



PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT
PROPOSED RETENTION OF UNAUTHORISED WORKS AND
CHANGE OF USE OF BUILDING TO 32 AFFORDABLE FLATS AT 18
ORCHARD STREET, NEATH.

on behalf of
Orchard Street (Wales) Ltd and Linc Cymru

Our Ref: 1010.b
Date: January 2021
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Evans Banks Planning Ltd has been instructed by Orchard Street (Wales) Ltd to prepare a full planning application for the retention of unauthorised works relating to the construction of a building and its change of use to 32 affordable flats at 18 Orchard Street, Neath. The application has been prepared following the receipt of a response from the local planning authority (LPA) to a pre-application enquiry, the contents of which have been given full consideration.

1.2 This Planning, Design and Access Statement therefore forms part of the submissions of the application to be considered by the Authority, and provides information on the following points:

- A brief description of the site and surrounding area
- A description of the proposed development
- Consideration of relevant local planning policy
- Accessibility
- Character
- Community Safety
- Environmental Sustainability
- Movement to, from and within the development

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 THE SITE

- 2.1.1 The application site (pictured below) relates to a prominent partially constructed semi-detached building on Orchard Street, Neath.



Photograph 1

- 2.1.2 The site has been subject to a number of planning applications submitted and approved between 2004 and 2007 for the demolition of a former building (former Liberal Club) and its replacement with a new block of offices, served by on-site car parking at the basement level. As illustrated above at Photograph 1, much of the construction of the building has been completed, although internally it is considered significant work is needed for the building to become habitable.
- 2.1.3 The application building itself is set over six floors (including the basement) with windows on all elevations bar its southern elevation, which adjoins the neighbouring building. The main access doors into the building are then located in the eastern

elevation, which lead to the public highway (Orchard Street). Vehicular access is then via a ramp to the basement level, again leading from the site's eastern boundary.

2.1.4 Internally the building currently consists of a single open space on all floors.

2.1.5 Externally the property currently contains a small amount of circulation space along the side and front of the building.

2.2 THE SURROUNDING AREA

2.2.1 The building lies on the edge of Neath Town Centre, towards its south eastern boundary. Further along Orchard Street are retail units (illustrated in Photograph 2) and directly opposite is a Public House (illustrated in Photograph 3).



Photograph 2



Photograph 3

2.2.2 The building itself adjoins others of a retail (A1/A3) nature on their ground floor and residential uses above. This is also replicated by properties to the site's rear. To the east then is a place of worship whilst Victoria Gardens and the Town's Bus Station is located to the south east. The town's train station is located a short distance to the west.

2.2.3 Notwithstanding the site's position within the Town Centre, it should be noted that the commercial retail core of the Town Centre is located away from the site to the north, west and south west, as shown on the accompanying Land Use Audit Plan. The predominant land use mix then throughout is residential units on the first floor and above, with commercial uses then positioned at the ground floor.

2.2.4 With regards to bus travel, the Town Centre bus station is located within a very short distance of the application site, served by regular services, providing regular access to the surrounding and wider areas of the County and beyond. The application site also lies a short distance from Neath train station (approx. 4-minute walk) which gives access to all areas of South Wales and beyond. As a result of this high level of sustainability, on-street parking is limited on Orchard Street.

2.3 PROJECT DESIGN PARAMETERS AND PRINCIPLES

2.3.1 As a result of the local context and the aspirations of the Applicant for the property, the following design principles and parameters have influenced the design of the proposal subject of this planning application:-

- **Scale** – To generally retain the application building in its existing form, with no increase in volume.
- **Design** – To respect the existing position the building occupies within the settlement through retention of key features and the use of reflective and respectful external finishes.
- **Access** – To utilise the existing means of access serving the site and include facilities within it for the promotion of sustainable means of transport to capitalise on the position of the site within the local context.

3.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The proposal is in effect for full planning permission for the change of use of a partially constructed office building for the purposes of 32 affordable residential flats. The following information should therefore be read in conjunction with the accompanying plans, drawings and associated supporting information.

Project Overview

- 3.2 The proposal is to create 19 one-bedroom (two person) flats for older persons, 8 two-bedroom (three person) flats for older persons and 5 one-bedroom (one persons) flats for move on accommodation for previously homeless persons.
- 3.3 The proposed mix has been influenced and amended as a result of previous consultation and discussions with the Housing Strategy Department in Neath Port Talbot CBC (see accompanying consultation response). It was identified that, there is a significant strategic housing need for older persons accommodation in the town centre in the form of both one and two bedroom provision.
- 3.4 The aforementioned discussions also highlighted a need for an element of accommodation provision for those currently homeless, in order to assist in achieving the Welsh Government's vision to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurrent. As a result, the application proposal also includes 5 one-bed (one person) flats for this group, with units being self-contained one-bedroom homes with no shared living facilities. The flats are proposed to be move on/step down accommodation for single previously homeless persons. As a result, the flats created will be occupied by individuals that are likely to have been previously supported more intensively (e.g., in a hostel), but would be sufficiently independent to live by themselves with low level support.
- 3.5 This low level of support will be delivered by a specialist support provider and will be delivered in the individual's residence or at another facility. There will be no

communal/support delivery facilities therefore and so there are no institutional aspects to the proposed building. The only communal facilities are practical ones such as corridors, bin stores, bicycle parking etc.

- 3.6 With regard to the older persons accommodation, homes of this nature are operationally defined as 'Over 55's' within Linc's independent living department. The flats and building will be Development Quality Requirements (DQR) compliant with design and specification features to assist older persons. Examples include buggy store, walk in showers and power assisted doors. The flats will not be care in nature and so these features will allow residents to live independently.
- 3.7 The older persons accommodation will be managed by Linc-Cymru's internal housing management team that specialise in health and housing. The proposals do not include communal facilities and there will be no day-to-day manager. All homes created will be made available at social rent levels and with standard tenancies.
- 3.8 Upon the development's completion, the building will be controlled and managed by a local housing association.

Internal Accommodation

- 3.9 Internally, the space will be divided to provide the following accommodation mix:
- 5 one bed 'Move On' flats
 - 8 two bed flat
 - 19 one bed flats
- 3.10 The above accommodation will be provided over the ground, first, second, third and fourth floor levels.
- 3.11 The building also includes a basement level, which will provide 10-off street parking spaces, cycle racks to accommodate 46 bikes, a buggy store and a plant room. All

will be accessed from the adjoining external space via a ramp, through a new roller shutter door.

External Finishes

3.12 As the accompanying drawings illustrate, the proposal will see little alteration to the external appearance of the existing building in terms of its external finishes to that previously proposed.

3.13 The only and main difference to that previously proposed relates to the ground floor front element. This will involve the removal of the previous 'bay' style element, with a new hard and soft landscaped area between the application building and public highway. This area will also accommodate the bin store to serve all of the proposed units.

Drainage

3.14 All surface water and foul water will continue to be disposed of as existing, via connections to the public sewer.

Waste Management

3.15 All domestic waste will be managed as set out in the accompanying Waste Management Plan. A key part of this is the aforementioned Bin Store, which will be managed by Linc.

Biodiversity

3.16 Based upon online searches for bats and having undertaken Bat Surveys (which accompany this application) in the near vicinity, 2x Schwegler 1WQ (or similar) boxes are to be erected to the rear elevation of the building alongside one sparrow terrace box.

4.0 LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

4.0.1 In terms of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the adopted development plan for the area within which the application site is positioned is the *Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (LDP)*.

4.0.2 On the basis of the above, the following policies are considered of particular relevance to the application proposal and so have been given full consideration in its preparation :-

- Policy SP3 – Sustainable Communities
- Policy SP21 – Built Environment and Historic Heritage
- Policy AH1 – Affordable Housing
- Policy R2 – Proposals within Retail Centres
- Policy TR2 – Design and Access of New Development
- Policy BE1 – Design

4.0.3 In addition to the above, the following ‘Supplementary Planning Guidance’ (SPG) produced by the Local Authority have also been given due consideration:

- Parking Standards (Oct 2016)
- Design (July 2017)

4.1 POLICY SP3 – SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

4.4.1 Policy SP3 (*Sustainable Communities*) states that the delivery of “*sustainable, healthy and cohesive communities and the conservation of the countryside*” will be promoted by “*the identification of a settlement hierarchy that reflects the role and function of settlements*”. New development will therefore be steered towards the more sustainable locations of the county.

4.4.2 Table 3.1 of the LDP 'Settlement Hierarchy for Neath Port Talbot' identifies Neath as a Town and is described as a regionally important settlement providing the widest and most diverse range of functions. It is located on the strategic road network and is fully accessible by a range of transport options. It is the highest out of a 6-tier hierarchy highlighting that it is regarded as a very sustainable settlement by the Local Authority. On this basis, the application site is located within the Settlement Hierarchy at a position that will assist in promoting sustainable development, ensuring therefore that it adheres to the requirements of Policy SP3

4.2 POLICY AH1 – AFFORDABLE HOUSING

4.2.1 National planning policy and guidance clearly seeks to increase the delivery of affordable housing, particularly at sustainable locations. Under the provisions of the LDP, Policy AH1 requires that all new residential development within the Neath area must deliver at least 25% of all new residential units on an affordable basis. The proposal subject of this application will in fact deliver 100% of the proposed units on an affordable basis and therefore is in full adherence with Policy AH1.

4.3 POLICY R2 – PROPOSALS WITHIN RETAIL CENTRES

4.3.1 As mentioned previously the site (red star) is located on the edge of the designated town centre of Neath as shown in the extract of the LDP Proposals Map in Figure 1 below:

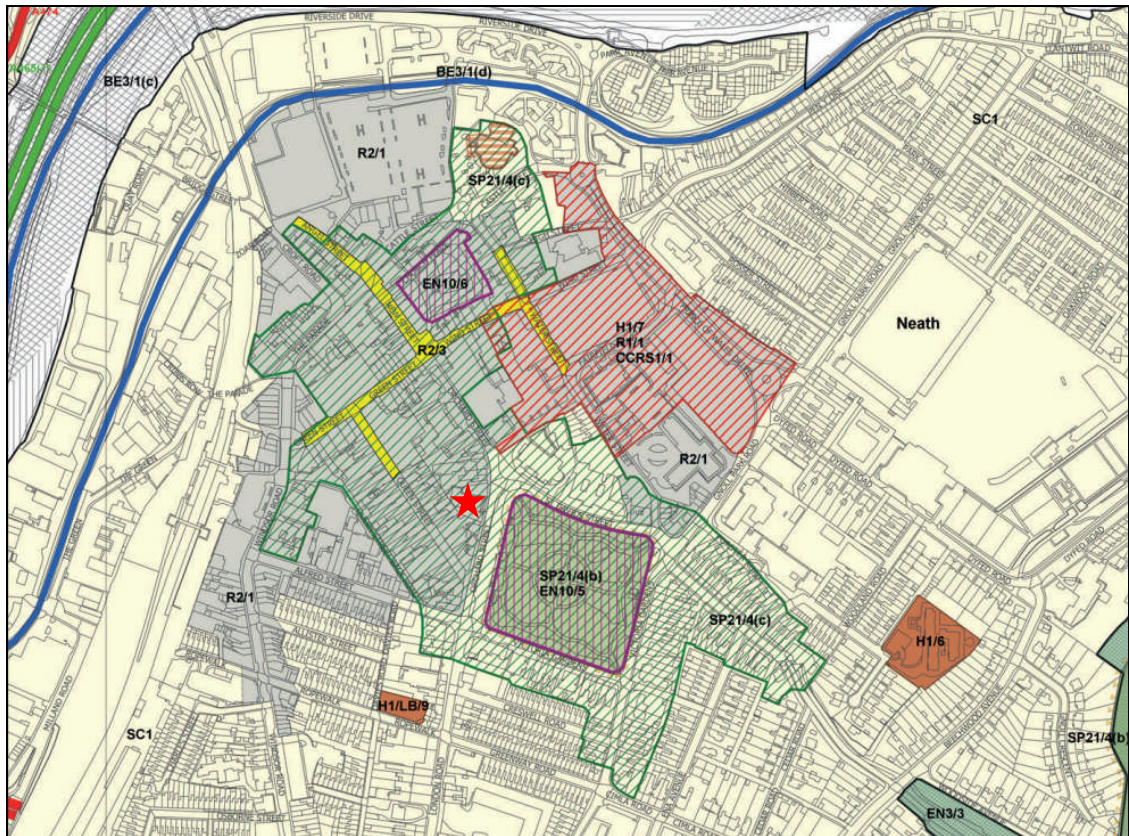


Figure 1

- 4.3.2 Policy R2 represents the key policy for the consideration of all forms of development within such designated areas. It is important to note that the Policy also integrates in part with the requirements of Policy R3 (*Primary Shopping Streets*), the locations of which are indicated by the yellow shading on Figure 1.
- 4.3.3 Policy R2 is a criteria based policy that sets out a series of requirements for differing forms of land use or development circumstance. Criteria 1 broadly requires that proposals must “... *enhance the vitality, viability and attractiveness of the centre* ...”, seeking to ensure their positive integration with the area, an avoidance of prejudicing the effective use of upper floors and maintain ‘vibrant and attractive’ shopping street frontages.

- 4.3.4 In terms of the application site, as the accompanying Land Use Audit Plan illustrates, the site is located in an area of the Town Centre that can be considered to be both full of vitality and vibrancy in terms of the mix of uses at ground floor level and the low level of vacancies. The exception to this is of course the application building itself, who's current state of construction and long term vacancy is in fact having quite the opposite effect on the vitality and viability of the Town Centre.
- 4.3.5 The above fact then leads on to Criterion 2 of the Policy, which sets out guidance on when non-commercial uses would be considered to be acceptable at ground floor levels. One such example is sub-criterion (c), which states "*The proposal would result in the redevelopment of derelict, unsightly, underused and vacant land/premises for alternative uses which would have significant social, community or regeneration benefits.*".
- 4.3.6 In considering the information provided at Section 3 of this Statement, it is quite clear that the application proposal through the provision of a mix of affordable housing units will deliver social, community and regeneration benefits for the Town Centre of Neath and the people of the wider community. The regeneration and completion of an unsightly feature near to one of the Town's main transport hubs for the purposes of providing much needed housing for vulnerable groups in the community, ensure therefore that the application proposal fully complies with the requirements and objectives of Policy R2.

4.4 POLICY TR2 – DESIGN AND ACCESS OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

- 4.4.1 For developments to comply with Policy TR2 (*Design and Access of New Development*) proposals must adhere, as appropriate, to the relevant requirement of four Criteria. In the case of the application proposal, it is considered that three are of relevance and an assessment of the application proposal against each now follows:
- 4.4.2 Criterion 1 requires that proposed developments do not "*comprise the safe effective and efficient use of the highway network*" and do not in turn have a detrimental

impact on highway safety or create unacceptable levels of traffic generation. The application proposal seeks to in effect complete the construction of the current building, which will include the use of the previously approved means of vehicular access. Notwithstanding this, due to the nature of the proposed occupants, combined with the sustainable positioning of the application site, the level of traffic generated by the proposed use will be minimal. As a result, the requirements of the Criterion will be adhered to in full.

4.4.3 The second criterion for consideration - Criterion 3 - requires that developments must be accessible by a range of travel means. Again, as set out previously, the application site is accessible by a range of travel means, including bus and rail, as well as pedestrian routes giving access to all parts of Neath Town Centre and adjoining areas. The proposal therefore adheres to the requirements of Criterion 3.

4.4.4 Criterion 4 requires a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan for developments likely to generate significant traffic generation. As the proposal will not generate significant levels of traffic, it is not considered that a Transport Assessment or Travel Plan is required. In summary therefore, the application proposal fully adheres to all relevant requirements of Policy TR2.

4.5 POLICY BE1 - DESIGN

4.5.1 The final policy of the adopted LDP for consideration is Policy BE1 (*Design*). As its title suggests, it represents an overarching policy applicable to all forms of proposed development relating to the matter of design. The Policy sets out that all proposals will be expected to “... *demonstrate high quality design which fully takes into account the natural, historic and built environmental context and contributes to the creation of attractive, sustainable places.*”.

4.5.2 The application site lies not only on the edge of Neath Town Centre, but also on the edge of the Town's Conservation Area and near to historic assets such as Victoria Gardens and a Listed Building. In considering these, consideration must also be

given to the fact that the application site is occupied by an existing building, the principle of which has already been given planning permission. With the proposal subject of this current planning application only including limited changes to the external appearance of the previously approved scheme, and no alterations to its scale, the relationship of the application proposal with the adjoining area (including its historical assets) will be comparable to that previously approved.

- 4.5.3 On a more detailed level, the application scheme retains the existing external finishes of the previously approved scheme. However, its proposed treatment of the main entrance and its associated external area creates a more sympathetic and harmonious addition to the local streetscene. This combination has then ensured that its detailed external appearance continues to be acceptable in policy terms.
- 4.5.4 The relationship of the proposed use and surrounding land uses has also been given careful consideration. Through a detailed window survey of adjoining properties, and the application building, it has been identified that there will be no detriment to the amenity of existing or proposed occupants of the application and surrounding buildings.
- 4.5.5 From an accessibility perspective, the application site is positioned at a very sustainable location within the Town Centre. This combined with the provision of cycle parking ensures then that the application proposal will support and promote sustainable modes of transport. In addition, the position and arrangement of all means of access to the building have given full consideration to the principles of 'Secure by Design'.
- 4.5.6 In summary therefore, the proposal represents the sympathetic re-use of what is in effect a brownfield site in sustainable manner with no identified or perceived detrimental impact, ensuring it meets the relevant requirements of Policy BE1 in full and all other relevant aspects of adopted local planning policy.

5.0 ACCESSIBILITY

5.1 ACCESSIBILITY

- 5.1.1 All-inclusive design issues identified have been addressed wholly in compliance with the requirements of the Disability Rights Commission Code of Practice “Rights of Access: Services and Premises” and Part M of the Building Regulations, where applicable. Thereafter full compliance will be maintained in perpetuity.

5.2 MOVEMENT TO, FROM AND WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT

- 5.2.1 The application site is located within the Town Centre of Neath within walking distance of community facilities and local services. The public transport network is also easily accessible for all, whilst the application proposal also makes provision for non-motorised means of transportation.
- 5.2.2 As a result of the above, the application site will be able to fully promote the use of public transport and discourage the use of the private motor car.

6.0 CHARACTER

Landscape Design

- 6.1 The application proposal seeks to include a small area of landscaping to the front of the building. This will incorporate elements of both soft and hard landscaping, providing a more sympathetic integration with the adjoining public realm than that previously approved.

Scale

- 6.2 The proposal seeks no increase in the scale of the application building.

Number

- 6.3 The design objective is to provide 32 affordable residential flats.

Layout of Development

- 6.4 The layout of the proposed development has been steered by the form of the existing building. As a result, the proposal represents a logical layout that is sympathetic to both its immediate and wider setting, whilst also securing a high level of legibility for both residents of and visitors to the site.

Appearance

- 6.5 As detailed previously, the proposal seeks very little change to the external appearance of the building, retaining its existing character and role in the setting of Neath.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

- 7.1 The layout of each element of the proposal will continue to promote a degree of natural surveillance of areas within the adjoining public realm. The proposal also follows the principles of 'Secure by Design'. The proposal will not impact or impede the existing flow of pedestrian traffic on the adjoining footways, ensure their safety is retained.

8.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Landscaping/Townscape Setting

- 8.1 As detailed above, the proposal seeks an element of landscaping to the front of the application building, which will enhance its role in the immediate street scene and the adjoining element of the Conservation Area.

Biodiversity and Local Environment

- 8.2 As the accompanying bat survey suggests, the site is within close proximity to a favourable bat habitat, but is not within 2km of any site which is known to support bats. It is considered that the property has negligible to low potential to support roosting bats, and a negligible to low risk of bats using the features present. As a result the following recommendations have been implemented:

Recommendation 1: Based upon online searches for bats and having undertaken bat surveys in the near vicinity, 2x Schwegler 1WQ (or similar) boxes are to be erected to the rear elevation of the building once works are complete.

Recommendation 2: One sparrow terrace box is to be erected to the rear elevation.

Energy Efficiency/Carbon Reduction

- 8.3 The following measures will be undertaken where possible to maximise energy efficiency and carbon reduction of the units themselves and during their construction:
- Maximise use of daylight in key rooms through fenestration
 - Use of local suppliers and labour wherever possible
 - Use local recycled products wherever possible
 - The units will be insulated to current targets
 - Energy efficient internal and external lighting units will be installed.

Sustainable Materials

- 8.4 We understand that recycled or reclaimed products will be used in the construction of the proposal wherever possible

Water

- 8.5 We understand that the existing mains supply will be utilised. In line with this, we would propose that the domestic water and heating system of the residential units be designed to reduce domestic water wastage, through a range of measures including low water consuming fittings in the bathroom and kitchen.

Waste Management

- 8.6 We understand that the residential units will have access to domestic recycling facilities.
- 8.7 The existing connection to the public sewer will be utilised for the disposal of foul waste.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The proposal is for the completion and change of use of a former office building to 32 Affordable Flats at 18 Orchard Street.
- 9.2 The application proposal seeks to regularise the construction of a formerly approved office building and then its subsequent conversion for the purposes of 32 affordable units. The building is a unit that has been vacant now for some time, resulting in an appearance that is detrimental to the setting of the Town Centre and the associated Conservation Area. Whilst its vacancy status has no doubt been influenced by its current construction state, a lack of demand for such floorspace and use class has no doubt influenced the lack progression of the building to its completion. This is in contrast to a Town Centre that can be currently considered to be both vital and viable.
- 9.3 In contrast to its current state and status, the application proposal seeks to revitalise the application building physically and the role it plays in the Town Centre and local community. The proposal represents a direct attempt to address the affordable housing need position of the area through the provision of a mix of units in terms of form and scale. The introduction of 32 new homes will therefore represent a significantly positive impact to the future residents of the building and the local community.
- 9.4 On the matter of sustainability, as detailed above, the application site is positioned at an extremely sustainable location within the urban form. Being positioned within the Town Centre of Neath, it has easy access to a range of community facilities via foot, alongside excellent public transport links and non-car access routes. All these attributes ensure that the site and indeed the proposed use are able to fully promote sustainable transport patterns.

9.5 In conclusion therefore, the proposal represents an appropriate and sustainable development that adheres to all relevant current planning policy.