

CONSERVATION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Case Officer: Jacob Cooke

Application No: 25/0102 & 25/0163

Listed Building: Grade II

Address: 20 Bridge Street Newport

Proposal: LISTED BUILDING CONSENT FOR THE CHANGE OF USE, CONVERSION. REFURBISHMENT AND ALTERATIONS OF REGENCY CHAMBERS, 20 BRIDGE STREET TO CREATE A SCHEME COMPRISING 8 APARTMENTS

1.0 BACKGROUND

Regency Chambers, 20 Bridge Street, is a grade II listed building located near Newport City Centre, constructed around 1870. The building is characterised by its Italianate design of stucco with rusticated quoins and channelled ground floor. Second floor sees a bracketed cornice with 5 camber-headed windows. First floor's 5 windows have bracketed pediments, with the central having engaged columns. On the ground floor, the central recessed entrance is flanked by paired pilasters, with two round arched windows either side with keystones breaking up into an entablature with dentil cornice. The rear of the property sees a variety of original sash windows and modern openings on a rendered elevation.

Internally, the plan form is typical of an Italianate building, focusing on symmetry, large spaces, intricate detailing, and harmonious proportions. There is a large central staircase which spans the three storeys and is a focal point of the building's interior. A lot of the spaces have historic and ornate cornicing, picture rails and skirting, most openings have their original architraves.

A site visit was conducted on the 2nd April 2025 to assess the proposals within the applications.

2.0 CONSIDERATIONS

The applications propose a variety of internal and external alterations to bring the building into a residential use. Being previously used as office space, some modern additions are evident including light stud walls, dropped ceilings and contemporary lighting. Whilst the stud walls have slightly altered the historic plan form of the building, it remains easily readable and could be restored without causing damage to historic fabric. A lot of historic fabric and detailing remain within the large spaces, and original openings and hallways have been well preserved. Externally, the front elevation would see no alterations other than repairs. To the rear, the application proposes some fenestration alterations, removal of existing fire escape and the addition of courtyards. There are several concerns with the applications surrounding the proposed plans, the lack of information and the assessments within the Heritage Impact Assessment, which I will address.

Starting with the Heritage Impact Assessment, I do not agree with some of the assertions within the document, and it does not fully assess the impact that these proposals would have on the listed building. It does not go into the depth of detail that I would be expecting on for a building of this scale, particularly one that has significant features and original plan form. I disagree that the buildings significance is mostly aesthetic and its contribution to the street scene – what about its historical value or its evidential value seen in the ornate detailing, symmetrical plan and construction methods internally? It is difficult to agree that there would be 'no loss' of fabric when sections of wall are proposed to be removed, and original doorways would be blocked up. I also note that Cadw's listing description is not a complete inventory of what is listed or of higher significance: it is principally intended to aid identification. I would advise the applicant reaches out to a Heritage Consultant for this project.

Looking at basement level proposals, the applicant advised on site that a structural survey had not been undertaken. This was concerning due to the level of wall removal that is proposed for the basement to make it more open plan. Thicker walls, which could potentially be load bearing, are proposed to be removed. The plans do not indicate how this would be done; specifically, what structural support beams/lintels would be installed to allow for larger openings. I'm unsure how this can be proposed as it may not be structurally possible. I am not comfortable agreeing to this without the assurance of a report (ideally from a contractor with

CARE accreditation). The extent of wall removal is significant particularly between the proposed living, bedroom and office areas. Whilst the doors on this level are not as ornate as those above, it seems odd to remove doors to then place back in the same location without reasoning – why can't the existing door or architrave be reused? I would have no concerns to the creation of new doors to a patio area. Given there are currently no bathrooms and kitchens within the basement, would additional service runs have to be installed? How would this work with the existing floor and stone walls?

At ground floor level, the main internal entrance way has been somewhat altered with the addition of a modern glazed infill wall to form a porch, and the creation of large openings to both side rooms to make one large space. The ground floor is characterised by its symmetrical plan form and the staircase forms a central focal point to the space. Most openings are in their original locations with original architraves. Some doors have been replaced and some removed altogether. In my opinion, the proposed plan does not utilise the historic plan form sufficiently. Original and perfectly useable doorways would be blocked up, with new ones created a few feet away. Some doors would seemingly be removed and then reinstalled to open in another direction. It is not clear whether this would reuse the existing doors or whether it would be a replacement. If using the existing doors, this could impact door furniture and require additional fixings. A new stud-walled corridor would project into each of the proposed living rooms of units 3 and 4, which disrupts the openness and historically large spaces within the building. I do not see why this is necessary. I would also highlight that a lot of the wall finishes have been stripped to expose the brick, therefore it would be useful to understand what would be done here.

Similar concerns arise when assessing the first-floor proposals. In the existing hallway at the top of the stairs, there is a central doorway that sits under a 9 panelled glazed arch, and then two doorways that enter the side rooms. The proposed plans show that all of these historic elements would be infilled with no justification why or how. In addition, two additional entrances would be formed either side of the archway to act as the entrances into the two flats. This feels extremely unnecessary and does not take the historic layout into account whatsoever. I would strongly advise the existing openings are utilised. As per the above, the application needs to note whether existing doors are being re-used given some seem to open opposing ways to the existing. I have no concerns with removal of existing modern partitions and improving layout of the space providing any architectural features, such as skirting, picture rails and cornicing are preserved. I note within these front rooms, a modern dropped ceiling with lighting has been added at some point, and it would be useful to know whether cornicing above this remains and whether the dropped ceiling would be retained.

At second floor level, some interventions have been made in the past including blocking off the staircase from the hallway. Originally, this would have been open, and I do believe it a good opportunity to restore the building's historic plan rather than infilling with a bathroom and storage cupboards. There are similar concerns to the above with the proposals, such as some historic openings would be blocked up and existing doors being turned to open the other way. There is no justification or reasoning for this and should be something the HIA addresses.

Proposed external alterations mostly relate to fenestration. The drawings note that all windows would be repainted and made good if required, however from visiting the site, substantially more work is required than this. Some windows are missing and boarded up and one has an air condition unit punched through it. These details are missing from the application. We would therefore need to see details of new window units, and ideally a repairs statement for windows that may be missing glazing or some timber bars. Other works include the removal of the fire escape, however as discussed on site, it's advisable to discuss this with building control. I note that there would be an increase in bathrooms and kitchens, which may require additional external drainage pipes for this demand; this needs to be addressed. There are a number of elements on the rear such as a flue and CCTV cameras that likely do not have permission. If these are now redundant fixings I would advise removal. If CCTV is required, this needs to form part of the application.

Other elements to consider and missing from the applications include details of:

- Insulation
- Drainage
- Ventilation
- Sprinkler system (mentioned on site)

3.0 CONCLUSION

Overall, the application lacks significant detail, documents and justification. I do not believe appropriate consideration to the historic and architectural interest of the building has been taken. The proposals attempt to make the building work around the plans, rather than designing residential units around the existing, historic

plan form and utilise the important features that remain. Therefore, I cannot support the application as it fails to remain in accordance with section 96 of the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2023, and I would therefore recommend refusal. I strongly advise pre-application is sought so the proposals can be discussed in more detail prior to a full application being submitted.

Date: 10/04/2025

Signed: Laura Smith