

Application No: 12/1730N

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

Proposal: 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.

Applicant: Nick Cook, Cheshire East Council

Expiry Date: 10-Jul-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 in this instance Councillor Roy Cartlidge has called this application into Southern Planning Committee for the following reason;

*'I want to call in the planning application 12/1730N Municipal Buildings on the grounds that it will be detrimental to the street scene and contrary to planning policies BE2, BE7, BE9 and BE13.*

*No Public consultation and no input from the Disability resource exchange centre have been looked into this puts into question whether there is a need for an extra disability access into the building when at present it meets all the disability legislation and could in fact be improved upon and the ceremony room could be provided at ground floor level in the new build municipal buildings at a much reduced cost. Therefore I ask the application be refused on the grounds that it would harm the character, appearance and the future setting of a conservation area and would also defect from the*

*scale, form and the character of the building and a building of this kind of architectural and historic interest which the town of Crewe has very few building of this kind and would I feel spoil the street scene and townscape for future years to come.'*

## **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 planning (11/1023N) and listed building (11/1024N) consents approved in 2011. This application permitted alterations to the front suite of rooms (previously the Planning Help Desk and Legal Department), this also including the insertion of two sesame lifts, one to the front of the building and another to the internal staircase. Since this approval was given and prior to works commencing the British Standard BS 6440:2011 (Powered vertical lifting platforms having non-enclosed or partially enclosed lift way intended for use by persons with impaired mobility) has been brought in and therefore requiring both lifts to have barriers around them. Permanent fixed barriers would not be suitable and would go against the concept of the hidden sesame lift. Retractable barriers are possible but require a larger pit for the lift to submerge and to the front of the building this would include an area of servicing and foundations. This option is therefore no longer a viable or feasible proposal.

The proposed development has been submitted following discussions between English Heritage, and the Council's Conservation Officer regarding the possible alternatives to the previously approved works.

## **2. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

The proposal is 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. The application also includes the removal of the double lobby entrance and reinstating the original single door entrance to the front of the building.

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**

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.9 (Listed Buildings Alterations and Extensions)

### **Other Material Considerations**

National Planning Policy Framework

**5. CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)** – None received at time of writing this report.

**7. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS:** None received at the time of writing this report.

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

Design and Access Statement

### **9. OFFICER APPRAISAL**

#### **Procedural Matter**

Within the call in reason it is noted that the proposal is contrary to Policy BE.7 (Conservation Area) and BE.13 (Building of Local Interest), however the site is not within a designated conservation area, and the Municipal Buildings are on the Statutory List of Buildings (Nationally Listed) and therefore is not on the Building of Local Interest list which relates to buildings on a non-statutory interest (Locally Listed). Therefore these policies will not be considered as part of this report as they are not relevant.

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.

#### **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 alteration will enable improved access and egress by disabled users of the facility. The proposal is considered to be in the public interest. The building itself is only open to the public during normal working hours currently and the intention is to fully utilise the viable uses of the building and open at weekends in the future as part of the new registration of births, deaths and weddings use, which will move into the ground floor offices at the front of the 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 of the building to get to the main desk/reception area of the building. Currently this is only available during only 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 '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.

The proposed internal lift and alterations have already been considered acceptable in principle within the previous planning and listed building applications and 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 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 a 1:21 gradient to allow level access to the building by all users. The gradient will be such that no handrails or landings 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. Furthermore the current two door system into the building will be removed and the original single door reinstated.

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.

The insertion of the retracting stair lift internally will also have some impact on the visual amenity of the building as this will require the existing stone steps to be movable, as they will retract under each other to allow the base of the lift to emerge from the basement area. Furthermore, the addition of retractable barriers and glazed balustrade will have a limited visual impact when raised, and will appear relative unobtrusive.

Much of the internal works are decoration with the intention of reinstating original high level ceilings by removing the new lowered additions, and creating similar style doors, frames and architraves to the new walls. Furthermore, other than the new internal wall within one area of the building and the replacement of the two door vestibule entrance with the original single door arrangement, the stair lift area should remain fairly similar in appearance to the existing situation, except when in use.

It is considered that the new single door will improve the visual appearance of the building and by replacing it with an original feature. The minor alterations to the internal rooms are considered acceptable and will not have a detrimental impact on the historic fabric of the listed 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.

## **Conclusion**

It is considered that the initial harm to the building which will occur due to the need to cover over the front steps and minor alterations to the internal layout of the building 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 Materials to be used to be submitted to approved in writing,**
- 4. All Painting to be same as existing,**
- 5. All carpeting to be unpatterned and the same colour as existing,**

- 6. All doors to match existing,**
- 7. All fire places to be retained,**
- 8. Full illustrative details of all call buttons and signs to be submitted for written approval,**
- 9. Risers and treads to internal Sesame lift steps to be surfaced in materials to match the existing stairs**
- 10. All studs to match others within building in colour and size and to be recessed within the steps.**
- 11. Details of the proposed railings/balustrades to be submitted to and approved in writing**
- 12. Ramp to be constructed in surfacing material to match the existing pathway**
- 13. Schedule of approved plans**

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