

From: Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 03 January 2025 15:39:21 UTC+00:00
To: "Andrew Horrell" <Andrew.Horrell@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: DM/24/2288 Park Centre, 60 Park Road, BH

Hi Andrew

Comments on the above planning application.

The application site, 60 Park Road, is a mid-late 19th century building located in a prominent position within the St John's Conservation Area of Burgess Hill. Historical map regression suggests that the building started life as St John's Reading Room and is one of the earliest buildings in the area, which is named for the church of St John the Evangelist (II* listed), which was consecrated in 1863 and is located a short distance to the south. This area of Burgess Hill was developed rapidly following the opening of the Burgess Hill Railway Station in 1841. The former reading room has a symmetrical classically composed façade, which is brick built but has been painted. This façade is a feature in views from the open space of St John's Park, which is just to the south west. The rear of the building, which has been much altered, is also fairly prominent in views from Marle Place Park which is directly adjacent to the north. The building appears to have gone through a variety of community uses, from a reading room, to an institute, and is now known as the Park Centre.

The building is a prominent and quite attractive feature of the Conservation Area, and also a historical focus of community activity within Burgess Hill. It contributes positively to the character and appearance of the Area, and is also likely to be regarded as an NDHA on the basis of its period architecture, age (relative to the majority of development in the locality), historical interest, and communal value.

The current proposal, which somewhat unfortunately has not been preceded by pre-application advice, is for alterations and extensions to the building including extensions to both sides, refurbishment and upgrading of the building including removal of the paint to the façade, replacement windows, new insulation and structural works. The proposal also includes a new bin and bicycle storage building to the frontage of the site.

Firstly, I would note that the illustrative 3D images provided do not appear to correspond to the detail shown on the submitted proposed elevations, for example in respect to the works to the façade. This is unfortunate as it gives an inaccurate and inconsistent impression of the proposals, and I would recommend that the images are revised accordingly.

Repair and restoration of the building:

In principle, the restoration of the building in conjunction with the establishment of an ongoing use for it is welcomed. As above, the building would be regarded as an NDHA making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and therefore its repair, alongside the reinstatement of features to the façade which have been previously lost is particularly welcomed. More detail will be required of the works to the façade, including the proposed replacement porch, reinstatement of the arched window at the centre of the first floor, and reinstatement of timber sash windows to currently boarded up openings.

In general I would consider that this information could be required by appropriate conditions, however the removal of paint from the façade and the restoration of the underlying brickwork is caveated as to be confirmed following the removal of the existing paint. As this would be a key element of the restoration of original features to this most prominent elevation of the building is, I would suggest that it would be preferable to achieve a greater degree of certainty at this stage as to whether or not this work does form part of the proposal. The removal of test patches of paint should, I would hope, allow a more informed assessment to be made as to the condition of the underlying masonry, and I would suggest this is carried out now and the results submitted as part of the current application process. This is particularly because, as discussed below, the extent and quality of the restoration works to the façade will be a key factor in establishing the overall impact, on balance, of the proposals on the NDHA and the Conservation Area.

Alterations and extensions to the building:

The proposal also includes extensive works to the sides and rear of the building including extensions to both side elevations over part one and part two storeys, refurbishment of existing additions to the rear including new windows, and landscaping around the building including works to the rear garden.

Although the building has already been substantially extended to the rear, I do consider that there may be potential in principle for additions to either side, subject to detail, and as part of a wider proposal for its restoration and beneficial re-use. I do however have some concerns regarding the current proposals:

- The form of the additions, including the roof form, is overly complex and does not relate particularly comfortably to the host building. For example, the additions have some negative impact on the surviving, original symmetry of the building as seen in views from Park Road, which is exacerbated by the unbalanced bulk and form of the extensions themselves. The complex form of the additions, including in particular the overhanging first floor and inclusion of a crown roof to the western side of the building, do not relate well to the relatively simple form of the original building.
- Aspects of the elevational treatment including the largely blank, unrelieved elevations to both sides of the proposed side additions also do not relate well to the original building. The large windows to the front facing elevations of the side extensions, in particular the large arch headed window at first floor to the eastern side extension, may in contrast appear unduly visually prominent, and may draw the eye from the original façade of the building.

With respect to the proposed replacement windows around the building, whilst the use of replacement double glazed timber sashes to the front elevation is welcomed in principle, elsewhere the approach may require reconsideration- the building is quite visible from both the rear (Marle Place Park) and in sequential glimpsed views from the south side (between buildings on Upper St Johns Road). Therefore we would expect new windows to the sides and rear of the original building (as opposed to the existing additions to it) should be to match the surviving original windows to it.

I would therefore suggest that that the proposed works to the building itself in terms of the proposed additions to it and elevational alterations require further consideration and amendment.

Works to the area around the building, including new bike/bin store:

In terms of the proposed works to the areas around the building, whilst these are largely considered uncontroversial in principle, I do have concerns regarding the new bike and bin store to the front of the site. This is quite a substantial building, and is set forward both of the existing building on the site and of the established building line along Park Road, including the adjacent properties at 62-64 Park Road. The building will therefore be prominent in views from Park Road, and also in views of the Centre from St Johns Park. In some of these views it will partly obscure the façade of the original building, detracting from its appearance and its contribution to the local street scene and to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Furthermore, although the existing frontage to the building, being entirely hard surfaced and without any boundary treatment onto the road, is not a positive feature of this part of St John's Road, it is at least open and undeveloped. This is typical of the front gardens to the residential properties elsewhere along this northern side of Park Road, none of which contain similar outbuildings, or garages etc. The proposed new building would therefore be forward of the consistent, established building line, and out of character with the established grain of development along this side of Park Road. For these reasons, in my opinion a new building in this position is unacceptable in principle.

In addition, although each case must be considered on its own merits I would also note a concern that granting permission for the bike/bin store might establish an unhelpful precedent in terms of potential future applications for ancillary buildings within front garden areas elsewhere along Park Road.

I would therefore recommend that the new building is omitted from the scheme and provision for bike and waste storage made elsewhere on the site.

In summary, although the principle of the restoration and re-use of the building is considered welcome, aspects of the current proposal require further consideration and/or amendment, in order to ensure that the proposal preserves the significance of the NDHA and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and meets the requirements of District Plan Policies DP34 and DP35 and the relevant paragraphs of the NPPF.

Thanks,

Emily

Please note that this advice is given at Officer level only and is without prejudice to the formal decision of the District Council.

Submit your planning application online.
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>

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