

DELEGATED REPORT

Application No: P/20/0161

Site Address: Government Buildings
Castle Street
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8TX

Development: Change of use of ground floor offices to retail units (A1 Use Class)

Case Officer: David Cross

Site Visit: 5th August 2020

Application Expiry Date: 16th October 2020

Consultation reply date expired: 12th August 2020

APPLICATION SITE

This application relates to a former four storey Government office building situated in the town centre. The building is located on a prominent corner, with the principle elevation of the office building fronting on to Castle Street to the southeast and the side elevation fronting on to highway to the southwest. To the northwest is a multi-storey car park and to the northeast is an adjoining retail/office building (Oldway House). It is noted that part of the application site includes private land that is currently paved in the same materials as the land which forms part of the adopted highway. As such, the public footpaths currently appear to be much wider.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Full planning permission is sought for the change of use of the ground floor level of the building to accommodate six retail units (A1 Use Class) ranging from 43sqm to 75sqm. Each of these units would be separately access by a new entrance on the southeast or the southwest elevations of the building. The existing entrance into the building would be retained, together with a new reception area, to serve the office spaces on the upper levels of the building.

It is proposed that new shop fronts would be provided along the southeast and southwest elevations of the building. This would involve replacing the existing glazed and upvc panels and the installation of new glazed panels and doorways for each of the retail units.

To provide a level threshold into each of the retail units on the southeast side of the building, it is proposed that a new ramped terrace (2.1m wide) would be constructed alongside the building (approx. 290m in length). A series of steps would also be introduced along one side of the terrace to address the change in levels.

A raised platform with stepped access would be provided on the southwest side of the building to serve two retail units. This would measure 2m wide and 7.3m long and would include balustrade along one side.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no relevant planning history relating to the application site.

CONSULTATION

Planning Division's
Policy Officer - No objection.

Engineering and Traffic
Group Leader - No objection.

PUBLICITY

In accordance with the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012, two site notices were displayed within the vicinity of the site.

No representations were received as a result of this publicity exercise.

POLICY CONTEXT

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

- Policy SW4 - Settlement Boundaries
- Policy SW11 - Sustainable Design and Placemaking
- Policy SW12 - Improving the Transport Network
- Policy CW1 - Historic Environment
- Policy EnW4 - Environmental Protection
- Policy EnW3 - Retail Hierarchy
- Policy EcW5 - Town and Local Centre Retailing Areas

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG):

- SPG 3: Shopfront Design
- SPG 4: Sustainable Design

Other material considerations:

- CSS Wales Parking Standards 2008
- TAN15: Development and Flood Risk, July 2004

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Land use and retailing

The application site is located within the settlement boundary and Primary Growth Area where the majority of new development is generally encouraged by policy SW4 of the

LDP. The proposal also helps to bring back part of a building that is currently vacant back into beneficial use.

It is noted by the Planning Division's Policy Officer that the development lies within the town centre boundary, where policies EcW3 and EcW5 of the LDP apply. Policy EcW3 relates to the retail hierarchy, with the town centre being the favoured location for retail and other complementary uses, where they improve the vitality and viability of the town centre. Policy EcW5 also supports development that enhances the vitality and viability of the town centre and defines the areas where retail, leisure and other town centre uses should be concentrated.

The office building was previously occupied by HMRC, which is an acceptable complementary commercial use, the loss of which could affect the viability of the town centre, by reducing the availability of larger commercial floorspace. However, given that the commercial / office space would be retained on the upper floors of the property such a loss would not directly affect the viability of the town centre. The retail use on the ground floor could beneficially contribute to the vitality of the town centre and would be seen as a continuation of the neighbouring retail units to the northeast of the site.

For the above reasons the proposed change of use of the ground floor area from offices to retail units is acceptable in principle and would comply with policies SW4, EcW3 and EcW5 of the LDP.

Design

The existing office building is of a 60's/70's design when pre-cast concrete construction was popular. However, the building now appears somewhat dated with its repetitive fenestration and subdued entrance does little to integrate the building with the street scene. The proposed shop fronts would be appropriately integrated in to the existing envelope of the building i.e. between columns. The introduction of larger glazed shop windows to the southeast and southwest elevations would provide more interesting and active frontages that integrate well with the street. Indeed the design would be similar to that incorporated on the adjoining building to the northeast, thus reinforcing the street scene in the vicinity.

It is acknowledged that the development lies in close proximity to the Town Centre Conservation Area and listed buildings, notably the former Town Hall. Although the proposal does not seek to install traditional shop fronts, which are commonly found elsewhere in the town centre. Given the appearance of the building and its location close to other properties of a similar design (e.g. Oldway House and the Law Courts), it is considered the installation of modern shopfronts would be appropriate within this context. The proposed alterations to the elevations and the provision of associated ramps/steps would overall improve the appearance of the building and would have a positive impact on the setting of the Conservation Area and the quality of the town centre as a whole. Therefore the proposal complies with policy SW11 of the LDP.

Highway

Given the location of the application site within the town centre and with reference to the CSS Wales Parking Guidelines, it is acknowledged that there are no parking requirements for the proposed retail development. Notwithstanding this, it should be noted that there is a

multi-storey car park adjacent (north) to the site, as well as other public car parks within walking distance.

The introduction of the raised terraces would not only ensure suitable disabled access could be provided to the retail units with level thresholds, it would also improve the existing access into the proposed reception area serving the offices on the upper levels.

The raised terrace would be constructed on an area of land that has recently been paved as part of a wider regeneration scheme. Although no details of the surface treatment for the ramp and steps have been provided at this stage, this can be addressed by a suitably worded condition, to ensure the development appropriately integrates with quality of the street. It is acknowledged that the Engineering and Traffic Group Leader has not raised any highway safety concerns. Therefore the proposal complies with policy SW11 of the LDP.

Flooding

The existing office building is located within a C2 Flood Zone, being an area of floodplain without significant defence infrastructure as defined by the Development Advice Maps (DAM). Whilst development should generally be directed away from C2 Flood Zones, proposals for less vulnerable development may be acceptable, where they meet the tests set out in Section 6 of TAN15: Development and Flood Risk.

The office building is situated on prominent corner within the town centre and has been vacant for some time. The proposal would assist in providing an alternative use for the building, which will help to bring it back into beneficial occupation. This in turn would assist with the wider regeneration programmes that have been implemented across the town centre to improve the viability and vitality of the area. The proposal would also support a range of employment opportunities within a sustainable location.

Although the proposal would introduce a number of new entrances along the elevations, which may give rise to greater risks from flooding i.e. water ingress, it is noted that these entrances would be elevated above the street and accessed via a raised terrace. The proposal would not impede on flood plain storage or water flows. Nor would it likely increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. The proposed shops are deemed to be a less vulnerable use, which does not differ to the existing office use of the building.

As such, the development would not be at any significantly greater risk from flooding and would not differ significantly to the situation of other properties within the immediate vicinity. Therefore, the development is deemed to be acceptable and meets the appropriate tests set out in TAN15.

CONCLUSIONS

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.

For the above reasons, the proposed development is acceptable and complies with the relevant LDP policies. Accordingly, the following recommendations are made:

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

1. The development shall begin not later than five years from the date of this decision.

Reason - To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

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

- Drawing No. 10 Rev A, Proposed Ground Floor Plan, Received 16.09.2020
- Drawing No. 11 Rev C, Proposed South Elevation, Received 16.09.2020
- Drawing No. 13 Rev A, Proposed Southeast Elevation, Received 17.09.2020

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

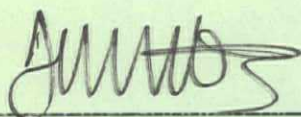
3. Prior to works commencing on site, details/samples of the material to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the shop fronts on the southeast and southwest elevations and the surface finishes of the raised terrace, steps and handrails, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure that the external appearance of the proposed development will be in keeping with the character of the area and adjoining buildings in the interests of visual amenity and to accord with Policy SW11 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

INFORMATIVES

1. The applicant/developer is advised to liaise with the County Borough Council's Engineering and Highways Division regarding any consents which are required in association with works that may affect the adopted highway.

RECOMMENDATION ENDORSED



Head of Town Planning

DATE:

21/9/20