

Allerdale Borough Council

Delegated Planning Application

Reference No:	2/2010/1025
Received:	10 December 2010
Proposed Development:	Listed building consent for proposed conversion of United Reformed Church building to computer, museum and science/engineering educational centre (resubmission to 2/2010/0852)
Location:	United Reformed Church Water Street Wigton
Applicant:	Time-Line Computer Archive Ltd
Constraints:	Settlement Limit HS5 Listed Building, II, 14/96 Conservation Area:, WIGTON ASCA Area Article 4 Adv Control Exclusion - Wigton
Policies:	Allerdale Local Plan, Adopted 1999 (Saved) Policy CO14 - Change of use of Listed Buildings Policy CO15 - Alterations to Listed Buildings
Relevant Planning History:	Applications 2/2010/0851 and 0852 for the same proposal were withdrawn because of additional information requirements. Applications 2/2007/0874 (withdrawn) and 2/2007/1294 (approved) – Alterations to include means of escape and improved access.
Representations:	Town Council – No objections. Cumbria Highways – No objections, recommend condition requiring lighting units to be erected so that no direct rays of light shall be visible to drivers. Fire Officer – No objections. County Archaeologist – Building retains the majority of its original architectural features and significantly, also the majority of the 19 th Century internal fixtures and fittings. The church is of historic significance and the proposed conversion will considerably alter its historic fabric as well as internal character and appearance.

Recommends an archaeological building recording programme of the church prior to development, to be secured by condition (summarised).

Natural England – No objections, informative relating to presence of bats.

English Heritage – Proposal involves a completely new interior. This will undoubtedly have an impact on the Listed building, it is clear from the report on the historical importance of the church and impact assessment that the interior, although of some interest, it has been altered on a number of occasions in the past. In the circumstances, it appears that the provision of a viable use for the building, ensuring that it will be retained as a notable feature in the townscape of Wigton, will outweigh the damage caused by the replacement of the interior.

English Heritage therefore has no objection to the granting of planning permission and Listed building consent, subject to a condition requiring full record to be made of the interior before it is dismantled.

Access Officer – Objects, unless internal counters have a lower area, following Document M of Building Regulations.

The application has been advertised on site and within the local press. Adjoining owners have also been notified.

No representations have been received to date (1 February 2011).

Report

Site

The proposal site is the existing United Reform Church in Wigton town centre. The church and the adjoining manse are Grade II Listed buildings. The building is the equivalent of three storeys, including a lower ground floor level, with access in the side elevation off Water Street. The main elevation and entrance faces onto Church Street but is set back from the street frontage. The building dates from 1834 and is of sandstone construction. The stained glass has been retained to the upper floors, with protective glazing added. The Listing refers to a slate roof but at present it is tiled. The interior of the building remains that of the church and the Listing indicates no interior features of interest. Structural problems have required internal supporting structures for the roof (a series of steel columns and beams) in recent years.

Adjoining the site is the old manse to the north boundary. The immediate area contains a mix of uses, including residential, commercial, car parking, with the town centre to the north and west.

The use of the church on a regular basis ceased in 2003.

Proposal

Listed building consent is required for a series of internal and external works.

The external works include:

- Removal of two upper stone steps within the existing main entrance formed by 5 steps and re-form the remaining steps with a wider landing at the entrance to facilitate provision of an access ramp to one side for DDA compliant access. (This will tie in with internal alterations to lower the ground floor.)
- Increased height entrance doors (resulting from the lowered steps), detail to match the existing.
- A new external fire escape stair from the basement to car park level with recessed fire gated fire escape within boundary wall.
- New entrance gate formed in boundary wall for access to forecourt.
- New opening formed within sandstone retaining wall to provide disabled access ramp to lower ground floor.
- New slate roof to replace existing roof tiles.
- Flues within chimney to facilitate mechanical ventilation/extraction system.
- Ground floor windows renewed with double glazing

The internal works include:

- Removal of the existing internal floor structures above the lower ground floor level. The interior will be reformed on four floors.
- The existing ground floor will be lowered by two steps to improve accessibility.
- As there are only two levels of windows above ground floor level, but three floors (ground, first and second floor) the first floor will be set 1m in from the external wall as a gallery level.
- New floor structures to be supported on circular steel columns set in from the external walls to facilitate construction of new foundation bases without affecting the external walls and to provide additional support for the main roof support beams. Steel beams will span the across the building, which will tie into the existing walls to provide additional structural stability (as recommended by structural engineer).
- Removal of all internal features (will recycle and re-use where possible).
- Includes installation of new stairs, lift and separate platform lift

Supporting Information

Submitted with the application is a report on the historical significance of the building and a business plan (the latter is provided confidentially).

The application has been submitted in conjunction with a planning for the conversion of the building including external alterations. The impact assessment provided indicates that the church under consideration is in a different class to any previously assessed, first on the basis that it is Grade II Listed and secondly, because it is one of the largest Nonconformist chapels/churches in West Cumbria. The report indicates that, at the least, the building requires recording. It concludes that the presently proposed Re-development will at least preserve the original external appearance. The internal features would deteriorate over time and a vacant building would be susceptible to both decay and vandalism. As such, an appropriate and viable use for the building, in addition to the opportunity to fully record the heritage value, is preferable to one of decay and dereliction.

A business plan for the proposal has been provided to justify the level of internal floor space considered necessary to make a viable development. This information was requested due to the impact the additional floorspace proposed would have on those internal features of historic and architectural importance. Essentially, the proposal requires the removal of the existing internal arrangement and the addition of two floors. In particular, the additional floor at first floor level which dissects the window.

The business plan has been drawn up, using benchmarking information from other similar developments within West Cumbria, including The Rum Story in Whitehaven. The business plan indicates anticipated revenue streams from the differing functions proposed within the building. The centre's income is projected at £86,700 within the first year, rising to £129,700 by year 5. The centre's outgoings/overheads are predicted at £105,888. The scheme is likely to have a challenging time in the current economic climate and it is unsurprising that the additional uses of the building over and above the museum are required to improve viability.

It is considered that sufficient supporting information has been provided with the application.

Assessment

In determining applications for Listed building consent, local planning authorities must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Policy CO14 of the Allerdale Local Plan states that a flexible approach will be taken to the change of use of Listed buildings where this will secure the retention of the building. Although it will be necessary to clearly show the extent of the impact on the layout and structure of the building. Policy CO15 of the Allerdale Local Plan requires the design of such proposals be in-keeping, special features are to be safeguarded and maintained and materials and detailing used, should match the original as closely as possible.

Internal alterations

The proposal includes the loss of the existing interior.

The conservation officer's advice is that the re-use of the existing building is fully supported and it is considered that a museum use, which encourages public access, will retain and encourage greater public appreciation of this heritage asset than many other alternative uses. There is concern over the loss of the entire present interior layout; however, keeping it would not provide the interior spaces required for a computer museum or any other use that is likely to be economically viable. Maximising floor space will maximise the chances of the use being economically viable and that this is the most important aspect for the building's future. As such, there is no objection from the conservation officer to the proposed internal arrangements.

Advice from English Heritage reaches similar conclusions.

The report into the historical significance of the building notes both the merits of the existing interior and the practical problem of achieving a viable re-use of the building which could utilise this interior. Without losing the existing interior, the building risks remaining unused and falling further into disrepair. The advice from conservation bodies is that it that the provision of a viable use for the building, ensuring that it will be retained as a notable feature in the townscape of Wigton, outweighs the damage caused by the replacement of the interior. Further, the business plan provided details the limited viability of the development with the additional floor space proposed; therefore, the need for the creation of the two new upper floors is accepted.

Based on the information provided (Report of Historic Significance, business plan) and the advice from heritage consultees, it is considered that the loss of the interior of the building is outweighed by the benefits arising from its re-use overall.

External alterations

With regards the external alterations, the conservation officer's advice is that it is accepted that the alterations to the main entrance are needed to allow for modern access requirements and the proposed arrangement retains the grandness and elegance of the door as far as possible, and in some ways (subject to the final details and workmanship) may enhance it by increasing the door height, which will hopefully compensate for the loss of symmetry which is an important characteristic of such classically derived architecture. In addition, there will be a benefit to the current external appearance by the replacement of concrete roof tiles with slate and the repair of the damaged windows. Overall, the benefits of this development are stated as considerably outweighing the losses and that not approving these applications would provide an unwelcome risk to the building's future, and therefore also to the distinctiveness and significance of the Conservation Area and town.

The proposal includes the replacement of the existing tiled roof with slate, which will have a positive impact, enhancing the appearance of the building and therefore the wider Conservation Area.

As indicated above, the external alterations to the building are largely dictated by requirements to comply with current legislation for public use buildings. The alterations to the entrance (lowering the entrance steps and increasing door height) will utilise materials and design consistent with the existing building. The grandness of the entrance would be retained, thereby retaining this important architectural feature of the building. The external ramps will be the most notable addition to the building; however, the heritage bodies and conservation advice indicate that these aspects to the scheme are outweighed by the wider benefits of retaining the building for a public use.

The visual impact of the part of the extraction/ventilation system that is shown to be visible on the drawings (flues projecting from the chimney) would have limited visual impact on the building itself. The use of the chimney is considered to be the most suitable option, given that alternative methods would be likely to have a more visual impact on the building. It is considered appropriate to attach a condition requiring the exact treatment/materials and possible screening for the flues to control the final appearance of these works given the location on a Listed and prominent building.

The renewal of the ground floor windows with the addition of double glazing is considered to be acceptable in this instance as these windows are not original.

Externally, the proposed alterations are considered to largely retain the special architectural and historic features of the building.

The request from the Highways Authority regarding a condition for the direction of lighting is noted, but the submitted plans do not include external lighting.

Conclusion

The proposal contains both positive and negative impacts in relation to this Listed building. On balance, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in considering Policies CO14 and CO15, with significant weight being given to the re-use of this Listed building, which has been vacant for 7 years.

Recommendation: Approved

**Conditions/
Reasons:**

- 1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.**

Reason: In order to comply with Section 51 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans:**

3011/3A - Proposed floor plans and section

3011/4A - Proposed elevations

3011/100 - Site location plan

Reason: In order to ensure a satisfactory standard of development.

- 3. Prior to the carrying out of any construction works the existing building affected by the proposed development shall be recorded in accordance with a written scheme of investigation that has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Local Planning Authority in advance of the permitted development. Within two months of the commencement of construction works three copies of the resultant report shall be furnished to the Local Planning Authority.**

Reason: To ensure that a permanent record is made of the building of architectural and historic interest prior to its alteration as part of the proposed development.

4. **Notwithstanding details of the submitted plans, details (including colour finish) and representative samples of all external and roof materials, railings including gates, ramp details, flues and rainwater goods shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall be solely implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to the use of the development commencing.**

Reason: In order to protect the architectural and historic importance of this Listed building, in accordance with Policy CO15 of the Allerdale Local Plan.

5. **Notwithstanding details on the submitted plans, details of any part of the mechanical extraction system that projects above the chimney and the screening/treatment for this, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall be solely implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to the use of the development commencing.**

Reason: In the interests of visual amenities of the Conservation Area, in accordance with Policy CO2 of the Allerdale Local Plan.

Notes to Applicant:

Add informative – Natural England response dated 3 November 2010 (taken from response on 2/2010/0852 which was withdrawn).

To achieve compliance for Building Regulations, Para 4.16, Part M, 2004 Edition, it will be necessary to lower the area of the counters internally. To discuss this further, please contact Michael Serginson on tel no 01900 702516.

Case Officer Signature		Date	
Counter Signing Officer		Date	