

Heritage Impact Statement

Regarding

The Impact on the Heritage Asset of Proposals for a Replacement Shopfront at 2, Regent Street, Wrexham

Wrexham CBC



Report by
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2020 Jeff St. Paul was commissioned by Mr. Rob Lloyd to prepare a Heritage Impact Statement in connection with an application for Planning Permission to Wrexham County Borough Council with regard to a proposed replacement shopfront at 2, Regent Street, Wrexham.
- 1.2 This Statement forms part of that application submitted by Owen Devenport and should be read in conjunction with all the submitted information, in particular the submitted drawings by Mathew Jones Architects
- 1.3 Because the application site is in an important location within the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area this Heritage Impact Statement has been prepared to ascertain the impact of the proposals on the heritage asset.
- 1.4 This Statement involves an examination of the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area, its character, significance and importance to the heritage asset. The proposals for 2, Wrexham Street will be examined and how they affect the heritage asset. This will then be used to reach an assessment of the impact of the scheme on the heritage asset.
- 1.4 The legislative background to Heritage Impact Statements is outlined within The Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016, the Welsh Government Planning Policy Wales Technical Advice Note 24, The Historic Environment May 2017, and The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Wales) (Amendment no 2) Regulations 2017. These give the context where an HIS will be a statutory requirement including development affecting Listed Buildings and where Conservation Area Consent is needed. Guidance is also provided in the Welsh Government publications, 'Setting of Heritage Assets in Wales', and 'Managing Change in Conservation Areas in Wales 2017.' In the local context, the importance of the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area Character Assessment and Management Plan, which was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in January 2009, is acknowledged.
- 1.5 National guidance on such matters indicates that the level of information provided in a Heritage Impact Statement should be proportionate to the significance of the Heritage Asset and to the potential impact of the proposals on that asset.

2.0 Background and Context

- 2.1 Wrexham has a long history. There is evidence in the area of Mesolithic and Bronze Age activity and of a Roman settlement in the area. After the withdrawal of the legions in the late 4th and early 5th centuries AD the area was certainly one of conflict between the Celtic/ Romano British and Mercian/ Anglo Saxon invaders. Norse attacks were increasingly evident from the 9th Century. The Normans do not appear to have established early control of the area although a motte and bailey castle in the area was built by Hugh 'Lupus' d'Avranches, first Norman Earl of Chester.
- 2.2 By the early 13th century Wrexham was firmly under the control of the Princes of Powys which allowed the town to develop as a trading and administrative centre. The death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282 led to the loss of Welsh independence and a Marcher lordship was established in the area.
- 2.3 Wrexham continued to develop as a commercial and administrative centre during the late mediaeval period and the 16th and 17th centuries despite setbacks caused by support of the Glyndwr rebellion and the Royalist cause in the English Civil War.
- 2.4 From the mid 18th century onwards the coming of the Industrial revolution saw dramatic expansion of activity in the area with such developments as the Bersham ironworks and numerous collieries. Wrexham became established as the regional centre of several industries including leather working and brewing.
- 2.5 Wrexham was incorporated as a Borough in 1857. In the middle to late 20th century Wrexham, in common with many towns and cities, saw the decline of its heavy industries with the closure of its mines, steelworks, brickworks and breweries.

3.1 Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area and 2, Regent Street–Description, Statutory Designations and the Heritage Asset

The move to designate areas of historic importance rather than just individual buildings grew during the 1960s and culminated in the 1967 Civic Amenities Act which introduced the concept of Conservation Areas. This was consolidated in the 1971 Town and Country Planning Act and further in the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act.

Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area was designated in March 1974 and was therefore a relatively early designation. There have been a

number of amendments to the boundary of the Conservation Area, the latest being in April 2007.

Wrexham Town Centre was designated as a conservation area because it illustrates the growth and development of the Market Town and Regional centre from the mediaeval core based on St Giles' Church through the development of the commercial and service area of the late mediaeval period through to the rapid growth of the 18th and 19th centuries. This long period shows a diversity of architectural styles and periods.



The Horse and Jockey Public House. A Grade II listed building.

Wrexham Town Centre has a number of buildings worthy of recognition as buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest but it is the overall character of the townscape and open spaces which create the character which is worthy of protection and enhancement.



Hope Street looking from the site.

3.1.1 The Site: 2, Regent Street.

Within the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area Character Assessment and Management Plan five different areas are identified, each with their own distinct character. The application site falls within the Hope Street, Regent Street and Queen Street area.

The street pattern of this area is a continuation and development of that around the mediaeval core of St Giles' Church. The streets formerly held markets and now form the retail core.

The north west of Regent Street is identified as an important entry into the Conservation Area with its long views. It is recognised that there are few statutory listed buildings in the area, the Grade II listed Horse and Jockey Public House being an exception, but the application site is recognised as being part of an important late 19th Century building and of, '... local interest and architectural merit.'

2, Regent Street is the left hand part of an imposing three and a half storey building built in 1875. The building is predominately of yellow brick with sandstone dressings. There is also some red brick detailing to the voussoirs above windows and the arch and some chequerboard tile detailing between first and second floors. A prominent feature is the tall central arch, greater than one storey, which leads through to Argyle Street. Above the arch is an elaborate triangular oriel window in

sandstone. The roof is of natural Welsh slate with two hipped dormer windows to each side.

At street level, 2, Regent Street has fine sandstone pilasters which have been painted matt black. These have been removed to the right hand which has a modern shopfront in glass and faux marble.

The shopfront to 2, Regent Street has been removed, not by the applicants, but it is believed to have been of modern design and materials.

The whole composition is a pleasing and interesting building devalued by the loss of detailing at street level.



2, Regent Street to left with Archway and Neighbour

3.2.1 Assessing the Heritage Asset

In the publication, 'Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the Historic Environment in Wales', March 2011, Cadw set out the principles behind conservation philosophy which guides their decision making in managing change in the historic environment. The Cadw guidance acknowledges the foundation provided by an earlier English Heritage publication, 'Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance,' 2008.

Both publications give detailed guidance on the assessment of the built heritage and propose four categories into which they might be grouped. These are assessed below in relation to the designated Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area.

The Assessment is made with regard to the Heritage Asset as a whole which comprises the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area with particular regard to 2, Regent Street and the surrounding area.

The sections in italics which follow each heading are taken directly from the Cadw publication.

3.2.2 Evidential Value

Evidential value ... Those elements of an historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity.

Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area exhibits Evidential Value in abundance. From the mediaeval core and street pattern surrounding St Giles' Church to the phases of growth through the 18th and 19th Centuries, of which 2, Regent Street is a prominent example, the changing imprint of human activity can be traced.

3.2.3 Historical Value

An historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or it might be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement.

Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area illustrates moderate Historical Value. The whole area illustrates the establishment and growth of a market town from the association with the Princes of Powys in the early mediaeval to its establishment as a sub-regional and regional centre through the importance of trading and markets and its incorporation as a Borough in 1857.

3.2.4 Aesthetic Value

Aesthetic value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

As the centre of the urban area of Wrexham CBC, the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area has moderate aesthetic value. This is largely centred on the mediaeval core surrounding St Giles' Church but with many other buildings in the surrounding area of which 2, Regent Street is one.

3.2.5 Communal Value

This derives from the meanings that an historic asset has for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. It is closely linked to historical and aesthetic values but tends to have additional or specific aspects. Communal value might be commemorative or symbolic.

Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area lies at the centre of, and covers much of the area of the town of Wrexham and sits within the County Borough, a community of approximately 135,000 people. It lies at the centre of the character of the town and wider area and therefore has high Communal Value in the Heritage Assessment.

3.3 Summary

In terms of the guidance offered by Cadw, the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area offers a strong contribution to the Heritage Asset through all of the four categories of Evidential Value, Historical Value, Communal Value and Aesthetic Value. It is difficult to single out any particular strength but perhaps the Evidential and Historical elements stand out as particularly important.



Neighbouring Shopfront

4.0 The Proposals and the Impact on the Heritage Asset

4.1 The Proposals

4.1.1 The planning application to Wrexham CBC involves a proposed replacement shopfront, and it is this which will be examined in terms of potential impact on the Heritage Asset

The building will be refurbished internally which is clearly important in bringing the building back into a beneficial and sustainable use but these works do not require planning permission and are not the subject of this Heritage Impact Statement

4.1.2 The Design Philosophy underpinning the proposals is clear. The intention is to bring a retail unit back into use with an appropriately designed replacement shopfront based on a traditional model and using appropriate materials.

All design decisions have been undertaken with consideration of the special character of the building and the Conservation Area with a view to preserve and enhance their importance.



The proposed shopfront

4.1.3 The existing stone pilasters, which are part of the original building but which are missing from the neighbouring property, will be retained and the replacement shopfront fitted between them.



Existing black painted sandstone pilaster

4.1.4 The existing shutters will be removed.

4.1.5 Appendix 1 of the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area Character Assessment and Management Plan gives guidance on replacement shopfronts and this has been considered in the case of 2, Regent Street. The elements of traditional shopfront design have been followed. A stallriser will be installed and the glazed area broken up by both mullions and a fanlight transom line. Inset timber pilasters will frame the shopfront within the existing stone pilasters. The materials proposed are a mixture of external quality MDF for many on the surface areas with hardwood framing as shown.

The composition will be a positive addition to the building and the wider area.

4.2 Impact of the Development on the Asset

- 4.2.1 The Historic Asset comprises the application site of 2, Regent Street and the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area in which it sits.
- 4.2.2 The Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area will be positively impacted in that an important building will be renovated in an appropriate manner and its position and future secured.
- 4.2.3 Similarly, with regard to 2, Regent Street itself, the proposals will re-establish a beneficial use and secure a sustainable future for this important building. The changes proposed are proportionate and directed towards this end and they are executed with appropriate design and materials.
- 4.2.4 The proposals are limited and well considered. Firstly, the original sandstone pilasters will be retained. The proposed new shopfront is traditional in design with the elements one would expect including stallriser, pilasters, and fascia. The design follows guidance issued in Appendix 1 of the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area Character Assessment and Management Plan by breaking up the glazed area by use of the stallriser, mullions and fanlight transom line.
The materials proposed are appropriate with a mixture of high quality MDF and hardwood.
- 4.2.5 The restoration and reinstatement of interest and detail at street level will have a very positive impact on the building and area.

4.3 Impact on Views of and from the Asset

- 4.3.1 The Heritage Asset of the building and the wider Conservation Area will be affected only in a positive way.
- 4.3.2 The only real impact on views will be that the vacant building, currently detracting from the street scene, will be fully refurbished in an appropriate manner therefore will be a wholly positive development.

4.4 Summary

- 4.4.1 The proposals have no adverse impact and many positive aspects on the Heritage Asset and as such are compatible with the Asset. This follows the guidance regarding new work as detailed in section 28 of Cadw's 'Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the Historic Environment in Wales' , March 2011.
- 4.3.2 The five points detailed in section 14 of that report are stated and addressed below, Cadw's words in italics:

New work or alteration to a significant place will normally only be acceptable if:

a. The Need for the work is fully justified

The works have been justified in terms of restoring a sustainable retail use on the site in Regent Street and by ensuring appropriate design and detailing.

b. And there is sufficient information comprehensively to understand the impacts of the proposal on the significance of the place;

The impact of the proposed changes upon the building and wider Conservation Area are limited, and can be easily judged. They are intended only to afford better use of the existing building and secure a sustainable future.

c. The proposal would not materially harm the values of that asset which, where appropriate, would be reinforced or further revealed;

It is contended that the proposals have a wholly positive effect on the value of the Heritage Asset and by contributing to a sustainable use for the site will greatly help it. Use and restoration of more appropriate materials will also aid this objective.

d. The quality of the design and execution must add value to the existing asset

Following the design philosophy, the design choices and materials used are of high quality, wholly appropriate and are compatible with the site.

e. The long term consequences of the proposals can, from experience, be demonstrated to be benign, largely reversible or be designed not to prejudice alternative solutions in the future;

These proposals do not prejudice the future of the site in any way and could be reversed. They have a benign, in fact very positive effect, upon the Heritage Asset.

5.0 Conclusions

- The Heritage Asset, which comprises the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area and the application site of 2, Regent Street, are important to the Town and wider area and it is important that any development respects this.
- The proposed changes, in particular the proposed shopfront, are well considered, enabling reintroduction of a retail use and securing a beneficial use for the future. The important existing features of the sandstone pilasters will be retained.
- The restoration and reinstatement of interest and detail at street level will have a very positive impact on the building and area.
- The proposals are of a scale, design, and materials which are appropriate for the existing building and locality and compatible with the Heritage Asset.
- The proposals will have a wholly positive impact upon the area restoring a building in an appropriate manner. The sensitive restoration of this building will preserve and enhance the character of the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area and follows the relevant legislation and guidance.
- The quality of the Heritage Asset has been assessed and the impact of the proposals on the Heritage Asset considered. The conclusion of this is that the proposals are compatible with guidance on new works, appropriate, and will have a positive impact on the character of the 2, Regent Street and the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area within which it sits.