

Conservation

Comment Date: Thu 01 Nov 2012

The former drill hall appears on the 1890 OS map and is marked as 'drill hall'. Architecturally it is quite unremarkable, particularly with the alterations that have taken place over the years. The front elevation retains a rendered finish with moulded window surrounds. The windows have been replaced but would have had timber sliding sashes judging by the aperture proportions and design of the replacements. The side elevations are constructed in brick with a thin cement render coat. This is a prominent building at the end of The Esplanade and makes a neutral contribution to the significance of the conservation area.

HOW WILL PROPOSED ALTERATIONS AFFECT HISTORIC CHARACTER OF BUILDING AND ITS SETTING:

The principle of demolition needs to be considered following a proper assessment of its significance within the conservation area. I do not consider that this has been done properly in accordance with government guidance in the NPPF and the EH practice guide. Understanding the significance of an asset should consider all aspects including the historical, cultural, aesthetic and archaeological significance of the asset. The English Heritage Practice Guide outlines in section 5 how the significance of assets should be properly assessed. While an assessment may very well conclude that the aesthetic significance is limited the cultural significance of the former use of the building may be considered important. Is this a particularly rare survival of this building type and how important has its role been in the cultural heritage of the town? This needs to be assessed and measured before demolition can be properly considered.

It is conceded that the building is in a poor state of repair. No structural report has been produced to confirm its structural integrity and therefore there may be potential for its adaption and re-use. Policy 130 of the NPPF advocates that the condition of a heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision if the cause has been deliberate neglect. The reasons for the condition of the building are not known but since it has not been well-maintained in recent years should not necessarily be justification for its demolition. I would also advocate that evidence is presented to demonstrate that alternative uses have been sought and suitably dismissed.

PROVISIONAL RECOMMENDATION - PROPOSAL UNACCEPTABLE unless a cogent case can be presented for demolition.