



URBANA

TOWN PLANNING

Change of Use, Refurbishment and Erection of Building at Westgate House

Planning Statement



Prepared by: CD
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**CHANGE OF USE, REFURBISHMENT AND ERECTION OF DETACHED STORAGE BUILDING AT WESTGATE HOUSE TO FORM THE NORTHERN ACADEMY FOR VOCAL EXCELLENCE
BARNSELEY, S70 2DJ**

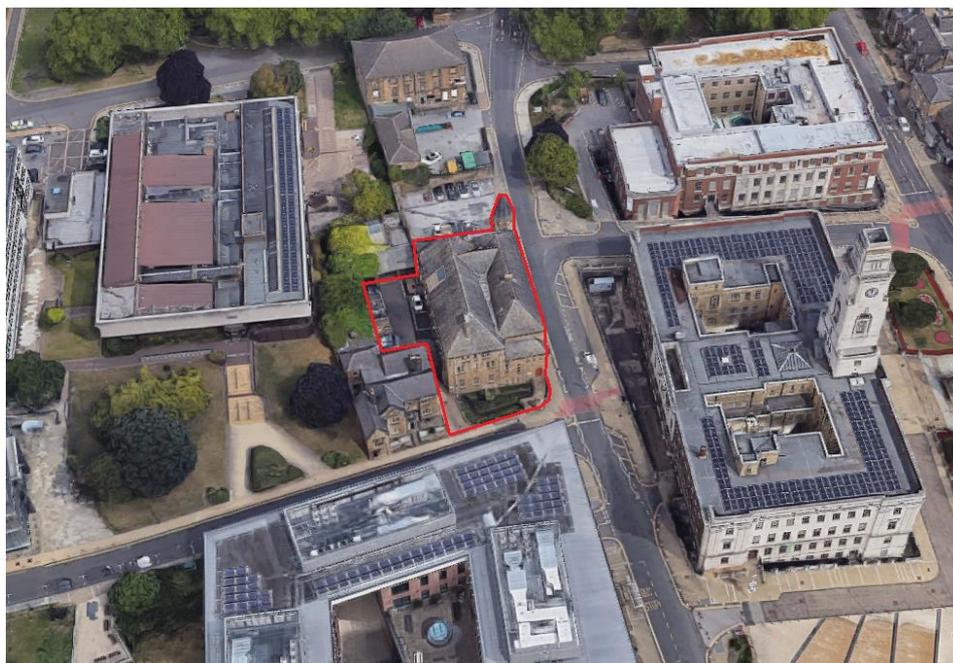
1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared by Urbana Town Planning, on behalf of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council in support of an application seeking planning permission for the proposals described above.
- 1.2 The development proposals have been subject to engagement with Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council planning departments ('the LPA') in the form of informal correspondence prior to this application, which has guided the proposals to their current form.
- 1.3 The proposals form one of the Council's capital projects that comprise the delivery of its successful Levelling Up Fund 2 bid, and represent a change of use, comprehensive restoration and refurbishment to the existing building, and erection of a small detached storage building. Together the changes allow for the occupation of the site by the Barnsley Youth Choir (BYC), forming the Northern Academy for Vocal Excellence: the NAVE.
- 1.4 The Barnsley Youth Choir is a choir of exceptional quality and of international standing and reputation. The NAVE is a project of the BYC intended to be the Choir's new home and to become a regional and national centre of excellence, supporting the very highest levels of singing and delivering outstanding tuition to young people. In doing so it plays an important community role. The NAVE project will serve to significantly enhance the facilities of the Choir and therefore enhance the extremely valuable role that it plays in the community and the lives of many young people in Barnsley, the wider South Yorkshire region and beyond.
- 1.5 This statement demonstrates justification for the proposals from a planning perspective through their accordancy with relevant local and national planning policy, with consideration given to the pertinent aspects of sustainable development in the context of the site and its surroundings.
- 1.6 The proposals do not relate to a nationally listed building nor is the site within a Conservation Area, however as set out subsequently, the site is locally listed and is within the setting of certain heritage assets that the proposals may affect. As such, the level of information and assessment set out within latter sections of this document with respect to heritage is considered to comprise a Heritage Impact Assessment of appropriate depth proportionate to this relationship.



2.0 Site and Location Overview

- 2.1 As defined in the accompanying drawing package, and as shown in the image below, the application site is focused on the future NAVE building situated at the junction of Westgate and St Mary's Place. The building is locally listed in the South Yorkshire Local Heritage List, named as the Old West Riding Courthouse and Police House, collectively with the buildings immediately to the west.



- 2.2 It is located very centrally within Barnsley, being directly to the rear of the Grade II listed Town Hall which sits across St Mary's Place to the east of the site. It is just a short walk from what is considered to be the centre of activity in Barnsley, being approximately 350m walking distance from May Day Green. Immediately to the south of the site is the imposing contemporary structure of Barnsley 6th Form College, and to the west are buildings of comparable age and style to the subject building, beyond which are the Law Courts and a number of other civic buildings and uses.
- 2.3 Immediately to the north is a small surface car park beyond which is a wholesale retail carpet shop, located within the Grade II listed Cass's Warehouse and the separately Grade II listed Former Carriage House to Cass's Warehouse. The listed buildings that have been noted must in this case be considered within the context of certain other heritage assets, in particular the Old Town Conservation area, the boundary of which runs along St Mary's Place. The site sits outside of the Conservation Area but this setting remains an important planning consideration.
- 2.4 Beyond this context, the area surrounding the site is typical of its very central location, hosting several civic buildings and uses, public squares/open spaces and a range of retail and commercial uses, food outlets and surface carparking.



- 2.5 In its existing state, due to its age and recent disuse (it was originally built in 1879 as the town's courthouse and was most recently the Council's 'Computer Centre') the building is in a less than adequate physical state, and so is in growing need of the restoration and refurbishment proposed to bring it up to an appropriate standard and crucially to allow for its successful occupation as the NAVE by the BYC.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 Accordingly, the application seeks planning permission for the change of use of the building to the proposed community choir use, internal changes to allow for this use, a number of external changes to facilitate this, and the erection of a small detached storage and plant building to the rear of the existing building.

- 3.2 Not all of these elements would require planning permission individually, but some do, and so the whole of the proposed programme of works is set out:

- Principal external works:
 - Erection of storage and plant building to the rear of the existing building.
 - Works to the space around the new storage and plant building to accommodate deliveries and facilitate level access.
 - Formation of new door to north elevation replacing existing window, and blocking up of 1no other existing window, to facilitate the above elements.
 - Formation of new entrance door to west elevation ground floor with works to create level access.
 - Installation of new access gate.
- Principal internal works:
 - Creation of large 'main space' to a world-class choral standard with sprung floor.
 - Creation of rehearsal spaces of varying capacities.
 - Creation of multipurpose reception area with ability to be flexible depending on need.
 - Creation of variety of other ancillary spaces including a range of storerooms, breakout spaces, kitchens, WCs, etc.



4.0 Relevant Planning History

4.1 There are no recent or relevant planning applications on the site considered to be of interest or relevance to the proposals.

5.0 Planning Assessment

5.1 In determining the application, the most relevant planning policy documents include the following:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)(revised September 2023).
- Barnsley Local Plan (2019).
- Relevant associated Supplementary Planning Documents (e.g. Heritage Impact Assessment SPD).

Sustainable Development

5.2 The NPPF states that at the heart of the document is a presumption in favour of sustainable development that represents a fundamental consideration in the process of both plan-making and decision-taking. Sustainable development is defined by 3 core dimensions: economic, social and environmental. It is established that: *“For decision taking this means: approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay.”* (Paragraph 11c).

5.3 This is reflected locally in Local Plan policy SD1, which is also concerned with the Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development.

5.4 In the case of this planning application, the proposals represent redevelopment that will, principally, make a significant contribution towards achieving greater social sustainability in the Barnsley, in addition to meaningful economic and environmental sustainability contributions. This will be contributed primarily through the enhancement of the existing community choir function played by the BYC and the growth of this in the form of the NAVE, represented by the proposals, which will manifest itself as previously alluded to in improvements to the quality of the existing provision, as well as the (perhaps relatively limited, but still tangible) impact of potentially increased activity in the area surrounding the site resulting from the proposals bringing the building back into active use.



- 5.5 There is also less tangible but equally valuable economic benefit arising from the financial investment represented by the proposals which will support local jobs during the course of construction, and which is indeed already supporting small businesses in the wider South Yorkshire area. Further in this respect the significant improvements to the thermal and wider environmental performance of the building will also benefit the financial resilience and sustainability of the BYC. It is further considered that the significance of achieving all this will be amplified by the fact of the site's central location within Barnsley, which as a result of which the investment represented by the proposals will feed back more effectively into the businesses, services and amenities in the immediate surroundings, both during and after construction.
- 5.6 Environmentally, the sustainable location of the site in terms of its accessibility affords the proposals with significant sustainability credentials. Furthermore, the fact that the proposals represent a restoration and reuse of an existing historic building at a higher level of efficiency must be given significant positive weight. On a technical level, as a central element of the proposals and this project within the associated LUF funding, there is commitment to delivering the highest standard of enhancement that funding will support within the constraints presented by the historic nature of the building.
- 5.7 In addition to this, in spite of ongoing economic challenges, it remains the case that construction is at the forefront of economic recovery from the long-term market shock from the COVID-19 pandemic and development schemes in the town, including these proposals, will lead the way in this process. Furthermore, in periods of social uncertainty, confidence shown through the investment in and enhancement of existing community institutions and facilities such as that proposed by this scheme will be invaluable in supporting the social and civic life of Barnsley and the wider region.
- 5.8 As a result, it is asserted that the proposals represent a scheme that fulfils underlying sustainable development goals and requirements in terms of its economic, social and environmental sustainability. Moreover, it is evident that the proposals represent sustainable development and, in accordance with the compliance with other policies as indicated below, should be approved without delay.

Principle of Proposed Use

- 5.9 With respect to the principle of the proposed development, principally comprising a change of use as well as certain physical adjustments and additions as outlined, the planning policy matter of most immediate relevance is the land use designation. In this case, the site is situated within the Westgate/Churchfields area of Barnsley's town centre zone, though is some distance away



from both primary and secondary shopping areas. The Local Plan describes the area, specifically the Westgate area, as having been historically and remaining the civic heart of Barnsley, primarily due to the adjacency of the Town Hall. As previously described, in more recent years and decades various civic uses continue to be located in this area, within which the proposed use of the building is considered to fit seamlessly. Accordingly, a range of uses are identified as being allowed in this area with a focus on civic uses, office, education, leisure, entertainment and other supporting ancillary uses at an appropriate nature and density including retail and residential.

- 5.10 Additionally, along with the Courthouse Campus District, Westgate is described as being the 'knowledge hub' of the town and so also encourages cultural and creative uses. In this case as indicated above it is very strongly considered that the proposed new use for the building being community-led, cultural, offering vocal education and entertainment in the wider community, entirely fulfils these policy expectations and so is considered wholly acceptable in policy terms.
- 5.11 In terms of more general local planning policy relating to the existing uses, the Local Plan makes clear in Policy I2, *Educational and Community Facilities*, that the Council supports the provision of schools, educational facilities and other community facilities. It highlights that it is an ambition of the Council to invest in such facilities, an ambition which these proposals directly fulfil. The role that these facilities and institutions play in the economic, cultural and social life of Barnsley is acknowledged, and that such development will be supported.

Design and Heritage Impacts

- 5.12 Beyond the above and with respect to the principle of the (minor) physical changes proposed to the external fabric of the existing building and the addition of the new detached store/plant building, it is also necessary to establish the relevant policy context and justification for this approach being taken.
- 5.13 With respect to the heritage-related policy context, it is important to understand this specifically due to the aforementioned fact that the site is located close to a number of designated and non-designated heritage assets. Indeed, while the existing building is not a designated heritage asset itself, its original use and history that have been described does mean that it holds a certain civic and social historical weight within Barnsley that must be treated with the requisite sensitivity.
- 5.14 The proposals will accordingly slightly alter the wider setting and therefore the heritage impacts of the proposals must be assessed accordingly. Sections 12 and 16 of the NPPF set out criteria concerning the achievement of well-designed places while enhancing the historic environment. Specifically, developments should aim to be visually attractive in terms of their architecture and



layout as well as being sympathetic to the local character and history of their surroundings. Any proposals should optimise the potential of the site in question, creating welcoming and distinctive places in which to live and work (and sing).

- 5.15 This is reflected in local policy in the form of various specific policies, which are set out most fundamentally in Local Plan Policy D1 *High Quality Design and Place Making*. This sets out the Council's approach towards ensuring that development respects, takes advantage of and reinforces the distinctive, local character and features of Barnsley, including development decisions relating to *'Heritage and townscape character including the scale, layout, building styles and materials of the built form in the locality.'*
- 5.16 More specifically, Local Plan Policy HE1 *The Historic Environment* establishes more detailed principles in accordance with the Framework when it comes to ensuring the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. The following key guiding principles of particular relevance in this case are set out in HE1, the main goal of which will be achieved by:
- Supporting proposals which conserve and enhance the significance and setting of the borough's heritage assets.
 - Ensuring that proposals affecting a designated heritage asset conserve those elements which contribute to its significance.
 - Supporting proposals which conserve and enhance the character or appearance of a conservation area.
 - Supporting proposals which conserve Barnsley's non-designated heritage assets.
 - Supporting proposals which will help to secure a sustainable future for Barnsley's heritage assets.
- 5.17 All of these principles acknowledge that any degree of less than substantial harm to heritage assets may only be acceptable where it is judged to be outweighed by the other benefits of a given proposal. This is in line with the NPPF, which allows for such circumstances to occur and describes at paragraph 202 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, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'



5.18 As a result of this it is necessary to consider and understand the potential for the proposed external changes to cause harm to relevant heritage assets. A schedule of the relevant changes and analysis of their impact is therefore set out below.

- *Erection of new detached storage/plant building to rear (north) elevation of existing building alongside associated works to space to accommodate transportation of staging and AV equipment and facilitate level access for this.*

The potential for this new building to cause harm to the setting of surrounding heritage assets comes primarily in the form of the consideration as to whether it will detract from the primacy and significance of said assets by virtue of its size or appearance. With respect to the subject building the accompanying design material is considered to show clearly that the new structure will be demonstratively small and subservient in nature. It seeks to adopt similar appropriate scaling and proportions while still being able to fulfil its functional necessities, these being the need for storage for the BYC and the accommodation of plant.

With respect to the two separate listed buildings immediately to the north, Cass's Warehouse and its Carriage House, once again it is considered that the scale and appearance, and the chosen materiality of the new store, is appropriate to this setting. It is also highlighted that the relationship between these two listed buildings is one of clear subservience in size and a connection through related activities. The proposals in fact reflect this historic nature, with the new structure playing a crucial role in the new community function of the original historic building, while remaining similarly subservient in scale and design. As such, this is considered to reflect favourably.

It is considered that the same conclusions apply to the Town Hall and the Old Town Conservation Area in terms of the physicality and appearance of the new structure. Indeed, the nature of the proposed use and function of the new building is such that it may be considered that a small ancillary community/civic structure such as is proposed would be a typical historic feature in a historic sense in this location, given its civic character.

More generally in terms of the works to facilitate deliveries and level access into the main building, it is asserted that these are minor in nature relative to the significance of the assets in question. Moreover, the impact of these works must be weighed against the existing context of this part of the site, which is untidy and visually cluttered, used for informal parking and contains old and poorly screened plant, and therefore overall is considered to be unsightly and currently detracts from the setting of surrounding assets. The rectification of this existing state is therefore considered favourably.



- *Formation of new door to north elevation replacing existing window and blocking up of 1no other existing window in order to facilitate the elements assessed above.*

It is accepted that the impact of this element of the proposals will be to alter some of the original historic fabric of the building that has a visual relationship with nearby heritage assets.

With respect to the consideration of any weight to attached to this impact, it is stressed that as a non-designated heritage asset this fabric is not statutorily protected, and so any assessment of degrees of harm must account for this fact. Accordingly, while it will alter a small part of this northern elevation, it is not considered that this will materially change the building's contribution to the setting or significance of surrounding designated heritage assets. This alteration is essential to the operation of the building in its proposed new use, which will much more fundamentally secure the restoration of the whole building and therefore on this balance it is considered that this benefit far overrides any degree of harm that may be perceived arising from this particular change.

- *Formation of new entrance double doors to west elevation ground floor with works to create level access.*

As above, it is accepted that the impact of this element of the proposals will be to alter some of the original historic fabric of the building. The same analysis applies in this case and in fact it must also be considered that the visual relationship between the west elevation of the building and the surrounding designated heritage assets is much weaker. Accordingly, the same conclusion is reached.

- 5.19 As a result of this it is considered that while it may be perceived that overall a very slight degree of 'less than substantial' harm may be caused by the proposals, this must be itself weighed against the benefits of the proposals which chiefly include the conservation of the existing building through its restoration, as well as the social and economic community and public benefits offered by the BYC and the NAVE project. In securing the restoration and sustainable long-term use of the building in question, the proposals also safeguard its positive future preservation and role in terms of its relationship with other nearby heritage assets. The community-focused use of the building is considered to also enable the interpretation, appreciation, and engagement with the historic civic character of the area.
- 5.20 It is asserted that these benefits significantly outweigh any very limited degree of harm that may be perceived. It is therefore the case that this aspect of the proposals should be viewed as acceptable in planning terms.



- 5.21 The Design and Access Statement accompanying this submission expresses and explains the design genesis and detail of the proposals in greater depth, and it is asserted that in this being made clear the myriad qualities of the proposals are evident, and as per the preceding discussion the proposals are not only acceptable in planning terms, but highly desirable.

Ecology

- 5.22 This matter is reflected broadly in Local Plan policy BI01 *Biodiversity and Geodiversity*, which sets out the Council's approach towards development that might impact upon important biodiversity and/or geological features of the Borough. This policy is principally concerned with the conservation and enhancement of important features and designated sites but does also refer to the more general need to protect, and to encourage the provision of, less significant biodiversity features and enhancements.
- 5.23 As such owing to the age and physical nature of the building in question a bat survey has been undertaken, comprising a roost suitability assessment as well as an interim emergence survey. One of the findings of this work is that a number of potential roosting features exist on the site. An emergence survey was therefore conducted which identified commuting and foraging activity but did not identify any bats emerging from the building.
- 5.24 As a result, it is considered highly unlikely that the building hosts any bats, however a further emergence survey is recommended. With respect to this, the author of the report, Brooks Ecological, has engaged in pre-application discussion with BMBC's ecologist who has indicatively confirmed that planning permission may be granted prior to a second emergence survey having taken place, on the basis of the accompanying report and with a suitably worded condition attached requiring the additional survey to be undertaken at the appropriate time.



6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The application seeks planning permission for the change of use, restoration and alterations to the existing building in addition to the erection of a small detached storage/plant structure. The primary intended outcome of this will be to host the BYC and the NAVE to dramatically enhance the capabilities, social contributions, public benefit and sustainability of the BYC in multiple dimensions.
- 6.2 The proposals will offer key social, environmental and economic benefits to the community that the BYC/NAVE serves. Through this statement it has been shown that the proposals are acceptable in planning policy terms, in large part due to the extent of benefit that they represent, but also due to the fact that the proposals have been conceived in a sensitive and respectful manner.
- 6.3 As a result of this, it is considered that it has been proven that the proposals comply with all relevant national and local policy and are therefore acceptable. It is therefore hoped that the LPA agrees and seeks to grant planning permission without delay.

