

## **DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT AND HERITAGE STATEMENT**

**PROPOSAL** : Alterations to existing Schoolhouse and conversion of former School to form three dwellings  
**ADDRESS** : St John's School, Mill Lane, Wetley Rocks, ST9 0BN  
**APPLICANT** : J Pointon and Sons Limited  
**DATE** : May 2015 **JOB No.:** 2010.1838

### **DESIGN**

#### **Introduction**

This application follows the withdrawal of application SMD/2014/0334 for alterations to the existing schoolhouse to form a single dwelling and the conversion of the former school building to three dwellings. The application was withdrawn following a Committee Report recommending refusal on the grounds of an inappropriate road access. The resubmitted application is supported by a report by Whittaker and Biggs estate agents showing that the market has shown no interest in the use of the building for its last use or for other appropriate uses. The application building is located adjacent to St John's Church which is a Grade II Listed Building.

#### **ASSESSMENT**

##### **Assessment Area**

The application proposes the restoration of the former schoolhouse and the conversion of the former St John's School buildings to form three dwellings- one single bedroom unit and 2 two bedroom units. The building is genuinely redundant following the re-location of the school to a new site further to the west. The development would be accessed by car from Main Road and by foot from Mill Lane and Main Road. There is an amended access proposed from Main Road shown in a planning application for affordable housing on the adjoining site. The Council has resolved to grant permission for this amended access and the conversion application therefore adopts this amended access as an alternative to the earlier access that generated the recommendation for refusal.

For highway safety reasons, it is proposed to convert the school to three dwellings only following the development of the affordable housing scheme. To ensure that this is the case, the Council is invited to condition the planning permission so that it cannot be occupied until the access road to Main Road is satisfactorily completed. Car parking for the proposed three dwellings will be provided off this new access road. The Schoolhouse will use roadside parking which it has historically always done.

Given the nature of the proposal and its location, it is considered that the context that will influence the proposal is the character of the former school buildings, the character of other buildings nearby and the character of the village of Wetley Rocks.

The application buildings became vacant following the erection of a new school about 150m to the west of the site about fifteen years ago.

##### **Context**

Wetley Rocks is a fairly long and narrow settlement along the A520 (Main Road), Mill Lane, Cheadle Road (A522) and Randles Lane. Wetley Rocks has a church (St John's), a school (St John's Primary School), a village hall (Wetley Rocks Village Hall), a petrol filling station that incorporates a convenience shop and a public house (The Powys Arms PH). Other than these buildings, the village is residential.

There is a range of ages, styles and sizes of dwellings in the village. Traditional development in the village comprises 19<sup>th</sup> century small roadside stone cottages. There is more than a small amount of 20<sup>th</sup> century infill housing, usually of brick construction. Although there are a few large bungalows in the village, the principal building form is a two storey detached or semi-detached house.



**School House (on the left) and School Buildings (on the right) from Mill Lane**

The former school buildings that are proposed to be renovated and converted are single and two storey gabled buildings. They are principally constructed of stone but with some red brick infill in the rear gable of the schoolhouse and a red brick addition on the western elevation of the school building. The roofs are slate. Windows and doors in the stone areas have carved stone surrounds and stone mullions in the larger openings.

The adjacent St John's Church is a Grade II Listed Building that was listed in 1986. The English Heritage entry states:-

Chapel of Ease. 1833-4, chancel by J. Beardmore, 1901. Coursed dressed and squared stone; slate roof; verge parapets and chamfered eaves band; west tower, combined nave and aisles, chancel. Tower: of 3 stages with angle buttresses canted out, crenellated parapet, labelled pointed Y-tracery, bell chamber openings; pointed door to west is the only entrance to the church. Nave and aisles: of 5 bays divided by 2-stage buttresses; string under labelled pointed Y-tracery windows. Chancel: lower, of 2 bays divided by 2-stage buttresses, 3-light pointed east window and high-level window to both sides of eastern bay; square-headed with 2 trefoil lights. Interior: arcades of 5 bays, octagonal columns and pointed arches.

A hard-cored farm track has been laid on land at the rear of the site off Main Road. This track was formed with the benefit of a planning permission granted in 2002. The planning application for a local needs housing scheme proposes to re-position this road. This new road would provide vehicular and pedestrian access to the proposed development. An alternative pedestrian access is available off Mill Lane through a carved stone arch and wooden door.

### **Planning Policy and Evaluation**

The application site is located in an area indicated in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan as being in an area of open countryside that has been included in the North Staffordshire Green Belt. The proposal must therefore be judged against the policies contained in the relevant rural housing and green belt policies of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework. The Core Strategy was adopted in March 2014 and its policies carry great weight.

Core Strategy **Policy R1- Rural Diversification** states that wherever possible new housing development in the rural areas should be accommodated in suitably located buildings that are

appropriate for conversion. It further states that priority will be given to commercial and tourism uses for rural building conversion proposals.

**Comment:** The applicant proposes the residential conversion of a former school building. It is attached to the former school house which retains its residential use and character. The building is located on the edge of Wetley Rocks village and is conveniently placed to access village services and is within easy reach of a regular bus service. Consequently, it is considered to be in a sustainable location. The application is supported by a marketing report that shows that the market has shown no interest in the site for non-residential use.

**Policy R2- Rural Housing** supports the conversion of non-residential rural buildings to residential use where:-

- the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion; and
- it can be demonstrated that agricultural or commercial use is not viable or suitable. In such cases there will be a requirement for a marketing exercise to be carried out by a suitably qualified professional or other evidence that the building would be unsuitable for a commercial use; or
- conversion to residential use would enable a building of particular merit to be safeguarded.

**Comment:** The application building has a pleasant design and character that is worthy of retention. The application is supported by a marketing report that shows that the market has shown no interest in the site for commercial use.

**Policy DC2- The Historic Environment** states that the Council will seek to safeguard and seek to enhance the historic environment

**The National Planning Policy Framework** was published in March 2012 and has at its heart a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 90 recognises that “the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction” is not inappropriate development. Paragraph 128 requires planning applications that affect an historic asset (in this case the Church of St John) to describe the significance of the asset and to assess its impact.

**Comment:** The application building is considered to be of permanent and substantial construction. The Church of St John is a Grade II Listed Building and its west entrance faces the application building. Given its close proximity it would be fair to state that the application building lies within the area of influence that could impact on the Listed Building. The application building is a former school and its eastern elevation that faces the church contains many high windows and two entrance doors. All of these features are proposed to be retained. The physical appearance and character of the application building will therefore be retained. The proposal does not propose alterations to this elevation of the application building. For this reason it is considered that the proposal ensures that the character of St John’s Church is not harmed.

## **Conclusion**

The proposal to convert this building to residential use complies fully with local and national planning policy. The application building is in a sustainable location. It is structurally sound and has a character that is of worth. The proposed works will not harm that character and will not impact on the character of this historic asset that is St John’s Church. The application is supported by marketing and biodiversity reports. The previous application was recommended for refusal solely on the grounds that the proposed access road was considered to be inappropriate and harmful to the character of the Green Belt. The means of accessing the site has been amended to a position within the application site that the Council has found acceptable in its consideration of the neighbouring affordable housing scheme. On this basis it is considered that there are no obstacles to the granting of planning permission.

## **DESIGN**

### **Use**

The proposal is for the conversion of the former school building for residential purposes.

### **Amount**

The application proposes to retain the former schoolhouse as a two bedroom dwelling. The former school building is proposed to be converted into three dwellings- two of them being two bedroom units and one a one bedroom unit.

### **Layout**

The layout is contained within the confines of the existing buildings. The application does not propose extensions. It does propose the removal of a brick addition to the school.

### **Scale**

The scale of the proposal represents the scale of the existing buildings.

### **Landscaping**

The dimensions of the site are not capable of accommodating a significant amount of landscaping.

### **Appearance**

The development has been designed to represent a sensitive conversion taking care to retain the character of this historic building.

## **ACCESS**

### **VEHICULAR AND TRANSPORT LINKS**

The site has easy access onto the A520, a major highway linking Leek with Cheadle and south moorlands settlements, and beyond that, the Potteries. The A520 carries bus services, the principal one being the 16 service between Leek and Hanley via Cheddleton about every half hour (at peak times about every 20 minutes and, at off peak times at longer intervals). The site is within easy walking distance of community services such as the church, school, village hall, village shop and village pub. Given the range of community facilities within easy walking distance, the site is considered to be in a sustainable location.

### **INCLUSIVE ACCESS**

The development provides for occupation by less abled people through compliance with Part M of the Building Regulations by the provision of level accesses to the principal entrances to the proposed dwellings, and provides internal arrangements, such as the width of corridors and doorways, that are suitable for less able access.