

## **APPENDIX 1 – Conservation and Design Comments:**

### **Demolition of service wing and ancillary structures**

To facilitate the key new build elements, it is proposed to demolish a range of ‘accessory’ buildings and structures on the north side of the Hall. Most notably these would include the existing single-story kitchen block with its attractive chimneystacks, the stable block and associated range and the greenhouses with their related enclosures. Although these have been altered, added to, and in the case of the greenhouses rebuilt and relocated, this support cast of structures primarily date back to the 1860s when the ‘principal’ Hall was being enlarged. They therefore not only have their own intrinsic, evidential and aesthetic value, but they also make a positive contribution to our collective understanding and appreciation of how the overall site has developed over time. Against this context, the notion of sweeping aside all of these intimately connected ancillary structures is not one that can be supported by C&D. Indeed, the only conclusion that can be reached is that it would result in harm being caused to the setting and overall significance of the designated heritage asset.

### **Erection of north wing extension**

Taking the place of the kitchen wing and stable range would come a new two-storey, L-shaped extension which would spring straight out of the main hall and which would house the additional teaching spaces and dining facilities. However, by virtue of its overall size, position and design, the new build would clearly not complement in the subordinate way usually required on listed buildings. Instead, it is considered that it would: -

- i) Constitute a disproportionately large addition which would be noticeably out of scale with the ‘principal’ building.
- ii) Have a relatively monolithic quality as a result of its angular form and strong horizontal design lines,
- iii) Contrast overtly and dramatically with the architecture of the Hall (both in terms of its proportions and detailing),
- iv) Largely divorce the Hall from its original walled garden, and
- v) Run contrary to the established hierarchy on site which has always seen the structures descend in size and significance the further away from the Hall you get.

Therefore, whilst we can acknowledge that the extension would be lower than the existing Hall, and that it would be connected via an indented link, the reality is that it would superimpose itself on the heritage asset and thus become the dominant and transcendent element on site. C&D are therefore firmly of the view that additional heritage harm would ensue and that this would not be offset by the architectural offer (which no doubt would have its own design drama and would become a dramatic/landmark composition by a noted architect).

### **Erection of multi-purpose hall**

Although clearly not as impactful as the new wing, this structure would nonetheless be a significant building in its own right. It would also sit immediately in front of the walled garden where it would project forward on site and thus have added prominence. Whilst to a limited extent this would be mitigated by its offset position behind the existing tree belt, it would nonetheless work in tandem with the extension given their close proximity and aesthetic similarities. It would therefore not only be a significant eye-catcher in its own right when stood in front of the main Hall, but it would also exacerbate the unwanted shift of focus away from the listed entity. In offering this view, no specific references have been found to the proposed facing materials. However, the assumption must be that these would be identical to the main extension.

### **Reconfiguration of walled garden**

Going back to the very first conceptual plans, it was proposed to drop the main volume into this contiguous space. However, as this would have wholly compromised any real appreciation of its qualities, it was quickly dropped in favour of simply re-imagining the garden. The net

result is potentially an attractive axial design which would take its key from the existing quadrilateral space (albeit with splayed corners). Unfortunately, however, any gains to be had from this new landscaping are likely to be undermined by the scale of the buildings which would frame the garden. Hence, instead of the original boundary walls providing the defining enclosure, the much larger buildings behind are more likely to frame and inform the overall experience. If we also then factor in the physical breaches of the historic enclosure to improve its permeability, the balance tips more towards the harmful rather than the beneficial.

#### Erection of music hall

Several of the forementioned breaches would stem from the provision of this building. At the same time, however, it would be of a more complementary height and scale and would tuck itself quietly in behind the walled garden. Therefore, despite shrouding the outer face of the garden wall in development, it is a structure which could theoretically be accepted on balance as a standalone structure. This, however, would be subject to understanding the physical and visual relationships between the new build and the wall; i.e. where does the new build take its support from (hopefully independently), and how much of the wall would be left visible from within the new circulation corridor (hopefully most of it)? Unless they have been missed, such matters do not appear to have been detailed in the submission.

#### Erection of field study centre

Under this heading, the proposals raise no C&D concerns. Indeed, with the new structures offering a better contextual response to the setting than the existing temporary buildings on site, this proposal can be viewed as a positive within the wider setting of the Hall (assuming of course the proposals are acceptable from an arboricultural point of view).

#### Erection of sports pavilion & energy centre

Set within the wider grounds of the Hall, the existing woodland belt to the South-East of the Hall would create affective separation distance between these buildings and the heritage asset. Hence, the impacts here would be more on the appearance and character of the Glaven Valley Conservation Area rather than the setting of the listed building. Even in respect of this wider designation, however, the site would be set within the perimeter tree belt and would thus have a self-contained quality which would limit any impact upon significance. For the record, however, the submission version for the pavilion building is far more appealing than the earlier concept drawing and would, it is considered, sit comfortably within its setting.

As regards the energy centre, C&D have not found any elevations of this building - only illustrations appear to exist within the D&A Statement. From what we can deduce, however, it looks to be a rather boxy, angular structure with light cladding panels and a functional looking aesthetic which arguably would look more at home on a business park rather than the grounds of a Victorian hall. Therefore, whilst the wish to differentiate it from the pavilion is appreciated and understood, the two buildings still need to happily co-exist and have resonance within their setting. At present, it is difficult to know whether this would be the case or not.

#### Formation of parking areas

By their very nature, the new staff and public car parks would have an urbanising affect upon the wider grounds of the hall, and thus the rural qualities of the wider conservation area. However, as the two areas in question would be nestled recessively into their respective settings, the actual impacts would be contained and relatively modest in practice.

#### Works to Holt Hall

At the heart of all of these proposals lies the main listed building. Built essentially in two main phases, it is a confident and detailed composition which harks back to 'Tudorbethan' times but which is equally very much of its time. With it also retaining some original features of interest, it is definitely worthy of its grade II listing.

The hall, which is structurally sound and weathertight, has a significant need for repair to maintain its position. It also received an institutional makeover during the mid-late 20th century, offering potential for new use to deliver heritage benefits. The proposed works aim to retain 19th fabric and remove later alterations, reinstating fixtures and fittings that better respond to the Hall's significance. However, with a 21st scholarly use, practical and legislative requirements have negative implications for the heritage asset. These include replacing all existing single-glazed panes of glass with sealed units for occupant comfort, reworking opening mechanisms to increase ventilation levels, dismantling the grand staircase, removing C1860s fabric for access into the new extension, and reprofile the roof structure to house a new shaft.

The grand staircase would not only truncate key C1860 rooms but also introduce a new shaft running through the full height of the building, requiring the re-profiling of the roof structure. These proposals stem from a desire to lose the existing unsightly external fire escape stair, but the level of harm involved raises questions about whether the cure would be worse than the disease.

Despite these specific areas of harm, valuable heritage benefits could also be delivered, as well summarized in section 4.5 of the D&A Statement. The weight given to these benefits depends on whether they could be delivered through another, less intensive use, such as reinstating the building as a house.

#### **Further comments received 25/07/2024**

I refer to the amended details received by the Local Planning Authority on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024 and can now offer the following updated comments on behalf of the Conservation & Design section.

#### Demolition of service wing and ancillary structures

The notion of sweeping aside the support cast of structures remains no more appealing from a Conservation & Design point of view. Yes, they have been altered over time, but best practice usually dictates that the subsequent layers are reversed, and the historic elements retained rather than lost completely. Whilst noting the intention to now record these structures for posterity, this is clearly no substitute for them being retained in situ.

#### Erection of north wing extension

The applicant's willingness to reconsider this proposal and produce a revised proposal which is now the minimum required to serve as a school is hereby acknowledged. Ultimately, however, this does not equate to heritage acceptability. Therefore, whilst the reductions in footprint and height and the changes in materiality have certainly not hurt matters, they have equally not fundamentally addressed the earlier expressed concerns around scale, compatibility and hierarchy. Hence, the previously identified mix of drama and harm would essentially still apply.

#### Erection of multi-purpose hall

As with the extension, reducing the size of this building and setting it back from the walled garden entrance have moved the application forward in a positive direction. In real terms, however, the modest reduction in length and the slight set back would make only a nominal difference and would not prevent this element becoming a significant 'front-of-house' eye-catcher.

#### Reconfiguration of walled garden

The size reductions outlined above would also make things slightly better in terms of understanding and appreciating the qualities of this space. However, it is not considered that trimming ~3m off the length of the ~33m long teaching block, and ~1.5m off the length of the ~28m long sports hall, would fundamentally alter the overriding impression of the walled

garden being hemmed in by new build, and being divorced visually from its parent building. Perhaps more positively, reducing the number of apertures in the existing walls would better maintain the integrity of the historic enclosures.

#### Erection of music hall

Although never one of the main C&D concerns, the clarifications around this building's relationship to the existing wall are to be welcomed. So too are the reductions in length and in the number of new openings in the existing wall. These all knit together to create a proposal which is basically considered acceptable in its own right. The additional details also now remove the need for the previously suggested condition in the event of the application being approved.

#### Erection of field study centre

No additional comments required.

#### Erection of sports pavilion & energy centre

Now armed with elevations of the energy centre, C&D are now satisfied that these two buildings would co-exist comfortably on site. With there also being no substantive design concerns raised, these two structures are also considered to be acceptable in their own right.

#### Formation of parking areas

No additional comments required. This said, the removal of laybys and lighting along the driveway is to be welcomed. So too is reducing the width of some of the footpaths to downplay the prominence of the infrastructure.

#### Works to Holt Hall

- The additional information around the main staircase is helpful and confirms that the historic fabric is to be supplemented rather than taken away. Although the end result would no longer be the same proportionally and visually, the proposals are considered to strike a reasonable balance between conservation and necessary adaption. The submitted details also remove the need for the condition previously mentioned.
- Whilst noting the additional justification for the new staircase at the southern end of the building, this proposal remains very finely balanced from a heritage perspective. On the one hand it would lead to the loss of the external fire escape and would remove pressure on the main staircase. On the other, however, the new stair would affectively drive its way up through and out of the existing building and would thus have significant visual and physical implications for the heritage asset. As a result, C&D remain of the opinion that this alteration is decidedly questionable.
- The statement about reusing the demolished materials has also been noted. Whilst clearly no substitute for the structures remaining in situ, at least a significant amount of the fabric could theoretically be retained on site (albeit without the same contextual meaning). An appropriate condition could then be imposed to secure this in the event of an approval ultimately being issued.

#### Conclusions

Summarising the above, there is no denying that the sum total of the various revisions and additional clarifications has moved this application forward from a C&D perspective. As a result, the overall level of heritage harm across the scheme has undoubtedly been reduced. At the same time, however, let us not forget that the harm originally identified was relatively high by listed building standards. Hence, best will in the world, chipping away around the margins cannot ever hope to overcome the previous C&D objection. The application therefore remains very much a balancing exercise under para 208 of the NPPF.