

Victor Grayson

From: Sue Oakley
Sent: 07 January 2019 14:37
To: Victor Grayson
Subject: FW: 2018 92555 & 93377 St Mary's Church conservation response

Hi Victor,

I have considered this outline application for the demolition of the former school buildings and nunnery and the erection of a residential development of 14 dwellings at St Mary's RC Church in Batley. The proposal site is within the curtilage of the Grade II listed St Mary's RC Church and also located within the Cross Bank Batley Conservation Area. The buildings proposed for demolition are designated heritage assets as they are within the curtilage of the church and are listed by curtilage.

To the north of the proposal site, also within the curtilage of the listed building, is the Grade II listed St Mary's Church itself which is attached to the school and dates back to 1870, and the presbytery which is linked to the church and is curtilage listed. These buildings and space make a positive contribution to the conservation area and along with the nunnery and older school buildings form an important group. On the opposite side of North Bank Road to the south is Batley Cemetery, a site of high heritage value and a significant space within the conservation area. Adjacent to the site to the west is St Mary's Catholic Primary School, a late C20 school with no heritage significance which makes a negative contribution to the conservation area. To the east are a small number of residential properties, some of which date back to the C19 and make a neutral contribution to the conservation area, along with some houses dating to the late C20. One of these, 11a and 11b North Bank Road, a simple gabled two storey building, is directly adjacent to the proposal site and is highly visible from the junction of North Bank Road and Cemetery Road. This building makes a negative contribution to the conservation area.

The main school building within the proposal site is constructed of pitch faced stone with prominent gables and is simple in design with typical detailing of a C19 school building including carved door heads reading 'Girls' and 'Boys' over their respective entrances. The blue slate pitched roof covering extends through the building phases. This building can be glimpsed from some aspects through gaps in the surrounding buildings, and is fully visible from Upton Street and also the junction with North Bank Road, and is a distinctive and prominent structure. The C19 school was built in three phases, with the earliest section on Upton Street dating back to 1868, and the larger building range to the south east built in 1898. The group of buildings itself is prominent in the urban landscape and is highly visible from public vantage points, particularly from the cemetery.

The nunnery, a large detached building reminiscent externally of a late C19 villa, dates back to 1876 and is constructed in coursed stonework with architectural detailing around the apertures, ashlar quoins, stone gutter corbels and symmetrical proportions. To the south of this building was a terrace of back to backs which were demolished in the late C20.

A mid C20 building, the former Boy's School, is located in the centre of the site and although part of the group is considered to have little of architectural significance.

The heritage impact statement states that Catholicism was revived in the area following a strike by shoddy trade workers in 1832 and the subsequent introduction of Irish labour. The Irish population further grew due to famine and poverty in Ireland. The school and church were constructed in the late 1860's with the earliest phase of the school pre-dating the church by two years due to the importance of education in the Catholic Church.

This group of buildings gains much of its significance as part of the group formed by the church, nunnery and school buildings which all have direct associations and it is clear that the site's existing buildings are important surviving illustrators that help tell the story of Batley and its people. The main school building and nunnery have architectural interest which makes a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area, and social interest which shows the rise of the Irish population in the area. The heritage impact statement states that the buildings have low

significance, a statement that I disagree with, and then goes on to acknowledge that they are designated heritage assets - the main school building through attachment to the church and the Senior Boys Department and nunnery as structures within its curtilage. It concludes that they have local significance as heritage assets in terms of the social history of the larger church and school complex. It also states that the main school building and nunnery are dilapidated and in a state of serious disrepair, with the mid-C20 building fire damaged.

The applicant has put forward the following public benefits for the proposal: bringing a brown field urban site back into use, demand for new build dwellings in the area and the removal of an eyesore site. In line with the NPPF paragraph 191, the dilapidated nature of the site should not be a consideration, and paragraph 192 of the NPPF should also be considered. Along with this, the provision of car parking for the church is proposed. I do not agree with the statement in the Design and Access Statement that 'there are significant public and community benefits attached to the proposed re-development of the site, particularly in relation to the positive impact on designated heritage assets'. I also do not agree with the conclusion in the Design and Access Statement that 'In conclusion, and for reasons set out above, the principle of the proposed scheme is therefore considered to meet all relevant national and local planning policies.'

The heritage statement states that the main school building has been vacant since around 2008, with the nunnery vacant for approximately two years and the boy's school badly damaged by fire several years ago. The application states that the site has been marketed for 15 months, commencing in April 2017. Following the marketing exercise four bids were received, with none of the bidders meeting the conditions of the sale that the nunnery and old school buildings should be retained, and all at a significantly lower level than would be accepted by the Diocese. It is not known whether the expected value was realistic given the condition and listed status of the site. A brief feasibility budget cost has been submitted but this does not appear to include a comparison of restoring and converting the existing buildings, retaining the most significant structures with partial new build, and full demolition and new build. There is no clear options appraisal to explore the potential options for the site and potential values, and no known condition surveys have been submitted.

Due to the historical and social significance of the buildings outlined in the heritage impact statement and the architectural quality of the C19 school building and nunnery, it is considered that their demolition would cause substantial harm (NPPF paragraphs 194 and 195) as it would result in total loss of the buildings and historical context with the development of the Irish Catholic population in this area. It is acknowledged that the level of significance of these buildings is variable given the alterations and extensions made over the years and it is considered that there is scope for potential development on the site without causing substantial harm. However, any harm must be justified and any proposal that causes less than substantial harm will need to be weighed up against the public benefits of a proposal (NPPF paragraph 196), as any development on the site would be within the curtilage of the listed buildings and in a high profile location within the conservation area.

In 2014 Listed Building Consent (2014/91709) and Planning Permission (2014/91713) were refused for the demolition of the former school and nunnery and clearance of the site. There was no proposal for the development of the site at this time.

The proposed layout bears no relationship to the historic buildings currently on the site. The heritage impact statement proposes that these will be determined as reserved matters and will preserve and enhance the conservation area, as well as allowing the setting of the listed church to be read more effectively when viewed from North Bank Road through gaps between the new buildings and from the west from Upton Street. I consider that retaining the significant elements of the existing group of buildings would preserve and enhance the setting of the church and the conservation area, along with a carefully considered and detailed proposal which would incorporate these buildings.

If this proposal is supported I have a number of comments. Rather than only applying for demolition, the applicant has proposed a new use for the site although as an outline application there is a limited level of detail. To allow an informed decision to be made to outweigh the harm to the listed buildings and conservation area more detail should be provided. This includes design details including elevations, scale and relationship with the existing buildings, as well as proposed materials and the re-use or retention of existing architectural features such as stonework, boundary walls, gate posts etc. Any development on this site would need to be of an exceptionally high quality and I would recommend a re-design to reflect the historic layout and incorporate the more significant

structures on the site. The proposed layout bears no relationship to the current layout on site and insufficient information has been provided to properly assess the proposal to help mitigate the harm.

If any demolition is supported, it should be carried out carefully where the school building is connected to St Mary's Church to prevent any damage to the church, the wall of the church should be made good using matching stone recovered from the demolition, reclaimed materials should be incorporated into the scheme and an archaeological record should be commissioned prior to demolition. If the proposal is approved, demolition should not be allowed to commence until a full redevelopment scheme will proceed (NPPF paragraph 198).

In conclusion, at this stage I cannot support the proposals due to a lack of justification for demolition in line with the NPPF paragraphs 190-196, limited information on the proposed design of the development and a proposed layout which is out of character with the existing site.

Regards
Sue

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