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Heritage Statement in relation to the formation of a vehicular access and parking area

Old Police House, High Street, Alton

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1 Introduction

1.1 JMI Planning is a Midlands based town planning consultancy. Its directors are chartered town planners with over 30 years' combined experience in both the public and private sector.

1.2 The author of this statement, Jim Malkin, has worked as a principal planning officer in local government, and more recently as a planning consultant in the private sector. He has extensive knowledge of the planning system and experience of the appeals process. He is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

1.3 This statement accompanies the plans and drawings completed by AJS Structural Design.

2 Site Details

2.1 The application site comprises of the Old Police House which is an imposing semi detached property located on High Street in Alton. The property is set approximately 1.8m higher than High Street and is provided with walling and railings to the frontage. The property is set within a densely developed part of the village where on-street parking is prevalent and detracts from the appearance of the area. The property lies within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area, and is adjoined by the grade II listed Vysehouse.

2.2 The site is currently accessed via a pedestrian gateway which emerges onto High Street. There is currently no vehicular access or parking associated with the property.

2.3 The site and its surroundings are shown on the following photograph.



3 The Proposed Development

3.1 The application proposes the formation of a car parking area to the front of the property. The scheme involves the removal of part of the front wall and the formation of parking area to the frontage of the property with associated retaining wall. As part of the scheme the existing gate will be re-located to the right of the proposed access.

4 Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 **The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** sets out the government's policies in relation to development and the following section is most relevant to this proposal:

Section 12 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The following paragraphs should be considered with regards to this proposal:

Paragraph 128 of the NPPF requires that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes or has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

Paragraph 131 advises that in the determination of planning applications local planning authorities should take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Paragraph 132 advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.

Paragraph 134 advises that a 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, including securing its optimum viable use.

Paragraph 137 states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably.

Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy (2014)

4.2 Policy DC2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy refers to the historic environment and states the following:

The Council will safeguard and, where possible, enhance the historic environment, areas of historic landscape character and interests of acknowledged importance, including in particular scheduled ancient monuments, significant buildings (both statutory listed and on a local register), the settings of designated assets, conservation areas, registered historic parks and gardens, registered battlefields and archaeological remains by:

1. Resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the special character and historic heritage of the District's towns and villages and those interests of acknowledged importance.

2. *Promoting development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings and features which contribute to the character or heritage of an area and those interests of acknowledged importance through the use of conservation area appraisals, design statements, archaeological assessments, characterisation studies and Masterplanning.*

3. *Preventing the loss of buildings and features which make a positive contribution to the character or heritage of an area through appropriate reuse and sensitive development, including enabling development, unless their retention is not viable or there would be substantial planning benefits to outweigh the loss.*

5 Heritage Statement

5.1 The application site lies within the Alton and Farley Conservation Area, which was designated in 1971. The Staffordshire Historic Environment Record identifies that the nearest listed building is the Grade II dwelling Vysehouse which lies immediately to the west of the site.

5.2 The list entry for Vysehouse reads as follows: -

'House. Early C18 with later alterations. Roughcast; plain tile roof; brick integral end stack and ridge stack. 3-cell lobby-entry plan, aligned north-east/south-west facing north-west. 2 storeys; 3 windows, casements with segmental heads; 6-panelled door, the upper 2 panels glazed with mid-C19 latticed porch; fretted eaves fringe. Interior: noted as having a staircase with turned or splat balusters to the rear of the central bay'.

5.3 Paragraph 128 of the NPPF requires that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.

5.4 Paragraph 132 advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.

5.5 The application site lies within a very densely developed area of the village where properties are grouped closely together, and off-street car parking is at a premium. The conservation area covers a significant area of Alton and adjoining Farley, and advises that *'each element of the Conservation Area has its own form and character, reflecting its history, topography, and relative importance over time'.* The conservation area appraisal advises that area around High Street falls within the planned settlement area of Alton and is defined as having 'densely packed housing'.

5.6 The conservation area appraisal provides a number of solutions to existing problems within the village (and especially the *'planned settlement'* area), and this refers specifically to parking advising the following:

'Parking is a serious problem in those areas of Alton village where houses are densely packed, such as the High Street, where off-street parking or garaging is not readily available. Parking for residents only would help cut the problem in the tourist season if space could be found elsewhere for a public car park'.

5.7 The character of the area around High Street is significantly compromised by the high levels of on-street car parking that occur in this location. The proposed parking area will only remove one vehicle but will have a positive impact on the appearance of this part of the village.

5.8 The proposal results in the removal of part of the front wall. The wall appears to be a more modern feature and is constructed of concrete block made to appear as stone, as opposed to natural stone. The removal of a small area of this wall is not considered to be a significant concern to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The existing gate will be relocated with a new pier constructed out of matching materials.

5.9 Retaining structures will be constructed out of stone and will weather to appear as traditional stone walling which compliments the predominant boundary treatment found within this area of the village. There are a number of other accesses available from High Street and therefore the provision of another access point will not appear inappropriate or incongruous in this location.

5.10 The significance of the Vysehouse can be ascertained from the listing description which is set out in 5.2 above. This refers in detail to the external architectural detailing of the property which is of the highest quality, and provides a positive contribution to the street.

5.11 The access point and parking area will not be read in the same context as the grade II listed Vysehouse and therefore no impacts on the properties setting, or on its architectural features will occur. As with all properties on High Street views of the Vysehouse are compromised by on street parking, and the proposal will help to remove a vehicle from the street.

5.12 Given the above it is not considered that the proposals will harm the character of the conservation area or the setting of The Cottage.

5.13 In this instance, even if there were less than substantial harm arising from the proposals, this would be outweighed by the benefits of the provision of off-street parking which is supported by the Alton and Farley Conservation Area Appraisal.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The application proposes the formation of an off street car parking space to serve the Old Police House, High Street, Alton.

6.2 This part of the village is plagued by on-street parking which adversely affects the character and appearance of conservation area, and the setting of the adjoining listed building.

6.3 The proposal will result in the loss of a small area of modern walling, and the relocation of existing gates, the provision of natural stone retaining walls will however preserve and enhance the conservation area.

6.4 The proposals therefore comply with the requirements of the of the National Planning Policy Framework and the adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy.