Hewitt&CarrArchitects

Heritage Statement

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

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1.0 HERITAGE STATEMENT
Introduction

1.1. This Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of a retrospective listed building application for alterations to the Grade II listed Bull's Head Inn, Alton.

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 burgage plots to the north side.

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. The main pub (as described in the listing), has undergone numerous changes over time, 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).

2.11. The single storey flat roof extension is built in modern blockwork, and the box dormer above presents a rather unattractive feature.

2.12. 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.

2.13. It has continued to operate as a public house 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, and they have since undertaken a programme of repairs and alterations, which now require retrospective listed building approval.

2.14. Although listed by association, the listing description makes no reference to the adjoining building, which is currently used as the restaurant, but is assumed to have been stabling and/or coach house for travellers visiting the adjacent inn. 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).

2.15. To the rear, the elevation is an interesting mix of ashlar stone and brick, punctuated by a rather erratic layout of doors and windows. The two largest windows at ground floor looked 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 had slender timber sills rather than the stone of the neighbouring (and presumably original) stone window sills.

2.16. The chimney stack had 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 did the addition of white paint to all elevations.

2.17. Interestingly, the 1881 OS map shows this as two buildings, with the division appearing along the line where the material changes between brick and stone along the rear elevation. It's possible that this is indicative of two differing uses during this period, and perhaps explains the much-altered appearance at the rear.

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.

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.

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.

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).

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 attractive 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 works described in this heritage statement have already been carried out, and now require retrospective approval for alterations to a listed building.

4.2. The interior has been updated cosmetically, with the removal of paint to the timber in the bar area, new bar, glazed screens and log burner within the fireplace. The bar area has been expanded via knocking through to the adjacent property, with a stepped access down to further seating and new WCs.

4.3. The restaurant area has been completely revamped. The chimney breast has been removed and a new fireplace with log burner installed to the far end. One of the original doorways (with segmental arch) has been reinstated. Paint has been removed from much of the timber, and the brickwork/stone revealed, repaired and repointed.

4.4. At first floor, above the restaurant, the previous B&B rooms have been removed and the space transformed into a large function room with bar area. The large window to the gable end has been blocked internally.

4.5. Externally, the traditional shopfront to the adjacent property has been restored to its original appearance (using historic photographs). New stone steps and metal railings have been added to both entrances.

4.6. The restaurant frontage has been repainted in pale grey (rather than the previous white), whilst the modern brickwork to the chimney has been removed, and its height reduced below the eaves.

4.7. Windows to the front elevation have been replaced like-for-like, whilst, to the rear, a small number have been replaced with new timber casements.

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 is barely visible within the public domain.

5.3. When the current owners took on The Bull's Head in 2016, the property had become rather run-down and repairs and alterations were obviously necessary in order to make the pub a viable business.

5.4. It may be difficult to properly assess the impact on the significance without knowing fully the internal appearance and features that may have been affected, and so one must assess the quality of the workmanship where new additions or repairs are apparent. The extent of works carried out has mostly been established through talking with the current owners and through viewing photographs, both historic and of work in progress.

5.5. Works are of a high quality and have had an overall positive impact on the aesthetic value whilst respecting and enhancing the history. The mix of traditional materials, original features and modern additions make for an attractive and welcoming interior space.

5.6. It would appear that the windows to the frontage have been replaced like-for like in both style and material, and the joinery and fittings are of excellent quality. The stone steps to the entrances replace modern concrete steps, whilst the railings are in-keeping along the High Street.

5.7. The repainting of the restaurant exterior in grey has smartened up the overall appearance of the building. The stone/brick was previously painted white and so the change in colour represents no significant harm to the building fabric that hadn't already been done. To have removed this paintwork may have done more harm to the stone.

5.8. The reinstatement of the historic shopfront is a marked improvement on its previous incarnation. Again, the joinery is of high quality and traditional design, having an overall positive impact on the conservation area.

5.9. Creating a new opening between the two properties obviously has some impact on the historic fabric of the listed building, by creating an access

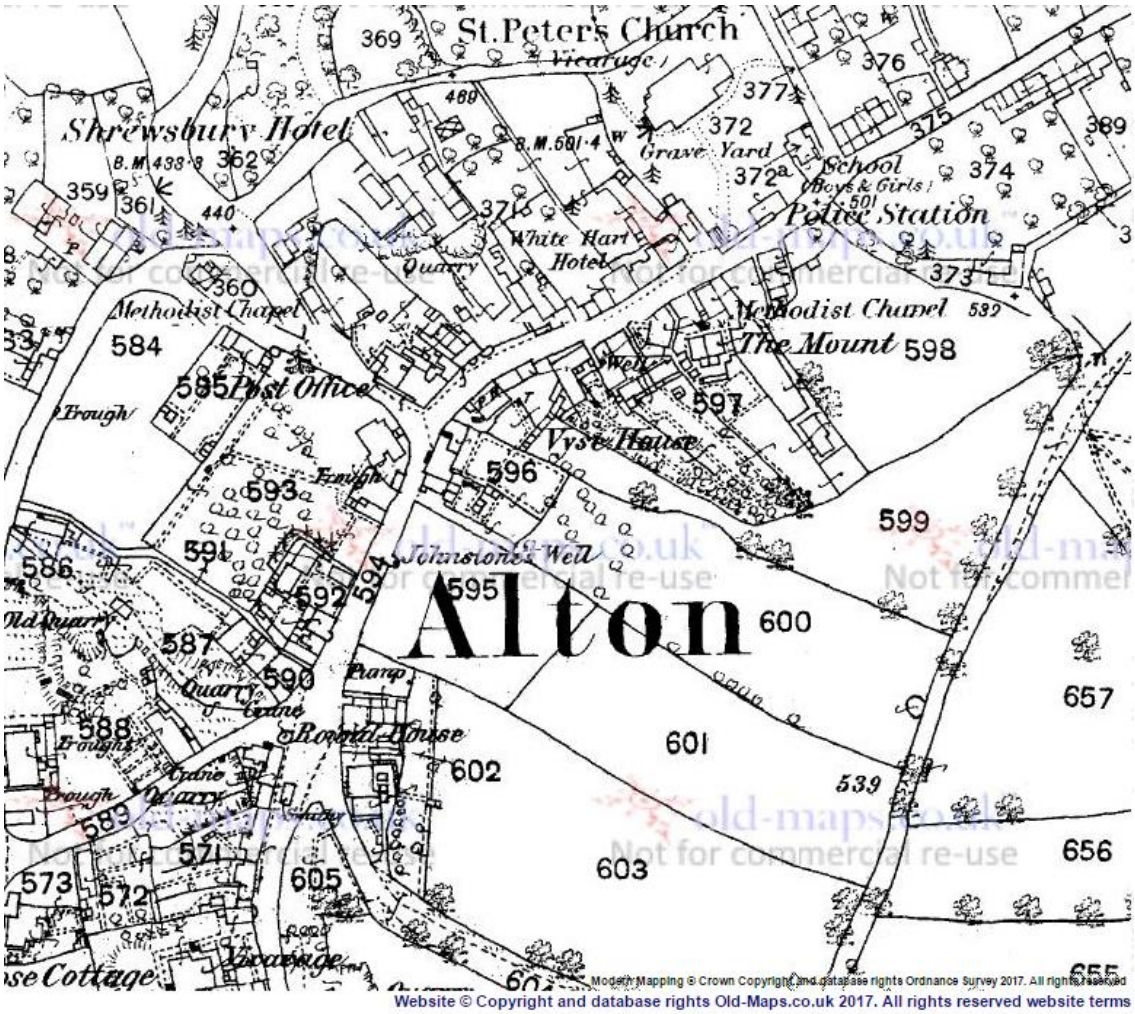
between two previously unrelated properties with different uses. This must be weighed against the positive impact of the additional space created for the bar area, making the pub a more viable prospect, and so conserving the building and its use for years to come. It is also perhaps important to note that the properties still read as such externally.

5.10. In conclusion, it is felt that the works that have been carried out represent a high-quality finish that both respects and enhances the significance of the listed building and its setting within the conservation area.

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)
www.old-maps.co.uk
www.historicengland.org.uk
www.buildinghistory.org/buildings/inns

6.0 HERITAGE STATEMENT
Photographs & images



1: 1881 OS Map



2: Image from 1915



3: 2016



4: Works to shopfront



5: Completed works



6: 2016



7: Completed works



8: New opening to bar area



9: Bar area



10: Restaurant



11: Function space