



Historic England

Dr Andrew Wigley
Shropshire Council
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 6ND

8 March 2022

Dear Dr Wigley,

Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings

As you will be aware, Historic England are in the process of restoring Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings (“the Flaxmill”), a site of historic and international significance, following its acquisition in March 2005. The site’s restoration is being undertaken in four stages.

Planning permission for the Flaxmill (comprising an outline planning permission and a detailed planning permission and listed building consent for an initial phase of development) was first obtained in November 2010 following a masterplan study (undertaken in 2004) which identified the opportunity to greatly improve the site and the surrounding environment of the Flaxmill based upon the acquisition and sympathetic redevelopment of neighbouring sites (“the masterplan consents”)¹. The masterplan consents have now expired.

However, a series of planning permissions and listed building consents have subsequently been obtained (and in certain instances implemented) in order to authorise the mixed-use redevelopment of outbuildings within the vicinity of the Main Mill (which is Grade 1 listed)², as well as the repair and restoration of the Main Mill and Kiln themselves in order to form a visitor interpretation centre; a learning space and café; restoration of the upper floors of the Main Mill for commercial use; and the creation of a new car park, roadway and combined cycle and pedestrian route within an area known as the ‘Railway Triangle’³. These works constitute a first and second stage of development – the first stage focussed on the Office (now Smithy) and Stable buildings and was completed at the end of 2015 with the opening of a visitor centre and education facility charting the history of the Flaxmill; the second stage works, comprising the repair, restoration and repurposing of the Main Mill and Kiln, are well progressed and are due to be completed by the end of May.

¹ See the following consents: ref. 10/03237/OUT; 10/03230/FUL; and 10/03233/LBC.

² See the following consents: ref. 12/04435/FUL and 12/04436/LBC – repair and conservation of the Dye and Stove House, office and stables to provide mixed use development (use classes A1-A3, B1-B2, B8 and D1-D2); new landscaping; and ref. 13/02383/LBC – demolition of existing south silo structure affecting a Grade 1 Listed Building.

³ See the following consents: ref. 16/02872/FUL and 16/02873/LBC – repair and restoration of the Main Mill and Kiln; installation of structural strengthening solution; re-opening of windows to all floors, formation of visitor interpretation centre, learning space and café; restoration of upper floors for commercial use; landscaping and formation of car parking area with improved accessibility across the site.



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The third stage of development at the Flaxmill proposes the conversion of the Apprentice House to residential use and the redevelopment of the brownfield land to the north and east of the Flaxmill's historic buildings for a residential-led mixed use scheme ("the Scheme"). Planning permission for the Scheme has been obtained in outline, granted on 10 May 2021, with all matters reserved save for access ("the 2021 Permission")⁴. It is intended that, following a competitive tendering exercise, Historic England will appoint a private sector development partner to deliver the Scheme and that a proportion of the profit generated as a consequence of the said redevelopment will be utilised by Historic England to reinvest into the Flaxmill and provide critical funding for the ongoing maintenance, repair and preservation of the site's historic buildings. This will be the fourth and final stage of the Flaxmill's redevelopment. The implementation of this final stage, and the realisation of Historic England's ultimate objective to comprehensively regenerate the site, is reliant upon the Scheme being delivered in full.

Much of the land needed for the Scheme ("the Stage 3 Land") is already within the ownership of Historic England. However, the Stage 3 Land includes commercial premises at no. 1 and no. 15 Haughmond Square, located on the Spring Gardens frontage, which are currently being operated as hot food takeaways, each with residential accommodation at first floor level (together, "the Haughmond Square Properties"). The Haughmond Square Properties are both in private, third party ownership.

Historic England has sought to acquire the freehold interests in the Haughmond Square Properties and is committed to supporting the relocation of both takeaway operators, together with the residential occupiers of both properties. We will continue to communicate with the affected parties with a view to moving matters forward. However, it is considered that the present dialogue has reached stalemate and that, absent intervention, there is little prospect of the acquisition of the Haughmond Square Properties proceeding in a timely and constructive manner. Therefore, assembly of the totality of the Stage 3 Land cannot currently be guaranteed.

The Haughmond Square Properties are in average condition and have each been the subject of ad-hoc, ill-considered and poor quality works/repairs over the years, including inappropriate fenestration, low-grade shop fronts and unsightly extraction units. The rear yards to both properties are in a semi-derelict state, being overgrown with vegetation and strewn with rubbish and fly-tipped material. The Haughmond Square Properties detract from the Shrewsbury Town Centre Conservation Area within which the Flaxmill sits.

As part of the Scheme, and the illustrative masterplan submitted in support of the application for the 2021 Permission, the Haughmond Square Properties will appear as 'gate posts' forming an

⁴ See planning permission ref. 20/05065/OUT.

appropriate entrance, indeed the community gateway, to the historic core of the wider Flaxmill, and serving as the threshold to a reinstated Haughmond Square – historically the location of a cluster of small workers cottages which have long since been demolished. Indeed, in their resumed role as ‘gate posts’, the Haughmond Square Properties will frame a key view of the Kiln (which is Grade 2 listed) – the hub of the historic mill complex – and of Jubilee Tower alongside. The Haughmond Square Properties sit at ‘front and centre’ of the Scheme. As such, their acquisition and refurbishment for a mixed commercial use is central to the Scheme’s success. In particular, the unsightly modern extension and lean-to structures at the side and to the rear of the properties are required to be removed and the 19th century elevations restored.

The financial appraisals undertaken in respect of the Scheme indicate that a failure to acquire the Haughmond Square Properties will result in a marked reduction in the residual value of the Scheme, which will have an undermining effect on Historic England’s disposal and redevelopment strategy for the Stage 3 Land and the overall viability of the redevelopment project for the Flaxmill. The assembly of the Stage 3 Land is of critical importance and a pre-requisite to Historic England being able to ‘go to market’ and invite tender responses in respect of this unique development opportunity. The prospects of success for this third stage of development must be maximised so that it can enable the fourth and final stage of the redevelopment project. Only then will the Flaxmill’s long-term and sustainable future be secured and its legacy safeguarded.

In order to secure the comprehensive regeneration of the Flaxmill, and the delivery in full of the four-stage redevelopment project to which this letter refers, Historic England require the ongoing support of the Council and, in particular, a commitment on the part of the Council to authorise, in due course, the making of a compulsory purchase order pursuant to s.226(1)(a) of the Town and County Planning Act 1990, the Council being satisfied that a compelling case in the public interest is established thereby justifying the exercise of its powers of compulsory acquisition. You will recall that the Council proceeded with a compulsory purchase order in April 2020, made pursuant to the same powers, in respect of land in unknown ownership within the Railway Triangle. This order was successful and was confirmed by the Secretary of State in April 2021. The acquired land has since been transferred from the Council to Historic England and has been developed to provide the new car park and roadway at the Flaxmill.

As you will be aware, a local authority to whom s.226(1)(a) applies shall, on being authorised to do so by the Secretary of State, have the power to acquire compulsorily any land in their area if the authority think that the acquisition will facilitate the carrying out of development, re-development or improvement on or in relation to the land, the subject of the compulsory purchase order, provided that such development, re-development or improvement is likely to contribute to the



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achievement of any one or more of the following objects: the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and/or environmental well-being of the local authority's area.

A key milestone in the compulsory acquisition process is the preparation of the Statement of Reasons which will articulate the 'compelling case' in support of a decision by the Council to make a compulsory purchase order in this instance. It is accepted that in order for the Council to proceed in the manner envisaged, the case for compulsory acquisition will need to be fully developed and substantiated.

With regard to the contents of this letter, it is requested that the Council continues to support the long-anticipated restoration of the Flaxmill and, in particular, that it confirms its commitment, in principle, to the use of the Council's powers of compulsory acquisition in order to secure the delivery in full of this critical regeneration project.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely

Alastair Godfrey
Project Lead, Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings
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