



Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

Service Manager - Planning
East Lothian Council
John Muir House
Haddington EH41 3HA

21 April 2017
Your Ref: 17 /00106/P
My Ref: 17.09 [EH42 1JZ]
Allied case:

Dear Sir

Thank you for giving the Society the opportunity to comment on the following planning application.

17/00106/P Dolphin Inn, 2 Queens Road, Dunbar, EH42 1JZ

COMMENT

Proposal: Change of use to 4 flats over 2 shops.

The Society is in favour of finding new economic uses for this late 18th century, 3-storeys, symmetrical, 3-bays inn building, on the former Great North Road, at the East Port entry into the High Street of Dunbar, now empty and recorded since 2011 as 'A Building at Risk.' For clarity of description, the inn is assumed to face south, its east gable facing onto Church Street, and its early 20th century narrower 3-storeys west extension, continuing uphill to High Street (which the application erroneously names Queens Road), where a single storey kiosk, with battlements facing the road, together with a similar structure opposite, mark the position of the East Port (the town's East Gateway). For convenience these comments will follow the order of the submitted 'Design and Access Statement'.

2 BRIEF

The inn is an unlisted building within the designated Dunbar Conservation Area, and is now open to view from all sides, and therefore must be examined on site as the 'as existing' elevational drawing submitted is unreliable on details such as the presence and pattern of astragals in windows

Seen from the front (south) the building is clearly of two stages; the symmetrical Georgian 3-storeys rendered and painted original inn of c.1790, with a regular pattern of dressed stone margins to openings, and still retaining 6-over-6 panes sash and case windows in the rear wall and the evidence of a photo that c1900 the front had 6-over-6 panes in the upper floors, while the bar rooms below, appear to have enjoyed expensive polished plate glass sashes (possibly converted by cutting out the astragals) on the ground floor. The pitched slate roof was merely extended over the west extension, c.1910, which is narrow and only has a footprint of about half that of the older building, and its floor levels are consistently about a metre higher than in the original inn, requiring stairways to be cut through the middle of the original gable wall at each floor, as the extension lacks any staircase. The sash and case windows of the extension are the Arts and Crafts single and twin windows with unequal heights of sashes, a taller undivided bottom sash and a squarish top sash often with a cross of astragals. The gabled porch was added to the older inn, and its 6-panel bolection moulded doors, match the front doors of the extension.



Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

RECOMMENDATION

That the when the present all-over ginger paint, and cementitious wet cast is removed, and the rubble stonework and dressings are repaired, the external walls be given a moisture permeable finish of lime-based harling, leaving the dressed stonework exposed, and different colour schemes of tinted lime wash be applied to give a contrasting appearance to the harled areas of each of the two buildings, which will enhance the appearance of both. The original type of window as in c. 1900 should be reinstated in the original inn, and appropriate window patterns of c.1910 in the extension. Any approved new windows should copy the style of existing windows appropriate to its part of the building. The 1-over-1 panes pattern of double-glazed window proposed on drawing Pn3, for universal use, would be most damaging to the character of the building and of the conservation area. Slim-profile double glazed units can be obtained at the dimensions of single panes, for fixing by glazier's putty, as is traditional, into existing wooden sashes, or new or replacement sashes.

The proposed conversion would produce two shops on the ground floor, one large and one small matching the different extents of the two parts of the building; and a similar large and small flat on each floor above. This appears to be a logical proposal, but difficulties arise from access to each of the staggered floor levels, and it is proposed to install a lift with exits at each end so that 5 distinct levels could be served, from a new external door at the rear of the extension, and a helical steel external escape stair provided adjacent. Internal stairs would connect the two flats at each level. In principle these proposals may be effective, ***but it is desirable that the existing stair, central at the rear of the inn, and connected to the east side exit door, be also repaired and retained as an alternative continuous escape route, and not be lost in this conversion, as is proposed. The existing linking stairs through the middle of the former gable wall on the upper floors should be retained, but have 2- hour fire resistant, self-closing doors fitted, to make that wall a fire division, thus compartmenting the flats from the spread of fire. No other stair opening through the original gable wall should be allowed in order to preserve the fire barrier, but fire doors should be fitted to the single doorway at each level through this wall giving access to the lift from the west extension. As the largest flats are in the original inn, the lift should stand there, close to the gable wall, to serve both flats at each level (for some illogical reason the 'proposed plan' has the lift further reducing the areas of the two small flats).***

A photo of 1904 shows that the rendered boundary wall of the inn yard, facing the High Street, was of least 3m in height, had close wooden fencing and gates next the first building at the north end, and met the kiosk at a height just below the corbel-course at the underside of the battlements. ***Any reinstatement of this boundary wall, and any solid wooden gates, should be high enough to hide from view the present rough land now open to the High Street, and should end high enough to come to just under the battlement corbelling on the existing east kiosk, projecting from the SW corner of the inn as formerly. A length of close-boarded wooden fencing of the same height should be included so that it may easily be removed***



Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

to give access to a fire engine, etc. in case of fire in any of the building surrounding the garden, and a hard standing should be provided for it. A formal entrance door to the flats and to the private garden should be built into the wall. The proposed 1.5m high wall and iron gate proposed for this boundary, and drawn on DwgPn3, would be too insignificant to visually link the present isolated inn building, back into the built-up commercial frontage of the High Street, and would be too low to give privacy to the garden. A new door in the external west face of the kiosk would allow this small building to serve for delivery and storage for the western shop.

3 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The stated objectives in the submitted Statement, are to, 'Redevelop this historic building, retaining/reinstating period features whilst improving to create a welcoming place to reside and shop.' It is hoped that the comments made above will be useful in achieving these objectives, and enhance both the inn and the character of the conservation area, in a sustainable and economic benefit to both the developers and the town. The planning authority generally confine their considerations to external features of unlisted buildings in the conservation area, however the submitted plan drawing 'as proposed'(Dwg Pn1), and the 'proposed elevations' (Dwg Pn2) show three proposals for altering the structure of the building, any one of which proposals, if attempted, could lead to the catastrophic collapse of most of the building. As this would adversely affect the external appearance and the very future survival of this prominent building, planners may wish to pay heed to these proposals in determining this change of use and planning application, and impose conditions to prevent the dangers of the proposed alterations.

THE FIRST proposal to discuss is to demolish the original (now internal) west gable wall of the inn, from the rear wall at the NW corner, to the existing linking stairs in the middle of the building, for its full height from ground to roof, so as to provide a shaft for the lift and new linking stairs positioned between the lift and the rear wall. As the rear wall of the extension only butts against the original corner, after the proposed alterations there will be no stability of the NW corner due to the loss of continuity and any buttressing from the original gable wall there, so that the rear walls of the whole building will become unstable, leading to collapse outwards. ***In the comments above it is suggested that the lift could more logically be positioned within the larger flats and near the original gable wall, so that a single new doorway through it at each level, fitted with fire doors, would give access to the flat at each upper floor level. In this way, lift access would be secured, without cutting away the structure of the NW corner, and fire safety would be improved. A condition should ensure a safer and more logical position for the lift.***

SECONDLY if the 'as existing' ground floor plan (Dwg Ex1) is examined, it shows a planned layout of structural partitions, some replaced in part by beams at the ceiling, with an enclosure around the staircase, in the middle of the rear wall, and the main elements of the layout repeated in the structural partitions of the two floors above, arranged around the staircase. On the ground floor, there are two bars with smaller rooms along the rear wall, and another bar in the extension,



Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

with a store at the rear. The proposed plan of the ground floor (DwgPn1) shows the stair and every structural partition within the four original external walls, removed, to create a single open-plan space as Shop 1, with no indication of how the two storeys above are to be supported. This must be a purely conceptual drawing both misleading to would-be tenants and the planning authority, and both impracticable and unnecessary. The law requires that each shop provides a staff toilet, and it is normal to have a staff changing/rest room, and the business will need storage in the form of a stock room; so that the existing smaller rooms at the rear of the shop can be retained and adapted for these minor rooms in the new function, while continuing to support the floors above. New columns and beams may free the larger sales areas, requiring new foundations, but the submitted proposals drawing shows neither a possible nor a desirable open plan arrangement, which it would be economic to create. ***The LPA should require drawings of a more practicable and less misleading scheme, and should specifically state by condition, that despite the proposals shown on these drawings, the existing ground floor level structural supports are to be retained or adapted, so that at no stage of the alterations, can the structural stability of the building be threatened.***

THIRDLY, despite being at a street corner, the original inn was built with the symmetrical plan of a normal Georgian house, 3 storeys high and 3 windows wide, and the interior was two rooms deep, with a central rear staircase, reached by a central passage from the front door. All the doors and windows were in the front and rear walls; the rear will have followed the pattern of the front but with the central stair windows raised to the half-storey height of landings, and having a rear door at the base. The two gable walls would have had no openings, but were reserved for constructing fireplaces and their individual flues. Every room on every floor had, in the adjacent gable wall, its own fireplace, and every fireplace needed a flue (a square stone duct rising in a gentle curve towards the chimney over the centre of the gable, while avoiding the fireplace in the floor above). Fireplaces were designed to be central in their rooms, and so were built roughly at a quarter and at three-quarters across the width of a gable. The wall between the fireplaces was occupied by 2 flues on the ground floor, by 4 flues on the 1st floor, and by 6 flues on the 2nd floor, where the flues lined up to enter the chimney stack, where only single stones divided the flues. The flues weaken the wall locally, and the higher in the wall the weakness increases with the presence of more flues and fireplaces, so that the main structural strength of the gable walls, is at the outer corners and a limited area of adjacent wall before the vicinity of the fireplaces begins the sensitive area in the middle of the gable wall.

Wood's Plan of Dunbar shows that in 1830 the inn still was free-standing, with a garden to the rear, but later in the 19th century a fine ashlar-faced 2-storeys house (now 4 and 6 Church Street) was built against its rear wall, blocking all the stair windows, rear door, and the windows of the rear rooms next to Church Street. The windows of the western rear rooms were not obscured, and they still retain the original 6-over-6 sash windows today, to serve as a model for replacement windows in that part of the building. In replacement, a single sash window, with a red sandstone projecting surround, was formed on each of the upper floors, mid-way between the NE corner and the fireplace, in the safer part of the gable wall, and a new exit door provided below the new



Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

windows, opening to Church Street. Also the ground floor bar was given an extra window in the safr wall midway between the ground floor fireplaces. The staircase was newly lighted by a rooflight, which during the past 30 years of neglect has leaked and caused rot in the stairwell and adjacent floors, hopefully now to be repaired. ***The proposed elevations and plans (DwgsPn1 and Pn2) propose to form new windows in the present external gable walls at each end of the block, to give a 'dual aspect' to living rooms on both upper floors. At the west gable the windows in the 'Safe zone' between front corner and fireplace, may be a safe proposal, but a further central window proposed will conflict with the four flues gathering to the chimney of the gable, and pose a danger of collapse. These two central windows should be omitted. At the east gable, already altered in the 19th century, the possible sea view has led to the proposal to form triple width windows on both upper floors, by cutting away a continuous elongated section of the gable wall, one above the other, next the SE corner. The proposed holes will cut into both flues and fireplaces, and will endanger the stability of the whole (already weakened) gable wall, causing general collapse of the building. The form of the windows would be foreign to the external design of the old Georgian building, but the chief objection to this proposal is the danger to the stability of the building. A single window, at each upper level, in the 'safe zone' between corner and fireplace, may be acceptable visually, but the proposed triple windows should be specifically rejected by a condition of the planning permission.***

CONCLUSION

The Society agrees with the general conclusion of the Statement that the opportunity exists to create a modern commercial and residential building whilst retaining an active street frontage in the town centre, and in doing so to save the Dolphin Inn from continued neglect and eventual ruin. If the actual proposals, as shown on the drawings, can be modified to more closely match the potential of the existing building, as outlined above, the Society looks forward to a successful conversion, which will enhance the conservation area.

Yours

Sarah Pearce
On behalf of the East Lothian Cases Panel

