

Allerdale Borough Council

Delegated Planning Application

Reference No:	2/2010/1026
Received:	10 December 2010
Proposed Development:	Proposed conversion of United Reformed Church building to computer museum and science/engineering educational centre (resubmission to 2/2010/0851)
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 CO1 - Retention of important buildings Policy CO2 - Design of alterations in Conservation Areas Policy EN4 - Tree & Hedgerow Preservation Orders Policy EN6 - Location of potentially polluting development Policy EN39 - Access for the disabled
Relevant Planning History:	Applications 2/2010/0851 and 0852 for the same proposal were withdrawn because of additional information requirements. Applications 2/2007/0874 (withdrawn) and 2/2007/1294 (approved) – Alterations to include means of escape and improved access.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 conditions. Fire Officer – No objections. Conservation Officer - Fully supportive of the re-use of the existing building and consider a museum use, which encourages public access, will retain and encourage greater public appreciation of this heritage asset than many other alternative uses would not.

Concern over loss the entire present interior layout, however, satisfied that 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 most important for the building's future. As such, no objection to the proposed internal arrangements, and note that English Heritage is now also satisfied with the proposals.

Whilst it is also a shame to alter the main entrance, it is clear that alterations 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 will considerably outweigh 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 (summarised).

County Archaeologist – Building retains the majority of its original architectural features and significantly, also the majority of the 19th 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.

United Utilities – No objections.

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 is a Grade II Listed building. 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 interior of the building remains that of the church. Structural problems have required internal supporting structures for the roof (a series of steel columns and beams) in recent years.

The lawful use remains that of a church (D1), although the premises is currently unused.

Adjoining the site is a dwelling 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 site lies within the Wigton Conservation Area.

Proposal

The proposal seeks the conversion of the church to a museum/educational centre, with café and shop at ground floor, foundation museum for computing at lower ground floor, science and engineering educational experiments area at first floor and multi function room at second floor.

Planning permission is not required for the change of use of the building from a church to a museum, as both uses fall within a D1 use class. However, from the information provided, the dedicated floorspace to museum/educational area is approx. 50%. The floorspace for the café/shop is approx 25% and the local museum/multi function room is approx 25%. The café/shop is anticipated to generate a significant portion of the income stream at approx 34%. Additionally, there is the potential for the café/shop to be severed from the museum use and operate viably. As such, the proposed conversion is considered to be a change of use to a mixed use scheme (*Sui Generis*). Permission for the following external works is required:

- 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 application has been submitted in conjunction with a Listed Building Consent for both the external works noted above and additional internal works.

Assessment

The proposed museum, educational centre, café/shop and function rooms are considered to be appropriate at this town centre location. Whilst the site lies outside the defined town centre boundary within the Allerdale Local Plan, it is essentially a town centre location where visitors can utilise the adjoining public car parking and amenities. The proposal will be beneficial in terms of a tourist facility within the town and the proportion of retail proposed does not raise any significant conflict with retail policies.

The external works largely relate to achieving the necessary requirements for public access in terms of the Disability Discrimination Act, safe access and egress in the event of fire for Building Regulations in relation to public buildings, requirements for ventilation/extraction of the café, and tying the external access levels to the internal floor levels which are to be altered.

The physical impact of the external works on the Listed building will be considered under the separate application for Listed building consent.

Retention of important buildings within Conservation Areas

The re-use of this building and the external alterations proposed will support the conversion of this Listed building, which is an important building, contributing significantly to the wider Conservation Area. The building has been vacant for a number of years and has previously required structural supports for the roof. A viable re-use of the building is supported therefore to encourage the retention of the building, which contributes positively within the Conservation Area and this aspect of the scheme carries significant weight. The proposal therefore complies with Policy CO1 of the Allerdale Local Plan.

Alterations to buildings within the Conservation Area

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 have the largest visual impact on the building and the surrounding area, which would not specifically preserve or enhance. However, the heritage bodies and conservation advice indicates 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 wider Conservation Area. 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 prominent building within the Conservation Area.

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.

On balance, whilst not all the external alterations will preserve or enhance the character of this building within the Conservation Area, these are considered to be outweighed by the benefits of retaining this building overall and securing its future maintenance through occupation and use.

Noise/Odour

It is proposed that the extraction/ventilation system for the ground floor café will largely be contained within the existing chimney structure, which is the most acceptable solution both visually and for Environmental Health in terms of controlling noise and odour. The Environmental Health section has requested additional information in this regard but is satisfied that this can be dealt with by condition. No detailed information has been submitted at this stage to demonstrate that the chimney will adequately provide for the extraction/ventilation needed for the café. If it does not, then any alternative method will require planning permission and listed building consent and is unlikely to be acceptable if it requires an externally mounted flue. This has been explained to the applicant and agent. Should a solution to the extraction/ventilation system not be available, the café would be unable to serve hot food.

As such, on noise and odour grounds, the proposal is considered acceptable with regards to Policy EN6, subject to conditions.

Accessibility

As the proposed use requires full public access, the proposal has been designed to meet DDA requirements. As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to Policy EN39.

The access officer raises objections to the height of internal counters; however, this is beyond the control of this planning application. The issue will be flagged as an informative, but will need to be addressed under the Building Regulations application.

Highways

The Highways Officer has requested that any new gates open inwards so as not to restrict the footpath, this is considered appropriate. The condition relating to control of surface water is considered to be unnecessary given the scale and nature of the alterations that require permission. No objections are raised to the principle of the development or the reliance on town centre car parking.

Trees

There is a substantial tree within the frontage of the United Reform Church which has protection by virtue of the siting within the Conservation Area. Some minor works proposed to the existing footpath may have the potential to disturb the tree protection area. Whilst the works are relatively minor, it is considered prudent to include a condition that requires details of the works to be agreed and appropriate protection for the tree.

Conclusion

The proposal is considered to be acceptable at this location, with significant weight being given to the re-use of an important building within the Wigton Conservation Area

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. **No works within the root protection area defined using British Standard 5837 of the existing tree shown on drawing 3011/3A shall commence until details of the exact works have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details submitted shall be accompanied by information sufficient to demonstrate that the existing tree will not be adversely affected by the works. The development shall proceed only in accordance with the approved details.**

Reason: To provide appropriate protection for the existing tree in accordance with Policy EN4 of the Allerdale Local Plan.

5. **Access gates, if provided, shall be hung to open inwards only away from the highway.**

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

6. **Detailed specifications of the mechanical extraction system (including the noise output of the fan and the number of air changes it will achieve), shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to its installation. The works shall be solely implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to the use of the development commencing, unless no hot food is to be prepared for sale on the premises.**

Reason: To ensure noise and odour are dealt with to an acceptable level in accordance with Policy EN6 of the Allerdale Local Plan.

7. **Notwithstanding details on the submitted plans, details of any part of the mechanical extraction system that projects above the chimney and 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.

8. **Notwithstanding details on the submitted plans, details (including colour finish) and representative samples of all external and roof materials, railings including gates, ramp details 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 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	