

2024/0001

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Former Council Computer Centre, Westgate House, Westgate, Barnsley, S70 2DJ

Change of use, refurbishment and erection of detached storage building at Westgate House to form the northern academy for vocal excellence

The application is before members as the applicant is Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

Site Description

The application relates to Westgate House. The building is located on Westgate in Barnsley Town Centre. Westgate House has been adopted onto Barnsley's local list of non-designated heritage assets. Westgate House is also adjacent the setting of the Regent Street, Church Street and Market Hill Conservation Area and multiple grade II listed buildings including the Town Hall. In 1977 it was converted into a Computer Centre and is now currently vacant.

Relevant Planning History

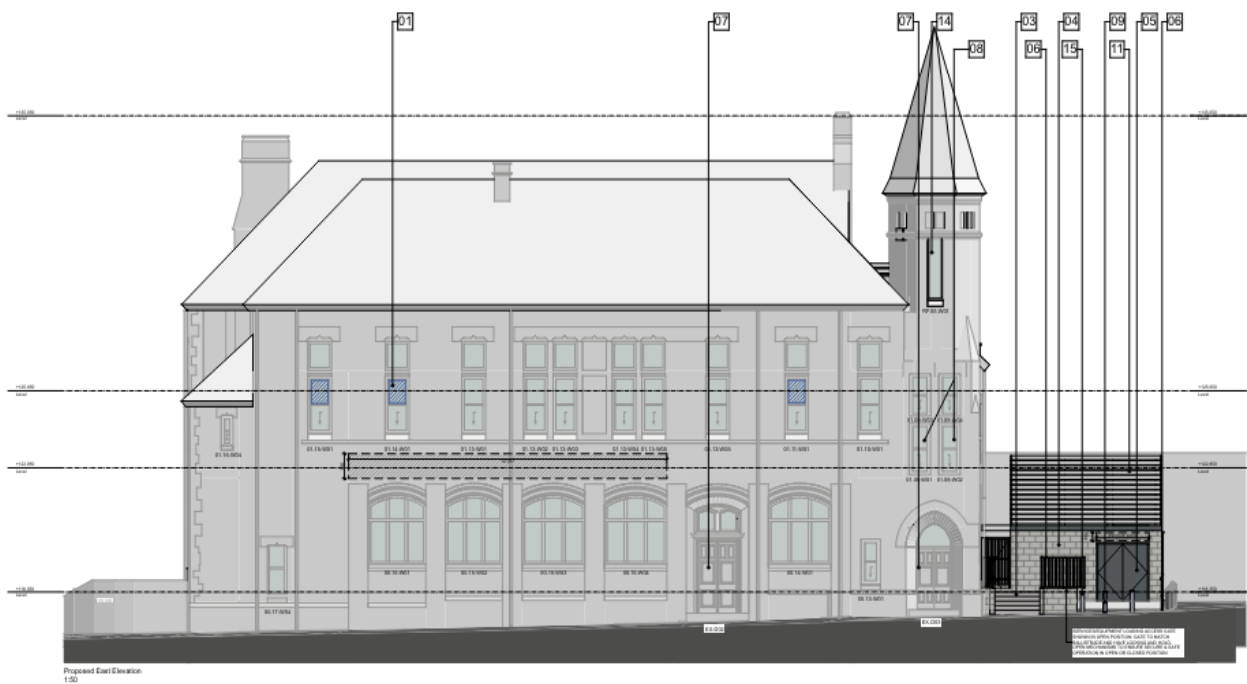
B/74/2588/BA - Temporary Garage Extension

B/77/2061/BA - Conversion of former magistrates court to Police Driving School to Computer Centre

B/82/1687/BA - Alterations to roof

B/00/0833/BA - Installation of stand-by generator

Proposed Development



This application seeks planning permission for a change of use, and refurbishment of Westgate House with a small plant building to the north. Following conversion, the building will form the Northern Academy for Vocal Excellence. The Barnsley Youth Choir intend to use this as their home and will take the building on a long lease.

The proposal seeks to re-open the ground floor to create a larger multipurpose space and a secondary rehearsal space to the east side of the building with secondary rooms (kitchen, store, office W.C. etc.) retained at the north and south end of the building. At first floor level, the intention is to create two further large rehearsal spaces with further small ancillary rooms to the north and south of these. The current office spaces on the third-floor mezzanine are proposed as a fourth new rehearsal space with kitchen, office, and W.C. at the south end of the building.

With regards external features doors will be restored and refurbished, and if not suitable for re-use, will be replaced to match the existing. The same goes for the existing glazing which will only be replaced where re-use via repair and refurbishment is not viable. The existing roof covering will be re-used in its entirety if possible, and replacement or additional slates required will match the existing. Additionally, an external plant building is proposed which measures 7.4 metres by 5.9 metres and features a flat roof with a total height of 5.6 metres

Policy Context

Planning decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise and the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The Local Plan was adopted in January 2019 and is also now accompanied by seven masterplan frameworks which apply to the largest site allocations (housing, employment and mixed-use sites). In addition, the Council has adopted a series of Supplementary Planning Documents and Neighbourhood Plans which provide supporting guidance and specific local policies and are a material consideration in the decision-making process.

The Local Plan review was approved at the full Council meeting on 24th November 2022. The review determined that the Local Plan remains fit for purpose and is adequately delivering its objectives. This means no updates to the Local Plan, in whole or in part, are to be carried out ahead of a further review. The next review is due to take place in 2027 or earlier if circumstances, require it.

Local Plan Allocation – Barnsley Town Centre District 5 Westgate/Churchfields

To the extent that development plan policies are material to an application for planning permission the decision on the application must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise (section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004). In reference to this application, the following policies are relevant:

Policy SD1: Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development – States that proposals for development will be approved where there will be no significant adverse effect on the living conditions and residential amenity of existing and future residents. Development will be expected to be compatible with neighbouring land and will not significantly prejudice the current or future use of neighbouring land. Policy GD1 below will be applied to all development.

Policy GD1: General Development – Development will be approved if there will be no significant adverse effect on the living conditions and residential amenity of existing and future residents. Development will be expected to be compatible with neighbouring land and will not significantly prejudice the current or future use of neighbouring land.

Policy D1: High quality design and place making – Development is expected to be of a high-quality design and will be expected to respect, take advantage of and reinforce the distinctive, local character and other features of Barnsley.

Policy TC1: Town Centres – New retail and town centre development will be directed to centres to maintain and enhance their vitality and viability and that a sequential approach will be used to assess proposals for new retail and town centre development outside the designated centres.

Policy BTC18: Westgate/Churchfields – Within the Westgate/Churchfields District, priority will be given to office development but residential, shops, leisure and entertainment uses will also be acceptable.

Policy HE1: The Historic Environment – Positively encourage developments that help in the management, conservation and understanding of the historic environment.

Policy HE3: Developments affecting Historic Buildings – Proposals involving historic buildings should conserve and where appropriate enhance, respect historic precedents, and capitalise on opportunities to reveal significance.

Policy Poll1: Pollution Control and Protection – Development will be expected to demonstrate that it is not likely to result, directly or indirectly, in an increase in air, surface water and groundwater, noise, smell, dust, vibration, light or other pollution which would unacceptably affect or cause a nuisance to the natural and built environment or to people.

Policy T3: New Development and Sustainable Travel – New development will be expected to reduce the need to travel, be accessible to public transport and meet the needs of pedestrians and cyclists.

Policy T4: New development and Transport Safety – Expects new development to be designed and built to provide safe secure and convenient access and to not cause or add to problems of highway safety or efficiency.

National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies and how these are expected to be applied. The core of this is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Proposals that align with the Local Plan should be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In respect of this application, relevant policies include:

Section 12: Achieving well designed places – The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. It is important to plan positively for the inclusion of high-quality design for all developments, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes. Within section 12, paragraph 139 states *“development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes”*.

Consultations

The LPA's Biodiversity Officer was consulted and raised no objections subject to conditions.

Central Ward Councillors were consulted and raised no objections.

The LPA's Conservation Officer was consulted and raised no objections subject to conditions.

Highways Development Control (DC) were consulted and raised no objections subject to conditions.

Pollution Control were consulted and raised no objections.

South Yorkshire Police were consulted and after discussion with the applicant provided the following comments.

As Police Design Out Crime Officers our concerns will always be with regard to the 'Safety and Security' for students and staff, which will obviously include the Loss Prevention Standards or Security, Security Technical Standards or BS EN Resistance Classifications for Doors (Pedestrian or Vehicular), and similar other standards for any access control systems, cycle storage, Emergency Egress Doors, Manual or Electronic Security Systems. That will be covered in a BREEAM HEA06 Security Needs Assessment, should it be required.

Representations

A site notice was posted adjacent the site and a press notice issued; no comments were received.

Assessment

Principle of Development

The application site is in a town centre location where national and local policy indicates that main town centre uses will be directed in order to maintain the vitality and viability of centres. The site falls within the Westgate/Churchfields Town Centre District. As such, Local Plan Policies TC1: Town Centres and BTC18: Westgate/Churchfields are relevant which generally expect development to support and maintain the Town Centre's sub-regional role as the Borough's dominant Centre. Support will be given to retail, but other suitable town Centre uses will be supported with the primary use expected in the Westgate/Churchfields District to be offices.

The proposed development and therefore change of use of the building is acceptable because Policy BTC18 also states "*we will also allow residential, shops, leisure and entertainment uses*" and the proposed use can be deemed to fall with those categories. Additionally, Westgate falls within what the Local Plan states as the knowledge hub of the town centre where educational uses and cultural/media uses will also be supported. Given the above the proposed change of use of the building to the northern academy for vocal excellence is deemed acceptable in principle.

Impact Upon Heritage Assets and Visual Amenity

In terms of visual amenity there are no major external changes to the building beyond a major refurbishment. There will be no significant detrimental impact upon the street scene of Westgate with the building holding its same prominence within it as existing. With regards the external changes to the building these are seen as an improvement over the existing and are needed for the building to be able to be utilised. Doors and windows are to be retained and repaired with secondary glazing to improve their performance. Internal wall and roof insulation is also proposed to bring the building closer to modern standards.

Furthermore, the LPA's Conservation Officer has been consulted and was supportive of the application. There will be no harm to the setting of the adjacent listed buildings nor the Regent Street, Church Street and Market Hill Conservation Area. The refurbishment and re-use of the building can be seen to enhance the other heritage assets as well as revitalizing a building currently on the local list of non-designated heritage assets.

A plant building to the north is proposed in the car park space and is to be in sandstone to match the existing building. This is a simple flat roofed structure in order to differentiate the old from the new. Whilst a pitched roof may well have worked, on balance, there is little harm as it is a relatively small enclosure, set well back from the road and in matching materials, unlikely to harm the setting of the conservation area, adjacent listed buildings or the visual amenities of the locality. Furthermore, it is replacing an existing plant compound due to be demolished.

Residential Amenity

There will be no impact upon residential amenity as a result of the proposed works as there are no dwellings within the immediate vicinity of the proposed development.

Highway Safety

There will be no detrimental impact upon highway safety. The site is within the recognised town centre of Barnsley and is in easy walking distance of local car parks and public transport links. As such, although no off-street parking is provided in the proposal, concerns are not raised of the scheme on these grounds given the sustainable location of the development. Bin and cycle storage locations are demonstrated in drawing no. BALU-BBA-NV-XX-DR-A-1008-P01. However, these should be of suitable size, construction and location, and conditions will be applied to ensure this is the case. As such, the scheme is acceptable from the perspective of highways.

Conclusion

The proposed use is considered to be acceptable in this town centre location as it would offer a service to visiting members of the public in a highly sustainable and accessible location and will contribute towards the vitality and viability of the centre. The proposal will breathe new life into a building of significant local merit and provide a significant and necessary enhancement.

Recommendation

Approve with conditions