PLANNING STATEMENT

CHANGE OF USE FROM D1 SCHOOL TO MULTI-USE SITE INCLUDING A1, A3, B1, D1 AND D2 USES.

Former Pontfadog County Primary School, Pontfadog, Wrexham, LL20 7AH



INTRODUCTION

This planning statement is submitted voluntarily to assist consideration of a planning application for a change of use of land at the former Pontfadog County Primary School (PCPS).

The proposed change of use is from a D1 (non-residential institution) use to a mixed-use site including A1 (retail), A3 (food and drink), B1 (business), D1 (non-residential) and D2 (assembly and leisure). At this stage, no further development is proposed, no new building/extensions are proposed nor changes to the external appearance of the building. The application is solely a change of use to enable works refurbish the building and is seeking to bring this exciting community venture to its opening phase.

The land and buildings were purchased by four residents to save the building from demolition and are now leased for 25 years to a local community interest company (Pontfadog ForestSchool Community Interest Company-PFSCIC). Alongside the five board of Directors of PFSCIC, are a network of local residents who are bringing their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to make the Pontfadog community hub project a reality.

This planning application is the fundamental next step for the project, to enable the move from an old, tired school building to a vibrant and sustainable indoor and outdoor community hub and provide a focus for further economic investment in Pontfadog.



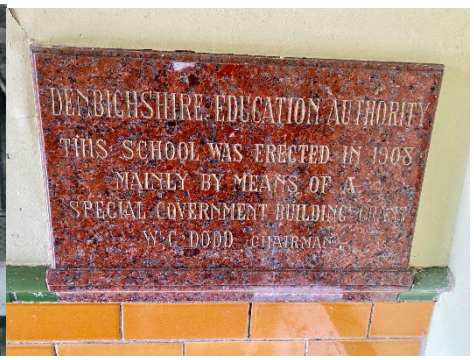
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE EXISTING SCHOOL D1 USE

The school is situated in Pontfadog, a village in the Ceiriog Valley four miles west of Chirk, Wrexham. It sits within Wrexham County Borough and part of the community of Glyntraian. Between 1874 and 1996 it was part of the County of Clwyd and prior to 1974 part of historic Denbighshire. In 1996 it became part of the modern County of Wrexham.

Pontfadog School was one of the first "new" schools to be built at the instigation of Lloyd George. He was a regular visitor to the valley and described the area "as a little bit of heaven". The new school building was constructed in 1908 and opened on 15th April 1909. The construction and design of the primary school is said to be state of art for the time.

The design centers around two separate entrances, one for boys and one for girls/infants. These open into separate cloakrooms connected to a shared lobby area. Off the lobby, there is an infant's classroom and a larger mixed classroom which features a flexible classroom/dinner space that can be closed off using a sliding wooden screen, still present today. The school had a latrine to the rear which provided separate access for each gender.











In 1955, a new field for play was purchased to the north of the building.

In 1966, a new extension was added to provide kitchen facilities for the school, located on the south side of the building. At some point a new entrance was provided straight into the lobby rather than separate entrances.

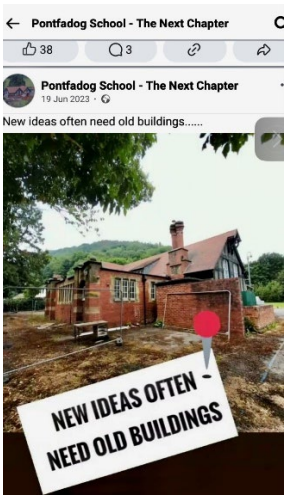
In July 2019 the school closed due to low pupil numbers.

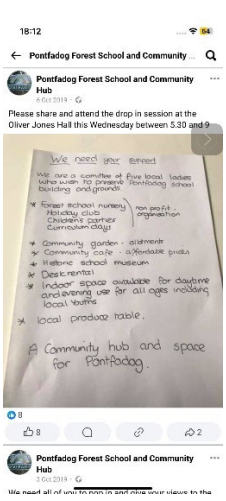
In March 2023 four local residents purchased the school at auction and retain its use as a community building. A 25 year lease was signed by a local community interest company to repurpose the historic school for community use and save it from demolition.

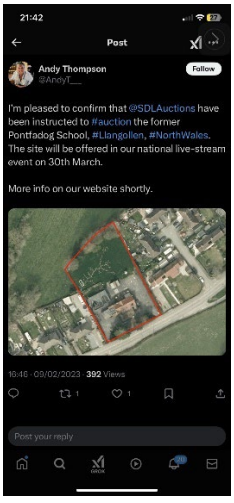
During 2024 and early 2025 considerable work has been done on business planning, community engagement, discussion on use options, feasibility planning and optioneering. This has included the appointment of Chambers Conservation Ltd who have completed an Options Appraisal on the site to explore options for the conversion of the vacant buildings and land, a condition survey, heritage statement, options and detailed costings.

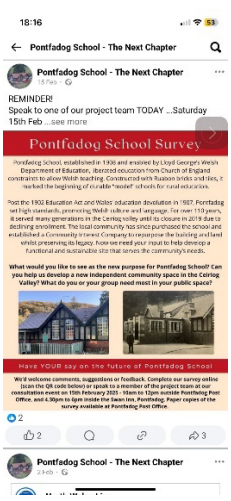
During early 2025, a community consultation exercise was completed seeking input from the diverse range of stakeholders with an aim to help develop a functional and sustainable use of the site to serve the communities needs.

The outcome of all this work is brought forward in this planning application. A scheme that has been developed by the community for the community. We think it brings forward a new and exciting future for a historic building that has always been at the heart of Pontfadog.









PONTFADOG SCHOOL, THE NEXT CHAPTER

Existing use

The buildings and land at Pontfadog School have an existing D1 use class as a non-residential institution. The site comprises existing buildings, a playing field, car park, access and an exernal storage/toilet. All previous portacabins and structures have been removed from the rear of the school.

This subject application includes an existing ground floor plan and site plan.

Proposed scheme

This subject application is proposing the change of use of land from an existing D1 use to a mixed use comprising A1, A3, B1, D1 and D2.

No further planning permissions are being sought for the project.

The site has an existing heating system with some electrical power provided by an existing roof mounted solar panel scheme. The site has an existing access and car park. There is no proposed external change to the building and no extensions are proposed at this stage. All works at this stage of the project will be repair and replacement. The building is not listed, and no development requiring planning permission is proposed at this phase of the project.

The site has level access to all areas of the building and grounds.

Pre application discussion was held with the Planning Authority (Pre app Reference ENQ/2024/0077, 1/10/24, with Matthew Phillps). The pre app confirmed the existing use as D1, indicated that the majority of proposed uses could take place without the need for planning permission, confirmed planning permission would be needed from D1 to a mixed use site, confirmed that additional uses indicated would be acceptable subject to adequate on site parking, confirmed the site was vulnerable to flooding but noted the existing use was classified as an existing highly vulnerable use and thus the proposed development would not increase the risk of flooding, required the submission of a Green Infrastructure Statement (GIS) and identify proposals to deliver net benefit to biodiversity (NBB).

This planning statement identifies what might be considered as material planning considerations for the proposed change of use, discusses issues raised in the pre application, and is submitted alongside a separate GIS which brings forward proposed NBB.

This planning application is accompanied by proposed block plans showing the specific uses that will be brought forward at the property, which include the following:

A1. Retail. The lobby area of the building would be for tourist information. This would likely involve leaflets, interpretation board, a welcome point. This may be considered an ancillary use.

A3. Food and Drink. The western classroom will be opened as a cafe, amounting to around 36sqm. This will use the existing kitchen, servery and the existing WC will function as a staff toilet facility. The existing doorway will be used to provide access to an outside seating area. The indicated capacity of the café is around 7 internal tables and 4 external tables, around 45 covers. The existing 1950's extension is retained and upgrade to current hygiene standards.

B1. Business. The existing school office will transform to a flexible business office, breakout space or event space. The office could be used for confidential meetings, short term space rental or for public/health/drop-in surgery appointments or hot desk space. The area amounts to around 10sqm.

D1. Non-residential institution. Part of the site will bring forward Forest School activity and Holiday Club. This will be based in the grounds but also use the main event and flexible space at the centre of the building. It is possible that training events will be brought forward in the building, display of art and sculpture, exhibitions, also utilizing the main event space within the D1 use class. Externally there are plans for a community garden. The building D1 use amounts to 71sqm.

D2. Assembly and Leisure. Events at the building may involve yoga, and for indoor and outdoor sport, parties/wakes. This will also use the main event space and be likely a minor and potentially ancillary use.

Other uses are a cycle storage and cycle charging space. This will be located in the existing outdoor building and previous school cycle area. Several EV charging

points will be installed in the existing car park, this will be progressed under permitted development and not require any planning permission.

In summary the use of the building will continue under its existing D1 use, with the addition of a small café A3 use (36sqm), the wider use of an existing office B1 (10sqm) with a very small ancillary level of usage at A1 and D2.





PLANNING CONTEXT

The site is an existing D1 use, the proposed scheme is primarily a continued D1 use with smaller additions of A3 and B1, with an ancillary level of A1 and D2.

Pertinent planning issues are discussed below.

Biodiversity.

The application site includes existing buildings and an area of open space to the rear. There are no proposed works to existing trees, designated sites or protected species to be considered. This planning application is seeking only change of use of an existing building and land with no impact to biodiversity interests. A separate Green Infrastructure Statement is submitted including proposed net biodiversity benefits.

It is considered that an appropriate scheme has been brought forward for biodiversity. A planning condition is welcomed to secure the implementation of the GIS proposals and NBB.

Arboriculture

No trees will be impacted by the change of use. Works to trees are not required for the proposed change of use.

Heritage

There are no designated heritage assets within the application area. The building is not listed. A heritage statement was prepared as part of the options appraisal which identified the opportunities for the site including keeping existing spaces; locating the café where the existing services are present; recognising the visual role of the building in the centre of the community and identifying the high historic value of the building.

A statement of significance was developed and adopted which is provided below:

The Pontfadog School is a visual reminder of Wales educational transition, notably representing the resurgence in Welsh language education. It's connection with revolutionary figures such as Lloyd George enhance its historic value, and its state of the art design at the time of construction embodies the modern idea of education that was being implemented in the early 20th century. The building retains much of its original layout and features, and therefore offers a valuable insight into historic educational practices. Moreover, the school holds great communal significance as it is a huge part of the memories of former pupils and the Pontfadog community, despite modern alterations affecting its aesthetic appeal.



The proposed change of use meets the aims of the statement of significance.

An economically viable use is needed to ensure that the building survives, and the heritage features can be managed and maintained.

The change of use brought forward in this application will enable this path to viability. It is likely that at a future date, more adaptation to the building may be required, which may need a planning consent. A more sustainable energy system is being considered. A glazed replacement café area has been costed. But at this stage, the route to viability and a new chapter in the life of the building is through the existing utilities, existing building form, existing car park and the minor change in uses brought forward.

We hope that the heritage benefits of the scheme will be recognised in the submission.

Residential amenity

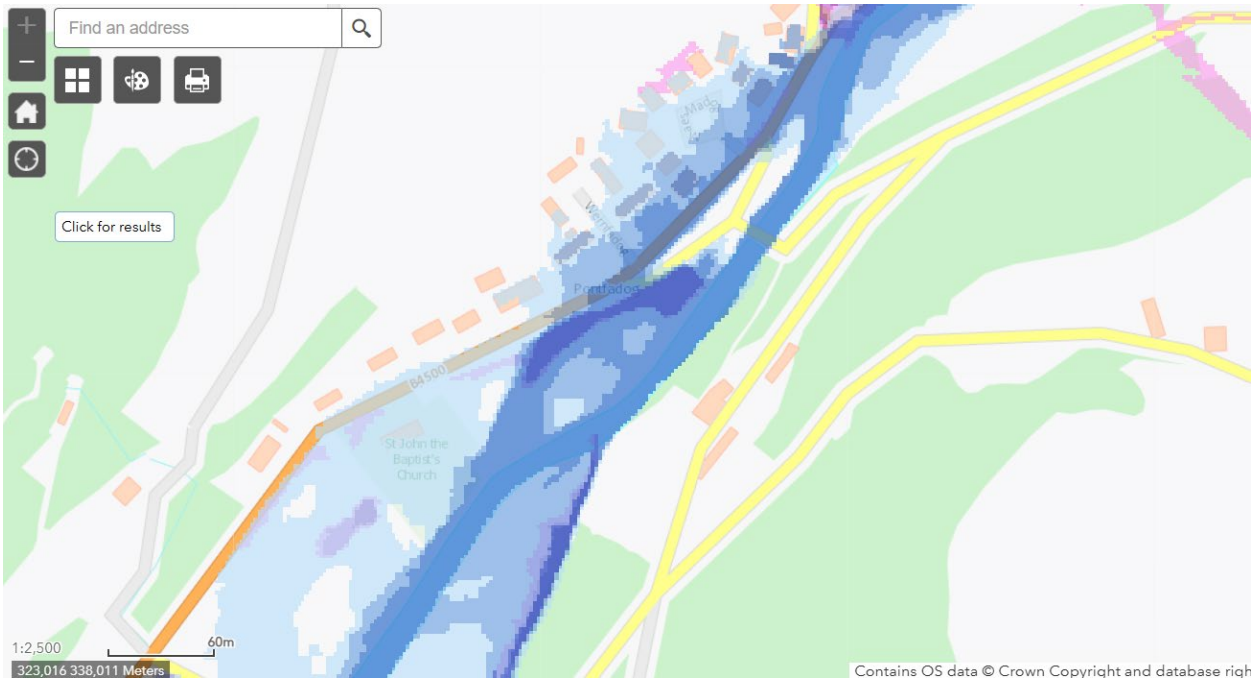
The building is at the centre of the Pontfadog settlement and has residential properties on both east and west boundaries. Consideration of the amenity of our neighbors will be an integral part of operating the community hub. We do not plan to make an application for an alcohol licence, and all events will be subject to the licencing requirements. Evening and weekend events will be strictly controlled**. It is not envisaged that residential amenity is an issue in the proposed change of use**.

Flood Risk

The application site lies within an area vulnerable to flooding. It lies within Zone C2 as defined in the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Development Advice Maps and within zone 2 and 3 on NRW Flood Maps for Planning. The existing permitted use of the building is classed as a highly vulnerable use. The proposed change of use also within a highly vulnerable use. The proposed change of use would not increase the risk of flooding to users of the site, nor any offsite consequences**. It is considered that flood risk is not an issue for the change of use of the site.**

The applicants recognise this issue and during refurbishment will undertake voluntary resilience measures including raising electrical infrastructure from floor level, operating the site in accordance with the NRW flood warning and alert

system, staff briefing, installation of flood barriers on the access doors, and the installation of non-return valves on water discharge pipes.



The NRW Flood Map of Pontfadog (NRW Website).

<u>Need and economic benefit.</u>

The community consultation has demonstrated the need for the proposed change of use. Many respondents identified the need for a small café, a space for community events, support for Forest School and Holiday Club and the benefit of a local hot desk and office space.

The new uses aim to bring financial sustainability to support the management and maintenance of the existing buildings and land.

Should the scheme be approved, the site will employ new staff to manage the facilities, estimated at the current time to be in the order of 4fe. The facilities will enhance the tourism offer in the Ceiriog and thus enhance secondary economic spend in this area of Wrexham.

The proposed uses will not detract from existing businesses and community facilities in the area. We believe they will complement the existing offer in the Ceiriog Valley and give the community a new space for small local events and activities combined with a café, forest school, business space and tourism hub.

The site will be a new Forest School and Holiday Club in the Ceiriog Valley. In late 2021, Wrexham Council set itself the challenge to become the 'capital of play'. This was part of Wrexham's bid to be named the UK's City of Culture 2025. The proposals within this change of use align nicely with the Wrexham Tourism strategy of 'Capital of Play' for 2025.

The new use will give new life to an old building. The uses identified have been carefully selected, the community consultation has identified the need, and our proposals seek to meet the identified demand. The change of use will provide an economic boost to the area during refurbishment, and its operation as an economically viable hub.

Transport

The application site adjoins the B4500 from Chirk to Llanarmon DC.

The existing use of the site has an existing access and car park at the eastern end of the building. There is a small car park with unmarked spaces for 15 cars. The proposed change of use will use the same car park. No additional parking is required or proposed for the new usage. Level access is from the car park.

The scheme is considered to meet the requirements of Wrexham Planning Guidance Note 16 (WPGN 16) in relation to Parking standards.

Part iii of WPGN 16 states "changes of use will be judged on their own merits. Additional spaces may be required where the demand for parking arising from a new use is likely to be greater than that from the existing use".

The new uses brought forward for the subject application are based on an existing D1 site with a minor addition of an A3 use, a 10sqm B1 use and continuing D1 use.

The requirements from WPGN are as follows:

A3. 1 car space per 4sqm. 36sqm proposed. Total car parking required 9 spaces.

B1. 1 car space per 30sqm. 10sqm proposed. Total car parking required 0.3.

D1. 2 car space per 25sqm. 70sqm proposed. Total car parking required 6 spaces.

It is estimated that the change of use would require 15 spaces from WPGN. The site has sufficient space to accommodate this requirement.

The scheme is a community facility and car-based traffic will be part of the solution, with local use bringing forward a greater use of walking, cycling and public transport. Active travel will be actively promoted in the operation of the new use.

Two disabled car parks will be provided nearest to the building. The refurbishment will facilitate greater access into the building, and a refurbishment with the recommendations of the RNIB Guidance "Building Sight" will bring forward a scheme better able to accommodate visitors with access needs.

It is intended to provide two car electric vehicle charging points within the existing car park. This will move forward on funding, and as permitted development not needing planning permission.

WPGN also provides estimates for cycle provision. The requirements are in the order of 1 cycle space per 40sqm. Total site area 120sqm. 3 cycle spaces required. A cycle area utilising the existing latrine building at the rear of the café will be used, this will be greater than the WPGN requirement. The school lock up cycle fencing will also be used and is close to the site entrance and café area.





The site is on the 64 bus route linking Llangollen to Llanarmon DC, via Chirk and Chirk Railway Station. It is hoped that active travel and promotion of the bus service and train links will form an important part of the visitor operation of the site. We welcome discussion with Wrexham Council on how this can move forward.

It is considered that the site meets the local and national transport requirements, there is sufficient parking, adequate cycle provision and the operation of the site will include promotion of bus and rail links.

Sight line visibility access improvements at the car park entrance can be made, there would, however, be loss of a small area of boundary hedge. We welcome any contribution or discussion with the Highway Authority should any issues arise.

Planning Policy

The application is considered in the context of national and local planning policy. National Policy might be considered to include the following: Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12, 2024); Technical Advice Notes (TAN) 12 (Design), 13 (Tourism) and 24 (Historic Environment); and Future Wales (2019).

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) considers that place making should be at the heart of decision making. Chapter 5 of PPW identifies that "Productive and Enterprising Places" are those which promote our economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being by providing well connected employment and sustainable economic development". The graphic below illustrates many of the outcomes of the a productive and enterprising place**. Pontfadog hub will achieve many outcomes as an emerging productive and enterprising place**.



Para 3.38 of PPW in relation to Placemaking in Rural Areas identifies the importance of fostering adaptability and resilience in maintaining the vibrancy of communities alongside the availability of services and contributing to the cohesive communities well-being goal. **The Pontfadog hub seeks to maintain the vibrancy of this rural area of Wrexham and provide a new community facility demonstrating both adaptability and resilience**.

Within the Active and Social Places theme of PPW, community buildings and spaces are identified as providing an important focus for sustaining communities and their well-being. This policy indicates that such spaces "cover a broad range of activities and services that can be delivered by the public, private and third sectors". Para 4.4. 1 states that "*community facilities contribute to a sense of place which is important to the health, well-being and amenity of local communities and their existence is often a key element in creating viable and sustainable places*". Para 4.4.2 continues to state "*Planning authorities should develop a strategic and long-term approach to the provision of community facilities when preparing development plans based on evidence. They should work with their local communities to identify sites and buildings that can help deliver community benefits and which support the development plan, and where appropriate, place plan objectives. When considering development proposals, including those associated with asset transfer, planning authorities should consider the needs of the community and ensure that community facilities continue to address the requirements of residents in the area*".

Local Planning policy might be considered to include the following: Wrexham Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 1996 – 2011, Policy EC7, EC9 and EC11; and Wrexham Local Development Plan 2013 – 2028 Deposit Plan (March 2018). It is noted the uncertainty in the LDP currently, however, the following policies are considered to be met: NE4 (AONB), NE3 (Trees Woodland and hedgerows), SP16 (Historic and Cultural Environment), and the overarching Development Management policy DM1.

The scheme is considered to meet national and local policy.

PLANNING CONCLUSION

The community of Pontfadog has been at the centre of developing the proposed change of use and the former County Primary School.

The scheme has been through a wide consultation and community engagement process.

Pre application advice was sought to help develop an appropriate scheme.

A wide range of advice has been obtained and it is considered an appropriate scheme has been brought forward.

A change of use is sought for the site, moving from a single site wide D1 use to a multi use site comprising primarily continued D1, but with the addition of A3 and B1 with a smaller ancillary level of D2 and A1.

Material planning issues have been identified and key issues identified as heritage, flooding, amenity, need and economy, biodiversity and parking.

It is considered that all national and local policy requirements are met, and a change of use can move forward.

We look forward to your consideration of the scheme and the comments of consultees. Should any issues arise during your determination of the proposal we are happy to meet and discuss and look to resolve any questions.

Thank you.

