

Engedi Court Affordable Housing Development

Planning Statement



Perspective View

In support of the Planning Application April 2017



Site Location

Location

Engedi Court
High Street
Brymbo
Wrexham
LL11 5BL

Development History

The site in question has been used as a Calvinistic Methodist Chapel since the original structure was constructed in 1820. This was extended in 1861 and rebuilt in 1895 which is the current structure on the land. The Chapel was well utilised until the late 20th century when dropping congregation numbers finally forced the Chapels closure in 2003. Since then the property has fallen into an increasing state of disrepair and is now derelict and unsafe, within overgrown grounds with boarded up windows. In addition roof slates have been known to come off in the strong winds experienced in the area causing a risk to adjacent land owners and members of the public. Public opinion in the village has swung over the past decade from a desire to see the building renovated and brought back to its former glory, to a desire to see the site itself redeveloped, rather than serving as a derelict unutilised site in the centre of the village.



The current owners, came to the property in 2009, and have undertaken a number of feasibility assessments on the options to renovate over the past 8 years. All of these have proven to be economically unviable because of the condition of the existing structure, and the level of accommodation which can be provided within its confines, coupled with what would be effectively zero vehicle parking provision due to the external space available.

The feasibility studies have included both residential and commercial premises, and the outcome of the comparison process has been that although commercial spaces might be provided within the existing structures, market rates, lack of parking and the adjacent Brymbo Enterprise Centre makes this option commercially unviable. Coupled with the extensive costs associated with trying to repair and renovate the building, this option simply couldn't be made to work from a practical and economical point of view. The residential option demonstrated that although the structure could theoretically be converted into a few apartments, again the market rates, lack of parking and repair/renovation costs made this entirely unviable in this location.

The output of this exercise was that although full due diligence had been done on the feasibility studies to try to convert the existing structure, it simply couldn't be made to work economically. As such, the only option for the owner to do something with the site, was to look to redevelop it, taking advice from the local Planning Authority, consulting with local councillors and residents to ensure that the proposed scheme would meet local approval, and also be a commercially viable scheme for them to build out.



With this in mind, the owners appointed a designer to start looking at how the site could be redeveloped, to both respect the current built landscape within the site and local sensitivities, and to incorporate parking and make the scheme into something which could be made economically viable to take forward into development and delivery. A key discussion at this time was over the format of the residential properties which were to be provided. It became evident that despite the large recent former Brymbo Steelworks development half a mile away, true affordable housing had been neglected through this development, and that this was what was needed within the village. As such, this became a central part of the design brief moving forward.



Design Development Process

On first review of the site, massing, orientation and situation, it became clear that the proposed built form would have to mimic that of the existing structure in order to optimise the potential for the triangular shaped site. Further to this, it was noted that the current site fell sharply from back to front, and the existing structures were part-elevated over the level of the road. This prompted the investigation of integration of under-croft parking in the ground floor of the development. This proved to work to the tune of circa 10 vehicles with sheltered, potentially secure parking provision. This was then coupled with a circulation core in the rear corner of the site, and 2 residential floor plates on the first and second floor levels, each with 2 no. 2 bed apartments each, and a reduced third floor pulled back into the depth of the site, with 1 no. 2 bed apartment on each floorplate.



Initial Space Study

This initial feasibility study aimed to pull as much of the massing of the development to the rear of the site away from the street aspect and aimed to contain the mass of the development within that of the existing structure. This was achieved in principle, and the outline proposals were taken for review with WBC Planners in May 2016 for feedback.

The feedback confirmed the acceptance of the development in principle and the number of affordable apartments proposed. The feedback also confirmed the acceptance of the removal of the derelict existing structure and its redevelopment as a residential site. The advice was to maintain the 2 distinct wings expressed in the current structure with the high ridged main chapel building running back to front on the site with a pronounced street gable, with the lower extension running along the back boundary. Furthermore, advice to take inspiration from other similar redevelopments such as the one in Coedpoeth was made in terms of proportions, facing materials and features.



Similar development on site of former chapel in Coedpoeth

This advice and feedback was taken under advisement, and scheme design progressed accordingly. Changes were made to the fundamental form of the scheme, retaining the under-croft parking and circulation core elements, which worked so well. The design of the floorplates moved the third floor apartments onto a single floorplate towards the road, mimicking the massing expressed within the current site structure as recommended by the Planners. Further to this, aesthetic treatment was progressed significantly, with the front feature gable shown dressed in reclaimed stone from the existing structure, with brickwork elevations elsewhere, and feature windows reminiscent of the many mining, milling and forging structures which feature throughout the area. Roofing was all in natural slate to match both the existing structure and the vast majority of properties in the village.



Design evolution from concept stage following Planning Dept feedback

At this point, further feedback was sought from Wrexham Borough Council Planning Officers, and the advice was that we should investigate incorporating the third floor into the loft space. Early ecological and habitat surveys had identified an endangered lesser horseshoe bat resident in the existing structure, and as a result we have incorporated a “bat loft” within the development to accommodate this species (among potential others), which, along with the practical limitations of stair configurations and head height restrictions, this limited the extent to which this could be done, but every effort was made to reduce the upper eaves level in accordance with this request, and it was felt that this presented a very clean, well defined and high quality appearance to the development without compromise to the internal spaces provided within any of the apartments.



Further design evolution following further Planning Dept feedback

Further pre-planning advice from WBC Planners late in 2016 then advised that the massing, although following their previous advice was too overbearing and that the height/street impact needed to be reduced. This initiated a further element of redesign which ultimately lead to the removal of the third floor entirely, and the incorporation of one no. apartment in the ground floor of the development, with its own dedicated front entrance porch. At this stage, the aesthetic impact of the design was reviewed also, and following the suggestion to take reference to the similar development in Coedpoeth referenced in the Development History section above.



Existing form



Proposed form

The scale of the development falls within that of the existing structure as can be seen in the above illustrative images, with a lower roof height, no increase in proximity or bearing on the street scene nor on adjacent neighbours. This follows the advice of the Planning Department, and fits in with the usual Architectural approach to the redevelopment of any site.



The layout of the site has been optimised to ensure that circulation, parking and building are all clearly identified. Access to the parking area is through the existing access point into the site, and a secondary pedestrian access point is present at the position of the current front door of the existing structure. The boundary wall is to be retained and repaired as far as is reasonably possible as part of the development as a key feature to the impact of the scheme on the street scene.

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The apartment layouts are typical of modern apartments with a double room, single room, open plan living area, bathroom and soundproof utilities cupboards to ensure washing machines etc. do not impact on quality of living in the open plan area.

Under-croft parking is provided on the entrance level with a provision of 10 no. spaces. It is intended for these areas to be kept as open as possible to ensure passive surveillance is ensured, supported by a carefully considered lighting proposal which will be reviewed by the North Wales Police Liaison Officer as part of a Secure by Design review, concurrent with the Planning Application.

Appearance

As referenced earlier in this document, the appearance of the development has been driven by the mass development advice from WBC Planning Department, coupled with the physical restrictions of the site. To this end, the appearance of the proposals is that of a mature concept which pays homage to the cultural and environment history and diversity of the village of Brymbo, the site itself, and the requirements of low maintenance modern living.

The treatment of the walls is to refurbish and reuse the high quality facing stone from the existing chapel in the facing material of the main front gable and porch, with return detailing to the corners. This brings a soft historical reference from the existing into the new development, and ensures the utilisation of traditional local materials in the impact of the building.

The roof will be finished in natural slate as existing, and as most of the traditional building in the village. Whether or not the existing slates can be reused will be evaluated during the demolition of the existing structure.

Windows and doors are proposed to be UPVC double glazed units – this is for low maintenance longevity primarily, and is representative of the units installed in the many and varied new-build residences around Brymbo over the past two decades.

The boundary walls which are facing stone to the front elevation are to be retained, refurbished and adapted to suit the new layout. This is to maintain the quality boundary condition to the important front elevation and to maintain the impact of such on the streetscape.

Side and rear boundary treatments are to remain as existing with brick built walls to the side, and a brick faced retaining wall to the rear, with metal handrail above.

Access

The existing access point into the site is to be adapted to suit vehicular access. Once inside the site, the courtyard and undercroft will be generally flat, but with positive drainage (and where necessary attenuation, subject to further analysis) allow ease of movement and manoeuvre into and out of the parking spaces identified.

Level access from the boundary is to be provided to the main personnel lobby from which Part K compliant stairs will allow vertical circulation within the building. Early engagement with WBC Building Control department has confirmed that there is no requirement for an access lift so this has been omitted from the scheme.

10 no. parking spaces are provided within the development; 9 in the under-croft parking area, and 1 in the open. This provides 1 parking space per apartment, with 1 additional parking space for guests or building management. This provides a higher parking space to apartment ratio than Valley View, which is a similar residential conversion/development just 150m down the road in the centre of the village. No parking concerns are apparent from the Valley View development which provides an established precedent and justification for the parking levels provided in this case. It is also noted that parking standards in the planning guidance documents refer only to maximum parking standards, and that there are no minimum parking standards, subject to suitability which has been demonstrated above.

An established bus stop with direct connection into Wrexham and thence to the wider surrounding area via road and/or rail, is situated within 100m of the development, providing excellent commuter potential into town and the wider area.

Climate Change & Sustainability

The development will be specified to meet (and exceed where practicable) the current Approved Document Parts L, F, G & J of the Building Regulations, all of which pertain to sustainable design, specification and installation.

The use of reclaimed materials for the facing stonework and within the roof where possible, and in recycled or recyclable gypsum boards for walls and ceilings, will significantly reduce the embodied energy of the material going into the works.

These measures will ensure that the finished property has a minimal impact on the environment both on a wide and micro-scale.

Habitat and Ecology

Please refer to the Bat Report (appended) to this document for full details. It should be noted that the recommendations are to be implemented and the necessary features of the bat loft are indicated on the appropriate drawings.

Full technical proposals will be developed in order to support a Bat Licence in due course as the development progresses.

In conclusion:

The existing buildings exhibit examples of structural concern where cracks in stonework and other masonry walls exist, evidence of extensive water ingress and rot within wooden members of the structures, as well as the invasion of fungus growth in many areas. Coupled with the relationship of the existing structure, the adjoining ground levels (above internal floor areas) and the retaining wall to the rear of the site causing extensive technical difficulties in making a dry and healthy internal environment, this all contributes to the difficulty of undertaking a refurbishment and conversion project within the existing structure at any reasonable economical undertaking.

As such, redevelopment of the site is required, in order to prevent the continuing deterioration and distress *ad infinitum*, of this village centre site and once proud structure. Local residents have been engaged with as part of this development process, and the feeling is strong that redevelopment is preferred over continued decay and eventual risk of collapse.

The proposals herein have been back and forth to Planning Dept at WBC over the past year, and the recommendations at each point have been taken on board, until we have arrived at the final design proposals. Commercial optimisation of the site in terms of apartment numbers has been sacrificed in order to respond to the requests of the planners in order to ensure that the final proposals are supported.

Local materials are to be recycled and reused in the proposed structure to ensure that a permanent link between the old and new is ingrained into the fabric of the development.