

APPLICATION NO:
P/2022 /0944

LOCATION:
36 CHESTER ROAD WREXHAM
LL11 2SD

DATE RECEIVED:
01/11/2022

COMMUNITY:
Acton

DESCRIPTION:
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P/2021/1075 I GANIATAU I BARHAU I
DDEFNYDDIO'R ADEILAD FEL
LLOCHES I'R DIGARTREF /
VARIATION OF CONDITION 1 OF
P/2021/1075 TO ALLOW THE
CONTINUED USE OF THE BUILDING
AS HOMELESS SHELTER

CASE OFFICER:
MP

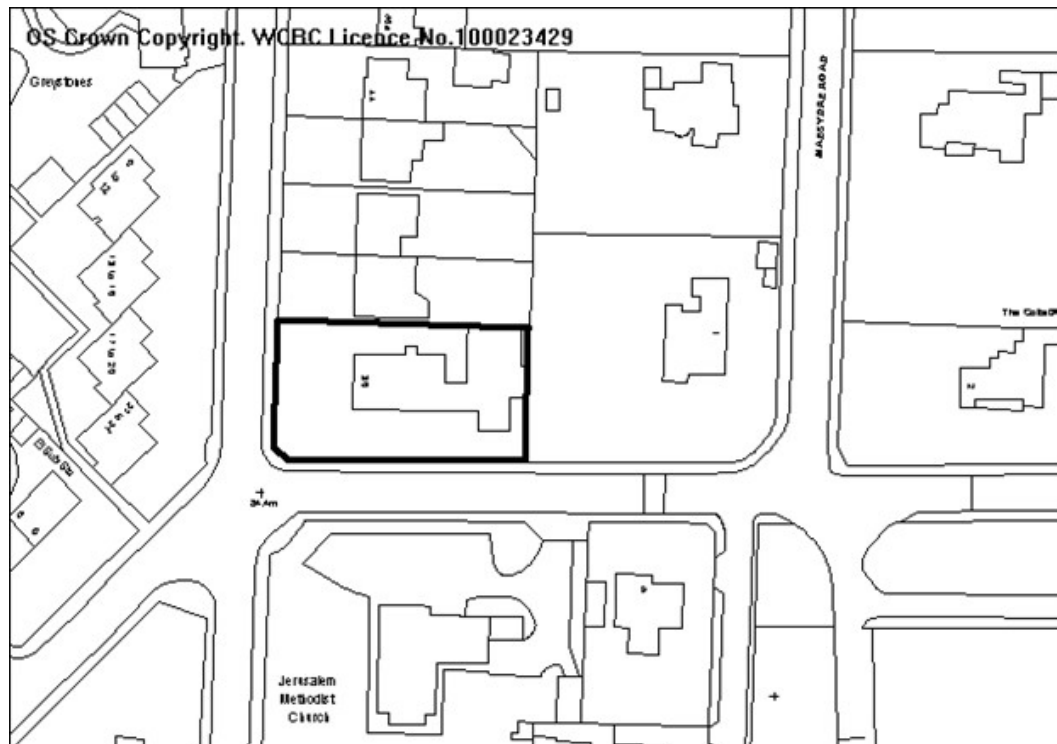
WARD:
Maesydre

AGENT NAME:
WREXHAM COUNTY
BOROUGH COUNCIL

APPLICANT(S) NAME:
CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER
WCBC

THE SITE

The site is on the corner of Chester Road and Penymaes Avenue



PROPOSAL

As above.

HISTORY

P/2004/0324 Reduce lightly and thin by 10 - 15% 1 No. beech tree, remove deadwood and stubs, and crown raise over road (T5) (TPO No. WMBC 21). Granted 19.4.2004

P/2005/0053 Extensions and internal alterations. Construction of new glass link. Refused 16.3.2005

P/2005/0499 Extensions to existing guest house and construction of new glass link. Granted 3.10.2005

P/2009/0439 Erection of sign. Advertisement consent granted 30.6.2009.

P/2012/0285 Change of use to tea room (A3). Granted 2.7.2012

P/2013/0362 Change of use of guest house to house in multiple occupation (HMO). Granted 29.7.2013

P/2013/0363 Alterations and change of use of guest house accommodation and dining area to residential dwelling. Granted 18.7.2013

P/2019/0855 Change of use from guest house to residential care home
Granted 2/1/2020

P/2021/1075 NEWID DEFNYDD O GWESTY GWELY A BRECWAST
(DOSBARTH C1) I HOSTEL I BOBL DDIGARTREF (SUI
GENERIS) / CHANGE OF USE FROM HOTEL/BED AND
BREAKFAST (CLASS C1) TO A HOMELESS HOSTEL (SUI
GENERIS). Granted 10.1.22

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Within settlement, policies GDP1 and T8 apply.

CONSULTATIONS

Community Council

Have commented that they have no planning related observations to make.

Local members

Notified 8.11.22. No response at the time of writing.

Highways Officer

No objections

Public Protection Officer

Consulted 8.11.22

Natural Resources Wales

Do no object to the application.

NRW have noted that the site is within the catchment of the River Dee and Bala Lake SAC but recognise that the nature of the application means it is unlikely to increase the amount of phosphorous entering the catchment.

Welsh Water

No objection.

North Wales Police

Have commented there has been no change to the response they give to the previous application (local officers and inspector do not have any concerns providing it is continually managed well, which it seems to be at present). They have commented that there have been a few incidents at the location from time to time but nothing that causes them any concerns.

Site Notice

Expired 30.11.22

Neighbours

The owners/occupiers of 17 nearby properties notified 9.11.22.

3 objections received making the following comments:

- It was supposed to be temporary during Covid;
- The facility is not fit for purpose and should not be in a residential area;
- No control of the history of persons being housed.
- Continued use as a homeless shelter is wrong/unacceptable;
- There is a need for the facility but it is introducing undesirable people into a community with young children who should not be exposed to drug taking and drug dealing. There have been numerous instances of this.
- Witnessed persons using drugs behind the wall of the Groves School campus entrance on Penymaes Avenue;
- Residents have been exposed to anti-social behaviour by people from the facility entering their gardens;
- The Council's efforts to supervise the shelter have failed;
- residents accumulating outside smoking;
- grandchildren are nervous;
- always men who are there;
- have to cross the road sometimes;
- always looking over our shoulders walking home;
- Wrexham is a magnet for people from other counties – i.e. homeless, drugs;
- Had to install CCTV cameras;
- Feeling unsafe;
- Pushbikes left in Craigmillar Road secured to the lamppost. Encountered abuse and foul language when the person was questioned;
- Council encourages undesirables for monetary gain; and
- Not enhancing the city, you are bringing it down

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Background: The publicity period for the application is still on-going at the time of writing this report. The application is being reported to this Committee meeting due to the fact that the current temporary planning permission expires on 31 December 2022 and there is a continued need to provide support to homeless people in the County Borough. Any additional consultation responses or representations received will be reported to Members via the Addendum.

The property has been in used since January 2021 to provide temporary accommodation for homeless people. The use benefitted from temporary permitted development rights introduced the Welsh Government in response to Covid-19 pandemic to allow certain changes of use to take place for a time limited period.

Due to the time limited nature of the permitted development rights, planning permission to permanently change the use of building to a homeless shelter was sought in November 2021 with permission being granted on 10 January 2022. Members imposed a condition limiting the permission to a 12 month period in order to enable the impact of the use on the amenities of nearby properties and in respect of crime and anti-social behaviour in the vicinity to be monitored. The planning permission expires on 31 December 2022.

The Council has a statutory duty under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to provide accommodation for homeless people and therefore the Housing Department have applied to vary condition 01 of the extant planning permission to enable the facility to be used on a permanent basis to continue to provide accommodation for people who present to the Council as homeless.

To note, people do not necessarily need to be living on the streets to be classed as homeless. Someone may be legally classed as homeless if they are sleeping on a friend's sofa, staying in a hostel or living in overcrowded accommodation.

There many causes of homeless, such as a lack of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment, life events that push people into homeless (losing a job, mental or physical health breakdown), as well as the need to escape a violent or abusive relationship.

In order to end homelessness in the County Borough, premises such as 36 Chester Road are required. Indeed, the Housing Department has advised that additional facilities are needed based on the number of people presenting as homeless over the past 3 years, as Table 1 below illustrates. Due to pressures such as inflation, interest rate rises and energy poverty, the number of people presenting as homeless is predicted to increase.

Table 1: Wrexham Borough- individuals presenting as homeless

Year	Number of individuals
2019- 2020	1,089
2020-2021	1,709
2021- 2022	2,238

The premises is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide support and guidance to individuals and ultimately assist them into permanent accommodation.

Individuals accommodated at the site are assessed for their particular needs. The accommodation is only suitable for single individuals therefore there are no families or couples.

A total of 30 representations were received to the previous application. The Housing Department has provided the following responses to issues raised:

Concern	Our response
Residents of Grove House (36, Chester Rd) are causing problems with drug use.	We have strict protocols and zero tolerance with drug taking and smoking. There are eight internal and eight external CCTV cameras. Any reports or concerns can and will be investigated. There have been no reports logged with North Wales Police in relation to these offences at this premises from Jan 2021 (when we started) to present October 2022.
Pollution from smoke.	There is a designated smoking area external to the dwelling. The numbers of residents allowed to use the area has been restricted to two. This was to reduce pollution and noise. Complaints have ceased since we implemented this protocol.
No consultation	We have had regular meetings since Jan 2022, eight in total to October 2022 these are held with WCBC Staff, neighbours and local members see numbers 9 – 26 table.
The model is a triage centre housing. Increased anti-social behaviour has been noticed by neighbours.	The facility is not run as a triage centre, Individuals are assessed before being placed. All issues highlighted to staff at 36 Chester Rd are investigated.
Litter etc.	Staff monitor litter around the facility.
Regular throwing of drugs paraphernalia into surrounding gardens.	There is no evidence that this has occurred as a result of the residents at Grove House (36, Chester Rd).
Light pollution because the light remains on.	We have repositioned the light to stop the light pollution
How is the curfew imposed?	In order to enter the premises a door release mechanism is activated by staff. If the curfew is breach strict protocols are implemented.

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The Housing Department has also met with occupiers of nearby properties 8 times since January 2022 to discuss concerns. The table below provides a summary of issues raised and responses to them:

Concern	Our response
Smoking area people congregating, being loud,	To trial 11pm no congregating in smoking area
Alleged cannabis smoking area Thursday evening 8-8.20pm.	Staff checked CCTV. Staff increased presence around smoking area, all residence were reminded of the zero tolerance approach and protocols.
Discussion around potential non-smoking site	Discussion - External only in designated area
Request from residents for conifers in front garden to be reduced in height.	Work has been commissioned by Housing Dept. to reduce the height of the conifers.
Resident stated fence that was down	Fence reinstated 31/01/2022
CCTV Bus pass area, vomit bowls, drug paraphernalia in the road,	Investigated not related to Grove House.
Blind needs to be fixed down as it keeps been left open	Blind to skylight sorted 31/01/2022
Resident stated smoking area noisy 9-9.30pm Friday evening they phoned staff and problem was resolved. Concerns raised that issues will get worse as the weather gets better	The situation was monitored throughout the summer and no complaints were received.
Concerns as last summer people were congregating in the car park	The situation was monitored throughout the summer and no complaints were received.
Neighbours heard a fence rattle, a security light go on and the fire door opposite annexe made a noise.	PC Andy 3366 attended the next morning. He advised a report would be submitted. Staff advised CCTV would be checked.
Resident stated the lamppost opposite 6, Pen y Maes Ave still not working	This issue is not related to Grove House.
5 people at the bus stop by Grove House who were using bad language, two residents of Grove House then carried on the bad behaviour in the middle of the road which became a threatening situation, the two residents	Grove House Manager response – Two residents who were involved were immediately removed from Grove House. Following the incident the Manager brought into place only two people allowed out for a cigarette at any one time after 6pm and night staff are to regularly patrol Grove House building and boundary to discourage any

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER ECONOMY AND PLANNING – 5 December 2022

from Grove House were involved but had ample opportunity to move away from the situation. When residents arrive at Grove House are they made aware of any rules regarding the residents in the area and noise disruption?	meetings. Further to this after 11pm nobody is allowed out of the building (unless there is an emergency fire evacuation etc.).
Resident concerned with bad language in area, stated there was an incident on 17th May at 7.38am, loud shouting and bad language on the road by the traffic lights.	Manager confirmed after investigation that the incident had not involved Grove House residents.
Resident had reported a guy at 8pm at night was knocking at his door begging for money.	Manager stated the person begging is not a resident at Grove House and this is a historic person, Police are aware.
Resident stated there has been litter, a large number of cans and plastic bottles in bus stop. Concerns raised of the possibility the area in the vicinity of the bus stop is being used as a toilet and a resident had found a lump hammer placed in the hedge at Grove House near to traffic lights. (This is near the junction with Chester Rd)	Manager stated – No incidents have been reported by police involving any weapons (lump hammer). The litter at bus stop is a separate issue. Residents that witness these events occurring can pass information onto Manager at Grove House who can investigate by reviewing CCTV footage to establish if the incident was caused by a resident.
Resident in the area have witnessed drug deals taking place in bus stop near Grove House.	Manager stated this is an ongoing issue which has been reported to the police and is being monitored. Allegedly a car approaching the vicinity on a regular basis may be involved in drug deals. Manager encouraged residents of the area to take note of registration plate, dates and times when this is taking place and report to Police.
Resident asked if we use Grove House as a prison release unit	No, WCBC manager confirmed in meeting with residents that the premises was and is not a prison release unit
Resident raised concern that person was leaving property drinking alcohol	Staff viewed CCTV. The drinking vessel is believed to be an energy drink can. The person identified in the footage has been spoken to and communication has been given in regard of zero tolerance to alcohol at 36, Chester Road premises.

The Supporting Statement accompanying the application confirms that no third party calls had been received by North Wales Police between 1 Jan 2021 to 1 October 2022 regarding incidents relating to 36 Chester Road.

North Wales Police have confirmed there has been no change to the response they gave to the previous application.

Policy: The property is situated close to the city centre where there is a range of services and facilities that are easily accessible for occupants. Development in this location would be normally permitted unless it generated significant adverse impacts that would indicate a decision to the contrary.

The UDP has no specific policy dealing with the conversion of hotels/guest houses to hostels and as such there is no policy objection in principle to the continuation of this use.

Character: The immediate locality is one of fairly low density buildings predominately used as single family dwellings. Paragraph 6.9 of the UDP states that *'Attractive tree-lined, and/or low density areas (e.g the Chester Road/Maes Y Dre Road/Penymaes Avenue/Park Avenue or the Wynnstay Lane/Stanclyffe Avenue/Pistyll Hill/Hoseley Lane locality in Marford), must not be spoilt by insensitive developments which increase densities, result in the loss of private or public open space; or detract from the general character of the area'*.

Whilst there is a high occupancy use, this is also true of the previous guest house use. The guest house building provided 13 guest bedrooms plus the attached dwelling. Planning permission was also granted in 2020 (P/2019/0855) to convert the property to a care home with 19 bedrooms. The current use provides 16 bedrooms and is therefore considered broadly comparable to both uses in terms of levels of occupancy and level of activity associated with them.

No external alterations have been carried out and none are proposed by this application. The trees within the site (one covered by a TPO) are to be retained.

On the basis of the above, permitting the use of a permanent basis would not harm the character or appearance of the area and therefore accords with the policy GDP1(a).

Amenity, crime and anti-social behaviour: No external alterations or extensions have been undertaken and none are proposed by this application. As a result, the development does not result in any additional impact upon the privacy or visual amenity afforded to nearby occupiers.

The property has adequate garden space (around 80 square metres) as well as dedicated space for bin storage. This affords adequate standards of amenity for occupiers of the facility.

It is noted that concerns have previously been raised that the facility would lead to crime, anti-social behaviour or noise disturbance. The concerns expressed in the representations to this application are also noted. However, the evidence advanced by the Housing Team indicate that such concerns have not been a particular issue over the last 12 month period. Furthermore, separate legislation is in place to deal with such matters.

As a result, it is considered that the permeant use of the premises as a homeless hostel would not give rise to undue safety or amenity concerns and therefore accords with policy GDP1(f).

Parking: The property has parking for 8 parking spaces which is considered adequate for staff use.

The site is within walking distance of the town centre, is located on bus route with a regular service and is provided with cycle storage.

Visibility at the site access onto Penymaes Avenue is currently substandard. Nevertheless, the use has resulted in a reduction in vehicular movements compared to the previous use as a guest house.

The Council's Highway Officer has raised no objection to the continued use of the premises as a homeless hostel and accordingly the proposals accord with policy GDP1(d).

CONCLUSION

It is considered that the permanent use of the site as a homeless facility would not give rise to undue adverse impacts in respect of the character or appearance of the local area, residential amenity, highway safety or public safety. As such the proposal accords with policies GDP1 and T8.

RECOMMENDATION: That permission be GRANTED

CONDITION(S)

1. The development shall only be carried out in strict accordance with the details shown on the drawings received 11 November 2021 and as contained within the application documentation.

REASON(S)

1. To comply with section 71ZA (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
