

PLANNING COMMITTEE	DATE: 13/02/2017
REPORT OF THE SENIOR PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICE MANAGER	PWLLHELI

Number: 4

Application Number: C16/0835/44/CR

Date Registered: 09-Nov-2016

Application Type: Listed Building Consent

Community: Porthmadog

Ward: Porthmadog West

Proposal: Conversion of former chapel into 9 residential units

Location: Capel Garth, Bank Place, PORTHMADOG, LL49 9AA

Summary of Recommendation: TO APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS

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1. Description:

- 1.1 This is a listed building application to change the use and convert a former Chapel into 9 residential units. The existing building has been empty for approximately 18 years and was last used as a chapel in 1999 and the building was listed in 2000. An application was approved in 2010 to convert the building into 8 living units, however, this consent was not implemented and the time period has expired.
- 1.2 This proposal involves converting the building into nine living units with parking provision on the lower ground floor. The building has been empty since 1999 and is by now in a fairly poor condition. It is proposed to convert the lower ground floor into a car park for the units, one parking space for each unit. It is proposed to gain access to the car park by removing the existing timber double-doors to the front of the building and create a vehicular opening with mechanical iron doors. The existing stone pillars will need to be removed from the front wall of the building to site the new access. It is proposed to convert the ground floor into four units and this would entail the removal of the existing seating and creating new units with partitions. On the existing first floor where the gallery is situated, again it is intended to remove the seating and also the gallery itself in order to create a new second floor. The first floor would comprise five living units with a kitchen and living room on this floor, with the bedrooms and bathrooms on the second floor. Again, the new units would be created from anew with partitions.
- 1.3 It is not intended to undertake many external adaptations to the building, the main change will be the vehicular access to the front. The remainder of the front openings will remain as they are. It is not intended to make any external alternations to the eastern elevation opposite Dora Street, or to the western elevation, except for the removal of a small unused building that is already in poor repair. In the back, it is proposed to create one new opening that will serve units number 3,4,8 and 9 whilst units number 1, 2, 5 and 7 will gain access via the existing front openings. There will be no other new windows or doors created and all the existing windows will be renovated as they are with secondary glass installed internally.
- 1.4 The proposal also involves an amenity area at the side of the building opposite Dora Street, where a small open plot on the lower ground floor already exists.
- 1.5 The site lies within the town centre of Porthmadog with a class 3 highway running in front of the building. It is a grade II listed building and is also situated within the Porthmadog Conservation Area.

2. Relevant Policies:

- 2.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and paragraph 2.1.2 of Planning Policy Wales emphasise that planning decisions should be in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Planning considerations include National Planning Policy and the Unitary Development Plan.
- 2.2 Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 the Council has a duty not only to carry out sustainable development, but also to take reasonable steps in exercising its functions to meet its sustainable development (or well-being) objectives. This report has been prepared in consideration of the Council's duty and the 'sustainable development principle', as set out in the 2015 Act; in making the recommendation the Council has sought to ensure that present needs are met without

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compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is considered that there would be no significant or unacceptable impact upon the achievement of well-being objectives as a result of the proposed recommendation.

2.3 Gwynedd Unitary Development Plan 2009:

B2 – ALTERATIONS TO LISTED BUILDINGS OR BUILDINGS IN THEIR CURTILAGES - Ensure that proposals do not cause substantial damage to the special architectural or historical character of Listed Buildings.

B3 – DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING THE SETTING OF A LISTED BUILDING - Ensure that proposals have no adverse effect on the setting of Listed Buildings and that they conform to a number of criteria aimed at safeguarding the special character of the Listed Building and the local environment.

B4 – DEVELOPMENT WITHIN OR THAT AFFECTS THE SETTING OF CONSERVATION AREAS - Ensure that proposals within conservation areas, or which affect their setting, are refused unless they aim to maintain or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area and its setting.

The Gwynedd and Anglesey Joint Local Development Plan which is currently being prepared is subject to an ongoing Public Inquiry. At present, it is not a relevant planning consideration for determining planning applications.

2.4 National Policies:

The Welsh Office Circular 61/96 Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas.

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 9, November 2016) Chapter 6: Safeguarding the Historic Environment

3. Relevant Planning History:

3.1 C05D/0644/44/CR Conversion of former chapel into eight residential units - Approved 8/3/2010

3.2 C05D/0645/44/LL Conversion of former chapel into eight residential units with a car park on the site - Approved - 8/3/2010

4. Consultations:

Community/Town Council: No objection

The Council for British Archaeology: Not received

The Victorian Society: Thank you for consulting with the Victorian Society on this application. Having considered the submitted documentation we object to the proposals, which would seriously compromise the special interest of this nationally important building.

The letters from both the Ancient Monuments Society and the Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service highlight what is less than apparent from the information submitted

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with the application, which is that the chapel interior is distinguished and almost completely intact. Its gallery and plan form are perfectly preserved and the array of fixtures and fittings – good quality joinery, organ, set fawr etc – are clearly of considerable distinction.

The application proposes converting the chapel to residential use, creating nine flats (according to the notification we have received) within the envelope of the listed building. This would entail the intensive subdivision of the chapel interior, the destruction of the understated grandeur of its spacious volume and the almost total loss of its good quality fixtures and fittings. In short, the conversion proposed would all but obliterate the interior of the listed building, in the process causing substantial harm to its significance. External alterations, such as the destructive and objectionable means adopted to provide parking, by crashing through the east elevation of the building, would amplify that harm still further. Such unusually high levels of harm would require correspondingly robust and convincing justification, which this application simply does not provide.

We concede that a degree of alteration – perhaps a significant one – may be required to secure the sensitive reuse of this building. However, due to the highly and inevitable detrimental impact that would result from any form of residential conversion it should be deemed acceptable only as a last resort. In order to establish the principle of residential conversion it should be demonstrated that there are no other viable alternatives. Finding some form of community or performance use, one that utilises the volume and preserves the special interest of the interior, should be the aim.

To accept the principle of residential conversion is not to accept the creation of any number of residential units. As a general rule, the more units created, the greater the harm. If it is the case that residential use is considered acceptable, then the number of units created should be the minimum required to achieve a viable conversion of the building. Even in the context of such schemes, the creation of eight or nine flats, as is proposed here, would represent a highly intensive residential conversion and has not been justified.

In light of the above we object to this application, which proposes a scheme that is preferable only to complete demolition of the listed building, We urge you to refuse it consent.

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales:

Not received

Ancient Monuments Society:

This is the sort of application that excites a strong if ambiguous response.

For a listed building that is about to enter its third decade of disuse, such a promised sizeable capital investment in its rescue is welcome. However, the price of rescue is hugely destructive.

The interior shown in the Bat Report is dilapidated but yet

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conveys an air of grandeur. It confirms the internal survival of the galleries with three tiers of seating, the particularly elaborate pulpit and rail, (most of) the organ and the great swirl of ceiling.

The applicants promise complete retention of the ceiling, albeit divided between four apartments, the relocation of the pulpit within one unit (F2) and some minimal reuse of gallery woodwork. Everything else is destroyed. The interior would be utterly unrecognisable. The new internal structure would be one of steel and concrete.

Moreover, even these promises appear contradictory

- a) How is the retention of the ceiling compatible with the exposure of the timber framed trusses promised in the annotation to Drawing 18?
- b) I cannot find any reference to the pulpit in the plans provided.

We note the provision of sheltered car parking within the sub ground floor of the shell and that such a provision is a requirement of Gwynedd Council. The applicants state that that necessitates the complete loss of all the interior for replacement by new load-bearing steel and concrete floors. But does that follow? Such an approach must be very expensive as well as destructive. What guarantees are being sought that the shell can withstand the complete removal of the galleries (which act as a quasi-ring beam)?

It is stated that present doors cannot be reused because they cannot be made fire-resistant. But is this the case? Such doors are regularly retained in conversions, through the use of intumescent paint or by increasing the depth by adding proprietary fire-resistant material within the door.

It may be unrealistic to call for this chapel to be put to the sort of auditorial use for which it was designed. We appreciate that such a use has not materialised since closure in 1999. However the current application goes to the other extreme and in effect only keeps the exterior. Has consideration gone to creating less than 9 units? The fewer the units the less pressure to subdivide and to devote the whole of the sub ground floor to car parking.

Better this scheme than demolition but we suggest that your Council does need to satisfy itself that a less destructive scheme is out of the question. Such a “gut and stuff” approach should be a matter of last resort.

Unless it is quite clear that more accommodating uses cannot be found, we have to oppose the present application.

Further to our representations of 29 November we are grateful for the alert that a revised Design and Access Statement and brand new Heritage Impact Assessment have been lodged in respect of this application.

We have read this through carefully.

I am not sure that they shake us from the view that this is effectively a scheme of “gut and stuff”. It may be marginally better than the preceding scheme for 8 units but the

difference is minimal. In fact, reading the revised documentation we note that the apparent intention to retain the (exceptionally fine) pulpit in one of the apartments has been dropped in favour either of its resiting in another building or breaking it up to use bits and pieces as part of the conversion. By the way I very much doubt that The Church in Wales will have any interest in re-housing the pulpit – they have too many already from their own closed churches. The photo confirms the pulpit as a major piece in what looks to be varnished mahogany with Rococo cartouches resting on a large stem looking like an upturned flower. This is then set against an elaborate gallery front with vigorously carved newel posts. The decorated panel in front of the organ is just as good.

It is astonishing that the Heritage Statement doesn't pick up on this.

Vague promises about keeping bits and pieces are not adequate.

I am not sure it gets us very far to describe the internal alterations are “reversible” – the use of that word implies light partitions and the like not several floors in steel. The ejection and dispersal of the fittings is clearly not “reversible”. And a car park in the basement is certainly not.

This scheme can only be accepted by your Council if you are truly convinced that it really is the last resort.

The Georgian Group:

Not received

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings:

Not received

Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service:

Concerns regarding the proposal, but propose a standard condition of a photographic record.

Public Consultation:

A notice was posted on the site and nearby residents were notified. The advertising period has expired and correspondence was received stating concern for the following:

- Some of the windows in the units will look down at their property and details are required regarding window materials and their size
- Placing scaffolding on their land and car access problems.

Following the above consultations, the application was discussed with the Agent and it was agreed to retain more of the existing internal features, namely the floor tiles in both entrances, the original stairs, the ceiling rose to be retained in the above units, the pitch pine doors, the wooden panels behind the organ to be retained as well as the pulpit

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woodwork etc to be retained and re-located within the building.

5. Assessment of the material planning considerations:

- 5.1 As this is a listed building application, the only matters that are assessed are the conservation matters, namely the impact on the appearance and historical character and architectural nature of the listed structure. There are no other matters that are relevant in assessing this application.
- 5.2 Paragraph 68 of the Welsh Office Circular 61/96 "Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas" states that Local Planning Authorities should have particular regard for the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Policy B2 of the GUDP supports this and states that proposals for external or internal alterations, additions or change of use of Listed Buildings will be approved provided that the proposal will not cause significant harm to the special architectural or historic character of the building.
- 5.3 The application details have been outlined in the description at the beginning of this report. The former Chapel is a striking stone building situated on a busy and prominent road within the town of Porthmadog. The building has been empty since the Chapel closed in 1999 and the intention to re-use it is to be welcomed. As mentioned above, an application was approved in 2010 to convert the building into 8 living units, however, this consent was not implemented and the time period has expired. The building has been on the open market for some time and no interest has been shown and over time the condition of the building has deteriorated significantly.
- 5.4 It is proposed to convert the lower ground floor into a car park for the units, one parking space for each unit. This part of the building has been used as a storage area together with teaching and classrooms in the past, where no special features existed. Since there are no special features on this floor it is considered suitable to create a parking area and is a fair compromise without losing any special features within the building. However, to enable the siting of a car park on this lower ground floor a new vehicular access has to be created in front of the building. Therefore it is proposed to remove the existing timber double-doors to the front and create a vehicular opening with mechanical (roller shutter) metal doors. The existing stone pillars will need to be removed from the front wall of the building to site the new access. This location is not deemed ideal in terms of the impact on the appearance of the historical building, but due to road safety issues it is considered that there is no other option to provide suitable parking. However, it is therefore considered that there is an opportunity to get a suitable design for this new access, as the existing proposal of installing metal 'roller shutter' doors is not suitable at all. It is considered that suitable doors can be agreed by imposing a relevant condition. It should also be considered that the boundary wall along the front of the building is quite high in certain sections. It is proposed to remove the central section in order to site the access, however, the remainder of this wall would hide sections of the new access from different directions and would mean that the view from the street would remain quite similar and would respect the building and its setting. Therefore it is considered that these adaptations would be a fair compromise to enable the development to proceed and to ensure the building's long term use.
- 5.5 It is proposed to convert the ground floor into four units that will entail the removal of the existing seating and creating new units with partitions. The original seating is still in place as well as the organ, pulpit and 'set fawr'. It is proposed to remove the

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seats and retain them for re-use within the development together with other features. Units numbers 1, 2, 5 and 7 will gain access via the existing front openings where it is proposed to retain the two original stairs and the floor tiles. A new opening will be created at the back of the building as access to units numbers 3,4, 6, 8 and 9. There is an existing opening at the back and therefore it is not deemed that creating a new opening would impair too much on the buildings's appearance or character. The new walls would be located between the existing windows without impairing on the external appearance of the building. Following discussions with the agent, it is proposed to re-use some of the original features within the units, e.g. create kitchen cupboards from the seats together with the woodwork from the 'set fawr'. Sections of the organ will also be re-used and this information is noted in the statements and it is considered that it would be fair to propose a condition to this end. It is proposed to restore all the original windows together with the stained glass with the addition of internal secondary glass.

- 5.6 On the existing first floor where the gallery is situated, it is again intended to remove the seating and also the gallery itself in order to create a new second floor. This means that the cast iron pillars that support the gallery will have to be removed as it is not possible to retain these. However, it is considered that it would be reasonable to include a condition to re-use them within the development. The first floor would comprise five living units with a kitchen and living room on this floor and the bedrooms and bathrooms on the second floor. Again, the new units would be created from anew with partitions. As on the ground floor, it is proposed to place the walls between the windows in order that they do not impair them. It is also intended to re-use the features as described above. One of the main features within the building is the ceiling rose and there is no intention to remove this, however, the walls of the new units will divide it up with the majority located within two units and therefore it will not be visible in its entirety. Again, it is considered that a condition would be appropriate to ensure that the rose will not be affected significantly and to agree on how to suitably place the unit walls to ensure that the rose remains complete.
- 5.7 It is considered that the proposal will entail significant internal work and that many of the original features will be lost. However, in such cases consideration has to be given to how long the building has been empty, the period it has been marketed for sale as well as the implications of not approving any such development. In this case, and despite some responses during the consultation period, it is considered that the principle of the proposal is acceptable and is a means of ensuring this substantial building's future in the centre of the town of Porthmadog. We appreciate that it is necessary to adapt or remove at a fairly extensive rate the features within the building, however, there has to be a balance between this and ensuring a future for the building. As things are, the building has been unused for nearly twenty years and there has been no interest to convert it for any other use except for residential and of course such work has to be viable for any developer. During this period its condition has deteriorated and now it is impacting on the building itself, the streetscape and the amenities of nearby housing not to mention being a hazard. Therefore the correct balance needs to be struck between safeguarding a listed building and its features and ensure its long term use. The reason for listing the building states "listed for its special architectural interest as a prominent, large and imposing late c19 chapel of definite character", and when approving this application it is considered that the above is still true.
- 5.8 An objection was received expressing concern regarding the installation of new windows on the western side of the building that would in the opinion of those who were concerned entail overlooking. There is no intention to create new opening (except for the door mentioned above) only to continue with the existing windows.

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Having considered the nature of the site and the location of the existing windows, there is no concern regarding overlooking or the loss of privacy from three directions and this will be discussed in greater detail in the full application. Currently these windows are frosted glass and therefore it is not considered that it can be established that there is overlooking or loss of privacy from these windows. It would also be totally reasonable (as in the previous permission and as this is what is currently there) to ensure that these windows are re-glazed with frosted glass (or similar) in order to ensure the privacy of the adjacent house and that no unacceptable overlooking would occur as a result of the proposal.

- 5.9 The Victorian Group and the Ancient Monuments Society strongly object the proposal and state that the interior of the chapel would be lost and this is totally unacceptable and that the application should be refused. We appreciate the points they make which are quite fair, however, no interest has been shown in the building since the previous approval expired and the building is rapidly deteriorating. It also needs to be noted here that the previous permission was granted in 2010 for eight living units with much greater internal adaptations. None of the interior features were retained and this application uses much more of the original building and this is to be welcomed. In this case, it is considered that some loss and significant internal change is a compromise that has to be made to ensure the building's use and future. Welsh Office Circular 61/96 states *where new uses are proposed, it is important to balance the effect of any changes on the special interest of the listed building against the viability of any proposed use and of alternative, and possibly less damaging uses*". Having considered the above assessment, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable for approval.

6. Conclusions:

- 6.1 It is considered that the principle of the proposal to re-use and convert the building is to be welcomed which will ensure the future and new use of the listed building. The interior work is substantial in nature, however, as explained above this is considered essential to enable the establishment of a new long term use for the building and the compromise is to ensure the many of the features that will be removed/taken off are used within the units.

7. Recommendation:

- 7.1 To approve subject to receiving confirmation from CADW and to relevant conditions relating to:
1. 5 years
 2. In accordance with the plans
 3. Design and finish of the vehicular access, to include the door, to be approved in writing by the LPA prior to the commencement of any other work subject to the permission.
 4. Photographic record condition.
 5. Roof slates to match the existing slates
 6. Original windows as they are to be repaired and any windows replaced to be in keeping with the original/glazing conditions with opaque/frosted glass
 7. New back door to be made of wood to match the rest
 8. Cast-iron rainwater goods
 9. Original stairs to be retained at all times
 10. Details to safeguard the ceiling rose to be agreed beforehand and approved in writing by the LPA
 11. Details of any external vents to be approved in writing by the LPA prior to commencement of the work.
 12. Agree on a plan to re-use the internal features within the development.