

MOOSE HALL, NEATH HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

MAY 2023

Revision A (13.07.2023)



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared on behalf of the applicants, Mr & Mrs Hill, in support of new applications for planning and listed building consent. These applications outline the proposed internal and external alterations to the former Masonic Lodge known as Moose Hall, including change of use to include proposed uses as a restaurant (A3 use class) and offices (B1 use class).

The property is Grade II listed and is identified as the 'the first Methodist Chapel in Neath' having been built circa 1813. Since that time the building has undergone a number of substantial alterations and changes to the use of the building, including dedicated use as a Fire Station and until recently as a Masonic Lodge.

This Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been developed in conjunction with the proposed drawings and documents which together outline the full detail of the proposals, the need for change and the approach to design in relation to the historical value and significance of the building.

This document considers the site, history and constraints which have influenced the development of the design and considers use, layout, appearance and materials.

1.2 SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

Whilst Moose Hall has undergone several redevelopments during its life, each has provided some level of public/community function before becoming redundant and falling into disrepair. This HIA will consider the proposals' historical interest and value alongside its setting and its enjoyment and use by the community, in order to put the building into its physical and historical context.

1.3 CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT

This report will cover the following:

- **Understanding:** providing background information about the building including description, ownership and use along with applicable statutory legislation.
- **Historic Development:** providing an overview of the history of the property.
- **Significance:** providing an overview of the historic interest and significance of the property.
- **Issues & Opportunities:** identification of threats to the building and where there may be scope for improvement and change.
- **The proposals:** providing a brief description of the works with reference to the proposed alterations and extension to the existing property.
- **Heritage Impact Assessment:** providing an assessment of the impact of the proposals on the historic fabric of the property.

1.4 AUTHOR OF THIS REPORT

This document has been prepared by Volute Architects Limited, an architectural practice specialising in the conservation, prolongation and enhancement of buildings within the historic environment.

Specifically, this report has been prepared by Amanda Needham – *BA (Hons), BArch, RIBA, MSc Cons, AABC, EASA*.

1.5 EXISTING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

This report is based upon publicly available archive material, including online, and where applicable reference to recent planning information relating to the property and on-site inspections of the existing building, fabric and context.

2.0 UNDERSTANDING

2.1 OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The application property, known locally as Moose Hall, now falls under the private ownership of local couple, Mr & Mrs Hill, who purchased the building in January 2020 following the closure of the Moose International-Neath Masonic Lodge and the building becoming vacant. Being local to the area, Mr & Mrs Hill had developed a longstanding fondness for the building and were saddened to see the property suffer from lack of use and maintenance over recent years.

Regularly expressing their desire to save the building from further decline, Mr & Mrs Hill kept a constant watch for the sale of the property and purchased it at the first opportunity with the firm intention of preserving the building's future. In doing so, the applicants also wanted to ensure that the building would be returned to a use which could be enjoyed by the community at large, rather than creating an exclusive development (such as housing or apartments) which could only be enjoyed by the few people who would live there.

For further details of historic ownership and use, please refer to section 3.0 of this report.

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF MOOSE HALL

LOCATION

Moose Hall is situated to the north of Stryd Castell (Castle Street) in Neath town centre (Fig 1). To the north of the property, and sharing a boundary is the site of Neath Castle, a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The site sits within the north-easternmost boundary of the Neath Town Centre Conservation Area (Fig 2).

Application Site:	Moose International - Neath Lodge, Castle Street, Neath, SA11 3LU
Local Authority:	Neath Port Talbot Council
Site Area:	396 sq.m

The principal (southern) elevation and entrance to the building are immediately adjacent to the pedestrian footpath on Castle Street (Fig 3), with a further entrance into the property set back from Castle Street and accessed via a private, gated yard (Fig 4).



Fig 1: Ordnance Survey extract illustrating 'Moose Hall' in proximity to Neath Town Centre and Neath Castle immediately to the North

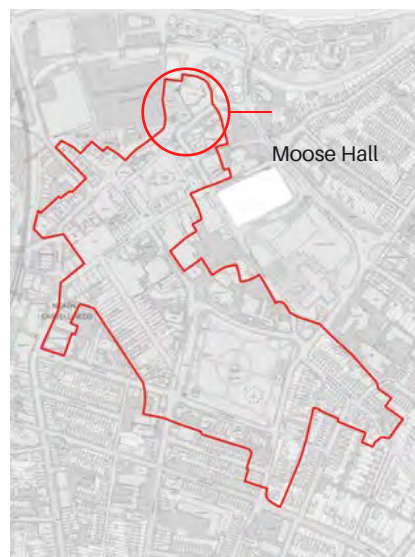


Fig 2: Moose Hall location within the Neath Town Centre Conservation Area



Fig 3: South elevation abuts Castle Street public highway and incorporates principal entrance



Fig 4: Secondary entrance (behind wall) to south-west corner of building, just off Castle Street

To the south of the building, Castle Street provides access into Neath town centre which is only a short walk away to the south and south-west of the property. To the east and west are links to the primary road network including public transport and car parking. To the north and east are the remains of Neath Castle, now a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Figs 5 & 6).

To the west of the property is 'The Roundhouse' cafe.

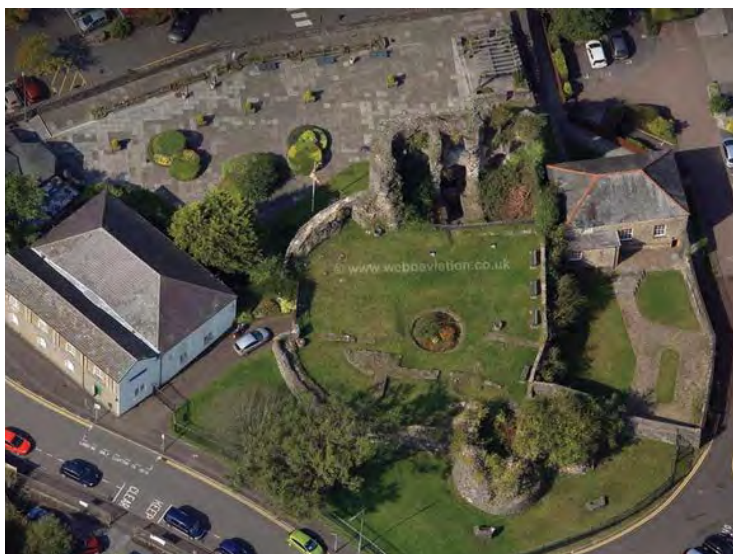


Fig 5: The remains of Neath Castle and extended grounds to the north and east of Moose Hall



Fig 6: Remains of Neath Castle

EXTERIOR

Moose Hall is constructed over two storeys and comprises two primary structures:

To the rear (north) of the building and adjacent to the Neath Castle site is the former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel structure (now comprising the main function space, including bar and kitchen to the ground floor, and the Masonic Lodge Temple to the first floor). The external walls of the former chapel structure are formed in solid masonry with a hipped slate roof over. See Fig 7 below.

To the front (south) of the building and immediately adjacent to the pedestrian footpath along Castle Street is a later and more decorative gabled extension incorporating an arcade of Bath stone moulded door and window surrounds. Again, the external walls of the structure are formed in solid masonry with a gabled slate roof over (see Fig 8 below). The two pitched roofs are connected via a hidden and staged lead valley (see Fig 9 below).



Fig 7: Former Wesleyan chapel structure with hipped slate roof to the northern part of the site (LHS of photograph) and later, gabled structure to the south and fronting onto Castle Street (RHS of photograph).



Fig 8: More decorative south elevation incorporating bath stone detailing and window surrounds facing onto Castle Street.



Fig 9: Staged lead valley connecting the hipped roof of the former Wesleyan Chapel (LHS of picture) and the gabled extension (top RHS of picture)



Fig 10: Lean to structure to north of former chapel with corrugated roof. Lean-to uses blockwork faced boundary wall within structure.

The building has very little external space within its curtilage, with a narrow yard to the west elevation providing access to the secondary entrance and single storey lean-to structure between the rear (north) of the former Wesleyan Chapel and the boundary wall (see Fig 10 above). The yard is contemporary in finish, being laid to concrete and enclosed by a fair-faced clockwork wall. The yard is level with a gentle fall to a rainwater channel which extends to the perimeter of the yard (see Fig 11 below).

The only other external space associated with the building is a small enclosed yard to the north-east corner of the plot. This area is enclosed by the former chapel to the south, a second lean-to structure with felt/single-ply flat roof over to the west, boundary wall to the north and adjacent property to the east. This outdoor space is currently inaccessible.

To the East of the building lies a tarmac driveway and gardens laid to grass that are outside of the ownership of the building (see Fig 12 below). It is noted that a surface water drainage channel and associated gulleys serving the building are located within the tarmac driveway, which owned by others.



Fig 11: Access yard to west of building laid to concrete with drainage channel to perimeter.



Fig 12: Driveway and gardens to the east of the building are under separate ownership.

The external walls have been largely altered over time with much of the original solid masonry walls now concealed behind cementitious render including; Canterbury Spar (Durite) dry-dash finish to the west elevation, and fined down sand and cement render to the east and north elevations, these being finished in paint (see also Figs 7 and 12 above).

The only exposed stone remains to the principal (south) elevation overlooking Castle Street, which comprises thinly coursed, square edged pennant sandstone. The south elevation incorporates four bays, each including a single round arched window/door with dressed stone surrounds (see Figs 13 & 14 below).

Across the south, east and west elevations, existing windows and doors comprise a collection of materials and fenestrations including modern timber casement windows, steel casement windows, modern timber boarded and steel panel doors. A number of existing openings have also been blocked and/or covered, both completely to conceal their previous location, or partially to provide a visual reference their previous locations. This approach is consistent with the former use as a Masonic Lodge which often screen visual access into the building (see Figs 15 & 16 below).



Fig 13: Each of the four bays to the south elevation incorporates a single window at both ground and first floor. At ground floor level, the existing window openings have been concealed with steel covers with painted window fenestration applied. At first floor, single glazed timber casement windows remain.



Fig 14: Principal entrance located on south elevation abutting Castle Street. Timber doors in poor condition throughout.



Fig 15: East elevation incorporates concealed windows openings at first floor level (also visible internally) and metal windows at ground floor level. Metal windows incorporate vent to kitchen.



Fig 16: Secondary entrance located in yard to west elevation. contemporary steel door with modern galvanised steel framed canopy over.

Whilst there is no reason given for its designation, the exterior of the building is referenced within the listing description and provides a useful summary of the fenestration in 1989 (the time of listing) which is consistent with how the elevations are represented today. A copy of the listing description is included within Appendix A of this report.

For detailed information regarding the condition of the external elements of the building, please refer to the accompanying *Structural Survey (Inspections)* report by Structural Surveys UK, dated February 2021.

INTERIOR

Whilst Moose Hall is currently unoccupied, internally, it has been refurbished on multiple occasions as the use of the building has been adapted over time. This means that little remains of the original fabric, much of which has been removed and/or concealed behind modern finishes including plasterboard, cementitious and/or gypsum plaster, tongue and groove timber panelling, lay in grid ceiling tiles, carpets etc. The ground floor construction has been replaced over time and now consists of a concrete slab with contemporary finishes laid over.

The interior of the building is currently in a poor state of repair with extensive cracking and moisture penetration to external walls, loose and/or blown plaster and tired/damaged finishes. The use of modern surfaces (such as cementitious and/or gypsum plaster/plasterboard) on solid masonry construction is considered to be contributing to the further decline of the interior (Structural Surveys UK, 2021).

For detailed information regarding the condition of the internal surfaces elements of the building, please refer to the accompanying *Structural Survey (Inspections)* report by Structural Surveys UK, dated February 2021 and the *Asbestos Refurbishment Survey* report by Anchem Laboratories Ltd, dated 1 December 2021.

At present, the building comprises the following spaces which remain from its previous use as a Masonic Lodge:

Former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (North Structure)

Ground Floor

- **Main Functions Space:** the original chapel has been reconfigured to provide a primary function space including bar and servery hatch to the adjacent kitchen. There is no natural light with all external openings now concealed behind contemporary surfaces. The room incorporates modern lay-in grid ceiling tiles, plastered walls with contemporary anaglypta style wall paper and a sprung 'Junkers' style timber floor over a gently sloped concrete sub-floor. The sloped floor is believed to date back to the building's use as a fire station where access was provided for parking fire appliances within the building). Contemporary steel panel radiators are located around the perimeter. Above the lay-in grid ceiling is a large void with cement tile ceiling (containing Chrysotile and Crocidolite asbestos). The cement tiles have been damaged to provide support for the lay-in grid ceiling below. Refer to Figs 17 to 20 below.
- **Kitchen:** to the east of the main function space is a kitchen (equipment now removed) formed across two separate rooms. The two rooms are connected by an open doorway. The kitchen incorporates a shuttered concrete ceiling, painted brick walls and vinyl floor tiles. Windows to the east elevation are painted metal. Refer to Figs 21 & 22 b below.
- **Bar & Store:** located within the main function space, a contemporary bar structure is formed in stained timber and melamine board. To the rear of the bar, existing wall finishes have been removed to expose the original stone external (north) wall of the former chapel. The sprung timber floor of the function space continues into the bar area. To the rear of the bar area is an enclosed store which is accessed, along with the bar, through the kitchen. The store incorporates a corrugated sheet ceiling, plastered walls and exposed concrete floor. Refer to Figs 23 to 25 below.

- **External Stores (North Elevation):** to the north of the main function space are two lean-to structures formed between the original stone wall of the former chapel and the boundary wall with the adjacent castle. The western store provides an emergency escape route from the main function space to the western yard. The store incorporates a shallow pitch corrugated sheet roof over a simple timber structure, a combination of wall finishes including brick, stone and the rendered external wall of the former chapel (all paint finish), and an unfinished concrete floor. To the north wall of the chapel, the original window openings of the chapel have been blocked up with fair-faced blockwork. The east store is similarly formed with a shallow pitch corrugated sheet roof internally (externally overlaid with single-ply membrane), painted brick walls and an unfinished concrete floor. The eastern store incorporates a gas fired boiler and associated distribution pipework with the flue exhausting into the small inaccessible courtyard. Refer to Figs 26 & 27 below.
- **Female WC:** to the south-western corner of the main function room is a female WC, accessed from the extension structure to the south of the former chapel. The WC incorporates a painted plasterboard ceiling, plastered/plasterboard walls and a sheet vinyl floor covering. Sanitaryware is contemporary white vitreous china close coupled WC's & WHB within a melamine faced cubicle system.

First Floor

- **Ceremony Room:** during its time as a Masonic Lodge, the ceremony room was the principal first floor space within the former Wesleyan Chapel. The first floor structure is believed to have been incorporated into the eastern end of the former chapel, with the floor supported on a structural steel beam (forming a bulkhead in the ground floor function room) and a timber floor structure. As a room used for Masonic purposes, again the room is fully enclosed with all existing windows having been concealed (although the window recesses remain). The ceremony room is accessed from the two storey gabled extension structure to the south with the floor level set below that of the adjacent rooms. The ceremony room comprises a painted plasterboard ceiling with cementitious plaster to both internal and external solid stone walls which conceals the stonework below. The internal wall separating the ceremony room and the adjacent ceiling void (above the lay-in grid ceiling within the main function space) is formed in plasterboard on timber studs. The floor of the ceremony room comprises a boarded timber floor with a secondary boarded timber floor overlaid - the secondary floor is provided to the perimeter of the room, with the central area (formed as a circle) stepped down with the existing timber floor boards overlaid with carpet. Refer to Figs 28 & 29 below.
- **Male WC:** the male WC is located at first floor level and accessed from a half-landing from the western staircase located within the southern extension structure. The WC comprises a lay-in-grid ceiling with painted brickwork floors and a combination of sheet vinyl and vinyl tile floor. Sanitaryware is contemporary vitreous china urinals, close coupled WC and WHB's with exposed drainage pipework fixed to the brick walls. Internal metal windows open into the adjacent ceiling void and the brick walls which form the male WC encroach across existing external windows. Refer to Figs 30 & 31 below.

Two Storey Gabled Extension (South Structure)

Ground Floor

- **Kitchen Store:** to the south of the ground floor kitchen, located in the later gabled extension adjacent Castle Street and accessed through an unsupported (no visible lintel) doorway is a kitchen store. The kitchen store incorporates a plasterboard ceiling, painted brick walls and vinyl floor tiles. Windows to the east elevation are painted metal. Refer to Figs 32 & 33 below.
- **Social Room:** the social room forms the principal ground floor function room within the later gabled extension structure. During its time as a masonic lodge, the social room was fully enclosed with the existing ground floor windows enclosed behind a timber framed plasterboard wall. The ceiling also comprised a lowered, lay-in grid ceiling - which through agreement with the local planning authority was removed to expose the structure behind. The social room therefore comprises a painted tongue and groove ceiling (including around suspected steel beams supporting the floor structure over), framed plasterboard walls with anaglypta wallpaper and an unfinished concrete floor. Refer to Figs 34 to 36 below.
- **Lobby:** the existing lobby is the principal arrival space from the secondary entrance, and provides access to the main function space, social room and staircase to the first floor. The lobby incorporates a combination of finishes including a plasterboard ceiling to the main lobby area, finished in decorative wallpaper and polystyrene cornice, cementitious plaster walls finished in decorative wallpaper and red quarry tiles. The entrance lobby (immediately adjacent the entrance) and staircase are lined with tongue and groove timber panelling. Refer to Figs 37 to 39 below.

First Floor

- **Hall (Bowling Alley):** the principal space at first floor level within the extension structure is the long hall which, during the buildings' use as a masonic lodge, was used as a makeshift bowling alley. The hall is accessible from the ground floor via open timber staircases at each end of the hall. With the bowling apparatus now removed the hall incorporates a cement board ceiling, cementitious plaster applied to solid stone walls and a boarded timber floor. The existing single glazed timber casement windows overlooking Castle Street remain at first floor level, albeit these appear to be replacement contemporary casement windows. Refer to Figs 40 to 42 below.



Fig 17: Main function space with access/view through serving hatch to kitchen. Surfaces include lay-in-grid ceiling, cementitious plaster walls/wallpaper finish and sprung timber floor.

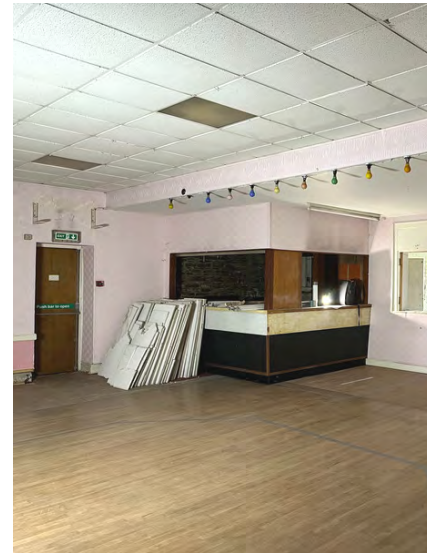


Fig 18: Contemporary bar structure and fire escape route through external stores beyond.



Fig 19: Former fire station entrance to east wall, Floor includes gentle slope towards former door. Modern panelled radiators fitted.



Fig 20: Void over lay-in-grid ceiling with cement tile ceiling, damaged by modern ceiling structure.



Fig 21: Kitchen adjacent to function space. Equipment removed with shuttered concrete ceiling, painted brick walls and vinyl tile floor evident. Metal windows to east elevation.

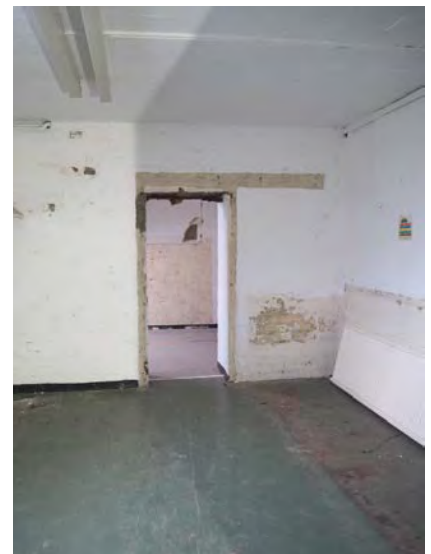


Fig 22: Secondary kitchen space leading through to kitchen store beyond.



Fig 23: stained timber and melamine bar enclosure to north east corner of function room, leading to bar store and kitchen beyond.



Fig 24: Bar store.



Fig 25: Modern cementitious plaster surface behind bar area removed to expose solid stone external wall below.



Fig 26: External store (west) with fire escape & blocked up window chapel window opening.



Fig 27: External store (east) housing gas fired boiler.



Fig 28: First floor ceremony room (within former chapel). Chapel window openings blocked and external walls covered with cementitious plaster. Boarded timber floor below tarpaulin.



Fig 29: Entrance to ceremony room from adjacent hall (first floor level within extension structure).



Fig 30: Male WC with modern sanitaryware, exposed pipework and contemporary finishes.



Fig 31: Internal metal window between Male WC and roof void (over ground floor function room).



Fig 32: Kitchen store (ground floor) with modern plaster finish affected by damp and surface mounted pipework. Possible former chimney stack in corner.



Fig 33: Access between kitchen and kitchen store through unsupported doorway.



Fig 34: Ground floor social room with route through to kitchen store/stairs to first floor hallway. Image shows previous lay-in-grid ceiling/contemporary finishes and cracked concrete floor.



Fig 35: Social Room ceiling following removal of lay-in-grid - painted timber boarding revealed.



Fig 36: Removal of plasterboard in social room reveals contemporary single glazed timber window



Fig 37: Entrance lobby with access to main function space beyond.

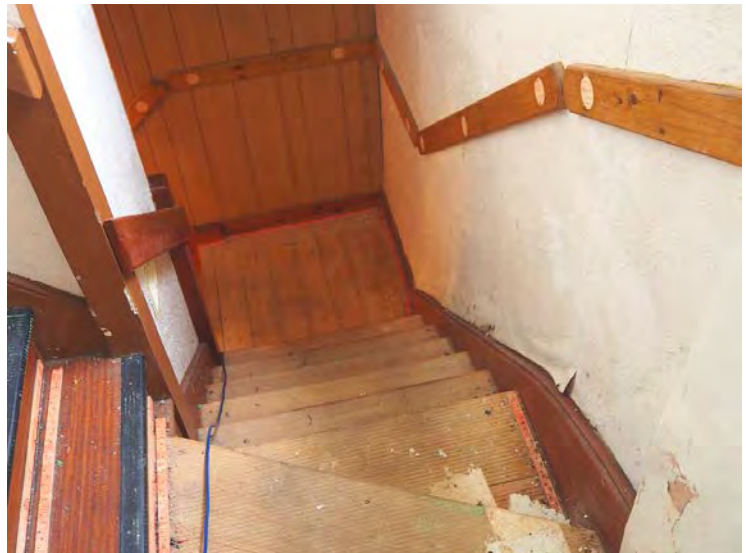


Fig 38: Timber staircase leading from lobby to first floor hall. Note timber panelling to lower section of stairs leading from lobby.

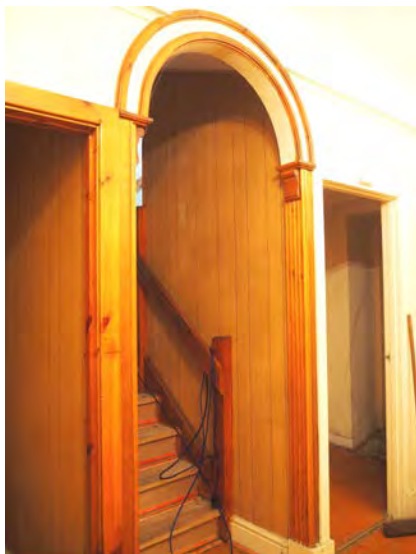


Fig 39: Timber panelling to bottom of stairs and foyer (left of frame). Female WC access (right of frame).



Fig 40: First floor Hall within extension structure overlooking Castle Street.



Fig 41: First floor hall with staircase (rear of frame) down to ground floor and access to ceremony room (top left of frame).

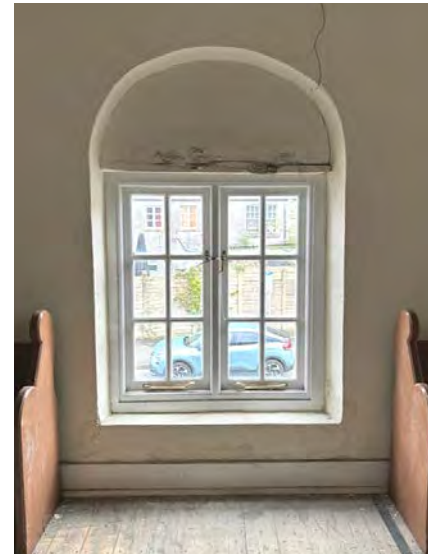


Fig 42: Modern timber casement window to south elevation, overlooking Castle Street.

2.3 STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

Listed Buildings

Listed buildings are buildings of special architectural and historic interest which make up Wales' historic environment. They are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and any alteration or demolition requires Listed Building Consent to be provided by the Local Planning Authority before the work can proceed.

In 2016, the National Assembly for Wales passed additional legislation, The Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016, which amends the 1990 Act to be specific to Wales' own historic environment.

In England and Wales there are three categories of listing. Moose Hall is Grade II listed which is the lowest category and includes buildings of 'special interest', warranting every effort to preserve them.

The listing description dates back to 1989 and makes no specific reference to the reason for designation. The exterior description does however reference the building as being constructed circa 1813 and to being the first Methodist Chapel in Neath. The listing description references the external materials (many of which are referenced as 'modern') and general fenestration, which is much altered from the original chapel including a number of windows having been blocked by this time and many of the original stone elevations being concealed by 'pebble-dash' and render.

A copy of the full listing description can be found in Appendix A.

Conservation Area

A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance (Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

The main purpose of conservation area designation is to acknowledge the special character of an area. This influences the way in which the Local Planning Authority (LPA) deal with planning applications that may affect the particular character of the area.

Moose Hall sits just within the north-easternmost boundary of the Neath Town Centre Conservation Area.

It is noted that *The Historic Environment: Supplementary Planning Guidance (April 2019)* prepared by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council makes no reference to Moose Hall, including no reference within Appendix A which sets out a 'Schedule of Buildings of Local Importance'.

The document gives a general indication of the features of importance within the Neath Town Centre Conservation Area as outlined below, which excludes any reference to Moose Hall:

"features of importance include the traditional commercial centre with some small shop units, the general market, public buildings, the castle, St. Thomas' church, Victoria Gardens and other architectural features and structures".

2.4 NATIONAL & LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

Planning Policy Wales (PPW)

Published in 2016, Planning Policy Wales is the overarching planning policy document for Wales and provides guidance on how to implement legislation relating to the historic environment. Section 2 of PPW: *Conserving the Historic Environment* contains the Welsh Governments' policies for the protection of heritage.

The policies provide a holistic approach to planning and development, where all significant elements that make up the historic environment are termed 'historic assets'.

These consist of 'designated assets' such as listed building or conservation areas, and 'non-designated assets' such as locally listed buildings or those features which are considered to be of heritage value.

Moose Hall is noted as having 'designated' status.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (2011 - 2026)

The Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan is the Local Planning Authority's overarching planning policy document, setting our priorities for future planning and development within the city. It outlines the nature and volume of development including where it should be, when it should happen and how it will be delivered.

It identifies the enabling infrastructure, development and necessary safeguards required to implement national and regional policy guidance at the local level.

The following policies within the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan are considered to be potentially pertinent to the proposed works at Moose Hall:

- SP3 Sustainable Communities (P.35)
- SP11 Employment Growth (P.59)
- SP21 Built Environment & Historic Heritage (P.84)
- SC1 Settlement Limits (P.36)
- BE1 Design (P.85)
- TR2 Design & Access of New Development (P.82)

Guidance Documents

Cadw is the historic environment division for the Welsh Assembly producing guidance documents that give advice on the management of the historic environment. In particular, this report takes reference from the following:

Conservation Principles for the Sustainable Management of The Historic Environment in Wales (2011): Produced by Historic England (formerly English Heritage), this document was set out by Cadw to provide a logical approach decision making in relation to the historic environment based on significance.

Managing Conservation Areas in Wales (2017): The focus of this guidance is on providing clear and consistent criteria for defining special architectural or historical interest which make up conservation areas.

Managing Change to Listed Buildings in Wales (2017): The focus of this guidance is on change to the physical fabric of a heritage asset based on understanding the significance of the fabric.

Technical Advice Note 24: The Historic Environment (2017): The purpose of this TAN is to provide guidance on how the planning system considers the historic environment during development plan preparation and decision making in planning and listed building (LBC) applications.

3.0 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

3.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Traces of medieval past are evident across the local landscape, including Neath Castle and Neath Abbey which was the ecclesiastical centre prior to the foundation of later monasteries and churches. The remains of Neath Castle are situated adjacent to, and share, the northern boundary of Moose Hall, with the castle site designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument under the care of Cadw.

The dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century led to the transfer of landholdings from the church to local aristocracy, of which the Gnoll Estate is the most local to Moose Hall.

The pattern of industrialisation was influenced by these estates, including copper and iron at Neath Abbey and lead and copper at the Gnoll estate. However, Neath was a developed town before the industrialisation of the area, the pattern of its streets therefore being largely influenced by its medieval origins.

3.1.1 LOCATION

When the application building was first established as a Wesleyan Baptist Chapel in 1813 the street arrangement was different to that seen today. Whilst no longer present, the west of the building abutted a narrow side street running north-south. The street is referred to on the 1935-36 Ordnance Survey map with the name 'Castle Buildings'. Earlier maps show the road as unnamed.

It is anticipated that the principal elevation and original entrance to the chapel would have been directly from the street known as Castle Buildings.

Other buildings along Castle Buildings were arranged in a terrace with their frontage directly abutting the highway. Historic maps and photographs appear to show the street as residential in character and is close to 'The Latt' which, at the time, was a residential street for lower income families. It is however possible that the buildings served other uses, such as light commercial.

The choice to establish the original Wesleyan Chapel at the site appears to have been deliberate - to serve the community in which it was based, being very much in the centre of Neath at that time. It is understood from the archives held by the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT) that there was once a Wesleyan Meeting House located north of where the building now stands. It is therefore considered probable that the Meeting House was located within the row of buildings lining Castle Buildings. It is also considered likely that this was where John Wesley would perform sermons to grow the society, and is the likely link between the application site and John Wesley.

It is noted that a plaque fixed to the south elevation of Moose Hall states:



"First Methodist Chapel in Neath Opened 1813. Visited Sometime by John Wesley"

It is however noted that this statement is misleading as John Wesley passed away in 1791, some 22 years before the Chapel opened. The link is therefore more likely to relate to the site or buildings close by such as the Meeting House noted above.



Fig 43: Tithe Map provides very little detail to identify building structures, but illustrates the emerging Neath street-scape.

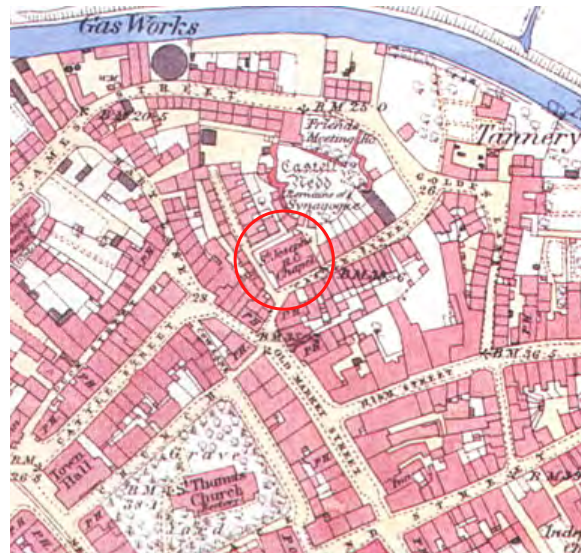


Fig 44: 1877 OS Map. Earliest map identifying the building, then known as St Josephs RC Church. The street configuration now shows public realm masterplanning and adjacent buildings. Also note indicated difference in alignment of north and south structures of the building.



Fig 45: 1897 OS map illustrating places of worship as black



Fig 46: 1935-36 OS map, street to west identified as 'Castle Buildings'.



Fig 47: 1930's image of 'The Latt' with the Friends Meeting House in the background



Fig 48: 1950's aerial image of Neath illustrating the building as a fire station (refer to large door opening in west elevation)



Fig 49: 1980's image of Moose Hall as viewed upon approach from the west along Castle Street

3.1.2 WESLEYAN BAPTIST CHAPEL (1813 - 1868)

This part of the building is believed to be the original structure established c. 1813 (as noted within the listing description and on the plaque fixed to the south elevation).

The building is formed of two defined structures, the original chapel to the north with hipped slate roof, and a later two storey gabled extension to the south, which also incorporates a slate roof and abuts Castle Street. The date at which the extension structure was added to the south is unknown. It is however considered to be a later addition and could perhaps have been added in the late 1860's when ownership transferred to the Roman Catholic Church and a school is believed to have been introduced.

As is typical of most Wesleyan Baptist Chapels it is considered that the chapel would have been arranged on an east-west axis, with the focus of worship towards the east. This would likely have included a preacher's pulpit (top pulpit) and a lower pulpit used by lay-people to recite readings or lead hymn's.

Several arrangements of pews are evident in Wesleyan Chapels, which is supported by photographic records, however it is considered likely based upon subsequent use and photographic records from its time as a Roman Catholic Church that the pews were located to the centre of the ground floor with access provided by side aisles.

A gallery was often incorporated within a Wesleyan Chapel, being either a three-sided or a single gallery to the west. Photographic records of the building (see Figs 50 & 51 below) show no gallery to the north or south of the space, therefore a single west gallery may have been present, but remains unconfirmed.



Fig 50: The Baptist Chapel of Cardigan, constructed 1846-7 provides an example of a typical interior arrangement. Galleries were commonplace as an economical way of increasing capacity



Fig 51: Historic image of the building under Roman Catholic ownership, as St Joseph's RC Church. It is plausible that the interior was remodelled following the change of ownership (including removal of galleries), however given the height of the space it is anticipated that changes were minimal and limited only to removing the pulpit and installing a reredos.

As a result of the building having gone through several phases of ownership and uses there is extremely little evidence remaining of the original Wesleyan Chapel, with perhaps the exception of the original window openings to the chapel structure - these window openings now having been blocked up with only the occasional outline evident, most notably on the north and east elevations.

A summary of the likely remaining traces of the Wesleyan Baptist Chapel is outlined below:

- Photographic records indicate two large arched windows to the east elevation, with the focus of worship between. Whilst the windows are no longer open, having been concealed, the reveals remain evident both internally and externally. At ground level, the window openings appear to have been used to install later metal windows to provide natural light and ventilation into the kitchen.
- Photographic evidence indicates large arched windows on the north elevation. Once again, whilst these windows are no longer open, evidence remains of their existence with the reveals visible internally (within the ceiling void above the function room) and externally where the cementitious render seemingly follows and accentuates their outline.
- The south elevation of the original chapel structure is concealed by the south extension. Given that buildings of this nature would typically be symmetrical it is plausible that the original south elevation would have incorporated similar windows. It is however noted that during the time the building was used as a Roman Catholic church, no windows were evident on the south elevation, as can be seen in Fig 51 above. Some evidence of openings remain above the ground floor function room ceiling void.
- The west elevation contains no visible reference to the building's use as a Wesleyan Chapel due to the substantial changes made during subsequent uses, most notably its use as a fire station (see below). It is however noted that the west elevation does incorporate two high level asymmetrically located arched windows which are comparable in scale to the other concealed windows. This suggests that there could have originally been three windows, or that these are later additions. The windows which remain are not original.

The roof structure of the Wesleyan Chapel is considered to be the original hipped roof, formed with timber king post trusses, purlins and common rafters. The original ceiling to the Chapel would most likely have been lath and plaster, with traces of such remaining evident on the base of the timber roof structure, however, this has subsequently been removed in its entirety.

3.1.3 ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF ST JOSEPH'S (1868 - 1933)

The Roman Catholic Church acquired the building in 1868, and it is believed that the two storey extension to the south of the original chapel was added around this time (being evident on the 1877 OS map) to accommodate a boy's and girl's school. It was commonplace for Roman Catholic Churches at this time to incorporate educational buildings in response to the growth in members following the mass migration from Ireland.

Figure 51 above provides an illustration of the interior of the building during its time as a Roman Catholic Church, and illustrates the following features:

- Plastered ceiling with ceiling vent, pendant lights and deep cornice
- Plastered walls with decoration to the east wall and perhaps to the low level walls of the north and south

- **Timber panelling to the east wall - most likely installed by the Wesleyan's and retained in the Roman Catholic refurbishment works**
- Installation of reredos and tabernacle with crocketed gables and altar featuring marbled column
- Central bench pews and side aisles
- Note: the large crucifix in Fig 53 appeared to move between the south and east walls

The Roman Catholic church vacated the building in 1933, when they built a new church on Hillside Lane in Neath in Gothic Revival Style, which remains as the Roman Catholic parish church today.

3.1.4 NEATH FIRE STATION (1933 - c.1965)

Although the exact date of change is unclear, following the relocation of St Joseph's to Hillside Lane in 1933, the former chapel went through a significant transformation from a place of worship to become Neath Fire Station.

This transformation is believed to have been the most significant in the buildings' history and saw the removal of substantial amount of original fabric. The chapel was subdivided to form the required functional spaces including a control room, toilet and ladies bedroom in place of the reredos, and the main chapel volume was transformed to incorporate access and parking for a fire appliance. This change saw the replacement of the floor with a sloped concrete floor, falling towards a new appliance entrance formed in the west wall (see Figs 52 & 53 below).

The southern extension was also reconfigured for use by the fire station to include a kitchen and mess room at ground floor. The first floor arrangement is unknown, but presumably included sleeping quarters for male operatives.

The building continued to be used as Neath Fire Station until the mid-1960's, and in 1967 the building underwent a further transformation when Moose International acquired the building.



Fig 52: The west elevation of the former chapel transformed to accommodate a fire appliance inside the building. The side road, providing vehicular access to the building remains. Due to the decline in appearance shown in later photographs (see below), it is believed that this image was taken early in the buildings tenure as Neath Fire Station.

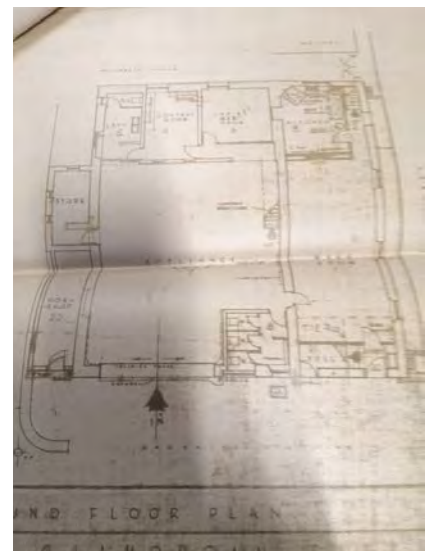


Fig 53: Image of the ground floor plan of the fire station.

3.1.5 MOOSE INTERNATIONAL (c.1965 - Present)

Established in the United States during the late 1800's, Moose International is a fraternal organisation which, whilst originally established to offer men an opportunity to gather socially, has developed to provide valuable services to the communities in which they are based, including providing care for children.

Moose International claims over 1 million members across 50 US states, four Canadian provinces and Great Britain. In the UK, Moose International Great Britain Association has 22 Lodges throughout England and Wales which operate in a manner most commonly known as Freemasonry. The Lodge would meet regularly to conduct formal business relating to community activities, elect new members, appoint officers and administer the lodge. In addition, a ceremony may be performed to confer a Masonic decree or receive a lecture on an aspect of Masonic history or ritual. The Lodge would also undertake functions, including a formal dinner at the end of meetings and events open to members, their partners and non-Masonic guests.

Following the sale of Neath Fire Station in 1967 (see Fig 54 below), Moose International acquired the building and set about further renovations to support the uses outlined above, including further internal demolition and refurbishment (see Fig 55 & 56 below).

The further transformation changed the internal spaces of the building to reflect generally the current spatial arrangement, including:

- **Ceremony room:** located at first floor level of the former chapel, this is where formal activities would be conducted. The room was remodelled to include a raised floor around a circular central area. As a result of its symbolic importance, most of the remaining fixtures and fittings (see Fig 57) were removed as the building fell in to disrepair. Only the raised floor and surface finishes remain.
- **Social Hall with bar and kitchen facilities:** the remaining open space from the former chapel (later used for parking a fire appliance) was transformed into a large social hall with bar, kitchen, and toilets (see Figs 58 & 59).
- **Hall with Bowling alley:** the first floor of the south extension comprises a long, open hall which was later used as a bowling alley (see Fig 60), although the equipment is now removed.
- **Ladies Social Room:** on the ground floor of the south extension is an enclosed room provided for social gatherings among the Ladies of Moose International (see Fig 61).

It is believed that during this renovation any remaining windows were blocked or enclosed to provide privacy for lodge activities, as is typical of Masonic buildings. This includes covering the ground floor windows to Castle Street - the windows having remained during the time the building was used as Neath Fire Station (see Fig 53 above).



Fig 54: Photograph of the fire station building for sale in 1967. Note the deterioration of elevations.

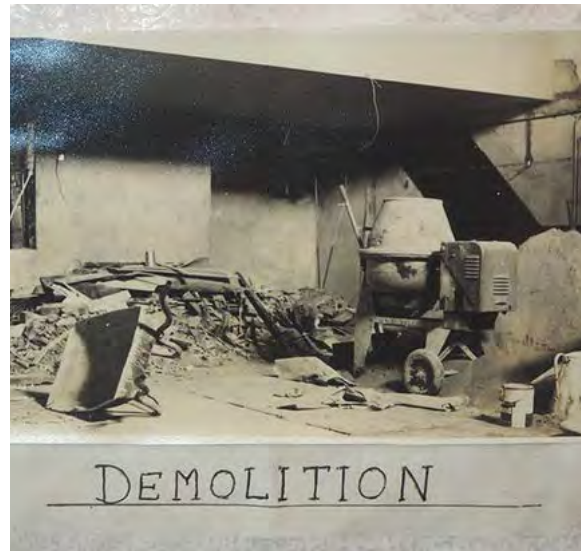


Fig 55: Demolition within the fire appliance room to create a main function space.



Fig 56: Transformation of the former fire appliance parking area to the main function space, including new bar and dance floor.



Fig 57: 2019 photograph showing first floor ceremony room including ceremonial fixtures and fittings.



Fig 58: 2019 photograph of main function hall, including modern fixtures and fittings.



Fig 59: 2019 photograph of kitchen including modern fixtures and fittings.



Fig 60: 2019 photograph of first floor hall to south extension, including temporary bowling alley (now removed).



Fig 61: 2019 photograph of Ladies Room including contemporary fixtures, fittings and finishes.

During their tenure at the building, it would appear that Moose International made significant alterations to the interior of the building, but did little to maintain the exterior after their initial renovation.

The organisation vacated the building in 2019 after removing most of the fixtures and fittings. The building was then offered for sale. As noted above, the applicants, Mr & Mrs Hill purchased the building in January 2020 with the intention of restoring it and reinstating the building for use by the community.

3.2 PLANNING HISTORY

3.2.1 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

To understand more about the history of Moose Hall, reference has been made to the planning history of the property in order to identify further information about possible ownership and use.

It is noted that the planning history of the property (accessed through the online applications search) only relates to the period from 2007. No information relating to earlier applications or the historic transformations are available via the planning portal.

A summary of the applications and status are provided below:

P2007/0006	Reinstate first floor windows on south elevation to original design and reinstate arched doorway at south west boundary (Listed Building Consent Application). Approval never enacted.	Approved (24 Aug 2007)
P2007/0007	Reinstate first floor windows on south elevation to original design and reinstate arched doorway at south west boundary. Never enacted.	Approved (13 Mar 2007)
P2022/0605	Felling of 1x Large Leyland Cypress protected by Neath Town Centre Conservation Area Status	Approved (16 Sep 2022)

3.2.2 APPROVAL OF INTERNAL INVESTIGATIONS

In preparation for the submission of this application, informal discussions were held with Neath Port Talbot Planning Department regarding initial investigations within the building to establish the presence and condition of historic fabric behind modern finishes.

The investigation works were outlined in Volute Architects document ref: 21/1011/700 Revision A, dated 19th October 2021. A copy of this document is included in Appendix B.

The investigations were confirmed as acceptable without the need for a formal planning and/or listed building consent application by Chris Davies via email on 30th November 2021.

3.2.3 PRE-APPLICATION ENQUIRY

A pre-application enquiry outlining the proposed change of use of the building along with internal and external alterations, the nature of which are included within this application, was submitted on 31 August 2021, under reference: Q2021/0189.

A pre-application response was provided on 12th October 2021 (a copy of which is included within Appendix C of this document).

The pre-application response confirmed the requirement for both planning and listed building consent and outlined the constraints which should be considered in any application.

Broadly, the pre-application response noted the proposed uses of the building to be acceptable and not contrary to the policies within the Local Development Plan, but the ultimate support of any applications would be subject to consideration of detailed submissions, particularly in relation to listed building consent.

These detailed proposals are the subject of this application.

4.0 SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 ASSESSING SIGNIFICANCE

Cadw's guidance document *Conservation Principles* (March 2011) outlines a methodology to thoroughly assess the significance of a heritage asset as the sum of the cultural values which make a building or site important to society. When assessing significance, aspects to consider include architectural interest, historical interest, group value, social value, former uses and local distinctiveness.

These considerations can be categorised as four core values - Evidential, Historic, Aesthetic and Communal as described below:

- **Evidential Value:** the potential to yield evidence about the past which could alter or enhance the perception of its significance, for example, intact below ground archaeology not yet known or excavated, or the concealment of significant period decor by modern surface treatment.
- **Historical Value:** being associated historical value such as the connection of a building or place to historically significant people and/or events, or alternatively, illustrative historical value such as how a place conveys its history, development and/or importance through time visually.
- **Aesthetic Value:** the ability to draw sensory or intellectual stimulation from a place through such considerations as good design, use of materials or the character and setting of a landscape.
- **Communal Value:** how a site or building brings people together as a community, a place of associated meaning by those who relate to it or a collective experience or memory. Note - this is often confused with the 'utility value' of a heritage asset such as the use of a historic park for dog walking which may be unrelated to the heritage quality of the asset.

Once the cultural values of a heritage asset are understood, the significance of the built fabric can then be assessed using a scale of significance as outlined below:

- **Very High:** these elements are essential to the understanding and appreciation of the building or site, and are key contributors to its overall character as well as local, regional and national importance.
- **High:** important at national or international level with high cultural value and makes an important contribution towards the character and appearance of the building and its setting.
- **Medium:** important at regional, or sometimes higher level with some cultural importance and some cultural contribution towards the character and appearance of the building and its setting.
- **Low:** local value only with possible regional significance and minor cultural importance or contribution to the character or appearance of the building and its setting.
- **Neutral:** little or no cultural value but do not detract from the character and appearance of the building and its setting.
- **Intrusive:** detract from the values of the building, its character, setting or appearance. Efforts should be made to remove or enhance these features.

4.1 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As set out above, the historical interest in Moose Hall lies primarily in its relationship to Neath and the surrounding areas. Whilst the building is Grade II listed, the reason for its designation is not clearly stated within the listing description, however, with reference to the above criteria the social and historical significance of the building can be considered as:

- **Evidential Value:** the architectural and evidential value of the building, by reference to its original use and historic fabric, has been largely diminished both externally and, more notably, internally with the original fabric having largely been removed/replaced with contemporary materials and the subdivision of original spaces (removing any interpretation of the original use as a place of worship).
- **Historical Value:** originally established c. 1813 as the first Methodist Chapel in Neath, the building has possible ties to John Wesley, one of the founders of the Wesleyan Methodists with claims that he visited the site (however, it is noted that John Wesley died in 1791, some 22 years before the current buildings were established).
- **Aesthetic Value:** as noted above, the building has been adapted on a number of occasions throughout its history with subsequent uses removing and/or replacing elements of the original building. It is noted that subsequent uses, including as a fire station and latterly a Masonic Lodge have, by their nature necessitated substantial change including, reconfiguration and subdivision of original spaces, replacement of original floors with concrete, replacement of original fabric with modern/hardwearing materials and the removal/covering/blocking of original window and door openings. It is noted that the use of inappropriate modern materials, such as cementitious and gypsum based render/plaster and poor detailing has contributed to the decline of the building, which has now fallen into disrepair.
- **Communal Value:** whilst the building has undergone multiple uses, each has remained true to the original purpose as being a building which supports the community (initially a place of worship, followed by a fire station and later a Masonic Lodge). The building also sits adjacent to the remains of Neath Castle, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and has remained a constant part of the street scene whilst adjacent buildings and roads have been lost through modernisation, masterplanning and development.

Therefore in accordance with the criteria set out above, the significance of Moose Hall is assessed as:

The direct historical connections of Moose Hall are predominantly local as the first Methodist Chapel in the town and with possible links to national historic figures (John Wesley). It is also considered that the property has strong cultural value due to its proximity to Neath Castle and prominence in the local landscape which has changed and developed significantly over time. Therefore, when considering the historic and communal value Moose Hall is considered to be of high significance.

However, when assessing the building individually or in relation to its noted historic features, many of which have been removed with little remaining to identify the original and subsequent historic uses, the evidence and aesthetic value of Moose Hall is considered to be low.

5.0 ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

The following section seeks to identify some of the key risks and vulnerabilities which either currently affect, or which may affect the property in the future. These views are based upon observations of the building during site visits and through discussion with the Client and as such should be considered a starting point rather than a definitive assessment of the issues and opportunities pertaining to the site.

5.1 OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT & USE

As outlined within the report, ownership of the building has changed a number of times throughout its history, with each change being accompanied by substantial renovations which have, over time, largely removed much of the original fabric and has resulted in the original use as a Chapel and place of worship being largely unrecognisable.

These changes were also undertaken at a time when understanding of the long term impact of using materials which were, new at the time of use, such as cementitious render and plaster applied to solid stone walls, was not yet known or, perhaps, considered less important. In addition, it appears that during previous ownership of the building by Moose Hall UK, care and maintenance was primarily focused on the interior of the building whilst the exterior was allowed to deteriorate over time, including extensive vegetation growth which has now been removed.

The result of this is that the building has fallen into a state of disrepair, including extensive moisture ingress, and requires urgent intervention in order to reverse years of neglect, remove inappropriate materials which are contributing to its decline and to ensure the buildings future use as part of the community.

In preparing this application, the applicants have declared their intention to undertake such intervention by seeking to remove inappropriate materials which are contributing to the buildings' decline, repair the damage previously caused to the fabric and protect the future of the building through the application of appropriate materials, detailing and maintenance.

The proposals and continued use of the building are therefore considered to be a benefit for the ongoing protection and enjoyment of the building for future generations.

5.1.2 CONDITION & MAINTENANCE

The regular upkeep and maintenance of historic buildings is crucial to their conservation and continued enjoyment.

Whilst the building has, over recent years, been allowed to fall into disrepair the proposed restoration of the building for commercial use provides the opportunity to continue to preserve the building for future generations.

The proposed use will allow for the implementation of an annual maintenance programme to underpin the continued use, which is required so that guests and users continue to see the building as a desirable place to be.

5.1.3 STATUTORY CONSENTS

Being Grade II Listed and located within the Neath Town Centre Conservation Area means that any further and future development and/or changes are restricted without the prior consent of the Local Planning Authority and, specifically, Listed Building Consent.

This places a restriction on the building owner in relation to making changes that it may believe to be in the best interests of their building.

However, such a restriction should be seen as an opportunity for early engagement and consultation with the relevant authorities and statutory undertakers relating to any future alterations.

This should not be considered onerous, but instead create an opportunity to harness local and architectural knowledge of the building and the wider area and use it to the advantage of the building and the community, preserving its significance for future generations.

5.4 FINANCE

As the building continues to be used by the community as a result of these proposals, including for gatherings, functions and for commercial activities, the building will be subjected to wear and tear and require further maintenance and investment.

However, the continued use of the building for economically viable commercial activities creates a continued opportunity to generate income which will then be used to fund future maintenance and repairs to ensure the building and its fabric is preserved for the enjoyment of the community.

5.5 SECURITY

Moose Hall is located within an urban area with very little natural surveillance afforded by neighbouring properties to deter anti-social behaviour and/or vandalism. This is particularly relevant through the night, with very few residential properties directly overlooking the application site or adjacent properties.

It is further noted that the majority of adjacent properties, including Neath Castle (SAM), The Round House Cafe, and Neath Guide Headquarters, are closed/unoccupied overnight. The nearby Duke of Wellington Public House is open and occupied late into the evening, however it does not directly overlook the Moose Hall site (overlooking nearby Old Market Street), therefore natural surveillance afforded by this property is also limited.

As a result, the properties along Castle Street are at an increased risk of vandalism - with documented and anecdotal evidence of vandalism to adjacent sites, including the Neath Castle (SAM) site (See Fig 62). A particular target of vandals are windows and lights, with the adjacent Round House Cafe also having suffered smashed windows on multiple occasions.

It is therefore considered that once the building has been re-established for its intended use, which includes multiple occupancy through the day and into the evening, this will provide improved levels of security and safety for both the application building/fabric **and** adjacent properties (including the SAM site), by:

- Bringing back into use a prominent building with multiple uses which create activity and natural surveillance to Castle Street, and adjacent properties, throughout the day and into the evening. This includes regular visitors to the building throughout the times of opening by employees and members of the public.
- Improved natural surveillance to all sides of the building through re-establishing existing/historic window openings to the north, south and east elevations, and re-establishing a large entrance opening to the west elevation.
- Re-establishing windows to the north elevation, combined with a new terrace with limited outdoor seating will provide natural surveillance of the adjacent properties, in particular the Neath Castle.
- The proposed provision of CCTV to private spaces (north and west elevations) will act as a deterrent to crime and vandalism to secluded parts of the building, particularly when closed.



Fig 62: Social Media post by Neath Castle from March 2023 confirming vandalism at the SAM site
(Source: Facebook)

6.0 THE PROPOSALS

The proposals for change outlined within the application comprise internal and external alterations to Moose Hall, including change of use to include proposed uses as a restaurant (A3 use class) and offices (B1 use class).

The proposals, including their proposed uses, are broadly aligned with the two distinct structures which make up the existing building and which are outlined in this document - these being:

- The former Wesleyan Chapel structure to the north of the site, which is proposed to be refurbished for use as a restaurant (A3 use class). The restaurant would be open to the general public, and;
- The later two storey extension to the south of the site and which now overlooks Castle Street, which is proposed to be refurbished for business use (B1 use class). The business use is intended to serve a variety of possible uses including, for example, a hair salon and/or offices.

Whilst it is appreciated that the alterations required to facilitate this change could be considered substantial, the original and subsequent historic uses of the building are now largely unrecognisable, with much of the original fabric having been removed and replaced with modern, inappropriate finishes which are contributing to the decline of the building.

As illustrated below, whilst the proposals constitute a further change of use, the internal arrangement largely follows the existing building layout (much of which dates back to the buildings' time as a fire station) with only minor alterations.

Where the proposals are destructive is through the proposed removal of inappropriate modern fabric, for example the removal of cementitious render from the north, east and west elevations as well as the removal of cementitious and/or gypsum based plaster from the interior face of external walls. Due to the original walls being solid stone masonry, these materials are believed to be trapping moisture inside the walls which is manifesting as cracking and blowing of these surfaces. Additional moisture damage is also present due to poor detailing and deterioration of the envelope.

Based upon the above considerations, the proposals are therefore considered to be in the best interests of the building.

NORTH STRUCTURE (FORMER WESLEYAN CHAPEL)

As already outlined, the north structure dates back to c. 1813 and was first established as a Wesleyan Baptist Chapel.

It is proposed that the north structure operate as a restaurant and bar with associated facilities to include a private function room, kitchen, male, female and accessible toilets and storage. Existing single storey extensions to the north of the building would be utilised for plant and bin/recycling storage with a proposed new terrace over providing additional outdoor seating overlooking Neath Castle, and serving as a fire escape to comply with building regulations.

Please refer to accompanying drawings 21/1011/201 and 202 for detailed proposals.

Approach & Entrance

The approach to the restaurant is by the existing courtyard to the west of the building. The existing courtyard is a private space associated with the building and laid to concrete. Access is currently restricted by a steel gate where the boundary meets the public highway along Castle Street. The courtyard is level from the point of existing access along its length to the northern boundary with Neath Castle.

It is proposed to retain the existing courtyard, laid to concrete, to provide level pedestrian access to the restaurant entrance, which would provide access directly into the north structure. To segregate the proposed uses and their respective entrances, and to provide additional security to the restaurant when not open a new gate and wall would be provided at the junction between the north and south structures of the building. The existing pebble-dash boundary wall and steel gate would be removed and replacements provided to be more in-keeping with the re-rendered elevations (paint finish render).

The entrance to the restaurant is proposed on the west elevation, and provides a design reference to historic uses, i.e. the original entrance to the chapel (from the then Castle Buildings) would have been located on this elevation, as was the vehicle entrance for fire appliances when the building operated as Neath Fire Station, therefore re-establishing this historic and prominent entrance point.

The proposed entrance would comprise a large glazed screen and doors (former fire appliances entrance), providing a clear visual link to the entrance from the highway, and allowing natural light and visual links into the interior. Externally, the opening would be protected by a top hung, vertically boarded timber roller shutter which would be open during operating hours, and closed outside of these hours for security. The timber shutter would provide a design reference to the former fire appliance doors (refer to Fig 52 above).

Inside the entrance, a draught lobby would provide comfort to users, with barrier matting. The glazed entrance doors are to be outward opening in accordance with statutory fire regulations. The main restaurant space is accessed directly from the entrance lobby.

Restaurant, Bar & Function Room

The restaurant is proposed to occupy the main space of the north structure, originally used as the chapel and then later, parking for fire appliances and currently the main function room of the Masonic Lodge. The intention is that the restaurant would comprise two floors, the existing ground floor and a new mezzanine structure with an open central void to re-establish, and allow users to interpret, the original open volume of the building with clear views throughout this space. Contemporary ceiling finishes are to be removed and the ceiling reinstated to the underside of the existing roof structure, as the original intention. New services i.e. lighting, mechanical ventilation, fire control systems etc. are proposed to be exposed to provide contrast between the original surfaces and new use.

It is proposed that the mezzanine structure be formed in a standalone steel structure (not mechanically fixed to the original stone walls of the chapel), with minimal structural support posts and a post and vertical rail balustrade to promote clear views between the levels. Structural support posts would bear onto the existing concrete floor (please refer to accompanying structural proposals). The structure would be fully reversible.

At mezzanine level the original arched window openings to the north elevation, which date back to the Wesleyan Chapel and are currently blocked or covered, are to be re-established to allow natural lighting, ventilation and views out of the adjacent Neath Castle. The existing openings will also enable access to the proposed external terrace, doubling as a second means of fire escape from the first floor level (as required by statutory fire regulations).

The reinstatement of windows will provide a reference back to the original use as a chapel.

Restaurant seating generally would be provided by loose tables and chairs and banquette seating.

The existing bar and store are to be retained in their current location with the bar updated to better support the proposed use and to allow direct access between the bar and guest areas for table service.

Guest toilets are accessed from the restaurant, including a new accessible WC at ground floor level.

A feature staircase is proposed to provide access between the ground floor and mezzanine, comprising steel structure and balustrade to match the mezzanine, and timber treads to correspond with the existing sprung timber floor which is to be retained.

At first floor level the existing timber stud wall forming the ceremony room is to be removed, with a new wall provided (to align with the perceived location at the time of Neath Fire Station) and the space repurposed as a private function room with the original window openings (again dating back to the Wesleyan Chapel and would have framed the pulpit) re-established to provide natural light and access to the first floor terrace. The function room will be accessed from the mezzanine floor, adjacent to the proposed staircase for direct access.

It is proposed that the contemporary finishes applied to the original stone walls, including cementitious and/or gypsum plaster/plasterboard be fully removed to enable the structure to 'breathe'. The existing stone walls would then be repaired, as required in accordance with the recommendation of the accompanying structural report, and remain exposed where possible. Where walls are not constructed in stone and/or have been subject to previously poor repairs, areas of wall are to be rendered in lime plaster to retain the ability of the solid structure to breathe.

First Floor Fire Escape & Stair

To comply with statutory fire regulations, a secondary means of escape is required from the first floor seating area of the proposed restaurant. It is therefore proposed to create an external terrace at this level, comprising a steel framed structure with timber board finish. The steel structure is to be self-supporting and is not to be mechanically fixed to the existing structure/elevations. The terrace structure is therefore fully reversible.

The raised terrace will provide a dedicated fire escape route from the first floor mezzanine and function room, with the escape route remaining clear at all times to ensure unhindered access to the proposed steel escape stair leading to the maintained access route to the public highway.

It is proposed that the raised terrace will also screen the external stores below, and as such will be of sufficient width to enable a small number of outdoor covers for the restaurant with views over the adjacent Neath Castle site, reinforcing the relationship between the two buildings.

Guest Facilities

Facilities for the convenience of guests include separate male and female toilets, which are proposed to replace the existing toilet facilities so as to utilise existing plumbing. A new accessible WC is also proposed at ground floor level. All facilities are easily visible and accessible from the main restaurant space.

Back-of-House Facilities

Back-of-house and supporting staff facilities include a dedicated kitchen (including utility and washing areas), stores and a staff rest room, all of which utilise the existing plan arrangement with only minor alteration. The staff room will also provide a secondary means of escape to the ground floor restaurant area in accordance with fire regulations.

To the north-east corner of the building, the existing store (which includes the existing boiler and associated pipework) is proposed to be retained for use as the buildings' primary plant/boiler room with any flues continuing to be discharged into the adjacent, private yard within the curtilage of the building.

It is noted that there is no current access to the adjacent yard, therefore included within the proposals is to provide an external door to the boiler room to allow access for maintenance of the land, buildings and plant.

SOUTH STRUCTURE (LATER TWO STOREY EXTENSION)

The later (undated) structure to the south of the building and overlooking Castle Street comprises a two storey gabled extension with the most decorative elevation overlooking the highway. It is believed that the southern extension was constructed to house a school associated with the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph, then later used as accommodation and mess facilities associated with Neath Fire Station, and currently provides function spaces for the previous use as a Masonic Lodge.

The structure is long and narrow and includes two storeys of accommodation.

The proposals include for reordering the ground floor to provide accommodation for light-use business purposes. The final use is yet to be determined, however, for the purposes of this application the proposal comprises a large flexible-use space, with toilet facilities (including an accessible WC) and storage.

Access into the ground floor unit is via the existing entrance door to the west elevation close to the adjacent public highway along Castle Street. The existing access is level and is easily accessible from the public footpath.

A secondary means of escape is provided from the ground floor unit via the south-east lobby which gives access to the south-east entrance for the first floor unit.

The proposed first floor accommodation includes the introduction of partitions to subdivide the existing space to provide three enclosed workspaces supported by a reception, tea point and WC.

Access to the first floor unit is provided through the existing entrance door directly from Castle Street. This provides dedicated access into a lobby and staircase to the first floor reception area. The entrance also provides secondary means of escape from the north structure and ground floor business premises.

It is noted that the existing staircase (south-east corner of the building) is noted within the accompany Structural Report as being rotten and 'sloped'. The stairs are also non-compliant with Approved Document K of the current building regulations. It is therefore proposed to replace the existing stairs with a new timber staircase in accordance with Approved Document K of the Building Regulations.

It is noted that the proposed layout of the south structure utilises where possible the existing walls and openings dating back to the buildings time as Neath Fire Station, and any new partitions and/or structures are fully reversible.

To the principal south elevation, it is proposed to remove all cracked, defective and /or cement mortar and replace with an appropriate lime mortar to enable the structure to breathe.

Whilst the above proposals will result in some aesthetic change to the elevations, the removal and replacement of inappropriate materials is intended to preserve and ensure the future of the original fabric and any changes to the fenestration/appearance of the building are intended ensure that the building is sustained in use.

6.1 PRESERVING THE EXISTING CHARACTER & SIGNIFICANCE

As set out above, the character and significance of Moose Hall lies primarily in its relationship to Neath and the surrounding areas as a result of it being the first methodist chapel in the town, it's continued community use, possible links to national historic figures (John Wesley) and its cultural value which lies in its proximity to Neath Castle and its retention and prominence through the developing local landscape.

It has also been established within this report that the the building has evolved significantly throughout its history and multiple uses, each of which conflicts with the last, that has resulted in most of the original and/or historic features and fabric having been lost. In addition, additional features such as original window openings to the former chapel have been blocked or concealed.

Apart from the external structure comprising solid stone masonry walls, slate roof and timber structure below, the building fabric is predominantly modern. As stated above and within the accompanying Structural Report the application of these modern, and often inappropriate materials, particularly in combination with the original solid stone walls, has contributed to the decline of the building which now suffers from substantial moisture ingress.

Approach

Therefore, in order to preserve the existing character and significance of the building, the approach taken by the applicant can be summarised as:

- Removal of inappropriate modern materials in order to repair and preserve the original fabric. Where replacement materials are proposed, these are to be appropriate for use with the historic fabric.
- Although opportunities are limited, reinstate original features (such as reinstating original openings) and fabric to showcase and celebrate the history of the building.
- Where possible, utilise the existing building layout to minimise removal of fabric developed over time and celebrate the history of the building's transformation.
- Where possible, the proposals will provide additional references to the building's history.
- Where appropriate, new works will incorporate modern materials to contrast with and celebrate original features and fabric.
- The proposals have been considered to have minimum impact on the original and existing fabric and can be fully removed to enable the original fabric, features and spatial volumes to be fully reinstated to as it was prior to the change of use, in the unlikely event that the need should ever arise.

- Where repairs are required, particularly in relation to original fabric, these are to be undertaken on a purely like-for-like basis using only appropriate materials to match the size, colour and finish of the existing.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the application proposals incorporate extensive alterations to the existing building, including the removal of existing fabric, this is only proposed where modern materials have been applied to the original fabric and so are either contributing to the decline of the building and/or have no historic character or significance.

Please refer to the accompanying proposal drawings for a detailed description of the proposals including additional justification for specific works.

6.1.1 CONSIDERING THE IMPACT ON NEATH CASTLE (SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT)

The application site is located adjacent to the historic remains of Neath Castle, which is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). It is therefore appropriate to consider the impact of the proposals on the Neath Castle site.

Neath Castle is a Grade II* listed building originating from the 12th century. It was established by the Earl of Gloucester between 1114 and 1130 and has a history of besiegement and capture. The original structure was demolished during baronial wars (c. 1320), with a new castle erected on the site along with a stone gatehouse (the structure of which is now much of what remains at the site).

The castle was in use until the 17th century and has been used as a recreational area for the town since the 18th century, with public access currently available to the remaining structures 6 days per week. The remaining structures are largely derelict, however, a programme of restoration works was undertaken in 2018.

The proposals do not directly impact the Neath Castle site (there are no physical works which directly impact the site or historic structures of the SAM). However, the proximity of the proposals and introduction of a publicly accessible terrace (albeit with limited outdoor seating) adjacent to and overlooking the boundary between the application site and Neath Castle could impact the SAM site.

This impact is considered below:

- The area surrounding the application site and Neath has developed significantly over time and is now predominantly urban in character. Neath Castle itself is bounded by a large chain supermarket and associated car parking to the west, the application building (historically a place of worship, fire station and masonic lodge) and Round House Cafe to the south, and a small amount of residential units in the form of flats to the north and east. Access to the SAM site is via a pedestrianised (former road) route with direct links to the town centre, business and multiple hospitality units to the south. The public entrance into Neath Castle grounds is via a pedestrian gate to the west of the Round House Cafe. It is therefore considered that re-establishing the building for business and hospitality use is appropriate to, and consistent with, the location and context of the SAM.

- Policy EN10 of the Local Development Plan sets out the requirement to protect areas of tranquility within urban areas, and identifies a number of historic sites which restrict development proposals which may have a negative impact. Neath Castle **is not** designated as a quiet area within the LDP, however, as a public recreational space it is acknowledged that such a site could be considered a place of quiet, albeit within an urban setting such quiet spaces are deemed to be limited to those within its curtilage. Given the location and context of the SAM site, including a busy chain supermarket/car park, multiple hospitality and business uses and nearby main road networks, the proposed use as a restaurant/business space including a publicly accessible terrace with limited seating, is not considered to materially alter the quality of the environment and/or the ability to enjoy the monument, its grounds or its setting.
- The application building was originally constructed in 1813 as a place of worship with large windows in its northern elevation, creating a strong visual link with the Castle site. As the use of the building has adapted over time, these visual links have largely been lost. The proposals seek to re-establish these historic links and views through the reinstatement of original window openings in the north elevation. Such visual links will be further strengthened by the provision of a raised terrace, with limited outdoor seating. The windows and terrace will provide customers with the ability to view and appreciate the Castle and its grounds from within specific areas of the restaurant.
- As set out in section 5.5 of this report, the area and buildings around Castle Street are susceptible to vandalism (including recorded incidents within the SAM site), therefore by reinstating existing openings in the north elevation and providing a terrace with limited outdoor seating, both of which provide natural views and surveillance over the Castle grounds throughout the day and into the evening, it is considered that this will act as a natural deterrent and improve security and safety within the immediate area.

Based upon the above, it is acknowledged that the proposals will have some limited impact upon the adjacent Scheduled Ancient Monument, however, it is considered that the Castles' location within a predominantly urban areas, the re-establishment of historic visual links between the application and SAM sites/buildings and greatly improved natural surveillance of a vulnerable SAM site outweigh such impact.

7.0 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been developed to outline the impact of the proposals on the heritage and significance of the Grade II Listed Moose Hall in Neath.

This section of the report is intended to assess the impact of the proposals and is prepared based upon the observations made on site and a review of the design proposals.

The level of impact will consider the significance of the heritage asset, the setting and level of change proposed. The impact will be assessed based on the following criteria:

MAGNITUDE OF IMPACT	DEFINITION
HIGH BENEFICIAL	The alterations considerably enhance the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate its significance values.
MEDIUM BENEFICIAL	The alterations enhance to a clearly discernible extent the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate its significance values.
LOW BENEFICIAL	The alterations enhance to a minor extent the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate its significance values.
NEUTRAL	The alterations do not affect the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate its significance values.
LOW ADVERSE	The alterations harm to a minor extent the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate its significance values.
MEDIUM ADVERSE	The alterations harm to a clearly discernible extent the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate its significance values.
HIGH ADVERSE	The alterations severely harm the heritage values of the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate its significance values.

The table below outlined the assessment of impact for the proposed changes:

Proposal	Internal and external alterations to Moose Hall, originally established c. 1813 as the first Methodist Baptist Chapel in Neath and substantially altered over time and subsequent uses. The proposals include change of use for business uses including A3 use class (restaurant use) and B1 use class (business use).
Objective	To retain the building for beneficial use of the community, in accordance with the original and subsequent uses. In doing so, prevent further decline and deterioration of the building and structure by removing inappropriate modern materials, repairing the building and ensuring continued use and maintenance to sustain the building in use.

Continued

Significance of Affected Fabric	The character and significance of Moose Hall lies primarily in its relationship to Neath and the surrounding areas as a result of it being the first methodist chapel in the town, it's continued community use, possible links to national historic figures (John Wesley) and its cultural value which lies in its proximity to Neath Castle and its retention and prominence through the developing local landscape. Ownership of the building has changed a number of times throughout its history, with each change being accompanied by substantial renovations which have, over time, removed much of the original fabric and features associated with both its original use and Methodist Chapel, and subsequent uses as a Roman Catholic Church and as Neath Fire Station. The significance of the fabric and interpretation of these historical uses has therefore been largely eradicated and is unrecognisable.
Assessing Beneficial Impact	The proposals seek to reinstate the building for the continued benefit of the community by enabling guests and visitors to enjoy and interpret the building for the foreseeable future, including re-establishing historic features associated with the original use as a chapel (original window openings) and historic uses. The proposals largely seek to utilise the existing internal arrangement, dating back to use as a fire station, with minimal loss of fabric from this point in the buildings' history. Removal of inappropriate modern materials from the original structure will allow the historic fabric to breathe. Combined with repairs using materials known to be compatible with the fabric will preserve the building and structure. The proposed commercial use will allow for the implementation of an annual maintenance programme to underpin the continued use, which is required so that guests and users continue to see the building as a desirable destination. The proposals have been considered to have minimum impact on the original fabric and can be fully removed to enable the original historic fabric, features and spatial volumes to be fully reinstated to as it was prior to the change of use.
Assessing Harmful Impact	Given the historic removal of original and historic fabric and features from the building, the character and significance of the property is considered to lie in its social and cultural value. It is acknowledged that the proposals will result in further change to the internal and external appearance of the building with some loss of fabric, albeit this is predominantly modern and in many instances is contributing to the decline of the building.

Proposed Solution	Considerate design which seeks to remove and reverse inappropriate use of materials and allow the structure to perform as intended. Internal proposals to utilise existing plan where possible to minimise loss of fabric and re-establish historic features. New works to be fully reversible and to contrast with historic structure to enable clear understand between new and historic elements of the building. Create an attractive and desirable building for users to ensure a commercially viable establishment which underpins future care and maintenance.
Magnitude of Impact	LOW BENEFICIAL: The alterations enhance to a minor extent the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate its significance values.

APPENDIX A

LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION: MOOSE HALL, CASTLE STREET, NEATH (REF: 11774)

APPENDIX B

VOLUTE ARCHITECTS LIMITED DOCUMENT 21/1011/700 REV A, DATED 19th OCT 2021:
OUTLINING INFORMAL INVESTIGATION WORKS TO BE UNDERTAKEN AT THE BUILDING, AS
AGREED WITH NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL

APPENDIX C

NEATH PORT TALBOT PRE-APPLICATION RESPONSE
REF Q2021/0189 (DATED 12th OCTOBER 2021)

