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Design & Access Statement: Change of use from a dwellinghouse (Class C3) to a women's community centre (Class F2), providing community, support, educational and wellbeing activities for local women at 302 Moston Lane, Moston, Manchester, M40 9WB

INTRODUCTION

This Design & Access Statement and Supporting Planning Statement has been prepared in support of an application for the change of use of 302 Moston Lane, Moston, Manchester, M40 9WB, from a dwellinghouse (Class C3) to a women's community centre (Class F2).

The proposal seeks to bring an existing redundant property back into beneficial use as a locally focused, charity-led community facility providing a safe, accessible and supportive environment for women living within the surrounding community.

The building is currently redundant and requires significant internal repair and refurbishment to bring it back into a suitable and habitable condition. The proposed development provides an opportunity to secure the continued beneficial use of the building while responding to an identified local need for additional community support facilities for women.

The proposed centre will provide a combination of:

- Community activities;
- Women's support services;
- Wellbeing activities;
- Educational and skills-based activities;
- Family and parenting support;
- Family planning information and signposting;
- Support and signposting for women experiencing domestic abuse;
- Mental health and emotional wellbeing support;
- Support for women experiencing addiction or substance-related difficulties;
- Activities designed to reduce loneliness and social isolation;
- Opportunities for women to meet, socialise and develop support networks; and
- Signposting and referral to appropriate specialist services where required.

The centre will be operated on a charity-led, community-focused basis, with the principal users being women from the local area.

The proposal does not involve any external extension or alteration to the building.

THE APPLICATION SITE

The application property is located at 302 Moston Lane, Moston, Manchester, M40 9WB.

The property is situated on Moston Lane, which is an established local high street containing a mixture of commercial, community and residential uses.

The surrounding area therefore already accommodates a mixture of activities and uses rather than being characterised solely by residential properties.

The location is considered particularly suitable for a community facility because of its position within an established local centre and its accessibility to the surrounding residential population.

The site is readily accessible by public transport and is served by bus services along Moston Lane. The location also provides opportunities for users to walk and cycle to the centre.

A public car park is available on Ebsworth Street, with timed/allocated parking provision also available along Moston Lane. The centre will primarily serve the local community and users will be encouraged to travel by walking, cycling and public transport wherever possible.

A secure cycle storage facility will also be provided within the rear yard.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL

The property is currently redundant and requires full repair and refurbishment before it can be brought back into meaningful use.

The applicant is a local charity which wishes to invest in the property and establish a dedicated women's community facility.

The proposal has arisen from a recognised need within the local community and approaches made to the charity by women seeking a suitable local place where they can access support, information, activities and a safe community environment.

There is a particular need for accessible facilities where women can seek support without necessarily having to travel significant distances away from their local neighbourhood.

The proposed centre will provide an environment where women can access support and activities relating to a range of issues, including:

Domestic abuse and safeguarding

Some women may require a safe and welcoming environment away from difficult or unsafe circumstances within their homes.

The centre will provide an appropriate setting for confidential support, initial discussions, signposting and referral to specialist domestic abuse and safeguarding services where appropriate.

The facility is not proposed as accommodation or a refuge. Rather, it will provide a community-based support environment where women can access advice, information, activities and onward referrals.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

The centre will provide opportunities for women experiencing loneliness, isolation, stress or difficulties affecting their emotional wellbeing to access supportive activities and community networks.

Activities may include wellbeing sessions, informal support, educational sessions, group activities and signposting to appropriate professional services.

The centre is intended to complement, rather than replace, existing NHS, social care and specialist services.

Family planning and family support

The centre will provide access to information, advice, educational activities and signposting relating to family planning, parenting and wider family support.

Where specialist medical or professional advice is required, users will be signposted or referred to the appropriate health or support service.

Addiction and recovery support

The centre will also provide a supportive community environment for women experiencing issues relating to addiction or recovery.

This may include peer support, educational activities, wellbeing activities and signposting/referral to established specialist addiction services.

The centre will not operate as a residential rehabilitation facility.

Social isolation and community participation

A further important function will be reducing social isolation.

Women who may be isolated because of family circumstances, caring responsibilities, unemployment, domestic circumstances, mental health difficulties or other barriers will have an opportunity to attend activities and develop positive community networks.

The centre will provide a welcoming environment in which women can meet other local residents, participate in activities and gain access to information and support.

CHARITY-LED COMMUNITY USE

The proposed centre will be operated by a local charity and is intended to provide a genuine community benefit.

The proposal is therefore materially different from a conventional commercial premises.

The purpose of the facility is to provide accessible community support rather than to generate a commercial footfall-driven use.

The charity intends to provide a range of activities according to the needs of local women. The precise programme will be capable of adapting over time as local needs change.

The centre may accommodate:

- Women's support groups;
- Wellbeing sessions;
- Educational workshops;
- Training and skills sessions;
- Parenting and family support sessions;
- Family planning information sessions;
- Community meetings;
- Peer support groups;
- Advice and signposting sessions;
- Social activities;
- Craft and creative activities;
- Digital and employment-related skills;
- Confidence-building activities;
- Health and wellbeing activities; and
- Referral sessions involving relevant specialist organisations.

The facility will therefore function as a local community resource, with activities focused on supporting women and improving their wellbeing, independence, confidence and connection to the wider community.

PROPOSED USE

The application seeks a change of use from Class C3 dwellinghouse to Class F2 community use.

The principal purpose of the proposed use is to provide a local community meeting and support facility for women.

The Use Classes Order identifies Class F2(b) as halls or meeting places for the principal use of the local community. The proposed operation is intended to fall within this community-focused use, subject to the Local Planning Authority's determination of the appropriate planning use classification.

The proposed centre will not provide overnight accommodation.

There will be no residential use associated with the proposal.

The building will operate as a daytime community facility.

Proposed opening hours are:

Monday to Friday: 9:00am – 6:00pm

Any occasional community event outside these hours would be subject to the charity's management arrangements and any necessary planning requirements.

The centre will employ:

2 full-time staff members; and
2 part-time staff members.

The number of users at any one time will be controlled according to the available accommodation and operational requirements of the building.

DESIGN AND APPEARANCE

There are no external alterations proposed as part of this application.

The existing building will be retained in its current form and there will be no proposed extension, change to the roof, alteration to the building footprint or external landscaping works.

The proposal therefore represents a change in the use of the existing building rather than a physical redevelopment of the site.

The refurbishment works will principally be internal and will be required to bring the currently redundant building back into a safe, suitable and usable condition.

Any internal works will be undertaken with appropriate regard to building regulations, fire safety, accessibility and the requirements of the proposed community use.

The proposal will therefore have a very limited visual impact on the existing street scene.

INTERNAL ARRANGEMENT AND FUNCTION

The existing building will be refurbished to provide a combination of communal, support and activity spaces.

The internal accommodation will be arranged to provide appropriate areas for:

- Group activities;
- Community meetings;
- Women's support sessions;
- Educational activities;
- Wellbeing activities;
- Private/confidential discussions;
- Staff facilities;
- Accessible toilet provision; and
- General circulation and reception/community space.

The internal layout will seek to provide a welcoming, non-institutional environment.

Where confidential discussions take place, appropriate rooms will be available to provide privacy.

The layout will also allow activities to take place in a flexible manner so that the facility can respond to the changing needs of local women.

ACCESS

Accessibility is an important component of the proposal.

The building will be refurbished to improve its accessibility and usability for people with disabilities and mobility difficulties.

The works will include:

Provision of a dedicated accessible/disabled toilet;
Upgrading of door widths where required;
Provision of appropriate circulation spaces;
Provision of suitable turning circles within the principal rooms and circulation areas;
Improvement of internal accessibility as part of the refurbishment; and
Consideration of Building Regulations accessibility requirements as part of the works.

The intention is to ensure that the principal community areas can be accessed and used by people with a range of mobility requirements.

The proposal therefore seeks to improve the accessibility of the existing property compared with its current redundant condition.

The detailed construction works will be undertaken in accordance with the applicable Building Regulations.

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

The proposed use is expected to have a modest transport impact.

The centre is intended primarily for women living within the local community, rather than attracting users from a wide geographical area.

The site is located directly on Moston Lane and is well placed for access by public transport.

Users will be encouraged to travel by:

- Walking;
- Cycling; and
- Public transport.

This is particularly appropriate given the local catchment of the proposed facility.

The property is also situated on a bus route/bus lane along Moston Lane, providing convenient access to public transport.

A public car park is available on Ebsworth Street, while timed parking provision is also available along Moston Lane.

A secure cycle storage facility will be provided within the rear yard of the property to encourage sustainable travel.

The proposed use is therefore considered capable of operating without creating an unacceptable demand for on-site parking.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

The proposal makes effective use of an existing building in an established urban location.

No new building is proposed and there is no requirement to extend the existing site.

The location provides access to established public transport routes and is within an existing mixed residential and commercial area.

The local nature of the proposed service means that a significant proportion of users are expected to be from the surrounding community.

The charity will actively encourage users and staff to use sustainable forms of transport wherever practicable.

The provision of secure cycle storage further supports this objective.

AMENITY

The proposed operating hours of 9:00am to 6:00pm are considered appropriate for the surrounding mixed-use area.

The proposed use is primarily daytime and community based.

There is no proposal for late-night opening, a bar, nightclub, restaurant, hot food takeaway or other activity that would ordinarily generate significant evening activity or noise.

The proposal will therefore maintain a relatively modest level of activity.

The centre will be managed by staff and the charity will be responsible for ensuring that activities are undertaken in an appropriate and considerate manner.

The proposal is not expected to result in unacceptable noise, disturbance, overlooking or other loss of residential amenity.

SAFETY AND SAFEGUARDING

The nature of the proposed use means that safeguarding and security will be an important part of the centre's operation.

The facility will be managed by the charity and appropriate operational procedures will be implemented.

The centre will provide a controlled and welcoming environment for users.

Particular consideration will be given to the privacy and safety of women accessing support services.

Where specialist issues such as domestic abuse, safeguarding, mental health or addiction are identified, the charity will provide appropriate signposting and referral to relevant professional services.

The centre is not intended to replace emergency services, medical services or specialist refuge accommodation.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

The proposed development would provide a number of community benefits.

These include:

Bringing a currently redundant property back into beneficial use.
Providing a dedicated community facility for local women.
Providing a safe and welcoming environment for women who may otherwise be isolated within their homes or communities.
Supporting women experiencing domestic abuse through appropriate support, signposting and referral.
Supporting mental health and emotional wellbeing.
Providing family planning and family support information.
Supporting women experiencing addiction and recovery issues through community-based activities and onward referral.
Providing educational and skills-based activities.
Reducing loneliness and social isolation.
Providing opportunities for local women to establish social and community networks.
Improving accessibility through the provision of an accessible toilet and improved internal circulation.
Supporting sustainable travel through the site's accessibility by public transport, walking and cycling.
Providing secure cycle storage.
Supporting the wider regeneration and community objectives for Moston Lane.

The proposal is therefore considered to provide a positive social and community benefit.

LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXT

Manchester City Council identifies Moston Lane as an important local high street and has undertaken work aimed at improving the area and supporting local communities.

The Council's Moston Lane consultation identified a number of objectives, including establishing a stronger local centre with a community-focused public space, enhancing public spaces, improving local services and supporting more sustainable movement.

The Council's current information on Moston Lane similarly identifies the area as a busy high street with numerous shops and businesses and sets out objectives to create a place where people feel safe and welcome, improve local services and spaces, and support walking, cycling and public transport.

The proposed women's community centre is consistent with these broad objectives by introducing a community-focused use within an established local centre.

The proposal would also make beneficial use of an existing redundant building without requiring additional land or a new building.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

The National Planning Policy Framework places importance on creating healthy, inclusive and safe places.

The current NPPF promotes social interaction, safe and accessible environments and development which supports healthy lives and addresses local health and wellbeing needs. It also encourages the provision and use of community facilities and local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments.

The proposed women's community centre directly supports these objectives by providing a local facility that encourages social interaction, community participation, wellbeing and access to support.

The proposal is particularly relevant to the objective of supporting facilities that address local health and wellbeing needs.

RESPONSE TO LOCAL NEED

The applicant considers that there is a genuine local need for the proposed facility.

A number of women have already approached the charity seeking access to a facility of this nature.

The absence of a comparable, locally accessible facility means that women may otherwise need to travel outside their immediate community to access suitable support, activities and social networks.

The proposed centre would provide a single accessible point within the local community from which women can access a range of activities and support.

The centre would also allow the charity to develop partnerships with existing specialist organisations, enabling women to be referred to appropriate services where their needs extend beyond the services that can be provided directly by the centre.

This model allows the proposed facility to act as a community gateway to wider support services.

USE OF AN EXISTING BUILDING

The proposal represents an efficient and sustainable approach to the use of land.

Rather than allowing the property to remain redundant or seeking a new building elsewhere, the proposal makes use of an existing building in an established urban location.

The building already has a relationship with the surrounding street and neighbouring properties.

No extension or external alteration is proposed.

The refurbishment will allow the building to be repaired and brought back into active use while providing a valuable community facility.

LANDSCAPING

No external landscaping works are proposed.

The proposal does not involve any extension, alteration to the external footprint or redevelopment of the rear yard.

The existing external areas will continue to serve the building, with the rear yard also accommodating secure cycle storage.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The proposal does not involve new construction or significant external alteration.

The principal works will be internal refurbishment required to make the existing building safe, accessible and suitable for continued use.

The re-use of the existing building avoids the environmental impacts associated with demolition and new construction.

The location also provides opportunities for users to travel by public transport, walking and cycling.

Energy efficiency improvements may be incorporated into the refurbishment where practicable and appropriate to the existing building.

CONCLUSION

The proposal seeks to change the use of 302 Moston Lane, Moston, Manchester, M40 9WB, from a dwellinghouse (Class C3) to a charity-led women's community centre (Class F2).

The proposal will bring a currently redundant building back into beneficial use and provide a locally accessible community facility serving women in the surrounding area.

The centre will provide community, educational, wellbeing and support activities, including support and signposting relating to domestic abuse, mental health, family planning, addiction, family support and social isolation.

The proposal responds to a need identified by the applicant through approaches from local women seeking a facility of this nature.

The centre will be operated by a local charity and will provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment where women can participate in activities, access information and receive appropriate support or referral.

There will be no external alterations to the building and no external landscaping is proposed.

Internally, the building will be refurbished to provide improved accessibility, including an accessible toilet, upgraded door widths and appropriate circulation and turning spaces.

The site is located on Moston Lane within an established mixed residential and commercial environment and benefits from good access to public transport, walking and cycling.

The proposed opening hours of 9:00am to 6:00pm, together with the modest staffing level of two full-time and two part-time employees, will ensure that the use remains appropriate for its surroundings.

The proposal is consistent with the broader objectives for Moston Lane to strengthen community facilities, improve local services, support community wellbeing and encourage sustainable movement.

The proposal also accords with the principles of national planning policy relating to healthy, inclusive and safe communities and the provision of community facilities that support local health and social wellbeing.

Overall, the proposal would provide a beneficial community use of an existing redundant building, provide an accessible facility for local women, address an identified community need and make a positive contribution to the local area.

It is therefore respectfully requested that planning permission be granted for the proposed change of use.

Kind Regards,
Mr Hasnaat Saeed