



Historic England

Ms Penny Canning

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28 January 2020

Dear Ms Canning

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**37-38 HIGH WEST STREET, DORCHESTER , DT1 1UP
Application No. WD/D/19/002470**

I write to provide Historic England's advice on proposals for the redevelopment of 37-38 High Street, Dorchester.

Unfortunately a "no-comment" letter dated 14 November 2019 was sent in response to these proposals following receipt of your initial consultation. A no-comment letter should not have been sent on these proposals, and this letter therefore supersedes our previous advice.

The site is a sensitive location, within the conservation area and in an area of high archaeological potential. It forms part of a series of buildings that act as the entry to the High Street, and sits close to the site of the former west gate in the Roman town walls. Any upstanding elements of the Roman walls at this point have been long since



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demolished, but evidence may survive buried within the ground. We support the views of Steve Wallis, the County Archaeologist, that a pre-determination evaluation of the site is necessary in order to establish the evidential value of the site.

We also have misgivings in respect of the design of the proposed development. The West High Street in Dorchester is an exceptional piece of townscape, of high quality and considerable historic character. The proposed development appears to have little regard for this context and is articulated as a series of massed boxes. It is bland, anywhere, architecture, with little regard for local distinctiveness nor the historic grain of this part of Dorchester. It will certainly fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, but also fails the policies of NPPF chapter 12 on achieving well designed places.

Paragraph 127 of the NPPF advises that developments should be "...visually attractive as a result of good architecture....sympathetic to local character and history including the surrounding built environment.....establish a strong sense of place...". Paragraph 200 advises local planning authorities to look for opportunities for new development within conservation areas...to enhance or better reveal their significance." We suggest these aims are not achieved by these proposals. In respect of archaeological potential, we suggest the level of detail provided is insufficient to allow understand the potential impact of the proposals, and therefore fails the requirements of NPPF paragraph 189.

Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of paragraphs 127, 189 and 200 of the NPPF.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hickman

Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas



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DESIGN & CONSERVATION OFFICER'S REPORT:

21 February 2020

Site Address: 37 - 38 HIGH WEST STREET, DORCHESTER, DT1 1UP

Application Reference: WD/D/19/002470

Application Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings and erect 1.no A1 retail unit and 9.no dwellings

Case Officer: Penny Canning

Site Visit Date: 21 February 2020

DESIGN & CONSERVATION OFFICER COMMENTS

SUPPORT	
SUPPORT SUBJECT TO CONDITION	
UNABLE TO SUPPORT	✓
NO OBJECTION	
REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION	
OTHER	

SUMMARY

We are unable to support this application.

Though the buildings are unlisted and not to be considered in themselves as non-designated heritage assets. The front section is considered to be a positive contributor to the character and appearance, and so significance, of the Conservation Area. Therefore, in line with the NPPF, its removal is considered to constitute **less than substantial harm** to this character and appearance.

Whilst the removal of the Hall is considered acceptable in principle, although not necessarily desirable in comparison with its retention and refurbishment, the extent of the proposed building to the rear arising from its scale and mass will greatly diminish the visual experience of designated heritage assets from the viewpoints identified below in a way that is not demonstrated by the current building. Given the openness and visibility of the site and the lack of dominance of any one structure, it is felt that the setting of the designated heritage assets forms a key part of their special architectural and historic interest. We therefore consider that this would result in **substantial harm** to the setting of the following designated heritage assets:

- Roman Wall;
- Nos 39-40 High West Street; and
- Nos. 13-14 Princes Street.

The above issues can be addressed individually in terms of assessing public benefits. The Heritage Statement includes enhancement of the Conservation Area and setting of listed buildings and provision of additional housing as public benefits. As the former is not applicable, the provision of housing is considered the sole advocated public benefit. This provision is not considered sufficient to outweigh the loss of the front range and its positive contribution, largely

as it is demonstrated by the approval of planning consent that it could be suitably converted to provide additional housing.

The tests for the justification of substantial harm in the NPPF are extensive. The proposal is considered to be detrimental to the public benefit accruing from the visual amenity of the immediate historic environment and so no 'substantial public benefit' can reasonably be demonstrated. The application documentation does not demonstrate that the sequential 'tests' found in para. 195 of the NPPF have been met and so the harm is not justified on this account.

SITE DESCRIPTION/CONTEXT/SIGNIFICANCE

Site Development

The site originated as two separate burgage plots with the long, thin form typical of planned medieval settlement. The plots ran back from High West to Princes Street, which may have developed as a 'back lane' to these plots; by 1886 this was still the arrangement. The rubble stone boundary wall which survives on part of the west boundary almost certainly dates from an earlier period, as does the brickwork atop it, and marks the western boundary of the burgage plot. The boundary wall on the east side of the site was removed when the hall was constructed.

At that time, both plots had buildings on the High West Street frontage, which comprised two shops either side of a central passageway leading to the rear of No. 37. Historic photographs confirm these as low two-storey structures with traditional glazed shopfronts; the front to No. 37 had a prominent bay window and a projecting oriel window existed over the central passageway. The buildings had the appearance of a mid-18th-century date. Both shops had been extended to the rear by 1886 and each had various ancillary buildings were present in the back lots all the way back to Princes Street.

The same general site arrangement is observable in 1901, but by 1928 the site had been cleared and the two plots united. The precise date of demolition is not known, but the two shops are shown in a photograph of 1922; the likely date for the construction of the Hall is therefore 1922x1928. Also by this time the current brick community hall had been constructed (simply labelled as 'Hall'), as had a structure on the site of the current Sterling House. The hall is constructed in cavity brickwork, laid to stretcher bond on the external skin, with a pitched gabled roof covered in corrugated asbestos cement sheeting. The walls along the long elevations have engaged brick buttresses and terminate in a brick parapet with stone or concrete copings. There are 7No blocked window openings along the west elevation, but no fenestration is (or was) present along the east elevation.

Following the construction of the hall, the frontage of the site was left vacant; historic photographs suggest the present of a fence and small archway. At the time of its construction, the Hall had two projections on its north side flanking an off-centre opening. One may have contained the current straight-flight stair to the first floor; the other has been demolished and replaced with the current modern structure. By 1938, the north elevation of the hall had been squared off, either through infilling the gap between the projections or by rebuilding. Additions after 1938 include the projection at the southwest corner and the small flat-roofed boiler room on south elevation.

The site was comprehensively redeveloped in the early 1980s, the principal result of which was the current building fronting High West Street. The current link extension joining it to the pre-existing hall, and what appears to be another rebuilding of the north end of the Hall, appear

from the 1980s drawings to have already been completed. Indeed, the 1980s drawings are entitled 'Proposed Rebuilding', suggesting that a building already existed on the frontage, possibly contemporary with the existing link structure. The architect was a 'P Henshaw', probably the same who was a job architect with the Dorset County Architect's Department in the late 1960s. The new structure comprises an asymmetrical Neo-Georgian design with a ground floor of coursed dressed stone and a first floor of stretcher bond brickwork. An off-centre vehicle arch is a dominant feature, along with a 'Palladian' window above. The windows are 6-over-12 timber sashes and wall terminates in a parapet with a small, urn-capped pediment above the arch and Palladian window.

Layout and Use

The archway was always intended as the primary means of access; the two doorways are located either side of its internal splays. The original intention seems to have been to have a bar accessed on the east side and a staircase foyer on the west side for access to a first-floor restaurant. The latter was contained in a single room over the full width of the new building. The space on the east side of the arch is now a commercial unit. The archway opens into a courtyard flanked by the modern, red-brick buildings formed by the link extension and the rebuilt north end of the Hall.

A doorway into the north part of the Hall leads into lobby and WC area, as well as a stairwell leading to a first floor over part of the Hall. From here a doorway leads into a lounge bar/waiting area and a restaurant-cum-nightclub beyond. The latter still retains its open-plan layout, although a modern suspended ceiling has been inserted, as has a considerable amount of ventilation ducting around the walls.

Significance

None of the buildings on the site are listed, although Nos. 39-40 High West Street to the east and Nos. 13-14 Princes Street to the west are listed Grade II. A short section of Roman wall, the only extant section of the boundary wall of Durnovaria, is situated along the boundary of No. 40 High West Street facing Albert Road. It is considered that development in the application site has the potential to affect the setting of these three designated heritage assets. The site also falls within the Dorchester Conservation Area.

Taking into account any architectural and historic interest of the buildings within the application site, it is not considered that any are to be construed as non-designated heritage assets. However, the buildings and site will be considered here in relation to their contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, itself a designated heritage asset.

The 'High Street' forms a sub-area of the Conservation Area, encompassing the strip of land through the whole width of the town either side of the street and back to their plot boundaries. The Appraisal refers to it as 'the town's finest' street and cites Pevsner's concurring view. The sub-area has a number of characteristics: sweeping views from Top o' Town eastwards and Swan Bridge westwards; an almost unbroken building line, described in the appraisal as a 'very large linear group' with a 'density of good buildings'; and high quality Georgian and Regency frontages. The only negative elements singled out in this ensemble are the Homechester House block, the former Genge's store on the corner of Trinity Street and a single-storey unit in High East Street.

The Heritage Statement adduces several reasons why the building is a negative element in the streetscape: it is a 'detracting feature' and 'considered to possess little architectural merit' (p. 7);

it 'lacks the scale, proportions and detailing which are evident in the neighbouring and more historic buildings and provides a bland appearance which contributes little to the character and visual amenity of the street scene and Conservation Area' (pp. 12-13).

We differ in our assessment and consider the front section of the building to be a well-considered addition, sensitively designed to marry with the characteristics of the Conservation Area described above, but in a recognisably modern idiom. The fact that the 1980s planning archive contains subtly different iterations of the design between 1981 and 1983 reflects this consideration. Other observations are scheduled below:

1. First, the front section could benefit from some maintenance: the ground-floor stonework is poorly pointed in unsightly strap pointing; the parapet and brickwork below the string course is stained through rainwater run-off and the windows are in need of redecoration. However, lack of basic maintenance on the part of owners and occupiers is not the same as architectural incongruity.
2. In the most general sense, the overall design of the frontage is broadly in-keeping with the Classical detailing inherent in a building line of Georgian and Regency buildings. From the key gateway view into the Conservation Area from Top o' Town, the building does not register as an incongruous element.
3. The smaller scale of the building compared to its neighbours to the east most likely reflects the wish to avoid dominance of the existing buildings, particularly No. 39 and to reflect the original, smaller buildings on this site.
4. The archway reflects the passageway between the two original shops mentioned above, and the Palladian window reflects the prominent oriel window which existed above it. The arch and window are subtly emphasised by the small pediment and urn finial above.
5. The frontage carefully responds to the details of surrounding buildings: the stone ground floor respects the rusticated stone ashlar on No. 39, a detail found on other buildings in Dorchester; the soldier course of Staffordshire blues terminating the stone section reflects the string course in the same position on No. 39, as well as those typically found above traditional shopfronts in the town; the same can be said about the brick flat arch heads to the windows reflects the gauged brick arches typical on Georgian and Regency buildings; the use of sash windows maintains the predominant form of fenestration for upper floors.

In architectural terms, therefore, the front section of the building should be considered a **positive contributor to the Conservation Area**. Its aesthetic merit is lessened only by a lack of basic maintenance: with cleaning, redecorating and repointing, the effect would be much improved and appreciated.

The Hall at the back of the site is of a style and scale largely in-keeping with similar backlot buildings not only along the south side of High West Street, but also in Dorchester generally. The relatively low height of the building, combined with the judicious use of parapets to conceal the eaves, mean that the building does not disrupt a number of key views towards High West Street, especially from West Walks, Borough Gardens, Albert Road and Top o' Town. Although less prominent, the building is also visible in one reading with Nos. 13 and 14 Princes Street over the top of Sterling House, though the relatively low mass and scale of the building means that only the gable is visible. Broadly, we would reiterate the comments made in the Pre-Application response that 'for a substantial building, it does well to sit comfortably within its plot without

competing with the adjacent listed structures.’ The Hall is visibly in poor condition and its aesthetic interest has been diminished by the infilling of the windows along the west side, but otherwise its form and materials do not detract from the Conservation Area and there it is a **neutral contributor to the Conservation Area.**

From views towards and into the Conservation Area, namely from West Walks, Borough Gardens, Albert Road and Top o’ Town, the setting of the aforementioned designated heritage assets can be appreciated as not dominated by any one structure, allowing each to be appreciated as a contribution to their special interest. This applies particularly to the section of Roman Wall which, though only a small length, is exceptionally significant in fabric and setting.

THE PROPOSALS

The proposals broadly comprise demolition of all the structures on the site and the provision of 9No new residential units in a four storey new-build block, with a storey height added by the top lift/service cores. Vehicle access would be maintained through an enlarged archway fronting onto High West Street.

The block would stretch in one mass back from a rebuilt front section along the east boundary, leaving vehicle and pedestrian access along the west boundary of the site. The overall footprint of the site will increase as a section of the adjacent garden to No. 36 (in the same ownership) will be given over to the new development.

The style and material palette of the proposed building is modern, though the walls would be clad in buff brickwork, roofs would be single-ply membrane, service cores zinc-clad, balconies clad with Alucobond aluminium composite panels, and the south elevation given a two-storey ‘green wall’.

MAIN ISSUES

The principal issues to be considered in relation to this application include:

- 1. Impact of the proposed development on the contribution made by the setting to the special architectural and historic interest of Nos. 39-40 High West Street, Nos. 13-14 Princes Street and Roman Wall.**
- 2. Impact of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the Dorchester Conservation Area;**
- 3. If harm is caused, the public benefits of the proposal and any other tests etc. set out in the Local Plan and NPPF.**

COMMENTS ON PROPOSAL

Demolition of Existing Structures

Though in need of maintenance and decoration, which is hardly excessive in scope, the front section of the building is a well-considered addition to High West Street and makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. We understand that this part of the building has had planning permission for conversion to 2No residential units.

The Hall is of some architectural interest, but on balance, taking this into account along with the extent of its contribution to the Conservation Area, its replacement with a new-build structure seems acceptable in principle. However, owing to its form and condition the building has considerable scope for change and we would reiterate the recommendation of the Pre-Application response that 'utilising the existing structure would be encouraged as an option.'

Proposed New-build Structures

There is no barrier in principle to the addition of well-designed modern buildings in Conservation Areas, but clearly great care and attention is needed to maintain a balance between modernity and congruity. It is felt that the overall design intention of the front elevation, responds relatively well to the Conservation Area, although the extension of this same idiom into the backlot does not readily sit with typical ancillary backlot structures in Dorchester. In broad terms, the frontage maintains the regular fenestration of the upper floors evident elsewhere, whilst alluding to additional 'window' positions with panels of projecting brick headers. We have concerns regarding the design of the ground floor. Though it maintains a shopfront, the plain design of the shopfront does not reflect traditional shopfront design and appears to respond rather to their typical modern replacements. Also, the archway is certainly a prominent feature of the current frontage, but it is a feature that cannot sustain being any larger lest it detract entirely from the building line.

However, the main concern remains that expressed in the Pre-Application: though slightly reduced from that initial scheme, the scale and mass of the building behind and above the frontage is excessive and dominates not only the adjacent buildings on High West Street, but also the immediate setting of designated heritage assets and be detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area. We certainly do not concur with the Heritage Statement that the proposed building 'sits comfortably against the existing two and three storey buildings, nor that the recessed upper floor is 'discreet' (p. 13). The elevation drawing (18/60/SK19) shows clearly that the building towers over No. 39 on the west side, whilst pushing skywards the habitable full storeys, which does not sit well against the attic 'half-storey' of No. 36. The increased scale and mass are particularly exacerbated by the additional height and width of the building, the latter aided by additional land taken from No. 36. Whilst it is acknowledged that the design appears to take the ridge height of No. 36 as its upward limit, and that this would likely be argued in the design's favour, it differs greatly in the mass beneath that height when seen against a typical gabled pitched roof extending to the same height.

Finally, the scale of the building is to be inferred from within the D&A Statement which emphasises 'spectacular' long-distance views from the top-floor flats (p. 6). On that basis, it is assumed that the views *towards* the building will be long-ranging and that its increased scale within the Conservation Area and against the surrounding heritage assets will be experienced.

POLICY CONSIDERATION

In determining the proposals due consideration has been given to the following:

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended), sections 66, 72
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): section 16, in particular paras. 190, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 200, 201
- West Dorset Weymouth and Portland Local Plan, Policy ENV4

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE/POLICY CONSIDERATION

Consideration has also been given to the following additional guidance, policies etc.:

- Dorchester Conservation Area Appraisal (SPD) (2003)

CONDITIONS

N/A

Informative

We note the comments of the Pre-Application response and County Archaeologist regarding the need for an archaeological assessment. Whilst the Heritage Statement states that archaeological matters are 'being examined', the document concludes elsewhere – seemingly without reference to any such archaeological assessment – that 'any harm to archaeology is likely to have occurred already' (p. 13). Any alternative schemes should be submitted with this element.

OFFICER: James Weir

TITLE: Conservation and Design

DATE: 21 Feb 2020