

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL  
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE**

**13th July 2023**

Application No:	SMD/2023/0153	
Location	Biddulph Town Hall, High Street, Biddulph, ST8 6AR	
Proposal	Alterations to the Town Hall Square in front of the Town Hall	
Applicant	Mrs Haydon - Biddulph Town Council	
Agent	Beverley Pool, bpArchitecture Ltd, 93 High St, Biddulph, ST8 6AB	
Parish/ward	Biddulph	Date registered: 14 <sup>th</sup> April 2023
If you have a question about this report please contact: Benjamin Hurst tel: 07738506367 <a href="mailto:benjamin.hurst@staffs Moorlands.gov.uk">benjamin.hurst@staffs Moorlands.gov.uk</a>		

## **REFERRAL**

The application is before committee because the premises is owned by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and leased to Biddulph Town Council.

### **1. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION**

<b>APPROVAL</b>
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### **2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS**

2.1 Biddulph Town Hall is an imposing example of 1960s community architecture, central to the town and dominant on the high street. The building's main entrance is set back from the highway behind a brick paved pedestrian area and wide access steps. The glazed main entrance door sits beneath a striking cantilevered first floor elevational projection.

2.2 To the side of the paved steps and main entrance there is lawned garden with a privet hedge and floral borders. The garden fronts the part of the building's elevation that is more functional and simple in form. The garden is enclosed to the front by a low boundary brick wall that is topped by decorative railings. A large mining wheel stands in the middle of the garden as an iconic monument to the town's heritage.

### **3. THE APPLICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL**

3.1 The proposal is to essentially remove the boundary wall to the edge of the footway and all of the lawned garden behind. The whole of this area would be hard landscaped with brick paviours to create an open square. The Scheme has been developed by the Town Council's Town Square committee with their appointed

architect as part of Biddulph's Regeneration Plan which aims to improve public spaces within the town.

3.2 Red block paving would match those used on the Town Hall steps, a grey block edging at the perimeter of the brick walling would provide visual contrast. A charcoal grey feature band is to be brought through the red block paved area in three block band width, this represents the profile of the mining seam to North Staffordshire running through Biddulph, which dips and rises. The mining wheel would be relocated to a raised brick built planter to the rear of this area. The edge of the square would be brought forward with a row of removable bollards that would front and narrow the width of the footway. Seat benches, notice boards, bins and one flag pole would be retained and relocated throughout the scheme. A second flag pole would be introduced so that there is one either side of the Town Hall steps. One for the Union flag and one for Biddulph's Flag.

3.3 A number of small ornamental Trees would be introduced into the square, set in Tree planting beds with tree grilles to match the four that exist either side of the entrance steps. As the existing ground falls from the front of the Town Hall to the Highway, this would fall to be maintained when the front wall is removed and the paving introduced. A Slot drain would be introduced along the junction with the red block paving and the paving flags which designate the pavement line, to take surface water away into the existing surface water drainage below. Railings from the front wall would be removed and reused as a side guard to the existing access ramp, behind the mining memorial. Bollards would be placed along the line of the Slot Drain, these would include two bollards that will drop for vehicle access. These will allow pedestrians to move through but prevent others in vehicles accessing the paved area without agreement.

3.4 Low voltage lighting would be set into the paving along the Mining Seam line, around the Tree position, and around the mining wheel to provide suitable feature lighting, these would be switched and timed. There are some plants, plaques and memorial stones in the square that commemorate people related to the Town who have died, these would be relocated within the scheme where disturbed. New brick walling would be constructed in brick with a contrasting paved edge, for those with sight difficulty.

3.5 Details of the application scheme can be viewed at:

<http://publicaccess.staffs Moorlands.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=128617>

#### **4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

Application site

SMD/2010/0215 Single Storey Rear Extension. APPROVED.  
SMD/2015/0702 Alterations of elevations. APPROVED.

## **5. PLANNING POLICIES RELEVANT TO THE DECISION**

5.1 The Development Plan comprises of:

- The Local Plan Development Document (adopted Sep 2020)

Adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan - Sep 2020

5.2 The following Local Plan policies are relevant to the application:-

- SS1 Development Principles
- SS6 Biddulph Town Area Strategy
- TCR1 Development in the Town Centres
- DC1 Design Considerations to protect residential amenity
- DC2 Historic Environment
- DC3 Landscape Character

Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide 2018

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) revised.

## **6. CONSULTATIONS**

### **Public response to consultation**

6.1 Neighbours received notification letters on the 27<sup>th</sup> April. A site notice was posted on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023, the period of consultation expired on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

There has been no response to the public consultation.

### **Ramblers Association**

6.2 No objection, does not appear to affect a public right of way.

### **Biddulph Town Council**

6.3 No comment.

### **SMDC Asset Management Team**

6.4 No Objection. SMDC are the Landlord of the Biddulph Town Hall. A lease is granted to the Biddulph Town Council for a term of 25 years with the lease expiring on 9 August 2045.

- The works to the front of Biddulph Town Hall largely fall within the demise of the lease granted.

- There is a strip of land between the highways and the demised area to Biddulph Town Council which remains in the ownership of SMDC and outside of the demised area. Subject to approval via the Scheme of Delegations it is recommended that this strip of land be let to Biddulph Town Council, on terms to be agreed.
- Under the terms of the existing lease 4(f), non-structural alterations are permitted, with Landlords consent, not to be unreasonably withheld or delayed. Alterations to be documented by way of licence to alter. Structural alteration are prohibited.
- Subject to approval via the Scheme of Delegations and further, subject to completion of a licence to alter with Biddulph Town Council (the tenant), the Assets Team intend to recommend the alterations are permitted, subject to all statutory consents being obtained and further terms and conditions, to be set out in the licence.

### **County Highway Authority**

6.5 No objection. Highway land appears to be a relatively narrow strip behind the layby and no works would take place within the adopted highway. Proposal involves bollards approx. 2m from the back of the layby. Technically 2m footway but partially on private land (as currently). Behind the bollards there would still be hard surface, so pedestrians will be able to pass between the bollards. Proposed bollards are on the same line as the existing bollards to the west of the proposed alterations. The slot drain will be on private land. The only practical difference is the introduction of the bollards. These will be on private land and pedestrians will be able to pass between them to the extended public square beyond.

Existing 'One way' sign is not shown on the drawings. This response is based on this existing sign remaining in place, unaffected by the proposals.

Existing surfacing to the existing footway appears unaffected. Note 18 on drawings 22-034 AS(0)03 P1 states 'Tarmac Retained'. Existing surface is slabs, but it is taken that the existing surfacing is to be retained. No works appear to be proposed with the adopted highway.

### **Staffordshire County Council Rights of Way Team**

6.6 The Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way for Staffordshire shows no public rights of way crossing the application site. Staffordshire County Council has not received any application to add to or modify the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way in that vicinity. The possibility of the existence of a currently unrecognised public right of way, makes it advisable that the applicant pursue further enquiries and seek legal advice regarding any visible route affecting the land, or the apparent exercise of a right of way by members of the public.

## **7. OFFICER COMMENT AND PLANNING BALANCE**

### **Principle of Development**

7.1 In the centre of Biddulph, Local Plan town area strategy SS6 applies. The strategy requires the Council and its partners to enhance the role of Biddulph as a significant service centre and market town and support its regeneration, to be achieved by improving the image and identity of Biddulph and strengthen its role as a visitor destination by, inter alia, regenerating and improving the streetscape of the town centre; upgrading the general environment of the town through landscaping and the improvement and creation of green spaces; and, protecting and enhancing the setting and historic character of the town, including heritage assets.

7.2 Additionally, Local Plan Policy TCR1 provides supplementary support for development and proposals in the town centre that protects and enhances the vitality and viability of the town centre by focusing and promoting retailing as well as other key town centre uses such as leisure and cultural facilities; enhances and regenerates the shopping and town centre environment and promotes tourism potential; enhances local distinctiveness by supporting proposals which help retain, attract or expand the provision of independent retailers in the town centre including niche markets. The policy sets out design principles to improve and enhance the distinctive heritage of the town centre including high quality public spaces as well as minimising the risk of crime and considering the needs of disabled people.

7.3 To be considered against that policy context, the application explains how the scheme has been developed by the Town Council's Town Square committee with their architects and in consultation with the Biddulph in Bloom Team. The scheme is described as being part of Biddulph's regeneration plan which, the application explains, has been designed to deliver the following benefits:

- The area to the front of the Town Hall would become a more usable Community Space;
- Regular Town Council events and monthly markets held in the High Steet and to the front of the Town Hall currently spill out into the street or require road closures. Opening the space in front of the Town Hall to a paved square would provide more space for the events;
- The Mining Wheel monument would be raised up to a platform so that it is more visible and prominent, it would be accompanied by a story board recounting Biddulph's mining past and memorial brick slips set in the walls of the brick planter would commemorate miners that lost their lives;
- Brick built planter would be planted and tended to by Biddulph in Bloom, the raised beds would improve prominence in front of the Town Hall (Biddulph prides itself on being well placed in the Annual Heart of England in Bloom events);
- Additional and relocated benches to the perimeter of the square would increase access and function of the space assisting visitor and community enjoyment of the town centre; and

- The town's Christmas Tree could be erected into plug in facilities provided centrally within the space. The Tree can continue to take the centre of the square but would be more accessible.

7.4 It is clear that the identified benefits of the proposal would align directly with the aims and purposes of the Local Plan strategy and policy for Biddulph and its town centre (SS6 and TCR1). The application presents a project to regenerate the town and strengthen its identity and role as a visitor destination with protection, sensitivity and enhancement for the town's heritage. By improving accessibility to and the function of the town centre's events and markets, the project would promote the vitality and viability of the town centre through improved retail, leisure and cultural experience. In all of these respects there would be strong and obvious compliance with Local Plan policies SS6 and TC1.

### **Impact on Character and Appearance of the Area**

7.5 The impact and change to the character and appearance of the area would not be insignificant, after all, a pleasant lawned garden to the front of the town hall would be removed and hard landscaped with brick paving making for, overall, a more urban environment. The proposal however, offers redeeming elements to counter this effect. The application argues that with the introduction of exposed and raised areas of planting within built planters, areas of floral and decorative planting would become more prominent and apparent in a way that would allow them to be experienced and enjoyed by more visitors within the realm. The scheme would also introduce additional ornamental trees into the space. Within the pattern of paving decorative patterns would create detailing and contrast, cleverly representing the coal seam that runs through North Staffordshire. In all these respects there would be well considered design that responds well to the existing environment and its heritage, with sensitivity to local distinctiveness and compliance with the Local Plan's design policy DC1 and the Council's Design Guide.

### **Planning Balance and Conclusion**

7.6 Overall the well-considered project and proposal would deliver on and comply with the key aims and objectives of Local Plan policy and strategy for Biddulph and its town centre. The benefits in these regards must be attributed significant weight and they would outweigh any reservation that may surround impacts and outcomes on the character and appearance of the area and environment. There would be no conflict with the policies of the Development Plan or the NPPF.

## **8. RECOMMENDATION**

**A. That planning permission be APPROVED for the Town Hall alterations, subject to the following condition(s):**

**1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.**

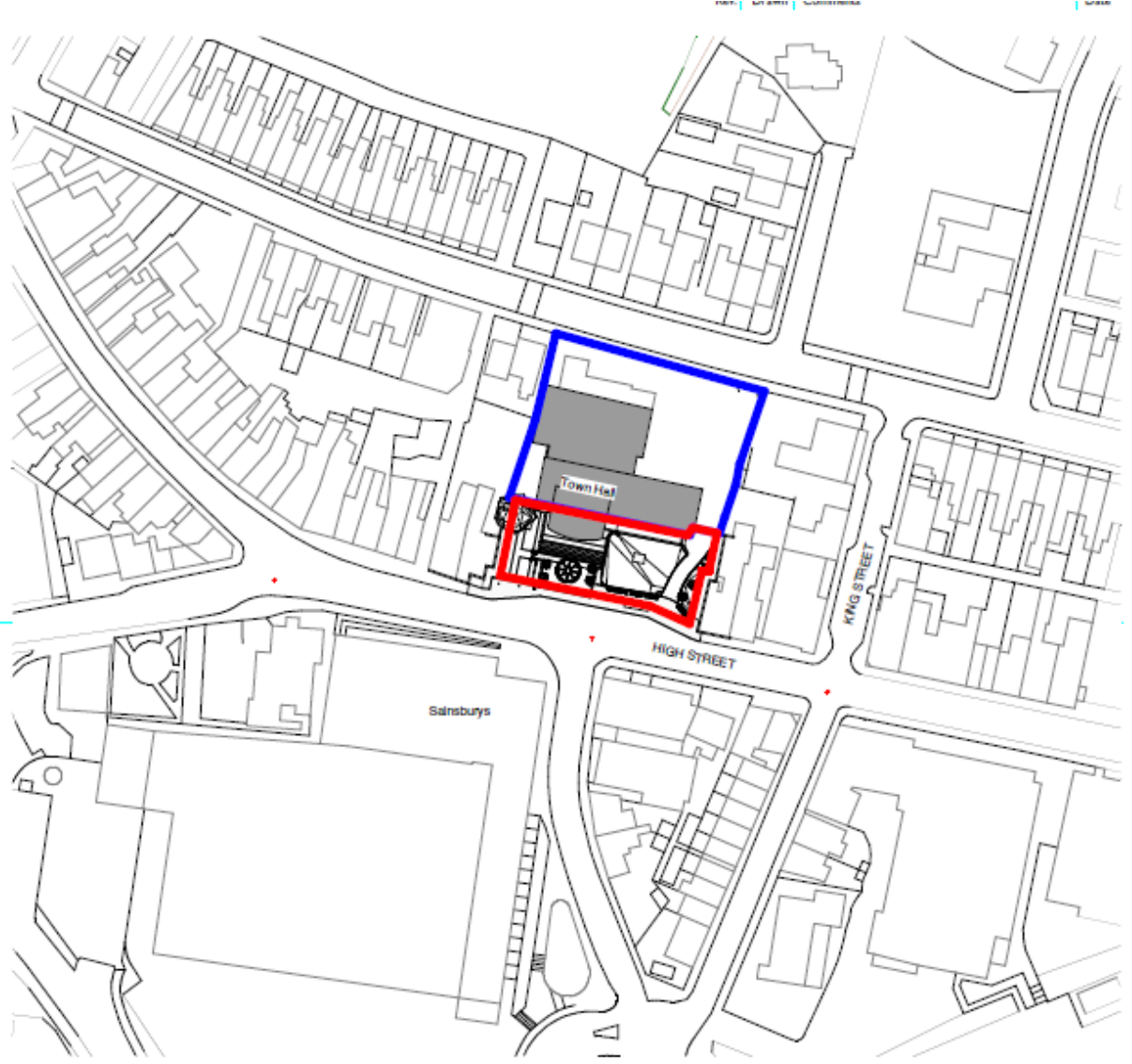
**Reason:- To comply with Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act**

**1990 (As Amended)**

**2. The development hereby permitted and described above shall only be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans that were submitted with the application numbered 22-034\_AL(0)02\_P1; 22-034\_AL(0)04\_P3 - Proposed Demolition Plan; 22-034\_AL(0)06\_P3 - General Arrangement Plan; 22-034\_AL(0)09\_P3 - Site Sections Elevations; 22-034\_AL(0)10\_P3 - Site Setting Out Plan; 22-034\_AS(0)01 - Site Location Plan 22-034-AS(0)03\_P1 - Site Block Plan; and 22-034\_AS(0)07\_P1 - Lighting Assessment Plan.**

**Reason:- For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.**

**B. In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions/informatives/planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Head of Development Services has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Planning Applications Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.**



**Site Location Plan**  
1 : 1250