

CHESTERFIELD AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

OBSERVATIONS ON PLANNING APPLICATION CHE/21/00778/FUL

CONVERSION OF ELM TREE INN, HIGH STREET, STAVELEY INTO RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION AND NEW BUILDING IN PUB YARD

- 1 In general, we support this application, since it will bring back into use a redundant former public house, including what seems to us a reasonable amount of infill building in the pub yard. Our comments are confined to the shortcomings in the historical information submitted as part of the application and some aspects of the design of the proposed new buildings.

Historical background

- 2 There is no Heritage Statement as such submitted with the application but the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Trent & Peak Archaeology covers much the same ground. Although Trent & Peak are a reputable local contractor and their archaeological investigation of the site is sound, their attempt to outline its history (repeated in the Interim Report on their work) is less successful. The historical element of the Design & Access statement illustrates that it is better for architects to stick to architecture.
- 3 The village of Staveley grew up on the right bank of the Rother at a point where the main road running north-east from Chesterfield (the modern A619) divides into two. Historically, one arm (today the B6053) ran north through Beighton to a crossing of the Don at Rotherham and the other continued east-north-east to Bawtry, at the head of navigation on the river Idle, crossing on its way the route which runs along the magnesian limestone ridge between Rotherham and Mansfield (A618/B6417) and the Great North Road.
- 4 At the southern entrance to the village a minor road (the modern High Street) branches from the main road to run north parallel with it, before turning east (as Church Street) to rejoin the main road. The parish church and manor house were built on the north side of Church Street. If a map of 1783 (reproduced in A. Court, *Staveley: my native town* (1946) from an original at Chatsworth) is a reliable guide to earlier settlement, most of the houses in the village stood on either side of High Street and the south side of Church Street, with more limited building on Duke Street. The map also marks the modern Porter Street, which connects Duke Street with High Street at roughly the mid-point of these two roads. The main road between the junctions with High Street and Duke Street is today known as Market Street, but there was no medieval market in Staveley.
- 5 The Elm Tree Inn stands on the west side of High Street opposite the end of Porter Street. It occupies a wide plot, which would originally have run down to

the Rother. Its width means that the pub yard extends alongside as well as behind the building. The plot is clearly shown on the map of 1783, with a substantial T-plan building on it, with access to a rear yard at its southern (left-hand) end. The present pub building appears to date from the middle or late nineteenth century. The Elm Tree is listed in county directories from at least 1888 but does not appear in that of 1857.

- 6 The suggestions on p. 11 of Trent & Peak's Written Scheme as to what questions might be asked of the site were clearly over-optimistic (and in any case Staveley was not a town in the Middle Ages). The results reported in their Interim Report are of limited interest, but, as the unit suggests, it may be worth doing more work when demolition allows better access to the site.
- 7 One question which the Written Scheme does not raise is whether evidence might be found for occupation on the site during the Roman period. Traditionally, it was assumed that there was little or no Romano-British settlement on the heavy clay soil of the Coal Measures of north-east Derbyshire, but this view has been modified in recent years with the discovery of a farm alongside the A61 at Wingerworth, and (of greater relevance here) slight evidence for settlement at a site in Brimington, between Chesterfield Road and North Moor View. If there was Romano-British settlement at Brimington, there may have been at Staveley as well, where inconclusive evidence of Roman occupation was found during excavations at Staveley Hall in 2006. If such occupation could be confirmed, it would prompt fresh thoughts about the use of routes from Chesterfield to the Don and the Idle in the Roman period, since both may have been used to export lead smelted in the Peak. The initial investigations on the Elm Tree site did not find any evidence of Roman occupation but the possibility is worth bearing in mind if further work is undertaken.

Design of the new buildings

- 8 The application proposes the refurbishment of the nineteenth-century pub building on unexceptionable lines. By contrast, the new buildings, both on the street frontage and behind, instead of fitting in with the style of the pub, have been designed with rather unpleasant mock timber-frame front elevations (illustrated on p. 10 of the Design & Access Statement). The justification given for this is that the adjoining property to the south has a similar front elevation, as illustrated on p. 11.
- 9 The text on p. 11 is largely sententious nonsense and in places is barely English. The building alongside the pub (23 High Street) is not Victorian but appears to date from either the 1930s or 1950s. Another mock-timber framed building next to it will not form a harmonious bridge with the rendered brick pub adjoining it on the other side, nor will it be in character with other buildings on High Street. A plain (or rendered) brick elevation would be much more in keeping with the older built-up area of Staveley, where real timber-framed buildings probably disappeared in the seventeenth century. It would also harmonise better with the pub. Very little lower middle-class housing was

built in Staveley between the two World Wars, the heyday of mock timber-framing for property of that type.

- 10 The local planning authority may feel unable to tell the applicant to go back and produce designs for houses with plain (or rendered) brick front elevations that fit in better with the former pub. We hope, however, that it will secure a better design for the faux timber-framing, i.e. one that fits in with the house next door. Whoever designed that house was evidently aware that in north Derbyshire and south Yorkshire timber framing was characterised by closely spaced vertical posts with narrow panels of infill, as illustrated by the mock framing between the bay windows and in the gables of No. 23.
- 11 The front elevations of the new houses, both on the street frontage and to the rear, should be redesigned on the same lines, so that they match reasonably well the facade of the older house. The almost square panels shown in the drawings in the Design & Access Statement belong in the West Midlands or further south, not in Staveley. In addition, the hideous, wholly unhistorical, curved 'windbraces' which disfigure the gables above the first-floor windows should be removed. The gables should also be close-studded, even if this involves making the central window slightly narrower.

Philip Riden
Chairman
Chesterfield and District Civic Society

25 November 2021