



STATEMENT TO SUPPORT LAWFUL DEVELOPMENT CERTIFICATE APPLICATION

NEW ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE, CONTINUED USE AS COMMUNITY ROOM AND INSTALLATION OF GLAZED SCREEN WITH DOORS.

MECHANICS INSTITUTE, MARKET STREET, WHALEY BRIDGE SK23 7AA

1866.Db.01

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General Overview

The works proposed are to allow wheelchair access throughout the building. The building is split level, and the only place for a lift to access all levels is towards the rear of the building where all levels can be reached. Access into the building for wheelchairs at the front has been investigated and is not feasible, but it is possible from a new side entrance.

The majority of the works are internal and include provision of a new platform lift to access all levels of the building, accessible wcs and some reconfiguring of the plan to allow for the lift.

At the rear of the building is the 'community room' which does not currently connect with the rest of the building. The new lift will be located towards the back of this space and allow access to all levels.

Entrance into the community room is currently via large timber doors within a large arched opening. The proposal is to change this to a glazed screen with double doors and a level threshold.

The reasoning for submitting this Lawful Development Certificate is to ensure in writing that the glazed screen be installed at the new entrance and the room can be used as an entrance / community facility without the need for a planning application. A meeting was had with the Planning Duty Officer and in his opinion, planning approval is not required, however this type of application was suggested in order to give written assurity.

The Building

The Mechanics Institute is the home of Whaley Bridge Town Council and Whaley Bridge library. It was constructed in 1876 and is located in the centre of Whaley Bridge, on the main street within the conservation area.

The building is owned by the Town Council and the Mechanics Institute Charity runs and operates the building. The library in the basement is rented by DCC.

'Mechanics Institutes were a product of the Industrial Revolution which had created a demand for a workforce to manage its machinery, to tend, repair and improve the complex mechanisation. They provided education for the working man through lending libraries, lecture theatres and class rooms and often included in the mix of courses and technical material, wider opportunities for learning and

betterment. This was a successful concept and by mid century there were several hundred mechanic's institutes. A significant number were purpose built, showing an investment in the nations workforce and the priority given to the initiative.' From Historic England website information about the publication 'Introduction to Heritage Assets; Mechanics Institutes'.

The building was constructed as a Mechanics Institute and Public Hall and opened in 1876. The money for its construction was raised by public subscription as well as the Jodrell Estate. Prior to its opening, the High Peak News in July 187 described ' *The new hall is to be 30 feet by 56 feet. On the ground floor there will be a large reading room, library and classroom and in the lower room a billiard table is to be placed*'. It is thought that the room at the back we are proposing to use as the accessible entrance, was originally a coach house as part of the building.

In an appeal for help to clear the mortgage on the building in 1922, the building was described: *'The object was to provide a place for the young men of the district where they might obtain social intercourse, education and recreation. The interior, which is well furnished throughout, contains a large reading room, which is provided with a good selection of papers, periodicals, magazines, and library containing a large selection of books which are obtainable on application to the librarian; also a large Hall where lectures, concerts etc are given from time to time; a large room containing two full sized billiard tables; chess, draughts, dominoes etc; rooms for meetings etc, which are largely used by the public for various purposes. The institute is non political, unsectarian, and free from intoxicating liquors. It is the centre of village life, and is used as a place of assembly at all public demonstrations etc. It will therefore be seen from the foregoing that apart from its public usefulness, the Institute is endeavouring to create a higher moral standard of life among its members, which in fact should appeal to the community and especially those interested in social welfare'*.

The Institutes started from around the 1820s and continued into the years preceding the First World War. Many, like the one in Whaley Bridge, found compatible uses after the adult learning was no longer required. The Mechanics Institute was and still is a charity. The building is run by the Mechanics Institute charity and is held on charitable trust by the Town Council, the owner. It still houses a library and has a reading room, meeting room and large hall. Clearly, its roots have always been a building for the community.

The internal layout has changed over the years, particularly at the rear of the building and the stairs. The current toilets are located on an additional mezzanine level which utilised the tall space in the original coach house, now the proposed community room.



The building has an ashlar stone frontage with balcony, clock and flagpole. It is rectangular in footprint with a deep plan going back from the frontage. Access to the library at basement level is down the left hand side of the building, and separate from the rest.

The other elevations have split faced coursed stone as well as stone detailing around openings.



Access to the community room is under the overhang of no.29 Market Street to the yard behind. The community room door cannot be seen from the road.

There route from road to the new accessible entrance will have some signage and will generally be tidied and improved to ensure a safe route. Any proposals to the access will be agreed with the adjacent owners.



The existing door is vertically timber boarded and split into 2 folding doors with a fixed panel above.

Users of the room either have to have the light on or leave the doors open if they want any natural light.

Internally, the space has a low ceiling where the mezzanine level toilets have been located above. The right hand side photograph shows the modern concrete floor above drops down into the space. Where the timber doors open, it is full height.

We understand that this space had been unused for many years and was under separate ownership. Since it was purchased, it has been used as a room for hire, as a base for the well dressers in summer, where to learn wood carving, and is Santas Grotto as part of the Whaley Bridge Christmas celebrations.

The Mechanics Institute is a community building. It has a meeting room which is used for Town Council meetings, coffee mornings, base for Citizens Advice etc, a reading room, Town Clerk office and a large hall at the first floor with a kitchen which can be hired for parties as well as fitness classes etc. This would come under planning Use Class F2 or F1. The library space leased by DCC would be F1. There is no planning history online for the building.

The proposals

Use of the room as entrance and community facility;

- The room will become a new, accessible side entrance to the building as well as being upgraded to become a more usable space for hire; with insulation, heating and daylight.
- It has been a vacant (and underused) room within an existing community building which is tied up in functionality with the building – no change of use.

Glazed screen;

- There is no alteration to the structural opening and stonework detailing.
- There are no building operations, structural alterations, rebuilding or extensions.
- The change doesn't materially affect the external appearance of the building; the doorway is not visible from the road and has no impact on the Conservation Area. There is no Article 4.
- The glazed screen is set back in the opening the same as existing, and will retain a solid timber element at the top of the arch as existing. The work is minor

Conclusion

The proposals will significantly improve the usability of the building for those less able and in wheelchairs. The change to the external appearance is small, yet will make a big difference. The space is within a community building and will now have access through to the rest of the building and be made more practical and useful as a community space.