



# PLANNING HERITAGE

*Conservation Planning Consultancy*



## HERITAGE STATEMENT

Project: Regency Chambers, 20 Bridge Street, Newport

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This statement has been prepared following further concerns raised by Council officers to provide additional information with regard to the heritage significance of Regency Chambers, 20 Bridge Street, Newport (hereafter referred to as the 'Site'). The building is listed at Grade II and is a recognised heritage asset.

It is located within the Town Centre Conservation Area (TCCA designated 1987) as proposed in the draft Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal, in which proposes the extension of the boundaries. The Site would fall within the extended conservation area and as such is considered to be within the TCCA.

This new application submission follows and has also been directly informed by, a previously refused application for planning permission (21/1272) which comprised: *the Conversion of the church to 20 Nos. flats (comprising 16 Nos. 1 Bed and 4 Nos. 2 Bed flats) including the construction of dormer windows.*

As required by Technical Advice Note 24 (The Historic Environment), paragraph 1.12 that **when considering development proposals and other works to historic assets. It is important for those responsible to understand the heritage values and assess the significance of the historic assets that will be affected. There are four heritage values which need to be understood before the significance of the asset can be assessed.**

- Evidential value
- Historical value
- Aesthetic value
- Communal value

**An understanding of these values forms the basis of a statement of significance prepared as part of a heritage impact statement.**

# 2 THE PROPOSAL

The proposals seek to convert the Site for residential accommodation, comprising 8Nos. flats.

# 3 THE APPLICATION SITE

The Site is located on the south side of Bridge Street. It is adjacent to the Queen's Hotel. Bridge Street and opposite the Travelodge, between Caxton Place and Baneswell Road. The property was listed at Grade II in May 1980 and is located outside the adopted TCCA, as designated in March 1987. A subsequent review of the conservation area in 2018 proposed the extension of the TCCA boundary to include the Site, as shown in the draft conservation area character appraisal. The draft document also renamed the TCCA as the City Centre Conservation Area .

The list description states:

## **HISTORY**

**Circa 1870.**

## **EXTERIOR**

**Three storey, 5 window Italianate block; stucco with rusticated quoins and channelled ground floor. Bracketed cornice; 5 camber-headed windows to second floor. First floor windows have bracketed pediments, central window has engaged columns. On ground floor, round-arched openings with keystones breaking up into entablature with dentil cornice; recessed central entrance flanked by paired pilasters; paired pilasters to ends.**

## **REASON FOR DESIGNATION**

**Well-preserved building in Italianate style; group value with adjacent Hotel.**

The architectural styles along Bridge Street is mixed and includes a collection of buildings, which date from the early C19 to the C21. Bridge Street provides the principal approach into the town centre from the west and being in close proximity to both the rail station and the Civic Centre meant it was a busy

thoroughfare. Today, it remains a street with a constant flow of traffic and pedestrians travelling along it.

The Site is believed to have been built c.1870 and is currently vacant but was until recently, in use as offices. The property reflects the Italianate architectural style of the early-mid C19. It is a three storey rendered building with basement accommodation fronting Bridge Street, which is characterised by a mix of commercial and residential properties. To the rear, it backs onto an enclosed yard accessed via a small carriage entrance on Caxton Place.

The topography on site is such that the ground levels are higher at the front, whilst to the rear the ground level is a full storey lower. There is access directly into the basement from the rear yard. The rear elevation has a plain architectural appearance and has a full width addition which appears to act in the capacity of a buttress to the main building. It appears that the rear addition was either that, an addition or it has been modified at the top to allow for the installation of long horizontal window along the top landing, c.1960s-80s. The rear elevation has a modern cement render finish. A full height, metal fire escape is located alongside the rear extension to the left (west) side and is located behind a metal security grill at ground level. A full height, external metal boiler flue is attached to the right side of the extension.

The inspection of the Site highlighted the distinctive contrast between the ornate architectural treatment of the front façade and the simplicity and functional appearance of the rear elevation.

The inspection of the interior of the property revealed the dilapidated condition resulting primarily from water damage, which in turn lead to the collapse of the plaster undersides to the staircase and associated walls. The loss of plaster finishes has exposed the extent of structural movement and cracking caused by the movement of the rear elevation of the building.

The building comprises ground and two upper floors with basement level accommodation. A central grand staircase of stairs rises to a full width landing, from which the stairs split and become cantilevered, using using to the first floor. This pattern/design is repeated from the first to second floor. The staircase has decorative bannisters of alternate square and turned patterns

with octantal newel posts. The basement flight, is however discreetly hidden under the ground floor central flight. The water damage and structural movement to and if the staircase has resulted in it becoming unsafe.

The interior inspection revealed the building has been subjected to extensive alteration over time. The commercial use of the building has seen the evolution of the interior, which has witnessed the loss of historic detailing as well as the insertion of modern partitions, ceilings and service routes.

The ground and upper floors have seen the principle spaces divided whilst in the basement the rooms were converted to offices and the works included the installation of a screed floor, service channels and suspended ceilings. The basement windows in the front elevation windows were blocked up perhaps as a result of external works to the pavement and street.

Turning to the surviving features throughout the building, the fireplaces have been lost and blocked up. The works to the ground and upper floors has also witnessed the installation of suspended ceilings and wall finishes. Equally, few historic doors have survived, with most being replaced but modern fire doors. The rear extension provided space for services and WCs accessed off each landing. Today, the character of the principal spaces is derived from the commercial office use, albeit with some historic detailing.

The inspection showed that where the decorative detailing survives it is varied and includes deep skirtings, a few doors and architraves, picture rails and deep plaster cornices. However, on the upper floors, the installation of suspended ceilings disguises/hides any surviving historic decorative detailing.

Today, the Site is characterised by the vacancy of the building and dilapidated condition of the property. If left to continue, the condition will blight the locality and the neighbouring properties.



1. Regency Chambers, 20 Bridge Street



2. Rear elevation



3. The central staircase



4. View of staircase and extent of water damage



5. Typical room showing extent of surviving fabric and detailing



6. Ground surviving door and features



7. Ground entrance lobby and reception



8. Ground floor entrance hall



9. First floor offices



10. First floor office showing typical detailing



11. First floor landing infill arch



12. Second floor offices



13. Basement room



14. Basement room; loss of window and fireplace



15. Basement circulation space

# 4 HERITAGE ASSETS

## Designated Heritage Asset

The Technical Advice Note 24 (TAN24) defines in paragraph 1.7 a designated heritage asset as an **identifiable component of the historic environment. It may consist or be a combination of an archaeological site, a historic building or area, historic park and garden or a parcel of historic landscape. Nationally important historic assets will normally be designated.**

## Listed Buildings

The Site is listed at Grade II. It is this designated heritage asset whose significance will be directly affected by the proposed redevelopment.

The Site is adjacent to the Grade II Queens Hotel and within the setting of 24 Bridge Street and Tredegar Chambers, also both listed at Grade II. Of these designated heritage assets, it is only the Queens Hotel whose significance has the potential to be affected indirectly by the proposed redevelopment of the Site.

## Conservation Area: Town Centre

The Site lies outside the TCCA however, the draft Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal (published April 2018), proposes an extension of the boundary of the TCCA, which would result in the Site falling within the extended area.

The draft appraisal states that the intention to include sections of Bridge Street is one based upon the recognition that there is need to include **to recognise and protect the architectural value of the terraced buildings along the main approach into the Conservation Area from the west** along the south side and part of the north side of Bridge Street.

The extension of the boundary responded to changing heritage views on what is considered to be architecturally and historically important.

## Historic Asset of Special Local Interest

TAN24 recognises that the historic environment includes both designated heritage assets as well as those assets identified by the local planning

authority which make an important contribution to local distinctiveness and public knowledge.

The draft character appraisal shows those properties considered to make a positive contribution and/or of local importance on Plan 3 (p.35). The map highlights all buildings along the southern side of Bridge Street.

## Scoped out Heritage Assets

Outside the Site's boundary and within the identified surrounding area are designated and non-designated heritage assets. It has been assessed based on desk based research and through the site inspection that the significance of these other heritage assets is unlikely to be affected by the proposed development taking in to the consideration the potential for impacts by existing topography, street pattern, built form and/or dense foliage. Accordingly, they will not be discussed further in this report.

## 5 HISTORIC CONTEXT

Given the heritage sensitive nature of the scheme, the scheme has been informed by the assessment of the context in which it is located and archival sources.

The development of Newport during the C19 was a direct result of the industrial revolution and it witnessed a rapid expansion from a small seaport town to an important centre of coal export and steel production. The railways came to Newport to supply the port from the industrial coal fields of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan valleys.

Bridge Street was established during the mid-C19, when in 1850 the Newport High Street railway station opened to the north by the South Wales Railway with passenger trains services connecting to the Pontypool, Caerleon and Newport Railway by 1874.

The original bridge was replaced by the current lattice-girder design in 1911.

Bridge Street formed part of the C19 town expansion and the street directory sources indicate that Bridge Street has undergone at least one renumbering, presumably as a result of its own localised expansion as the street increased in length.

The 1876 Street Directory indicates that No.20 Bridge Street was historically numbered as No.37 and was offices of 2 solicitors, a mining engineer and a firm of auctioneers. By 1886, the directories list the Site as *Victoria Chambers* and by the turn of the C20 it was the offices of estates agents, accountants, a colliery and lime company, a building society, solicitors and coal merchant and exporter.

The assessment of the cartographic evidence revealed how the area initially developed and how the streetscene has evolved overtime. The sources show the present Travel Lodge was the site of the Victoria Hall, the original building having been gutted by fire in 1896 and re-opened as the Lyceum, until it was subsequently demolished and the site redeveloped.

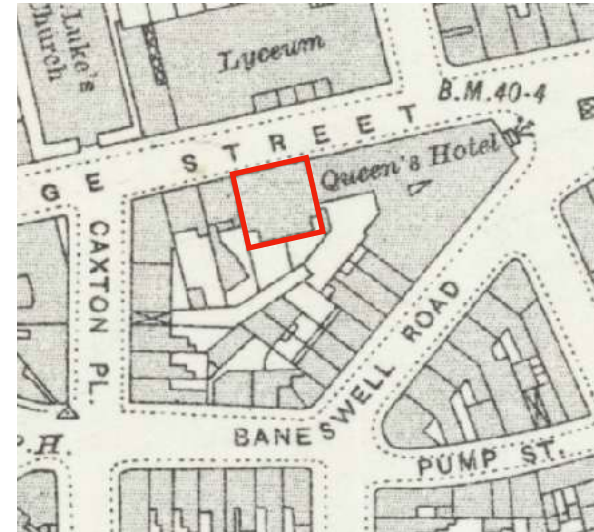


Fig.i: Extract from the 1917 OS map



Fig.iii: Extract from the 1968 OS map

## 6 SIGNIFICANCE

Significance is unique to a place and it is vital to identify so that changes within the historic environment can be managed sensitively to ensure that significance is protected, as well as revealed, reinforced and enhanced at every possible opportunity.

The TAN24 definition of the significance of a heritage asset is **the sum of the cultural and natural heritage values of a place, often set out in a statement of significance**. Importantly, the document recognises that change within the historic environment is 'inevitable' through variety of direct and indirect factors such as natural processes, wear and tear through use, and over time the needs of social, cultural, economic and technological changes.

In assessing the heritage significance of a designated asset, all of the above needs to be taken in account and in some case, this may be regarded simply as intrinsic. However, since significance is evaluated as a result of how a building or place is interpreted or perceived at a given moment, there are instances where significance can be regarded as a fluid concept that can either be eroded or enhanced, depending on the consequences of change. Significance can be eroded through, for example, partial demolition or inappropriate alterations. Alternatively, it can be enhanced through informed, considered change which can bring positive benefits. These benefits can include the revealing of heritage values, the re-assertion of historic integrity, facilitating greater public appreciation and the strengthening of communal values and uses – all of which may ultimately raise the level of significance. Thus the aims of managed change to protect, reveal, reinforce or enhance significance can be achieved through a variety of means including conservation, improved interpretation, understanding and/or presentation.

The following assessment of significance for the identified designated heritage asset of Regency Chambers, No. 20 Bridge Street and the draft TCCA is proportionate to the importance of the assets and also provides a sufficient level of description to understand the likely impacts of the proposals. This assessment work has been based on focused map progression, on-line archival research, and on-site investigative analysis.

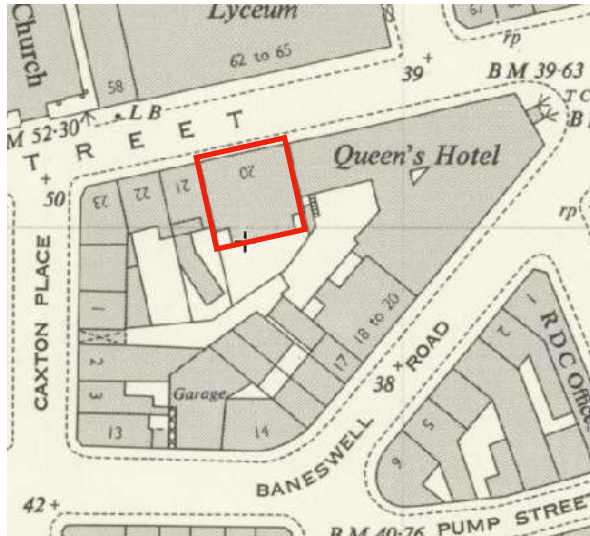


Fig.ii: Extract from the 1955 OS map



Fig.iv: Extract from the 1970 OS map

The city of Newport has been a port since the Normans built the castle, however it was during the C19 that the accessibility to the docks was the catalyst for the rapid expansion of the settlement. The industrial revolution witnessed the development of Newport from a small seaport town to a global centre for steel production and the exportation of coal. This was further enhanced by the extension of the docks which added to Newport's reputation, making it the largest coal exporter in Wales. Newport was until the mid-C19.

The period between the late C19 to early C20 was one of economic prosperity for Newport. In 1875, the Alexandra Docks opened and the town was expanding rapidly. In 1892 Alexandra South Dock opened and was the largest masonry dock in the world, although by this time the ports at Cardiff had overtaken Newport as the main coal exporter.

Newport's economy was varied and included foundries, engineering works, a cattle market, shops as well as having the benefits derived from the connection with Bristol through the White Funnel Line across the Severn Estuary, which ran until the mid-1950s. However, the importance of the docks started to decline by the early C20 and some were eventually filled in and redeveloped. As the town's traditional heavy industries were wound down, they started to be replaced by new public and private sector employers, which enabled the town to retain a degree of economic prosperity.

The assessment of the Site has revealed that it was built in the mid-late C19 c.1870 and appears to have been designed as a commercial building suitable for the legal professions. Originally known as Victoria Chambers, the street directories indicate it was the premises for a number of businesses associated with the law, property and the coal trade.

### **Summary of Significance**

Internally, the assessment identifies the significance is embodied in the surviving fabric of the main staircases and the planform, where the fundamental character of a Victorian commercial building plan remains visible and understood. However, that significance was reduced by changes to the planform and most recently through water damage which will require the need for reinstatement of appropriate features with modern

replacements, which will not carry historic significance. Likewise, the use and adaptation of rooms as offices over the last 170 years has resulted in the erosion of historic detailing and changes to the planform.

Although the floor plans form an important part of the significance of the heritage asset, the various adaptations have reduced their integrity. This is not to say that their contribution to the overall significance does not hold any heritage significance or value, it is just that their overall heritage value has been compromised by those alterations.

Where modern partitions, wall coverings and alterations have been installed in the main rooms, these have been altered regularly throughout the building's life and are not a part of the original features of the building. These features hold little historic significance.

The vacancy of the building has resulted in a need to sustain and enhance the significance of the heritage asset and create an opportunity for it to have a viable use, consistent with its conservation. The repurposing of this building for residential use would be a positive both for the Site but equally the wider town. This would take into account the role in which the conservation of the heritage asset would make to the wider sustainable communities and their economic vitality.

# 7 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The building has always been in commercial use since it was built. However, it is now vacant and in urgent need of repair and refurbishment to halt its decline. The fundamental objective is to secure its optimum viable use to safeguard the listed building and its heritage significance for the future, in accordance with the objectives of TAN24.

The proposals will achieve that in a sensitive way, thereby having a considerable positive impact on the main significance of the heritage asset.

In respect to the upper floors, the planform of these rooms has, in the past, been amended regularly to provide flexible working spaces. Partitions on all levels have been removed and new lightweight partitions installed to separate those spaces, thereby already impacting on the significance of the planform in these parts of the building. Likewise at basement level, the changes have included the infilling of the windows and potentially the front lightwells in the main façade. This has been detrimental to quality of these spaces and has left the basement level largely devoid of light and through ventilation.

This application will reinstate many of the historic partition lines on the upper levels which will thereby have a considerable positive impact on the significance of the planform. Accepting there is need to adapt some of the rooms to provide modern domestic facilities, which will constitute a small level of harm to the planform, the overall scheme seeks to avoid or minimise any harm to the significance of the historic asset.

In respect to the ground floor, the historic arrangement of the entrance lobby and rooms has been compromised by the loss/removal of the interior hall walls leaving a space that even with modern partitions, is too open. This has compromised the sense of arrival and focal importance of the main staircase, impacting on the significance of the planform in this part of the building. This application will reinstate the partitions to each side of the entrance and reinstate the sense of a formal entrance hall which leads directly through to the main staircase once more, which in turn having a considerable positive impact on the significance of the planform.

To each side of the entrance will be two separate apartments which can be accommodated without fundamental changes to the plan. The rooms at the bottom of the main staircase will have the door surrounds retained whilst the opening, currently a missing door and a modern door (to be removed) will be infilled. This there will be no further loss of historic fabric on this level.

In the principle reception rooms, there will a minimum impact upon the planform through the creation of lobbies into each apartment to provide storage space but also privacy and environmental/energy efficiency by creating a lobby between the main living spaces and the communal circulation areas of the property. These entrances will be designed to complement the building's existing style and materials, and of an appropriate scale that allows for the openness and importance of the reception room to be understood. The conversion of the rooms on this level will be undertaken in a sensitive way causing minimum impact to the fabric of the heritage asset.

At first floor level, the existing landing area has been compromised by infilling under the arch with an inappropriate 9 light glazed arrangement and central doorway into what is now an entirely open plan room, albeit one now subdivided by modern glazed partitions. The proposals look to recreate the formal division in the principle spaces between the two apartments as well as reinstate the original ceiling height. This will ensure the principle rooms reflect the historic proportions, better revealing the form of the original room plan, thereby having a considerable positive impact on the significance of the planform.

On the top floor, the level of previous intervention to the landing has been unsympathetic however, by adapting this space it reduces the need to introduce further sub-division on this level in the more sensitive main rooms. In this regard, there is a positive outcome.

It is on the basement level that the proposals will have the greatest impact. Previous concerns raised by the Council with regard to the extent of removal of the existing walls has been taken into account and the plans revised accordingly to reflect those concerns. The new layout seeks to work with the

existing plan rather than propose further roles of historic fabric, thus preserving the historic significance.

As described in the submitted details, the conversion of the rooms will be undertaken in a sensitive way causing minimum impact to the fabric of the heritage asset. The proposed alterations will respect the original plan form to ensure it remains clearly 'readable'. These proposals can be accommodated without the need for the complete or substantial removal of original walls.

The applicant's position is that the proposed works will have a considerable positive impact on the significance of the heritage asset through the investment proposed and the sensitive refurbishment of the property, bringing it back into an optimal viable use.

As set out above, the harm (if anything) is certainly minimal; reversible and on elements of the heritage asset that are not of primary significance. Against that (minimal) harm must be weighed the considerable public benefits of the proposal, which can be summarised as follows:

- Bringing a vacant listed building back into optimum viable use (a significant public benefit and a principal objective). The proposal will ensure that the property is sensitively maintained in the lifetime of the use which will enhance and future-proof the longevity of the heritage asset, and support its continued conservation, which is a significant positive environmental public benefit.
- Introducing an active new frontage to a vacant unit within the TCCA on one of the most prominent streets of the town approaching from the station. The vacant frontage currently detracts from the setting of Bridge Street and the wider Conservation Area. The proposal will contribute to the vitality and viability of Bridge Street and ensure that it remains a vibrant and viable location, which is a significant social, environmental, and economic public benefit.

## 8 CONCLUSION

The proposals are considered to be informed by their context, of an appropriate scale and form and using sympathetic materials that will respond successfully with the form of the building as well as the surrounding urban landscape. The proposals have been assessed to sustain and also to a degree enhance the use, character and appearance of the Site. The scheme therefore complies with the obligation to special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest.

The changes will ensure the Site is enhanced and secures the buildings' future. It is a viable design that will compliment the location and it will also enable a scheme of restoration and repair to be implemented that will bring about beneficial enhancement both for the Site and wider townscape.

The key enhancement of this scheme would be the securing of the long-term viability of the Site through residential use in a manner that would not materially harm the heritage value of the Site or the urban setting of Bridge Street. It is recognised that in order to do so, there would be a need to adapt the interior and windows, however the modest sub-division of some spaces, would amount to the minimum necessary to secure the future of the Site. This is a scheme that minimises the harm and is one whereby the public benefit of securing the future of the heritage asset through such development outweighs that harm.

Some of the positive design considerations include the securing of a longterm use, the provision of additional housing, the enhancement of the Site through the repair and restoration and the appropriate detailing and use of materials. This will provide a new use that will sit comfortably within its urban context. The delivery of residential use on Site would contribute positively to the vitality and vibrancy of the area, securing the future of a longterm building at risk.

Overall, the proposed scheme will save the building, improve the appearance of the townscape and the outlook of the surrounding properties. It is a scheme that will maintain the eclectic mix of built form, which characterises this area and achieve the restoration of the Site.

In conclusion, the application proposals would be in accordance with the principles of the relevant statutory duties of the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2023; Planning Policy Wales (Edition 11), TAN 24 and policy SP9 of the Newport Local Development Plan. It is a scheme that will give the Site a viable use that will not be detrimental to the wider character, appearance or setting of the heritage assets.