

DERWENT VALLEY MILLS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

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Sarah Pearce
Amber Valley Borough Council
Town Hall
Ripley
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23rd April 2018

Dear Sarah

AVA/2018/0290: New House on land adjacent to Swiss Barn, Chevin Road, Belper.

Please find below my response to the consultation concerning the above application. These comments will be taken to the World Heritage Site Conservation and Planning Panel for verification later this month.

The site lies within the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site (DVMWHS) Buffer Zone. 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; to protect its outstanding universal value (OUV), to interpret and promote its assets; and to enhance its character, appearance and economic well-being in a sustainable manner.

The retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) for the Derwent Valley Mills was adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2010. The SOUV refers to the following UNESCO criteria, which the World Heritage Committee agreed were met at the time of inscription. 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 SOUV records 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 late 18th 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 settlements.

A Management Plan for the World Heritage Site was created in 2002, and updated in 2014. It has as the first of its nine aims to: “protect, conserve and enhance the Outstanding Universal Value of the DVMWHS.” In accordance with this aim, and with reference to Section 12.1 of the Management Plan, I have consulted with Derbyshire County Council’s Conservation, Heritage and Design Service (which advises the World Heritage Site Partnership in planning matters), and have received the following advice:

These comments have been prepared in the absence of a Design and Access Statement which is claimed to have been submitted and without which we expect it would not have been validated.

This land is located approximately 250m from the World Heritage Site. The nearest listed building is Bankfield House, north of the site, located on Chevin Road, slightly to the north, opposite Chevin (Green) Farm. The twentieth century ribbon development of Chevinside occupies the west side of the lane, extending northwards. The character of the site is that of an isolated group of vernacular buildings within the open landscape context, detached from but clearly on the edge of the town of Belper. Swiss House and Swiss Cottages appear on the 1st edition OS and while there is no mention of it forming part of a farmstead, its relationship with the agricultural land, together with the presence of (converted?) barns and the Dutch barn, suggest it must have been associated with farming, historically.

The application site occupies a prominent position against Chevin Road, currently screened by vegetation and containing the open Dutch barn, which is proposed to be demolished. There would inevitably be a degree of urbanising to the character of the site, through the increased density of development upon it. The boundary treatment of repaired and supplemented drystone walls are welcome, but there would be a loss of taller vegetation that adds to the site’s rural character, currently. The conversion of the Dutch barn would be viewed very favourably.

In mitigation, the design concept has attempted to create an organic layout, with a degree of success and sensitively, using traditional vernacular forms, materials and detailing, acknowledging that buildings do commonly sit hard against the lane, with blank gables facing onto it. The danger with this approach is that the importance of ‘authenticity’ and integrity to the significance of the World heritage Site could be confused.

The main two-storey stone element would have a lowered eaves, as illustrated in the sectional drawing, which would be a beneficial pre-requisite. Unfortunately, this prompts the need for a number of rooflights. However, unlike the extension at Swiss Cottage, the scale, size location and type of these rooflights would be acceptable.

With respect of the consideration of ‘authenticity’, as previously mentioned, there are a few elements of the design proposals that give some concern:

1. The flat roof, single storey wing of the house between the main two storey block and the guest/study element is somewhat of an incongruous form, which is determined to some extent by the desire to create a main living space of generous depth. It is proposed to be in brick, in contrast to the stone elements that would have pitched roofs. It would also feature a lantern light. While there is a precedent for the use of brick amongst the generally older stone buildings (see Swiss Cottages and Chevin Green Farm), the overall character would be too heavy and permanent. A lighter-weight cladding material, typical of agricultural contexts, reinterpreted in a modern form would impact less on the site and this sensitive place. The 'detached' garage might also benefit from this approach towards its external materials, within a holistic re-consideration of the design concept (see below). Consideration of a pitched roof solution is an alternative option.
2. The double garage would have a hipped roof, which would have less of a visual impact, but is an element that is not characteristic of the location. It would relate more successfully were it to be a linear element on the end of the house, with a duo-pitch roof and brick or stone gable, but there might be other options within the re-consideration of external materials. A fully detached element that could be read as an honest modern element might be another option;
3. The organic concept is not rigorously followed through in some of the detailing. In particular, window and door openings, particularly in the single storey elements, tend to be formally centralised with their masonry 'panels', rather than having a more random character that would occur in authentic organic buildings:
 - the pair of prominent windows of the south facing house gable have inherent flexibility for being repositioned, within the layout of the individual rooms, towards a less suburban appearance;
 - the openings to the stone 'links' on either side of the brick living room are positioned centrally;
 - the doorway to the study/guest room is centrally positioned;
 - the openings to the brick living room are centrally positioned, to the north and south elevations (which is probably the more justified location for this approach, particularly in a contemporary solution, as discussed above);
 - the lantern light itself establishes a centralised pavilion form;

Cumulatively, despite the commendable proposals as submitted, all the above add towards a domesticity of character, which can be addressed towards a building that would be better assimilated into the site.

Whilst it is understood that this detailed assessment might appear to go beyond the material consideration of the significance (OUV) of the World Heritage Site and its setting, were the application to be acceptable in policy terms, the best possible design solution, respecting the concept of 'authenticity', would be required to balance the degree of harm to the loss of rural character within the setting of the world heritage site.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Adrian Farmer". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Adrian" and the last name "Farmer" written in a single continuous line.

Adrian Farmer

Heritage Co-ordinator, Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site.
cc Sarah Johnson, AVBC