

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE – 14th January 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

HALESOWEN ABBEY- PROPOSED CONVERSION OF BARNES TO FORM SIX DWELLINGS AND PROVIDE A VISITOR CENTRE. (Planning References P09/1219 and P09/1218).

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to describe the submitted proposals for the site of St Mary's Abbey, Halesowen and to invite comment.

Full details of the proposals can be found at Planning Online by following this link:

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/environment--planning/planning/online-planning-and-building-control/search-for-a-planning-application>

The applications can also be viewed in Planning Reception at 3, St. James's Road, Dudley.

Background

2. St Mary's Abbey was founded in 1215 as a monastic house of Premonstratensian Canons. It remained in use as a monastery until the 16th century when, in common with many other English monasteries, it was closed down by Henry VIII. As a result many of the medieval buildings fell into decay or were dismantled or destroyed. The site was granted to Sir John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland and his servant George Tuckey occupied a "mansion house" at the Abbey until the site was sold to the Lyttleton family in 1558. It later descended to Lord Cobham. Tuckey's mansion house was probably in the location now occupied by the current Victorian Farmhouse. This has ancillary farm buildings that also date mainly from the nineteenth century but have some earlier components and these together comprise Manor Abbey Farm whose buildings mainly sit over the area of the medieval cloisters.
3. The Abbey site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the Abbey Ruins are grade 1 Listed Buildings, by association the farm buildings also listed grade 1. Whilst the Local Planning Authority deals with planning and listed building consent the Secretary of State, advised by English Heritage, determines applications for Scheduled Monument Consent.

4. Until the mid 1980s a tenant of Lord Cobham worked Manor Abbey Farm but thereafter the farm buildings were left vacant for a period, suffering deterioration and vandalism until the site was sold to the present owner, Chris Tudor, in 1995. He has substantially restored the Manor Abbey Farmhouse for residential use and currently lives there. Original proposals for the refurbishment of the farm buildings on the site envisaged their use as a mix of office and residential accommodation. It was also proposed in conjunction with this work to open up the wider Abbey site to enhanced public access.
5. In 2002 planning and listed building applications were submitted for this scheme (Reference PO2/0136&PO2/0137) but these were withdrawn in 2004 following concerns expressed by English Heritage. They felt unable to grant scheduled monument consent for the ground works necessary to service the converted buildings. EH were also concerned that if the freehold of each unit of accommodation were to be sold to new owners then it would be very difficult to ensure the comprehensive future management of the monument, parts of which are in the Guardianship of the Secretary of State. (The latter consideration is not a planning matter).
6. Since 2004 the owner has explored and discounted a series of options in an attempt to identify a sustainable beneficial future use for the farm buildings that could be implemented without unacceptably negative impacts upon the listed buildings or scheduled monument.
7. Regarding the ancient monument the owner, advised by English Heritage, commissioned Birmingham Archaeology to excavate a number of test pits and trenches on the proposed lines of service trenches that would be necessary to provide the farm buildings with power, water and drainage. This was in order to physically demonstrate at what depth the survival of significant archaeological remains could be expected. Resulting from this it could be demonstrated that the services could be provided without unacceptable damage to the sites archaeological significance. Scheduled Monument Consent was accordingly granted for the implementation of these ground works in November 2008.

The Current Listed Building and Planning Consent Applications: P09/1219 and P09/1218.

8. The applications propose the conversion of the farm buildings into six units of accommodation with the provision of a visitor centre in the former threshing floor of the main barn. This would take advantage of the barns opposed cart arches by glazing them, thus allowing visitors a direct view across the farmyard to the impressive remains of the Abbey Refectory or dining hall. It is proposed to equip the visitor centre with fully accessible toilet facilities.

9. Amenity space and car parking for the six dwellings is proposed in the form of courtyard spaces within the former farmyard area. It will, therefore, not impinge upon other areas of the Abbey, so as to avoid any potential “suburbanising” effects.
10. The site owner has undertaken to provide permissive footpaths across the Abbey site linking to the public footpath network that currently runs past the Abbey at a considerable distance to the east. Interpretation panels will be provided at salient points within the site and it is proposed that the outline of the Abbey Church will be picked out with boards and gravel to further aid visitor orientation and understanding. Visitor parking is proposed on the site of a former Dutch Barn to the north of the site of the Abbey Church, the farm track currently used for access will be resurfaced.
11. At the time of writing this report comments are awaited from various internal and external consultees, including statutory consultees and English Heritage, also Halesowen Abbey Trust. It is evident, therefore, that further discussions may well be required and that the proposals are likely to be subject to evolution and change prior to their eventual determination. The views of Area Committee will clearly make a valuable contribution to that process.

Finance

12. There are no direct financial implications for the Council arising from these proposals

Law

13. The applications will be determined by the Council’s Development Control Committee under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990.

Equality Impact

14. The proposals seek to provide access to St. Mary’s Abbey for all sections of the community.

Recommendation

15. That Members consider and comment upon the submitted proposals for the refurbishment of the buildings and improved public access at St Mary's Abbey, Halesowen.



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List of Background Papers