

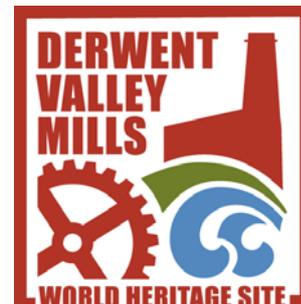
DERWENT VALLEY MILLS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

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Clare Thornton
Amber Valley Borough Council
Town Hall
Ripley
Derbyshire DE5 3BT

14th May 2014

Dear Clare

AVA/2013/0265: Redevelopment, Conversion and part new build to provide 26 dwellings with parking and alterations to the access at John Smedley Ltd, Lea Road, Lea Bridge.

Please find below my response to the consultation concerning the above application. These comments will be taken to the next meeting of the World Heritage Site Conservation and Planning Panel in June for verification.

The development area is within the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site, and the John Smedley Mills are a key attribute contributing to its outstanding universal value (OUV). The Derwent Valley Mills were inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 2001. The Derwent Valley Mills Partnership, on behalf of HM Government is pledged to conserve the unique and important cultural landscape of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site; protect its outstanding universal value, interpret and promote its assets; and enhance its character, appearance and economic well-being in a sustainable manner.

The Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Site was defined by the following criteria, agreed by UNESCO when the mills were inscribed. They are:

- C(ii) That the site exhibits “an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design”;
- C(iv) That the site is “an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape, which illustrates a significant stage in human history”.

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee recorded that these criteria were met for the following reasons:

C(ii) The Derwent Valley saw the birth of the factory system, when new types of building were erected to house the new technology for spinning cotton developed by Richard Arkwright in the early 19th century.

C(iv) In the Derwent Valley for the first time there was large-scale industrial production in a hitherto rural landscape. The need to provide housing and other facilities for workers and managers resulted in the creation of the first modern industrial towns.

A Management Plan for the World Heritage Site was created in 2002, and most recently amended in 2007. The Plan has as the second of its seven aims to: “*establish guidelines for the future management of the site, and the buildings and land within it, so that the special character of the cultural landscape is protected and enhanced.*” It also has as the sixth of its twenty-five objectives to: “*maintain and enhance the quality and distinctiveness of the Derwent Valley Mills cultural landscape.*”

I have consulted with Derbyshire County Council’s Conservation and Design Section over this application, and have received the following advice about the following elements of the proposals.

Restoration of ‘Lea Bridge Cottages’:

These three Grade II listed buildings are currently included on the Derbyshire County Council Buildings at Risk Register, and attributes relating to OUV. The proposal to restore and re-use these buildings is strongly supported.

Demolition of the ‘Dining Room and Yarn Store Block’ and construction of 8 new dwellings:

These buildings are not listed and from the evidence provided in the Heritage Statement (HS), were constructed in around 1936. They are clearly of some architectural interest, although they are a late edition to the original mill complex. In this respect we agree with the HS in that they have lower evidential value than other buildings on the site; such as the adjacent machine store block, for example. The buildings are not associated with any sensitive visual receptors in relation to the WHS and are located out of view from the street scene along Lea Road. The removal of these buildings will have a minimal impact on the OUV of the WHS.

The 8 new dwellings proposed in their place are of an appropriate scale and should not detract from the factory buildings. Given their location they should also not detract from or impact on the street scene. They appear to be well designed, taking inspiration from the mill-workers’ cottages vernacular, and reflect the materials used on the surrounding factory buildings. Therefore this new development should have a minimal impact on the OUV of the Derwent Valley Mills.

Construction of 4 new dwellings on the ‘Grassed Area’:

The research in the HS indicates that this parcel of land was unlikely to have been built on in any way or used in connection with the mill complex. However, the Grassed Area is in a prominent position on the northern edge of the site, overlooking the Mill Pond and valley further below. Any development on this would also be clearly visible from the street scene from the south, and from the north when descending Lea Road. The land also features within one of the 47 monitoring views in the DVMWHS that need to be 'closely monitored to ensure the Outstanding Universal Value of the Derwent Valley Mills is maintained, and their setting is preserved or enhanced'.

The development of this piece of land can be seen as the incremental erosion of the setting of the mill complex especially when arriving at the World Heritage Site from the north along Lea Road.

Part of the reason for inscription to UNESCO's WHS list is that the Derwent Valley represents the development of the first factory systems which are still largely intact sitting in a rural landscape. While housing has been developed along the eastern side of Lea Road it is either sufficiently far away from the mill complex or set back from the road to have no visual connection to the mill complex. John Smedley provides a clear industrial development line which, when viewed from the north, sits in a rural landscape and has wooded slopes running down to the mill complex and the slopes of the Derwent Valley in the background. The field which would be developed is an important part of this rural composition so its development would erode the setting. Also, the development of residential properties in this location alters the historic relationship of the mill with surrounding housing and while the design is obviously a modern interpretation of mill-workers' housing it could blur the ability to interpret the development of the mill complex in the future.

To this end, it is the WHS Partnership's view that developing this area for housing would negatively impact on the OUV of the DVMWHS.

Conversion of the 'Machine Room Block' to 10 dwellings:

Given the difficulty in finding a sustainable alternative use for the building, coupled with its large and on-going maintenance costs, the proposal for its conversion to housing is well justified. Its conversion will inevitably require the loss of a significant amount of historic fabric both internally and externally. However, this is mitigated by leaving the prominent and iconic façade of the Lea Mills complex visually in-tact when seen from the key monitoring positions along Lea Road. In addition, the original building footprint will remain unchanged and the distinctive 'saw-tooth' roof design should also remain interpretable from most directions. The historical analysis presented in the HS indicates that there may have been an earlier building present here and that the extant building, of early 20th century construction, is a later addition to the site. Although there may be a loss of some evidential value in relation to the development and operation of the mill it is not part of the early mill complex.

Therefore on balance the proposal to demolish a relatively small part of the building should not adversely impact on the OUV of the Derwent Valley Mills.

Conversion of the 'House' to a single dwelling:

The historical evidence presented in the HS suggests that this building may have originally been a single house, although the evidence submitted in the archivist's report suggests that it was used for many more years as offices for the mill complex. The conversion of this building to a single dwelling should only have a minimal impact on the internal fabric and on views from the street scene, although the loss of the shop-window frontage will reduce the potential to interpret its former function as offices associated with the mill complex. The impact on the OUV of the Derwent Valley Mills should be minimal although the loss of the external fabric should be appropriately recorded.

Demolition of the 'Wool Warehouse':

According to the Archivist's report the Wool Warehouse is likely to have been constructed as part of the later redevelopment of the east site by John Smedley at some point between 1860-79. The building was believed to have been used for the storage of raw materials for the factory and was probably located here because of its suitable location for deliveries close to the road. Whilst the building is considerably older than the majority of buildings on the east side of the site, given the nature of the structure/fabric, it does not contribute greatly to the interpretation of the development of the original mill complex.

Despite its age, it is of relatively low aesthetic characteristics having a robust and rough external appearance. However, the building does provide a definitive 'bookend' and sense of enclosure to the mill complex at present. The proposal to demolish this building is regrettable and is likely to have some degree of adverse impact on the site. However, the retention of the gable-end abutting Lea Road should at least mitigate any serious adverse impacts by preserving the key views of the site from the south of Lea Road.

Further to this, the viability of the conversion of the Stock Warehouse to 4 dwellings is very much reliant on the demolition of the Wool Warehouse. It is understood that finding a sustainable alternative use or converting the Wool Warehouse to dwellings would be difficult to achieve.

Conversion of the 'Stock Warehouse' to 3 dwellings:

The evidence presented in the HS and archaeological report suggests that Stock Warehouse was constructed between 1835 to 1860, and is similar in construction to older parts of the Lea Mills complex. There is also evidence in this to suggest that this building has a long history of adaptation and use; being used in its early years for the storage of raw materials and later adapted by John Smedley

for weaving/spinning. Therefore this building has significant historic evidential value in relation to the development of the Lea Mill complex.

The conversion of the building to dwellings should help facilitate the preservation of the building as suggested in the HS. The demolition of the adjoining Wool Warehouse should also allow this earlier mill-complex building to be viewed more openly and more easily interpreted. Whilst the conversion will involve the loss of some historic fabric this should be mitigated through the preservation of its overall external appearance. The exception to this is the adjoining elevation which will need to be adapted to accommodate the necessary windows and doors for the new dwellings. The information submitted in the application suggests that the new elevational treatment will read as a modern and 'honest' intervention, with the fenestration carried out stylistically consistent with the new dwellings. On balance, the proposal will not have an adverse impact on the OUV of the Derwent Valley Mills. However, whilst the WHS Partnership does not object to the proposals, greater detail is needed to demonstrate how the old and new fabric will be discerned in relation to the North Elevation.

Summary

There will be a substantial loss of historic building fabric on the east side of the site, which will be replaced with the new dwellings or converted. However, on the whole, these are of relatively low historic significance to the Lea Mills complex. In balancing the impacts on the WHS's OUV a number of factors need to be taken into consideration:

- The alterations through the proposed development will not adversely impact on any sensitive visual receptors; notably views from Lea Road would remain largely intact thus maintaining the setting of the Lea Mills complex.
- The development will ensure that some of the more significant attributes of the Lea Mills complex will be preserved through their new use as dwellings.
- The proposed development or interventions are of a clear modern design and of a consistently high standard. Therefore these should not dilute the authenticity of the site.
- Some of the money from the sale of the new housing development is to be invested in the John Smedley factory and to finance the restoration of the 3 historically significant cottages. The continuing presence of John Smedley Ltd, the last remaining historic textile manufacturer within the Derwent Valley Mills, is strongly supported as this provides visitors with the opportunity to interpret the original historic function of the site.

Taking these points into consideration, with the exception of our objection towards the proposal to develop 4 new dwellings on the 'Grassy Area', the World Heritage Site Partnership does not oppose the development, as it should not adversely impact on the OUV of the DVMWHS. However, should permission be granted then the demolished buildings and any fabric lost through the conversion of the other buildings should be appropriately recorded with copies provided to the county archives.

I hope these comments can be considered when a decision is made concerning permissions for this development.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adrian Farmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping underline.

Adrian Farmer

Heritage Co-ordinator
Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site.

Cc Rob Thorley, Rachael Coates AVBC.