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Stanton Andrews
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5/10/16

Dear sirs,

Application 3/2016/0895
11 Castle Street, Clitheroe

Further to your instructions regarding the above application, I can confirm that I conducted an inspection of the property earlier today in order to determine the nature and significance of the building fabric, mindful of proposals to carry out internal alterations. My findings are summarised below. They respond to the requirements of section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework and the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act, and are principally concerned with the impact of the proposals and any potential harm to heritage significance.

Introduction

11 Castle Street is a grade II listed building which is believed to date from the C18th. The listing description is given below:

“C18 origins. Gable end to road rendered, side elevation in coursed stone. Coped gable ends with kneelers, rusticated quoins. 1 window on 2 storeys, stone surrounds. Attractive mid to late C19 shop front with carved brackets and fascia, 2 windows and centre door, at either end a small pediment on trusses decorated with vine leaves. Nos 3 to 19 (odd) and the Starkie Arms Hotel form a group, Nos 3 to 7 being buildings of local interest only.”

As described in the listing description, the building has C19th alterations including its shopfront and is listed for its group value contribution to the terraced row of which it is

part. At present the ground floor level of the premises comprises an optician's shop (front) with consulting room (rear), off which a stair rises to first and second floor accommodation in the rear left corner. The first floor is partially used for storage and office space but otherwise the upper floors are vacant.

Heritage Values & Significance

The primary heritage values of the building, which establish its main significance(s), are the aesthetic value of its road facing façade and the contribution this makes to the historic streetscape, and the historic value of the building as an illustrator of C18th and C19th life in the town. Whereas the authentic building fabric of the building possesses evidential value, the level of this value has been reduced by previous alterations, albeit some alterations, including the shop frontage, have in fact enhanced value despite not being part of the 'original' building. Herein a degree significance is borne from past adaptation of what might have been a domestic building.

Of particular interest in this case are past alterations to the interior including the replacement of the ground floor staircase (the extant stair is of modern softwood construction, shallow in pitch, and cuts diagonally across a former fireplace – see figures 1-3), the partial removal of the mid-division wall at ground floor level and the insertion of studded partitions and suspended ceilings at ground and first floor level. These works have altered the historic plan form of a property, which originally comprised a front and a rear room at each level, the former served by a fireplace (now blocked) to the right flank wall and the latter served by a fireplace (now blocked) to the rear wall. The position of the original staircase is unclear, however in a simple two unit plan form such as this, and mindful that stair would not have cut across the fireplace as the modern one does, it seems most likely the stair was located against the former mid-division wall running side to side across the building plan. The stair from first to second floor level seems much older in date, but appears likely to date from the C19th, possibly when the alterations were performed to the shop front and the use of the building changed (it may have been domestic when built).

In summary the extent and nature of past changes to the interior mean that the interior plan form is not of notable evidential value and does not contribute to the primary significances of the building. These significances lie in the contributory aesthetic and historic values of the building, which provide architectural and historic interest in themselves and more importantly to the street scene (as suggested by the group value listing).



Figure 1. Alterations to the floor at the head of the stair (first floor level) with new chipboard panel and plank boarding.



Figure 2. Modern softwood stair tread beneath carpet

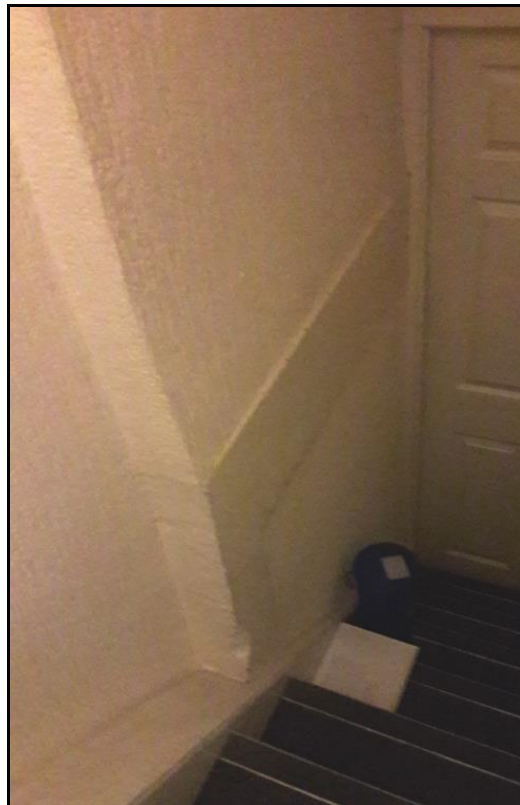


Figure 3. Lower stair flight cutting across blanked fireplace.

The Proposals

The proposals are intended to improve the quality of the premises and facilitate the use of the upper floors as a working part of the business. These are mostly vacant at present. Proposal drawings have been submitted as part of the full application. They depict staircase and partition alterations. The staircase changes are needed to ensure the safe use of the building, particularly in the event of fire, whilst the partition alterations subdivide the space to suit current and proposed uses.

Discussion

There can be no doubt that bringing the upper floors of the listed building back into full active use is beneficial for sustaining the designated heritage asset. Maintaining active use is a primary tenet of modern building conservation philosophy and fully supported by heritage planning policy and law. It seems highly likely that previous alterations to the building were likewise intended to sustain function, including the C19th shop alterations, with the more recent changes such as replacement/relocation of the lower stair were aimed at improving the use of space. Change is thus a part of the building's history and indeed the reason for its survival.

That is not to say, however, that finding new uses is the sole aim of building conservation, since in the process of change conserving significance is at least of equal importance. In this particular case the question of relevance is whether the proposals cause harm to the significance of the building and, if they do, how severe is that harm and can the harm be justified (as outlined in policies 132-134 of the NPPF). Quantifying harm in this context is based upon a proper understanding of the significance of the building, as outlined earlier.

Given that primary significances of the listed building are its aesthetic and illustrative historic values, the proposals will not alter or harm these significances since the external appearance of the building will not change and the contribution it makes to the historic streetscape will likewise remain unchanged. As to the internal alterations, these will mainly affect relatively modern and non-original fabric, with the only area of potential concern being the replacement of the first to second floor stair. This fixture would appear to date from the C19th and, whilst of some minor historic interest, it is not a contributor to the overall significance of the building and its removal will not, therefore, harm significance. In essence, if granted consent, upon the completion of the proposed changes the listed building will retain its heritage significance and be no lesser a contributor to the history of the place.

Conclusion

The proposed alterations to 11 Castle Street will help put all of its floor space into active use. This is a favourable outcome, which is aligned to modern building conservation philosophy and satisfies the requirements of heritage planning policy and law. The interior alterations will change the building, but these changes will not harm the building's primary significances. They will only affect non-original fabric, and will not in any way harm or change the external appearance of a building which has a history of change and adaptation. The proposals are therefore both appropriate and desirable.

Yours faithfully

Chris O'Flaherty MRICS, MSc (Heritage & Building Conservation)