

Proposed New Build Offices at 33 King Street, Wrexham, for Unite the Union

Design Statement

Revision B 04September 2014

SUMMARY

The proposal is for the demolition of an existing retail and workshop unit and its replacement with a new-build District Office for Unite the Union.

There is an extant planning approval, ref WRR P/2014/0012, approved 20th March 2014, for the change of use of the existing retail / workshop unit (use class A1) to offices (use class A2 & B1).

BACKGROUND

The current building use is as an Independent Electrical Retailer. This business has been contracting over time due to the growth of on-line shopping and the relocation of the effective 'shopping centre'.

Unite the Union have been searching for suitable premises in a central location for a new District office. The criteria for access via public transport, proximity of support outlets such as snack bars, coffee shops and the like, some private parking and a prominent position within the town have led to consideration of this self-contained site as a new District office.

Existing Site

The site is outside of the central retail area defined by Wrexham Council, and is on the periphery of the commercial district..

The site occupies a prominent position directly opposite the main bus station in Wrexham, and mere minutes walk from either train station. There is plentiful public parking available within 200m, plus the site has existing private car parking.

The site is within the Grosvenor Road Conservation area.

One boundary is the access route for the adjoining building, which presents a featureless elevation to the building.

The rear of the site is bounded by a mixture of stone wall and wire mesh fence. The rear boundary includes a regularly used pedestrian gate and rarely used vehicle gate to the property to the rear.

The site has a slight fall from front to back.

The buildings to the rear on Grosvenor Road have a covenant granting them access across the site to King Street. In addition, the property to no. 35 King Street has a right of access across the site via the east passage to the rear of their property.

Existing Building

The frontage comprises large windows at ground floor directly onto the pavement, with first floor windows above (with high cills internally).

The building is a completely detached construction with private parking to the rear accessed via a private drive to one side

The current accommodation comprises ground floor retail space with staff toilet and small store room, and first floor of offices, service and repair workshop, store, staff kitchen and male staff WC.

The original proposal, as indicated in the aforementioned previous planning approval, was to refurbish this building and alter to suit the new use. However, subsequent investigation of the structure, and changes to Unite's requirements for the building, have led to the current proposal to replace this existing building with a new building fit for the future.

PROPOSAL

The proposed new building is of 3 storeys with a footprint broadly similar to the existing building. The primary driver of the exterior design of the building is the need to respect the aims of the Grosvenor Road Conservation Area Assessment and Management Plan, as prepared by Wrexham Council. This assessment identifies the particular unique elements of this area, and provides guidance on development.

Extracts of the assessment relevant to 33 King Street:

Much of the character derives from the predominantly two and three storey residential scale buildings, tightly packed on regular narrow plot widths and forming an unbroken terrace. The irregular rooflines punctuated with chimneys, and small sash windows deeply recessed within their reveals at first and second floor level, create depth and interest to the street frontage. The dominant and unifying architectural style is typically Georgian with brick walling, slate roofs, brick chimney stacks, dentil courses, decorative window heads and cills.

Numbers 55 to 67 King Street were purpose built as a terrace of seven shops with living accommodation over. The remainder of the houses in the street were mostly altered during the 1920's by local builder Charles Caldicott who converted them to retail and office premises. Traditionally designed shopfronts with fascias, stall risers and pilasters were inserted and these are important to the character and appearance of the street.

The east side of King Street was in use as tennis courts up until the 1950's, when it was developed into the towns' central bus station. The bus station was re-developed in 2002 in a very contemporary architectural style, which contrasts sharply with the character of the rest of the street.

The design guidance provides specific examples of preferred approaches, and these are individually examined below, along with the proposal's response:

Scale

7.2 Restoration and re-development must respect traditional plot widths and avoid massive repetitive and unrelieved facades, which typify so many modern designs.

The proposal retains the existing plot width and, by introducing 'shop front' articulation at ground level avoids a monolithic appearance.

Proportion

7.3 Older building styles followed traditional systems of proportion. In most of the buildings within the Conservation Area, the relationship between windows, doors, floor heights and the relationship of solid to void (the extent of wall area in relation to the number and size of window or door openings), in the design of elevations is crucial. Traditional proportions should be emulated in new development

The King Street elevation of the proposal recreates the traditional hierarchy of window height and widths related to storey heights, with apparent reduced height to the top storey relative to the first floor storey. The overall height of the building, although slightly higher than the adjoining building to no. 35, is no higher than the buildings to no. 31.

The walls to the rear of the proposal continue the theme of solid walls with punched openings, but with less emphasis on traditional proportion to reflect the modern use patterns within.

Building Line

7.4 Frontage development must conform to the historic street pattern.

The proposal retains the existing street pattern, being built up to the existing building line.

Roofs

7.5 The roof-line is nearly always a dominant feature of a building and retention of the original shape, pitch, verge and eaves detail and ornamentation is essential. Heights and shapes of roofs are important; flat roofs are alien to local tradition and are unacceptable. Chimney-stacks are important features of the roofscape and must be retained even if no longer required.

The proposal adopts a varied response to this guidance. To the principal elevation to King Street and the visible gable returns, a duo-pitched slate type roof is created with correctly proportioned fascia and gutter line. The introduction of false 'chimneys' is considered

inappropriate in a new building. To the rear elevations, the roof form is unashamedly modern to reflect the reality of the building footprint. It is considered that the reduction in bulk and cleaner lines complement the more overtly contemporary appearance of the rear of the building.

External Walls

7.6 Any alteration or repair to external walls[The guidance makes no recommendations in respect of new walls to new buildings in the Conservation Area.]

The proposal respects the materials used on the adjoining properties to 35 King Street, and aims to repair the visual discordance caused by the block up to 31 King Street. To this end the elevations are in simple brick with colour and texture relief to the rear elevations. A single brick type is retained to the front elevation as sufficient articulation is provided by the windows and their surround and the different textures to the shopfronts. The brickwork to the rear and side elevations is a different colour to the front to provide further articulation of the more modern concept to the rear.

Where walls form parapets to terraces or to the flat roof, these will have metal cappings.

Windows

7.7 These are important features and must be correctly proportioned, well related to each other and adjoining buildings and should respect the existing openings. Any repair or replacement Particularly important is the method of opening, the set back within the reveal and the sections of glazing bars. Sash and casement windows predominate in the Conservation Area and windows almost always have a vertical emphasis. ...All windows must have a traditional painted finish rather than a modern stained alternative.

The windows to upper floors are clearly 'punched' windows within solid walls. Proportionally, the windows to the main elevation reflect the traditional pattern as described above. To accentuate the window recess without introducing inappropriately thick walls into modern construction, the window reveals and heads are lined with coloured metal surrounds. In addition, sloping window cills (to prevent bird roosting) are created in metal. In addition, the vertical emphasis is provided by a window head detail of a textured coloured slightly recessed panel within the overriding surround feature, to the first floor windows.

The vertical division of the windows, if set to reflect the Georgian emphasis, should be in thirds or sixths rather than half or quarters. The current window divisions on the adjoining buildings are the result of late 19th or early 20th century alterations (as indicated in the assessment) and are not 'correct' in the strictest sense. However, there were considerable objections to the proposed non-symmetrical window divisions, indicated in the previous planning application, raised by the planning department. Given that the new design is not attempting to provide a pastiche of a past style, it is considered reasonable to provide symmetrical windows that do not confirm to the Georgian rules of proportion.

It is inappropriate, in terms of scale, maintenance and strength, to consider the use of painted timber window frames in a new commercial building, and the window frames will therefore be solid-colour finished aluminium or GRP (not UPVC) to retain relatively narrow frame widths.

Windows to the sides and rear of the properties will be simpler in design and of more modern proportion, retaining a simpler metal reveal, head and cill. Windows to the east side passage at ground floor level, which will remain accessible to the public out of working hours, will have integral electrically operated roller shutters for security.

The detail of the windows is such that no purchase is left for roosting birds: any projections will be minimal or, in the case of window cills, steeply sloping surfaces.

Doors

[There is no guidance on new doors in new buildings]

Doors reflect the functional requirements of the building. The main entrances to both Unite and the Tenant's areas on King Street will have out-of-hours shutters to close off the recesses.

Shop-fronts

7.9 Modern shop windows with large areas of unrelieved glass can be difficult to integrate successfully with an historic street to ensure that each façade retains its own identity from the ground upwards and not only from the first floor level. The retention of original shopfronts is essential and replacement shop fronts should reflect the vertical proportions of the elevation. New signs must be the subject of careful consideration to ensure their integration into the design and composition of the urban fabric will be discreet and unobtrusive. Display signs will be restricted to fascia level and fascia boards and lettering must be in scale with the building as a whole and must not obscure traditional elevation features. Corporate styles will be accommodated where possible where they are sympathetic to the special appearance of the area. Hand painted signs or the application of individual lettering will be encouraged. Both fascias and projecting signs may be externally illuminated in a discreet manner. Internally illuminated box fascias and projecting signs must be avoided. The use of perspex or aluminium for signage within the conservation area is undesirable.

The proposal is not for a retail unit. However, the internal functions of the proposal allow the creation of larger windows onto the street frontage emulating a traditional shop front. The ground level is articulated by use of light coloured ceramic or cast stone surrounds to create the proportion and rhythm of traditional shop fronts without creating an inappropriate pastiche of the existing buildings. It is considered visually dishonest to attempt to create a look of a wooden framed shopfront for a new commercial building.

To avoid an uninteresting appearance, the ground floor windows to the meeting room and administration office within have secondary glazing, creating a shallow 'shop window' area into which the Union will place a variety of changing promotional and informative items.

The detail of the surrounds is such that no purchase is left for roosting birds: any projections will be capped with steeply sloping top surfaces. Where a level surface is unavoidable, anti-roosting devices will be provided as part of the design.

Boundary Treatment

7.10 Sandstone walls are the most common and traditional form of enclosure within the conservation area. Red brick walls with sandstone cappings are also common boundary treatments. As a character feature of the area, the removal or alteration of boundary walls will not be viewed favourably.

The proposal has no separate boundary walls to the principal elevation. To the rear, the boundary consists of a mixture of utilitarian sandstone and brick walling, to be retained, and chain-link fencing, to be upgraded.

Ornamental Features

Not relevant for this proposal.

Surfaces

Not relevant for this proposal.

Highway Works

Not relevant for this proposal.

Micro Energy Generation

7.14 Whilst the use of micro energy generation systems is to be encouraged, they will not be accepted where equipment is fixed to building frontages or main or visible elevations where they would have a negative visual impact upon the Conservation Area or where the fabric or setting of a Listed Building is detrimentally affected.

Not relevant for this proposal. However, the flat roof to the rear will provide potential space for roof mounted PV panels, but this would be subject to a separate application.

Car & Cycle Parking

The proposal provides for 14 standard car parking spaces plus one dedicated 'disabled' space, suitably marked. In addition, cycle stands will be provided. Access into the building from the car park will be via the front main entrances.

Refuse and Recycling

A new enclosed area is to be created to house a standard eurobin plus 2 x recycling bins.

ACCESS

The proposal provides principal accommodation at ground floor level , accessible directly from pavement.

Internal passages and doors to be created to adequate widths for all users. A wheelchair accessible toilet will be provided at ground floor and second floor levels for staff and visitor use.

In addition, a suitably sized passenger lift is to be provided to provide access to upper floors for all users.

TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT

The proposal occupies an existing town centre site, directly opposite the bus station. Both local train stations are within 5 minutes walk. There is both private parking on site plus extensive public parking within the adjoining shopping centre within 2 minutes walk.

The permanent staff of the Unite areas within the building number approximately 13 persons. It is anticipated that tenant staff numbers will be no more than 10 persons. Visitors generally number less than 10 persons except for monthly meetings of up to 30 persons and annual meetings of up to 50 persons.

Given the self evident transport facilities, the extensive parking provision and the low numbers of people, it is not considered necessary to provide further analysis of transport links to the development.

WASTE MINIMISATION STATEMENT

It is the intention to insert into the construction contract preliminaries and/or specification the requirement for the Main Contractor when appointed, to ensure that all relevant waste materials, generated by or as a result of the proposed demolition and rebuilding works, the majority of which will be brick, glass and metal window frames, will be required to be disposed of/recycled through any local authority or commercial industrial waste management facility, wherever this is practically possible. We will also request that the main contractor provides all the necessary method statements and Associated documentation for record purposes, in support of this process.

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