

Application No: [W 16 / 2244 LB](#)

Town/Parish Council: Warwick
Case Officer: Helena Obremski

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Shire Hall, Northgate Street, Warwick, CV34 4SP

Proposed internal and external works to facilitate the use of the buildings as an events venue, including: external alterations, installation of gates, disabled access ramp and internal alterations consisting of the installation of additional toilets, acoustic improvements and associated fire risk assessment works. FOR
Warwickshire County Council

The application is being referred to Planning Committee because the application is made by Warwickshire County Council.

RECOMMENDATION

Planning Committee are recommended to grant planning permission.

DETAILS OF THE DEVELOPMENT

The applicant intends Old Shire Hall complex to be used for private and corporate dining, conferences, events and weddings. Apart from the Great Hall there are a number of other rooms that can be used to host events. The first floor Judges' Drawing Room in the Judges' House could be used for pre-dinner and drinks receptions, the Judges' Dining Room could host fine dining, corporate hospitality and smaller team events, or be an exclusive wedding ceremony venue or reception area. On the ground floor, the High Sheriff's room would be a medium sized meeting, dining and wedding ceremony venue. The dungeons, cells and courtrooms could provide an additional opportunity for bespoke events allowing all of the spaces within the building to be used, though not necessarily simultaneously.

Specifically, the proposal includes the installation of iron gates to the side entrance of the building, facing Northgate Street, with ramp behind to provide disabled access to the rear of the site, following the removal of an existing single storey garage. Toilets will also be installed in the old "library" and acoustic provisions will be made in the main hall to prevent noise transfer to Northgate Street. A wireless CCTV system is proposed to ensure adequate security provisions throughout the venue.

The applicant has provided details to show that the maximum capacity of the whole venue is 500 people, with the main events being held in the main hall. The site is in a sustainable location, with nearby County Council owned car parks which could be used outside of normal office hours for parking provision.

The venue is already used to host a variety of civic and ceremonial events, for example an event for the Royal Warwickshire Fusiliers hosting around 350 standing in the Old Shire Hall itself and another annual events for similar numbers for the High Sheriff; an evening staff award ceremony with gala dinner for the Law Society for 140, which included a short dance performance to classical music; and a 2 day event supporting a graduation ceremony for around 300 graduates. The Judges' Dining room hosts around 40 guests for council dinners and the Jury Rest Room can host meetings for up to 20.

The applicant's Design and Access Statement notes that market research carried out on behalf of the council identified a market for a high-end event venue in Warwick. To achieve this, the venue needs to be of superior quality in every aspect of its offer, especially in the detail. Research concluded that hiring the venue exclusively is an important factor for potential clients and that parking and accommodation are not limiting factors.

The Design and Access Statement states that the County Council agreed to pursue a proposal for the development of a premier event venue based within the Old Shire Hall and Judge's House Complex. The proposed approach addresses Warwick District's Local Plan priorities identified as supporting the growth of the local economy and maintaining and promoting thriving town centres for its future sustainable prosperity.

After consideration of all the bids by the elected members of the County Council it was agreed to support the in-house bid. In doing so, the elected members stressed the Council's civic responsibility, and that the Council's bid will ensure a high quality service reflecting its good reputation. The proposals were recognised for the importance placed on keeping this historic building in use and for the innovation required to deliver the business plan.

Importantly, the Council itself will be the sole shareholder of the trading company, so that all the company does is subject to the oversight of elected members who are themselves democratically accountable. The trading company, which is the trading body of a public authority, intends to be maximally sensitive to the needs of local residents and it will ensure that local residents will not be unreasonably disturbed, particularly at night.

THE SITE AND ITS LOCATION

The application relates to the Grade I listed Old Shire Hall, built in 1750. The complex is comprised of a collection of highly significant heritage assets including *Shire Hall with the old law courts* fronting Northgate Street, *the Judge's House* fronting Northgate street, and the *county offices incorporating the former county gaol and militia barracks* with frontages on Northgate, Barrack Street, and Market Square. The site has retained a significant civic function since at least the 1570s when the county courts and gaol were transferred from Gerrard Street to a site on Northgate.

Shire Hall:

The Hall was built between 1753-4 by William and David Hiorn of Warwick, replacing the previous Shire Hall built between 1670 and 1680 by William Hurlbutt and potentially designed by William Hawksmoor. The exterior is an impressive neo-classical design with one high single-storey and extensive decoration of the Corinthian order with tall sashes. The interior retains a high degree of material and visual integrity. Off Northgate through a round-headed entrance, is the hall itself. The hall is a cavernous space retaining an impressive coffered plasterwork ceiling with foliate-carved and painted decoration by Robert Moore. Behind the hall separated by walls of ashlar stone and elaborate doorways with moulded stone surrounds and Corinthian pilasters, are two octagonal court rooms with segmented domed roofs, Corinthian columns, octagonal lanterns, and retaining tiered hardwood seating, the judges seat, and a gallery with decorative ironwork. A Grand jury room, with an octagonal circulation space below, is situated behind these spaces and has a decorative coved ceiling. Below these spaces are 18th-19th century passageways leading to holding cells.

The Judge's House

Connected to Shire Hall along Northgate Street is the Judge's House. The house was built in 1816 for assize judges serving the adjacent courts and as a meeting place for the justices of the peace. Designed by Henry Hakewill the main elevation is decorated with an Ionic porch, pilasters, and moulded cornicing. Surviving interior features include a marble fireplace to the High Sherriff's room.

County council offices incorporating former county gaol and barracks:

The county council officers consist of several phases of building. Facing Northgate Street is the former county gaol and militia barracks built in 1779-83 with decoration of the Doric order by Thomas Johnson who enlarged and replaced an earlier gaol and a house of correction built in the 17th-century of which only the dungeon (accessed from Shire Hall) – an octagonal domed and cobbled room with timber posts for chaining prisoners – survives. The interior space retains many historic features including marble fireplaces, furniture, and a lift with art deco decorative metalwork. Behind this frontage is a series of interior ranges constructed in the 1920s-30s in neo-Georgian style by A. C. Bunch, arranged on two quadrangles. At the corner of Northgate (one bay) and running along Barrack Street is a 1790-3 addition to the gaol by Henry Couchman – in which a historic gaol door has been set – though this largely survives as a frontage only. Beginning at the western end of Barrack Street and curving around onto Market Square and old Square are mid-twentieth century additions.

Her Majesty's Court Service vacated the Old Shire Hall and Courts complex at the end of 2010, resulting in a budget pressure for the County Council. Since then, the courts vacated the buildings the council has continued to hold the civic and ceremonial events which have traditionally been held at the Old Shire Hall for more than 250 years.

PLANNING HISTORY

There are a number of previous permissions on the site, however, only that relevant to the assessment of the application are listed below:

W/05/0675/LB - listed building consent approved for the installation of an access ramp, handrails and relocation of steps to the main Shire Hall entrance.

RELEVANT POLICIES

- National Planning Policy Framework

The Current Local Plan

- DAP4 - Protection of Listed Buildings (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DAP8 - Protection of Conservation Areas (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP4 - Archaeology (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)

The Emerging Local Plan

- HE1 - Protection of Statutory Heritage Assets (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- HE2 - Protection of Conservation Areas (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- HE6 - Archaeology (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

Warwick Town Council: No objection.

CAF: CAF supports efforts to develop a viable use for the building to ensure its long term survival. The proposed access ramp is incongruous and would harm the significance of the building. CAF encourages landscaping and moulding of the garden to facilitate a natural level of accessibility. The proposed access gate is too ornate for the area. Historic windows should be retained and the use of opaque glass in the toilets is not supported - blinds or screens are recommended.

WCC Archaeology: No objection, subject to condition.

Historic England: No objection, following submission of clarification of details and subject to conditions.

3 Public Responses: Objections: concern regarding: noise generation and disturbance, loss of privacy, traffic generation, non compliance with planning policies DP7 and DP8. Two of the objections support securing the future of the building, subject to overcoming the issues raised.

ASSESSMENT

The main issues relevant to the consideration of this application are as follows:

- Principle of the Development
- The Impact on Landscape and Heritage Assets

Principle of the Development

The application relates to a Grade I listed building. One of the core planning principles within the NPPF is to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations. The NPPF also states that Local Authorities should take into account the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. The applicant proposes that the use of the site as an events venue will secure the future of this heritage asset - the loss of income as a result of the vacation of Her Majesty's Court Service in 2010 and the high maintenance costs of the building lead the County Council to look to other means to secure the future of the building and they propose that the use of the site as an events venue will allow the best means to do this. The impact on the heritage asset is discussed in more detail below.

Impact on Landscape and Heritage Assets

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty when exercising planning functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of a conservation area. Section 66 of the same Act imposes a duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting when considering whether to grant a planning permission which affects a listed building or its setting.

Paragraph 132 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage assets, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

The collection of structures is designated because of their architectural and historic merit, intactness, and group value.

Architectural merit:

The primary historic buildings in this group have profound architectural merit both as examples of *fortuitous* accumulation of form (the gradual development of a complex of related structures) and *formal planned design* with a high degree of architectural pretension and explore the major architectural themes of 18th-19th classical revivalism to the highest quality. Each has a clear and related

intentional design aesthetic in which classical motifs were used to portray civic pride and strength – a critical architectural theme of this period and indicative of the development of major civic buildings throughout the country. The old gaol and barracks, for example, are constructed in a muscular Greek Doric style which portrays the martial strength associated with its use.

Historic merit:

The buildings have evident *associative value* having been designed by local, national, and internationally-important architects – the architect of the Judge's House in particular is well known for his buildings including Rugby School. They are also of profound *illustrative value*, indicative of the development of architectural and design tastes from the 17th-19th centuries through both their architectural form and interior features - the gaol, for example, is one of the earliest Greek revival buildings in the country (following the first English building to use Greek Doric decoration in 1788). They also *illustrate* the development of social attitudes towards crime, punishment, civic administration, and justice through surviving courtrooms and dungeons and as such are a critical element of social history.

Group value:

There is an evident *functional* and *visual* relationship between the structures on this site. They were all built to serve a specific civil function, and were designed in relation to one another. Each constituent part highlights the development and use of the site as a centre for justice, punishment, and administration from the 16th century onwards through a related architectural form – the buildings as a group explore all of the Greco-Roman architectural orders (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian) so closely associated with civic buildings of this period. As illustrative of civic administration, they as a group signify the importance of Warwick as the county town.

The Conservation Officer, CAF and Historic England have no objection in principle to the use of the property as an events venue. There were initially concerns from the CAF and the Conservation Officer that the proposed ramp to the rear of the building would be harmful to the setting of the listed building and visually intrusive. Furthermore, the proposed gates were considered to be overly-decorative and inappropriate for the setting. The principle of gates in the proposed location is acceptable, but not as originally designed. The proposed CCTV system was not considered to be acceptable owing to the extensive amount of cabling which would be harmful to the historic fabric of the building and would be visually intrusive.

Historic England had concerns about the proposed ventilation system and replacement of historic doors. Furthermore, they also raised concerns about the proposed acoustic drapes and the impact which these would have on the historic character of the main hall. Historic England also queried whether the existing interior decor would be altered.

Following the submission of the above comments, the proposed ventilation system and rear access ramp were removed from the proposal (although the side access ramp still forms part of the proposal). The applicants have requested that the details of the gates and the amendments to the doors can be agreed at a later stage and secured by condition, which is acceptable to the Conservation Officer and Historic England, along with the side access ramp. The agent has also confirmed that secondary glazing will only be installed to one window to the Octagonal Room which is for acoustic purposes, which Historic England consider acceptable. The agent has confirmed that there will be no alterations to the internal decoration to the main hall and courtrooms which was a concern from Historic England and provided additional information in relation to the acoustic drapes, which Historic England are now satisfied with. Finally, the CCTV system has been altered to a wireless system, providing discrete security for the premises which would not be harmful to the historic integrity of the building.

The Conservation Officer notes that the loss of a historic sash window would not be supported, however, this does not form part of the application.

The amendments are considered to have satisfied the concerns of the CAF, Historic England and the Conservation Officer. Conditions will need to be implemented to ensure that large scale details are provided in relation to the doors, secondary glazing and gates to ensure a high quality of design for this listed building. It is considered that there would be no harm caused to this Grade I listed building and the proposal is in accordance with the NPPF and adopted Local Plan policy DP8.

Archaeological Impact

The NPPF and adopted Local Plan policy DP4 state that development will not be permitted which harms archaeological remains of national importance, and their settings. The Council will require that any remains of archaeological value are properly evaluated prior to the determination of a planning application.

WCC Archaeology have commented on the application and note that the proposed development lies within an area of significant archaeological potential within the extent of the medieval settlement of Warwick. Previous salvage excavations, undertaken during the 1950s at Shire Hall identified evidence for medieval and post medieval occupation of the area including pottery assemblages recovered from a number of rubbish pits (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record MWA2184). Recent archaeological excavations undertaken opposite Shire Hall between Northgate Street and the Butts have identified further significant evidence for the medieval occupation of this area.

Therefore, WCC Archaeology recommend that the application is conditioned to ensure that a programme of archaeological works are submitted in accordance with a written scheme of investigation, prior to commencement of works. This condition is considered to be acceptable and will be added. Therefore, the proposal is considered to comply with adopted Local Plan policy DP4.

Other Matters

There have been three objections from members of the public to this listed building consent application in relation to impact on residential amenity, parking and traffic generation. However, these matters are not dealt with under a listed building consent application and have been assessed as part of the associated full planning permission application.

CONCLUSION

The proposal to utilise Old Shire Hall would secure a viable future for the building and as amended, would not be harmful to the integrity of the listed building. There would be no harm caused to items of archaeological importance, subject to a suitable programme of archaeological works which can be secured by condition. Furthermore, the proposal would also bring investment into Warwick town centre. The application should therefore be approved.

CONDITIONS

- 1 The works hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this consent. **REASON:** To comply with Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended).
- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the details shown on the site location plan and approved drawings 5151209.03, 5151209.04, 5151209.05, 5151209.06, 5151209.07, 5151209.08, 5151209.09, 5151209.13, 1648/M/01, 1648/M/51, 1648/M/50 Rev A, 1648/M/52 Rev A, 1648/E/100 and 1648/M/10 Rev A submitted on 7 December 2016, 5151209.02 (A) submitted on 7th February 2017, and 5151209.01 A submitted on 16th February 2017 and specification contained therein. **REASON :** For the avoidance of doubt and to secure a satisfactory form of development in accordance with Policies DP1 and DP2 of the Warwick District Local Plan 1996-2011.
- 3 No development shall take place within the application site, unless and until a programme of archaeological works and investigations has been secured and initiated in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. **REASON:** In order to ensure any remains of archaeological importance, which help to increase our understanding of the Districts historical development are recorded, preserved and protected were applicable, before development commences in accordance with Policy DP4 of the Warwick District Local Plan 1996-2011.
- 4 No development shall be carried out on the site which is the subject of this permission, until large scale details of the proposed internal doors,

secondary glazing and the exterior gates at a scale of 1:5 (including details of materials) have been submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority. The development shall not be carried out otherwise than in full accordance with such approved details. **REASON** : To ensure a high standard of design and appearance for this Listed Building, and to satisfy Policy DAP4 of the Warwick District Local Plan 1996-2011.
