

ITEM	APPLICATION NO.	2013/1011
	WARD:	Penyrheol Area 2

**Location:** Seion Chapel, Pentre Road, Grovesend, Swansea SA4 8DD

**Proposal:** Change of use of chapel (Class D1) to residential dwelling (Class C3) with two storey side and two storey rear extensions

**Applicant:** Ms Madeline Richards

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **POLICIES**

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Policy Description</b>
Policy EV1	New development shall accord with a defined set of criteria of good design. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008).
Policy EV2	The siting of new development shall give preference to the use of previously developed land and have regard to the physical character and topography of the site and its surroundings. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008).
Policy EV20	In the countryside new dwellings will only be permitted where justification is proved in terms of agriculture, forestry or the rural economy; there is no alternative existing dwelling in nearby settlements; and the proposed dwelling is located close to existing farm buildings etc. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008)
Policy EV22	The countryside throughout the County will be conserved and enhanced for the sake of its natural heritage, natural resources, historic and cultural environment and agricultural and recreational value through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) The control of development, and</li> <li>ii) Practical management and improvement measures.</li> </ul> (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008)
Policy EC12	The conversion of existing buildings in the countryside to new uses that contribute to the local economy and the extensions of such buildings will be permitted subject to a defined set of criteria including the building's structural integrity, its ability to be converted without prejudicing the character of the building or its locality, the building's compatibility with its surroundings, issues of access and highway safety, and the building's past uses etc. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008)

### **SITE HISTORY**

<b>App No.</b>	<b>Proposal</b>
97/1633	CHANGE OF USE FROM CHAPEL (CLASS D1) TO CHAPEL OF REST

## **RESPONSE TO CONSULTATIONS**

The application was advertised on site and in the local. No third party response was forthcoming.

### **Highway and Transportation:**

The site has adequate parking and turning facilities which will be retained for the converted use. The forecourt is currently open plan and whilst no details of any new front boundary is indicated, I would wish to specify that any new boundary along the Pentre Road frontage should be no more than 1m high to aid visibility when exiting the site.

I recommend no highway objection subject to any front boundary being no more than 1m high.

### **Grovesend and Waungron Community Council:**

Subject to highway impact assessment, no objection

**Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust:** The chapel was constructed in 1885, remodelled or rebuilt in 1894; after its closure it was used as a chapel of rest. This building is of vernacular style and the building has had elements replaced in the modern style. Therefore we have no objection to the positive determination of this application.

### **Corporate Property**

Comment; It is difficult to value a property/site like this and the value will be the price someone is prepared to buy it for and there may be a special purchaser out there. In this case it appears that the property has been on the market since June 2012 at an asking price of £85,000. The agents, in their 'Viewing Summary' state that at this price out of 211 people who requested full details only 4 parties have viewed the property. All have withdrawn with the comment that the viability assessment was not positive at the asking price of £85,000. Usually with that amount of interest not generating any viewings or offers, then the asking price would/should have been reduced.

## **APPRAISAL**

The application is reported to Committee and a site visit has been requested by Councillor David Cole as it involves development not in accordance with the Development Plan and to allow members to assess the impact of the proposed development upon the character of the area.

Full planning permission is sought for the change of use of the redundant chapel building sited off Pentre Road, Waungron, into a single dwelling with associated residential curtilage and parking facilities.

The application site is part of a chapel building which has occupied for a number of uses since its use as a chapel ceased. The principle use in the intervening period was as an undertakers' chapel of rest (Ref: 97/1633 approved on 23/02/1998). Access to the site is

derived directly off Pentre Road. The site is located in an area of open countryside and also within a designated green wedge.

The main issue for consideration in this instance is whether the proposed change of use of this redundant rural building to residential use accords with adopted development plan policy. It is not considered that the provisions of the Human Rights Act raise any other overriding considerations. As such the proposal must be assessed against policies EV1, EV22, EV23, EC12 and EC13 of the Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008.

There is limited planning history relating to this site. The thrust of National and local policies express a strong preference for business use in the conversion of rural buildings and it is the view of the Local Planning Authority that the proposal has not adequately explored this possibility before attempting to secure consent for a residential use.

Policy EC12 of the UDP supports the principle of the conversion of existing buildings in the countryside to new uses that contribute to the local economy. The residential use of such buildings would not be supported unless evidence is provided that the premises has been actively been marketed without success for appropriate business use, or a proposed residential use is ancillary to a business re-use of the premises, or the resulting residential use will contribute to an identified local need for housing or for affordable housing in the location concerned.

With regard satisfying the criteria (i-v) of Policy EC12 it is considered that the building is largely intact and is capable of conversion without prejudicing the original character of the building or significantly compromising the character of the wider area. It should be noted that the proposals to alter and extend the building have been previously agreed at officer level and are regarded as acceptable in this instance.

The building is also considered structurally suitable of conversion in its current form without a major reconstruction.

The Head of Highways and Transportation has raised no objection to the proposed scheme subject to any proposed boundary treatment not exceeding 1.0 metres in height; at present the scheme as supplied does not include provision of a boundary treatment. It is considered in terms of vehicle movements that a residential use may introduce an increase at specific times of the morning and evening however this would have to be considered against the possible levels of vehicle movements throughout the day should a more intensive commercial use resume at this location. On balance in terms of highway and pedestrian safety the conversion to a residential use is considered acceptable.

The building previously operated as a chapel and chapel of rest and no agricultural use or rights have accrued in respect of the building and associated site and therefore criteria (iv) does not apply.

Turning to Criteria (a) of Policy EC12, the building has now been vacant for approximately 3 years. The property was purchased in 2011 with a view to conversion for residential use for approximately £70,000 - £75,000; however, it appears that the purchasers of the chapel and surrounding land were unaware of the policy restrictions that were in place in respect of the conversion of the conversion of rural buildings for residential use.

This current application is supported with evidence of marketing together with statements from local estate agents to the effect that conversion to a business unit is not an economic option owing to its location and distance from tourist attractions. The argument against

the unit providing suitable tourist accommodation has been assessed by Tourism Officers for the Local Authority who highlighted the difficulty of securing viable year round letting outside of honeypot areas forming Swansea Bay. However it is noted that the Swansea Tourism Strategy is focused on the extension of the holiday period into the shoulder months in areas north of the M4 and there is a possibility that in the future walking holidays in this area may serve to provide a more viable income stream.

In late 2013 the applicant instructed their agents to advertise the property on the basis of Price on Application, however, further investigation with the Estate Agents confirmed that offers of less than £70,000 were unlikely to be entertained as the current owners were minded to reduce any potential loss. It is the view of the Local Planning Authority that this intervening period should have been utilised to advertise the property at offers in the region of £50,000 which is the approximate valuation placed on the unit by the Local Authority Valuer for Estates. The Estate Agent for the applicant did not accept the valuation provided by the Local Authority as being realistic.

In respect of Criteria (b) of Policy EC12 no mixed use scheme has been proposed and the applicant has clearly expressed that this is not a viable alternative and as such options that may be applicable under Criteria (b) have not formed any part of this determination.

Turning to Criteria (c) no evidence has been provided to the Local Planning Authority to suggest that there is an identified local need for affordable housing at this location.

The application property is sited approximately 45 metres to the north of No. 204 Pentre Road which is the nearest residential property and on this basis the Local Planning Authority is also mindful of the potential impact of any business use upon the residential amenities of these occupiers, which would be a material consideration, and on this basis, it is considered that this further limits the re-use options for the building.

It is acknowledged that the existing chapel unit benefits from a defensible boundary which would serve to delineate the building and its curtilage from the surrounding countryside and the nature of the building is such that it may be capable of conversion into a residential dwelling without prejudicing the intrinsic character.

The plot is bounded to all sides by agricultural fields with the exception of its eastern boundary which fronts directly onto Pentre Road the boundary treatment to the north south and west inhibit long distance views and as such serve to minimise the visual intrusion into the surrounding countryside. It is proposed that the area of hard standing currently in situ will be partially given over for domestic curtilage and parking once the proposed extension and associated renovations are completed.

The application building has been assessed in respect of its potential for providing harbourage to protected species; a bat survey was requested in support of the application. The submitted report dated May 2014 indicated no significant bat activity recorded at the site, notwithstanding this, a standard advisory note is recommended as a precautionary measure should the application receive the grant of planning permission.

The proposed residential unit would have a very limited curtilage and offer only 2 dedicated parking spaces whereas 3 are recommended in adopted guidelines. Additional room for parking is achievable in the remaining forecourt and on this basis the parking provision is considered acceptable on balance and therefore, the Head of Transportation and Engineering recommends that no highway objections are raised.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion therefore and having regard to all of the above material planning considerations including the provisions of the Human Rights Act, it is considered that the applicant has failed to provide adequate evidence to meet the test as set out in criteria (a) of Policy EC12 and as such as failed to demonstrate that the building in question has been actively marketed for an appropriate business use. It is considered that there is insufficient justification for the conversion of this building into a new residential unit in the open countryside. Recommendation: Refuse

## **RECOMMENDATION :**

### **REFUSE, for the following Reason:**

- 1 The applicant has failed to provide adequate evidence to meet the test as set out in criteria (a) of Policy EC12 and as such as failed to demonstrate that the building in question has been actively marketed at an appropriate market value for an appropriate business use. It is considered that there is insufficient justification for the conversion of this building into a new residential unit in the open countryside and as such the proposal fails to comply with the provisions of Criteria (a) of Policy EC12 of the City and County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008 and Supplementary Planning Guidance entitled "The Conversion of Rural Buildings 2011"

## **INFORMATIVES**

- 1 The development plan covering the City and County of Swansea is the City and County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan. The following policies were relevant to the consideration of the application: EV1, EV2, EV20, EV22 and EC12.

## **PLANS**

Site plan, 1343\_4-1 existing floor plan and elevations, 1343\_1-1rev B proposed floor plans and elevations, 1343\_4-2 Rev C block plan received 4th July 2013.