



## COMMITTEE REPORT

**Item Number:**

**Ward:** Mannington and Western

**Application Number:** S/19/0946

**Parish:** Central Swindon North

**Proposal:** Change of use of Former Telephone Exchange (Sui Generis) to 7 Apartments (Class C3) and associated works.

**Site Location:** Former Telephone Exchange, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon.

**Case Officer:** Ms P Moore

**Agent:**

Highworth Homes Ltd

Hampton Lodge

Highworth

Swindon

SN6 7RL

**Applicant:**

Ian Sullivan

Ian Sullivan Architecture Ltd

101 Victoria Road

Swindon

SN1 3BD

### Officer's Report

#### Background

This is a full application for the conversion of the existing former telephone exchange into seven apartments. The three Ward Members have expressed concerns about the application and requested the application be considered by the committee due to concerns surrounding the lack parking provision.

#### Recommendation

1. That planning permission is GRANTED subject to conditions

#### Site and surroundings

2. The existing building dates from the mid 20th Century and was a former telephone exchange for the Great Western Railways site. The building is typical of its time and takes a simple functional and industrial form and appearance. It is

constructed of a mock dressed stone with a slate roof with a rectangular footprint and pitched and gabled roof covered in slate. The building is reasonably large and has 3 bays of Crittall-style metal framed windows to the gables and 6 bays of Crittall windows to the sides. An external metal staircase is positioned on the north-west elevation which gains access to the first floor.

3. The building is located within the Railway Works Conservation Area, and is opposite to and forms part of the setting to the Railway Village Conservation Area. The site is adjacent to and part of the group of railway buildings which form a collective, such as being adjacent to the Swindon Works Main Office (Grade GII) opposite the carriage works and trimming Shop (both Grade II listed).
4. Cardean House (residential apartments) lie to the west of the site, the Historic England Record Office (grade II listed) is to the north with the railway and tunnel to the south and east respectively.

### **The Proposal**

5. The former telephone exchange building is to be retained and converted into seven apartments with associated cycle and bin storage.

### **Representations**

6. Neighbours : 2 comments have been received, one from the occupier of one of the flats at Cardean House, opposite the site, and one from Historic England as occupier of The Engine House. Comment on potential for overlooking and loss of privacy; concern about the proposed works and need to control hours of working and mitigation of noise and dust during business hours; need assurance that any asbestos is properly dealt with; need to ensure that access to other buildings will not be affected during construction; how will emergency services and delivery vans get access to the building
7. Parish Council – object due to lack of parking and high number of flats for a small space.
8. Conservation Officer: Whilst the principle of the conversion to residential is appropriate, the proposed external alterations are quite poor and fail to consider the surrounding context and the nature of the existing site. Amendments are required in order to be appropriate from a historic environment perspective. Revised plans have addressed some of the concerns, but still has reservations relating to the external staircase.
9. Highways No objection subject to conditions
10. Environmental Health – Noise: No objection subject to conditions.
11. Network Rail – No objection in principle, but seeks assurance that no part of the development adversely impacts the safety, operation and integrity of the

operational railway. The applicant will need to engage with Network Rail to agree the interface between the development and Network Rail before works commence. The developer should enter into a Basic Asset Protection Agreement. Surface water must not discharge onto Network Rail land or into their infrastructure. Foul drainage should be separate to Network Rail's drainage.

### **Planning Considerations**

12. The main issues for consideration in determining this application are

- Principle of development
- Impact on the conservation area and listed buildings
- Impact on neighbouring properties
- Highways/parking

### **Relevant Policy**

13. In determining any planning application, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas as set out in sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. In addition the submission must be determined against relevant policy including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012) and Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 (SBLP).

14. Other Policy/ Guidance:

- Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment: English Heritage (2008)
- Historic environment Good Practice Advice Notes 2, and 3
- Railway Village Conservation Area Appraisal 2006;
- Railway Works Conservation Area Appraisal 2006.

15. The SBLP 2026 was formally adopted on 26 March 2015. The key policies relevant to this application are:

- Policy SD1: Sustainable Development Principles
- Policy SD2: The Sustainable Development Strategy
- Policy EC2: Employment Land and Premises
- Policy DE1: High Quality Design
- Policy DE2: Sustainable Construction
- Policy EN10: Historic Environment & Heritage Assets
- Policy TR2: Transport and Development
- Policy EN4: Biodiversity and Geodiversity

### **Principle of development**

16. The site lies within the main built area of Swindon and is accessible to local facilities. Consequently there is no in principle objection to development, provided that it accords with the adopted policies of the development plan. Special attention has to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of Listed Buildings.

16. To enable provision of sustainable development and support sustainable communities, Local Plan policy SD1 sets out criteria which new development will be expected to comply. Of particular relevance to this application development should: be of high quality design; respect the natural, built and historic environment; contribute to retention of jobs and growth of the local economy and complement Town Centre regeneration; be accessible by walking, cycling and/or public transport; and use land and resources in an efficient and effective way.
17. This site lies close to facilities within Swindon and is close to bus routes. It is considered to be a sustainable location, accessible by various means of transport.

### **Heritage Assets**

18. The main historic environment considerations include the effect of the proposed development upon the conservation areas character and appearance and the effect upon the setting of heritage assets (listed buildings and conservation area).
19. The headquarters building of English Heritage/Historic England, opposite the site, is grade II listed. Special attention has been paid to the desirability of preserving the setting of the listed building. The only external works to the existing telephone exchange building is the extension of the staircase. The impact of the alteration to the external staircase is set out below. There is no extension to the building. Because there are no significant changes to the external appearance of the Telephone Exchange building, there would be no material change to the setting of the listed building. The proposed new use would be undertaken wholly within the building. Consequently there will be neutral change to the setting of the listed building, and the setting of the listed building is considered to be preserved.

### **Conservation Area Appraisal**

20. The site lies within the Railway Works Conservation Area. The Railway Works Conservation Area Appraisal states “the conservation area's special interest is twofold. First, the area's considerable historic importance as the site of a major nineteenth century industrial complex and its association with the early development of Britain's railways and, in particular, with the Great Western Railway Company; secondly, the architectural and historic interest of the area's surviving industrial and administrative buildings which display innovative forms of construction and exemplify the style of industrial building typical of its period (c.1840-1920).”
21. With regard to the character and appearance of the conservation area, the conservation area appraisal comments: “Typically, buildings are simple in form with a basic rectangular floor plan and pitched roof. Facades are generally flat and plain without significant projection or recess except for arched openings between vertical columns of brick or stone. Changes in roof level are uncommon

- the main examples arising from the meeting of buildings from different periods.”  
The design of the telephone exchange building reflects this character.

Impact of proposed development on character and appearance of Conservation Area

22. Paragraph 127 of the NPPF, Policy DE1 and EN10 of the Local Plan, requires that when looking to undertake development, the surrounding context, setting, and its character must be carefully considered, together with how the works affect the character and appearance of the surrounding heritage assets and how the works reinforce local character and distinctiveness.

23. The existing building is a modern installation to the historic site of Swindon's Railway Village where a number of historic and listed buildings exist. Whilst it might be of a functional design, the design of the subject site is effective in allowing the presence of the more historic buildings as part of the railway site dominate. Despite this, the building is located within a prominent location at the end of a well-used walkway, so alterations to the building have the ability to be quite prominent and cause harm to the significance of the sensitive historic environment surrounding.

24. Whilst the use in principle of the building is supported as it assists in facilitating maintenance and upkeep of the building, when the application was first submitted the Conservation Officer considered that further details were required, particularly with regard to replacement windows, reduction in the number of rooflights. The Conservation Officer expressed concerns at the loss of the chimney and the replacement of the external staircase with an extended staircase. With regard to the external staircase the comment was made that whilst the external staircase currently has a poor appearance and whilst its' like-for-like replacement might be appropriate, the opportunity should be taken to incorporate this inside the building.

25. With regard to the windows, the existing windows are metal Crittal windows that are single glazed. To obtain necessary noise insulation for the residential use double glazed units would be required. Whilst the use of double glazing may be appropriate, the proposed units need to be carefully selected as double glazing can thicken the appearance of windows, which together with the typical silver spacer between the panels, can make the windows look quite bulky. Any replacement windows should ideally be aluminium with double glazing being of a slimline variety with the glazing panels no thicker than 14mm. Glazing should be mounted to the glazing bars, and not of an arrangement where the glazing bars are internal to the glazing. Details of windows can be subject of a condition.

26. The revised plans show a significant reduction in the number of rooflights and retention of the chimney.

27. The revised plans retains the external staircase. The Conservation Officer feels that the staircase should be internalised as the external staircase is considered to

cause less than substantial harm to the conservation area. However, paragraph 196 of the NPPF requires that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this case the building is considered to contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The character is railway industrial. As such it is considered that an external staircase is not an inappropriate feature. Furthermore the reuse of the building as residential provides significant public benefit, by providing residential units and by providing the building with an economic use. Consequently in this case it is considered that the benefits of the proposed reuse of the building outweigh any harm caused.

28. Special regard has been had to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation areas. The revised scheme is considered to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area, and complies with policy EN10 of the Local Plan and the NPPF.

### Design

29. From an urban design perspective any proposal needs to address Policy DE1 of the Swindon Local Plan 2026 in light of the principles of Context & Character, Layout, Form, Function, Amenity & Quality of the Public Realm, it also needs to demonstrate high quality design as required in Local Plan policy SD1.
30. In considering applications for development environment Paragraph 127 of the NPPF, Policy DE1 and EN10 of the Local Plan set out criteria against which proposals should be assessed. In particular the building's setting, its character and particularly how the works affect the character and appearance of the surrounding heritage assets and how the works reinforce 'local distinctiveness.'
31. The existing building has a rectangular footprint and simple pitched roof. The proposed conversion includes the following changes:

#### South west elevation (facing Cardean House)

Ground floor window blocked up

First floor windows to be obscured glazed. These serve a bathroom, kitchen/dining area and bedroom, the bedroom and kitchen/dining area are dual aspect)

Second floor window to be blocked internally, with glazing to retain window appearance

#### South east elevation – addition of four rooflights

#### North west elevation (facing Historic England Record Office)

Addition of two rooflights

Rearrangement of doors and windows at first floor level

Replacement of existing external stair with external stair that wraps around north west and south west elevation

#### North east elevation – change to existing door.

These changes to the appearance of the building are minor and they do not materially or adversely harm or affect the character of the building the Conservation Area or the setting of any listed building.

### **Residential Amenity**

32. There considerations relevant to residential amenity, include the impact of the development on occupiers of existing properties, and the amenities of occupiers of the proposed accommodation.
33. The plans have been revised to show obscure glazing to the existing first floor windows in the south west elevation, and the internal blocking of the window at second floor. This will ensure no overlooking or loss of privacy to occupiers of the apartments at Cardean House. There are no other residential properties adjacent to the site.
34. Concern has been expressed about whether seven flats is an overdevelopment of the building. An indication as to whether the proposal is overdevelopment is whether the proposed flats meet nationally described space standards (NDSS). Gross internal floor areas have been calculated. The table below shows the intended occupancy for each unit the NDSS and the actual floorspace.

unit	Bed/person	NDSS (sq m)	actual
1	1b/2p	50	49
2	1b/2p	50	54
3	1b/2p	50	53
4	1b/1p	39	42
5	2b/3p	61	70
6	1b/2p	50	56
7	1b/2p	50	75

35. From the table it is evident that all the flats exceed the NDSS. It is considered that the proposed development would not have an unacceptable impact on the living conditions of future occupiers.
36. The site is immediately adjacent to the railway. A noise survey has been submitted with the application. The Environmental Health Officer considers that the occupiers would not be subject to unacceptable noise levels. Conditions are proposed to ensure that the appropriate noise limits are met.

### **Highways**

37. Local residents, the parish council and ward members have expressed concern about the lack of access and parking provision on site. With regard to adopted car parking standards the site lies within sector 2, where parking is required on site. However the southern boundary of the application site is the boundary with sector 1 (where no on-site parking would be required). The Highways officer

comments that “Although the located of the site is within Sector 2 of SBC’s Parking Standards, the close proximity of the Town Centre and local amenities, including sufficient cycle paths, as shown in Appendix B of the Transport Statement, pedestrian footways, bus stop locations as shown in Appendix C of the Transport Statement, and as the surrounding highways are subject to parking restrictions, the zero car parking proposed for the site is unlikely to cause an issue to the surrounding highway and area.”

38. The site has pedestrian access from Firefly Avenue (private road) and is within close proximity to the railway underpass, which leads into the Town Centre. The nearest bus stops are located on Bristol Street, located south of the underpass, with a further 2 bus stops located on Penzance Drive and Rodbourne Road, which is shown within the Transport Statement 3.6.24.
39. The cycle storage area is located within the basement of the building with a total of 18 spaces, accessed by the pedestrian underpass. The level of provision is acceptable but currently the cycle storage area can only be accessed when the underpass is open, which is not acceptable. A condition is recommended that requires that fully accessible cycle storage provision to be provided before any of the flats are occupied.
40. With regard to car parking, there is no space available within the site to provide parking. However the site is in a highly sustainable location. Furthermore, the existing building is part of the ‘industrial’ heritage and as such it should be retained. However, the use of the building as a telephone exchange is sui generis and almost any alternative use requires planning permission which will trigger a parking requirement to be fully policy compliant. The car parking requirement for the flats proposed is 10 – one space for each 1 bedroom flat, two spaces for the two bedroom flat and two visitor spaces. Office use would have a requirement of 14 spaces. If any alternative use will be unacceptable unless parking space is provided, it is unlikely that a use can be found for the building.

### **Other Issues**

41. Figure 4.1 of the Transport Statement shows the proposed site layout with the refuse storage area to the west of the building, which is proposed to be managed by a private refuse company which will access the site from Firefly Avenue, as stated in ‘Refuse Collection’ 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.
42. As stated above, the use is considered to be acceptable in principle but given the lack of on site or available parking provision, the concerns expressed in the representations are understood. As any new use of the property where non is available would attract objection or is reason, officers have considered the impact and the location and are of the view that the accommodation will be unlikely to be attractive to those persons who require parking close by. Also, officers have considered whether keeping the property empty and to deteriorate with the consequential harm to designated assets, is acceptable. No other uses have



been put forward and officers are of the view that any limited harm resulting from lack of parking is outweighed by the benefits of re-using the building especially as outwardly the re-use would be barely noticeable and would preserve the character and appearance of the area and the setting of the adjacent listed buildings.

43. It is recommended that planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions

#### Conditions

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

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 (1) of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.

2. This approval shall be in respect of the following drawings:

Received 12 August 2019:

14-1-RB rev B Proposed Ground Floor

15-1-RB rev B Proposed First Floor

22-1-RB rev B Proposed Elevations 1 of 2

23-1-RB rev B Proposed Elevations 2 of 2

RB-PL-01 rev A proposed site plan

And the Noise and vibration assessment by ACA Acoustics dated 28 May 2019 received on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019

Reason: To define the scope of the development hereby permitted, in accordance with section 72 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

3. Any alterations to the external appearance of the building shall be undertaken in materials (stone, mortar, slate) to exactly match those on the existing building.

Reason: To ensure that the appearance of the development is satisfactory.

4. Details of windows and doors including method of opening, depth of reveal, glazing bars, type of glazing, materials and finish shall be submitted and approved by the Local Planning Authority in writing prior to their installation. The windows and doors shall be installed in accord with the approved details and thereafter maintained as such.

Reason: To ensure that the appearance of the development is satisfactory.

5. The proposed residential units shall be designed to meet the indoor ambient noise levels contained in British Standard 8233:2014 (or later versions) which currently require:

- Resting 35 dB LAeq,16hour

- Dining 40 dB LAeq,16hour
- Sleeping 30 dB LAeq,8hour
- 45dB LAFmax
- 50 dB LAeq, 16hour in external amenity spaces

Reason: To ensure future occupiers will have adequate residential amenity

6. The development shall not be occupied until details of the extract ventilation and filter system designed to meet the criteria in condition 5 shall be submitted to local planning authority for approval in writing. The extract ventilation and filter system shall be installed in accordance with the approved scheme before the development is brought into use. and shall be maintained in accordance with the approved scheme thereafter, unless modified as a result of the post occupation assessment required by condition 7.

Reason: To ensure future occupiers will have adequate residential amenity.

7. Prior to occupation of the residential units, a pre-occupation validation noise survey shall be conducted in order to demonstrate that the noise mitigation measures installed are effectual in reducing external noise to an acceptable level and a certificate of compliance by an approved acoustic assessor should be submitted to the Local Planning Authority to demonstrate that the standards required under BS 8233:2014 have been achieved. The survey shall demonstrate compliance with the following criteria:

- Resting 35 dB LAeq,16hour
- Dining 40 dB LAeq,16hour
- Sleeping 30 dB LAeq,8hour
- 45dB LAFmax
- 50 dB LAeq,16hour in external amenity spaces

Reason: To ensure future occupiers will have adequate residential amenity.

8. Where the specified internal noise levels in bedrooms and living rooms can only be achieved by closing windows, supply air mechanical ventilation (MVHR) shall be provided to the room to a standard of ventilation to be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All supply air ventilation systems shall be supplied with heat recovery to reduce energy loss in winter and shall be supplied with a heat recovery by-pass in summer. All supply air ventilation systems shall have a standard and boost facility. All the controls on mechanical ventilation systems shall be easily and practically accessible by the occupants of the dwelling.

Reason: To ensure future occupiers will have adequate residential amenity.

9. No development shall take place, including any works of demolition, until a Construction Management Plan has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The approved Plan shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The Plan shall:

- i. specify the type and number of vehicles;

- ii. specify the point of construction access and access route to the site;
- iii. set out details of the parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors;
- iv. set out arrangements for the loading, delivery and unloading of plant and materials;
- v. set out arrangements for the storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development;
- vi. set out arrangements for wheel washing facilities;
- vii. specify the intended hours of construction operations;
- viii. Set out arrangements to ensure the adjacent pedestrian access / walkway remains unobstructed.

Reason: To reduce the potential impact on the public highway during the site preparation and construction phase(s) of development in accordance with Policy TR2 of Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026.

10. The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied until secure and sheltered cycle storage facilities for a minimum of 7 bicycles has been made available in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in accordance with The adopted Technical Guidance on Parking Standards 2007 , and thereafter maintained. The cycle storage facility shall be permanently available to occupiers at all times.

Reason: To promote and encourage sustainable transport and travel in accordance with Policy TR1 of Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026.

Notes for Decision:

NB1 The applicant's attention is drawn to the comments made by Network Rail in their letter of 29<sup>th</sup> October. You must ensure that their requirements are resolved before development commences.

NB2 In addition to this consent, under the Town Improvement Clauses Act 1847 the applicant is required to contact SBC's Street Naming & Numbering Officer as soon as possible with regard to registering new or changes to the official address of any properties within this development.

[http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20031/roads\\_parking\\_and\\_transport/321/apply\\_for\\_street\\_naming\\_or\\_number](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20031/roads_parking_and_transport/321/apply_for_street_naming_or_number)