

Application No: 12/2990N

Location: MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, EARLE STREET, CREWE, CHESHIRE, CW1 2BJ

Proposal: Proposals to provide level access to the principal elevation of the Municipal Building by re-grading the external path to a gradient of less than 1:20 and introducing new steps within the pavement.

Applicant: Nick Cook, Cheshire East Council

Expiry Date: 28-Sep-2012

**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE (subject to conditions)**

**MAIN ISSUES:**

- Principal of development
- Impact on the character and appearance of the listed building
- Impact on the surrounding streetscene

## **1. REASON FOR REFERRAL**

Applications for minor development submitted by Cheshire East Borough Council are usually dealt with under delegated powers. However as the last application reference number 12/1730N was considered by the Southern Planning Committee, the Southern Area Manager – Development Manager considered that the amended proposal should also be considered by the Southern Planning Committee for continuity.

## **2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT**

The application site is a Grade II listed building currently used as the ‘town hall’ in Crewe. The Municipal Buildings are sited within the town centre of Crewe, adjacent to the Vernon Way/Earle Street roundabout and faces onto the Municipal Square. The listing description for the building is,

*‘GV II Council Offices, 1902-1905 by H T Hare in English Baroque style. Yellow sandstone ashlar with stone slate gable roof. 2½ storeys and basement, 5 bays. 3 centre bays recessed for 2 storeys, flanked and separated by giant unfluted Ionic columns. Small Tuscan column mullions to ground floor windows, in outer bays. Deeply recessed semi-circular headed entrance with wrought iron gates and oak screen with double doors. This is flanked by timber mullion and centre-arched transome windows with matching archivolt and cartouche keystones. Pairs of large reclining figures, carved in relief by F.E.E.Schenck, surmount the*

*three centre openings. Cross windows with stone eared architraves at first floor level and segmental bracketted balconies to outer bays. Dentilled and bracketted eaves cornice. Dormer windows to second floor centre bays with small pediments above and fronted by balustraded parapet. End bay windows are bullseyes with egg and dart and festoon treatment. Copings to gables, stone chimneys and cupola with vane and locomotive finial. Interior: Tuscan columns in entrance hall, York stone geometrical staircase, marble Ionic columns and a window in Venetian style in the Council Chamber. Hardwood doors, in elaborate frames, and plasterwork based on festoons and egg and dart moulds.*

*Listing NGR: SJ7067055787'*

This application is for Listed Building Consent to amend the previous approved listed building consent 12/1703N which was recently approved by the Secretary of State on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012. Prior to this, Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission were granted for internal alterations to the front of the building (11/1023N) and (11/1024N) approved in 2011.

The 2011 applications permitted alterations to the front suite of rooms (previously the Planning Help Desk and Legal Department), with the 2012 application permitting an internal sesame lift, and a graded path covering the external stairs to the front of the building. During discussions with Building Control and the Highways Department concerns were raised about the 1:20 crossfall on the approved re-graded pavement, and it was considered that it would be difficult for some wheelchair users and ambulant disabled to use.

## **2. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

This application seeks Listed Building Consent to provide level access to the principal elevation of the Municipal Building by re-grading the external path. This amended scheme includes re-grading the path to less than a 1:20 gradient, and retaining a flat path surface adjacent to the road frontage. The proposal includes the addition of three steps up to the sloping path into the building. Therefore the path would be graded up towards the front entrance at the sides, with a stepped entrance in front.

As the application is made by Cheshire East Borough Council for alterations to a Grade II listed building, the Secretary of State will make the final decision on the application.

## **3. RELEVANT HISTORY**

12/1730N – Proposals to provide access to the principal elevation of the Municipal Building by re-grading the external path and integrating a Sesame access lift to the internal flight of steps. Refurbishment and minor alterations to the front range of ground floor suite of rooms to incorporate the registrations department. The internal refurbishment work includes redecoration to all the front range of ground floor rooms and reconfiguration to allow access to the suite of rooms to be designated as the registrations department. – Approved by the SOS 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012

11/1024N - Listed Building Consent to Provide Access to the Principal Elevation of the Municipal Building by Integrating a Sesame Access Lift to the External Flight of Steps and a Second Sesame Lift to the Internal Flight of Steps. Refurbishment and Minor Alterations to the Front Range of Ground Floor Suite of Rooms to Incorporate the Registrations

Department. The Internal Refurbishment Work Includes Redecoration to all the Front Range of Ground Floor Rooms and Reconfiguration to Allow Access to the Suite of Rooms to be Designated as the Registrations Department. – Approved by SOS 24<sup>th</sup> August 2011

11/1023N - Proposal to Provide Access to the Principal Elevation of the Municipal Building by Integrating a Sesame Access Lift to the External Flight of Steps and a Second Sesame Lift to the Internal Flight of Steps. Refurbishment and Minor Alterations to the Front Range of Ground Floor Suite of Rooms to Incorporate the Registrations Department. The Internal Refurbishment Work includes Redecoration to all the Front Range of Ground Floor Rooms and Reconfiguration to Allow Access to the Suite of Rooms to be Designated as the Registrations Department. – Approved 5<sup>th</sup> September 2011

10/0511N - Listed Building Consent for Recovering of the Front Section of the Roof to the Original Building - Approved by SOS 4<sup>th</sup> August 2010

P06/0069 - Listed Building Consent for Alterations to Front and Rear Entrances and Internal Alterations – Approved by SOS 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006

P06/0105 - Listed Building Consent for New Lighting Scheme for the Facades of Municipal Buildings and Market Hall – Approved by SOS 7<sup>th</sup> June 2006

P96/0020 – LBC for handrail to front entrance steps – Approved with conditions 29<sup>th</sup> February 1996

#### **4. POLICIES**

The policies from the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011 (LP) are:

##### **Local Plan Policy**

BE.2 (Design Standards)  
BE.3 (Access and Parking)  
BE.9 (Listed Buildings Alterations and Extensions)  
TRAN.4 (Access for the Disabled)

##### **Other Material Considerations**

National Planning Policy Framework

#### **5. CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

**Ancient Monuments Society:** No Objections. However notes that the proposal includes the removal of the existing central balustrade. Request if it is original, could it be retained.

**Highways Department:** This application proposal will need to be the subject of negotiations with CEC Highways Department regarding the management of the works within the public highway. Subject to that proviso the Strategic Highways Manager has no objection to make regarding this application proposal.

**English Heritage:** No Objections. This application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of internal expert conservation advice.

**Crewe Charter Trustees:** All the Charter Trustees were asked to comment on the attached application. One response was received by the Clerk, from Cllr C Thorley who stated that 'I am happy to support the application'

## **6. PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL COMMENTS:** n/a

## **7. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS:**

A letter of objection has been received from the occupier of 13 Scott Avenue, Crewe. The main issues raised are;

- The proposal will create more risk to the general public and mobility impaired using the pavement to the front of the building than outweigh any benefit of providing another alternative disabled access to the listed building,
- Lack of transparency as this application would not provide the alternative access,
- There have been numerous applications dealing with the aspect of access to this building over the past months and the fragmented approach is a recipe for disaster,
- Red edge shown on the location plan does not denote the full area of the ramp,
- The footway for pedestrians will be reduced to only 1.2m, 1/3 of its existing width,
- Notes that the Department of Transport (DfT) has issued clear guidelines to Councils for widths of footways. 2000mm allows two wheelchair to pass one another. However where not possible due to physical constraints 1500mm could be regarded as the minimum. This application does not achieve these minimum standards,
- Furthermore, as it is within the Cheshire East Town Centre retail area the footway should be retained to 3000mm to 4500mm.
- This proposal may cause pedestrians to step into the road as the path width is insufficient,
- The drawings submitted with the application do not show the adjacent highway,
- Insufficient space will be available for a wheelchair or buggy to turn safely, after crossing the Municipal Square and turn onto the pedestrian flow past the building,
- No Quality or Road Safety Audit have been carried out,
- The road to the front of the Municipal Building is very busy and becomes gridlocked at times, pedestrians may occupy the carriageway for longer than necessary if there is insufficient room on the footway,
- No tactile paving shown to be provided on the approach to the slopes and steps to warn visually impaired pedestrians,
- Application states that the slopes will have a gradient of less than 1:20. However the plan shows a rise of 430mm being achieved over a distance of 4500mm on west side of entrance landing which equates to a gradient of 1:12.5, and on the east site the entrance landing the 430mm rise is achieved in approx 6600mm a gradient of 1:15.3,
- 1.5m is not a suitable width for a wheelchair user to easily pass by the building, there is a risk an obstruction may cause a wheel chair user to topple over the top step, this should be risk assessed
- No details of if there is to be an automatic door which would be complimentary,

- A drain maybe required with a grill top between the existing level entrance and the new landing, due to possible drainage issues,
- Legal Framework may be required to be drawn up setting out responsibilities for maintenance and liabilities within Cheshire East of the proposed different elements of the footway, as utilities are affected under the area,

## **8. APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION:**

Design and Access Statement

## **9. OFFICER APPRAISAL**

### **Procedural Matter**

This application is for Listed Building Consent only. The works to the highway/path to the front of the building can be carried out without the need for planning permission under Part 12 Class A of the General Permitted Development Order. However, as the alteration to the path will be attached to the building and may affect the character and setting of the Listed Building it requires listed building consent.

The internal works to the building, including the sesame lift have previously been approved as part of 12/1730N. This application seeks only to amend the external works to the front of the building.

### **Principle of Development**

Policy BE.9 (Listed Buildings: Alterations and Extensions) states that in considering proposals for the alterations or extension of a listed building, the Local Planning Authority should ensure that the proposal respects the scale, materials, colour, detailing and other significant features of the building concerned and that the proposal should not detract from the character or setting of the building.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

The Municipal Buildings are listed and currently operate successfully as an office for the Local Council employees and as such any alterations that help to support this use and allow it to continue and meet new legislative requirements should be encouraged, subject to them being sympathetic to the historic integrity of the building.

The principle of development has already been considered to be acceptable by the LPA and the SOS. The proposed application only seeks to alter the design and gradient of the slope to

the front of the building. The alteration will enable improved access and egress by disabled users of the facility. The proposal is considered therefore to be in the public interest. The building itself is currently only open to the public during normal working hours and the intention is to fully utilise the viable uses of the building and open it at weekends in the future as part of the new registration of births, and deaths and for weddings use, which will move into the ground floor offices at the front of the original building. There is currently no disabled access from the front or rear of the original building with only a ramp and lift configuration, within the new building which requires members of the public to walk through the private office area to get to the main desk/reception area of the building. Currently this is only available during normal working hours when the building is open. The alterations will allow the original building to be functional for all users at all times.

The NPPF goes on to note 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. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Furthermore, the NPPF goes on to state that 'where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use'.

It is considered that whilst the proposal may cause some harm to the setting of the building, this would not be substantial harm to the significance of the designated asset. The works will be carried out to the entrance steps and whilst it is regrettable that these will be covered up for the foreseeable future, the works will be carried out in such a way that they can be uncovered in the future if necessary. However, the inclusion of three steps within the highway will now improve the visual appearance of the slope.

The proposed internal lift and alterations have already been established as considered acceptable in principle through the previous planning and listed building applications. It is therefore considered that the minor harm caused to the listed building is outweighed by the public benefit of creating a more inclusive and viable building which is able to be used both for Council staff and members of the public 7 days a week.

### **Visual Impact upon the Grade II listed building and the surrounding streetscene**

The greatest area of impact from the proposed alterations will be to the front elevation of the building which is a focal point within the surrounding area and from the Municipal Square. The alterations include raising the pathway adjacent to the front of the building in less than a 1:20 gradient to allow level access to the building by all users. The gradient will be such that no handrails are required. The existing small steps and landing area to the front of the building will be covered over with a single pane of stone to match the existing stone. The proposal also includes the provision of 3no. granite steps to the front of the re-graded area to match those on the Municipal Square and leaving an element of the existing pathway adjacent to the highway to allow for safe passing of pedestrians not entering the Municipal Buildings.

Whilst the proposed alterations will undoubtedly have some impact on the setting, character and appearance of the building it is considered that keeping the building in use, and making it

a viable asset of the Local Authority outweighs the initial impact the alterations will have on the building itself. It is also considered that the current proposal is an improvement on the previous design as it will help to retain an element of the former entrance to the building.

Furthermore, several restrictive conditions will be recommended to the Secretary of State to ensure that the materials used and their finished colour is submitted for agreement to ensure they are suitable for the Listed Building. It is therefore considered that the proposed works are acceptable and will not significantly detract from the character or setting of the listed building.

### **Other Matters**

The Ancient Monument Society have raised concerns that the existing central balustrade is to be removed as part of the proposal and if it is an original feature. As it can be seen from the planning history section of this report the handrail to the front of the building is a recent addition approved in 1996. Therefore it is not necessary to require it to be retained.

A number of issues raised within the letter of objection relate to health and safety and the requirements for risk assessments at the site. Whilst it is acknowledged that this may normally form part of the development works as a whole, they are not material planning considerations. Furthermore, as this application is for listed building consent only specific information relating to the impact on the listed building is required as part of the application.

### **Conclusion**

It is considered that the initial harm to the building which will occur due to the need to cover over the front steps will be outweighed by the ability for the building to be used at weekends by all members of the public. It is important to improve the viability of listed buildings and to ensure their continued usage. It is considered that the proposal is acceptable and will have a minimal impact on the character and setting of the listed building. Therefore it is considered that the proposal is appropriate and would not be harmful to the historic integrity of the listed building and in accordance with Local Plan Policy and the National Planning Policy Framework.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the proposal should be referred to the Secretary of State with a recommendation of approval subject to conditions**

- 1. Standard (Listed Building).**
- 2. Schedule of works,**
- 3. All new materials to be used to be submitted to approved in writing,**
- 4. Ramp to be constructed in existing surfacing materials and short falls made up with match materials to be submitted and approved in writing**
- 5. Submission of details of proposed brass skateboard deterrent fixings to be submitted and approved in writing**
- 6. Schedule of approved plans**

(c) Crown copyright and database rights 2012. Ordnance Survey 100049045, 100049046.

