

Conservation Team Advice

Date: 6th August 2025
Application Ref: SMD/2025/0300 & SMD/2025/0301
Site Address: Westwood College, Westwood Park Drive, Leek
Proposal:

- Replacement of existing non-compliant external escape stair with a compliant staircase. Alteration to small retaining wall to facilitate the installation of stair flight leading to external ground level.
- Listed building consent for the replacement of existing non-compliant external escape stair with a compliant staircase. Alteration to small retaining wall to facilitate the installation of stair flight leading to external ground level.

Heritage assets affected:		
Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☒	• Westwood Hall – Grade II (listing ref: 1268548)
Non-Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☐	

Conservation Advice

Summary of Significance

The proposal would involve alterations to Westwood Hall, which is a Grade II Listed Building.

Westwood Hall (Grade II) is a c.1850-53 house designed by Hadfield Weightman and Goldie for John Davenport with earlier remains. The building has been in use as a school since the 1920s. The building is constructed in red sandstone and scallop-tiled roof, designed in a Jacobean-revival style. The significance of the building derives from its historic association with Victorian country house building, association with the Davenport pottery family, landmark design and illustrative Jacobean style and later communal value as a school.

Assessment and Impact

The proposal seeks to demolish and replace an external metal fire escape staircase located to the north (rear) elevation of the principal part of the school building. The replacement staircase would be larger than the existing; it would be approx. 9m (H) x 4.5m (W) x 6m (L).

As set out in the Design, Access and Heritage Statement, the existing staircase is defective and not compliant with Building Regulations. The proposed replacement would be longer and wider than the existing to improve means of escape.

The increase in footprint would increase the visual bulk and mass of the structure, which would likely distract from architectural design of the building and it would cut across a chimney stack which makes up part of the overall Jacobean style of the building. The proposal has, however, sought to minimise some of this visual harm with the use of period detailing in the balustrading to help harmonise it with the historic part of the building. Even so, the increased footprint would still have a harmful impact on the architectural interest of the building, but it is noted that this would be on a less visually sensitive elevation as there have been modern extensions to this elevation and some of the visual impact would be reduced by tree screening to the east.

Overall, the proposal would likely result in a minor-moderate degree of harm to the special interest of the Listed Building. However, as set out in the supporting information, there is clear and convincing justification for the proposal in terms of improving fire safety and these upgrades would help secure the continued use of the building as a school.

Legislation and Policy

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The local planning authority should have a desirability of preserving the special interest of the Listed Building (s.16 and 66).

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

In determining applications, local authorities should take account of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (par.210).

Any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within the setting), should require clear and convincing justification (par.213).

Where a proposed development would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use (par.215).

Local Development Framework

Consideration should also be given to the following documents and local development framework policies:

- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted 2020) – DC2 The Historic Environment

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the proposal would result in a minor-moderate degree of harm to the special interest of the Listed Building. This would fail to satisfy the provisions of s.16 and 66 of the Act. With reference to the planning policies, this would be 'less than substantial harm' to the designated heritage asset (par.215 of NPPF and policy DC2 of the local development framework). There is clear and convincing justification for this level of heritage harm in terms of improving fire safety (par.213 of NPPF) and the proposal seeks to secure the continued optimum viable use for the building (par.215 of NPPF). Therefore, there are no objections from a conservation perspective.

For any consent granted, we would suggest the following condition:

- The staircase hereby permitted shall be metal and coloured RAL 9005 as specified on 'External Staircase Elevations as Proposed' plan (dwg no. WST02A-E3C-20-ELZ-DR-A-002 Rev P03).

Reason: To ensure the proposed development takes the form envisaged and to preserve the architectural interest of the Listed Building.

Conservation Officer: