

MINUTES OF MEETING

Warwick District Conservation Advisory Forum

Thursday 20th April 2023
14:30 via Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Cllr Carolyn Gifford
Cllr George Illingworth

Mr Angus Kaye (The Victorian Society)
Ms Cathy Kimberley (CPRE)
Mr James Mackay (20th Century Society)
Ms Susan Rasmussen (The Leamington Society)
Mr Mark Sullivan (RTPI)
Dr Christine Hodgetts (Warwickshire Gardens Trust)

Mr Robert Dawson (WDC)
Ms Jane Catterall (WDC)

Apologies:

Mr Gordon Cain (RICS)
Ms Gill Smith (Warwick Society)

1. **Substitutes and New Members**

None.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Carolyn Gifford noted that the applicants in regards to applications W/22/1762 & W/22/1763/LB – 41 Portland Street, to be discussed as part of the Planning Committee Agenda, were neighbours and friends and so will refrain from any comment during discussion of this item.

3. **Minutes of Last Meeting** (23 March 2023)

Were agreed.

4. **Planning Committee Agenda**

Members discussed the impact that modern windows can have on historic

elevations but refrained from making full comment on specific applications. Members noted the importance of the Planning Officers, outside the Conservation Team, who will be presenting the applications at Planning Committee having a full and clear understanding of any heritage issues that underpin these applications, as it can be integral to the decision making process of Committee Members.

5. Planning Applications

5.1 W/23/0382/LB & W/23/0381 – Use of Town Hall as a 'creative hub', including; a new access from Livery Street and new steps and ramps to the building's main entrance; adaptation of corridor spaces and main staircase to provide space for public exhibitions; adaptation to existing reception to create new 'anchor space' providing arrival point to visitors; demolition and reconstruction of an existing two-storey structure at the rear to provide upgraded toilets and new lift; adaptation of internal areas to provide shop, multi-use space and break-out space; internal refurbishment and fire upgrades – Town Hall, Parade, Leamington Spa, CV32 4AT

This application regards a Creative Hub proposed for Leamington Town Hall and the details of the application were familiar to the forum, as a pre-application proposal was presented to members in December 2022, with this submission remaining relatively unchanged. The Forum are generally supportive of the proposal's overall aim to reinvigorate the Town Hall, with the decision to offer a creative space which maintains a public function for inhabitants of the district welcomed.

In terms of details to the proposal, these were primarily considered acceptable. The proposed Livery Street entrance was discussed, both at pre-app and at application stage. Some representatives felt this was a potentially positive move, however it was raised by some that the function of the new entrance was unclear and potentially unjustified in terms of material harm to the building. Furthermore, it was noted that the proposed internal functions, which had been driving factor behind the Livery Street entrance at pre-app, were not included on this application, and with an existing entrance to Regent Grove and the main entrance to the Parade, was a further entrance actually an essential necessity that mandated loss of original fabric. Others raised that the colour of the door proposed should be white rather than black, to better connect with the wider façade.

Representatives who have used the building also noted that the focus of this application appears to have been on larger changes but smaller details which could also improve the space have perhaps been overlooked, such as improvements to access to the balcony or better positioning of female toilet facilities.

5.2 W/23/0415 – Demolition of existing buildings and erection of 55 dwellings and associated works – Woodside Conference Centre, Glasshouse Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2AL

In regards to this application, the forum noted that they would primarily focus on the locally listed heritage asset of the Woodside Hotel and its proposed demolition, rather than the principle of development of the 55 dwellings. Members, as an initial aside, noted that the documents in relation to this application were numerous and appeared to intend to obfuscate and overwhelm, a practice which should be discouraged as it can hinder proper consideration of a proposal by officers and the public alike.

In discussion of the proposed works regarding the Woodside Hotel, it was noted

that total demolition of the site was intended, with a larger structure in a pastiche of the existing Victorian Villa being proposed. Members, whilst in some disagreement of the merit of the design and significance of the existing building, were in agreement that this was somewhat distasteful, resulting in an unimaginative scheme culminating in a poor parody of a building deemed not important enough to preserve. The forum also raised the important issue of embodied carbon and the impact of the proposed demolition, with the vast carbon expenditure involved in demolishing and rebuilding this site considered both unpalatable and extremely controversial, at a time when developers and councils should be striving to reduce their carbon footprints. Members noted that a scheme which retained and worked with the building could easily be achieved by an imaginative architect but that instead, the simplest option had been chosen without proper consideration of the consequences. This lack of imagination or forethought was then reflected in the wider site, with banal, 'off-the-shelf' designs echoed through the nominally detached homes, cumulating in a site which feels devoid of character and diminishes the overall appeal of both the site and the wider town.

Overall, members were unsupportive and asked the applicant to give greater consideration to the proposal, not only in terms of carbon expenditure in regards to demolition but also to the wider character of the site. The retention of this locally listed asset would bring some integrity, atmosphere and history to the development, all of which would be vastly undermined through a poor pastiche of a building felt significant enough to copy but not valuable enough to save.

6.0 Any Other Business

It was noted that this meeting would be the last to be chaired by Cllr George Illingworth, who will be retiring after a long career in service of the district. Representatives thanked Cllr Illingworth for his valuable contribution to both CAF and the local council and wish him all the best for the future.

Due to the upcoming elections, the May CAF meeting has been cancelled and as such, the forum will return in June 2023.

Date of next meeting: 15th June 2023

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