

Eagle House Port Talbot

Heritage Impact Statement



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for

Castell Group

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Summary

A planning application has been submitted for the development of apartments and commercial units on the site of Eagle House, Talbot Road, Port Talbot (Planning ref P2021/0856). Eagle House was built as an inn in the mid-nineteenth century to serve Port Talbot railway station, was extended by the end of the nineteenth century when the Port Talbot Central Station was built behind it, and was a temperance hotel in the early twentieth century. In later years the building was a commercial premises. There have been significant external and interior alterations to the building that have diminished its historic interest. It is not a designated heritage asset but has been identified as a Building of Local Importance.

It is argued that if the building is to be lost a historic building survey should be undertaken to preserve the building by record. A survey equivalent to Historic England's Level 2 would be appropriate in this context. Eagle House stands in the vicinity of designated and non-designated heritage assets and therefore the report assess the impact of the development proposal on the setting, and by extension significance, of those assets. The Plaza Cinema is a grade-II listed building on Talbot Road, close to Eagle House. However it is argued that setting makes little contribution to the special interest of the building and that the effect of the proposals on its significance would be neutral. The Grand Hotel is not listed but has been identified as a Building of Local Importance. The loss of Eagle House, which like the Grand Hotel stands at the end of Oakwood Lane, would have only a marginal negative impact on the historic interest of the hotel, to which setting makes little contribution.

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I Introduction

A planning application has been submitted for the demolition of Eagle House and the construction of affordable housing apartments on upper floors with office/commercial units at ground floor and associated external works and parking area (Planning ref P2021/0856). Eagle House is on the corner of Oakwood Lane and Talbot Road (A48), Port Talbot, at SS 7681 8961 (fig 1).

Although Eagle House is not a designated heritage asset, it has been included in Neath Port Talbot Council's Schedule of Buildings of Local Importance (reference POR021), and stands close to listed buildings, notably the grade-II listed former Plaza Cinema and other buildings of local importance. A heritage impact assessment is therefore necessary to examine how, and to what extent, the new development will affect the significance of the listed buildings and buildings of local importance, specifically with regard to their setting. The impact of the development is measured in terms of negative/neutral/positive, and is intended to justify the existing proposals, or recommend changes to the design as necessary. The Heritage Impact Statement was commissioned by Castell Group and the site was visited on 13 June 2022. Eagle House was unoccupied at the time of the site visit.

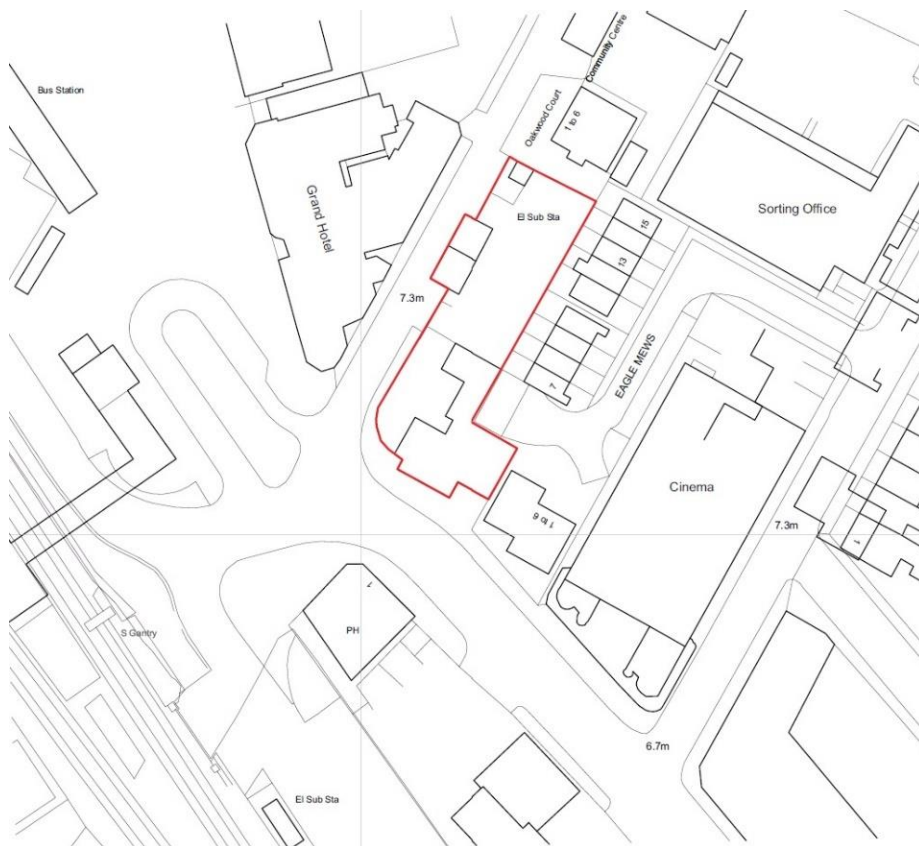


Figure 1 Location plan.

2 Policy and Guidance

The means by which the preservation of heritage assets and their settings is incorporated into the planning process is set out in Planning Policy Wales (PPW), supplemented by guidance contained in Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24, which covers the historic environment.

TAN 24 describes a heritage impact assessment as:

a structured process that enables the significance of a designated asset to be taken into account when considering proposals for change. Heritage impact assessments should be proportionate both to the significance of the historic asset and to the degree of change proposed, and should include sufficient information to enable both the significance of the asset and the impact of change to be understood. The results of the heritage impact assessment should be summarised in a heritage impact statement.

Planning Policy Wales identifies how local planning authorities must treat designated heritage assets in their consideration of planning applications. This includes the impact of proposed developments within the settings of these historic assets. It therefore places an obligation upon local planning authorities to make the impact on the setting of heritage assets a factor in planning decisions.

TAN 24 defines the setting of historic assets in paragraph 1.25:

The setting of an historic asset includes the surroundings in which it is understood, experienced, and appreciated embracing present and past relationships to the surrounding landscape. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral. Setting is not a historic asset in its own right but has value derived from how different elements may contribute to the significance of a historic asset.

There are also relevant local policies and guidance in the Neath Port Talbot CBC Local Development Plan 2011-2026.

Policy SP 21

Built Environment and Historic Heritage

The built environment and historic heritage will, where appropriate, be conserved and enhanced through the following measures:

1. Encouraging high quality design standards in all development proposals;
2. Protecting arterial gateways from intrusive and inappropriate development;
3. Safeguarding features of historic and cultural importance;
4. The identification of the following designated sites to enable their protection and where appropriate enhancement:

- (a) Landscapes of Historic Interest;
- (b) Historic Parks and Gardens;
- (c) Conservation Areas;
- (d) Scheduled Ancient Monuments; and
- (e) Listed Buildings and their curtilage.

Buildings of local importance that do not meet the criteria for designation as listed buildings are treated in a separate policy:

Policy BE 2

Buildings of Local Importance

Development proposals that would affect buildings that are of local historic, architectural or cultural importance will only be permitted where:

1. They conserve and where appropriate enhance the building and its setting; or
2. It is demonstrated that the development could not reasonably be accommodated without affecting or replacing the building and the reasons for the development outweigh the heritage importance of the site.

A schedule of buildings of local importance has been compiled that includes the details and interest of such buildings. Eagle House has been included in this schedule (reference POR021), the justification for which is that it is 'a long established former roadside Inn, one of the first buildings in the locality, having an important place in the early development of Port Talbot.'

3 Historical Background

Originally known as the Eagle Inn, the building is first shown on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map (fig 2). It was probably built soon after the railway station on the South Wales Railway, now known as Port Talbot Parkway, opened in 1850. It was clearly one of the earliest buildings in Port Talbot and originally stood in an isolated position on the road between Taibach and Aberafan. There had been little further local development by the time of the 1900 Ordnance Survey (fig 3). Eagle House had by this time been extended and is labelled as a hotel. This extension may have coincided with the building of Port Talbot Central Station, immediately behind the hotel, which was opened in 1897 by the Port Talbot Railway and Docks Company (it closed in 1933). The hotel was described as a Temperance Hotel in 1917 but on the 1947 is shown without annotation (figs 4, 5). In latter years it was a commercial premises.

By 1917 there had been considerable development of Port Talbot, although the temperance Hotel at Eagle House, and the railway station, were set slightly apart from the residential districts and the commercial centre of the town, which was focussed to the north west on Station Road. Development of the area occurred rapidly after the opening of the docks in 1898 and the steelworks in 1907.

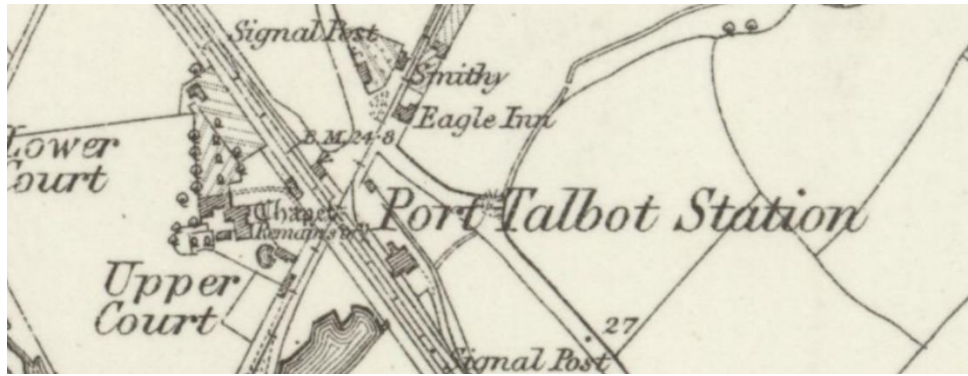


Figure 2. Ordnance Survey, 1884.



Figure 3. Ordnance Survey, 1900.

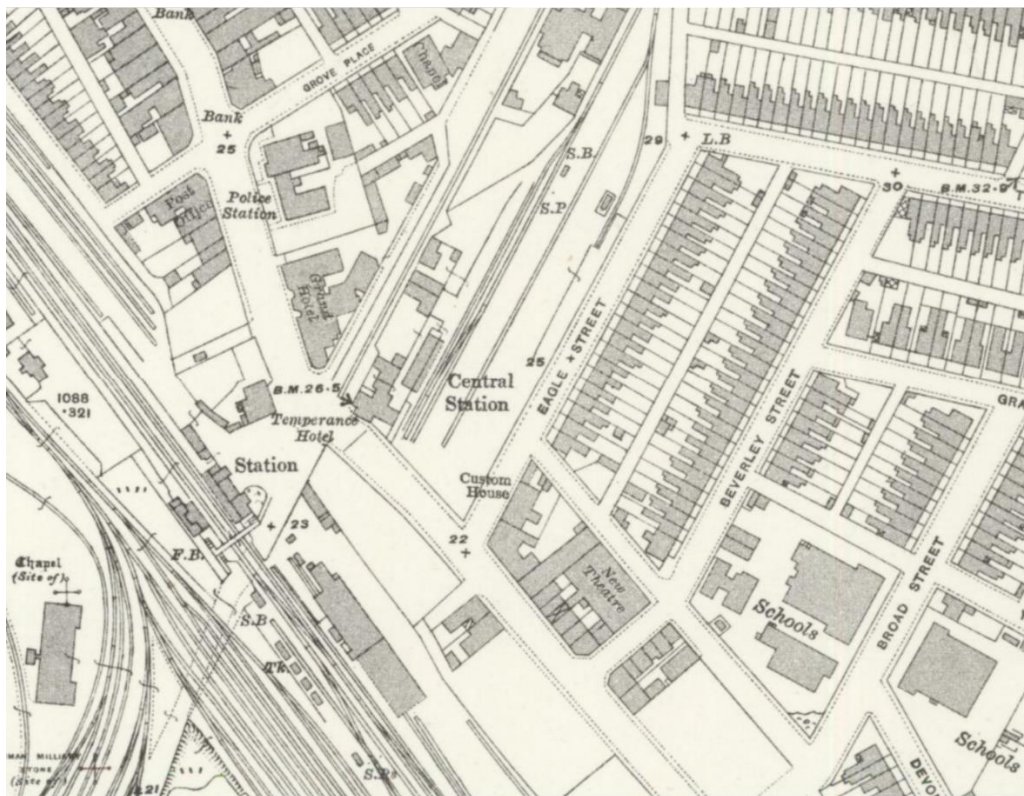


Figure 4. Ordnance Survey, 1917.

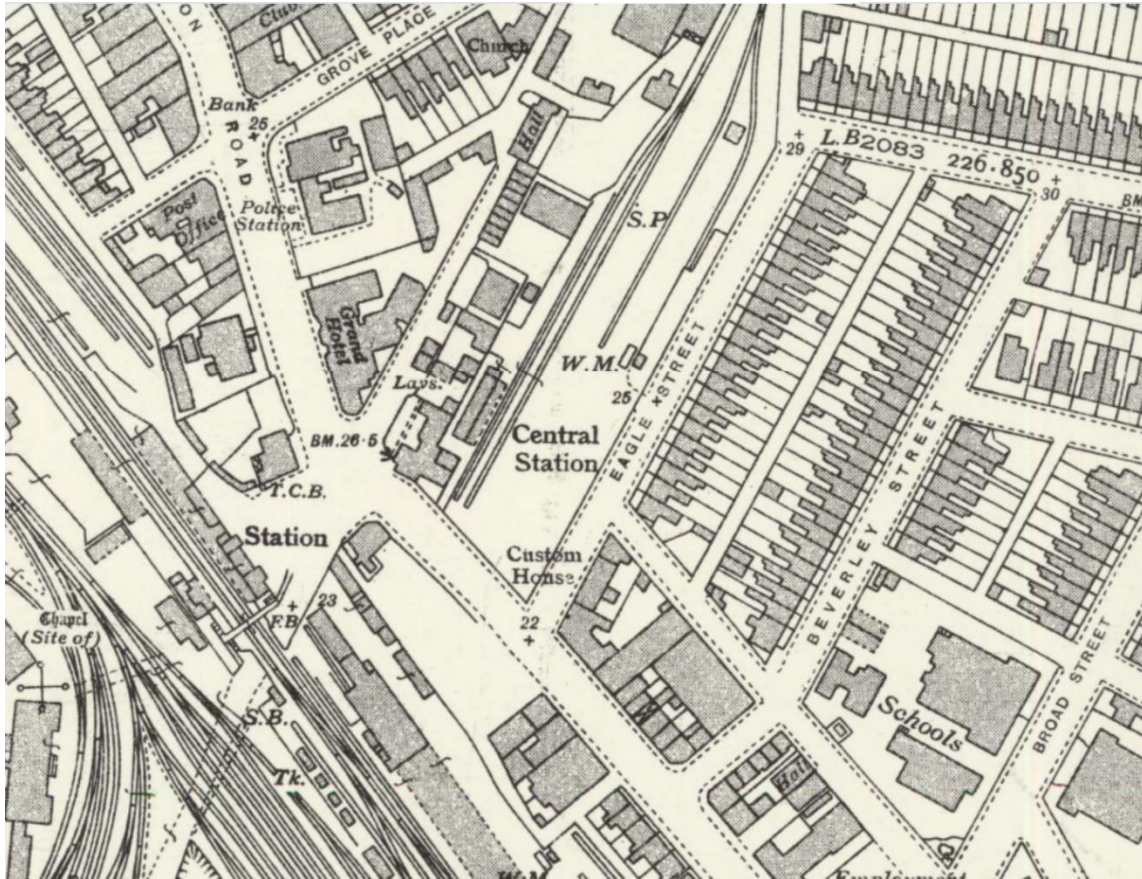


Figure 5. Ordnance Survey, 1947, surveyed in 1939.

4 Building Description

The building faces directly to the pavement on Talbot Road and is set back behind modern railings and small car park on Oakwood Lane. The car park, which is laid with tarmac, extends on the north side of the building, where there is another building, a modern but disused brick public toilet block.

Eagle House has front and rear ranges, the earlier of which faces Talbot Road. It is two storeys, with Gothic detail, built of rock-faced stone with painted freestone dressings, and a steep slate roof behind coped gables. There is an external stack against the right-hand gable end (but no chimney), and a round stone stack on the gable to the south front. Corbels support the rainwater goods at eaves level.

In the Talbot Road (south-west) front there is a projecting gabled bay left of centre, set back from the angle. The lower storey is cement rendered and has wide modern windows (fig 6). The upper storey also has enlarged modern windows, but retains an earlier blind cusped window. In the angle with the gabled projection is a modern two-storey lean-to incorporating the main entrance to the building, with glazed doors, modern windows in both storeys and double-height window in the return wall.



Figure 6. The south-west front facing Talbot Road.



Figure 7. North-west front, facing Oakwood Lane.

The right-hand (south-east) gable end is obscured by the proximity of Eagle Mews. However, it has original but blocked pointed windows either side of the stack. The left-hand (west) gable end faces the junction with Oakwood Lane and is cement-rendered in the lower storey (fig 7). It has wide modern windows in both storeys. The rear of this original

range is of rubble stone. It has windows in dressed surrounds and an offset gable above the link to the rear range.

Front and rear ranges are connected by a short link, which is lower than the front and rear ranges and has been significantly altered. In its north-west wall to Oakwood Lane it is now two storeys with door and window in the lower storey and spanned by a single window in the upper storey, under a flat roof.

The L-plan rear range had been added by 1900. It is also two storeys, of coursed rock-faced with painted freestone dressings, and a roof of concrete tiles behind coped gables (fig 7). It has retained more of its original window openings than the front range, in dressed surrounds, with two narrow cusped lights in a projecting gable on the left side.

The north-east side is rendered. A modern door right of centre is in an original chamfered stone surround, right of which is a modern window. On the left side are escape stairs to a modern first-floor doorway. There is also an original window opening to the right in the upper storey, retaining most of its original hood mould, but with replacement modern glazing.

The rear (south-east) front of the rear range faces Eagle Mews (fig 8). It is spar-dashed but retains significant original detail in the form of a cross window and two-light windows



Figure 8. Rear of Eagle House, viewed from Eagle Mews.

The boundary wall facing Oakwood Lane is a twentieth-century addition, first shown on the 1947 Ordnance Survey map. It has railings on a dwarf wall and divided into bays by intermediate piers (fig 7). The dwarf wall and piers are of coursed, rock-faced stone, with lighter-grey freestone quoins and copings. The railings themselves are modern replacements (the original railings may have been removed during the 1939-45 war).

4.1 Interior

The interior, including the room plan, has been significantly modernised. In the front range the partitions are all modern, and in the upper storey they are later than and do not respect the arrangement of the (modern) windows. The stairs here is also modern. The two fireplaces suggested by the presence of chimney stacks have been removed.

In the rear range the plan on both floors is a corridor along the spine of the building with rooms either side of it. These rooms have modern doors and no features of historic interest were noticed.

5 Methodology for Assessment of Setting

Guidance on good practice in the assessment of the setting of heritage assets has been published by Cadw (2017a). It sets out a methodology for assessing the impact of proposed developments on the setting of heritage assets, and the impacts they may have on an asset's significance. Cadw's recommended strategy has four stages.

1. Identification of heritage assets that would be affected by the proposed development.
2. Define and analyse the setting, identifying the key factors which contribute to the significance of each of the historic assets affected.
3. Evaluate the potential impact of change or development.
4. Consider options to mitigate the impact of a proposed change or development.

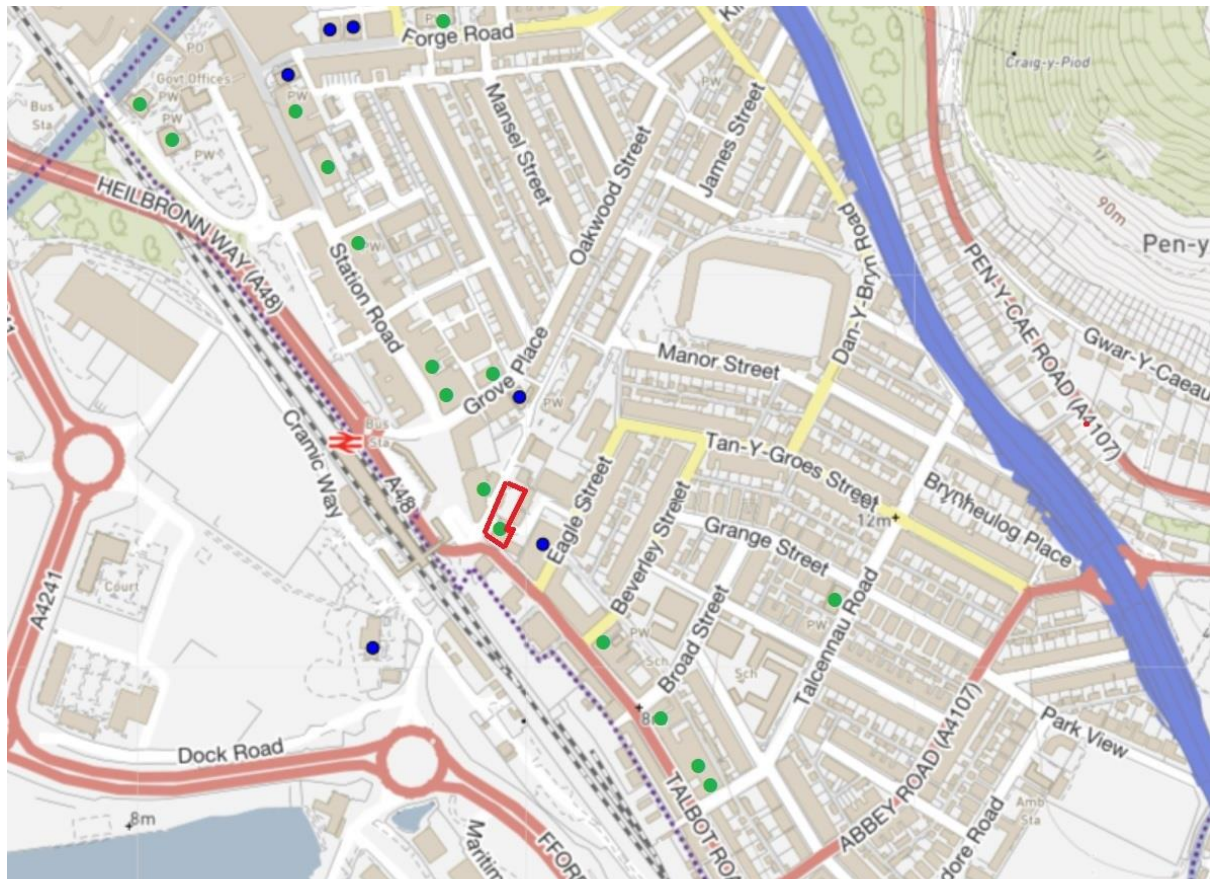
For Stage 1, buildings within 500-metres of the development site were identified, regardless of whether there was any direct visual relationship, known as a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (or ZTV). Stage 2 examines the contribution of setting to the significance of individual heritage assets. Significance is measured against agreed heritage values, as set out in guidance issued by Cadw (2011):

- **Evidential value:** This derives from those elements of an historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity, including its physical remains or historic fabric.
- **Historical value:** An historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or it might be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement.
- **Aesthetic value:** This derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from an historic asset. This might include the form of an historic asset, its external appearance and how it lies within its setting.
- **Communal value:** This derives from the meanings that an historic asset has for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. It is closely linked to historical and aesthetic values but tends to have additional or specific aspects.

Setting is relevant to all of these interests, and the contribution made by setting is considered for each of the heritage assets affected.

Stage 3 considers the effect the development would have on those heritage assets, for which the most important criteria are the visual relationship between the development and the heritage assets, and the impact on the surroundings in which the heritage assets are experienced, including the approaches to heritage assets. Stage 3 also identifies the areas and viewpoints most sensitive to the proposed development. The impact of the proposal is to be expressed in terms such as positive, neutral and negative, with an indication of its magnitude.

The need for Stage 4 depends upon the assessment of impact in Stage 3.



- Listed building
- Building of local importance

Figure 9. Listed buildings and buildings of local importance within 500 metres of the development site.

6 Heritage Assets affected by the development

There are six listed buildings within a 500-metre radius of the development site, all listed at grade II (fig 9):

- Plaza Cinema, Cadw ref 22136
- Harbour Court, Cadw ref 23152
- Grove Place Chapel, Cadw ref 23254

- Bethany Chapel, Cadw ref 23252
- Afan Masonic Temple, cadw ref 23249
- Tabernacle Chapel, Cadw ref 23251

In practice, most of these listed buildings have no visual relationship with the development site and so will not be affected by the development – Harbour Court, Bethany Chapel, Afan Masonic Temple and Tabernacle Chapel. Grove Place Chapel is listed primarily for the architectural interest of its street front, which faces Grove Place. Its setting on a residential street contributes to the historic and architectural value of the building. The rear faces Oakwood Lane, which is visible from the development site at a distance of approximately 200 metres. The roughcast rear of the chapel is utilitarian and does not contribute to the special architectural interest of the building, which will therefore not be affected by the development.

The Plaza Cinema stands south-east of the proposed development, at the junction with Eagle Street (fig 10). It has been listed because it is a rare surviving example of 1930s cinema architecture in Wales, with an exterior which is in a Modernist style, with Art Deco influences. Setting does not make a significant contribution to its special architectural interest. There are no nearby listed buildings with which it has group value and it stands on a road where there has been significant modernisation. The principal view of the cinema is the view from the south east, looking up Talbot Road. From here the present Eagle House is partially visible beyond Eagle Mews, which is next to the cinema. The view from the west is less important. It is framed by Eagle House and the Red Lion public house (The Corner House), a much altered commercial building of 1928. However the modern Eagle Mews and Customs House, which stand either side of the cinema, and significantly diminish its historic setting.



Figure 10. Plaza Cinema, viewed from the south-east looking up Talbot Road. (Google Maps)

There are also undesignated heritage assets in the form of buildings included in the schedule of buildings of local importance

- Former Lloyds Bank, 2-4 Station Road, POR006
- Grove House, POR007
- St Oswald's Chambers, 6 Station Road, POR008
- Barclays Bank, 48 Station Road, POR011
- Constitutional Club, POR012
- Former Glan Afan School main building, POR013
- Commercial Buildings, Talbot Road, POR014
- Grand Hotel, Talbot Road, POR015
- Romilly Buildings, Talbot Road, POR016
- 56 Talbot Road, POR018
- Lucania Buildings, Talbot Road, POR020
- Eagle House, POR021
- Grange Street Congregational Church, POR022
- St Agnes Church, POR023
- Carmel Church, POR026

Although none of these buildings are of national historical or architectural interest, they are considered to have strong associations with the locality and to give distinct local character to the community, and the aim of local policy is to try to retain this local character.

Most of these buildings would not be affected by the proposed development. Several buildings of local importance are on Station Road, which was the commercial centre of the town, and have significant group value on that account, but they have no visual relationship with Eagle House. None of the places of worship has a visual relationship with Eagle House and setting contributes to their importance insofar as they are close to or within residential areas. With the exception of the Grand Hotel, the buildings on Talbot Road represent the Edwardian (Lucania Buildings) and inter-war development of Port Talbot – the Romilly Buildings of 1924, and 56 Talbot Road of the 1930s. Setting is an important part of their importance as they stand on a road lined with inter-war housing. They are not inter-visible with Eagle House.

The only building of local importance that is directly affected by the proposed development is the Grand Hotel (fig 11). The Grand Hotel is an Edwardian commercial building said to be by Emily Talbot. A large and ungainly building, it is nevertheless a landmark building and its importance is its historical and communal value. It represents the economic development of the town consequent upon the opening of the docks in the 1890s and the steel works in the following decade. Setting contributes to its significance insofar as it stands close to the railway station and on the route into the town centre, although modernisation has diminished the historic character of the railway station and its surroundings.



Figure 11. The Grand Hotel. (Google Maps)

7 Design Proposals

It is intended to demolish the existing building, and the former public conveniences that stand on the site. In its place there will be an apartment block fronting Talbot Road, comprising eighteen apartments, with four commercial units on the ground floor. The building will occupy much of the footprint of the current building, with a car park on the north side with access from Oakwood Lane, as there is at present.



Figure 12. CGI of proposed Talbot Road front.

The new building is to be of four-storey height with an attic storey that opens to the flat roof (figs 12, 13). The four storeys will rise to a parapet level approximately level with the eaves of the Plaza Cinema. The material will be buff brick framing a large area clad with grey Cedral boards set vertically, and broken by windows which also have a vertical emphasis. The façade is rounded at the angle of Talbot Road and Oakwood Lane in order to emphasise its corner location.



Figure 13. CGI of proposed Oakwood Lane front.

8 Impact Assessment

Eagle House is one of the oldest buildings in Port Talbot. It is this historical interest that qualifies it to be a building of local importance. Although it retains evidential value in the form of its external fabric, the building itself has been significantly altered on the exterior, principally by adding very large windows that have undermined its historic character. As described above, the interior has been extensively altered and no longer has architectural, evidential or historic value. When built Eagle House was an isolated building and even now it stands in an area with few buildings and a mix of heritage and modern buildings. The railway station it was built to serve has been completely modernised, while the Central Station it also served has been taken down and the site redeveloped. The building does, however, make some contribution to the historical interest of the Grand Hotel.

Under Policy BE 2 the loss of buildings of local importance is permitted if it can be demonstrated 'that the development could not reasonably be accommodated without affecting or replacing the building and the reasons for the development outweigh the heritage importance of the site'. Those arguments are beyond the scope of this report. The loss of the building would of course be a negative impact, but as compensation a historic building survey would secure preservation by record. A historic building record equivalent to historic England's Level 2 would be appropriate for an undesignated heritage asset which has already been much altered.

Eagle House contributes little to the setting of other buildings of local importance, with the exception of the Grand Hotel. The principal view of the hotel is from the west on the A48 or the Parkway bus stop. On its left side is a modern building and in front of it is the modern bus stand. Eagle House on the right side of it is the only element of its setting that provides any historic context. The loss of Eagle House would therefore take away this last historical dimension, bar the street layout, although it should be remembered that alterations to the Grand Hotel have already significantly diminished its historic character. The new building would be conspicuous alongside it, but will not be tall enough to dominate it, and its buff-coloured bricks will match the cream render of the hotel. The impact on the significance of the Grand Hotel will therefore be marginally negative.

The most important view of the Plaza Cinema is from the south-east, where Eagle House is in the background, although it is not conspicuous. Its loss would not therefore make a significant difference to the setting of the Cinema, and the new building has been designed to match the height of the Plaza, ensuring that it does not compete with the Plaza as a landmark building when approached from the south east. Viewed looking east, the heritage setting of the Plaza is of less importance, surrounded by a combination of modern buildings, Eagle House and the 1928 Corner House. The overall impact of the proposal on the setting of the Plaza Cinema is therefore considered to be neutral.

9 Conclusion

Eagle House has been identified as a Building of Local Importance, and therefore its loss should be compensated for by a historic building survey, so that the heritage can be preserved by record. A record equivalent to Historic England's Level 2 would be appropriate for an undesignated heritage asset that has been extensively altered over its period of use.

The Plaza Cinema is the only listed building that has a visual relationship with the development site. However, setting contributes little to the significance of the Plaza Cinema, as it is surrounded by numerous modern buildings. Although the new building would be visible in the background when the Plaza is viewed looking north-west up Talbot Road, it will not detract from the setting of the cinema. The design proposal has ensured that the parapet level of the new building would be at the eaves height of the cinema, ensuring that the new building is not dominant at this end of Talbot Road. Viewed from the west, modern buildings are more prominent when looking towards the Plaza and so the new building

would have even less impact on the heritage. The impact on the significance of the Plaza is therefore considered to be neutral.

The Grand Hotel is a Building of Local Importance that stands next to Eagle House. The loss of Eagle House would be a marginally negative impact on the Grand Hotel, although the importance of setting is largely due to the hotel's location near the railway station and on the route to the commercial centre of the town.

10 References

10.1 Documentary and cartographic sources

Ordnance Survey, county series maps, 1884, 1900, 1917, 1947.

10.2 Online sources

<https://historicwales.gov.uk/>

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