

DELEGATED REPORT

Application No:	P/24/0167
Site Address:	Wesley Methodist Church South Street Dowlais CF48 3DS
Development:	Proposed conversion and change of use of existing vacant Wesley Chapel into 6 No self contained flats and associated external works (retention).
Case Officer:	Rebecca Owens
Application Expiry Date:	2nd December 2024
Consultation reply date expired:	14th August 2024

APPLICATION SITE

The application site relates to the former Wesley Methodist Church, located on South Street in the predominately residential area of Dowlais. The church is currently in the process of being converted into flats by virtue of a previous planning application (outlined below). The church is neither listed or locally listed and is of a non-traditional design. It is set back from the highway of South Street to the north-east by approximately 22m and is served by a front car park measuring approximately 200 square metres. As a result of the topography, the site falls away in a south-easterly direction and the church is constructed over two levels. Its curtilage predominately forms a grassed area enclosed by low brick walls and green weld mesh fencing.

Being located within a residential area, a number of residential properties surround the site. 9 Bryn Carwyn lies to the north-west of the church. Its two-storey gable end wall, containing three windows (two at ground floor, one at first floor), faces onto the side elevation of the converted church. It is separated from the north-western side wall of the application building by a distance of 5.5m and is set apart from its north-western boundary by a small footpath which runs along the side of the house. To the front of 9 Bryn Carwyn is an open grass area and to the north of the church car park is another small car park which is presumably used by the occupiers of the nearby houses. The front boundary of the church fronts the highway of South Street. It is separated from the Grade II Bethania Independent Chapel and a property known as Newlands to the north east by distances of approximately 9m with greater separation distances of approximately 30m being maintained between these properties and the front elevation of the church. To the south, the application site abuts the highway and to the rear, it faces onto a grass verge and a narrow footpath, beyond which are the rear gardens of 19, 20 and 21 Glanmor Gardens.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Full planning permission has previously been granted for the conversion of Wesley Church into residential units (planning reference P/22/0104). However, the conversion has not

been undertaken in accordance with the approved drawings and as such this application has been submitted to regularise the unauthorised changes and gain approval for other amendments.

This application again seeks full planning permission for the conversion of Wesley Methodist Church to provide 6 self-contained flats. However, the internal layout has been significantly altered, as have the design and positioning of windows and doors, and the material finishes to the external elevations and roof. In addition, the dormer windows previously proposed to the northern elevation have been removed and those of the southern elevation have been altered in their size.

The key aspects of the proposed external works now proposed are as follows:-

- The insertion of two roof lights into the northern roof plane.
- The erection of two dormer windows within the southern side elevation of the building. The larger of the two dormers would measure 9.2m wide, 3.65m deep and 1.73m in height above the roof slope. It would contain two windows serving an open plan kitchen/living/dining room. The second dormer would measure 4.2m wide, 4.2m deep and 2.1m in height and would contain a single window serving a bedroom. The external walls of both dormers have been clad in grey horizontal cladding.
- Replace the existing entrance door in the eastern elevation (at car park level) and create two new entrances at the lower level.
- Removed all the existing glazing in the eastern elevation and provide two new windows at lower ground floor level and five further windows at ground floor level.
- Replace the existing door in the western elevation (at the lower level) and provide a new doorway at the upper level (ground floor).
- Removed all the existing glazing in the western elevation and provide four new windows at lower ground floor level, a further six windows at ground floor level and two windows at first floor level.
- Create two new window openings in the southern elevation at lower ground floor level.
- Replace the existing door in the northern elevation, insert a new ground floor window and removed the existing glazing to the high level elevation that projects above the roof.
- Insert a new window and door at lower ground floor level in the north facing elevation of the projection off the western elevation.
- Provide a bin store, 6 bicycle stands and 6 off-road car parking spaces within the existing car park located within the front, north-eastern, corner of the site. A further smaller bin store would be located to the south west of the building adjacent to the pathway. The bin stores would be enclosed on all sides by 1.8m high treated softwood.
- Raise the brick walls located along the north-eastern, south-eastern and south-western boundaries to 750mm in height and erect new 900mm galvanised railings on top. Erect two new security gates, one along the north-eastern front boundary and a second along the south-eastern side boundary.
- Provide a communal garden to the rear of the building and private areas for flats 2, 5, 6. The private areas would be enclosed by 1.5m high fencing with 300mm trellis on top.
- Install integrated bat boxes and sparrow box.
- Provide new landscaping and lighting across the site.

- The external walls have been refurbished with rendered panels inserted amongst the existing grey brickwork and brickwork piers and the roofs have retained the existing concrete roof tiles. All new windows and doors are grey upvc.

The application is accompanied by a topographical survey, a Bat Scoping Survey and a Bat Survey.

PLANNING HISTORY

The recent planning history relating to the site is outlined below:

- P/22/0104 Proposed conversion of Wesley Chapel into 6 self contained flats with associated external works including new dormers to the northern and southern elevations
Granted planning permission subject to conditions on 15 December 2022
- P/23/0095 Discharge of condition 3 (materials) and 5 (landscaping) of planning permission P/22/0104
Approved on 25 May 2023

CONSULTATION

- Head of Engineering and Highways: No objection subject to conditions
- Planning Policy Officer: No objection
- Ecologist: No objection
- Environmental Health Manager: No objection subject to conditions

PUBLICITY

In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012, letters were sent to the neighbouring properties and site notices were displayed within the vicinity of the site.

No letters of objection were received following this publicity exercise.

POLICY CONTEXT

National Policy

The Future Wales – the National Plan 2040 sets out a strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy, achieving decarbonisation and climate-resilience, developing strong ecosystems and improving the health and well-being of our communities.

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 12 (February 2024) sets out the land use policies of the Welsh Government. The most relevant sections are:

Paragraph 2.2 notes that *“All development decisions, either through development plans policy choices or individual development management decisions should seek to contribute towards the making of sustainable places and improved well-being”*. Paragraph 2.3

expands on this highlighting that *“the planning system should create sustainable places which are attractive, sociable, accessible, attractive, secure, welcoming, healthy and friendly”*.

Sections 3.3 – 3.16 set out the principles of good design in new development proposals, which should take into account its relationship to its surrounding context.

Paragraph 3.9 states *“the special characteristics of an area should be central to the design of a development. The layout, form, scale and visual appearance of a proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings are important planning considerations”*

Paragraph 3.49 provides guidance in relation to accessibility. It advises that *‘Spatial strategies should support the objectives of minimising the need to travel, reducing reliance on the private car and increasing walking, cycling and the use of public transport’*.

Paragraph 4.1.8 advises that the Welsh Government is committed to supporting sustainable forms of transport with the aim of reducing reliance on the private car.

Paragraph 4.2.18 states *‘Maximising the use of suitable previously and/or underutilised land for housing development can assist regeneration and at the same time relieve pressure for development on greenfield sites’*.

Paragraph 4.2.23 highlights the preference for higher density development in suitable locations noting *“Planning authorities will need to ensure that in development plans and through the development management process they make the most efficient use of land and buildings in their area. Higher densities must be encouraged on sites in town centres and other sites which have good walking, cycling and public transport links”*.

The policies in PPW are supported by Technical Advice Notes (TANs). The most relevant TANs to this application are as follows:-

TAN 5 – Nature conservation and planning sets out the role of the planning system in protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geological conservation.

TAN 12 - Design advises that the Welsh Government is strongly committed to achieving the delivery of good design in the built and natural environment, which is fit for purpose and delivers environmental sustainability, economic development, and social inclusion at every scale throughout Wales.

Local Policy

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) 2016-2031:

Policy SW1 – Provision of New Homes

Policy SW4 – Settlement boundaries

Policy SW9 – Planning Obligations

Policy SW11 – Sustainable design and Placemaking

Policy SW12 – Improving the Transport Network

Policy SW13 – Protecting and Improving Local Community Facilities

Policy EnW1 – Nature Conservation and Ecosystem Resilience

Policy EnW3 – Regionally Important Geological Sites, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, Local Nature Reserves and Priority Habitats and Species

Policy EnW4 – Environmental Protection

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) Note No. 1 - Affordable Housing
Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) Note No. 2 – Planning Obligations
Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) Note No. 4 – Sustainable Design
Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) Note No. 5 – Nature and Development

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

It is recognised that full planning permission has previously been granted for the conversion of Wesley Church into residential units (planning reference P/22/0104). However, the conversion has not been undertaken in accordance with the approved drawings and as such this application has been submitted to regularise the unauthorised changes and gain approval for other amendments. As such, the principle of the development has already been considered and found to be acceptable.

Principle of the proposed conversion

As with the previous scheme, the proposal seeks to provide 6 residential units, arranged over three floors. The building is located within settlement limits, within reasonable walking distance of the retail centre of Dowlais and a number of local amenities and facilities. Further to this, the proposal would result in the positive re-use of a previously vacant building in the settlement boundary. The re-use and conversion of existing buildings in sustainable locations such as this often assist in the regeneration of an area whilst at the same time, relieve pressure for development on greenfield sites. In this instance, the proposed residential use of the building is considered compatible with surrounding land uses and is an acceptable form of development which accords with Policy SW4 of the LDP.

Having assessed the proposed layout for the building and the amount of space available for each unit, it is also considered that the scheme represents an appropriate division and use of the space and does not represent over development of the site. Whilst it is recognised that the proposed conversion would result in the loss of a community facility, the Council's Planning Policy Officer has raised no objection to the loss of the church as it has been vacant for a period of time. Therefore, it can be considered as being surplus to requirements and is no longer required in accordance with Policy SW13 of the LDP. Moreover, it is acknowledged that churches are governed by their own systems and such closures are often linked to small congregation numbers which make the facility unviable.

Character and appearance of the area

The application building is neither listed nor locally listed. It is also noted that it is a unique structure within this area and as such does not conform to the general character of buildings in the area. As such, there was more scope to alter the property without adversely impacting upon the character of the wider area. In order to convert and subdivide the building, several alterations have been undertaken to the external fabric of the building. However, the overall scale and appearance of the building has remained intact with the exception of two new dormers. It is considered that the introduction of the dormers is acceptable in terms of their design and impact on the character and appearance of the building. Furthermore, the conversion has resulted in significant changes to the fenestration and added new render detailing to the external elevations. Whilst these changes have altered the appearance of the building, their visual impact is considered to be acceptable given that this is a standalone building. These changes have therefore not impinged on the character or visual amenities of the area. The changes proposed to the existing boundary

treatments are also deemed acceptable and would not have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the building or the surrounding area.

Residential Amenity

Wesley Church is surrounded by residential properties, however, the re-use of the building for residential purposes would not unduly compromise the amenities of nearby residents. It is acknowledged that the building would be altered but its footprint would remain the same, apart from the introduction of dormer windows to the southern roof plane. As such, the scheme would not give rise to any harmful levels of overshadowing or overbearing impacts.

The greatest impact from the proposed development, in terms of overlooking would be to the residential properties located to the rear, namely 19 – 21 Glanmor Gardens and to the property to the north, 9 Bryn Carwyn. The amended proposal removes the existing glazing and provides a number of new windows which look towards the rear gardens of numbers 19 – 21 Glanmor Gardens from an elevated position. However, the rear boundaries of these properties are separated from the main back wall of the application building by a minimum distance of at least 17m. This is considered to be sufficient separation distance to ensure that there is no unacceptable loss of privacy. It should also be noted that no letters of representation have been received from the occupiers of these properties.

In addition, the current proposal no longer includes dormer windows within the northern roof plane which have been replaced by two skylights. These serve a bathroom and study and are installed with the bottom of the window 1.4m above the floor level. At this height they would allow views across to the flank elevation of number 9 Bryn Carwyn (the neighbouring property situated to the north-west of the site) which features a first floor window. It is acknowledged that this property is located in close proximity to the application site but having regard to the rooms that the roof lights would serve and the size of the first floor windows in 9 Bryn Carwyn (which suggests it would serve a non-habitable room), it is on balance considered that there is not a harmful level of overlooking and indeed these would have a lesser impact than the previously approved dormer windows. Consideration has also been given to the impact arising from the window and doorway located in the ground floor side elevation of the building. In this respect, it is not considered that the overlooking impact is significant. Additionally, no letters of objection or representation have been received from the occupier(s) of number 9 Bryn Carwyn.

As such, the proposal accords with Policy SW11 of the LDP.

Parking and Highway Safety

The amended proposal does not alter the previously approved access or parking arrangements. Although it is noted that the internal layouts of the flats have now been altered to so each flat only benefits from a single bedroom. Notwithstanding this, it is acknowledged that the rooms labelled as studies could be used as an additional bedroom. Having regard to this the Head of Engineering and Highways is still satisfied with the proposal and has not raised any highway objections. The previous key issues in this respect are still applicable to the assessment of this application including the previous approved use and access, parking, proximity to local amenities and cycle parking.

In terms of off-street parking and traffic movements, it was considered that the previous authorised use would have a greater demand for parking and could result in more traffic movements than the proposed use. The application site is also in a sustainable location where many day-to-day facilities can be accessed on foot, by bicycle or by using public

transport. As a consequence, residents may choose not to own a car. The six car parking spaces proposed for this development are therefore considered acceptable. It is also noted that a cycle store would be provided as part of this development. On this basis, the development would not have a detrimental impact on highway safety or the free flow of traffic in the area and is compliant with the requirements of Policy SW11 of the LDP.

Ecology

A scoping survey and bat emergence surveys were submitted in support of the previous application and have been resubmitted for consideration in this application. The Bat Survey highlighted that no bats were observed emerging from the building and the site does not offer significant hibernation potential. Therefore, it concluded that the proposed works would have a negligible impact on the local bat population. Whilst it is recognised that these documents are now out of date, given that the works have already largely been completed under the previous permission (albeit not in accordance with the approved plans), any impact has already taken place and it is not therefore considered necessary or justified to request that these are updated. It is also noted that no external lighting is now being proposed so it is recommended that a condition is included relating to the submission of a lighting scheme prior to any external lighting being installed to ensure that should this change there would be no harm to protected species.

It is also recognised that chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales (edition 12) requests that applications be supported by Green Infrastructure Statements (GIS). In this instance, due to given that this application seeks to regularise changes to a previously approved scheme, it is not considered justified or reasonable to request the submission of a GIS. Notwithstanding this, ecological enhancement measures are proposed which include the siting of integrated bat and bird boxes. The scheme also includes a planting scheme in the form of tree planting across the site and the provision of a small privet hedge along the rear boundary of the car park. These will be secured by condition, which would contribute to the wider green infrastructure objectives. The proposed development would therefore comply with LDP Policy EnW1 and the Council's Ecologist raises no objection to the scheme.

Accordingly, the proposal complies with policy EnW1 of the LDP.

Planning Obligations

Policy SW9 of the LDP considers the requirement for planning obligations and affordable housing contributions on all residential schemes. On proposed residential developments of less than 10 units, the Council will require a financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing elsewhere in the corresponding growth area of the LDP.

The requirement for an affordable housing contribution towards the proposed development has been assessed by the Planning Division's Policy & Implementation Group Leader. In this instance no planning obligations for the provision of affordable housing or any other contributions have been sought as this would likely render the development financially unviable. In order to come to this conclusion, an assessment has been carried out using the Three Dragons Toolkit.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable and therefore complies with the relevant LDP policies.

The duty to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, under section 3 of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (“the WBFG Act”) has been taken into consideration when determining this application. In reaching the following recommendation, the ways of working set out at section 5 of the WBFG Act have been considered and thus the proposal is in accordance with the sustainable development principle through its contribution towards one or more of the Welsh Ministers well-being objectives set out as required by section 8 of the WBFG Act.

Accordingly the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION: BE APPROVED subject to the following **CONDITIONS:**

1. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

Drawing no. LT2116.04.02 Rev J (Proposed Elevations) received on 7 October 2024

Drawing no. LT2116.04.0G Rev D (Proposed Site Plan) received on 12 August 2024

Drawing no. LT2116.04.01 Rev F (Proposed Floor Plans) received on 7 October 2024

Drawing no. LT2116.04.04 Rev A (Bin Store Details) received on 19 July 2024

Drawing no. TDA.2849.01 (Detailed Soft Landscape Proposals) received on 19 July 2024

Bat Scoping Survey, V1.0, dated April 2022, produced by Ecological Services Ltd, received on 19 July 2024

Bat Survey, V3.0, dated September 2022, produced by Ecological Services Ltd, received on 7 October 2024

Reason -To ensure compliance with the approved plans and clearly define the scope of the permission.

2. All planting, seeding or turfing comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species.

Reason - To ensure that the new development will be visually attractive in the interests of amenity and to accord with Policy SW11 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

3. The car parking spaces, as indicated on Drawing no. LT2116.04.03 Rev G (Proposed Site Plan), shall be provided before any flat, hereby permitted, is occupied. The car parking spaces shall thereafter be kept available for the parking of motor vehicles at all times.

Reason - To ensure that cars are parked off the highway in the interests of highway safety and to accord with Policy SW11 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan

4. **BEFORE** any of the flats hereby approved are occupied, bat and bird boxes shall be installed in accordance with drawing number LT2116.04.02 Rev J. The bat and bird boxes box shall be retained in perpetuity thereafter.

Reason - To protect the natural environment in accordance with Policies EnW1 and EnW2 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

5. **Prior to the installation of any external lighting**, a Lighting Scheme shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, which shall include:
- Details of the siting and type of lighting to be used, including the colour temperature
 - A plan illustrating the lux levels across the site.

The lighting scheme shall only be installed in accordance with the approved details and maintained as such thereafter.

Reason - To limit the impact on protected species and reduce light pollution in accordance with policies EnW2 and EnW4 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

INFORMATIVES

1. This planning permission does not provide consent to undertake works that require a European Protected Species (EPS) licence.
All bats and their roosts are protected under UK and European legislation. It is an offence to deliberately kill, injure, capture or disturb a bat or to recklessly damage or destroy their breeding sites or resting places.

If works are planned on a building/tree in which bats are found to be roosting, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) must be contacted. on 0300 065 3000 or at <https://naturalresources.wales/permits-and-permissions/species-licensing/apply-for-a-protected-species-licence/bat-licences/?lang=en>.

If work has already commenced and bats are found, or if any evidence that bats are using the site as a roost is found, work should cease and NRW should be contacted immediately.

Under these circumstances, an EPS licence is likely to be required to undertake the works within the law.

2. All birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) while they are breeding.

If works to any trees, hedgerows and/or other nesting bird habitat (including buildings with suitable features) are to be undertaken, they will take place outside of the bird nesting season. If the works must be undertaken during the nesting season (generally from 1st March until 31st August, although birds are known to nest outside

of these dates in suitable conditions), a breeding bird survey will be required and must be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist. Any active nests identified will be protected until the young have fledged.

Where a Schedule 1 species (as defined in the Wildlife and Countryside Act - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/schedule/1> is involved, compensation for impacts, e.g., loss of nesting sites, will be devised and implemented.

3. If a drop kerb is required, an application form to obtain permission for this aspect of the development can be obtained from the highways department;

Website : <https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/resident/parking-roads-and-travel/roads-footways-and-pavements/dropped-kerb/>

Email : Highways.CustomerCare@merthyr.gov.uk Tel no : 01685 727470 or 725000

4. The proposed development lies within a coal mining area which may contain unrecorded coal mining related hazards. If any coal mining feature is encountered during development, this should be reported immediately to the Coal Authority on 0345 762 6848.

Further information is also available on the Coal Authority website at:
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/the-coal-authority

RECOMMENDATION ENDORSED



Director of Neighbourhood Services

DATE: 11.10.2024