



**Bob Dewey
PLANNING**

PROPOSED CONVERSION OF
REDUNDANT AGRICULTURAL BUILDING TO DWELLING
CAE DEWI SANT, BERSE ROAD, NEW BROUGHTON,
WREXHAM

GROUND OFS OF APPEAL

Background: The proposal is to convert a steel framed two storey building into a small dwelling house at Berse Road, Wrexham. The site is located about one mile west of the centre of Wrexham and has a frontage to B 5430. Grid reference is 3318 3509

Site: The is within an area of urban fringe which is characterised by scattered (approximately) 10 houses, "horiculture", a retail garden nursery and a bus depot. The building on site was erected by a previous owner and appears clearly of excessive size for the small area of land on which it stands.

The building is in an excellent state of repair. A structural report is included in the appeal documents.

Reason for refusal:

The Council says:

"The structure is of a temporary nature constructed as a steel portal frame, infilled with blockwork at the lower level and clad with metal sheeting above. To convert to residential use, the external walls will be rebuilt/replaced to bring the construction to a habitable standard. The proposal as such does not accord with planning guidance set out in LPG 3 Converting Rural Buildings and policy H3 Conversion of Buildings outside Settlement Limits of the Wrexham Unitary Development Plan."

Council Policy:

The Council's policy is contained in the adopted Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which expired in 2011. The plan shows the site as outside any settlement limit and in a green barrier.

Policy PS2 of the UDP says that new development must not detrimentally affect countryside, landscape character or the quality of the natural environment.

Policy H3 allows the conversion of buildings outside settlement limits where (in the case of agricultural buildings) there is no longer an agricultural need and alternative non-residential uses have proved inappropriate. The other provisos are

that the building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without extensive rebuilding tantamount to the erection of a new dwelling.
any inherent characteristics of merit are retained

that the dwelling and curtilage would not create an intrusion or access difficulties the floor plan is sufficient to create a dwelling.

The Council is considering a replacement Local Development Plan and, following the failure of the first draft plan at Local Plan Inquiry due to inadequate provision for housing. It is seeking new sites to overcome the deficiency. As the previous plan is considered to have “expired”, the Welsh Government has now indicated that it considers Wrexham to have a Housing Land Supply of zero years (it is required to have a five year supply). Sites adjacent to the application site have been put forward for consideration.

Welsh Government advice:

Extracts from Planning Policy Wales are attached:

Paragraph 4.8.17 says The re-use of buildings in a Green Belt or green wedge is not inappropriate development provided that:

- the original building is substantial, permanent and capable of conversion without major reconstruction;

- the new use will not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt or green wedge and the purposes of including land within it. Strict control will need to be exercised over the extension, alteration or any associated use of land for re-used buildings; and

- the building is in keeping with its surroundings.

Detailed Grounds of appeal / Policy Analysis:

The Council objects to the proposal on two grounds which can be summarised as follows:-

- The building is temporary.

- The conversion would require replacement of the walls in different materials.

In response the appellants say:-

- A steel frame is likely to have a very long life and we have seen reference to periods on excess of 80 years mentioned. To that extent, it is difficult to understand the claim of “temporary”.

- The scheme was designed so as to improve the appearance of the structure. The architect has advised that the scheme could be undertaken retaining the existing materials which new internal lining to meet modern insulation requirements. The Council could easily have asked for that amendment.

The Council’s policy recognises that there are a number of redundant buildings in the countryside. However, the refusal does not make reference to these so it must be assumed that these were not an integral part of the refusal reasons. It sets out (in policy H 3) criteria to be considered.

1. No longer an agricultural need:- It is not entirely clear whether the building was ever justified for an agricultural use. It appears likely to have been erected to provide hay storage for the grazing of horses and optimistically large for such a use. The minimal use in recent years and reported occasional occupation by trespassers confirms that it not reasonably required for use in connection with the use of the land.
2. Alternative non-residential uses have been investigated:- Although the applicants did not submit direct information to the Council , it had been assumed that it would have been self-apparent in any realistic appraisal by the Council that a commercial use was unlikely to be appropriate. It is considered that the Council was wrong to fail to make any simple appraisal for itself. There is a significant surplus of commercial units in and around Wrexham which are fully serviced and which are available for immediate occupation. Nevertheless, a long established Wrexham estate agent has now provided a letter which confirms that “attempts to market it for a commercial use would be most unlikely to attract any interest”.(copy attached)

Building is structurally sound: The architect engaged to produce the conversion plans said that he was “ ...more than satisfied that the primary steel frame is structurally sound and in a suitable condition to be converted without extensive rebuilding....”.

Subsequently the appellants have engaged a further report from a qualified structural engineer who concludes;

“ the steel framed structure would be suitable to convert the existing building into a habitable dwelling”

3. Capable of conversion: The architect also said: “The simple arrangement of the steel portal frame, with the regular grid and clear span make it an ideal structure to convert.”

The Council’s sole reason for refusal appears to relate to this criterion. Because of this, we will respond in more detail to this point later in this statement.

The plans did show the replacement of the existing walls because it was believed that the finished building would be more attractive and harmonise better with the surrounding area. The conversion could be carried retaining the external walls and forming a new internal insulated structure. However, it is difficult to understand why the Council would wish to retain the existing unattractive appearance of the building. (see also para 4 below)

4. Characteristics of Merit: The appellant is not aware of any merit in the appearance of the building. In this circumstance, the advice in LPG 3 is clearly appropriate: “..in circumstances where the building has no traditional features of merit, the Council will expect the design to reflect the character and appearance of other buildings in the locality..”. It would appear that as the building has no traditional merit, design should be more in-keeping with the locality. Hence the proposed materials shown on the plans.
5. Curtilage: the structure already has a curtilage so there would be no change.
6. Access difficulties: Access is excellent ; the location is most sustainable with easy walking or cycling journeys to the hospital, retail parks and the town. Public transport is extremely frequent with an estimated of over 100 journeys past the site each day.

7. Size sufficient to convert: the submitted plans show how the building can be converted to an attractive small dwelling. The building has an internal floor area of 60 square metres – this is 50 % greater than the 40 sq m stipulation set in LPG 13. The addition of a first floor will result in approximately 120 sq m, three times the minimum required

General Observations:

The Council is in a desperate situation in trying to provide adequate housing to meet the Welsh Government's stipulations. Recent approvals contrary to UDP policy have included sites at Ruabon (Pont Adam Crescent) , Summerhill (land adjacent to Chestnut Court), Llay (adjacent to the Straight Mile) both of which were green field sites in the green barrier. A site only ¼ mile west from this site along Berse Road was recommended by the Council officers (but refused) and is now subject of revised application. . All are highly visible sites where there was significant local objection. Whilst this proposal is for one unit only, there is no local objection and the site is very well screened and development is most unlikely to be noticed by passers-by. If the external walling materials were to be changes as originally proposed, then any comments would more likely than not to be positive.

None of the other sites mentioned above are as sustainable as this as they are remote from employment sites, remote from Wrexham town and walking or cycling would be unlikely due to poor road links.

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Conclusion:

The proposal is understood to have been discussed with the local Councillor and with nearby property owners and it is understood not to have resulted in any adverse comments.

It is an opportunity to reuse a redundant building and create a new dwelling for a key worker at the Maelor Hospital. The development will have no adverse impacts upon the appearance of the area indeed it is considered that it will enhance the appearance of the site.

The Council is urged to grant planning permission.

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- **Statement from the design architect:**

I can confirm that I have carefully inspected the steel portal structure on two occasions, and I am more than satisfied that the primary steel frame is structurally sound and in a suitable condition to be converted without extensive rebuilding.

The simple arrangement of the steel portal frame, with the regular grid and clear span make it an ideal structure to convert. The only requirement would be for the replacement of the existing cladding with a highly insulated alternative.

Geraint Edwards

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