

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0301
Valid 27/06/2025

WESTWOOD COLLEGE
WESTWOOD PARK DRIVE
LEEK

**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.**

**(LISTED BUILDING CONSENT -
ALTERATION)**

MAIN ISSUES

- Heritage
- Design

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Prestigious three storey Grade II Listed Building in Jacobean revival style dating from 1850. Originally a house for the Davenport family, founders of the Davenport Pottery Company in Leek but used as a school since 1920. It currently caters for up to 900 14 to 18 year olds.

This proposal relates to an existing external metal stair case off a side corner of the building front. This was constructed to serve as the means of escape for first and second floor parts of the building with new (non-original) doorways inserted at each of those levels. Following a fire safety review in 2024 the stair case has been found unsafe. The second floor which it served has been taken out of use as a result.

As an add-on to the original building the existing escape structure is relatively compact and despite the corner position is discrete. This is helped by strong tree cover adjacent, including evergreens.

PROPOSAL

Replacement structure appreciably longer and wider than the existing. The details are set out in the comments of the Council's Conservation Officer who was consulted in advance of the submission. In brief: 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). A bespoke design of metal balustrade is proposed.

The submitted Design, Access and Heritage Statement says the scheme is needed in order to address the “unsatisfactory secondary means of escape to the 2nd Floor identified as a significant risk on multiple surveys.”

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted 9th September 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
SS2 Settlement Hierarchy
SS5 Leek Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2024)

Paragraph(s) 1 – 14;
Section(s) 4 – Decision making; 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities; 11 – Making effective use of land; 12 – Achieving well designed places; 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment; 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/G):

- Space About Dwellings SPG
- Design Principles SPG
- Design Guide SPD adopted 21st February 2018

Local Plan Supporting Evidence Documents:

- Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None of direct relevance

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: **20.08.2025**
Neighbour consultation period ends: **06.08.2025**
Press Advert: **13.08.2025**

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Leek Town Council resolved to support this application for replacement of external fire escape at Westwood College. The safety of staff, students and visitors at the college should be paramount and, if designed well, the new fire escape may enhance the building and improve access. The council also supports completion of the work over the summer holidays ready for September Autumn term. No objection.

Environmental Health

No objections. No conditions requested.

Historic England

Defer to the Council's own specialist.

SMDC Heritage Conservation OfficerSignificance

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.

Impact

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.

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 the following condition is recommended:

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.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Several elements of spatial policy SS5 can be seen as supporting the principle of the development, in particular:

- Supporting the role of Leek as a principal service centre
- Increasing and improving the provision of facilities including educational facilities

Need and Justification

In reviewing the application it was found not fully clear what specifically is at fault with the existing fire escape. Whilst it is very understandable from the submissions that due to its closure an excessive length in any alternative escape route has led in turn to closure of a second floor area served by the escape, it was not actually set out why the staircase itself has needed to be closed.

The application refers to: "The current 'Unsatisfactory secondary means of escape to the 2nd floor', identified by the Fire Risk Assessor." The Fire Risk Assessor's report was not supplied. The safety enforcement notice meanwhile covers 8 substantive areas and one of those is "Emergency routes and exits". There are three stated concerns. One of these is that: "Due to some exits not currently being in use, travel distances are excessive in some of the emergency routes" and another is that: "The fire resistance of surface coverings in stairwells and some of these emergency routes is not as required." The enforcement notice does not explicitly specify a problem with the existing stairs and does not expressly say that it must be replaced. The LPA noted that the staircase externally appears of relatively recent construction, solid and in reasonable or good repair.

These points were put to the applicant's agent requesting additional explanation / corroboration. In an e-mail dated 9th September 2025 extracts from the Fire Risk Assessor's report have been supplied. Quoting from page 4 it is said, "External escape stair providing secondary means of escape from the first and second floor is non-compliant and totally unfit for purpose. Spiral stairs cannot be used as means of escape for pupils."

Design/Heritage impact

The design is no doubt heavily influenced and dictated by the functional purpose. There appears to be a degree of effort to tailor the scheme to its position on the Listed Building but it is nevertheless a substantial structure of obviously modern form. See Fig. 1.

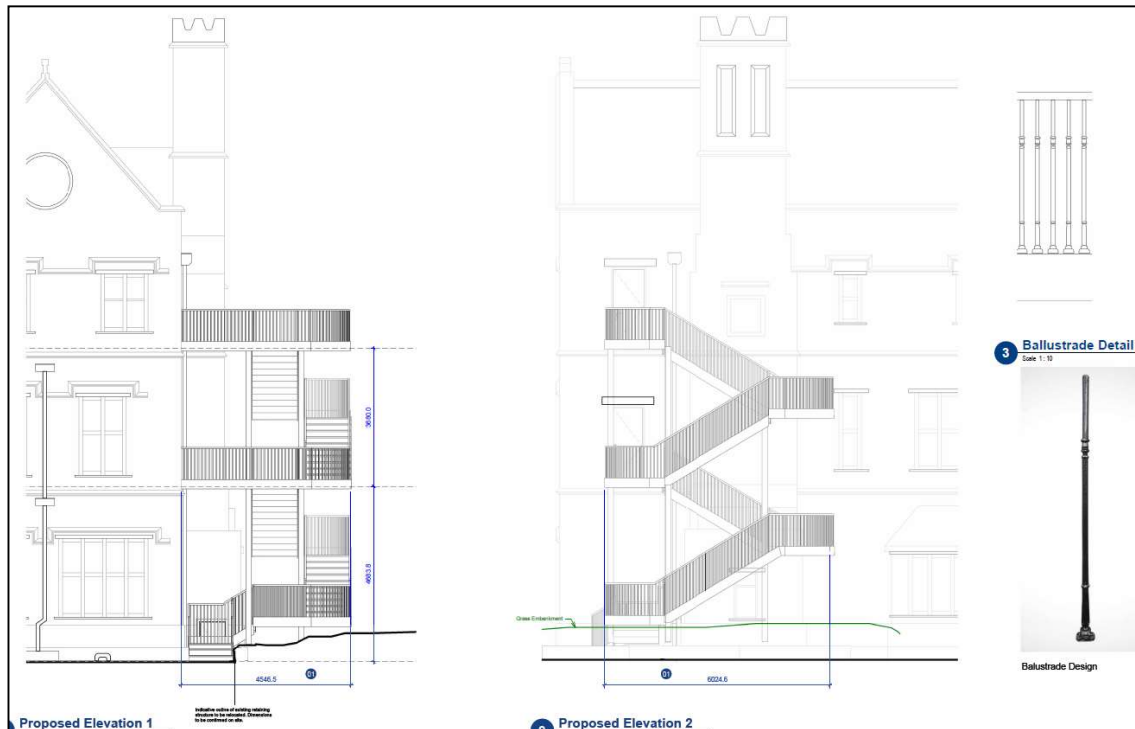


Fig. 1

In the submitted Design, Access and Heritage Statement it is stated:

The proposed staircase has been designed carefully to prioritise safety and compliance with modern standards whilst being respectful to the historical significance of the building. The proposed footprint has been kept to the minimum size allowed by building regulations to minimise the impact on the existing elevations. Orientation has also been carefully considered to ensure the historical significance of the main elevation is preserved. By keeping the staircase close to the side elevation, rather than protruding outwards, the impact on the main elevation is significantly reduced. Similarly, the curves incorporated into the landings create a softer edge addressing the main elevation, as well as reinterpreting the curved form of the existing staircase, incorporating the historical character in a modernised way.

By replacing the existing, disused staircase, with a compliant solution – the intended use is reinstated. The surrounding woodland area, within the site boundary includes a cluster of evergreen trees near to location of the external staircase. These are an effective barrier against any visual disturbance caused by the proposed staircase as the foliage significantly conceals the view of the staircase from the main elevation. No alterations to the existing trees is required as part of this application.

Materials

The staircase, including all treads and walkable surfaces, is proposed to be galvanised and powder coated in colour RAL 9005. The black finish is proposed as complementing the wrought ironwork of the Jacobean style building and it is suggested would replicate the existing staircase. The powder coated finish, along with the 'durbar

finish treads' is designed to ensure a slip resistant finish and provide protection from the build-up of snow and ice.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

It is understood from the submissions that without a means of escape from the second floor in the position proposed a travel distance to the final exit would be 100m over the maximum allowable distance. It is stated that this makes the second floor "extremely unsafe" and hence the school at present has taken this part of the building out of use.

The Council's Conservation Officer is very clear that there would be 'minor' going on 'moderate harm' to the historic significance of the Listed Building and that this would amount to 'less than substantial harm' in the meaning of the NPPF. By reference to NPPF 215 it is necessary to establish that there would be public benefits from the development sufficient to outweigh the harm if the scheme is to be approved. Given the submission from the specialist fire safety advisers as to the need and justification in technical requirement terms and given the public function of the building as a significant high school in the town and the fact that this proposal will secure the optimum viable use of the building, public benefits can be seen to be very high. In these circumstances there is compliance with Policy DC2 and the NPPF

There might be other design options but it is unlikely the impacts could be eliminated and more likely any alternative approach would ultimately be graded similarly. In using the position of the previous structure there is no requirement to create new alternative openings in the original building fabric.

Given the justification put forward in the submissions and incontrovertible public benefit the scheme is recommended for approval despite a level of 'less than substantial harm' which is put at 'minor to moderate' impact by the Council's Conservation Officer. A condition with regard to colour scheme finish is recommended.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : approve

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 22.08.2025 revised 09.09.2025

X 

Signed by: Jane Curley

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

