

ADRIAN AND ELAINE WAITE

1st October 2018

Ms. Caroline Dodgeon,
Town Clerk,
Appleby Town Council,
Moot Hall,
Boroughgate,
Appleby,
Cumbria.
CA16 6XE.

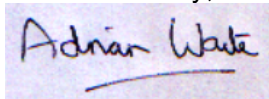
Dear Ms. Dodgeon,

Appleby Moot Hall – Options Appraisal

We would like to respond to your current consultation exercise on the Appleby Moot Hall.

Please find attached our observations and a completed copy of your questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adrian Waite". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Adrian and Elaine Waite

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Appleby Moot Hall – Options Appraisal

Introduction

In our view none of the three options that are being presented are satisfactory in that none of them appear to be consistent with the principles of good conservation and none would achieve the objectives of the Heritage Action Zone. We would like to suggest a different approach as explained below.

The Moot Hall

The Moot Hall is one of the most significant historic buildings in Appleby. Historic England recently published an investigation and assessment of its significance that stated that:

“The Moot Hall was probably built around 1596 for the Borough of Appleby, which was established by a royal charter in 1179. A re-set datestone over the south doorway is dated 1596, which accords with the findings of recent dendrochronological analysis of the oak roof trusses, which include timbers from trees felled in the period AD 1571-1596. The internal details of the roof and the masonry of the south gable end indicate that the eaves and roof were raised after the building was first built, re-using the original trusses. The date of this remodelling is not recorded but is likely to have taken place in the second half of the 17th century, when the accounts record significant expenditure and refer to a ‘newbuilding’.

“The Moot Hall has been in continuous use for the administration of the borough since it was built, although it has been altered and additional functions have taken place within it, over time. From the 1670s until 1773, the Westmorland Assizes were held in the upper hall, or council chamber. The chamber was also used for coroner’s inquests and for other meetings. The ground floor contained a lower hall until the second half of the 18th century, when the space was altered to provide separate shops.

“The Moot Hall has an exceptional level of heritage significance, as a rare surviving example of a Moot Hall first built in the late 16th century to serve the borough, altered in several later phases to meet the continuing needs of the Council. It is very significant as one of the few remaining early examples of a purpose-built moot hall in England, still serving its original administrative purpose.”

We understand that the Moot Hall is currently in a poor condition with problems including penetrating damp. Necessary repairs are estimated to cost about £500,000 and are required because of the failure of the Town Council over a period of many years to carry out necessary maintenance.

Conservation Principles

It is generally considered that historic buildings should be preserved as they are and that they should not be altered, extended, partially demolished or restored to a previous appearance. This has long been the practice of heritage organisations such as English Heritage and the National Trust; and is reflected in the National Planning Policy Framework and the guidance that is provided by Historic England.

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The principle is also enshrined in planning law as the 'presumption in favour of preservation' and in section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 that states that:

"In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority... shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses."

These principles were originally outlined by William Morris and Philip Webb in their manifesto of 1877 that have subsequently been adopted as the principles of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings and include:

- Regular maintenance. This is the most practical and economic form of preservation.
- Essential work. The only work which is unquestionably necessary (whether it be repair, renewal or addition) is that which is essential to a building's survival.

The proposed approach does not seem to be consistent with these principles in that:

- It appears that the Town Council has failed to carry out regular maintenance over a significant number of years.
- The proposals are for extensions to be made to the building that are not essential to the building's survival.
- There does not appear to be sufficient reason to over-ride the 'presumption in favour of preservation'.

The effect of the proposed works on the setting of the Moot Hall should also be considered. The Moot Hall is in the historic Boroughgate in the heart of the town's Conservation Area. It is adjacent to the Market Place, St. Lawrence's Church and other historic buildings. The proposed extensions would look too imposing and out of place in that location.

Appleby Heritage Action Zone

The objective of the Appleby Heritage Action Zone is:

"Restoring and reviving Appleby as a tourist attraction to benefit the local economy and the people who live and work there."

Proposed actions include:

- Improving the historic environment and repairing a number of listed buildings, including the White Hart Hotel and work on the Keep at Appleby Castle.
- Boosting tourism through a series of projects to showcase the town's rich heritage, including a town trail.
- Engaging local people through initiatives like Heritage Open Days and surveying the town's listed buildings.

Repairing the Moot Hall is clearly consistent with these objectives.

However, the current proposals are a missed opportunity in that they do not seek to make full use of the Moot Hall's potential to boost tourism through showcasing the town's rich heritage. The Moot Hall is essential to the achievement of these objectives because:

- It is one of Appleby's most historic buildings and should therefore be 'showcased' as an important part of Appleby's heritage offer.
- It is a place that could be used to 'showcase' Appleby's heritage in general with permanent and / or temporary exhibitions and / or displays building on the existing role as a Tourist Information Centre.

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- It is already in public ownership.

We would therefore suggest that:

- As the Moot Hall is not a large building it should be devoted exclusively to place-shaping and boosting tourism through showcasing the town's rich heritage. Activities that do not contribute directly to this such as the Town Council offices and the 'Blue Poppy' shop should therefore be relocated to alternative suitable premises in the town. This would also reduce the need for an extension to the building.
- Opportunities for members of the public to access the historic parts of the building should be optimised. For example, public access to the council chamber should not be restricted to occasional guided tours; and the public should be enabled to see the roof timbers.
- A lift should be installed to provide access to all public areas for disabled people.

We understand that the Town Council is reluctant to allow public access to the Council Chamber. We find this very disappointing as it suggests that the Town Council may not be committed to the objectives of the Heritage Action Zone.

Conclusions

Our conclusions are as follows:

- Appleby Moot Hall is an historic building that it is important to preserve. It is therefore important that necessary repairs are carried out. We also think that alterations to the historic structure and appearance should be avoided. We are not, therefore, in favour of options that involve extensions to the building.
- As one of Appleby's most important historic buildings we think the Moot Hall should be used to showcase the building itself and the history of the town through displaying artefacts and information. It is a small building and is currently very crowded. We therefore think it would be a good idea to relocate the town council offices and the shop to other buildings in the town.
- The Tourist Information Centre is valued by visitors and residents and should be retained.
- The council chamber is an important part of the history of the building and town and should be regularly open to the public. The same is true of the mayor's parlour. Whether it continues to be used to hold town council meetings is a matter for the Town Council.
- There should be disabled access to the first floor, especially if it continues to be the venue for town council meetings. It is unacceptable that a town council should meet in a place that does not have disabled access.
- The Town Council does not appear to have been a good custodian of the Moot Hall in that it has failed to carry out required maintenance over several years. Consideration should therefore be given to transferring ownership of the Moot Hall to an organisation with more expertise in the preservation of historic buildings such as English Heritage or the National Trust.

Adrian Waite
September 2018