

## Heritage consultation

The comments below are based on a review of the Heritage Statement submitted on 19 Dec, the Design and Access Statement, and the relevant planning policy and guidance.

### Background

The site and buildings lie within the north eastern corner of the Southernhay and Friars Conservation Area, which is itself a designated heritage asset. The inn is identified in the text of the CA appraisal (August 2002) as being a building that makes a positive contribution to the character of the CA, although it is not identified as such on the mapping, presumably due to a drafting error. It is not a designated heritage asset in its own right, as it is not on the national List or on the local one.

The site lies alongside Paris Street, which has been one of the main approach routes to the East Gate of the city from the Roman period until the present day. As such it is likely to have had extra mural development along its length close to the gate, and potentially also cemeteries slightly further out, but no remains of either have yet been reported in or around the present site. Later, buildings are shown on this site in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, and, after probable clearance during the civil war, are again shown on maps from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The present buildings are later 19<sup>th</sup> century in date, with later additions and partial rebuilds and repairs, although some parts of the boundary wall are probably earlier in date.

### Issues

The principle issues with the heritage aspects of this proposal include the:

- a) relative significance and value of the Honiton Inn site itself, both in terms of buried remains and the present buildings and boundary wall,
- b) impact on the character of the Conservation Area of the loss of the present buildings and of the erection of the proposed replacement, and
- c) degree of harm that would be caused to the Conservation Area and to the undesignated heritage assets on the site by the proposed development, and whether this is considered to be justified in terms of the relative significance of the buildings in particular and of securing an optimum viable use of the site.

### Significance and value of the individual undesignated heritage assets

This is assessed in terms of the definitions of significance - and of archaeological, architectural, artistic and historic interest - in the NPPF, PPG and supporting guidance, and in terms of the explanations of heritage values (evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal) in *Conservation Principles* (English Heritage, 2008) – which are referred to in the Heritage and D & A statements.

### **Potential buried remains**

These may include those from the Roman period (cemeteries or other remains), and of the buildings shown on the site on historic maps from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and also further remains of the clay pipe kiln material dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century that was found at the rear of the site during works to the car park in the 1990s. *Any such remains, if present, would be of at least medium archaeological interest (particularly in the case of any Roman remains or of the clay pipe kiln(s)), and give evidential value to the site.* However, this value is reduced in practice by the amount of ground disturbance that is evident within the site, particularly the lowering of most of the rear car park area in the 1990s (with the consequent

removal of any remains over at least half its footprint), the excavation of the “commodious cellar” mentioned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (unless “cellar” in this instance applied to a surface building used for storage rather than to an underground room), and the construction of the present building and more modern additions. *Any surviving remains are therefore unlikely to be extensive or particularly well preserved, and do not therefore in my view merit preservation in situ, and instead can be excavated and recorded in lieu of their destruction by attaching the standard condition to a planning permission.*

### ***The present buildings and boundary wall***

Based on the heritage statement and a visual inspection, the present building appears to be constructed largely of machine made brick (where visible), is painted and rendered, with straight clean lines to the walls and features such as chimney stacks, and appears to contain no visible evidence of the sorts of irregularities and features that would hint at the potential presence of earlier fabric. It has been dated to the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, with some later modern additions and builds of probable post WWII date. Internally, surviving features belong to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or later. Although there is no visible indication of the presence of earlier fabric belonging to the earlier buildings documented on the site, it is still theoretically possible that some still survives hidden within the former party walls and within the cellar walls beneath, if there is one. There is no indication here that the present façade fronts a much earlier building behind, which is a common scenario within the city walls.

The boundary wall has been identified as containing some potentially early stonework towards its base, topped with later brickwork of several phases. It does lie on the line of the property boundaries shown on 19<sup>th</sup> century mapping and does therefore represent one of the original late medieval boundaries of the properties shown fronting Paris Street.

### ***Archaeological interest and evidential value***

The present buildings are of unknown but probably low archaeological interest, and as such are of low evidential value.

The boundary wall is of some archaeological interest and evidential value - depending on the actual date of the stonework, which may of a later date than stated - if only as the last remnant of the pre-war townscape grain in this area, but this is interest and value is relatively low.

### ***Architectural interest and aesthetic value***

The present building dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is built in a pastiche Tudor timber framed style, with some post WWII additions on the sides and around the rear. The judgment of interest and value is inherently subjective; Tudor pastiche is relatively common as an architectural style of the time and since, and can either be regarded as a good example of that type, or as an example of little more than late Victorian nostalgia for the glories of a previous age.

What interest and value that it does have in this respect is principally as the last vestige of the pre-WWII townscape along Paris Street, and as a contrast to the modern office blocks that overlook it. Notwithstanding the particular views illustrated in the D & A statement, it does occupy a visually prominent site at the lower end of Paris Street, both when viewed from further up the street and from various points around the roundabout, and as such is familiar to many people, hence the number of objections to its proposed demolition. However, its value in terms of illustrating the pre-war townscape grain is low, as it is only a single building, rather than a set of 3 or more, and as such has completely lost its original

context and is difficult to read as what it once was – i.e. as one of a row of buildings that originally provided a frontage onto the historic line of Paris Street. Rather like it is difficult to read a single brick or stone as once being part of a wall on a certain alignment, but easier to do so if several bricks etc remain in place in a row.

#### *Historic interest and historical value*

As a building of relatively recent date, that has no particular associations with well-known historic figures or with particular events or technological or other innovations for example, it has no particular historic interest or historical value.

#### *Communal value*

As with any community facility such as a pub, it will have some residual communal value amongst its past patrons, particularly those who may retain memories of the past long serving landlord and landlady, although it has been closed for the last 8 years. Aside from this, it clearly, from the tone and content of the objections and comments received, does also have an emotional value for many, as the last remnant of pre WWII Exeter in this area, and as a familiar visual landmark on the approach to the city centre. Whether or not this emotional value and resonance equates with communal value in heritage terms though is a matter for debate.

#### **Impact on the character of the Conservation Area**

The significance of this northern end of the conservation area is described in the appraisal as mainly deriving from the Georgian planning and surviving buildings of that or similar date concentrated along Southernhay, Dix's Field and Barnfield Crescent, with an underlay of an earlier street pattern influenced and derived from the main historic routes into the city and the pattern of defensive works along the outside of the city wall. In contrast this northern corner of the conservation area is peripheral to this, containing a series of post war office blocks of neutral or negative contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, and bounded by post war highways. The only pre-war building this area contains is the Honiton Inn, which is completely divorced from the rest of the remaining historic grain and buildings of the conservation area and is of a different character and date from the predominant Georgian terraces elsewhere. Whilst the inn is identified in the 2002 appraisal as making a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area, there is no analysis as to why or how it does, except what can be deduced from its description as the sole survivor of the pre-war street frontage. There is also no reference in the appraisal as to how the boundaries of the conservation area have been defined; whether for example the boundary in this area has been deliberately extended to include the Honiton Inn, rather than running it along the edge of the surviving Georgian planning along Dix's Field for example, or whether it was simply a matter of cartographic convenience and simplicity to use Western Way and Paris Street as the boundaries to the area.

Therefore the predominant character of this part of the conservation area is one of monolithic post war office blocks, of various designs and material finishes, overlooking one single, isolated pre-war building of mock Tudor appearance, which, notwithstanding its small size, does represent a visual marker at the approach to Paris Street that is familiar to many.

#### ***Impact***

The complete removal of the Honiton Inn will clearly have an impact on the character of the conservation area here. Whilst on the one hand it could be argued that its replacement by another modern building of similar size and proportions to the office blocks behind will simply just reinforce and thus in a sense enhance – depending on the quality of its design

and finish - the prevalent character of this part of the conservation area, on the other it could be argued that the loss of the last, albeit isolated and unconnected, vestige of the pre-war townscape here will detract from the character of the conservation area by removing that vestige and variety, whatever the perceived quality of its replacement.

### **Summary**

The principle issue is the degree of harm that the proposal would be considered to cause to the conservation area as a designated heritage asset, and whether the complete removal of the Honiton Inn and potential damage to other undesignated heritage assets is considered to be justified in this case.

Para 138 of the NPPF is relevant to this case. This states that “Not all elements of a .....Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area...should be treated either as substantial harm under para 133 or less than substantial harm under para 134, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area... as a whole”. Accepting that the Honiton Inn has been identified in the appraisal as making a positive contribution, notwithstanding the lack of analysis or explanation in the appraisal to underpin that, the key to evaluating the degree of “harm” that the development as proposed would cause to the significance of the Conservation Area is an assessment of the relative significance of the Honiton Inn site itself and of the latter’s contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area.

“Significance” in the context of heritage/planning policy is defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF as “The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.”

The relative significance of the Honiton Inn site and buildings has been assessed against these types of heritage interest above, and against the various complementary types of heritage value defined in *Conservation Principles* (Historic England, 2008). Setting is not considered applicable here as the proposed development lies within the Conservation Area, not adjoining it, and is not considered to be within the setting of any other designated assets in the vicinity.

The relative significance of the Honiton Inn site is summarised as follows against the types of heritage interest and values.

### ***Archaeological interest/evidential value – is low***

Buried remains, if present, would be of at least medium archaeological interest (particularly in the case of any Roman remains or of the 17C clay pipe kiln(s)), and give evidential value to the site. However, this value is compromised in practice by the amount of ground disturbance that is evident within the site, particularly due to the reduction of the level of the car park in the 1990s and the construction of the present building and the potential presence of a cellar underneath it.

The present buildings are of late 19<sup>th</sup> century and later date, and contain no visible indication of earlier fabric that may belong to the buildings shown on the site from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, although there remains the residual potential for earlier fabric to be present

low down in the party walls and/or within any cellar. As such they are of low archaeological interest, and of low evidential value.

The boundary wall is of some archaeological interest and evidential value - depending on the actual date of the stonework, which may be of a later date than stated - if only as the last remnant of the pre-war townscape grain in this area, but this interest and value is relatively low.

In both cases any remains that do survive are not so extensive as to merit preservation *in situ*, and can be recorded in lieu of their removal via a standard planning condition.

***Architectural interest and aesthetic value – is low overall, but higher for the aesthetics of the frontage***

The individual building – depending on the subjective judgement of the value and interest of Victorian Tudor pastiche architecture this could be anything from non-existent to medium. It is not particularly rare as a style of architecture. In my personal view it is low, as it is a pastiche rather than a good example of architecture of its time.

Its context, as the sole survival of the pre-war street frontage and as a visible feature on the approach to the city centre. As it is isolated, and has lost its context, then in my view it does not have sufficient critical mass to be of high interest and value in this respect. If it was one of a short row of pre-war buildings to survive then its interest and value in this respect would be considerably higher, particularly if some of the buildings were older in date and also had higher evidential value as a result as well.

However, many people do find it more aesthetically pleasing than the office blocks that overshadow it, as is clear from the responses to the application.

Thus in terms of critical mass and viability as a meaningful survival of the pre-war street frontage its interest and value is low in my view, but in terms of its aesthetic value – particularly of the frontage – its value will be medium to high in many people's view.

***Historic interest and historical value – none***

As a building of relatively recent date, that has no particular associations with well-known historic figures or with particular events or technological or other innovations for example, it has no particular historic interest or historical value.

***Communal value - medium***

This is not listed in the NPPF as one of the types of heritage interest that contribute to the significance of a heritage asset. However, it is a type of heritage value and this is reflected in the responses to the application. As with any community facility such as a pub, it will have some residual communal value amongst its past patrons. It also has a value to many respondents as the last remnant of pre WWII Exeter in this area, and as a familiar visual landmark on the approach to the city centre.

***Contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area as a whole – is low***

The significance of this northern end of the conservation area is described in the appraisal as mainly deriving from the Georgian planning and surviving buildings of that or similar date concentrated along Southernhay, Dix's Field and Barnfield Crescent, with an underlay of an earlier street pattern influenced and derived from the main historic routes into the city and the pattern of defensive works along the outside of the city wall. In contrast this northern corner of the conservation area where the Inn is located is peripheral to this, containing a series of post war office blocks of neutral or negative contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, and bounded by post war highways. The Inn is the only pre-war building in this area and is completely divorced from the rest of the remaining historic grain and buildings of the conservation area and is of a different character and date from the

predominant Georgian terraces elsewhere. Therefore in these terms it does not contribute greatly to the prevailing significance and character of this end of the Conservation Area.

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of the above, the overall heritage values and interest of the site are considered to be predominantly low, and therefore the relative significance of the site and buildings, and its contribution to the significance of this northern part of the Conservation Area, is also assessed as low. Therefore, in these terms the removal of the Honiton Inn and its redevelopment can be classed as less than substantial harm in the context of para 138 of the NPPF. However, as it does have some aesthetic and communal value, the option of incorporating at least the visually prominent frontage in the new development should be assessed and considered, and the quality of the proposed replacement and whether it protects or enhances the character of this part of the Conservation Area also requires consideration.

Andrew Pye  
Principal Project Manager (Heritage)  
City Development  
Exeter City Council  
Civic Centre  
Paris Street  
EXETER EX1 1NN

Email: [andy.pye@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:andy.pye@exeter.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01392 265224