



Ripon Spa Partnership

Please reply to:
Neil Grandison
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7 November 2008

Chief Executive
English Heritage
PO Box 569
Swindon
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Dear Dr Thurley,

Ripon Spa Baths

Earlier this year you gave a fascinating lecture to the Civic Society in Ripon on the importance of our heritage buildings. At the time, our Spa Baths had recently been placed under threat by Harrogate Borough Council (HBC): you will recall that David Winpenny of the Civic Society showed you the Baths, and that you were kind enough to feature the Ripon Spa while drawing particular attention to the value that lies in our Victorian swimming pools. Your talk inspired and informed our subsequent campaign to save a unique and iconic building.

With the support of over 3000 people we have petitioned HBC to engage in a meaningful consultation over the future of the Spa Baths. With assistance from the Prince's Regeneration Trust, Ripon Civic Society with other local community groups have established the "Ripon Spa Partnership" in the hope that HBC would join us to develop an alternative scheme that would keep the building as a community asset.

Knowing the importance that the Government attaches to the activities of the voluntary sector in heritage matters we expected support from HBC (and English Heritage) in our efforts to either sustain the existing facilities or to find some way of preserving the Spa Baths in community ownership. Unfortunately neither the Council nor English Heritage has so far done anything to support this cause.

By the time local residents became aware of the intention of the Council to sell the Spa Baths site for housing, English Heritage had already indicated (in the course of pre-application discussions with HBC Conservation Officer) that no objection would be raised in principle to the development of the site for housing. This was confirmed in EH's formal response to the planning application (your ref: P00060794). All the efforts (which have been substantial) of the HBC Conservation Officer and English Heritage have been devoted to a detailed consideration of the design of the new buildings – not of the basic heritage issues. There is nothing on record to qualify your organisation's endorsement of the HBC proposals – which brings us to PPG15.

We have, perhaps naively, assumed that the obligations to comply with Government policy would result in joint efforts between HBC and the local community (supported by English Heritage) to follow the guidelines set out in PPG15. In particular we have relied on the wording in Article 3.17 which anticipates that: "*planning consent would not be given without clear and convincing evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to sustain existing uses or find viable new uses, and that these efforts have failed, that preservation in some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible etc.....*"

We can find no record of any mention of PPG15 by HBC in their planning application or by English Heritage in their comments. It is not referred to in the Design and Access Statement, nor in the planning policy statement that was issued by HBC to their consultants.

HBC initially refused to have any dialogue with our group on the grounds that our objectives ran counter to Council policy; however we have been able to use the democratic process to call for an extraordinary meeting of the Council. At that meeting, in July, councillors called almost unanimously for an extended consultation process. The council has now agreed to a consultation process that will end with a referendum for the people of Ripon on the issue of the future of the Spa Baths at the end of March 2009.

cont/-

Ripon Spa Partnership comprises Ripon Civic Society, Ripon Area Business Association and Aquatic sports providers

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The other consequence of this decision is that council officers are at least now talking to the Ripon Spa Partnership, although there has been no movement on the headlong dash to get listed building and planning consent for using the Spa Baths for housing.

The planning applications are now scheduled to be heard on Tuesday 18 November. This letter is a last minute plea to English Heritage to make it clear to HBC that your endorsement of the development of the Spa Baths site for housing does not relieve them of their obligations under PPG15, that housing is an option of last resort and that there is at present insufficient evidence to satisfy the Secretaries of State that an acceptable alternative future for the Ripon Spa Baths cannot be found. Until such evidence is forthcoming and meaningful dialogue is held with all interested parties, it would be sensible to suggest that the planning application is suspended until the end of March next year.

We would be grateful if you were able to ensure that English Heritage makes HBC fully aware of its legal responsibilities in this matter, and that your officers in York are rigorous in enforcing them.

We have some issues with other aspects of the comments made by English Heritage that are unrelated to the core problem of PPG15 compliance. These are addressed in the attached supplementary note.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Grandison
Ripon Spa Partnership

Enc/- Supplementary Note.

Ripon Spa Baths

Supplementary Note

- 1 The planning applications concerned with the Spa Baths are:
 - i) [08/02082/SOSLB](#) Listed Building application
 - ii) [08/02082/RG4](#) Conversion of Spa Baths to Housing

They will be heard at the planning committee meeting on 18 November 2008. There is a direct link to the documents on the www.saveourspa.co.uk website.
- 2 The comments made by English Heritage in P00060794 observe quite correctly that the whole ensemble of Spa Baths, Spa Gardens, the monuments and the bandstand were developed around the early years of the twentieth century as *an important public facility of considerable communal, social and historical significance for Ripon*. Nothing has happened to change this in the succeeding 100 years. However in the very next paragraph EH confirm that they have no objection to the change of use for housing. This in effect gives very clear assurance to HBC that EH have taken the public and historical significance into account and have discounted it. This is a great pity as this conclusion was reached months before the community were made aware of the demolition plans.
- 3 There is considerable anecdotal evidence from older users of the Baths that much of the original art nouveau tiling has been covered over – not destroyed, and that the Pump Room is not the sole remaining architectural feature of any significance. Before making a formal response to this application, EH became aware of a large area in the east wing that is obstructed, not tiled over (there are photographs of some beautiful tiling on the SOS website) and have given the advice that any features discovered by the builders during the conversion to maisonettes can be managed at the time. The view of the Ripon Spa Partnership is that the evidence of surviving features is such that a conservation report based on a physical examination of the internal structure should have been recommended and carried out before reaching any conclusion concerning the demolition of the building. We hope that it is not normal practice for EH to advise demolition as a means of uncovering architectural features.
- 4 Section 5 of the EH report concerns public access. It notes the historic and present role of the Spa Baths as a public amenity but then concludes that the building can be closed to the public except for occasional access days. No consideration is given to the effect of removing the Spa Baths from the list of city amenities that are key to Ripon's success as a tourist destination. To the Ripon Spa Partnership it is vital that the Spa Baths continues to play a role in the ability of the city to attract visitors. We regard these recent events as a wake up call that should be used as an opportunity to enhance our local amenities not diminish them.
- 5 As a whole the English Heritage report supports HBC's destructive plans and makes it very difficult for local community groups to exert any real influence on developments. Any revision or shift of emphasis on the part of EH before the hearing on 18 November would be welcome.

Ripon Spa Partnership