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Design Statement for Listed Building Consent Application

for

Proposed Internal and External Works

at

Alton Station, Alton, Staffs

1.00 The Property and Its's Status

The property is currently owned by The Landmark Trust who let it out as holiday accommodation. It consists of two buildings. One being the old Stationmaster's House and the other the old Waiting Room.



Alton Station viewed from the Farley Lane road bridge

The Stationmaster's House is a Grade 2 listed building. The Listing is as follows:-

SK 0642-07 FARLEY C.P. FARLEY LANE (South-west side)

13/137 Former stationmaster's - house, Alton Railway Station GV II

Former stationmaster's house. Circa 1849. Rock faced ashlar with smooth faced ashlar dressings; hipped and gabled pantile roofs; ashlar integral end stack with bracketed gable. Italianate style; L-shaped plan, square block at the south-east corner with wings to the north and west aligned north-south and east-west respectively; entrance to the inner 3 storey

building to the left with second floor storey band and pyramidal roof capped by a finial, slightly recessed single-storey wing to the right; 1:1 bays, casements with raised surrounds, bracketed openwork balcony to first floor window; Alton station served the now disused Churnet Valley Railway which opened in 1849.

Listing NGR: SK0704142689

The Waiting Room is also a grade 2 listed building. The Listing is as follows:-

*SK 0642-0742
13/136*

*FARLEY C.P.
FARLEY LANE (south-west side)
Former waiting room, Alton Railway Station*

*GV
II*

Former waiting room. Circa 1849. Rock faced ashlar with chamfered rustication and smooth faced ashlar dressings; hipped pan tile roofs with bracketed overhanging eaves; ashlar ridge stack. Italianate style; aligned east-west facing south, main range to the centre with shelter to the south and extensions to the north and west.

Listing NGR: SK0704142689

One storey; four bays, open fronted shelter with wooden piers bracketed to the eaves and wooden fretted fringe, two round-headed windows with bracketed sills; half-glazed doors to left and right with semi-circular fanlights, both doors and windows are recessed.

Alton railway station formerly served the now disused Churnet Valley Railway which opened in 1849.

Listing NGR: SK0706242684

2.00 Historical Description of the Property

(The following is mainly extracted from The Landmark Trust History Book for this Property with a few additional notes)

Alton Station was built in 1849 as part of the Churnet Valley branch line for the North Staffordshire Railway (the NSR, also known as "The Knotty", from the Staffordshire Knot which it took as its emblem).

Railway fever coincided with the height of the Battle of the Styles in Victorian England and the construction of stations provided a rare opportunity outside the aristocratic and institutional for well funded, architect-designed buildings.

The stations on the NSR were a particularly fine group, the majority being in a consistent Tudor or Jacobean style, but with the odd appearance of Domestic, Rural and Italianate

Styles. The main line stations were characterised by diamond patterns in the brickwork, the Churnet Valley line by the use of the local stone, while the roofs of both displayed patterns in different shaped tiles.

The NSR employed a London architect called Henry Arthur Hunt to design these stations for them. On this basis, Hunt seems the most likely candidate to have designed Alton Station, even though his other stations were Tudor or Jacobean. Conclusive evidence remains elusive and it is strange that Alton is unique among NSR stations in being Italianate in style.

For a long time, sheer geographical and chronological coincidence meant that the station was attributed to A. W. Pugin, in an area that contains some of the finest examples of his collaboration with Lord Shrewsbury in the Gothic Revival style, although it is implausible that Pugin would have designed such an Italianate group of buildings. In fact, NSR Company were happy to employ Pugin, on condition that he provided detailed drawings and specifications. This Pugin declined to do – he was not capable of tendering on these terms, since he relied heavily on his builder, George Myers to transform his drawings into reality. Pugin had to settle for providing a new lodge across the road, a suitably grand entrance to convey those visiting Lord Shrewsbury by rail on by carriage to Alton Towers itself.

Perhaps all this discussion delayed progress on the line, since Alton had a temporary station when the Churnet Valley line opened for passengers and freight on 13th July 1849. Even so, H. A. Hunt could easily have built a station in style in keeping with Pugin's Gothic gatehouse a hundred yards away and built a year earlier.

If the Earl was indeed disinterested, the design may even have been a propagandist gesture by Hunt on behalf of 'cosmopolite practice' in the so-called Battle of the Styles, a successful and provocative infiltration of the opposition's very heartland.

It was not until 1850, then, that the main station buildings (on the Up side) were ready to receive passengers. Most were day visitors who came in their droves from the Pottery towns to visit the famous gardens at Alton Towers and marvel at its temples, pagodas, glass-houses and monoliths.



Station Master's House in the foreground with the Waiting Room building behind.

Initially, the Waiting Room was known as the Booking Hall, with a small, heated Ladies Waiting Room (now a kitchen) alongside, and a Ladies' WC leading off, a Station Master's Office and Porters' Room (gentlemen's facilities were originally across the line on the Down platform, behind the signal box, but in less inhibited times were moved alongside the Ladies').

The Waiting Room was extended in 1882 to provide a Ticket Office (now used as a bedroom).

In 1884, £200 was spent on lengthening the platforms and building a special pathway leading directly from the platform to the road up to the Towers, known as 'The Avenues'.

In 1923 the NSR merged with the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS), which extended the catchment area for excursion trains considerably. Alton Towers itself was sold to a consortium that planned to run it as a full-scale public attraction. Business on the line boomed and in 1937, three rows of steps and barriers were put in up The Avenues, to manage the flow of visitors to and from Alton Towers in an orderly fashion.

The station experienced a great increase in use from 1924, when Alton Towers was sold to become a tourist attraction, with its gardens and parts of the house open for public use, although it did not become a theme park for several decades afterwards.

After nationalisation in 1948, the name of Alton Station was changed to Alton Towers – and use of such rural lines began to decline dramatically. In 1960, passenger services on the Churnet Valley Line were cut to almost nothing. Four years later, as part of Dr Beeching's overhaul, the line was reduced to single track, with total closure following in 1965.

The stationmaster lived on in his house for a year or two, but the waiting room soon began to suffer from neglect and the inevitable attentions of vandals. Staffordshire County Council bought sections of the line with the station buildings in 1969, aiming to turn the former into a footpath and find new uses for the latter.

In 1970, having failed to find anyone locally to take on Alton Station, the County Planning Officer approached Landmark, who in 1972 took on the station master's house and the waiting room block. At the time, funds were only available to make the station master's house into Landmark accommodation. The house needed little work to make it habitable again. The only major change was to turn the kitchen into a third bedroom, and to make a new, and combined, kitchen and dining room, with an arch inserted between this and the sitting room, to make both rooms larger and lighter.

The waiting room, meanwhile, was simply made sound, repainted in LMS colours and left to complete the picture until funds became available or some other use could be found for it.

The station embarked on a new lease of life as an inspiring place to stay, and since then thousands of people have enjoyed living in and learning about this remnant from the height of the Railway Age.

In 2008, the time had come for a thorough refurbishment of the accommodation. Landmark was able to make funds available to incorporate the Waiting Room block into the accommodation, turning the Booking Office into an additional bedroom, the Ladies Waiting Room into a new kitchen and the Lamp or Porters' Room into a shower room. New internal doors were made into the bedroom, kitchen and bathroom, registered in the floor tiling.

Care was also taken to ensure that the external appearance of the Waiting Room block did not change, even where a door had to be blocked internally. All surviving original features have been retained: Minton tiles on the floor, interior finishes (the 'panelling' is in fact plaster, for better wear), the shelving, hatch and ticket barrier associated with the booking office, the brackets for fire buckets and oil lamps outside. The London Midland and Scottish Railway colours, which had survived on the walls, have been repainted. In the Station Master's house, the kitchen was turned into a bathroom and the sitting room made slightly smaller to allow a corridor between, now that visitors also have the whole Waiting Room to enjoy.

3.00 The Present Day Situation

Since reinventing the Waiting Room as ancillary accommodation to the Station Master's House for those staying in the house, The Landmark Trust have had the opportunity to evaluate how the arrangement is working. This has been partly done by listening to the feedback from those staying at the house.

At the present time, the sitting room is in the Station Master's house whilst the kitchen and dining room are in the Waiting Room. This arrangement has often been commented upon and the thinking is that the kitchen, sitting and dining areas should all be in the same building since when visitors are staying there on holiday it is often one or two member of the family who are in the Waiting Room cooking whilst others are in the Sitting Room relaxing in the house.

The S M House and Waiting Room sleep eight people and there is more than enough room in the old waiting and ticket sales area to accommodate these people in comfortable seating around the fireplace and, with a shaped table, for them to also dine in this area. In this way, those staying at the property can be together during those times when at the moment they may be split up.

When this new arrangement is implemented the Lounge in the SM House will not longer be used for that purpose and it will be necessary to find a new use for the room. The Landmark Trust propose to turn this into a quite reading area and for that reason they propose to turn this into a Library .

At the moment the Lounge is open to the lobby that also serves to give access to the main bathroom of the house through an arched opening. It is proposed to remove the plasterboarded archway to restore the square headed opening and to insert a new stud wall with a door to give separation between the Library and the Bathroom.

This new arrangement will make the present door between the Lounge/Bathroom and the Hallway obsolete so it is proposed to use this door in the new opening and to leave the existing frame and architraves in place and make good the hinge rebates.

Other works will include lighting and heating with the present radiator in the Lounge being moved which will require a shallow trench being made in the floor for conveying heating pipes. The tiled floor will be made good upon completion as it has been elsewhere in the house back in the 1970s when similar trenching was undertaken.

The alterations in the Waiting Room will be the removal of the Ticket Barrier to allow access to the tiling (see under 'Repairs' below) and this will be replaced using stainless steel dowels inserted into stainless steel sockets in the floor.

Evidence on site shows that the floor tiling continues beneath the Ticket Barrier and so it is not an original feature. It hasn't been possible to establish when the barrier was erected.

It is also proposed to create a laundry room next to the Plant Room and to facilitate this the existing boilers and electrical equipment will be screened off with a painted t&g boarded stud wall with three similar doors and a painted t&g boarded removable panel will be provided in the Laundry room to screen existing pipework. To complete the alterations, a pair of painted t&g boarded doors will be provided to secure the shelving above the washing machine.

4.00 Repairs

4.1 Floor Tiling in Waiting Room

The Waiting Room floor is tiled with an ornate geometrical pattern of tessellated coloured Minton tiles.



Detail of Waiting Room floor tiling



Tiling and Ticket Barrier

The floor tiling has suffered badly from the sheer numbers of people who have historically used the station and in places the floor has sunk. Thousands visited nearby Alton Towers gardens.

Major repairs are now required and a close down of the lettings of the property has been allocated for March to May 2021 to carry out this work. A specialist tile maker from Stoke on Trent who uses the same techniques as the original Minton tile makes has been engaged to do this work. The firm is Rieveley Ceramics (<https://www.rieveleyceramics.co.uk>).

When the Waiting Room was converted to use by the Landmark Trust in 2008, a new heating installation was installed using 25mm diameter steel pipes and flat radiators. The pipework

was surface mounted along skirtings and through walls and the Landmark Trust wish to take advantage of the tile works to open up the floors and to divert this pipework in the Waiting Room only to run under the floor.

This will involve the tiling being taken up and a trench dug for then pipework and the tiling reinstated upon completion. The main area of tiling to be repaired/replaced will be carefully taken up, the floor levelled and the new tiles together with any reusable tiles will be relaid exactly as they are at the present time.

4.2 Roof Coverings

The roofs of all the buildings are covered with Staffordshire blue pan tiles many of which on the Waiting Room were replaced in the 1970s with concrete tiles of the same shape. The concrete are now becoming perished and the Landmark Trust had planned to carry out repairs between March and May 2021 only it is likely that the roof tiles and spaces could be used by bats and so it has been decided to delay these works until 2023 in order to organise ecology reports and prepare any mitigation proposals prior to applying for listed building consent.

A separate application will be submitted in the autumn of 2022.



The Waiting Room is in the foreground.

4.3 Repointing

The chimney stack and boundary wall at the rear of the Station Master's House have open and perished mortar joints which will require repointing with a hot lime mix.



Peter Napier and Co Ltd.,

26th November 2021