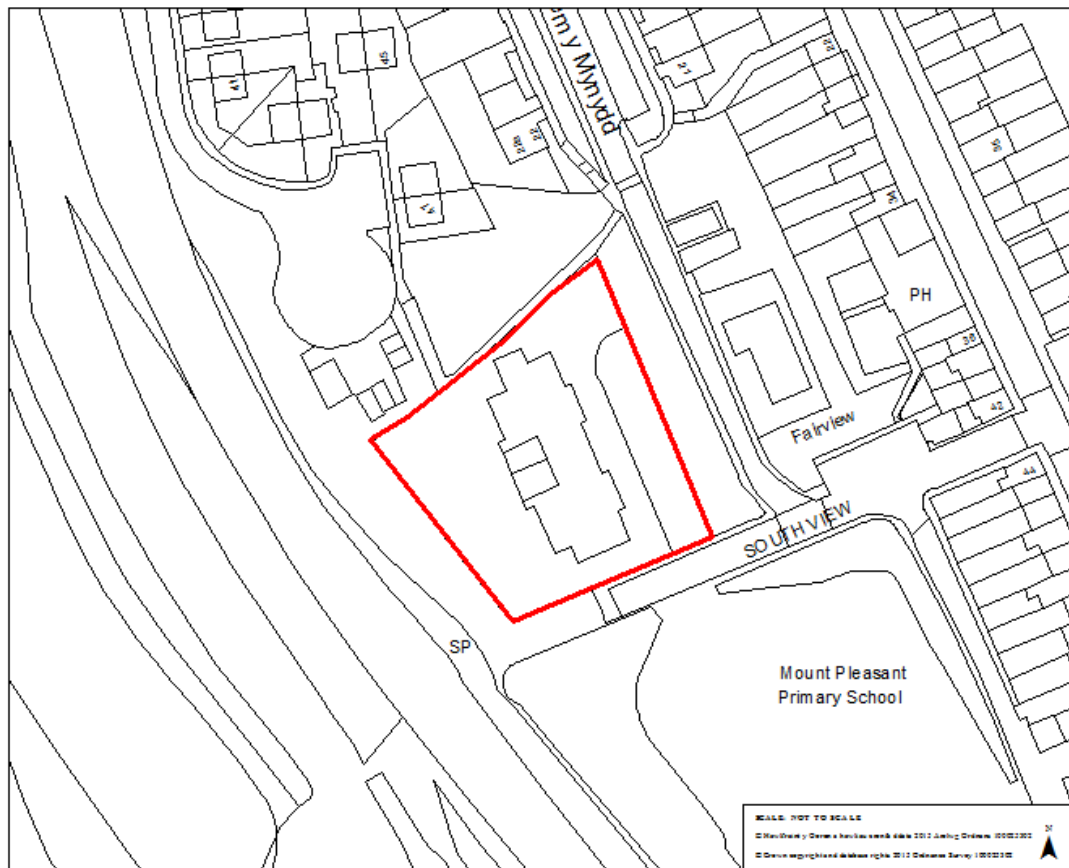


Application No.	Date	Determining Authority
P/15/0369	25th January 2016	MTCBC
Proposed Development	Location	Name & Address of Applicant/Agent
Change of use from school (Use Class D1) to a bunk house (Sui Generis) and the provision of a new car parking area	Former Old Mount Pleasant School Cardiff Road Merthyr Vale Merthyr Tydfil CF48 4TD	Mr Tahsin Atas c/o 3dcadwales Limited F.a.o. Mr P Harris 5 Ashlea Drive Thomastown Merthyr Tydfil



APPLICATION SITE

This application relates to the former Mount Pleasant School which closed in 2010 and was then used as the Merthyr Tydfil Learning and Well-Being Centre until 2011. The building has subsequently remained vacant for a number of years.

The site is bound to the south-east by South View with a sports field beyond and to the south-west is vacant land which abuts a railway line with the Taff Trail on the opposite side. To the north-east is a sloping grassed embankment with a number of trees that adjoins Mount View. A public footway runs along part of the northern boundary of the site with a group of garages and a hard standing area located opposite the north-west corner of the site.

The majority of the application site is hard surfaced with a grassed embankment and tree located in the eastern part of the site. The school building is also located on an upper plateau with the western part of the site being at a lower level. Access into the site is limited to pedestrian entrances only, which are located at the northern and southern ends of the site.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Full planning permission is sought for the change of use of the school building to a bunk house, which would provide rooms with up to 34 beds, communal bathroom facilities, a hall and kitchen area, along with staff accommodation and office space. There are no proposed alterations or extensions to the existing building.

The applicant has indicated that the proposed bunk house would provide accommodation for recreational / tourism activities in the area including mountain bikers visiting Bike Park Wales, cyclists using the Taff Trail and by hikers visiting Brecon Beacons. The building is not to be used for any other temporary form of accommodation.

A new vehicular access into the site from South View would be created which would involve the removal of part of the boundary wall to form a 4.8m wide entrance. A total of 13 parking spaces with turning facilities would be provided in the eastern part of the site.

Councillor Mansbridge has requested that this application be reported to Committee so that the proposed access and highway safety implications of the development can be considered.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no relevant planning history relating to the application site.

CONSULTATION

Engineering and Highways Manager	-	No objection.
Town Planning Division's Policy & Implementation Group Leader	-	No objection.
Town Planning Division's Countryside Officer	-	No objection.
Environmental Health Manager	-	No response.
Economic Development and Tourism Manager	-	No objection
Welsh Water	-	No objection subject to conditions relating to foul, surface water and land drainage.

PUBLICITY

In accordance with the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012, three site notices were displayed within the vicinity of the site.

As a result of this publicity exercise a petition has been received with a total of 152 signatures. The main concerns raised are as follows:

- The development would result in additional traffic in the area which poses health and safety concerns for children who play in the vicinity and use the highway to visit a nearby playground.
- The building is not suitable for commercial use where people will reside or visit the building at all hours.
- There are a number of bunk houses in Merthyr Tydfil and it is questioned whether there is a need for any more.

POLICY CONTEXT

The following policies are relevant to the determination of this application:

National planning policy:

Planning Policy Wales (PPW), 8th Edition, January 2016:

Sections 4.11.9 – 4.11.12 sets out the principles of good design in new development proposals, which should take into account its relationship to its surrounding context. Regard should be given to the appropriate scale, appearance, landscaping and quality of building design and should also be accessible for all.

Sections 5.5.1 – 5.5.3 notes that the impact a development proposal may have on wildlife or the landscape is an important consideration in determining applications. Where ever possible adverse effects on the environment should be avoided or acceptably minimised.

Section 8.7.1 sets out the criterion that should be considered where transport implications may occur, such as impacts on local travel demand, public transport provision, accessibility and highway safety.

Section 11.1.13 states that local authorities should seek to protect and enhance the rights of way network as a recreational and environmental resource, as well as promote the use of national cycle networks.

Local planning policy:

Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan (LDP) 2006-2021:

- Policy BW3 - Development Strategy – Other Growth Areas
- Policy BW4 - Settlement boundaries / locational constraints
- Policy BW5 - Natural heritage
- Policy BW7 - Sustainable design and place making
- Policy BW8 - Development and the water environment
- Policy BW15 - Community facilities
- Policy BW16 - Protecting / enhancing the network of leisure facilities
- Policy TB11 - Access, parking and accessibility of local facilities

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG):

- SPG 5 – Nature and Development, May 2015

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Land use

The application site is located within the settlement limits as defined by the LDP, where new development is generally supported in principle by policy BW4 of the LDP. The site also lies within the 'Other Growth Area', as defined by policy BW3 of the LDP, where development is limited to proposals that sustain the integrity and vitality of the existing settlement.

Policy BW15 of the LDP seeks to protect and enhance the provision of community facilities within the County Borough. Where development proposals would result in a loss of an existing community facility, permission should only be granted where:

- Alternative provision of at least equivalent value to the local community can be provided nearby, or
- It can be demonstrated that existing provision is inappropriate or surplus to the needs of the community and is no longer required, or
- It can be demonstrated there is no longer a viable community use for the facility.

The former Mount Pleasant School was closed in 2010 as it was deemed to be surplus to the requirements of the community with alternative provision for children now being accommodated at the Ynysowen Community Primary School. Furthermore, the building has remained vacant for at least 4 years following the closure of the Merthyr Tydfil Learning and Well-Being Centre. Therefore the conversion of the building is considered to comply with policy BW15 of the LDP.

The proposed use of the former school building as a bunk house would provide temporary accommodation that supports recreational activities and tourism in the area and is suitably located near the Taff Trail, which forms part of a network of footpaths and cycleways. It is considered that the proposal would help sustain the quality and vitality of the area and bring an otherwise vacant property back into beneficial use. Therefore the proposal complies with policies BW3, BW4 and BW15 of the LDP.

Design

The former school building is considered to be a prominent and attractive property with brickwork detailing, large glazed windows and a slate roof, which contributes to the architectural quality of the area. Its conversion to accommodate the proposed bunk house would not require any alterations or extensions to the existing building. As such, the architectural qualities of the building and the quality of the area in general can be maintained, which is a more favourable approach than the redevelopment of the site. Additionally, the alterations required to the existing gate and boundary wall to provide a new vehicular entrance into the site from South View are deemed to be generally minor in nature. It is considered that the proposed development would not have adverse impact on the character or appearance of the area. Therefore the proposal complies with policy BW7 of the LDP.

Highways

Access into the site is currently limited to two pedestrian entrances located to the north from Mount View and to the south from South View. There are no alterations proposed to the gated entrance from Mount View. However, alterations would be carried out to widen the existing access from South View to enable vehicles to enter and exit the site. This would involve increasing the width of the entrance from 4m to 4.8m by demolishing part of the existing stone boundary wall.

Whilst the approach to the site along South View is down a steep road, this section of the highway and the proposed vehicular access into the site would be of an acceptable design to accommodate the traffic generated by the development. There would be sufficient room to enable vehicles to enter the site with appropriate turning facilities to allow vehicles to exit in a forward gear. There would also be sufficient room to enable vehicles to pass each other within the site and along South View without impinging on the free flow of traffic in the area.

There are no specific guidelines on the parking requirements for bunk houses, which would differ to the requirements of a hotel or guest house, given that the majority of the rooms accommodate larger groups of 4-12 people. A total of 13 parking spaces would be provided within the site, of which one of these spaces would be required for staff. It is anticipated that the majority of people using the bunk house would arrive as a group by car or in a mini-van.

The Engineering and Highways Manager has requested that a total of 12 visitor parking spaces be provided within the site to serve the bunk house, which would accommodate up to 34 people. This equates to an average of 3 people per vehicle arriving at the site. On this basis, adequate off-street parking provision would be provided to serve the development.

It is considered that the conversion of the building to a bunk house would not give rise to highway safety concerns and the traffic generated would not differ significantly to its original use as a school. As such, the Engineering and Highways Manager has not raised any objection. Therefore the proposal complies with policies BW12 and TB11 of the LDP.

Residential amenity

The nearest residential properties to the application site are the semi-detached and terraced dwellings (approximately 25m) to the north of the site, which form part of Mount View. Fairview bungalow is located (approximately 16m) to the north-east of the site.

In terms of the potential impact on the amenities of nearby residents, the main consideration is whether the proposed bunk house would generate unacceptable levels of noise and disturbance in the area. The original use of the building as a school would have likely generated a greater level of noise and disturbance in the area during peak pickup/drop off times and during the day when the children were playing outside. In comparison, the impact of the proposed development on residential amenity is considered to be minimal. The number of vehicles arriving and leaving the site is likely to be intermittent throughout any day. Additionally, the noise generated by those residing at the bunk house is unlikely to have an adverse impact on neighbours given their distances away from the school building. On this basis, it is considered that the proposed development would not adversely impact on residential amenity and would therefore comply with policy BW7 of the LDP.

Ecology

A Protected Species Survey: Preliminary Bat Inspection Survey report has been submitted in support of this application. Whilst, it is identified that there is some potential for bats to use the building, the report concludes that there was no evidence of bats being present, with no signs of historic use externally or internally. Additionally, no evidence of bird nesting was found. Given that there are no alterations proposed to the school building, the report concludes that the proposal would not have an adverse impact on any bats or birds. In this respect the Town Planning Division's Countryside Officer has raised no objection. Therefore the proposal complies with policy BW5 of the LDP.

Representations

Concerns have been raised that the additional traffic generated by the bunk house poses health and safety risks to children who play in the vicinity and use the highway to visit a nearby playground. As noted above, the traffic generated by the development is not considered to differ greatly from its original use as a school. Additionally, there is an adequate network of footways along the adopted highway leading to the recreational facilities. In this respect, the Engineering and Highways Manager has not raised any highway safety concerns.

In terms of the commercial use of the building, it has been adequately demonstrated that the proposal can be accommodated on the site with appropriate facilities. The level of noise and disturbance is also likely to be less than the original use of the building as a school. It is not deemed necessary to impose restrictions of the times at which people can arrive or leave the site. In this respect it is considered unlikely that there would be significant traffic movements in the early/late hours of the morning and evening.

It is acknowledged that there are other bunk houses located in Merthyr Tydfil that support recreational activities / tourism. Whilst the need for an additional bunk house has been questioned by local residents, the viability of the development is a matter for the applicant to determine and would not form a reason to refuse this application. Furthermore, the Council's Economic Development and Tourism Manager advises that the current accommodation offer in the area is predominantly B&B's with a low number of serviced bunk houses, as such the proposed bunk house would complement the existing tourism sector and support the vision of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council in terms of promoting and encouraging tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

For the above reasons the proposed development is considered to be acceptable and complies with the relevant LDP policies. Accordingly, the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION: BE APPROVED subject to the following **CONDITIONS**.

1. The development shall begin not later than five years from the date of this decision.

Reason - To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. No more than 34 guests shall be accommodated within the bunk house hereby approved at any one time and the internal layout of the bunk house shall be provided in accordance with the approved plan (Dwg No. 51024003P) and retained as such in perpetuity.

Reason - To ensure adequate parking provision is available for guests using the bunk house in the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policies BW12 and TB11 of the Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan.

3. **Before the bunk house hereby approved is brought into use**, the vehicular access, car parking spaces and turning facilities shall be provided in accordance with the approved block plan (Dwg No. 51024072B) and retained as such thereafter.

Reason - In the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policies BW12 and TB11 of the Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan.

4. **Before the bunk house hereby approved is brought into use**, details of the works necessary to make good any alterations to the existing stone wall to form a new vehicular access into the site, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. All works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure the development will be visually attractive and its appearance is in keeping with the character of the area, in accordance with Policy BW7 of the Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan.

5. **Before the bunk house hereby approved is brought into use**, details of the gates (including its height, design and materials) that form part of the new vehicular access into the site, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. All works shall be completed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure the development is visually attractive and its appearance is in keeping with the character of the area, in accordance with Policy BW7 of the Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan.
