and leaves several central areas without windows or natural lighting and the demolition works have been proposed to give a workable residential layout. It states that existing natural roof slate covering are to be preserved and made good with slates and ridge tiles salvaged from the demolished buildings. Similarly, new openings will contain salvaged dressed stone lintels, cills and quoins where practical. The exposed walls facing the newly created courtyards would have a rendered finish as it is considered unlikely that the stonework revealed would be of sufficient quality to warrant pointing. All other features, such as rainwater pipes,

existing windows and fascias will be made good where possible or replaced with a like for like material.

- **Design and Access Statement.** – provides a site appraisal and outlines the works proposed (as detailed above). It discusses access to the proposed units, the character of the building, community safety/security and Environmental Sustainability.

SITE APPRAISAL

The application site relates to a broadly rectangular shaped parcel of land that is located on the north-eastern side of Court House Street, Pontypridd. It measures approximately 1154m² and appears to be relatively flat in profile.

The site is currently occupied by a large detached building that occupies the most central part of the plot. A linear row of off-street car parking spaces are provided to the front of the building whilst an area of established trees appear to occupy the rear of the plot. It is understood that the building was last in use as Council offices.

The surrounding area is characterised by a mix of uses with some residential and commercial uses located in the immediate vicinity. The site is bound by the former registry office (currently or most recently used as offices) to the north-west and the Masonic Hall to the south-east. The grounds of Dewi Sant Hospital are located immediately opposite the site to the south-west whilst Pontypridd Train Station is located approximately 11 metres to the north-east.

It should be noted that the former registry office to the north-west is a Grade II Listed Building. The application property however, whilst holding some architectural merit, is not Listed. The site is located within the Pontypridd Conservation Area and the Pontypridd Character Area.

PLANNING HISTORY

None recorded within the last 10 years at this property

PUBLICITY

The application has been advertised by means of direct neighbour notification, the display of site notices in the vicinity of the site and through advertisement in the local newspaper. An advert was also placed in a local newspaper.

Two letters of objection have been received from local residents which are summarised as follows:

- Parking is terrible in the area and the proposal will make it much worse for residents;
- Some students can be noisy and will cause disturbance which will bring the area down and make local families suffer the consequences;

- The Graig already has big issues with drugs, rubbish, parking, disturbances, murders and anti-social behaviour;
- We are neglected as a community already and more flats would put even more strain on our failing scruffy community;
- We have the Dewi Sant Health Park issues with parking – residents cannot park outside their own home.

Further letters of objection have been received from Cllr. Brencher, the Ward Member for the Graig. These letters are summarised as follows:

- With the development of Dewi Sant Hospital as a Health Park and proximity to the town centre, residents are unable to park near their homes;
- Highways have been involved in these issues and are looking to alleviate existing parking problems of extreme concern;
- The site is adjacent to the Coroner's office and the Masonic Hall where meetings are held. In addition, the train station is located in close proximity as well as the town centre. People park here to access of these;
- The extra care development in the area will also add pressure;
- Students will have cars and visitor who will also have cars;
- The Dewi Sant Health Park has insufficient parking for patients and staff who also park in nearby streets as a result;
- Sardis Road car park closes at 7pm which means visitors to the Masonic Lodge in the evenings park on the pavements;
- Nearby social housing developments and the extra care facility already have insufficient parking.

CONSULTATION

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust – No objection, however, the building is considered to be of historical importance by virtue of its history and cultural significance within the area and a condition is therefore considered that archaeological mitigation is required in order to preserve the Old Courthouse by record. As such, a condition is recommended to ensure that a building survey is carried out prior to demolition and works commencing.

No other responses had been received at the time of writing this report.

POLICY CONTEXT

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan

The application site is located inside the defined settlement boundary and is within the Pontypridd Town Conservation Area and the Pontypridd Character area. The following policies are considered to be relevant to the application:

Policy AW7 – states that developments which impact upon sites of architectural and/or historical merit will only be permitted were it can be demonstrated that the proposal would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the site.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Design and Placemaking
The Historic Built Environment

National Guidance

In the determination of planning applications regard should also be given to the requirements of national planning policy which are not duplicated in the Local Development Plan, particularly where national planning policy provides a more up to date and comprehensive policy on certain topics.

Planning Policy Wales Edition 10 (PPW) sets out the Welsh Government's (WG) current position on planning policy. The document incorporates the objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act into town and country planning and sets out the WG's policy on planning issues relevant to the determination of planning applications.

It is considered that the proposed development is consistent with the key principles and requirements for placemaking set out in PPW; and is also consistent with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's sustainable development principles through its contribution towards the Welsh Ministers' well-being objectives of driving sustainable development and building healthier communities and better environments.

Other relevant national policy guidance consulted:

PPW Technical Advice Note 12: Design;
PPW Technical Advice Note 24: The Historic Environment

REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that, if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Furthermore, applications that are not in accordance with relevant policies in the plan should not be allowed, unless material considerations justify the grant of planning permission.

Main Issues:

This application seeks conservation area consent for the partial demolition of the Old Courthouse in order to provide student accommodation consisting of 20 no. flats. As such, the key considerations in the determination of this application are the impacts

resulting from the loss of the parts of the building to be demolished and the resulting effects of the conversion and associated works upon the character of the site and its wider conservation area setting.

Impact on the character and appearance of the area

Both Policy AW7 and Supplementary Planning Guidance: The Historic Built Environment set out a range of criteria which must be taken into account when assessing application for development in conservation areas. The guidance states that proposals in and adjacent to conservation areas should avoid harming the character and appearance of those areas and should, where possible, positively enhance them. Furthermore, Planning Policy Wales states that developments should seek to protect, conserve, promote and enhance the historic environment as a resource for the general well-being of present and future generations. It states that the individual historic assets are protected and preserved.

The application proposes the part demolition of the existing building with these works primarily taking place towards the centre of the site. The principal elevation would remain relatively unchanged, with the exception of the demolition of a small entrance porch to the existing front projection, and the majority of the original features that are considered to be of some architectural merit would be retained.

The proposal has been assessed by Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust who have indicated that the building is recorded by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. The building contains the date 1863 over the south elevation entrance and the original footprint of the building can be seen on the First and Second Edition Ordnance Survey maps (dated 1875 and 1900). The Third OS map (dated 1919) shows an extension to the building to the north. GGAT are of the opinion that the site is of historic importance by virtue of the building's history and cultural significance within the area and, consequently, due to the proposed change of use and partial demolition of the building, it is considered that archaeological mitigation will be required in order to preserve the Old Courthouse by record. As such, a condition is recommended in this regard.

Taking the above into consideration, the works would be carried out in a sympathetic manner with the majority of the visible parts of the site being retained. It is noted that materials obtained through the demolition of the central parts of the building would be retained and re-used where possible and any new additions (materials) would be carefully selected to ensure that they would match/compliment the existing building. Furthermore, the proposal would ensure the re-use of the existing building, which is currently vacant, and it would therefore prevent it from falling into disrepair. As such, the proposal would preserve the character of the site and the wider conservation area and the application would therefore comply with Policy AW7 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan and SPG: The Historic Built Environment.

Conclusion

To conclude, the impact of the proposed demolition and conversion works are considered to be acceptable in terms of the impact they would have on the character and appearance of the site and the wider conservation area. The development would therefore comply with Policy AW7 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan and the SPG: The Historic Built Environment.

RECOMMENDATION: Grant

1. No works to which this consent relates shall commence until an appropriate programme of historic building recording and analysis has been secured and implemented in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: As the building is of architectural and cultural significance, the specified records are required to mitigate impact, in accordance with Policy AW7 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.