

**WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL**  
**PLANNING CONTROL BOARD**  
**25<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2001**  
**REPORT OF THE CHIEF PLANNING OFFICER**

**P.C.B 25/10/01**  
**PART1**  
**ITEM NO**  
**FOR DECISION**  
**CPO**

**N6/2001/1145/FP**  
**REFURBISHMENT OF EXISTING GROUND FLOOR RECEPTION AND OFFICES,**  
**SINGLE STOREY REAR EXTENSION, CHANGE OF EXTERNAL LEVELS AROUND**  
**DOORS AND ADDITION OF RAMPS AND STEPS, WELWYN HATFIELD DISTRICT**  
**COUNCIL, CAMPUS EAST, WELWYN GARDEN CITY, HERTS**

**APPLICANT : WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL**

(Handside)

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 These proposals relate to the Council Offices but are solely concerned with the old building and the arched link to the new wing. The original building is very prominently located on the corner of the Campus at its junction with Bridge Road with the main west elevation of the old building being pleasingly symmetrical in terms of the position of window openings and dormers together with the main entrance porch balcony above it and clock tower. The building is finished in red brick with attractively proportioned Georgian windows. Entering the building from the main entrance from the Campus the internal floor levels rise up by two stair treads making access for the disabled difficult. The site is located in the Conservation Area.

**2.0 THE PROPOSALS**

2.1 The motivation for the works consists of the proposals by the Council's premises Department for the re organisation of the main Council reception and interview room facilities and to provide disabled access to the building as required by the Disabilities and Discrimination Act, which relates to access to Public Buildings. As noted above at the present time there is no level access to the main reception. The internal changes do not require planning permission. This application is for the attendant changes to the external elevations of the building which consist of the following elements.

i. It is intended to provide a new disabled access ramp to either side of the main entrance as well as two external steps to achieve level access to the interior of the building. The sides of the access ramps which flank the stepped entrance will be finished in a low wall and finished in stone to match the stone of the existing entrance door surround. The top of the wall would be finished with a handrail matching the existing handrail on the balcony above the entrance door. The entrance door itself will be replaced with new painted doors matching the existing which will be closed at night. During the day the doors would be open revealing two automatic glazed doors. It is also intended to infill the existing arch link between the new and old wings with glazing associated with the creation of a new internal access between the new wing and the old building. The proposals also show that the existing Council coat of arms and lettering identifying the location of the main reception will be moved and lighting is proposed to either side of the doorway and uplighting the clock tower. The lighting and signage do not require advertisement consent or planning permission.

ii. On the elevation of the building facing the into the courtyard between the old building and the new, (the north elevation), the only change to the elevations consists of the replacement of one of the window panels next to a blank return wall with a new entrance door, with the head height of the new door matching the height of the head of the adjacent windows. Two steps are again featured to achieve the internal floor height of the old building. This door will give access to a staff corridor within the old building.

iii. The east, (rear), elevation of the building would be changed in the following respects. Firstly, the existing steps beside the print room will be replaced by a new ramp and stepped access to a new door matching the main entrance door. Within the courtyard it is intended that there would be a small extension to the existing single storey extension to provide additional office accommodation. The extension would be 3 metres deep and would be finished in red brick with a parapet wall with a concrete coping which would be used to hide air conditioning equipment contained on the flat roof behind. This would contain a new staff entrance with the window openings on it matching the existing windows.

iv. The elevation of the building to the south of the courtyard would be altered by introducing new stepped entrances to the doors giving access to the main building and a new entrance door to the fire escape.

2.2 The ground floor plan submitted with the application shows that the existing service yard will be landscaped, but the drawing is annotated to indicate that the landscaping is only indicative and does not form a part of this application. Therefore, while there is the modest single storey extension to the rear of the building, car parking and servicing arrangements will be largely unaffected by this proposal but one parking space will be lost and the bicycle shed will need to be relocated or alternative provision made.

### **3.0 MAIN RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES**

3.1 The adopted Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No 1 1998.

Policy BEV 5 - Welwyn Garden City

Policy BEV 10 - Development In Conservation Areas

Gen Criteria 4 – Servicing, Access And Car Parking

Add Criteria 1 – Access To Building Entrances

### **4.0 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED**

4.1 The application has been advertised by site notice and by press advertisement. To date one letter of representation has been received from the Welwyn Garden City Society. They have objected to the original proposals, (now amended), on the basis of the impact which the treatments to the disabled access ramp to the main front entrance would obscure. They indicate that “ the design should ensure that it is appropriate for the important position on the building, and is designed with a sympathetic approach and attention paid to the detailing that the current schemes lack ”. The Garden City Society conclude that the application should be refused as being contrary to Policy BEV 5 and BEV 10 of the adopted District Plan. At the time of writing this report the comments of the Garden City

Society in relation to the amended plans had not been received and any additional comments which they make will be circulated to Members in the normal manner. The amendments which have been sought take account of the comments and suggestions made by the Welwyn Garden City Society.

- 4.2 In addition the Council's adviser from the Built Environment Advisory and Management Service has been consulted in relation to the proposals and has commented that he has no objection to the scheme and would find a scheme which involved provision of a railing to the access ramp on the front elevation acceptable.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION OF PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 The main issues in this case are whether the proposal would represent development which can be assimilated into the Conservation Area in a way which will preserve or enhance its appearance and character as required by Section 72 of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings And Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and reflected in the wording of Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 "Planning and the Historic Environment", (PPG15), and Policy BEV 10 of the adopted District Plan. Policy BEV 5 indicates that new development will be required to reflect the established character of the area in terms of landscaping and space, lower building densities, the formality of layout orderly grouping of buildings and the uniformity of its architecture. In terms of these attributes, I believe that the main contribution played by the Council Offices in the built environment of the town relates to its architecture as a landmark building. Therefore taking into account the prominence of it and the pleasing symmetry of the front elevation, I believe that the main question is whether these proposals respect those qualities.
- 5.2 Dealing with the front elevation, the alterations to provide the disabled access ramp have now been amended so that in terms of the width of the ramp either side of the main entrance door the appearance of the main front elevation retains its symmetry. Similarly, the materials proposed for the construction of the access ramp, the treatment to the handrail on top of it and the appearance of the new entrance door will all pay reference to materials and details to be found on the existing building at the present time. In addition, in my opinion, the amended scheme which is before Members goes a long way towards addressing the concerns which have been raised by the Garden City Society. The enclosure of the link is necessary to provide a covered way to give internal access at ground floor level between the old building and the new building. The use of glass is considered to be the only acceptable solution to this as any more solid infilling could look incongruous on this elevation of the building. The drawing indicates that there will be some form of manifestation on the glass, for example the logo of the Council could be acid etched on it or there could be a degree of pattern or tinting to it. The option of having gates or some form of railing behind the glass could be added without the need for planning permission. This will be important to ensure that the fact that the area is actually closed off is apparent to the visually impaired. Subject to conditions requiring submission of samples of the stone, to agree the colour finish of the ramp, railings and to secure an appropriate treatment to the glass in the link I am satisfied that in terms of the requirements of both Policy BEV 5 and BEV 10, the proposal will reflect the established character of the building and will preserve the character and appearance of this part of the town centre Conservation Area. It will be apparent that provision of a level ramped access to the main entrance complies with the requirements of Add Criteria 1 of the adopted Plan.

- 5.3 Turning to the other elevations of the building I would make the following observations.  
The alterations to the north elevation in the courtyard between the old and the new building is straightforward and again pays reference to the appearance of the higher quality door openings to the offices. Similarly, the alterations to the east elevation of the building are also straightforward. Once again, the provision of a ramp as well as the steps, to ease movement around the building for those with impaired mobility can only be regarded as welcome in terms of the requirements of Add Criteria 1.
- 5.4 The main service courtyard area of the old wing of the building is probably one of the least pleasing parts of the Council Offices. There are a range of different door openings and the elevations of the building are cluttered with various air conditioning units and various types of guttering and down pipes ranging from original white painted cast iron to grey plastic. While the provision of an extension projecting 3 metres between the wings either side of the service yard with a high parapet wall will partially obscure the round headed brick detail reveal on the rear elevation of the building the increased height of the parapet enables the air conditioning units to be hidden behind the parapet on the flat roof of the extension. It should also be noted that the parapet features the concrete coping detail which is a feature of this area of the building. The installation of the three windows on the rear elevation of the extension will need to be controlled to ensure details of the windows are submitted to me prior to installation so that in the event that the existing windows are not re used an appropriate design of white painted wooden window is installed. Similarly, the extension would involve moving the location of pipe runs and possibly involve other alterations to rainwater goods.
- 5.5 In view of the mixed nature of some of the materials used for rainwater goods, I feel that a condition will also be required to ensure that any new down pipes, hoppers etc are finished in an appropriate material, for example white extruded aluminium. The alterations to the south courtyard elevation also help to tidy up what is at present an untidy elevation although the difference in floor levels between the fire escape and the internal floor level of the office accommodation does mean that there is some difference in the head heights of doors. Nevertheless, I feel that the alterations to the south elevation can be regarded as a genuine improvement on the existing, and that in general terms it is fair to say that the alterations to the courtyard area as a whole not only preserve but enhance the character and appearance of this part of the building. In terms of the loss of the one parking space I do not believe that this will be critical as my own observations lead me to conclude that it is rare for this part of the service yard to be full of parked vehicles on a regular basis. A condition will be necessary to ensure that a new cycle shed is provided prior to the commencement of work to ensure that facilities are available for those staff who travel to work by cycle.
- 5.6 It has been noted that the drawing shows landscaping to the main rear service yard but that this is only indicative and does not form part of the current application. While the concept of a landscaping scheme for this portion of the building is an attractive idea, the loss of the service yard would need to be carefully considered and the implications of provision being made elsewhere for the vehicles which use it would need to be fully evaluated. Subject to a condition relating to the provision of bicycle parking facilities, I am satisfied that the proposal would comply with the requirements of Gen Criteria 4 of the Plan.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 I have concluded that the proposal will not cause any demonstrable harm to, and will potentially enhance, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. I believe that subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions the proposals will comply with the requirements of Policy Bev 5, Bev 10, Gen Criteria 4 and Add Criteria 1 of the adopted District Plan.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 I therefore recommend that planning application N6/2001/1145/FP be approved subject to the following conditions:

1. SCO1 Standard Time Limit Full Permission.
2. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, details and samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the access ramp, including the colour finish and appearance of all handrails, of the glazing to the link, of all rainwater goods and of the windows on the east elevation shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall only proceed in strict accordance with the details so agreed.

### **Reason**

In order to ensure that the development is carried out using materials which preserve or enhance the appearance of the building, to protect the character of this part of the Conservation Area and to ensure that the proposals comply with the requirements of Policy Bev 5 and Bev 10 of the adopted Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No 1, 1998.

3. The existing bicycle shed shall be relocated/a new bicycle shed provided in a position to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved.

### **Reason**

In order to ensure that facilities are available for those employees of the Council who travel to work by cycle and to encourage employees to use alternative modes of transport.

### **Background Papers**

Planning application N6/2001/1145/FP