

Stanwell Architects

Design and Access Statement for Change of Use of
the upper two floors at 126&126a High Street Merthyr
Tydfil CF47 8BT



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Introduction

This is an application to change the use of the first and second floors from offices and storage into 5 self-contained flats with a communal internal storage area.

The ground floor commercial units will remain unaltered and whilst vacant for some time, they have now been leased to commercial companies. The upper floors remain unoccupied.

Discussions with the planners prior to the application submission have indicated their general support for this conversion.

Site and Context

Numbers 126 and the adjoining 126a are located on the corner of High Street and Market Square within the pedestrianised shopping precinct.

The buildings are located within the Merthyr Tydfil central Conservation Area.



Photograph of the buildings facing the High Street.

Interpretation and Design Development

The proposals involve very modest alterations to the external fabric of the buildings. The existing public facades facing High Street and Market Square will remain unaltered.

The ground floor level layout will remain as existing with just the introduction of a new rear fire exit door to serve the corner unit 126a. This will enable the existing rear fire exit door to be dedicated to the upper floor of this unit. The ground to first floor staircases will remain unaltered.

At first floor level, a new internal staircase will serve the second floor level and the first floor will be converted into 2no (1no 3bed and 1no 1bed) flats with a communal secure storage area.

The second floor level will be converted into 3no 1 bedroom flats. To facilitate this, the steep roof slope on the northern (non-visible) side of the number 126a side return wing will be altered by raising the eaves level to improve headroom for the accommodation. The existing ridge height will remain unaltered.

The Proposal

Character

The existing buildings are located in a prominent position on the corner of High street and Market Square. The buildings are 3 storey with raised gable end features with an additional window on the corner and at the end facing Market Square, to create the impression of a further storey height in these more prominent positions. The internal space is a double height space with no additional floors.

The character of the building will remain unaltered.

Access

Access to the site is pedestrian only from the High Street or Market Square.

There is a securely gated rear pedestrian access lane running behind the properties from Market Square through to Victoria Street at the northern end of the block.

The only access to the flats is from this non-adopted lane. The building owner recognises the need to keep this lane clear of general debris to ensure that a clean and uncluttered access to the flats is maintained at all times. This will also protect the fire exit routes from this lane.



Photograph of the rear lane access from Market Square.

Movement to, from and within the site

As described the buildings are located within the Merthyr Tydfil pedestrianised shopping precinct along High Street.

This central area of Merthyr is well served by rail and bus services.

There is no car parking available directly on this site but large car parks are available only a short distance from the site.

The movement within the site which is actually the buildings is all internal. There is no external private space available for these buildings.

.Layout

The conversion to create residential accommodation is all internal with only the pitched roof alteration to improve internal headroom on part of the second floor.

Scale and Appearance

The two visible elevations facing High Street and Market Square remain totally unaltered.

Community Safety

The occupation of the upper floors when converted to residential use particularly during the evenings and at weekends can only improve community safety.

Sustainability

The conversion of the existing offices to residential will require considerable upgrading of the thermal qualities of the external walls and roof.

The use of modern well insulated construction with locally sourced materials will achieve a more sustainable solution combined with more energy efficient lighting, heating and controlled water usage. All elements of the construction will conform to the current building regulation standards or better where appropriate.

Response to Planning Policy

A pre-application advice enquiry was submitted and a subsequent meeting was held with Mr David Cross at the planning office on 9/5/22. Various options were discussed for the possible development of the upper floors. It was always the intention of the building owners to retain the 2 ground floor retail units for that purpose.

In summary, Mr Cross advised a low density private residential development could be supported. A high density of HMO's or emergency accommodation was not considered appropriate for this location.

The principle of regeneration with the Town Centre by bringing vacant properties back into beneficial use was to be welcomed.

Mr Cross advised that car parking would not be an issue, but consideration would have to be given for refuse and possible cycles storage for residential use.

A communal secure storage area has been proposed at first floor level. There is no external space available for this as the rear lane is shared with adjoining properties.

The Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan (2016-2031) Written Statement was adopted on 29 January 2020.

Within this document there are policies that relate to this proposal and are referred to as follows:

Policy SW4: Settlement Boundaries.

To encourage development within urban areas, support the re-use of previously developed land_____

Primary Growth Area – Merthyr Tydfil

The application site is located in a mainly commercial retail area, but applications have been approved for upper storey conversions for residential use. This would support the policy of encouraging development within this location.

Vacant accommodation within the central area attracts unwanted attention, invariably allows buildings to become run down and eventually dilapidated with an adverse impact on the appearance and vitality of the immediate area.

Policy CW1: The Historic Environment

6.5.17 CADW have identified Urban Character Area

1 – Town Centre: High Street and Pontmorlais.

As described, the permission to convert the upper floors into residential use will provide new life into the building with enhanced longevity whilst having no visual impact on the existing scale and character of the existing building within this conservation area.

Policy EcW3: Retail Hierarchy – Supporting Retailing provision.

Merthyr Tydfil is the favoured location for retail.

This application is for the floors above the existing ground floor retail units which are retained, so there is no loss of retail space associated with this application.

Policy EcW5: Town and Local Centre Development

Development enhancing the vitality and viability of the Town and Local Centres will be supported.

The vacant office accommodation was originally associated with the ground floor retail use. The ground floor retail units are self-contained and do not require additional office accommodation. The first floor offices therefore fell into disuse over a period of time.

The regeneration of this existing floor space will certainly make the building more viable and will arguably add vitality to this corner site.

Conclusion

The proposed conversion of the upper two floors requires no changes to the external appearance of the properties facing High Street to the east or Market Square to the south. There would be no impact to the central Conservation Area arising from this partial conversion.

The introduction of residential accommodation on the two upper floors would breathe new life into the building and as previously described, enhance the building fabric and longevity of the building that if left vacant would no doubt deteriorate over time.

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