

**3/10/0175/FP – Internal and external refurbishment of Arts Performance building with extension to main entrance lobby area, new windows to riverside and new windows and roof atrium to hexagonal building, night time ambience lighting, riverside decking, railings and associated landscaping at Castle Hall, The Wash , Hertford, SG14 1PS for East Hertfordshire Council.**

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Date of Receipt: 01.02.2010

Type: Full - Minor

Parish: HERTFORD

Ward: HERTFORD - CASTLE

**RECOMMENDATION**

That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:-

1. Three Year Time Limit (1T12)
2. Samples of materials (2E123)
3. Details of the Atrium Roof, louvre screens, and a schedule of windows and doors to be replaced within each of the main elevations to the riverside, The Wash and the Castle Grounds approach shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The external doors and windows shall be replaced in accordance with the approved details prior to the first occupation of the development and thereafter maintained to the satisfaction of the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the development within the Conservation Area including the approach to and the setting of the Castle Grounds, a Scheduled Ancient Monument and in accordance with policies BH6, BH12 and ENV1 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007.

4. Landscape design proposals (4P12 - b, e, i, k, )
5. Landscape works implementation (4P13) *“The details for the area in front of the main entrance on The Wash shall be implemented in a phased programme as shall be approved in writing by the local planning authority”*
6. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of the replacement cycle racks for the existing parking spaces at the site shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority. The cycle parking shall be provided prior to the first occupation of the approved development.

Reason: The alternative provision shown on the submitted schemes will obstruct pedestrian movement to the River Lee footbridges.

7. The permission granted shall not extend to the works within the public highway shown on plan 136902 Rev. D.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to the scope of this permission in the interest of highway safety.

### Directives

1. Other Legislation (01OL)

### Summary of Reasons for Decision

The proposal has been considered with regard to the policies of the Development Plan (East of England Plan May 2008, Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, Minerals Local Plan, Waste Local Plan and East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007), and in particular SD1, HSG6, ENV1, ENV2, , ENV19, BH5, BH12, LRC4. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies is that permission should be granted.

\_\_\_\_\_ (017510FP.TH)

### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The application site is the Castle Hall building, the town's main civic building and performance arts space. It was built in the mid 1970's on a prominent town centre site that had suffered war time bomb damage. The site is shown on the attached OS extract and has an area of 0.27 hectares.
- 1.2 It lies within the centre of Hertford adjacent to the River Lee. The building has parking provision at the side and rear. On its north west side is a small landscaped garden by the River Lee and an open space setting to Castle Hall.
- 1.3 The building was designed with a steeply pitched zinc clad roof to echo the architecture of the town's maltings in a more modern style. It is visible from many public vantage points along the approach roads and elsewhere in the town centre.
- 1.4 The submitted application proposes the internal and external refurbishment and enhancement of the facility. The internal alterations to the building, which do not materially change the external appearance of

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the building and do not therefore require planning permission in themselves, include:-

- A new multi purpose café/ internet café/arts exhibition space
- A larger foyer/reception
- A new multi purpose dance studio and break out theatre space

Alterations to the external appearance of the building and its surroundings which require planning permission include:-

- A new entrance lobby area
- Extended lightweight glazed main entrance for the new lobby
- New windows to the river side (north west)
- New window openings and atrium within the hexagon corner building on The Wash
- New riverside decking
- Re - location of the “5 Bishops” artwork and lighting
- New night time ambient lighting

1.5 The Design and Access Statement indicates the use of De-Ionized and Non Reflective Glazing for the windows; solar panels on the roof and an air source heat exchanged on the River Room. Although not part of this application a future project could see measures to secure hydro energy from the River Lee.

1.6 The application indicates new signage for the building but a separate advertisement consent will be needed for this, subject to the requirements of advertisement regulations, and does not therefore form part of this application.

1.7 The design of the proposed alteration and the treatment of the external spaces has been subject of pre application discussion with your officers.

## **2.0 Site History**

2.1 The original permission for Castle Hall, granted in April 1973 (Ref: E/1461-73), was for a 2 phase scheme for a larger and smaller public halls. In the event the smaller hall (phase 2) to the north west side was not built and this now provides the green open space.

2.2 The current entrance lobby to the building was approved in 1998 (Ref: 3/98/1819/FP) and replaced a series of square porch entrances to the front. No other significant external alterations have been carried out to the building since then.

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- 2.3 The public toilets built at the same time as Castle Hall on the south side were replaced as part of the new Wetherspoons development (not shown on the OS plan) completed in 2008. This change enabled the opening up of the approach to the Hertford Castle Grounds with new hard and soft landscaping measures around the listed Castle Gates (recently damaged by a vehicle collision)
- 2.4 Widening and improvements of the connecting footbridge between The Wash and the St Andrews Street car park was carried out last year (3/07/1973/FP).

### **3.0 Consultation Responses**

- 3.1 Hertfordshire County Highways comment that no significant differences to traffic movements are anticipated. Works in the public highway require consent. This area was recently enhanced by paving in quality materials associated with the adjacent public house development (Wetherspoons). The indicative drawings show the placing of a bench and soft landscaping directly on the line of the existing footway which is not acceptable and should not form part of the plans. A condition is recommended in this respect.
- 3.2 The Environment Agency object to the application as the site is within Flood Zone 3 and there is a lack of an adequate Flood Risk Assessment with the application and secondly as the proposal involves building in close proximity to the River Lee. The agent has been referred to this and an update on the position will be reported to the committee.
- 3.3 The Assistant Conservation Officer comments that the building frames the approach from the commercial town centre to the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Castle Grounds. It is also a prominent element in vistas along The Wash and Maidenhead Street. The new minimally glazed entrance screen is more in keeping with the character of the 1970's building and the addition of a glazed atrium will add interest to the roofscape. The new openings will increase the transparency of the building. Improvements to lighting; to move the clutter of security cameras internally; to use high quality materials and to provide external landscaping are noted. Specifically she recommends that the remainder of the doors and windows are replaced to achieve a more uniform appearance. Overall she advises that the development will have a positive impact on the character of the Conservation Area and recommends that permission be granted.

3.4 The County Archaeologist has commented that the development stands over the (infilled) inner ditch that once surrounded Hertford Castle. While the site is archaeologically important given the nature of the proposals it is unlikely to have an impact on significant archaeological deposits.

3.5 The Council's Landscape Officer has as yet made no comments.

#### **4.0 Town Council Representations**

4.1 Hertford Town Council welcomes the application in particular the riverside aspect adjacent to The River Room. They are keen that water power is harnessed both for traditional reasons of a powered waterpowered mill and also for the vitality of a sustainable energy source for the refurbished hall.

#### **5.0 Other Representations**

5.1 The applications have been advertised by way of press notice, site notice and neighbour notification.

5.2 One email from a member of the public has pointed out the proposed replacement cycle racks will restrict pedestrian access to and from the bridge and car park.

#### **6.0 Policy**

6.1 The most relevant Local Plan policies to this application include the following:-

SD1	Making Development More Sustainable
ENV1	Design and Environmental Quality
ENV2	Landscaping
ENV19	Development in areas liable to flood
BH5	Alterations to unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas
BH12	Development affecting the setting of a listed building
LRC4	Arts Culture and Entertainment

6.2 National guidance in PPG15 for conservation areas is also of relevance to this application.

## **7.0 Considerations**

### **Principle of Development**

- 7.1 The site lies within the town centre of Hertford and the use of the building is both established and supportive of the arts and leisure functions of the town centre. The building is unlisted, but is an important 20<sup>th</sup> century addition to the town, so its upgrading is welcome in principle. The enhancement of the facility is fully in accordance with East Herts Local Plan policies for its town centres and is to be welcomed.
- 7.2 The main issues to be considered in the application are therefore:-
- Whether the proposal is well designed having regard to its context, and of such quality as to secure the enhancement of this part of the Hertford Conservation Area and the approach to the Castle Grounds
  - Whether the provisions for public access are acceptable and that these provisions are well overlooked and have regard to public perceptions of safety
  - Whether there is any objection on flooding grounds to the development
  - Whether the alterations make appropriate provision for the disabled, pedestrians and cyclists.

### **Design**

- 7.3 The Castle Hall building has seen few changes since it was first built. The proposal provides an opportunity to enliven the appearance of the building and increase its interaction with its surroundings but to do so in a way that is simple and respects the original, albeit modern, character of the building.
- 7.4 The atrium roof will, in officer's view, provide a stronger focus and visual interest at the corner of the building as viewed along The Wash and would reflect the intention of the original design. There was always intended to be a counterbalancing smaller hall to the side of the main hall in the 1970's design of the building. The current hexagon building appears as a slightly truncated feature and the proposal will address this by the added height of the atrium and the insertion of new windows.
- 7.5 The later addition of the bow like entrance doors does not reflect the angular geometry of the building and so the proposed triangular form of the new entrance and the use of lightweight quality glazing will be more in keeping with this and provide a significant enhancement. The tip of the

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glazed screen will be marked by a purple interlayer, a reference to the First Synod and Church of England.

- 7.6 The new large window panes of de-ionised glass will be held within lightweight timber frames. The glass will appear clear and avoid the natural green impurities that otherwise come with manufacture. The design of the scheme as proposed will result in an enhanced contemporary building.
- 7.7 On the river side and in the hexagonal building solar shading is required and black louvre screens are proposed above the windows. It is recommended that the design, materials and location of these elements be reconsidered in relation to the window openings and this matter can be addressed via the recommended planning condition.

#### **External Setting and Landscaping**

- 7.8 The application indicates ideas for the treatment of space around the hall. In general, any changes that provide good quality landscaping and remove unnecessary street clutter will be welcome. Some of the details of this require amendment and those indicated on the highway would, in any event, require the prior approval of the Highway Authority. A possible change to remove the exit road which passes in front of the main entrance Castle Hall would require an agreement with Wetherspoons so this would need to be a matter for later resolution and funding. This can be provided for by the recommended condition without compromising the timetable for the provision of the hall's refurbishment.
- 7.9 The terrace adjacent to the river will be improved by the proposed "light seats", timber deck, soft landscaping, low level ambient lighting, new matching railings and redefining of the areas for use in association with the River Room.
- 7.10 The areas within the approach to the Castle Grounds can be enhanced by resurfacing of the existing tarmac surface by a resin bonded gravel treatment and incorporating new soft landscaping. There will be a continuing need for some vehicle use and parking in this area but the improved management of cars and vehicles is hoped to improve the appearance of the area and the approach to Hertford Castle Grounds.
- 7.11 Provision of the new windows on all sides increases the natural surveillance of the surroundings and an improved sense of public safety. The relocation of the First Synod artwork is required by the window

openings but placing this in a high level location on the south side of the building would provide a focal point for the view along Maidenhead Street and bring it closer to the Castle entrance.

### **Flooding**

- 7.12 At the time of writing this report, the Environment Agency has objected to the plans but it is hoped that this will be withdrawn before the committee meeting, given the lack of any material changes to the levels along the river terrace area. Officers will update Members on this issue at the Committee meeting.

### **Pedestrian Access/Cyclist Parking**

- 7.13 The new front extension will come close to the metal barrier railing alongside the existing exit road. This creates a difficult pinch point and a partial obstruction as well as appearing visually awkward. The scheme generally provides for good pedestrian access but in the longer term the redesign of the wider area immediately in front of the main front entrance could address this weakness and offer the potential for an attractive public area. As mentioned this would be subject to the removal of the exit road in agreement with Wetherspoons, and would be the subject of further detailed plans.
- 7.14 A planning condition is proposed to enable the re-siting of the replacement cycle parking. As currently proposed on the plans, these would obstruct pedestrian movement from the connecting path to St Andrews Street car park, the nearest available public car park for users of the hall. Officers are, however, satisfied that an appropriate siting can be agreed through this condition.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

- 8.1 Overall, it is considered that the proposed development will secure a positive enhancement of the building both in its function and in its contribution to the wider appearance and character of the Hertford Conservation Area. No changes are proposed to the river bank or river side details that in my view would warrant refusal although it is hoped to receive clarification of this from the Environment Agency.
- 8.2 The application is therefore recommended for approval subject to the planning conditions as set out above.