

3201600697

**PLANNING JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT**

**SITE AT 7 ACCRINGTON ROAD, WHALLEY BB7 9TD**

**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

There is a long planning history to the subject site, most recently culminating in the refusal of applications 3/2011/0014/P (CAC) & 3/2011/0015/P

Our client, Tony Stansfield, has been attempting to redevelop, and thus improve the site and put it to beneficial use, since the nursery closure in the mid 2000s.

It should be made clear, the existing site and buildings can:

- no longer support a viable business
- are effectively beyond economic repair and continue to deteriorate
- are not suited to a village centre conservation area setting
- without site redevelopment, the property will continue to detract from the character and conservation area status.

The conservation area consent for demolition and the commercial redevelopment proposal in the two applications were rejected for the following reasons:

- harmful to the character, appearance and significance of W.C.A. incongruous plan form, scale, roof configuration and over extensive and poorly proportioned shop frontage.
- Contrary to Policies GI (now DMG1) ENV16 (now EN5/DME4) and ENV18 (now ENV5/DME4) of the old Ribble Valley Districtwide Local Plan
- 3/2011/0015/P had the same reasons as above, but did not include ENV18

It should also be stated that revised plans had been submitted to the Council (receipt stamped) and the Planning Committee meeting, following a meeting with three members. The committee's decision was, however, based on the officer's recommendation report related to the original (pre-revision) plans with the written application. Also following advice received, a conservation architect had been employed by the applicant to revise earlier designs and recreate the amended shop front effect.

The revised plans had also been drawn up in response to comments from the Ancient Monuments Society, although it is not apparent why significant weight should be applied to their comments in the context of a new build commercial building. The Society had also commented on the original submission plan, pre-revision. The relevant revised plan received by the Council at the time was STA/01 Dwg 02F dated 23/02/2011 (in time for the 2011 Application Committee). Clarity was sought, following the confusion over the plans submitted and the officer's recommendation to refuse based on the older scheme plan.

A further pre-application was therefore made with a specific aim of obtaining some constructive feedback on the proposed scheme as further revised (Plan no. STA/01a Dwg 03 dated February 2014).

A reply was received from Rachel Horton at RVBC on 26 January 2015, copy attached. The comments are stated to be based on the latest plan drawing STA/01/a Dwg 03. The general issues remain:

- There is reference to the old delegated report with the 2011 application (based on the older plan drawing and the adoption of the Core Strategy).
- Part 12 of the NPPF stresses the desirability of new development making a positive contribution. The main consideration is, therefore, potential impact on character, appearance and significance of the Whalley Conservation area.
- After the 2008 refusal, CARE Architects comments to encourage a conservation architect to get involved, negative comment was made about the hipped roof design being similar to more mediocre Whalley buildings.
- In 2010, concerns were made regarding the plan form 'T' shape, hipped roofing, over large and poorly proportioned shop fronts. Also suggested consideration given to detailed design execution and verticality
- Ancient Monuments Society – new building would neither preserve nor enhance the character of the Conservation area. Specific comments on design were made.
- Reference in the Delegated Report is made to the retention of hipped roofs and the size/proportion of the shop fronts. Increase in pitch and height to ridge.
- Discrepancy in what the precise design of the most recent scheme is. This is clarified in STA/01a Dwg 03 and further comments made:

- a) Size and proportion remain with the same slight change to footprint and roof ridge from 9.7m to 10.5m;
- b) Proposal does little to address concerns of hipped roof and uniform detailing, size and proportioning. The proposal cannot therefore be supported and is likely to be refused;
- c) No objection to car parking; request to surface access to sub-station. Issues with location and access to bin storage area and location cycle parking/storage.

## THE SITE

The application site is situated very close to the centre of Whalley and, therefore, well within the defined settlement boundary; it fronts onto the north side of Accrington Road approximately 50m from the mini roundabout.

The site is rectangular in plan, with a road frontage of some 15m and a depth of 17m.

The site is currently occupied by a single storey building (now vacant) set back slightly from the back of the footpath but separated from it by a 1m high stone boundary wall which is constructed of coursed stone with dressed stone copings.

The building has white painted walls and a blue slate roof, and having started life as a residential bungalow retains that appearance despite a subsequent change of use.

To the rear there is a flat roofed building in the grounds.

In 1991 planning permission was granted (3/91/0299) for the change of use of the bungalow to a children's day nursery, and there have been subsequent planning applications for extensions to the buildings.

However an unfavourable OFSTED report eventually forced the closure of the nursery and alternative facilities are now provided elsewhere in Whalley, since when the building has been vacant.

Land in the vicinity of the site is in a mixture of uses, reflecting the proximity of the town centre.

Between the site and the mini-roundabout properties at ground level are in commercial use, with residential accommodation above; a pair of shops with flats above has been built immediately to the west of the site.

At the junction of Accrington Road with King Street there are three public houses with further commercial uses adjacent.

To the east of the application site there is a large area of land accommodating an electricity sub-station, and at a greater distance there are residential properties. Adjacent to the western boundary there is an access road to a car park situated to the rear of the Swan Hotel which accommodates parking for approx. 20 cars.

The access has been previously widened to allow two way traffic, and although in private ownership, the car park is pay and display for public use.

There is a further car park operated on the same basis on the south side of Accrington Road which accommodates approx. 50 cars. Both car parks serve the Town Centre.

Adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site there is also a gravelled track, providing access to the electricity sub-station and the rear of the former Police Station.

This track only gives access to the electricity station and the application site and is very tight in use.

Historically the building to the rear of the site was used as a Garage with access from this track.

The boundary of Whalley Conservation Area now encompasses several of the properties on Accrington Road to the east. However the site is not identified as containing buildings of townscape merit nor providing an important view; neither is it the subject of a proposed Article 4 direction.

The bus station is close to the site on King Street, and the railway station is also within walking distance.

#### **THE REDEVELOPMENT - DESIGN PROPOSAL**

We have read the pre-application advice dated 25th January 2015. Unfortunately this has not really helped us to progress what may be considered a more acceptable design to the Planning Officer. It seems a more fundamental re-design is being requested, which is impractical in our opinion, both in terms of economic viability and the physical site, limiting what can realistically be changed.

The design has therefore remained as amended and submitted in Plan STA/01a Dwg 03. In addition a 3D drawing of the proposal has been prepared and is attached with this statement and application. It is hoped this provides a clearer impression of what is proposed.

This latest proposed design addressed many of the issues raised in the past by various interested parties. These included:

- Shop frontage and front doors.
- Treatment of windows in terms of frequency, pattern and size to all elevations.
- Clean roof design at an apex height the same as the adjoining building to the west.
- Retention of the feature stone wall to the front of the property.

The overall design reflects a new building which needs to reflect the conservation area status of Whalley, whilst needing to be economically viable as a commercial building in the current market. Therefore it has to be 3 storeys high and the 'T' Shape adopted to reduce the massing on the front elevation. This design process also carries through to the hipped roof design in reducing impact on the street frontage.

## **RESPONSE TO COUNTER ISSUES RAISED**

Overall it has been difficult to change the design again significantly. There has been a lack of clear, constructive direction over the years since the first application, pre-application advice and refusals of permission. We would, however, comment as follows on the issues raised:

1. The site is relatively small, defined by its physical boundaries and would be expected to be fully developed, considering its street front location. The development plot stands on its own, being detached from its neighbours by side streets. It cannot be seen as a continuation of terraces on Accrington Road.
2. Whilst acknowledging the need to fit into the conservation area, a new commercial property has to be economically viable. Some compromise is necessary and the new building would not detract from the streetscape in our opinion. The design follows the same fashion as the adjoining building and other road front properties in the Conservation Area.
3. Efforts were made previously to take on the criticisms relating to regular quoining, uniformly sized windows and identical blocks of stone making the appearance repetitive and stolid; the awkwardness of the Neo-Victorian shop front, its distended width etc. In consultation with a conservation architect, certain changes were made and these are also reflected in the submission drawing. With constructive comment, further detail can be incorporated into the final design via specific conditions in the planning permission, if required.
4. The hipped roofs were included because the first designs had gable features and this was considered unacceptable at the time. The reasoning behind the hipped design was to reduce massing to the street front. The hipped roofs have therefore been retained similar to the adjoining buildings. It is interesting to note a hipped roof design has been permitted for the single storey extension to the former police station.
5. The height of the roof ridge had been changed from 9.7m to 10.5m, slightly increasing the pitch. This was deemed necessary to allow sufficient ceiling heights on the second floor; however the height remains the same as the adjoining building to the west.
6. The 'T' shape design of the building was also a response to comments about massing. The design now reduces the impact on the road front.

7. The comments from David Bloomer are acknowledged and noted. The applicant understands he has to surface the access to the substation and address the working of the bin storage area and cycle parking.

## **ECONOMIC CASE**

• The new development is to provide 336m<sup>2</sup> net usable commercial space comprising 84m<sup>2</sup> retail and 252m<sup>2</sup> of office space, adding a major new development generator to the Whalley economy.

• Retaining the site 'as it is' is not a long term option. The buildings are dilapidated and beyond economic repairs, as there are no suitable uses for its existing size, layout and condition.

• The size, shape and scale of the proposed new building reflects economic reality in a NW village such as Whalley. In our view there is demand from occupiers to run thriving business from 7 Accrington Road.

• However, there has to be some compromise. The building footprint almost fills the plot, which is not unusual in a town or village streetscape such as this; the height is three storey.

Both these factors are necessary to maximise lettable floor space and provide some on site parking.

• Anything smaller does not work economically. There is a tipping point beyond which rents are unrealistic and not achievable. Costs remain relatively steady and have to be managed very carefully on a speculative commercial venture such as this.

• Speculative commercial development is a risk and the margins between success and failure are small. The Applicant has always attempted to produce a building that does fit the Conservation Area aspirations as far as possible within an economic design.

• In terms of the economic impact, employment opportunities are very important. The commercial space will produce between 25-30 jobs whilst the retail element should be 4-6 full time equivalent posts

• Redevelopment presents an opportunity to increase the Business Rates income from a larger building.

• The number of additional workers in the village will add to the business and village economy during the working week.

• Whilst not an insignificant number, the increased activity will be easily managed and absorbed by the village. There are very good public transport links with bus and rail, together with two pay and display car parks close by and some limited roadside parking.

• This is a welcome opportunity to provide new commercial space in Whalley for the first time in a long number of years and should therefore be supported.

## **CONCLUSION**

The owner and applicant has invested a significant amount of time and money into this project, in an effort to bring it to fruition. Each application is a costly exercise and the

property remains non income producing, as well as being an eyesore in the Conservation Area. There is a limit to the amount that can be spent.

Overall the proposed design does not detract from the Conversation Area and the surrounding streetscape. A new building would represent a significant improvement on the existing, derelict site, in addition to providing new employment opportunities in the village.

**From:** [Rachel Horton](mailto:Rachel.Horton@avalontp.co.uk)  
**To:** [planning@avalontp.co.uk](mailto:planning@avalontp.co.uk)  
**Subject:** Pre-Application Enquiry - 7 Accrington Road, Whalley - RV/2014/ENQ/00181  
**Date:** 26 January 2015 12:37:27

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Dear Alan

I have spent some time going through the extensive planning history of this site and reviewing the main reasons for refusal, and in particular, the most recent application refused in 2011 (3/2011/0014 & 3/2011/0015). As you are aware, the Authority have a duty to consider Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Section 74(3) of the Act. There is a requirement for the Borough Council to give special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses (Section 16(2)). The Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (HEPPG) is material to individual planning and heritage consent decisions and the delegated report which accompanies the most recent application provides detail of specific points of consideration.

Since 2011, and as you are aware the Council's Core Strategy has been adopted and the broad principles of heritage conservation are outlined in Key Statements EN5 and DME4 of the Core Strategy. Furthermore part 12. of the NPPF stresses, amongst other things, the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (para. 126.).

In short, it has already been established that the broad principle of the scheme is acceptable subject to other material considerations. The main considerations, apart from highways, and as outlined previously is the potential impact of development on the character, appearance and significance of Whalley Conservation Area.

I note that a number of meetings have previously been held to discuss specific concerns about the scheme, and in particular the design and scale. In 2008 following the refusal of previous proposals officers conferred with the Design and Heritage Pennine Lancashire panel. In summary the CABE Architects advised that 'they would encourage a conservation architect to produce a bold and interesting design which is in context (e.g. traditional materials) and true to its time. They also commented that the hipped roofs of the most recent scheme picked up on the more mediocre buildings in the area and were not what Whalley is about.

In 2010 a letter to yourself conveyed concerns as to the proposed plan form ('T' plan having little precedent), hipped roofing (mindful of Cabe's comments), the over-large and poorly proportioned shop fronts and suggested consideration of detailed design execution and verticality. In 2011 a further meeting was held with the applicant and yourself where Committees specific concerns as to the proposed form of the shop front, roof and chimneys was discussed.

The Ancient Monuments Society have previously advised that:

'the new building would neither preserve nor enhance the character of the Whalley Conservation Area'. With regards to design they are of the opinion that the 'regular quoining, uniformly sized windows and identical blocks of stone bring no variation to the façade and



make it appear rather repetitive and stolid. The Neo-Victorian shop front sits awkwardly, especially given its distended width, on the large front extension and creates a curious juxtaposition which has no historical precedent' (refer to Deleg Report 3/2011/0014 & 3/2011/0015).

Furthermore, the Delegated Report written by Officer Adrian Dowd in relation to the 2011<sup>s</sup> applications (3/2011/0014 & 3/2011/0015) could not be more explicit in stating that 'in respect to the revised plan and Committees concerns, I note that there has been no change to the hipped form of the roofs (other than an increase to pitch and height) and no change to the size and proportion of the shop fronts. The design is an uninteresting and awkward composition of C18,C19 and modern elements which has no historical precedent.

For information, there is some discrepancy what the precise design of this most recent scheme is. The proposed roof design as per the colour sketch plans submitted as part of this enquiry differ, insofar as some elevations implies that the ridge height of the main front elevation (shopfront section) is to be 'set-down' from the remainder of the building, yet on some of the other sketches the ridgeline runs through. A request has been made to clarify this and submission of an A1 plan of the proposed scheme as the wrong one (office and residential) was submitted initially), however confirmation of the correct scheme has not been clarified, nor has a plan been submitted. I have therefore assumed that drawing STA/01a Dwg 03 as submitted via e-mail on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November is the correct plan.

In short, and in consideration of the above I am of the opinion that very little has changed from the previous scheme. The size and proportion is in the main the same, apart from a slight change to the footprint and increase to the ridge height from 9.7m to 10.5m. The hipped roof design coupled with the uniform detailing, size and proportioning have previously been expressed as specific areas of concern. Yet this proposed scheme, in my opinion, does little to address these concerns. On this basis, I cannot offer any support to the application as proposed as it is very likely to be refused for similar reasons.

For information, David Bloomer has reviewed the scheme which has been submitted with this enquiry. He has initially raised concerns regarding the parking provision, however this was considered acceptable by his predecessor and therefore he would have 'no objection'. Notwithstanding this, there is a requirement for surfacing of the access to the sub-station. Furthermore, he does have issues with the location and access to the bin storage area and location of any cycle parking/storage. On this basis, and if an application is to be submitted, irrespective of my advice I would advise that you liaise with David to ensure that he is satisfied with the proposal.

I trust that the above has answered your enquiry, and must stress that my comments represent officer opinion only at the time of writing, given without prejudice to the final determination of any application submitted.

Regards

Rachel Horton  
Pre-Planning Advice Officer



**Rachel Horton** – Pre-Planning Advice Officer

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