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Design, Access and Heritage Statement

Proposed change of use of Memorial Hall to create 2 dwellings, excavations to front garden to provide parking and works to Beech tree 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 single storey building is set back from the road on a significantly higher level.

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, where restrictive development plan policies apply. It also lies within the Rudyard Lake Conservation Area. The building is clearly located inside the smaller village of Rudyard.

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 accessed by steps up from the road and has no off-street parking or vehicular access other than directly from the road. A stone wall runs across the road frontage of the site. In the front of the building is a large beech tree which is a significant feature in the street scene.

The building has a large amount of curtilage to the rear which slopes up to the rear and is over grown with vegetation and several smaller trees.

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.

Planning History

SMD/2023/0327 - Proposed change of use of memorial institute 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. Refused for the following reasons.

1. "The proposed development is located in the green belt. Part of the proposed development includes a large rear extension. This substantial extension of the building as well as the existing large extension on the northern side of the building will cumulatively result in a disproportionate addition to the floor area of the building and thus will be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which by definition will be harmful to it. This is a form of development which is not supported by Green Belt policy. The proposed development would be significantly detrimental to the openness of the Green Belt, and no very special circumstances outweigh the harm have been identified. The development would therefore be

contrary to Green Belt policy as set out in Policy SS10 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and the Nation Planning Policy Statement section 13.

2. The application site is located in the Rudyard Conservation Area. The frontage of the former Memorial Institute building creates an interesting visual element in the frontage of Lake Road with the bank and the traditional stone wall, creating a sense of enclosure and definition to the street frontage. In the immediate vicinity, the same boundary type and material is seen at the opposite side of Lake Road and this portion of the road sees extensive surviving examples of this. The scheme proposes the significant reduction of this feature in the road frontage, this includes and is not limited to original boundary wall, gate and piers. The loss of the wall and bank will also cause harm through loss of the existing sense of enclosure. The large scale works to the front of the building would cause visual harm to the narrow lane, and the views along it by creating a car dominated frontage and a new large retaining wall and tarmac. The proposed works would not conserve or enhance the Conservation Area and would cause less than substantial harm to it. The public benefits of the scheme, including the provision of 2 dwellings at a time of housing land supply shortfall are not considered to be sufficient to outweigh this harm. The proposal is therefore contrary to policies DC1 and DC2, of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020 and advice in the National Planning Policy Framework
3. The works will require the removal of the large, prominent and attractive beach tree located at the front of the institute which benefits from protection under a Tree Preservation Order. This tree forms a very important feature in the street scene. Its loss would cause further significant harm to the character of the road and the conservation area. The proposal would thus result in the loss of an important mature tree of amenity value which would add to the harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area identified above and would be contrary to policies DC1, DC2 and NE2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020. “

The current planning application seeks to overcome the reasons for refusal.

Proposed works.

The plans address the reasons for refusal of the earlier planning application by amending the parking arrangements, omitting the tree removal and addressing the impact on the Green Belt.

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 2 bedrooms. To facilitate that redevelopment, the plans propose a rear extension with a flat roof. 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 a small area of the bank in front of the building would be excavated. The first plans proposed substantial excavation and this has been substantially scaled back in this application. One parking space³ would be provided for each dwelling.

The provision of parking with an excavated bank 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.

The mature tree in front of the building would no longer be removed. Routine tree maintenance to trim back some of branches and crown lifting is proposed to protect the building and to provide the parking spaces. The tree is not subject to a Tree Preservation Order. However, it lies within a Conservation Area.

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. The LPA raised no objections to the principle of re-use under the previous planning application.

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 built volume by 32%, 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, originally built to provide Wc facilities.

The planning officer, in considering the previous planning application, made the following point;

"The building has a flat roofed element added to the north end it is assumed that was added to the building since 1948 as a flat roof would not match the design of the rest of the building."

This is incorrect. This is an important consideration as the starting point for determining the original building is that which existed when planning legislation came into force in 1947. In determining the previous planning application, the planner added the floor area of the existing extension to the floor area of the proposal and concluded that the total enlargement of the building would be 92%.

The records held by <https://www.british-history.ac.uk> states:

"Rudyard Memorial Institute in Lake Road was built in 1922 and enlarged in 1934; a porch was added in 1939 to commemorate the coronation of 1937, and the building was further enlarged in 1947."

As a result, the floor area of the existing building, for planning purposes is considered to be the entirety of the existing building. This is approximately 148 sq. m.

The proposed extension will add approximately 70sq. m. floor area. The volumetric increase is 32% which is considered to be proportionate and therefore not detrimental to the openness of the Green Belt.

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. This was also the conclusion of the LPA in respect of the earlier unsuccessful planning application.

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 bank. 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.

The LPA raised no objections to the design of the extension in respect of the earlier unsuccessful planning application.

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. If this is not possible they will be passed to the Parish Council for reinstatement elsewhere in the village.

The Councils Conservation Officer took a similar view in respect of the earlier unsuccessful planning application. That officer however objected to the frontage alterations as follows;

“The former Memorial Institute building has no real architectural value. However, its position set back from the road among the land, and relationship with the trees affords it some desirability.

The historic boundary treatment and boundary material palette at front elevation, paired with two stone gate piers to the left-hand-side of the plot with surviving gate, are not accurately depicted in the existing elevations. There is little exploration into the history of, or relationship of these, as they are of quite some age in comparison to the current building. From brief investigation a building of a similar footprint is seen on maps dated 1898. Though whatever structure that once was is no longer, these features survive contributing as part of the character of the Conservation Area. As above, paired with the topography; creates an interesting frontage demonstrating the vernacular.

In the immediate vicinity, the same boundary type and material is seen at the opposite side of Lake Road. This portion of the road sees extensive surviving examples of this.

The scheme sees the total eradication of the frontage, this includes and is not limited to the tree/s, original boundary, gate and piers and such (again not clearly depicted). Despite the Design, Access and Heritage Statement recognising elements forming part of the setting of the area '*consist of 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*'.

It is also said the scheme '*would not propose significant changes to its appearance in views from the street*'. I do not agree with this and believe the large scale works at front elevation would in fact impose substantial alterations to the narrow lane, and views. The Heritage Statement appears to only assess the physical building, and I am not confident it realises the wider setting of the vicinity.

In addition, the very open nature of the Rudyard Hotel car parking and respective facilities opposite I feel is offset to a degree, by having the remainder of a 'wooded rural backdrop' in features such as the plot at the former Memorial Institute. I am concerned further opening up and extensive hardscaping, with views straight onto cars and tarmac, does not contribute nor enhance the setting and feels very unnatural and generic.

I encourage the retention of the Beech Tree at principal elevation as I cannot support its removal, the retention of the boundary wall with stone piers and gate, and encourage reduction in extensive hardscaping and car parking at the frontage. If the concept is to deliver desirable dwelling/s set within a historic landscape, measures should be taken to provide enhancement. As currently, what interest and rural aspects afford the uninteresting building *some* value, look to be totally sanitised. Consequently, there would be a risk of visual obtrusion.

Further to this, I am not sure only providing steps to the front of the proposed property is conducive. An alternative may perhaps be that steps are omitted, and with the retention of the stone piers and gates to the left – that a more subservient design of a gradually ascending slope would be more enhancing and inclusive. Enabling some natural form, existing earth and greenery to also remain along with the Beech Tree, therefore providing enhancement.

In regard to the remainder of the scheme:

- - I have no issue with a rear extension in principle and will advise if it is to be a flat roof that ample drainage is included.
- - Bi-fold doors and such are included on the rear extension though there is no indication of rear landscaping works, earthworks or further alterations.
- - Joinery details, external finishes of facing materials and such would require condition.

To conclude; as the scheme stands it is seen to pose harm on the setting of the Conservation Area, of which at this time I cannot see thorough exploration to mitigate this, and therefore justification for said harm. I would encourage revisions of the project, happy to continue to advise. “

The new plans, the subject of this statement respond to those concerns by substantially revising the proposed works to the frontage and retaining the existing tree. The existing steps up to the building are to be retained and will provide access on foot to each new dwelling. The wall, gates and pillars to the frontage will also be retained. The extent of excavation for parking has been substantially reduced from the earlier plan in order to have a far lesser effect on appearance of the site frontage.

It is considered that the plans now represent less than significant harm to the heritage asset.

Heritage- Planning Policy

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that Local Planning Authorities should, in considering 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.

There is a mature beech tree on the site frontage, which has not been maintained for many years and it is extremely large. The branches extend over the building and the site frontage, and the roots will extend beneath the land between the building and the road. Originally the plans were to remove the tree to prevent future damage to the building and in order to provide off street parking.

Following the concerns of the LPA the plans have been revised so that the tree will NOT be removed. It will require trimming back of some branches and lifting of the crown. This is considered to be little more than long overdue routine maintenance.

The proposed excavation works to provide 2 parking spaces is the minimum requirement. The digging out will be at the extremity of the tree's root protection zone. This will not affect the longevity or health of the tree.

An arboriculture report accompanies the planning application.

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 tea room. 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.

Th LPA raised no objections to the loss of the building as a community facility under the previous planning application.

Parking provision

The plans propose creation of two bungalows, each with two bedrooms. A total of 2 off street car parking spaces would be created, one space for each new dwelling. This is an under provision according to the Council's parking standards, where two parking spaces are normally required for each 2-bedroom dwelling.

However, this under- provision is a consequence of addressing the reasons for refusal of the earlier unsuccessful planning application. The provision of 2 car parking spaces is a direct result of the requirement to preserve and protect the beech tree on the site, and the heritage interest in the frontage features. Providing additional parking is not possible without removing the wall, gate and piers on the site frontage. Additional parking would also encroach further into the tree's root protection Zone and have a greater potential to affect the long-term health of the tree.

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 existing flat roofed addition to the building predates the 1947 planning Acts and therefore constitutes part of the original building for planning purposes. The extension the subject of this application would increase the original volume by 32 % which is generally considered to be proportionate and acceptable in the Green Belt.

The works no longer entail removal of frontage features and a Beech tree to provide parking on the site. These mean that a less than optimum level of off-street parking can be provided, but this is considered acceptable on balance as it is a direct result of the LPA's desire to retain the tree on the site and conserve heritage.