

Refurbishment to the Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Gurnos

Design and Access Statement



September 2021

Blaenau-Gwent County Borough Council • Community Services

Plan 1: Main L25 - G10 - Plan 1: Main L25 - G10

Introduction

This Access Statement is written in support of the accompanying application for the refurbishment of the Neighbourhood Learning Centre (NLC), Gurnos for and on behalf of Merthyr Tydil County Borough Council (MTCBC).

The application site is not a major project and therefore does not require a Design and Access Statement. The purpose of this Access Statement is to explain how the proposal addresses the objectives of good design and considers how the development will be accessible to all users of age, disability, gender through the concept of inclusive design.

Inclusive design places individuals at the centre of the design process whilst acknowledging their diversity and differences. It addresses and offers choice in the design solution to provide buildings and environments, which are flexible, convenient, enjoyable and safe to use by everyone. As this is a planning application for works to existing buildings the opportunities to encompass these objectives will be limited by the parameters of the buildings.

Site Location

The application site is comprised of three number brick clad buildings south of Pen-Y-Dre in the north, and assessed off the Gurnos Ring road to the west, sited north of Merthyr Tydil. The proposal involves the recladding of all three buildings, with the replacement of all external windows, doors and gutters, some minor interior alterations to Buildings 1 and 3, building 2 is proposed to be reinstated as residential accommodation comprising of a total of 5 flats, with a single 2 bedroom flat and two 1 bedroom flats at ground floor level and a 1 bedroom flat and studio flat at first floor level, in addition a warden's flat would also be provided at first floor incorporating a support staff room and staff facilities. Inclusive of some external works involved landscaping, the paving of some areas and the removal of the brick barrier/banister to the ramp (sited west of building 1) replaced with a metal railing to provide an open environment.

This document should be read in conjunction with the following application drawings:

No.	Title	Scale
TS1457-PL-01	Site Location Plan	1:1250 @ A4
TS1457-PL-02	Location Plan	1:500 @ A4
TS1457-PL-03	Building 1 - Existing Floor Plans	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-04	Building 1 - Existing Elevations	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-05	Building 2 - Existing Floor Plans	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-06	Building 2 - Existing Elevations	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-07	Building 3 - Existing Floor Plans	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-08	Building 3 - Existing Elevations	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-09	Building 1 - Proposed Ground Floor Plan	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-10	Building 1 - Proposed Elevations	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-11	Building 1 - Proposed Sectional Elevations	1:100 @ A3

TS1457-PL-12	Building 2 - Proposed Floor Plans	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-13	Building 2 - Proposed Elevations	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-14	Building 2 - Proposed Sectional Elevations	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-15	Building 3 - Proposed Floor Plans	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-16	Building 3 - Proposed Elevations	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-17	Building 3 - Proposed Sectional Elevations	1:100 @ A3
TS1457-PL-18	Proposed Images of Site	Not to scale @ A3
TS1457-PL-19	Refuse Store	1:50 @ A3
TS1457-PL-20	Existing Site Layout	1:300 @ A3
TS1457-PL-21	Proposed Site Layout & External Works	1:300 @ A3

Existing Building and Fabric

In order to meet the accommodation needs of 16-24 year olds, who are known to Housing services and social services and have been either within the care system or Children looked After, in Merthyr Tydfil, the applicant is seeking to refurbish a council owned building to provide 5 self-contained apartments. This accommodation will be utilised by young people leaving foster care or corporate parenting residential care accommodation, and may also be utilised to accommodate young homeless individuals who may not have been placed in care, but are vulnerable as a result of being homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The capital scheme proposal for the above mentioned of refurbishment and reconfiguration of building 2 with the re-location of existing workshops into the other buildings, allowing part of the learning centre to remain open to young people for training purposes. The intention is to create a unique accommodation centre where young people have direct access to suitable modern, safe accommodation whilst also providing them with access to onsite learning and training provision that could lead to further or higher education and/or assist in moving closer to the labour market and into sustainable employment through the support of a Community Employment Mentor.

Located in the Gurnos estate in Merthyr Tydfil, the building currently acts and is known as the Neighbourhood Learning Centre (NLC). The NLC plays a key role in supporting unemployed young people and adults to access training, with the aim of increasing their new employment opportunities. The site currently comprises three buildings, which offer a range of vocational training, where experiential learning can take place. There are carpentry workshops, plumbing, metal and other construction workshop areas, a hairdressing unit with professional hair salon equipment, a potter's kiln and ceramic workshops, along with staff office accommodation and currently empty, unused existing flats. The buildings are owned by MTCBC and the service/department area is Housing and Regeneration.

Environmental Sustainability

Section 2 of the planning Policy Wales 'Planning for Sustainability' states that the Welsh Assembly 'will promote sustainable development and that the 'planning system has a fundamental role in delivering sustainable development in Wales'.

Wherever possible, building materials will be obtained from local sources. Structural and joinery timber will be obtained from a certified sustainable source such as FSC and/or PEFC.

Community Safety

The proposal will have no effect on the community safety, but will enhance it with the presence of a 24/7 staff located on site.

Access

Level access will be provided to all three buildings in the form of ramped pavements.

Impact on Ecology

A habitat assessment and a survey to consider the presence of protected species was undertaken in the summer of 2021. The full report by BEecological Ltd is submitted in support of this application. There is evidence that bats are present on site and are used as an occasional day roost for three single common pipistrelle bats in the existing buildings. These are considered to be Priority Habitats of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan or listed in Section 7 as a 'habitat of principal importance for conservation of biological diversity in Wales'.

Given that the development, possess a potential impact on these existing habitats, it is advised in the report that the roosts may be disturbed and possibly lost as a result of the proposed works. Recommendations are that a licence and mitigation be implemented. Therefore, two bat boxes are proposed to be attached within trees to the north, and that be left between any new barge board and walls to allow bats to continue to access their roosts as present.

Further enhancements include providing three sparrow terraces to the northern elevation of Block 2 and the eastern elevations of block 1 and 3.

The report concludes that one building acts as a roost for a single bat only, therefore work to the roof should be avoided during the winter months, to minimise causing significant adverse impact to wildlife. Other than some light maintenance work to the roof, only the replacement of gutters/fascia/soffits and barge boards will occur, which will require supervision from a qualified ecologist, and an European Protected Species Licence which is required will be obtained from Natural Resources Wales on receipt of planning permission and prior to works commencing on the development.

Landscaping

The proposed landscaping involves the repair of the existing footpaths, alterations to the ramped access with the lowering of the walls alongside the ramped walkway, of which opens up to the environment and provides a more welcoming approach to the building.

The native mix hedge create a buffer from the Gurnos Ring Road and separate private from public space.

The landscape has been designed to enhance the neighbouring Cwm Taf Fechan Woodland area, a local nature reserve and create a sense of community and promote wellbeing for residents. Landscaped growing shrubs have been provided to the northern boundary and

scattered trees planted around the site, promoting social engagement amongst residents and visitors to create a sense of ownership.

Summary

The ambition of the proposal is to create a high quality, environmentally responsible modernised learning and housing scheme that is contextually appropriate and inspiring.

The proposal will replace the existing brickwork finish with an insulated render finish, photovoltaic panels on the roof and the replacement of all windows and doors, presently single glazed and in a poor state of repair with new dark grey aluminium double glazing units.

The design of the proposed insulated render and external works aims to communicate a contemporary, modern approach to the nearby residential typology, the retro fitting of external insulation is a response to energy saving in order to reduce carbon emissions.

The scheme is built from a traditional material – sand cement render, which has been detailed with a modern approach in mind. The proposal develops an existing site to deliver an efficient scheme.

The development aims to have a positive impact on the local community and general character of the area.