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14 November 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

Application No: ENQ/2023/00981

Application Type: Pre-Application enquiry

Proposal Carry out exploratory works to boiler flue and remove blockage, open up fireplaces internally to encourage drying out, improvement of the cowl system to prevent birds nesting, consult a heating engineer on best course of action for extraction of boiler gases, possibly installing a stainless steel liner.

Site Address LACOCK ABBEY, HIGH STREET, LACOCK, CHIPPENHAM, SN15 2LG

On Behalf of: Neil Johnson Senior Surveyor

I refer to your pre-application enquiry which was lodged/registered on 29 June 2023.

In response to your enquiry I hope that you will find the following information helpful.

Please note that this advice represents an officers' informal opinion based upon the information you have provided. It is given without prejudice to any decision the Council may make on any subsequent formal planning application. In particular, a planning application will be the subject of publicity and consultation in accordance with the Council's procedures which may bring to light additional issues, and as you will be aware, advice offered is based on the planning policies that apply at the time of writing.

ENQ/2023/00981

Site: Lacock Abbey High Street Lacock Chippenham SN15 2LG

Proposal: Carry out exploratory works to boiler flue and remove blockage, open up fireplaces internally to encourage drying out, improvement of the cowl system to prevent birds nesting, consult a heating engineer on best course of action for extraction of boiler gases, possibly installing a stainless steel liner

Officer: Alex Marsh

Site Visits 25th July and 11th October 2023

Scope of comments:

The following comments relate to the built historic environment.

Site Description:

Lacock Abbey and Stable Yard form a mid- 16th century country house remodelling and extension of a cloister court to 13th – 15th century Augustinian Monastery.

The site is a stone chimney to the inner courtyard south block.

The house is owned and managed for public access by the National Trust. It's located to the south east edge of the village of Lacock and is within the Lacock Conservation Area.

Heritage Assets:

Lacock Abbey with Stable Yard
Lacock grade I
Lacock Conservation Area

Relevant planning History:

N/A

Pre-application Proposal and Process:

The pre application is to inform and discuss with the Local Planning Authority a process of exploratory works to a boiler flue that has been found to have become blocked and the resulting blockage has created damp penetration through a number of rooms and roof spaces in the vicinity of the flue blockage.

Policy:

From the point of view of the historic environment the main statutory tests are set out within the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Sections 16 (LBC) and 66 (PP) require that special regard be given to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 also requires the Council to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of designated Conservation Areas.

The NPPF outlines government policy, including its policy in respect of the historic environment. Section 16 of the NPPF 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' sets out the Government's high-level policies concerning heritage and sustainable development. Paragraphs 201-3 of the NPPF require a balanced approach with any harm which would be caused being weighed against the potential public benefits which might be achieved.

Paragraph 197 requires local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

National Planning Practice Guidance provides guidance on interpreting the NPPF.

The Council's Core Strategy Policy CP58 'Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment' requires that "designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced, in a manner appropriate to their significance."

Wiltshire Council's Core Strategy Policy CP57 'Ensuring high quality design and place shaping': A high standard of design is required in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complementary to the locality.

Historic England Advice Note 2 – Making changes to Heritage Assets illustrates the application of policies set out in the NPPF in determining applications for PP and LBC.

Issues:

Impact on the listed building and on the character and appearance of the Lacock Conservation Area.

Significance of assets:

The NPPF defines significance as the "value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest.

The interest may be architectural, or historic as set out in the Town and Country Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 S 1.

The NPPF defines significance as the “value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be, architectural, or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.” Historic England assesses significance in a similar manner, referring to evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal values of a place.

In this case the significance of the building lies largely with its historic fabric and architecture, its form, layout and architectural expression/detailing and use of high-quality design materials which have significant aesthetic and architectural interest, and which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area.

Assessment:

The NPPF defines significance as the “value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be, architectural, or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.” Historic England assesses significance in a similar manner, referring to evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal values of a place.

This pre application has been used to inform, and with site visit discussions to form a process with the knowledge and understanding of the Local Planning Authority to both investigate, identify and remove a blockage in the flue that carries the heating system for the main outbuildings at Lacock Abbey.

Lacock Abbey's gas heating system was turned off in April 2023 following the discovery that the flue was blocked with a birds nest causing condensed gases to permeate through the building resulting in water damage to the fabric.

Consultants Vitruvius Conservation's inspected the Boiler Flue and issued an Inspection Report (June 2023) that contained recommendations that the National Trust were seeking to inform the Local Planning Authority and gain authority to undertake namely:

1. Carry out exploratory works from an external scaffold to fully understand the internal construction and investigate the removal of the blockage;
2. Open up the fireplaces internally to encourage drying out;
3. Improvement of the cowl system to prevent birds from nesting and consider not using the hazardous masonry pillars/cowls;
4. Consult a heating engineer on best course of action for extraction of boiler gases, possibly installing a stainless-steel liner.

These investigative works included under the agreement of the Local Planning Authority for the opening up an area of about 50 cm by 50 cm to the back of the flue in the area identified through exploratory camera where the blockage has occurred. This opening up involved a small number of stone blocks being temporary removed and these are to be reinstated with appropriate lime mortar and plaster finish.

The works of investigation to find the source of the damp problems and the works to resolve have been undertaken as an ongoing process of investigation during the life of the pre app process. No formal Listed Building Consent was considered necessary in relation to the investigative works or the works to resolve the damp problems and redecorate and to instal a new flue liner to the existing flue. The pre app was kept open as a management tool and to allow a record of the repairs and consideration of the need for any further Listed Building Consents.

A stone cowl was removed from the chimney as part of the initial investigative works and Listed Building Consent will need to be submitted for the removal with justification and options for either leaving the stack without a cowl or alternative protection for bird and other debris from entering the chimney stack shaft /flue.

Summary:

The NPPF confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). It makes clear that any harm to a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification.

The works of investigation found the birds nest that was the source of the extensive damp problems and the works to remove this obstruction involve creating a small 50 cm x 50 cm opening in the side of the flue masonry that has been subsequently repaired along with associated decoration to other areas of water damaged fabric and finishes.

A new flue liner is to be installed for a new condensing boiler to replace the existing boilers.

No formal Listed Building Consent is considered necessary in relation to the investigative works or the works to resolve the damp problems and redecorate and to instal a new flue liner to the existing flue.

The pre app was kept open as a management tool and to allow a record of the repairs and consideration of the need for any further Listed Building Consents.

The works have not harmed the listed buildings and have enabled the identification and resolution of a damp penetration problem with minimal invasive works and the impacts have been neutral on the listed building fabric.

A Listed Building Consent will retrospectively be submitted for the removal of the former stone cowl to this stack including an appropriate justification.

Yours faithfully

Head of Development Management

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