

## REPORT TO THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>06.04.2011</b>		
<b>Application Number</b>	<b>W/10/03933/REG3</b>		
<b>Site Address</b>	<b>County Hall Bythesea Road Trowbridge Wiltshire BA14 8JN</b>		
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Extension and remodelling of County Hall to consolidate Library services and Registry Office into the main campus</b>		
<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Wiltshire Council</b>		
<b>Town/Parish Council</b>	<b>Trowbridge</b>		
<b>Electoral Division</b>	<b>Trowbridge Central</b>	<b>Unitary Member:</b>	<b>John Knight</b>
<b>Grid Ref</b>	<b>385428 157571</b>		
<b>Type of application</b>	<b>Reg 3 Application</b>		
<b>Case Officer</b>	<b>Mrs Rosie MacGregor</b>	01225 770344 Ext 5597 rosie.macgregor@wiltshire.gov.uk	

### Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The application falls to be determined by this committee as it is a significant application of over 500 square metres submitted by the Council.

### 1. Purpose of Report

To consider the above application and to recommend that planning permission be granted

Neighbourhood Responses

None

Trowbridge Town Council Response

Support.

### 2. Main Issues

The main issues to consider are:

- \* Historic Environment
- \* Design
- \* Residential amenity
- \* Highways
- \* Sustainability

### 3. Site Description

County Hall, which contains the administrative offices for Wiltshire Council, is situated on the south-west side of Bythesea Road close to the centre of the county town of Trowbridge.

It comprises the original building, Old County Hall, which is a fine traditional building circa 1930 and completed in 1940 in neo-classical style with an art-deco interior, on 4 storeys built from natural Bath stone under a clay tiled roof.

A more recent extension dating from the 1970s is situated to the south of the original building built from reconstructed stone under a lead sheet, mansard style flat roof. This is known as the MECH Building, or Modern Extension to County Hall. A central open courtyard and circulation area is located between the original building and the three wings of the existing extension which is laid predominantly to grass with three Silver Birch trees and seating located within it.

There is a further open grass area to the front of the original building with access from Bythesea Road which runs parallel to the frontage. The main Bristol to Westbury, Salisbury and the south coast railway line is to the rear of the building. A development of sheltered housing is located to the north side of the building and Mortimer Street comprising a mix of commercial and residential properties on the opposite side of the road is located to the south.

The existing Library and Registry Offices are located on the opposite side of Bythesea Road and there are areas of staff parking within the immediate vicinity.

It should be noted that, following a request to spot-list County Hall, consideration was given by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), based on a report and research work undertaken by English Heritage, as to whether or not the building should be given listed status. However, following careful consideration the decision was taken by DCMS that it would not be listed.

#### **4. Relevant Planning History**

None

#### **5. Proposal**

This is a full planning application for the refurbishment and extension of County Hall. This is in order to update the building to meet modern ways of working, improve the appearance of the existing extension, and consolidate Library Services and the Registry Office into the main building.

It is proposed that the existing link which forms a bridge at first floor level on the Bytheseas Road frontage would be demolished. This would be replaced with a three storey link finished in glass and metal panels and the existing courtyard would be enclosed to form a glass atrium supported on lightweight steel to create reception and open-plan public areas including exhibition space and a coffee shop.

The external elevations of the current extension would be remodelled and refurbished to incorporate a library at ground floor level with refurbished office space above.

The original building would be remodelled to include more open plan offices which would necessitate the removal of some original interior partitions and one of three original staircases. However, the existing main entrance foyer to Old County hall would be retained together with the central staircase and council chamber.

The application is accompanied by a Planning, Design and Access Statement, an Ecological Assessment, Travel Plan, Waste management Plan, Sustainability Statement, Statement of Community Involvement and Construction Method Statement.

Following consultations a Heritage Statement has been submitted and an additional report in relation to ecology.

Revised plans have been submitted as part of the planning process.

A separate Art and Design Strategy has been prepared on behalf of the Council which states that the proposals offer an opportunity to Wiltshire Council to realise a high quality creative arts and design programme in the public realm.

## **6. Planning Policy**

Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan 2016

DP1 - Sustainable development

DP3 - Development Strategy

DP5 – Town Centres, District Centres and employment areas

DP9 – Previously developed land and buildings

HE2 – Features of archaeological or historic interest

HE7 – Conservation areas and listed buildings

West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration (2004)

C17 – Conservation Area (setting)

C31a -Design

C32 - Landscaping

C35 – Lighting

C38 - Nuisance

CF1 – Community facilities

T10 - Car parking

River Biss Public Realm Guide

PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS4 Planning for sustainable economic growth

PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment

PPG13 Transport

PPG24 Planning and Noise

PPS25 Development and Flood Risk

## **7. Consultations**

### Trowbridge Town Council

Support.

However, 'the Town Council is concerned at a number of issues in the travel and access plan elements of the application documents: The Interim Travel Plan 7.1.12 does not make clear what facilities for visitors arriving by bicycle will be available. 7.1.21 is confusing, including Salisbury twice and including places such as Great Malvern but fails to include more important locations with direct services such as: Warminster, Bradford on Avon, Bath, Bristol, Newport, Cardiff, Southampton, Portsmouth and Gloucester. The train section also fails to mention the delivered to desk facility for pre-booked rail tickets offered by the Trowbridge Information Centre to Wiltshire Council business travellers. Section 4 'Access' of the Planning statement also fails to provide any details of parking facilities for the public. The remodelled County Hall will have much greater public use, in particular with the library and registration service, will there be any public parking on site? No mention is made of the poor direct access to the main town centre shopping areas and improvements to pedestrian access along Bythesea Rd to the Gateway and Railway Station or future potential for improvements to pedestrian links across the river to Court Street and the Shires. The Town Council would like to see these addressed'.

### Highways

There are no highway objections to this remodelling of County Hall, subject to the comments and recommended condition below.

A travel plan was being produced and this initiative is supported but it is not essential that the travel plan be made a condition of consent, merely that the travel plan will help the Authority manage and control on-site parking to the benefit of the users including those members of the public gaining access to the new library location and other facilities within County Hall.

Although there is no objection to the new disabled parking bays and drop off bays along the front of old County Hall it is pointed out that the vehicles using these bays must turn at the west end of the building and then return to the main access point.

The reopening of the westerly access point to Bythesea Road is not supported, in fact, to avoid any doubt, a condition should be imposed to prevent any vehicular access to and from the existing pedestrian and cycle only westerly access point onto Bythesea Road to avoid unnecessary vehicular turning movement onto and off Bythesea Road near an existing all movements junction which adequately caters with all movements to and from County Hall, in the interests of road safety.

#### Principal Urban Designer

'I remained concerned that urban design opportunities to significantly improve the approach to the building had not been fully explored.

Despite reassurances that these opportunities would be looked into I am disappointed to see that there are no revisions to the design of the building approach (nor explanations of why they were not achieved) in what has now become the planning application.

The Design & Access Statement (page 10) highlights the general development principle for prominent sites such as this that development should "minimise the visual impact of roads, vehicles and parking". Also, in Appendix C a clear reassurance has been given in the consultation process that "Enhancements will... be made to the landscaping and ecology to off-set any losses caused by infilling the courtyard". However, neither the very short section 3.5 on Landscaping (page 15), nor the external works plans submitted indicate any replacement green landscaping for the omitted courtyard. Instead, the plans indicate that the footway in front of Old County Hall (OCH) will be narrowed to accommodate parked vehicles (and necessarily prominent associated hatched road-markings), and they also indicate the replacement of the footway opposite with additional vehicular circulation width.

I continue to believe there may be scope to reduce the whole of this route to one-way with an associated narrowing of the vehicular route and expansion of the green space in front of OCH (subject to re-opening the vehicular entrance from Bythesea Road). I also feel that a more visually sensitive surfacing than hatched marking is needed for the disabled parking bays if they must occupy a position in front of the OCH.

With regard to the stepped route into the main frontage car park, I still believe the remodelling presents an opportunity to realign that route to a single, safer, wider and more direct position such as to the north of the adjacent tree, whereby staff will not be encouraged to emerge between parked vehicles on the main single aisle entry to the whole car park.

I hope these relatively small scale but prominent adjustments can be accommodated in any revised plans that may be approved, or conditions considered which allow their implementation in the construction stage.'

#### Conservation Officer

'This is not a listed building at the moment, although an application for listing has been made. The building is not in a Conservation Area, but is nevertheless an important historic building in the street scene. In light of this, I will discuss the planning merits related to conservation and then discuss the impacts if this building should become listed.

Planning matters - Glass link - The existing link detracts from the symmetry of Old County Hall and its removal would be welcomed. The replacement of this with a lightweight glass link would allow the symmetry of Old County Hall to be appreciated anew.

The new link itself would be a mixture of metal and glass and is an appropriate design approach to an addition to an historic building. The link would visually stand apart from Old County Hall, at once announcing the main entrance to the Council, yet also deferring to the solidity of the architecture of Old County Hall.

Atrium roof - This would allow a currently under appreciated elevation – south east of Old County Hall – to be viewed as part of the proposed atrium without resulting in any structural harm to the historic building.

New windows to MECH - The proposed new windows to MECH would be an improvement in the street scene. The new library windows in particular would give a much more welcoming appearance than the existing and this would be to the benefit of the street scene.

New fire escapes to the rear of Old County Hall - The existing metal fire escapes are to be removed and new fire escapes within 'glass boxes' are to be constructed. This would result in an overall improvement to the character of the building and tidy up areas which have become unsightly over the years.

No objection to the planning application.

#### County Archaeologist

No comments to make as there are no known archaeological sites in the area of the proposal.

#### Arts Development

As part of pre-application discussions it is noted that the Arts Service of Wiltshire Council engaged with the Project Manager and project architect to advise on the commission of an Art Strategy to accompany the planning application for County Hall Re-modelling. This has been completed by an independent consultant following wide consultation with stakeholders.

It is anticipated that the Art Strategy will be implemented to achieve the objective to create a sense of place and define new public access and engagement with the re-modelled building and celebrate the creative characteristics and local distinctiveness of Wiltshire. This will be achieved by a Project Working Group commissioning research and ideas by artists for the new public space; and to determine where prospective spaces can be utilised to display artworks from the Wiltshire Collection.

It is envisaged that a work will be designed and installed in the new reception and that an artist will work with the architects and design team to develop a floor treatment in the courtyard space and the lighting treatment for the entranceway. The textile work would be inspired by and reflect Wiltshire's landscape and historic textile industry.

It is also envisaged that the design of the remodelled building will enable Wiltshire's Creasey and Young collections to be displayed, enabling the arts team to work with partners to develop a programme of interpretation including participatory involvement of young people.

The Arts Strategy has now been finalised and should be a condition of any permission granted.

#### Ecologist

Is satisfied with the information submitted and asks that permission is conditional on the landscaping of external areas incorporating the recommendations made in the BREEAM report by Clarke Webb Ecology Ltd.

#### English Heritage

Does not wish to comment in detail, but offers the following general observations.

'We are grateful to you for the consultation in line with good practice on account of the spot-list request. In advance of the determination of that, we do have best practice counsel to recommend.

It is safest to address development proposals for office buildings of this nature on the basis of a management plan. Given the significance of the building, it would be wise to ask a recognised expert in C290 historic architecture (such as Professor Jeremy Gould, who did the plans for both Devon [1950s-60s Georgian] and Cornwall [1960s Modern]) County Halls. Such strategic master planning tools have been made positive contributions to both strategic and detail planning for the local authorities concerned and for us.

We would urge you to address the above issues, and recommend that the application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice.'

#### Wessex Water

No objection in principle.

#### Environment Agency

No comment to make.

#### Network Rail

Whilst there is no objection in principle to this proposal the requirements for the safe operation of the railway and the protection of Network Rail's adjoining land are as follows.

##### Drainage

Additional or increased flows of surface water should not be discharged onto Network Rail land or into Network Rail's culvert or drains. In the interest of the long-term stability of the railway, it is recommended that soakaways should not be constructed within 10 metres of Network Rail's boundary.

##### Safety

No work should be carried out on the development site that may endanger the safe operation of the railway or the stability of Network Rail's structures and adjoining land. In view of the close proximity of these proposed works to the railway boundary the developer should contact Richard Selwood at Network Rail on [AssetProtectionWestern@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:AssetProtectionWestern@networkrail.co.uk) before works begin.

##### Ground levels

The developers should be made aware that Network Rail needs to be consulted on any alterations to ground levels. No excavations should be carried out near railway embankments, retaining walls or bridges.

##### Site layout

It is recommended that all buildings be situated at least 2 metres from the boundary fence, to allow construction and any future maintenance work to be carried out without involving entry onto Network Rail's infrastructure. Where trees exist on Network Rail land the design of foundations close to the boundary must take into account the effects of root penetration in accordance with the Building Research Establishment's guidelines.

## **8. Publicity**

The application was advertised by site notice/press notice /neighbour notification.

Expiry date: 28.01.2011

There has been no response to the press advertisement, site notice or neighbour notification.

## **9. Planning Considerations**

## Design

9.1 County Hall is an important building of considerable visual impact in this part of the town centre. The most recent additions to the original building carried out in the 1970s have done little to enhance the appearance of Old County hall or integrate the design of one with the other. It must be acknowledged that the MECH building, as it is known, is in effect an earlier extension to County Hall and is very much of its own time and not even an impressive building for that era. Whilst Old County Hall is an attractive and well proportioned building, the existing extension is of bland appearance and unattractive. It is of little architectural merit or historic interest.

9.3 The changes proposed to the external appearance and design of the existing extension, the proposed new link building and atrium, together with the retention of the original elevations of Old County Hall would represent a significant improvement to the overall appearance of the building. These new elements would ensure that the new build elements integrate with, and enliven, the less sympathetic elements of the existing 1970s extension. It is considered that the refurbished building would be of striking appearance and of some considerable architectural merit.

9.4 The location, massing and height of the new building is of a similar scale to the existing and would not dominate Old County Hall. Indeed, the bold and imaginative modern design would create a rich visual dialogue with the historic Old County Hall. The proposals would result in a visually dynamic group of buildings and there would be a stimulating visual interaction between the old and new.

9.5 The priority for this scheme is that it should provide a viable future for a group of buildings that are not ideally suited to modern ways of working. The proposed alterations would not only positively enhance the working environment but would effectively result in the construction of a new library, a new registry office and associated facilities to meet the on-going needs of the local community as part of this major redevelopment and refurbishment of County Hall. The internal layout, once complete, would be more flexible and would be more readily adaptable to suit changing needs within the services provided and the community.

### Impact on townscape and setting of conservation area

9.6 The site lies within the built up area of Trowbridge close to the town centre on the edge of the conservation area. The importance of the built heritage both within and forming the setting to the conservation area in this part of Trowbridge cannot be under estimated. Furthermore, the site is in a particularly prominent location when entering the town as it is situated on one of the main approach roads into the centre. Although it is located outside the conservation area it is visible from a number of vantage points within the conservation area.

9.7 The Old County Hall building is an important element of the townscape, set back from the road but standing proud above the highway. It helps to define the character of the town at this point and makes a significant contribution to the setting of the nearby conservation area.

9.8 The scale of the proposals, their design and use of dynamic modern materials is such that the new elements of the design would be sympathetic to the scale of the original and would make an equally bold statement. Overall this is considered to be a well designed scheme fit for the 21st Century that will respect the area in which it is located. Furthermore, the proposals would not only enhance the character and appearance of the immediate area but would add to its vitality and visual appearance for the benefit of the wider townscape and for those using council facilities. The re-use of the site in the manner proposed would undoubtedly add to the vitality and continued viability of the town centre.

9.9 Whilst acknowledging the comments from the Urban Designer in relation to the frontage of the building, this is an existing access arrangement and in the context of the overall scheme, this would not warrant a refusal of the application.

## Heritage Asset

9.10 Despite the recent decision by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport not to list County Hall, it is still considered to be an important heritage asset for the town.

9.11 Given its importance in this context many of the observations made by English Heritage and the Council's Conservation Officer, including matters relating to the interior layout have been incorporated into the revised plans. Furthermore, a Heritage Statement has now been submitted. It is considered that the proposals would preserve and enhance this heritage asset and are consistent with government advice contained within PPS5 – Planning for the Historic Environment.

#### Sustainability and highways

9.12 This is a sustainable location in the heart of the town centre with bus stops close by and the railway station within easy and level walking distance. Public and some staff parking is situated close to the building including disabled parking spaces. The need for any additional parking is considered unnecessary given the sustainable location of the building.

9.13 The views of the highway officer who has no objections are supported. A travel plan has been submitted with the application which is supported but highways officers do not consider that it should be conditional on permission being granted. The use of a condition to prevent the reopening of the closed western access is considered appropriate.

9.14 The Town Council supports the scheme but does have some reservations, but in the overall context of the proposals, and given the sustainable location of the building and comments from the highways officer, are not considered so substantial as to warrant refusal.

#### Landscaping

9.15 Although the three silver Birch trees within the existing courtyard will be lost this is mitigated by the proposed planting and landscaping scheme that includes two mature trees of the same species to the front of the building.

#### Ecology

9.16 The ecological survey has concluded that there are no habitats of ecological interest within the site or likely to be affected by the development and no evidence of bats was found within the roofspace. The applicant's agent has submitted a further addendum to the ecology report which now forms part of the application to satisfy the Council's own Ecologist's concerns. This can be controlled by condition and as such would be enforceable.

#### Arts

9.17 The arts strategy for this important public building is considered acceptable. This will enhance and enliven the space and a condition to ensure that the arts strategy is implemented is considered appropriate.

#### Other matters

9.18 There is no known archaeology in the area.

9.19 Notwithstanding the comments from Network Rail regarding the safe operation of the railway and the protection of Network Rail's adjoining land, the proposals are basically for an extension to an existing building. The observations from Network Rail in relation to rail safety can be added as an informative.

9.20 Although there are nearby residential properties, these are on the opposite side of the road or railway line to the proposed extension, and since the proposals represent a refurbishment and extension of an existing building there would be no harm to neighbouring amenity.

#### Conclusions



9.21 It is considered that this is a well designed scheme that is in accordance with Council policy and government guidance and there is no reason why permission should not be granted.

9.22 The proposals represent a significant improvement to the overall appearance of the building, will enhance the street scene and add to the vitality of this part of the town centre. The refurbished offices will ensure that the building responds positively to contemporary work methods and the relocation of the library and registry office will benefit the community.

**Recommendation:        Permission**

**For the following reason(s):**

**The proposed development is in accordance with Council policy and government guidance and there is no reason why permission should not be granted.**

**The proposals represent a significant improvement to the overall appearance of the building, will enhance the street scene and add to the vitality of this part of the town centre. There will be no harm to neighbouring amenity or any other interests of acknowledged importance. The refurbished offices will ensure that the building responds positively to contemporary working methods and the relocation of the library and registry office will benefit the community.**

- 1     The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2     No development shall commence on site until details and samples of the materials to be used for the external walls and roofs have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the area.

West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration 2004 - POLICY: C31a.

- 3     There shall be no vehicular access to or from the existing pedestrian and cycle only westerly access point onto Bythesea Road.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety to avoid unnecessary vehicular turning movement onto and off Bythesea Road near an existing all movements junction which adequately caters with all movements to and from County Hall.

- 4     The proposals contained within the County Hall Re-Modelling, Wiltshire Council, Arts Strategy document dated February 2011 shall be carried out in accordance with the timetable attached at Appendix II, and further programme details for the installation of the work shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to their installation in the building.

REASON: In the interests of public amenity and the arts.

POLICY: West Wiltshire District Plan - 1st Alteration 2004 – Policy I2.

- 5 The recommendations contained within the BREEAM Ecology Report LE1-LE6 prepared by Dr Peter Webb and dated October 2010 shall be carried out during construction of the development. Thereafter the ecological enhancement works shall be implemented in full prior to the completion of the development.

REASON: In the interests of nature conservation.

POLICY: Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

- 6 In order to define the terms of this permission, this approval relates to the plans received on 10.12.2010, to the revised plans received on 07.03.2011, and to the documents submitted with the application and listed below:-

Plan Numbers for Trowbridge County Hall

P(0)001	Site location plan
P(0)002	Site block plan
P(0)004A	Mech and OCH ground floor plan
P(0)005A	Mech and links basement plan
P(0)006A	Mech and links ground floor plan
P(0)007A	Mech and links 1st floor plan
P(0)008A	Mech and links 2nd floor plan
P(0)009A	Mech and links 3rd floor plan
P(0)010A	Mech and links roof plan
P(0)011A	OCH basement plan
P(0)012A	OCH ground floor plan
P(0)013A	OCH 1st floor plan
P(0)014A	OCH 2nd floor plan
P(0)015A	OCH 3rd floor plan
P(0)016A	OCH roof plan
P(0)030A	MECH North West elevation
P(0)031A	MECH North East elevation
P(0)032A	MECH South East elevation
P(0)033A	MECH South West elevation
P(0)035A	OCH North East elevation
P(0)036	OCH North West front elevation
P(0)037	OCH South West elevation
P(0)038	OCH North West rear elevation
P(0)039	OCH South East elevation
P(0)040	OCH Council Chamber elevation
P(0)050	Section A-A
P(0)051A	Courtyard section
P(0)060	External works plan
P(0)061	External works – Entrance approach
P(0)062	External works – Entrance approach
P(0)063	MECH South –proposed escape ramp
P(0)064	OCH Rear – cycle store and basement access
P(0)070A	3D Images 1
P(0)071A	3D Images 2
P(0)1000	Site plan external underground drainage Sheet 1
P(0)1001	Site plan external underground drainage Sheet 2

Documents received on 10.12.2010

Planning Statement, incorporating Design and Access Statement  
Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey  
Interim Travel Plan  
Site Waste Management Plan  
Construction Method Statement

**Informative(s):**

- 1 You are advised that Network Rail has made the following comments in relation to its requirements for the safe operation of the railway and the protection of Network Rail's adjoining land are as follows.

**Drainage**

Additional or increased flows of surface water should not be discharged onto Network Rail land or into Network Rail's culvert or drains. In the interest of the long-term stability of the railway, it is recommended that soakaways should not be constructed within 10 metres of Network Rail's boundary.

**Safety**

No work should be carried out on the development site that may endanger the safe operation of the railway or the stability of Network Rail's structures and adjoining land. In view of the close proximity of these proposed works to the railway boundary the developer should contact Richard Selwood at Network Rail on [AssetProtectionWestern@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:AssetProtectionWestern@networkrail.co.uk) before works begin.

**Ground levels**

The developers should be made aware that Network Rail needs to be consulted on any alterations to ground levels. No excavations should be carried out near railway embankments, retaining walls or bridges.

**Site layout**

It is recommended that all buildings be situated at least 2 metres from the boundary fence, to allow construction and any future maintenance work to be carried out without involving entry onto Network Rail's infrastructure. Where trees exist on Network Rail land the design of foundations close to the boundary must take into account the effects of root penetration in accordance with the Building Research Establishment's guidelines.