

Heritage Statement

The Bull's Head Inn, High Street, Alton ST10 4AQ
Mr J Miller

1.0 HERITAGE STATEMENT

Introduction

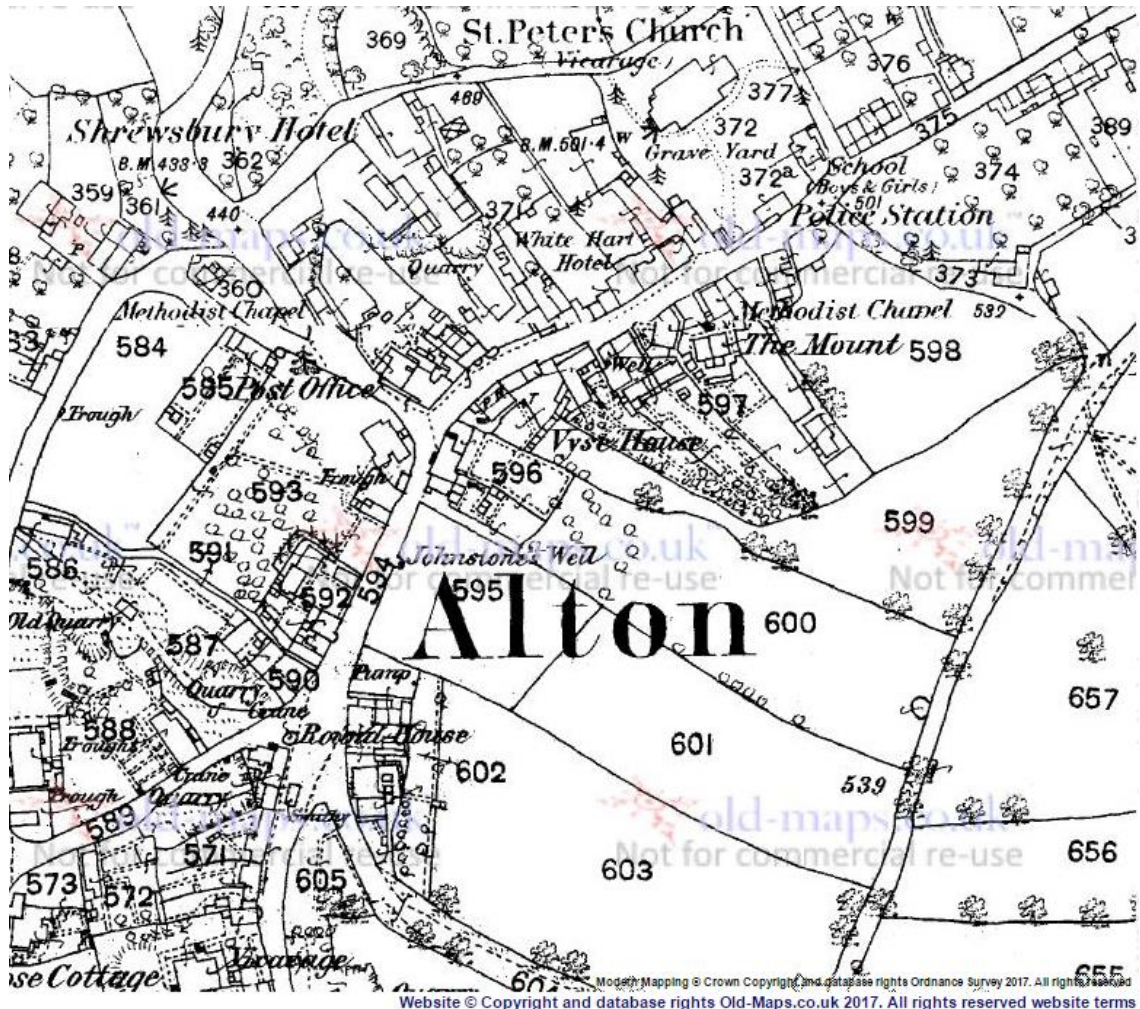
- 1.1. This Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of an application for the two-storey extension to the Grade II listed Bull's Head Inn, Alton. The extension will form a new seating area next to the existing restaurant.
- 1.2. The Bull's Head is situated to the south side of the High Street, at the western end, with Grade II listed Vyse House to the east, and the Old Coffee Tavern to the west.
- 1.3. Alton & Farley conservation area was designated in 1971, and underwent a conservation area appraisal in 2008, following a period of public consultation by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. A Historic Character Assessment was also carried out in February 2013, by Staffordshire County Council, in conjunction with English Heritage (now Historic England).
- 1.4. The purpose of this statement is to assess the impact of the proposed works on both the heritage asset and the character of the conservation area. Under the National Planning Policy Framework (2012), any design should seek to "conserve and enhance" the historic environment.

2.0 HERITAGE STATEMENT

Description of the Asset

- 2.1. Alton village lies to the south of the River Churnet and the Weaver Hills, in the northern uplands of the Staffordshire Moorlands. The village is most associated with Alton Towers Resort, a large theme park situated in the picturesque grounds of Alton Mansion.
- 2.2. Alton is an Anglo-Saxon name, and is mentioned within the Domesday Book as “waste” – an area without value for taxation. The medieval castle was built in the late 12th century by Betram de Verdun, who also founded the Cistercian abbey at Croxden. The vast estate was passed down through marriages to the Furnivals, and eventually the Talbots in the 15th century. The Talbots lived elsewhere until the 19th century, when the 15th and 16th earls set about a series of alterations and enlargements at Alton Lodge (now Alton Towers), under the supervision of renowned gothic revival architect A.W.N Pugin.
- 2.3. The village itself grew slowly. In 1666, a population of just 215 was recorded, increasing to 818 by 1801. However, the 19th century saw further expansion, increasing to 1,227 by 1901.
- 2.4. The conservation area appraisal identifies three elements of settlement – an early irregular phase relating to pastoral farming, the site of the past and present castles, and a later planned extension to the village. The Bull’s Head site falls within the latter, although on the edge of the former. The planned settlement is typical of those that accompany major castles, with the High Street running parallel to Castle Cliffs, “flanked by building plots with long rear gardens.”
- 2.5. The High Street is identified under HUCA 2 ‘Burgage Plots’ within the Historic Character Assessment.
- 2.6. The majority of the surviving buildings in Alton date from the mid-18th century onwards, which reflects increasing prosperity in these later years, particularly following the interests shown by the 15th and 16th earls. By the 19th century, much of the population was employed in the building trade, likely working at the nearby Towers estate. This is unusual for a market town in this area, as it relied heavily on work from the estate, rather than farming or industry.
- 2.7. “Buildings in Alton village are diverse in character, date and spacing. This reflects the historic development of the settlement, the topography, and piecemeal construction by numerous owners in a variety of materials. Hollington sandstone jostles handmade brick, and render sits adjacent to painted surfaces, masking a variety of phases and walling materials.” (Conservation Area Appraisal 2008).

- 2.8. The Bull's Head occupies the "less desirable" south side of the High Street, along the steep northwest facing slope. This side demonstrates a rather irregular pattern, with a cluster of buildings lying gable end to the street, unlike the narrow burgable plots to the north side.



1: 1881 OS Map

- 2.9. The Bull's Head itself is Grade II listed, with the following description:

"ALTON C.P. HIGH STREET (South-east side) SK 0642-0742 13/36 The Bull's Head Inn GV II House now inn. Early C18 with later alterations and additions. Red brick with ashlar plinth and quoins of unequal length; plain tile roof with coped verges; brick integral end stacks. Aligned north-east/ south-west facing north-west with extensions to the south-east. 2 storeys and gable-lit attic with storey band and coved eaves; 3 windows, casements with segmental heads, those to the ground floor have been widened, 4 small C20 attic windows; central C20 door with C18 bracketed segmental arched hood. Interior: chamfered and stopped ceiling beams."

- 2.10. Although listed by association, the actual listing description makes no reference to the adjoining building from which the application seeks to extend. This building looks to be later than the original, and has undergone numerous alterations over time. The road side elevation is of broached ashlar stone, with little to no detailing. The façade is broken only by four small window openings (later additions).



2: Rear elevation & setting of Vyse House

- 2.11. To the rear, the elevation is an interesting mix of ashlar stone and brick, punctuated by an erratic layout of doors and windows. The two largest windows at ground floor look to have been doors originally, with an obvious join in brickwork beneath the windows, and evidence of the reveal left internally. One retains a segmental arch, while the other maintains its stone lintel, however, both have slender timber sills which don't reflect the size nor design of the neighbouring original stone window sills.
- 2.12. The chimney stack has been crudely rebuilt above eaves level in modern engineering brick. A metal staircase and walkway, together with a modern brick wall, masks much of the detail to the rear, as does the addition of white paint to all elevations (aside from the original frontage).
- 2.13. Presumably this building originally had a differing use to that of the original house/pub, but has undergone numerous alterations over time. Interestingly, the 1881 OS map shows this extension as two buildings, with the division appearing along the line where the material changes between brick and stone along the rear elevation. Unfortunately, research has so far been unable to ascertain the original use of these elements beyond speculation.



3: Alton High Street - 1915

- 2.14. The original building (as described in the listing), has also undergone numerous changes, with limited success. To the front, the ground floor windows were originally much narrower, reflecting those at first floor level. At the rear, the mono-pitch extension is a mix of stone, with brick to the gable above eaves level, suggesting possible alteration at a later date (common in 19th century Alton, according to the Historic Character Assessment).



4: Rear elevation

- 2.15. The single storey flat roof extension is built in modern blockwork, and the box dormer above presents a rather unattractive feature.
- 2.16. The building was originally a house, and has been dated to the 18th century. The central door and symmetrical brick façade are typical of this period. According to historic directories, the building was operating as an inn by the early 19th century, and is perhaps reflective of the increase in population during this time, as works to the Alton estate expanded.
- 2.17. It has continued to operate as a pub ever since, but closed in January 2016 as the owners struggled to make it work financially. It was bought by the current owners in summer 2016.
- 2.18. The Grade II listed Vyse House lies to the east of the Bull's Head. The building has been dated to the early 18th century, but has undergone significant alterations in more recent years, including the addition of pebbledash render, and uPVC windows. The southern gable faces the rear car park of the Bull's Head, and this has been treated with a flat render, marked to imitate stone. A single attic window overlooks the pub.

- 2.19. The historic remnants of a stone building, of which only the rear and gable wall remain, are still present in the rear car park, adjacent to Vyse House. The building was originally one and a half storeys, with evidence of the first-floor joists still apparent in the rear wall.



5: Remnants of stone building to car park

3.0 HERITAGE STATEMENT Assessment of its Significance

- 3.1. In order to assess the significance of the Bull's Head and its setting, this document adopts the methods outlined in Historic England's publication "*Conservation Principles, Policies & Guidance*." The guidance describes four heritage values that may contribute to the significance of a place: Evidential, Historical, Aesthetic and Communal.
- 3.2. *Evidential Value* is described as "the potential of a place to yield evidence of past activity." For example, archaeological deposits may provide clues in place of any written record. The Bull's Head Inn embodies evidential value via the continued existence of its historic fabric in both its plan form and elevational treatment, and its continued use as a local pub.



6: Detail showing original door opening below window

- 3.3. Dressed ashlar stone is not a common feature of vernacular buildings, and was usually the preserve of the gentry and polite architecture. However, the quality of the local stone, such as Hollington sandstone, meant that it was used frequently in a vernacular context, as is obvious in this case.
- 3.4. Evidential value is often proportional to the amount of material evidence that has since been lost or altered. The Bull's Head has been greatly altered over time. The stone gables and Flemish bond brick facades suggest "radical alteration" (Conservation Area Appraisal 2008), which may have occurred as tastes changed and brick became more fashionable in the mid-18th – 19th centuries.
- 3.5. The remnants of the stone building adjacent to Vyse House, together with the mix of ashlar stone and brick to the rear elevation, provide strong evidential value of the changes the site has undergone. However, this has been somewhat lost with the addition of white paint, which masks the fabric beneath in order to present a uniform elevation, where none previously existed.

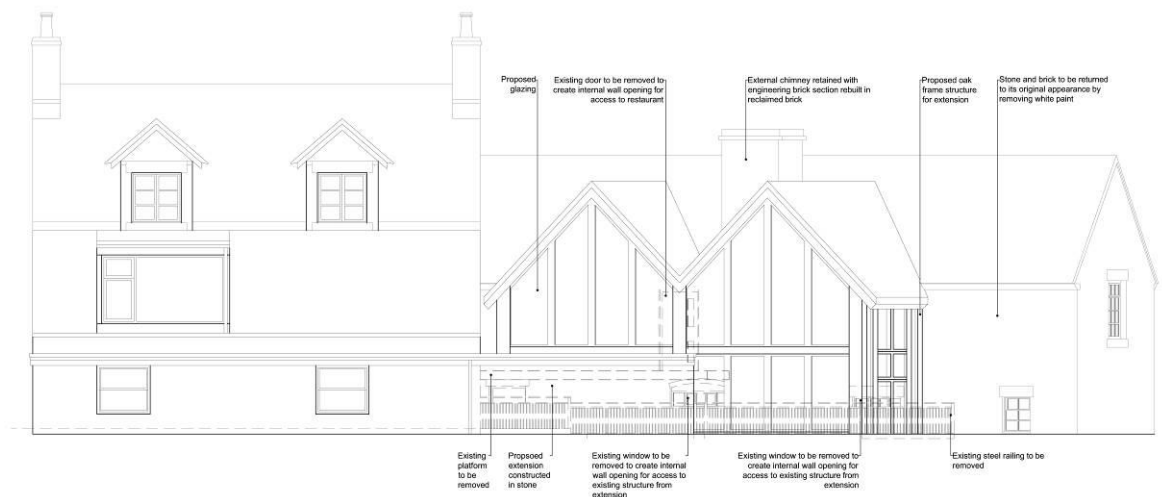


7: Front elevation

- 3.6. *Historical Value* derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. The continued survival of the inn contributes a significant amount of historical value as part of the conservation area, and along the High Street frontage in particular. It represents a primary source of information about village life, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- 3.7. The change of use from house to inn during the early 19th century is representative of the period of growth Alton underwent during this time. This was fairly commonplace, as purpose built public houses are only found from the early 19th century onwards. Inns generally differentiated themselves from the alehouse by providing accommodation for travellers, as well as stabling for horses (and eventually coaches). One might speculate that this was the original purpose of the additional buildings, such as that to the rear of the current car park.
- 3.8. *Aesthetic Value* derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place. This may be the result of conscious design, or fortuitous evolution. Though the house/pub obviously constitutes vernacular architecture, lacking the grandeur of those purpose built for the Shrewsbury's estate, it retains an appealing charm and attractive frontage as a key feature along the High Street.
- 3.9. Some alterations have occurred over time, such as the widening of the ground floor windows and the addition of the attic windows, but this does little to detract from the overall aesthetic value. However, some elements may require some attention, such as the timber casement windows. The stone quoins and plinth have been repointed in cement mortar, and this looks to have accelerated deterioration to the face of the stone.
- 3.10. To the rear, the building is less successful due to the patchwork of materials, alteration and addition of openings, poor quality modern additions (such as the box dormer and blockwork extension), and the external metal staircase.
- 3.11. *Communal Value* is about the meaning of a place for the people who relate to it. As a public house, the building retains a strong element of communal value, as it will have been used by various members of the local community for several decades as a place to relax, drink, socialise etc.

4.0 HERITAGE STATEMENT
The Design Concept

- 4.1. The concept proposes the addition of a two-storey extension to the rear of the stone and brick building, which currently contains the restaurant. This involves the removal of the metal staircase and the alteration of two openings, together with the rebuilding of the blockwork extension.
- 4.2. The proposed materials will be oak, glass and stone. The use of large panels of glazing aims to impact on the historic fabric as little as possible, and ensures the rear elevation remains visible externally.
- 4.3. The owners intend to remove the white paint in order to return the building to its original appearance, allowing clearer legibility of the historic features and materials.



8: Proposed rear elevation

- 4.4. The existing flat roofed blockwork extension at the rear will be demolished and rebuilt in local stone to match the existing building. This is extended across the ground floor in order to help marry the two elements and deal with an awkward junction between the buildings.
- 4.5. Internally, the extension will provide a new seating area and access to the restaurant. The design aims to create an “inside/outside feel” with cobbled flooring.
- 4.6. At first floor, the modern timber partitions will be removed.
- 4.7. The chimney stack is to be retained, but the design seeks to remove the modern engineering brickwork above eaves level, and reconstruct in a reclaimed brick, more suited to the age of the building.



9: Chimney stack with modern brickwork

5.0 HERITAGE STATEMENT

The Impact

- 5.1. The aim of this report is to assess the impact of any proposals on the significance of the heritage asset in question. To this end, the history of the building and its setting i.e. the conservation area; has been researched and discussed earlier within this document, together with an assessment of its significance, as outlined under the values put forward by Historic England.
- 5.2. The building itself obviously represents a key site within Alton conservation area. Its façade is somewhat of a landmark along the high street, together with the old coffee tavern and white house to the south west. However, the rear of the building, from which the extension is proposed, is barely visible within the public domain. A visibility splay, shown on drawing no. 00588 PL(0)03C, demonstrates that the extension will only be visible from a small portion of the High Street.
- 5.3. To the rear, the extension is visible via the single attic window of Vyse House, and from the modern property situated on the hillside above. It will not be discernible from any key viewpoints within the conservation area, nor from properties located further afield, such as those along Hurstons Lane.
- 5.4. Given the current state of the rear elevation and car park, a well-designed extension would go some way to improving the setting within this small area, including that of Vyse House. The removal of the metal staircase, modern walling and white paint would present a more appealing aesthetic, while use of large glazing panels ensure that the historic fabric remains visible externally. Internally, the creation of additional seating means that the public might enjoy previously unseen features to the rear of the property, including the remains of the stone building within the car park.
- 5.5. The removal of the white paint to the exterior of the building is perhaps the most controversial measure, as the methods required may harm the historic fabric. Paint is often applied to hide poor stonework or cover repairs, and we can't be sure what its removal might uncover. However, removal of the paint would lead to a more legible appearance that should also be visually appealing.
- 5.6. It's important, however, to first identify the type of stone and the paint to be removed. The involvement of a specialist conservator is recommended, to conduct proper sampling and cleaning trials before the least invasive method of achieving the desired result is chosen.
- 5.7. The use of timber and glass, though not a vernacular material within the conservation area, will ensure minimal impact on the historic fabric, and retain visibility of the rear elevation. This also represents an obviously new and modern addition, rather than a pastiche design constructed in brick or stone, that would have a greater impact and could be mistaken for a more historic feature.

- 5.8. The reconstruction of the blockwork extension in stone, to match the existing, should greatly improve the appearance of this element.
- 5.9. The alteration of the two large openings to the rear, which will allow an improved flow of movement from the existing restaurant, will restore original doorways by removing the single skin brickwork below sill level.
- 5.10. The eaves level of the extension is set below the stone corbel, and exposed rafter ends aim to present an honest picture of the new roof construction. The existing roof will be retained beneath the intervention of the new roof.
- 5.11. In conclusion, it is felt that the concept represents a well-designed addition to the heritage asset, that proposes minimal intervention to both the historic fabric and the character of the conservation area. By providing additional space to the restaurant, the pub should become more financially viable, which will help to secure the future of the building. Thus, the benefits of the proposals appear to outweigh what little, if any, negative impact may be perceived.

References

Alton & Farley Conservation Area Appraisal (SMDC 2008)
Alton Historic Character Assessment (SCC 2013)
Vernacular Architecture: An Illustrated Handbook (R.W. Brunskill 2000)
Practical Building Conservation: Stone (English Heritage 2012)
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