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REVISION C

Heritage Assessment

Single storey outbuilding to the rear of
The White Hart Hotel, Alton, Staffordshire, ST10 4AQ.

Introduction

This assessment accompanies a planning application for a change of use of a single storey outbuilding located to the rear of The White Hart Hotel in Alton.

The building is single storey and has three garage sized openings with loosely fitting timber boarded doors in the front western elevation facing the pub car park.

This statement forms part of the justification for the proposal which demonstrates that consideration has been given to the protection of the heritage asset and its setting. Its purpose is to identify important characteristics or significance of the existing heritage asset, explain how the proposals would affect these aspects and justify why this is necessary or desirable. This will help to ensure that care is taken to preserve the special appearance and character of the building or area which is affected.

The use proposed is as a micro brewery for craft beer. The use will not require extension nor rebuilding of the existing building and the elevation alterations make use of the existing openings in the South West facade of the building. Deliveries will come in the wooden doors at the end.

The outbuilding is constructed of carefully coursed semi-dressed sandstone typical of Alton, and has a pitched gabled roof of blue clay tiles. It lies approximately 5m to the rear of the Public house and lies on the site's side boundary. The North East (rear) elevation of the outbuilding forms the site boundary to the church. The South East gable end of the outbuilding is visible through the vehicular access to the pub car park. The building has an opening only in its South West elevation which faces the pub car park. These consist of a single window and 3 large openings each with a pair of timber side hung doors. There is a public right of way through the car park, from which the outbuilding is visible

The higher ground of the church yard reaches to nearly eaves level at the rear (NE) with only a band of brick courses visible. These are modern bricks.

The building is considered to be in good structural condition. It is used at present for storage associated with the Public House and for ancillary domestic storage.

Under the National Planning Policy Framework any design should seek to "conserve and enhance" the historic environment. The NPPF states that LPAs should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal, including any contribution made by their setting, with a level of detail proportionate to its importance.

Heritage statement

The White Hart Inn was Grade II listed in 1986 (Ref:1037923). The listing description is as follows:

"House now Inn. C18 with later alterations. Ashlar with herringbone tooling painted white; plain tile roof with coped verge to the right; brick integral end stacks. Aligned north-east/south-west facing south-east. 2 storeys, the right hand bay slightly taller and with projecting plinth; 3 bays, casements; door to right of centre." (Historic England)

The property is also located within Alton and Farley Conservation Area, designated in 1971. There are several listed buildings situated within the conservation area. Many of these are

located along the High Street, which represents the medieval core of the village. This is evidenced by the close packed houses and narrow burgage plots still visible to the north of the High Street.

The White Hart occupies one of these plots, and would originally have functioned as a private dwelling, likely becoming a public house during the 19th century expansion of Alton (due to the increased interest of the 15th and 16th Earls of Shrewsbury at Alton Lodge (now Alton Towers)).

The White Hart Inn was previously owned and run by Marstons brewery. The pub is now owned and run by the Alton community.

The building the subject of the planning application lies within the historic curtilage of The White Hart. It is not listed in its own right, nor specifically referred to in the listing description.

The White Hart itself is considered to be of moderate heritage significance but makes a positive contribution to the conservation area, being well maintained and occupying a prominent position within the High Street.

The outbuilding the subject of this application contributes to the character of the area in a modest way as an attractive traditional outbuilding. It lies within the curtilage of the listed building and has a positive contribution to the listed building and to the area as a whole.

Internally the outbuilding's roof has a very fine truss, purlin and rafter construction. Internally the building is subdivided by 3 internal walls. The outer two are not historic elements but the central dividing wall shows elements of historic fabric.

Heritage Assessment

The plans re-use the existing openings in the building. The new windows and doors will be tailor made to fit the openings without alteration to the opening's fabric or dimensions. The external doors which will be removed are not historic.

The original plans for the building included an extension to the south east elevation but this has now been omitted.

The existing building is subdivided by walls of which one is not historic, so its removal is not detrimental to historic character. One of the dividing walls is brick and the other is timber. The central dividing wall may be historic in terms of its materials and even if not, its presence reflects historic character and the buildings traditional layout. As a result, the amended plans retain this feature. In order to link the two halves of the building a central opening is needed, which would be 1.5m wide to facilitate the business use. This will allow items to be moved on a pallet between the two parts of the building. The remainder of the wall will be retained and its presence as a historic feature will therefore be retained.

If during the conversion process the structural stability of the internal wall is found to be unsafe, it will be rebuilt in coordination with the Council's Conservation Officer.

Without creating an opening between the two sections of the building the buildings re-use potential is extremely limited. Without a viable new use the building is likely to fall into disrepair.

The plans also includes creation of a new floor inside the outbuilding, to bring it up to modern standards including insulation.

The traditional historic roof structure will be retained, the roof requires re-tiling but no changes to the structural elements are planned or necessary. The tiles will be reused and any shortfall made good in matching local tiles.

The external envelope of the building will be largely unchanged. The changes to the South West elevation will re-use the existing opening in a sympathetic manner. The building remains unchanged other than the opening of the internal wall. Accordingly, it is considered that there will be no detrimental effect on the historic setting nor character of the conservation area.

Significance of effect

Significance is one of the guiding principles running through the historic environment section of the NPPF. The NPPF defines significance as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest'. Such interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic' and it may derive 'not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'. Significance is what conservation sustains, and where appropriate enhances, in managing change to heritage assets.

The National Planning Policy Framework definition further states that in the planning context heritage interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. This can be interpreted as follows:

- archaeological interest: As defined in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework, there will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.
- architectural and artistic interest: These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skill, like sculpture.
- historic interest: An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history but, can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

In legislation and designation criteria, the terms 'special architectural or historic interest' of a listed building and the 'national importance' of a scheduled monument are used to describe all or part of what, in planning terms, is referred to as the identified heritage asset's significance.

Heritage assets may be affected by direct physical change or by change in their setting.

Being able to properly assess the nature, extent, and importance of the significance of a heritage asset, and the contribution of its setting, is very important to understanding the potential impact and acceptability of development proposal.

All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not. The setting of a heritage asset and the asset's curtilage may not have the same extent.

The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to the visual relationship between the asset and the proposed development and associated visual/physical considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part in the assessment of impacts on setting, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust, smell, and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places. For example, buildings that are in close proximity but are not visible from each other may have a historic or aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of the significance of each.

Level of Harm

What matters in assessing whether a proposal might cause harm is the impact on the significance of the heritage asset. As the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear, significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

Proposed development affecting a heritage asset may have no impact on its significance or may enhance its significance and therefore cause no harm to the heritage asset. Where potential harm to designated heritage assets is identified, it needs to be categorised as either less than substantial harm or substantial harm.

Whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision-maker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. In general terms, substantial harm is a high test, so it may not arise in many cases. For example, in determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key element of its special architectural or historic interest. It is the degree of harm to the asset's significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed. The harm may arise from works to the asset or from development within its setting.

Works that are moderate or minor in scale are likely to cause less than substantial harm or no harm at all. However, even minor works have the potential to cause substantial harm, depending on the nature of their impact on the asset and its setting.

The National Planning Policy Framework confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). It also makes clear that any harm to a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification and sets out certain assets in respect of which harm should be exceptional/wholly exceptional.

Conclusion

The three categories of harm recognised in the NPPF are clear. There is substantial harm, less than substantial harm and no harm. There are no other grades or categories of harm, and it is inevitable that each of the categories of substantial harm, and less than substantial harm will cover a broad range of harm.

The proposal is considered to cause less than substantial harm to the heritage asset. This reflects the fact that the building is not prominently located and exhibits little historic merit. It is not a listed building in its own right. In addition, the manner of conversion respects the character and appearance of the building. The works do not involve demolition other than extremely minor and reversible, in the form of an opening in a dividing wall, and the elevation alterations re-use the existing openings in the building.

It is therefore considered that the works proposed will have a negligible impact on heritage assets.