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Design, Access and Heritage Statement

Proposed change of use of to form two number dwellings including single storey rear extensions, elevational alterations, removal of existing Beech tree and excavation of land to form parking areas.at
Rudyard Memorial Institute, Lake Road, Rudyard, ST138RN

Introduction

The site consists of a large piece of land occupied by a vacant and dilapidated building known as Rudyard Memorial Institute. It has a frontage to Lake Road and is within Rudyard Lake Conservation Area.

The building lies within a cluster of built development with dwellings to both sides, and a hotel opposite. However, it is within the Green Belt

The building is single storey with a pitched tiled roof. It includes natural stone in its construction and there are memorial stones dedicated to the war dead within the structure. In addition, there are areas of timber cladding and rendered sections.

The building has no architectural merit and is not identified as a building of intrinsic value or historical merit within the Council's Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

The building is elevated above Lake Road and has no vehicular access or off-street parking.

The site is overgrown and there is one particularly notable Beech tree, located between the building and Lake Road.

The building has been vacant for several years. It had a series of temporary planning consents to allow its use as tearooms.

The building has not been used for community use for in excess of 10 years and was recently sold at auction to our clients.

Proposed works.

The new owner wishes to convert the building to residential use. This would be in keeping with its setting as it lies within a residential enclave.

The applicant does not wish to demolish the existing building, nor propose significant changes to its appearance in views from the street.

The plans propose conversion and extension to create pair of semi-detached bungalows, each with 3 bedrooms. To facilitate that redevelopment, the plans include rear extensions. This has been chosen in preference to raising the roof and adding upper floor accommodation as it was considered that this would be more visually dominant and significantly increase the visual bulk of the existing building.

The extension would be wholly to the rear and provide a kitchen and bedroom to each new bungalow. The extension would span across the entire rear elevation, except for a modest inset at each side. Due to the modest roof pitch and low eaves and ridge, it is not possible to add a sloping roof to the proposed extension. The flat roof proposed will not be visible from public space.

In addition, in order to provide off street parking for the new dwellings, it is proposed that an area of the bank in front of the building would be excavated. This reflects the fact that the existing building is elevated above the road. Two parking spaces would be provided for each dwelling and new pedestrian access steps added.

This arrangement is common in the area as many other nearby buildings are elevated above the road. Indeed, some buildings almost resemble 3 storey houses as a result of the provision of an excavated parking area level with the road.

A retaining wall would be added at the back of the parking spaces, curving around and stepping down at the sides. This would be faced with stone or brick as agreed by the LPA.

In addition, the mature tree in front of the building would require removal to provide the parking spaces. The tree is not subject to a Tree Preservation Order. However, it consent is required for removal as it lies within a Conservation Area. This issue is discussed in more detail below.

The plans include minor elevation alterations to the existing Memorial Hall. It has always had a domestic appearance, but this is somewhat dated. The changes would generally improve the appearance of the building. Requisite alterations to the facades would be repaired using matching materials.

It is considered that the principle of re-using the building for residential purposes is generally acceptable as the building has not been used for its original intended community use for many years. An alternative facility exists within 1 mile.

Green Belt

The site is within a visually distinct village type setting, of dwellings over-washed by the Green Belt. Policy SS10 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan [2020] (LP) is concerned with ‘other rural areas’ comprising of the countryside and the Green Belt. This policy states, at section 1, that it will allow extensions to existing dwellings provided they are appropriate in scale and design. It continues that the Council will assess schemes having regard to the original dwelling, in cases where cumulative change has occurred. Section 6 of the policy also explains that the Council will maintain the Green Belt with strict control applied over inappropriate development allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

Paragraph 137 of the Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl and keep land permanently open. Paragraph 149 establishes that new development would be inappropriate unless it meets a listed exception. Exception (c) allows for “the extension or alteration of a building provided it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building”. LP policy SS10 is consistent with the objectives of the Framework and as such afforded full weight.

The phrase ‘disproportionate’ is not defined by the Framework. The Council refers to a ‘rule of thumb’ guide of 30 percent with respect to additions to buildings in the Green

Belt. However, this numerical measure is not enshrined in policy and would be an over prescriptive approach to matters of proportionality.

The plans for the Memorial Institute would enlarge the original floor area by 35%, which is very close to the Council's 30% guideline.

The 'original building' would constitute the building as it existed on the coming into force of the 1947 Act or the first building as originally built after that date. The existing building has a small single storey flat roofed element. However, this predates planning controls and for planning purposes is considered to be part of the original building.

A conclusion on the effect on the Green Belt cannot be arrived at purely on a mathematical calculation as a single factor. Consequently, the test is primarily an objective one based on size, as referenced by the Framework. This is therefore ultimately a matter for the decision maker, with much depending on the individual circumstances of the proposal.

Any arithmetic assessment must always consider whether an extension has a detrimental effect on openness, the most important attributes of the Green Belt. This consideration should reflect the setting of the building and its context, especially the size compared to nearby buildings.

The openness of the Green Belt has both spatial and visual dimensions. It is an open textured concept that requires a range of factors to be taken into account when considering the effect of a proposal on openness.

Visual perception is a factor which may reduce the spatial harm from the effect of development on the openness of the Green Belt. The proposed addition would be wholly to the rear of the dwelling, with extremely limited public views within a context of surrounding built form. The adjacent buildings provide containment to the site and would reduce the visual effect of the proposed addition. This context limits and visually contains the site from wider views and would partially integrate the scheme visually within the existing pattern of development. As a result, the visual effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt would be slight.

The proposed extension would be below the ridge of the main house. As a result, the extension would be subservient to the original building.

Consequently, it is considered that the proposal would not represent additions that would be disproportionate to the size of the original building. As the proposal would accord with the requirements of Paragraph 149(c) of the Framework, it would not be inappropriate development. Accordingly, the proposal would not be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt nor would it require to be justified by very special circumstances and would therefore be acceptable development

Character and Appearance

The Rudyard Character Assessment (RCA) is focussed on Rudyard Lake, the village of Rudyard and its environs. The lake has several characteristic holiday homes and chalets along its western ban. Important features of the area, as defined by paragraph

2.2 in the Council's RCA Appraisal, include "its natural beauty, developed as an Edwardian tourist resort, and being located within an exposed and dramatic location". The appraisal describes the area as being an intimate narrow network of rural lanes and scattered ribbon development, hidden from the wider area by the rolling agricultural setting. Accordingly, the significance of the area derives from its combination of cultural, natural, and built components set within a dramatic rolling wooded landscape.

The Memorial Institute and its immediate neighbouring built form are not of recognised heritage value and therefore make a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the area. Furthermore, gaps between buildings are of various sizes without a clear pattern of spacing. As such, neither does the spacing around the buildings in this area contribute to the significance of the RCA.

The proposed rear extension would be subservient to the original building and would complement its existing simple form. As such, the proposed addition would be in keeping with the building and its surroundings. Furthermore, the proposed additions would be well screened, and would thereby integrate well with the surrounding line of neighbouring development resulting in a neutral impact on the significance of the RCA.

Accordingly, the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the RCA. It would therefore comply with LP policy DC2 and the Framework. These seek, among other matters, for development to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance and to be sympathetic to local character.

Historic Environment

The conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance is a core planning principle. Heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and effective conservation delivers wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits. Conservation is an active process of maintenance and managing change. It requires a flexible and thoughtful approach to get the best out of assets as diverse as listed buildings.

This statement assesses the significance of the proposed works in terms of their effect on the heritage asset. What matters in assessing if a proposal causes substantial harm is the impact on the significance of the heritage asset. Whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision taker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework.

The elevation alterations are required to enable the re-use of the vacant building and allow it to be subdivided to create a pair of dwellings.

In addition, the existing concrete roof tiles would be removed and replaced with Staffordshire Blue roof tiles. This is more sympathetic to the Conservation Area.

The elevation alterations are considered to be at the very lower end of "less than substantial harm".

This reflects the lack of heritage interest in the existing building.

The existing windows are dated in style and do not add to the heritage value of the Conservation Area. The elevation changes proposed will be more in keeping and more attractive.

The memorial stones in the façade will be where possible, returned to the descendants' families. It this is not possible they will passed to the Parish Council for reinstatement elsewhere in the village.

Heritage- Planning Policy

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that Local Planning Authorities should, in conserving whether to grant consent have special regard to the desirability or preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural and historic interest which it possesses.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that great weight should be given to the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets.

Central Government Guidance: National Planning Policy Framework – paragraphs 128-129 and 131-132 National Planning Practice Guidance – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It states that one of the 12 core principles that underpin both plan-making and decision-taking is that planning should conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations. It also says that account should always be taken of;

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.

- their potential to contribute to sustainable communities; and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to the historic environment's local distinctiveness.

Significance, as defined by the NPPF glossary 'includes archaeological, architectural, artistic, or historic interest. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'.

The NPPF Section 12 makes it clear 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. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.

The advice contained within the framework clearly establishes a hierarchy; the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. It follows therefore that the lesser the importance of the asset the lesser the weight should be.

Tree Works

Policy NE 2 of Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2002 relates to Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows . It states that the Council will protect existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, in particular, ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows from loss or deterioration.

In order to provide off street parking a mature beech tree on the site frontage will require removal. That tree has not been maintained for many years and it is extremely large . The branches extend over the building and the roots will almost certainly extend beneath it. As a result it has a very real potential to affect the structural stability of the building

Trees, by their very nature can be very large, very heavy and can drink a lot of water from the soil surrounding them. Recommended Safe tree distances reflect the potential damage from their roots to the foundations of a property which may cause subsidence. There is also the fact that a tree may be old, in poor health and in poor structural condition. Trees and their root system can be weakened by previous storms or maybe they are in just poor condition due to poor management, ineffective or potentially damaging pruning methods.

The ABI (Association of British Insurers) have recommended safe distances of trees to buildings. In respect of beech trees the recommended safe distance is 15m. The beech tree Is less than 4 m from the building. It is therefore considered that its removal is a reasonable precaution to prevent potential damage to the building. In addition it is difficult, possibly impossible. to provide off street parking for the proposed dwellings without its removal.

Community Asset?

The building is known as Rudyard Memorial institute. It was built in 1922 for community use. Memorial plaques to the war dead of the Great War are incorporated in the façade.

Until its sale earlier in 2023, the Institute was under the control of the Trustees, which is also a charity.

However, the building has not been used for community activities for many years. It is understood that over 10 years have elapsed since it was last used. The building has fallen into disrepair and was originally for sale in 2019. Contractual issues arose and it was then sold in 2023.

Planning permission was granted in 1978 for the use of the Institute as a commercial tearoom. This was apparently implemented.

Current national policy continues to support re- use of existing buildings in the Green Belt.

There is a community building relatively near to the settlement of Rudyard, in the form of the village hall in Horton, the next village. This lies approximately 1 mile to the west. This is a large modern village hall with on-site car parking.

In addition, Hotel Rudyard lies opposite the site, and albeit a commercial property it has the potential to provide a space for community groups to meet.

Furthermore, the wide and varied selection of venues is available in the town of Leek, lie approximately 2 miles to the south east.

Conclusion

The vacant building formerly Rudyard Memorial Institute has been vacant for several years and planning permission is sought to allow residential re-use. The elevation alterations, rear extension and provision of car parking are required to facilitate that re-use.

The building has not been used for community purposes for over 10 years and a variety of alternative facilities exist within the local area.

The building is not listed and although it lies within the Conservation Area exhibits little heritage interest or architectural merit and has a poor visual contribution. The elevation changes will improve that visual impact, and reroofing with Staffordshire Blue tiles is generally welcome.

It is considered in heritage terms that the proposal complies with the general objectives of relevant development plan policies including Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The works proposed are considered to represent less than substantial harm to the designated asset and in having special regard to preserving the special architectural and historic merit of the listed building is still considered to be acceptable where Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is relevant along with local policies.

The modest size of the extension and its discrete location means that the impact on the openness of the Green Belt is considered to be slight, and the extensions would not appear disproportionate to the original building.

The removal of the large beech tree on the site frontage is necessitated by the need to provide off street parking. In addition a tree of this species and size sited within 15m of a building is unwise for safety and structural reasons. The excavation of the sloping land to the front of the building for on site parking is commonly seen in the locality.