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Dear Sirs,

Rebuilding of the former Punchbowl Inn, Longridge Road, Hurst Green BB7 9QW

Introduction and general background

In 2017 I composed a heritage statement in support of proposed developments at the site of the former Punchbowl Inn (grade II). This formed part of a listed building consent application which was approved with conditions in 2018 (ref: 3/2018/0363). It should be noted that the Heritage Statement uploaded on RVBC's planning pages for the application is not the completed version as prepared by the author (it appears to be an early draft), however the assessment of significance contained within that incorrect version are correct (i.e. they do feature in the correct completed version) and are repeated later below.

I understand that subsequent to the approval the listed building was demolished in 2021. This led to enforcement action being issued by Ribble Valley Borough Council (RVBC) upon you as the owners of the building. The enforcement requires the listed building to be restored to its former state, as detailed in existing elevation drawings and at the location shown on a location plan, all submitted with the 2018 application. The enforcement follows provisions set out in section 38(2)(a) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

It is my understanding that you intend to comply with this enforcement but are seeking a variation in design relating to the exact positioning of the rebuilt building. In brief, you wish to reposition the building slightly back from the public highway due to highway safety issues. This is because the eastern end of the building immediately fronts a bend in Longridge Road, which makes vehicular access and egress at the western end (car park access to the rear of the property) of the building perilous. I understand that highway safety engineers (including those from Lancs CC) are in agreement that the safety issue is real and problematic, and furthermore that the matter has impeded previous development proposals. This included the approved application of 2018, wherein LCC concluded that the site "suffers from poor visibility and as such the development represents a

potential road safety hazard to road users and should therefore be refused on highway safety grounds”ⁱ.

Ribble Valley Borough Council have advised that they would not accept the re-siting of the building, citing the terms of the enforcement action which state clearly the building must be rebuilt as per its previous location. It is understood that the planning authority has concerns that, notwithstanding the road safety issues, the proposed re-siting would cause harm to heritage significance. It is this matter, the impact on heritage significance, which I will consider below as per your instructions.

Heritage Significance

The aforementioned heritage statement authored in 2017 evaluated the heritage significances of the site and provided the following summary:

“The Punchbowl Inn is a grade II listed building with parts which appear to date back to the late C18th. The building has a complex history and appears originally to have been a short row of cottages that were later converted to an inn, possibly enlarged with a barn/coach house and extended with a new attached dwelling (possibly the landlord's house). These changes all occurred in the C19th and in the C20th the building was subject to further conversion and adaptation having passed through various owners before finally closing in 2012. It has remained on the open market for sale but proven to be an unattractive business proposition at a time when sustaining a rural pub business is extremely difficult.

An appraisal of heritage values and significances associated with the listed building has been conducted in order to define significance and identify priorities for future conservation. This appraisal relates both to the building and its setting, mindful that setting can contribute to significance. The findings of the appraisal are summarised as follows.

The building possesses a diverse range of heritage values which in each respect have been affected by the extent and nature of past change. The evidential value of the Punchbowl lies in its authentic C18th and C19th building fabric which preserves some evidence of its past uses (domestic, inn, farming). The historic value of the building is primarily illustrative and relates to the manner in which the building conveys a sense of lifestyles from C18th and C19th. The communal value of the building stems from its locally well-known historic landmark presence (roadside). The aesthetic value of the building lies primarily in its northern elevation and the contribution made by its roadside and rural setting.

On the specific issue of setting, the significant elements of the building's setting are the road and the rurality of place as primarily experienced from the road. This experience is commonly the dynamic experience travelling past the Punchbowl along the road, there being no real safe vantage points on the road to rest and inspect the building. In terms of historic setting as defined by

boundaries, whereas there is a large expanse of land to the rear (south) which is now part of the site, this area was rural fields in the C19th and most of the C20th with the boundary between the fields and the inn being very close to the south of the building. In terms of appearance the land to the south of the building is not a positive aesthetic contributor owing to unsympathetic extensions, demolished structures and non-native tree species. The land also slopes away to the south which reduces its visibility from the north (road)."

As identified above, the roadside setting of the building contributes to its heritage significance and ensures its landmark status (i.e. as viewed whilst passing along the road). This contribution arises because of the proximity of the road and building for the specific reason that proximity ensures visibility. In other words, being roadside makes the building visually prominent. Otherwise, the specific positioning of the building stems from happenstance rather than specific design, and the eastern part which is closest to the road (this is the part that causes safety issues) is in fact a C19th extension to the far more significant older central parts of the range.

Significance derived from archaeological interest was not explored in detail in 2017, beyond the extent to which the building provided physical evidence of vernacular construction. Now that the building has been demolished archaeological interest may be deemed more of relevance, however it is also noted that the process of rebuilding would by necessity require excavations that would remove any remaining materials below ground level, in order to form new foundations in line with modern regulations. This being said, it is understood that if repositioning is allowed, efforts will be made to expose the original building footprint (the foundations) so that this can be seen alongside the rebuilt structure. It is felt that this will conserve some significance that would otherwise be lost.

Impact on Significance

The demolition of the building in 2021 caused substantial harm that equated to total loss of heritage significance (as defined by the NPPF). Whilst reconstruction of the building cannot reverse this factual matter, it is understood that the enforcement action will at least ensure that a replica of the listed building will arise from the rubble. The issue of specific concern in this instance is to what extent would repositioning of the building cause any further harm to heritage significance.

The issue of impacts must be reasonably addressed with reference to the human experience of the building. In other words, would a slightly repositioned replica building present a building that holds less heritage significance than a replica built in the original position? This matter is of direct relevance to the heritage significances evaluated in the heritage statement written by the author in 2017 - as repeated earlier above - wherein the roadside setting of the building is identified as a contributor to heritage significance. It is self-evident that the option to slightly reposition the building would very slightly alter appearance within setting, however the building would still be roadside, it would still be a prominent visual feature as experienced from the road and it would still present

facades that match the appearance of the original. In other words, had the building been originally built in the position now proposed this would have in no way reduced its resultant heritage significance as evident prior to demolition. As such, setting contributes to significance; but precise positioning does not.

The possibility of exposing the original building foundations as part of the rebuild scheme also provides a degree of enhance that would otherwise be lost. Herein the proposal if achievable will salvage some retained significance.

Legal Issues

It is noted that the enforcement action requires the restoring of the building to its former state as outlined in section 38 (2)(a) of the 1990 Act. It should also be noted that according to the Act the enforcement action could require an alternative remedy which is not an exact replica in the same position, as laid out in section 38(2)(b):

“If the authority consider that such restoration would not be reasonably practicable or would be undesirable, for executing such further works specified in the notice as they consider necessary to alleviate the effect of the works which were carried out without listed building consent”

In this instance and with specific regard to road safety issues, it could be considered undesirable to rebuild the building in exactly its original position, and that by positioning the building the road safety issues could be alleviated. In terms of safety this approach would appear entirely reasonable, but clearly this is not a heritage matter.

It is noted that road safety issues are acknowledged as a factor that has to some degree contributed to viability concerns regarding the listed building. Similar factors affect many heritage assets however ordinarily there is no simple solution. In this case, whilst clearly the circumstances which resulted in the current situation are undesirable and unsupportable in law, there is an opportunity to resolve a lingering problem without causing harm to heritage significance.

Summary and Conclusion

This report considers the heritage-related impacts of rebuilding the demolished former Punchbowl Inn (grade II) on the south side of Longridge Road, Hurst Green. It refers to previous heritage significances evaluated by the author in 2017, which formed part of an approved application for developments at the site of the Inn (2018). The main findings of the report are that, whereas setting contributes to the significance of the Inn (as it existed when evaluated in 2017), the precise position of the building was not a contributor to its significance. This is because the significance of the building as derived from its setting is related to it being prominent and visible from the passing road, and not because of its exact position. In other words, setting contributes to significance; but precise

positioning does/did not. It is also of note that by relocating the building an opportunity arises to expose the original foundations and leave these visible for future reference and historic interpretability.

In conclusion there would appear no appreciable risk that very slight repositioning of the rebuilt building for safety reasons (improving road visibility from the site access/egress point) would cause any additional harm to heritage significance over and above that already inflicted, mindful that excavations would remove any below ground archaeology of interest. It is also noted that within the provisions of the 1990 Planning (LBCA) there exists some flexibility where enforcement action might not necessarily require an exact restoration in the exact position of the original building, particularly when such work would prove undesirable (i.e. highway safety).

I trust this clearly reflects my objective assessment of the matters to hand and welcome any further queries.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'O'Flaherty', written in a cursive style.

Chris O'Flaherty
MRICS, MSc

ⁱ https://webportal.ribblevalley.gov.uk/planx_downloads/18_0362_Highways_response.pdf