

PLANNING RESEARCH IN RELATION TO M23369 & M24008

The original planning application reference M23369 entitled Christian Meeting Room, Vehicular Access and Associated Car Parking and Sewage Treatment Plant.

Application M24008 which was for Removal of Condition 9 and was for the closure of the existing access appended to planning permission M23369 and this was approved on 8 June 1994.

M23369 was submitted on 11 May 1993, validated on 12 May 1993 and approved at committee on 7 September 1993.

The applicant was the Trustees of the Welshpool Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses but the landowner was Freda Elizabeth Emberton.

The application was granted in full with the following conditions:

1. 5 years.
2. Building to be used only in connection with Public Worship or Religious Instruction and no other purposes including D1.
3. Materials.
4. Roof materials.
5. Landscaping proposal.
6. Replacement of landscaping.
7. New access.
8. Close up existing access.
9. Perpetual visibility.
10. Sewage treatment plant.

There is a Section 106 in relation to visibility and signage.

Much play around the building being used solely as a place of worship and not for social activities during unsocial hours. This is a non residential institution under use class D1.

The applicant claims that application reference M13624 and M14491 for a Country Club is extant given that the road works have been started. There is no documentary evidence of a Certificate of Lawfulness to back this up and it seems to be accepted without challenge by the Local Authority.

Groespluan is a rural settlement as far as the Local Plan is concerned.

Planning officers have concerns regarding the visual impact, the impact on the settlement, traffic and access.

Applicant makes initial contact with the Local Authority on 05 November 1992 submitting illustrative schemes. The applicant makes the point that "the building is located in a hollow against rising land and close to the existing settlement so that it forms part of the settlement. Every effort will be made to integrate the building into the existing landscape and use will be made of the approved access".

The design of the building shall be "based on the designs of threshing barns".

Comment is made that there it is not planned to be extensive 'over planting' in the area.

Continued play on the fact that this is D1 non residential institution with sessional use. It is to be used only as a place of worship and not for coffee mornings, bazaars or social amateur dramatics. It is not to be used during 'unsocial hours' but this is not defined anywhere.

Note on file that the consent for the new access associated with M13624 and M14491 has been implemented but not proven.

Strongly worded exchange of letters between the Head of Planning Mike Backhouse and objectors at the time. He notes that his officers have recommended the scheme for refusal.

A petition against the application signed by members of the community was submitted but this was *after* planning had been approved at committee.

After the planning had been approved it was apparent that while Mrs Emberton owned the access (which was to be stopped up to make way for the new access) there was a right of way in favour of a third party and notice had not been served upon said third party. Consequently that third party decided that they did not want the access closed up and so a new application for the removal of Condition 8 was made. This was granted approval as well.

Highlights from the report to the committee are as follows.

Open rising grazing land which is readily visible, building designed to resemble a barn, single storey 7.7 metres to the ridge and 350 m², new access proposed, 35 vehicle car park alongside an existing bungalow, no objections from highways, new sewage treatment plant, building set into a sloping site and would be substantially landscaped and detailed to show earth mounding and stabilised grassed parking areas, this shall be used solely as a place of worship and not for social activities or during unsociable hours.

Section 106 attached to improve junction to the main road.

Welshpool Town Council support and no objections from neither NRA nor Environmental Health.

At the time of the committee there were 3 objections and these were based on traffic; changing character of area; loss of light and reuse; large and obtrusive building; foul water issues.

Note that after the committee there was a petition of over 30 names against the development.

Letter from MP Alex Carlile on file stating that 'there is a strong congregation from the Welshpool and Llanfair area.'

During the planning officer report it was noted that the building of a new church in the countryside or small settlement 'is a rare proposal and there are no detailed planning policies that exist to deal with this particular type of development. There is a possibility that we could limit the use of the building to just a place of worship and not as a generic D1 usage.' Planning officers have concerns about the high visual impact of the development but this could be outweighed by highways improvements. Nevertheless the planning officers still recommend refusal on the grounds of this is a large building in a rural setting.

Applicant and agent used an architectural model to show to committee the intention on the site. This seems to work very well.

Further letter from MP Alex Carlile on file confirming that there is a strong congregation in the area and 'the numbers rival most other churches in the area.' The word church is used instead of a Christian meeting room throughout the application by the agent.

Strong statement of intent from the applicant- see images attached.

Applicant makes play of the fact that there is no local guidance on church buildings whereas there is national guidance and the Local Authority need to make land available for church buildings.

Scheme gets presented to committee on 11 August 1993 and is deferred for a site visit. At the site visit 8 members against and 1 abstention. Scheme is presented again to committee 3 weeks later on this basis, together with officer recommendation for refusal, but surprisingly, is then approved. No records of committee meeting on file to explain this turn- around.