

Dan Charles  
Principal Planning Officer  
Warwick District Council,  
Riverside House,  
Milverton Hill,  
Royal Leamington Spa,  
CV32 5HZ

Dear Mr Charles,

### **W/23/0415 – Woodside Conference Centre – Consideration of Retention of the former Conference Centre**

This letter has been prepared by Vistry West Midlands in order to demonstrate the process that has been undertaken in considering the retention of the former conference centre.

#### **Background**

The previous business operated making a loss and subsequently went into receivership. The Site was marketed in 2020 for the purpose of selling it on as an operational Hotel. The marketing material was circulated to a number of Regional and National Hotel Operators. Unfortunately, there were no operators that were willing to take asset on.

During the period of closure, and prior to Vistry purchasing the site, the hotel was stripped and vandalised, and is presently in a poor state of repair. As a result, the hotel is now at a point where it would be uneconomical to make the required refurbishments to reopen as a hotel.

Following the purchase, in March 2023, Vistry West Midlands Region submitted a scheme for the redevelopment of the Woodside conference centre. This scheme was for 46 private and 9 affordable homes; 55 new homes in total. The scheme proposed to take a more measured approach in terms of design, using the same design principals as our existing adjoining development off Crewe Lane, to the north, east and south of the site. The proposals sought to demolish the existing building and proposed to build a new apartment block in its place, with the original designs for these as per the elevational drawings below.

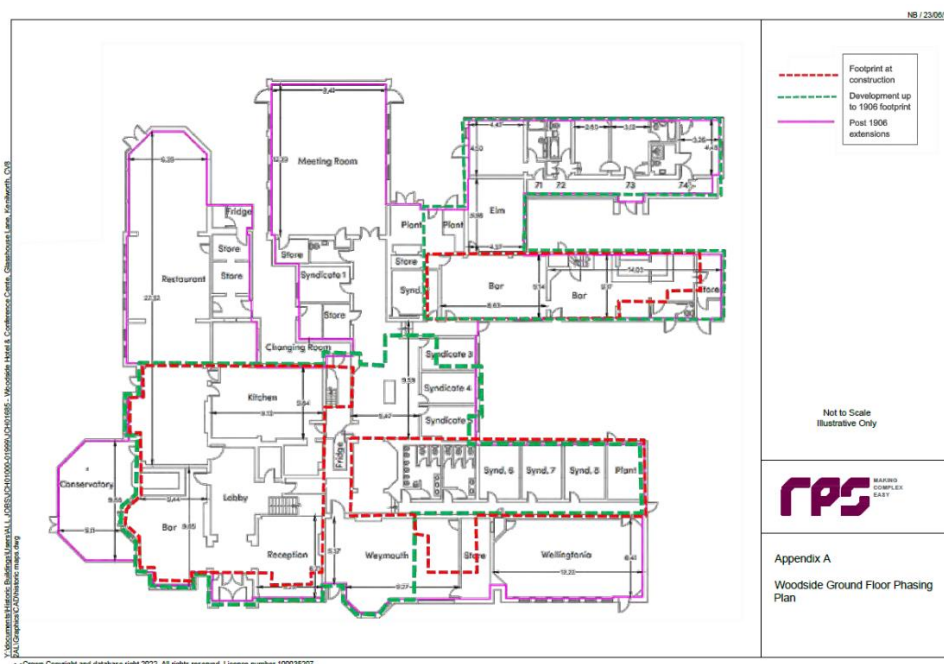


Concurrently to the above application, we also submitted a Prior Approval Notification application, Ref W/23/0495, to demolish the existing building. The demolition application was approved on 27/04/2023.

### Consideration of Historic Fabric

The planning application submitted includes a Heritage Statement prepared by RPS, specialist heritage consultants.

RPS researched, surveyed, and reported on the existing building. They concluded Woodside has undergone much change since its construction, most notably with a re-fronting in the early twentieth century but also, and detrimentally, extensive exterior additions and internal reconfiguring which have not only altered the legibility of the building but have removed a great deal of architectural interest in the process. This building was a relatively small house with simple architectural details and the loss of the fabric has eroded much of the significance that the building once held. The extent of the original historic fabric is shown by the red line in the below image.



This Assessment of Significance concludes that Woodside is a heritage asset of low local significance, at most, predominantly because of the considerable post-war alterations to facilitate its operation as a hotel. The proposed development therefore has the capacity to impact upon this low level of significance.

The demolition of the building will give rise to a total loss of the building and a high level of harm to a heritage asset of low local significance only. This harm will engage paragraph 203 of the NPPF which requires the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement (our emphasis) will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

### **Consideration of Conversion**

During the determination of the application, we have received subsequent representations from the planning case officer, local stake holders and Chris Elliot, Chief Executive of Warwick District Council, in relation to reviewing the possibility for retention of the original historic core and conversion; as prescribed in the heritage assessment as consisting of the main entrance and turret section of the building.

Despite having secured consent for demolition of the building through the granted permission, we have not initiated any works and we want to ensure we have fully reviewed all avenues for the retention of the part of the building deemed as most worthy of retention. This is considered and explained below.

#### Design

We commissioned our design consultants to produce several alternative layouts to retain the historic core of the existing Woodside conference centre within the heart of the scheme. They prepared feasibility plans to convert the existing Woodside conference centre retained area into 9 apartments.

Having reviewed the revised layout, it confirmed that retention of the existing building would notably reduce the overall net developable area across the site having a significant effect on the viability and deliverability of the scheme. This occurred primarily because the existing building footprint and existing rooms are not conducive to modern ways of living.

The critical issue in converting existing properties is that the existing built fabric is a limiting factor in that the way we occupy, and use spaces is vastly different now from how it was in the late 1800s. Therefore, the spaces within the existing building that could be converted resulted in very contrived layouts. In addition to this, the available internal space would be reduced by virtue of the need to increase the thermal insulation of the exterior walls, which could only be done internally.

Part retention and conversion to apartments would: -

- create contrived spaces and room sizes,
- not be possible to achieve the Nationally Described Space Standards without significantly reducing the number of units achievable, and then resulting in over-sized and contrived units,
- not allow spaces to flow and be used in line with modern living to achieve a high-quality living environment.

#### Practicalities and Costs of retention

Whilst procuring the revised site designs, we also reviewed feasibility of retaining the historic core of the existing building whilst demolishing the unsympathetic latter additions. We spent a significant amount of time and cost researching with our structural engineers and demolition experts how we could achieve this.

The cost to retain part of the existing structure whilst demolishing the rest is significantly more expensive than a complete demolition, the quote from our demo contractor was circa £50k more.

Retaining a small area of the existing building requires: -

- Pre demolition surveys to a much great level of detail
- Bespoke temporary works designs, internal propping, and bracing
- Daily monitoring of the temporary works by an independent specialist
- The time taken to demo is significantly greater is more complex and therefore costs more.
- Security and health and safety whilst working on and around a part retained / demolished building is a far great issue.

Cost and fees associated with retaining a small area of the existing building are anticipated to be as follows: -

- Full internal survey - £6k
- Structural survey - £6k
- Current condition report - £4k
- Temp structural design demo and supervision - £15k
- Propping - £10k
- Service re-direction - £15k
- Demo additional £50k
- Design fees architectural £25k
- Design fees structural £20k
- Temp works designer and supervision - £35k
- Temp works internal stabilisation supply, hire, installation and removal - £60k
- Additional build cost based on 1000sqft units x 9. Standard build cost of £120 per sqft refurbishment cost of £160 per sqft £360k additional build cost.

Total additional cost to retain and refurbish £606k.

Our Regional Sales Director, using local comparable costs, estimated the sales values and costs of the 'retained' scheme and the scheme to demolish. The revenues achievable for the refurbished scheme were significantly less than could be achieved on new build apartments, as a result of the higher conversion costs noted above, and lesser sales values for the converted apartments, by virtue of their less-than-optimal layouts.

#### Building regulations and Environmental Sustainability in a refurbished property

Any new building or refurbishment would need to comply with current building regulations. As of June, the applicable regulations have become far more complex. Much of the 'technology' used to achieve building regulations is built into the fabric of new buildings. A Fabric First approach is always preferable to alternative strategies, this seeks to increase the thermal efficiency of a building through thermally efficient building materials and increased wall cavities. By creating efficient dwellings, it reduces energy demand, as opposed to having to rely on creation of more renewable energy sources. The difficulty faced with this conversion would be the ability to achieve thermal efficiency, as a result of the existing construction of the building.

The challenges associated with refurbished properties are: -

- Achieving the required building regulations would be particularly challenging, and as a result would be significantly more expensive than a new build solution.
- Lifetime emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> in this conversion development are estimated to be higher than they would be for the new build, due to the efficiencies of a new build scheme, see below.
- Building new dwellings enables the design to meet the needs of modern living in a way that the conversion project was much less able to do – consequently the provision of good daylighting, thermal comfort and living space lent itself to better health and wellbeing for occupants.
- Operational costs of heating a less efficient conversion scheme, and future maintenance and repair costs for a conversion building, are likely to be higher than for a new build, and would be burdensome upon the future occupiers.

Key benefits:

- Improvements in insulation specification, efficient building services, a reduction in thermal bridging and unwanted air leakage paths and further passive design measures will enable the relevant standards to be met, whilst building in low energy design and future climate resilience to the design and construction of the dwellings
- estimated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of a new build apartment block are 9.12 TonnesCO<sub>2</sub>/yr, as opposed to 23.88 TonnesCO<sub>2</sub>/yr for an existing building conversion, or a 61.81% reduction.
- Calculations undertaken on the proposed dwellings under the approved Standard Assessment Procedure demonstrate that, through following the energy efficiency approach described, with the addition of low-carbon renewable technology, the calculated as-designed emissions are reduced by 20.41% over Part L 2021 requirements.
- The calculated water consumption equates to a maximum water consumption of 109 litres/occupier/day, and therefore offers a significant improvement on the maximum of 125 litres/occupier/day allowable by Building Regulations 2021.
- With the need to adapt to a shift in personal transportation to electric vehicles, the development will ensure the provision of EV charging points, in accordance with Approved Document S of Building Regulations.

### Conclusion on Conversion

In light of the above, we had meetings to explain our findings regarding the schemes and discussed the financial implications and challenges of trying to retain the historic core of the existing building. The conclusion was that it was not financially possible to retain, re-develop and refurbish it. In addition, retention is less environmentally sustainable over the life cycle of the building.

### **Proposed Re-development Evolution**

A meeting was held with the Case Officer during June 23 and we received feedback, in line with comments made in consultation responses from third-parties, that the design of the apartments was an unfortunate of pastiche and would need a total rethink to move away from trying to replicate the historic design features and proportions and move more towards creating an exemplary building with its own character.

In order that we produce a more design led scheme we redesigned the entire site with a more contemporary architectural edge. This would give this development area a unique and individual style and character in a naturalistic setting that would play its part in highlighting modern sustainable building techniques.

To prepare a suitable design solution for the apartment building, we instructed a second architect to assist, McBains, to deliver this. A copy of the revised design can be seen in the image below.



The design principle is a relatively simple built form, with a contemporary ‘arts and crafts’ feel (steep roofs / chimney features to the roofscape / relatively simple employment of materials and limited palette).

By cropping the corner, you create a dynamic plan form which appears visually richer (than the plan at first appears) when considered in 3D, giving a lively and undulating roofline as you pass round. Generous balconies are provided on these corners, which complement the living space well, and units benefit from glazing on up to three aspects each. A cosy study nook is provided on the outer face rather than internally as on the earlier schemes.

By way of compensating for the loss of the existing building we have in the new scheme over delivered in several areas. The scheme we have ended up with significantly over delivers on our building regulation obligations; we have added features such as additional PV panels to every home, we have widened cavities in walls, added more thermally efficient glazing, added air source heat pumps to several homes, waste water heat recovery. So, as well as a very contemporary forward-looking design the building’s green credentials also over deliver.

**Concluding Remarks**

As is demonstrated above, despite having secured consent for demolition of the building, at the request of the Council, consultees and stakeholders, we have fully explored the feasibility of converting the historic fabric of the existing building on the site. However, these explorations have demonstrated:

- the addition costs, and lower values, of a conversion scheme are not feasible;
- a conversion scheme would not be as environmentally sustainable as a new build proposal in the long-term
- operational and maintenance costs of a conversion scheme would be more burdensome on future occupiers
- we have worked with the Council to deliver a very high-quality design solution for the apartment building, and character of the wider site

In light of the above, we hope that you are able to support the proposals and recognise the justification for the loss of the existing building.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Oliver', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel Oliver