

Austin-Smith:Lord

Wrexham County Borough Council

01 February 2010
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DJH/mw/904396/03 a

Wrexham County Borough Museum
Design and Access Statement Ground and First
Floor Alterations

To be read in conjunction with all drawings and
specifications

Introduction

Wrexham County Borough Museum is a grade II listed building that has significant architectural and historic importance. Located near the central shopping district, it currently suffers from a lack of identity and presents a defensive face to the town. The Museum appears physically separated from the town and is enclosed behind the boundary wall (Photo 1). The forecourt is used for car parking which does not emphasise or celebrate the setting of this historic building.

The aspirations of Wrexham County Borough Museum are to provide a welcoming, inspiring place for the whole community which encourages visitors to explore the cultural heritage of the County Borough and its role in the development of Wales and the wider world. To achieve this vision the museum are to provide facilities that will ensure a high quality visitor experience.

The refurbished Museum will have innovative and changing exhibitions that celebrate the history and culture of Wrexham and its local communities, and provide good access to its archives and local studies resources. It will also incorporate dedicated facilities for the use of schools and other user groups.

To realise this vision the Museum is to undergo a series of phased developments; the first of which will create a new entrance encompassing shop, reception / information points and seating area for the cafe, set within a revitalised urban landscape.

Listed Building Consent, Conservation Area Consent and Advertisement consent has been granted under previous submissions and referenced as follows:

Planning Consent WRO - P/2008/0983.
Listed Building Consent - P/2008/0984.
Advertisement Consent - P/2008/0982.

Background Context

Historic Context

The existing building was designed by Thomas Penson, County Surveyor of Denbighshire. The building is constructed of Cefn Mawr sandstone and presented in a Tudor Gothic style. The original 1857 scheme has 4 turrets of which only two remain.

The building was originally built as a depot for the local Denbighshire Militia and was converted to a county court and police station in 1879 when a new barracks was completed at Hightown, Wrexham. Further alterations to the building occurred in 1897 when it was converted to a court building and then utilised as a police station. The police moved to new headquarters in 1976 and the court was relocated in 1977. Thereafter the building was used by Wrexham Citizen's Advice Bureau and then Aston College Art Department. In 1995 it was taken over by Wrexham Borough Council and in 1996 the current museum was opened on the premises.

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The Building Today

The rear and side elevations have been much altered but provide a palimpsest of the various phases of the building's development. The two surviving towers to the rear are critical elements of the original scheme and should be retained as free-standing elements.

The arcaded entrance loggia is of primary significance as a largely intact original element. Police and college era alterations including the external windows and openings into the former cells need to be reconsidered. The central opening mirrors the original layout but has been crudely formed and some reworking would be beneficial.

Internally, several interesting features have survived, including the imposing stone staircase with lantern light, decorative screen and bench where witnesses waited to be called to the stand, two large Courtrooms and the prisoner's exercise yard.

Surviving militia and court staircases are of primary value and should be conserved together with their relationship to key spaces such as the courts. Modern alterations, although limited, should be sensitively reversed based upon surviving evidence.

The modern alterations to the central courtyard make legibility of the historic plan and some of its key spaces impossible. Removal and reinstatement of the open arrangement or, alternatively, a lightweight glazed design allowing the earlier external walls to be revealed would be preferred. Original openings onto this courtyard should be retained.

The museum buildings are of national importance as a key example of the development of a system of barracks for militiamen and regionally as other examples (notably at Chester and Flint) have been lost. Surviving fabric, fixtures, and finishes are of critical importance and must be retained in-situ within an appropriate setting. Some adaptation within much altered or less important areas may be acceptable, however the surviving plan strongly reflects the cellular nature of the earlier buildings and should be retained as far as is practicable.

The Proposed Alterations

Ground Floor Roof Light Removal

Through the development of the detailed design and following investigations within the main gallery and first floor areas a new Listed Building Consent Application was submitted for the removal of the roof light to the ground floor gallery and the alteration to the first floor walls.

The existing roof light which is not part of the original 1857 building fabric but had been implemented during conversion of the building to a museum was found to be leaking, broken glazing needed to be replaced and energy loss was apparent due to the age and quality of the installation. The control of natural daylight was also an issue in the main gallery as high level blinds sympathetic to internal arrangements would prove difficult to install and operate.

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The proposed removal of the roof light will allow a greater control over the exhibition space, by creating a 'black box gallery', ensure that the risk from water leaks is considerably reduced and allow highly efficient insulation to be introduced in place of the roof light. This alteration will allow for an increased flexibility within the existing gallery.

The proposed internal finish will be plasterboard, while the external finish will match the current solar reflective finish but utilise a modern single ply membrane. The proposed materials will fix to the existing roof and if required in the future will allow reinstatement of the historic 1857 building fabric.

Access to the roof will be through the first floor window and will only be required by trained maintenance personnel and building operatives.

First Floor Wall Alterations

The proposed first floor alterations include the removal of light weight plasterboard walls and timber/glass partitions currently forming an existing store room and toilet block accommodation. Removal of the redundant WC's, sinks and the sealing of foul drainage pipe work will also occur.

Following the removal of the existing walls and widening of specific doorways new lightweight plasterboard walls complete with new doors will be introduced. All the new elements can be easily removed to allow reinstatement of the historic arrangement if required at a later date.

The proposals have been placed forward to create a more efficient use of space on the first floor accommodation and widen the corridor to ensure access can be achieved by all future users of the building. This new access will form the main route to first floor education rooms offices and fully accessible toilets.