



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 December 2022

by William Cooper BA (Hons) MA CMLI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 January 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/L3245/W/22/3302287

Former Hathaway Site, Monkmoor Road, Shrewsbury SY2 5TZ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by MAR DESIGN LIMITED against the decision of Shropshire Council.
 - The application Ref: 21/04356/FUL, dated 7 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 13 January 2022.
 - The development proposed is sub-division of ground floor retail to form 5 class 'E' units and creation of 14no residential apartments on first floor.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Since the Council's decision, a section 106 planning agreement has been submitted. This covers provision of affordable housing and financial contributions in respect of open space. This informs my assessment of the appeal proposal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this case are:
 - Whether the proposal would preserve the Belfast-truss aircraft hangar non-designated heritage asset (NDHA);
 - The effect of the proposal on the supply of employment land and premises; and
 - Whether the proposal would provide a suitable mix and type of housing.

Reasons

Heritage asset

4. The appeal building is a former military aircraft hangar, located in an area of Shrewsbury that is characterised by a mix of mainly twentieth century commercial, housing and retail development. Much of the appeal building is in use as a carpet retail showroom.
5. The appeal building is included in the Shropshire Historic Environment Record, and as set out in the 2016 appeal decision¹ about the site, and identified by the

¹ Appeal Ref: APP/L3245/W/16/3159221.

Council, it is a NDHA. This is based on the building's special interest, which derives from the following. It is part of the former Monkmoor airfield that was used by the Royal Flying Corps in World War 1 for equipping and testing aircraft before their operational deployment, and used by the Royal Air Force for aircraft maintenance in World War 2. It has regional significance as part of a group of military aircraft hangar buildings dating from World War 1, and a relatively rare surviving example of this type of building in Shropshire.

6. The appeal building has a large, distinctive arched roof that is supported by a substantial early twentieth century internal Belfast roof truss system (BRTS). The BRTS inside the appeal building comprises an eye-catching framework of timber chords and lattice work. The substantial span, height above ground level and form of the BRTS draw the eye and contribute to the distinctive historic scale and identity of the former hangar building.
7. Also, the stepped brick buttresses on the appeal building's north-western elevation are a rhythmic architectural element that further draws the eye to its distinctive historic hangar architecture. Albeit some distraction from this sequence of buttresses results from existing business signage and lean-to additions along around two thirds of this elevation, which obscure the lower part of some of the buttresses.
8. Furthermore, the early twentieth century aviation-related roof structure, building profile and mass of the appeal building contrasts with the smaller scale architecture of one and two-storey residential development in the neighbourhood. This adds local heritage-related distinctiveness to the character of this part of Monkmoor.
9. Thus, while much of the former airfield space has evolved with subsequent development on it, and the appeal building has undergone changes including closing up of hangar doorways and fenestration changes, the appeal building noticeably survives as an illustration of distinctive hangar architecture, construction technology and the area's military aviation history, dating from World War 1. Its arched roof with BRTS, makes an important contribution to illustrating these historic aspects.
10. Given the above, the appeal building has evidential, historical and communal value. Its special interest, insofar as it relates to this appeal derives from the enduring legibility of its early twentieth century military aircraft hangar architecture, including its BRTS, and its contribution to illustrating the locality's military aviation history.
11. The proposed development would include the following. The stepped buttresses on the appeal building's north-western elevation would be retained² and, through removal of lean-to additions, commercial signage and masonry paint from the brickwork, better revealed. Also, removal of a canopy from the north-eastern elevation, and corrugated iron cladding from the north-eastern and south-western elevations of the building would lessen distraction from the NDHA's historic character.
12. Replacement of roof sheeting with zinc sheeting is proposed to address reported water damage³ to trusses, support purlins and sheet joint support

² As illustrated in Proposed Elevations drawing SA36072-BRY-XX-PL-A-002.

³ As indicated by the engineer's report on the condition of the existing structure (RCES) of the appeal building, that was submitted by the appellant with the appeal.

strips, arising from rusting of corrugated roof sheeting. While the zinc sheeting would be a modern replacement of some of the building's fabric, the existing roof sheeting fabric is of uncertain age and authenticity. Also, the distinctive arched roof shape would endure. As such, the replacement zinc roof sheeting would appear as an architecturally 'honest' element that would not harmfully detract from the historic character of the appeal building. Also, the proposed steel framed windows to ground floor retail units would be suitably unfussy in their style, and characteristic of some earlier larger scale twentieth century buildings, to avoid distracting from the historic character of the building.

13. However, with the insertion of the first floor apartments level, much of the arched roof form and timber BRTS would be concealed from view within the appeal building, above apartments' suspended ceilings. This would obscure the cavernous character of the hangar inside the building, and diminish appreciation of the grand scale and appearance of its roof space with its intricate BRTS.
14. Furthermore, an opening in the roof is proposed above a new first floor external courtyard and gardens space. This would expose parts of several trusses as a feature above this courtyard and gardens space⁴. Treatment of trusses with wood preservative is proposed above the courtyard and gardens space⁵. Also, taped and sealed WBP plywood would be fixed to lattice sections of truss at external wall junctions of the courtyard. However, the exposure of trusses above the courtyard in the north-west facing opening of more than 200sq.m in the curved roof, at a height of around 12m would expose the BRTS to increased potential for moisture penetration from rain and other types of weather. Also, the location of exposed parts of trusses above a mix of communal courtyard and private gardens space at first floor level may limit maintenance access, to inspect and renew timber preservative, plywood, sealant and tape.
15. Given the above combination of factors, I have no certainty that the proposal would practicably protect the fabric of the BRTS from decay, to safeguard its survival in the medium to long term. No substantive case study to, for example decisively demonstrate a track record of such measures providing a realistically durable solution for retention of comparable historic interior roof timbers exposed to outside weather elements, is presented to persuade me otherwise. As such, the proposal would place the appeal building's BRTS and historic roof profile at unacceptable risk of future deterioration. Thus, the proposal would harm the distinctive historic fabric, construction technology and building profile of the NDHA.
16. Therefore, the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the NDHA. Given the scale and substance of the proposal, and the localised nature of its impact on the NDHA, I find the harm to the NDHA to be less than substantial in this instance, but nonetheless significant. In such circumstances I necessarily weigh the harm against the benefits of the proposal.
17. The proposal would contribute three one-bedroom flats and 11 two-bedroom flats on brownfield land to local housing supply. The three one-bedroom flats would be affordable, shared-ownership dwellings. This would add to the variety

⁴ As illustrated in the Proposed Roof Plan.

⁵ As described and illustrated in sections 6.4.2-6.4.3 of the appellant's Design and Access Statement Rev A.

of housing in the neighbourhood. The proposal would also provide five new commercial, business and service class units, with associated fresh employment opportunities, albeit tempered by the loss of the existing carpet showroom and associated employment. Furthermore, the proposal would contribute to public open space provision in the area. The above would provide socio-economic benefit during and after construction, within the county's Shrewsbury growth point.

18. Also, the proposal would better reveal the distinctive stepped buttresses on the heritage asset's north-western facade, and distract less from the historic character of its north-eastern and south-western elevations, from some exterior viewpoints. Proposed new roof sheeting would reduce water ingress to the BRTS, compared to existing deteriorated sheeting. The proposal would bring fresh architectural dynamism and investment to the building.
19. That said, the RCES indicates the following. More intrusive building survey investigations are required to ensure that the structure performs adequately long term. Fuller inspection of the appeal building's roof trusses is necessary, including to inform assessment of the suggestion that steel truss replacement 'may prove to be the most economic and robust option'⁶. Also, fuller inspection of the central gutter is needed, considering that reported water leakage and overflowing could affect truss end blocks.
20. Furthermore, a fuller building structure survey and assessment including, for example a) drawings and photographs of the extent and location of reported existing defects, and b) substantive demonstration of the structural capability of the appeal building to accommodate the proposed development while preserving its historic elements, is not presented. Nor is a substantive comparison of estimated costs of anticipated future maintenance works and income from the current retail unit, informed by audited accounts, for example, before me. As such, it is not decisively shown that the appeal proposal would be the minimum necessary intervention to secure the fabric and special interest of the NDHA in the future.
21. Given the above, the benefits are limited by the scale of proposed development and do not outweigh the identified harm to the significance of the heritage asset. I therefore conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the NDHA. As such, it would conflict with Policy CS6 of the Shropshire Core Strategy (CS), and Policies MD2 and MD13 of the Shropshire Site Allocations and Management of Development Plan (SAMDev). Together, these seek to ensure that development conserves and enhances Shropshire's heritage assets.

Employment land and premises

22. As established in the 2017 appeal decision⁷, the current appeal site is part of a protected mixed commercial employment site of moderate significance, that falls to be protected as an employment area for Class B and other sui generis uses, under Policy MD9 of the SAMDev. Criterion 5 of Policy MD9 requires that where proposals for alternative uses would lead to loss of protected employment area, evidence of appropriate marketing over a sustained period will be required, to demonstrate that the land or premises are no longer commercially viable for the appropriate uses.

⁶ As per point 4 of the Conclusions and Recommendations of the RCES.

⁷ Appeal Ref: APP/L3245/W/16/3159221.

23. Within this context, the proposal would replace the carpet showroom with five commercial, business and service class units of fresher appearance, that are likely to be more easily maintainable with associated potential attractiveness to future business occupants and customers. However, that said, the appeal proposal would result in the loss of around 600sq.m⁸ of protected employment land in the south-eastern part of the appeal building, for a residents' car parking area. No marketing over a sustained period of the land proposed for the residents' parking area is presented. As such, there is not substantive evidence before me of this protected employment land having been marketed for sale for a sufficient length of time and at a sufficiently realistic price to decisively support a finding of lack of future viability as employment land.
24. As such, the proposal would reduce the amount of protected employment land on the site and so diminish the supply of that land in the area, without the viability justification required by SAMDev Policy MD9. Also, no substantive assessment to, for example decisively demonstrate that the proposal would support delivery of the rolling five year strategic land supply of readily available committed employment sites and premises in the county is presented. As such, the proposal would not demonstrably support the management of a portfolio of employment land and premises sought by Policy CS14 of the CS.
25. Following the Council's decision on the current appeal proposal, a subsequent scheme for sub-division of the existing retail unit to form 5 class 'E' units, without the residential development, has been granted planning permission⁹. As this later scheme does not encompass changing the space within the south-eastern part of the appeal building to a residents' parking area, its approval does not establish the acceptability of the loss of employment land in the current appeal case. Also, another decision¹⁰ cited by the appellant differs from the appeal proposal in that it concerns another building. This other decision does not negate Policy MD9's marketing requirement, nor provide compelling evidence of lack of employment viability of the land proposed for the residents' parking area in the current appeal case. Thus, these other decisions do not alter my findings on this main issue.
26. In conclusion, the proposal would harm the supply of employment land and premises. As such, it would conflict with Policy MD9 of the SAMDev and Policy CS14 of the CS, as set out above.

Housing mix and type

27. Policy CS11 of the CS seeks to ensure that, among other things, housing development helps balance the type of local housing stock, provides appropriate affordable housing and is designed for adaptation to accommodate lifestyle changes and to achieve the Lifetime Homes standard. Also, Section 1i) of DP Policy MD3 requires that residential proposals on sites of five or more dwellings include a mix and type of housing that has regard to local evidence and community consultation. Together, this articulates the importance of providing a balanced housing mix that is demonstrably responsive to the diverse housing needs of Shropshire residents now and in the future. Supporting text under Policy MD3 identifies Shropshire Place Plans as a source

⁸ Measured from the Proposed Ground Floor Plan, excluding the proposed servicing access to the rear of the commercial units.

⁹ Application Ref: 22/02952/FUL.

¹⁰ Application Ref: 22/01175/DEM.

of information on housing types required locally, and specifies Shropshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) among key evidence.

28. In the absence of substantive evidence in the Shrewsbury and Surrounding Area Place Plan of housing mix and type need in Monkmoor and other urban parts of Shrewsbury town, the proposal focuses on affordable housing provision. The Council considers that the proposed development would include a sufficient amount of affordable dwellings with three shared-ownership one-bedroom flats, which I accept.
29. However, no substantive assessment of local housing mix or type need in urban Shrewsbury, drawing on the Shropshire SHMA, is presented. Nor is there clear confirmation that the proposed accommodation is designed for adaptation to accommodate lifestyle changes and to achieve the Lifetime Homes standard. As such, the proposal would not demonstrably provide a mix and type of housing that sufficiently comprehensively responds to local needs.
30. Therefore, in conclusion the proposal would not demonstrably provide a suitable mix and type of housing, and would undermine this objective. As such, it would not accord with Policy CS11 of the CS and Policy MD3 of the SAMDev which together seek to ensure that housing development delivers the right mix and type of dwellings to meet community needs.

Other Matters

31. Concerns have been expressed by some members of the local community about highway safety and parking stress, which go beyond the reasons for refusal. As I am dismissing this appeal on other grounds, it is not necessary for me to address these matters further in this instance.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

32. The appellant refers to potential alternative loss of existing Class E floorspace to residential (Class C3) use, through permitted development rights under Class MA of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development etc.) (England) (Amendment) Order 2021. Judging by the appellant's raising of this, and the Council's assessment of the noise and daylight aspects of the residential part of the appeal proposal as resolvable¹¹, this fallback position is more than a theoretical possibility. The total loss of existing Class E floorspace from the appeal building would be more harmful than the identified partial loss under the appeal proposal. As such, this fallback position carries moderate weight in favour of part of the proposal.
33. That said, the benefits of the proposal as identified under the first main issue, and the fallback position are insufficient to outweigh the significant totality of harm that I have identified in relation to the three main issues.
34. Therefore, the proposed development would be contrary to the development plan and there are no other considerations which outweigh this finding. Accordingly, for the reasons given, the appeal fails.

William Cooper

INSPECTOR

¹¹ As indicated in paragraphs 6.2.3 and 6.3.9 of the Development Management Report.