

YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER REGION

Mr A Hough
Harrogate Borough Council
Knapping Mount
West Grove Road
Harrogate
North Yorkshire
HG1 2AE

Direct Dial: 01904 601973
Direct Fax: 01904 601999

Our ref: P00060794
10 June 2008

Dear Mr Hough

Notifications under Circular 01/2001 & GDPO 1995
RIPON SPA BATHS, PARK STREET, RIPON, HARROGATE, NORTH
YORKSHIRE, HG4 2AX
Application No 08/02080/RG4

Thank you for your letter of 8 May 2008 notifying English Heritage of the above application. Our response also incorporates our comments on the associated listed building consent, Number 6.31.773.H.SOSLB 08/02082/SOSLB.

Summary

Ripon Spa Baths was built in 1904-5. Pevsner and Radcliffe's *Yorkshire West Riding* gives the designer as S Stead. Having been constructed as a Spa Baths, the building subsequently became a swimming baths, a pool being added to the rear in 1934. The building is owned by Harrogate Borough Council and is listed at Grade II.

It is proposed to build a replacement swimming baths on a new site and to demolish the 1934 pool. It is proposed to convert the Spa building itself into two houses, with a third in the laundry tower and to build a row of five further houses on the site of the present swimming pool.

We do not have objections to the principle of redeveloping the site of the 1934 swimming baths and the conversion of the Spa building. However, we have considerable concerns about the layout of the scheme, which in our view fails to integrate the entrance hall as a truly shared resource between all aspects of the development. Furthermore we have very serious concerns about the architectural treatment of the row of houses facing onto the adjacent park. We consider that the present design lacks architectural merit. In our view it fails to respond to the Spa Baths building and it visually dominates the public park, Spa Gardens. The park's War Memorial is stated to be on axis with the laundry tower but the houses largely mask the 1904/5 laundry tower from view. We suggest that a building with less of a



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central emphasis and without the proposed high hipped roof would sit more comfortably unassumingly in this setting because its scale and massing would be reduced. We would wish these concerns to be fully addressed before either the planning consent or the associated listed building consent are granted. We would be happy to comment on further proposals if this would be helpful.

The Spa Building is an ornate building which was designed for public use, it is important that the proposal secures the long term management and maintenance of the buildings on the site, along with an appropriate level of public access to the communal entrance hall.

English Heritage Advice

It is proposed to close the public baths and build a replacement facility on a new site; also to demolish the present swimming bath and to convert the original 1904-5 front block into two houses, using the ornate entrance hall as a common access (leading directly to the two houses and to the rear of the site). The 1904-5 laundry tower would be converted into a further house, with a roof-top addition, and a row of five town houses in a block would be constructed on the site of the pool, with parking to the south of the site and parking for four cars at the front of the Spa.

The Spa was designed as a public building. It has a plaque in the entrance hall stating 'These baths were erected AD 1904 being the tercentenary of the second incorporation of the City by King James...' It has remained in public use since that time. It sits side-on to Spa Gardens, a public park, which appears to have been laid out at or about the same time. The gardens contain the early 20th century Grade II listed War Memorial (approximately on axis with the laundry tower, this relationship later disturbed by the 1934 swimming baths) and also a statue of 1912 of the Marquess of Ripon, who was Ripon's Mayor (Grade II). There is also a Grade II listed band stand. It is evident 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. All of these assets also lie within the Ripon Conservation Area.

English Heritage was consulted at pre-application stage about this application and gave some initial comments concerning the demolition of the 1934 pool building and about the character and massing of the rear blocks. I confirm that we do not object in principle to the proposed change of use and conversion.

With regard to the **planning application**, we have the following comments:



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1. Relationship of the houses to the Spa entrance.

We question the layout of the proposed houses, which do not in our view have any meaningful relationship with the entrance hall to the Spa. The 'communal entrance' to the housing appears to us to pay lip service to the glorious *porte cochere* and entrance hall and we do not see how these can be properly maintained and enjoyed in the scheme as it is. We would wish to see the layout of the block of houses reconsidered in order to relate more convincingly to the Spa Baths entrance.

2. Architectural treatment of the new build houses

In terms of the architectural treatment of the elevation to the public park, we are aware that the design of the five houses has been subject to some review. However, in our view fails to take best advantage of the setting or to respond to the Spa Baths building and public park. The park's Grade II listed War Memorial is stated to be on axis with the laundry tower but the footprint and height of the houses denies this relationship, largely masking the tower from view. Some of the earlier schemes which we saw at pre-application stage did make better use of this relationship and we would advise that this fundamental aspect of the scheme is reviewed.

It is our understanding that whilst the present design has symmetrical classical 'country house' massing and proportions, it has on other hand, modern detailing. Your Council will be aware that we expressed concerns at pre-application stage about articulating the block as a 'country house façade'. This we felt would be inappropriate in the setting of a municipal park. We feel that Spa Gardens and the Spa Building itself would not be enhanced by such an architectural approach, even if mitigated by modern detailing, and we consider that the present design is both too relentlessly symmetrical and too classical in its proportions, bearing little visual relationship with the Spa Baths in its architectural treatment, whilst visually dominating the adjoining public park. We believe the heavy hipped roof is part of the problem and it may be appropriate here to consider a flat roof in order to reduce the over all massing and scale of the proposed new building. This would also alleviate the present uncomfortable visual clash with the modern proportions and treatment of the new top storey of the laundry tower. We consider that a building with less of a central emphasis may sit more comfortably and unassumingly in this setting.

We regret that the opportunity was not taken following our pre-application comments in January 2008 to discuss further with us the treatment of this block, before submitting this application.

Whilst we are aware that the Council's intention is to sell the site on with planning permission, rather than to build the scheme itself, we nevertheless consider that it is an integral part of the Council's responsibilities to ensure that this scheme has high architectural quality and that this remains the case when it is built. This is especially



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the case given its prominent position facing onto a significant public open space. We would expect the proposals to aspire to a quality of design and execution which will be valued into the future.

3. Parking

The front of the Spa Baths sits back from the road and has increasingly been used for car parking, which does not enhance the street. We wonder whether there is any scope to improve the frontage and not to use it for car parking?

With regard to the **listed building consent**, we have the following comments: -

1. The pool building:

English Heritage notes that the pool was added to the original complex in 1934. It is steel framed with a plaster vault and we do not consider it to be of particular structural or architectural interest for its period. I confirm that we do not object in principle to its demolition.

2. The laundry tower:

We are content in principle with the proposed conversion of this into one house. We note that the floor levels are to be changed and two extra floors inserted. As designed, the floors clash in places with some of the existing windows (the retention of which, *in situ*, we welcome). We suggest this problem is addressed to enable fuller benefit to be gained from the existing windows and a more appropriate appearance when viewed from outside achieved. I confirm we do not object in principle to a modern treatment for the top storey, which has extensive glazing, in order to compensate for the restricted windows further down the tower.

3. The Spa building:

I confirm that English Heritage does not object in principle to the conversion of this building into two houses, reached by a 'communal entrance hall'. We would wish to see a more meaningful relationship between the proposed new-build houses and the entrance to the Spa.

I noticed at my recent visit that original decorative tiling remains around some of the walls of the eastern wing, partly covered up by later fittings. One inner wall which I saw to have original decorative tiling is proposed in the scheme to be removed. I discussed this at our site meeting with Ann Johnson of your Council and we agreed that this area of the plan would be reconsidered in order to retain this tiling *in situ*. Other areas of tiling should be considered individually when they are uncovered with a view to retaining the tiling where it is not excessively damaged.

4. Management and maintenance: -



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We would expect any planning consent to include a fully enforceable management agreement to ensure the appropriate future maintenance and upkeep of the Spa building, including its external fabric and also the entrance hall (to include all decorative features, stained glass etc) in addition to other common areas. If the property is to be sold on by your Council (as we understand it is) there needs to be an enforceable requirement upon the buyer and future owners to implement this (whether by a covenant with the sale or by Section 106 agreement with the buyers or by other means).

5. Public access: -

The Spa was conceived as a public building and the entrance hall in particular has obvious value to the community as an architectural resource, in addition to its historic and present role as a public amenity. We would therefore expect, as a condition of any consent - and as an absolute minimum - the entrance hall to be opened up to the public on Heritage Open Days (and preferably more often).

Recommendation

We recommend that consent is not granted on the planning application as it stands, and that further architectural options for the housing on the site of the swimming pool are considered. We would wish to have an opportunity to comment on these before any consent is granted. Whilst in principle we do not object to the associated listed building consent, we consider that it would be good practice to consider it in tandem with the associated planning application, as the two applications are entirely interdependent. To grant the listed building consent for partial demolition without suitable proposals for the re-use of the site would in our view be inappropriate. We therefore consider that consent should not be granted for either application until an appropriate scheme for the proposed new development has been agreed.

It is essential that the development secures the long term management and maintenance of the Spa buildings. We also consider it essential that some form of public access is secured.

We would welcome the opportunity of advising further. Please consult us again if any additional information or amendments are submitted. If, notwithstanding our advice, you propose to approve the scheme in its present form, please advise us of the date of the committee and send us a copy of your report at the earliest opportunity.



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Yours sincerely

Diane Green

Historic Buildings Inspector

E-mail: diane.green@english-heritage.org.uk

cc Ann Johnson, Harrogate Borough Council
The Victorian Society
David Winpenny, Ripon Civic Society



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