

Conservation Team Advice

Date: 2nd September 2025
Application Ref: SMD/2025/0312 & SMD/2025/0313
Site Address: The Foxlowe, Market Place, Leek
Proposal:

- Partial demolition of rear extension and erection of community multi-purpose events venue with associated ancillary facilities. Internal and external alterations to retained listed building to facilitate development and external works/landscaping.
- Listed building consent for partial demolition of rear extension and erection of community multi-purpose events venue with associated ancillary facilities. Internal and external alterations to retained listed building to facilitate development and external works/landscaping.

Heritage assets affected:		
Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☒	• Leek Conservation Area • Foxlowe – Grade II (listing ref: 1268572) • 1 & 3 Stockwell Street – Grade II (listing ref: 1268539) • 2, 2a and 4 Church Street – Grade II (listing ref: 1268645) • St Edwards Vicarage & garden wall – both Grade II (listing ref: 1268610 & 1268611) • Parish Church of St Edward the Confessor – Grade II* (listing ref: 1268646) • Nicolson Institute and Leek College of Further Education – Grade II* (listing ref: 1268544)
Non-Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☐	

Conservation Advice

Summary of Significance

The proposal would involve partial demolition, alterations and extension to The Foxlowe, which is a Grade II Listed Building situated in the setting of several Listed Buildings and also within Leek Conservation Area.

The Foxlowe (Grade II) is a late-18th century house, used as a trade union and labour club from the early-20th century and now used as an arts centre. The original aspect of the building is a good example of a Georgian townhouse, situated in a very prominent location overlooking the Market Place. To the rear are some 19th and 20th century extensions of a different scale, massing and design. The principal part of the building is constructed in red brick with an M-plan slate roof. The significance of the building derives from its retention of historic fabric and plan form as a double-pile townhouse, symmetrical façade, illustrative Neo-Classical architectural influence, evidence of difference phases of development and alteration, landmark position in the town overlooking the Market Place and historic association as the trade and labour club throughout the 20th century.

The building is situated in Leek Conservation Area, which was designated for its medieval origins overlaid with Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian buildings. The building is situated in the town centre part of the Conservation Area where buildings are typically 2- and 3-storeys, constructed in red brick walling with slate or Staffordshire blue tile roofs. Much of the town centre character derives from the Georgian townhouses and later Victorian commercial buildings and adaptations. The Foxlowe makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and as noted above, is a landmark building within the town due to its prominent positioning in the market place.

The development site is surrounded by several Listed Buildings, including: 1 & 3 Stockwell Street (Grade II), 2, 2a and 4 Church Street (Grade II), St Edwards Vicarage & garden wall (Grade II), the Parish Church of St Edward the Confessor (Grade II*) and the Nicolson Institute and Leek College of Further Education (Grade II*).

Assessment and Impact

The proposal would involve the partial demolition of areas to the rear of The Foxlowe and construction of a 3-storey rear extension for an events venue.

It is recognised that since the cease of the trade union operations there have been a number of different uses for the building and that the proposed development seeks to secure a long-term use for the building as an arts and events venue for the town centre, the principle of which are welcomed and supported. However, from a design and conservation perspective, there are concerns with the overall proposed scale, massing,

design and palette of materials of the rear extension and how this would visually impact the setting and significance of the designated heritage assets.

Demolition

As noted in the Design, Access and Heritage Impact Assessment, there have been some alterations to the original part of the townhouse and the extensions to the rear are of a different architectural styles, massing, roof formations and appearance which creates a visually discordant rear elevation. The Design, Access & Heritage Statement identifies the areas of significance of the building's floorplan. Whilst these rear additions are of lower significance in comparison to the front part of the building, the rear additions still retain panelling, timber panelled doors, fireplaces and decorative ceilings from the late-19th and early-20th century which have a degree of heritage significance.

As illustrated on the demolition plans (dwg nos. 2100 Rev P03, 2101 Rev P03 & 2102 Rev P03), the proposed development would involve a large portion of demolition to these rear additions. The Rainbow Room, which was a meeting room for the union, has an arched ribbed ceiling with decorative plasterwork as shown in Fig 3.24 of the historic report submitted. The proposal would involve partial demolition of this room which would negatively impact its designed proportions and diminish the ability to appreciate the decorative interior. The proposal would also involve total loss of the former Billiard's Room which has a decorative panelled interior.

The proposed demolition would result in high degree of harm to the special interest of the Listed Building as, although these are later additions, they still retain historic fabric and architectural detailing and are associated with an important aspect of the building's history.

Events venue extension

The proposed extension to the rear would predominantly be a sawtooth design with three pitches. It would be finished in dark brown (Nordic Copper) cladding, a mixture of rusticated stone and smooth finish stone and natural pitched slate roof. There would be flat roof glazed link element constructed in dark grey aluminium, with spandrel panelling infills, and an approx. 10.8m lift shaft between the extension and the principal building. To the rear, facing the car park, there would also be a single storey lean-to finished in stone with a slate roof.

The Design, Access & Heritage Statement mentions red and dark brown multi bricks in the palette of materials, but it is assumed that this was in relation to a discounted design option discussed in the supporting information. It is also noted that the Application Form states that there will be timber slim double-glazed windows in the existing building, but no further details of this are provided – are existing historic windows in the principal listed building proposed to be replaced? If so, details of the extent of this would be required along with justification for any loss/replacement.

Whilst there are several components to the extensions, the principal part of the extension would be the 3-storey sawtooth events venue extension. This element would be approx. 12m to the ridge (when measured from the elevation facing the rear car park) x 21m (L) x 16.5m (W).

Overall, this would be a large extension in terms of massing, height and scale. Its sawtooth form would be more reminiscent of an industrial warehouse building, which would be at odds with the Georgian townhouse character of the principal Listed Building and this part of the Conservation Area. There are other examples of sawtooth design of outriggers to the rear alleys and yards in Leek, but these are typically located on the fringes of the settlement where predominantly historic industrial buildings are situated. There are limited industrial buildings within the town centre part of the Conservation Area, and of the few examples within the town centre, these are modest in scale and more traditional in their construction.

In addition to the above, it is considered that the dark colouring of the cladding, aluminium framing and spandrel panelling would create an overbearing and dominating feature to what is principally a Georgian townhouse that is influenced by elegance and balanced proportions.

The proposed cross-section plan (dwg no 4201 Rev P01) illustrates that the plant deck would be concealed within the sawtooth roof design. It is not overtly clear from the submission whether other options for the siting of plant equipment have been considered to help reduce the height and scale of the proposed extension or whether alternative roof designs could still achieve this without creating such a harsh industrial appearance.

It is also noted that the proposed floorplans show the replacement extension would have a close junction to the 19th century curved bay window to the rear and part of a valley would be overlaid adjacent to the first-floor conservatory. It would be useful if more technical detailing could be provided on these junctions to ensure that the proposed development would not negatively impact these architectural features.

Viewpoints

In addition to the impacts on the significance of the principal Listed Building, there are also concerns regarding the wider visual impact on the setting of surrounding Listed Buildings and the character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area. It is considered there are a number of viewpoints that may be negatively impacted in the town centre due to the overbearing massing and scale as well as the contrasting palette of materials of the events venue extension and lift shaft.

It would be recommended that, subject to a possible redesign, consideration is given to producing a visual impact assessment from the following viewpoints (which is a non-exhaustive list):

- Corner of Stockwell Street and entrance to Moorlands House (looking west towards the proposed development)
- Churchyard of St Edwards (looking east towards the rear of The Foxlowe)
- Church Street (looking northeast between The Vicarage & no.4 Church Street)
- Market Place & Stockwell Street (looking towards The Foxlowe)

Legislation and Policy

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The local planning authority should have a desirability of preserving the setting and special interest of the Listed Buildings (s.16 and 66) and preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (s.72).

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
- Leek Conservation Area Appraisal (2017)

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the proposal would result in a high degree of harm to the special interest of the Listed Building, potentially moderate harm to the setting of the surrounding Listed Buildings and minor-moderate level of harm to the overall character and appearance of the Conservation Area (subject to the extent of visibility in the wider viewpoints).

Nevertheless, this would still fail to satisfy the provisions of s.16, 66 and 72 of the Act. With reference to the planning policies, this would be ‘less than substantial harm’ to

the designated heritage assets (par.215 of NPPF and policy DC2 of the local development framework).

The demolition would result in a high degree of heritage harm as an important social and historical aspect of the building's significance derives from its later uses and the proposal would involve a considerable demolition of tangible links to this. The significance of the remaining aspects of the 19th and 20th century additions would become illegible in the context of the replacement extension.

Whilst it is recognised there would likely be public benefits arising from the principle of the events use development following the demolition, there are still concerns with the proposed design and palette of materials resulting in a dominating and juxtaposing feature in the predominantly retail and civic core of the settlement. It is not overtly clear what the scale of visual impact on the surrounding designated heritage assets would be and further visual assessments and/or CGIs would be useful to illustrate this impact.

We are supportive of finding a new long-term use for the building, but from a conservation perspective we cannot support the proposal at this stage and would recommend the following:

- Visual impact assessment / verified CGIs of the proposed development in key views in Leek town centre
- Alteration to the design – possible reduction in the height/alteration to roof formation and alteration to the palette of materials
- Clarification on the proposed timber double glazing in the existing building mentioned in the Application Form
- Details of the intersection of the replacement extension next to the bay window and conservatory

Conservation Officer: Megan Atkinson