DERWENT VALLEY MILLS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

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Mark Penford
Amber Valley Borough Council
Town Hall
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3rd November 2020

Dear Mark

AVA/2020/0750: Erection of dwelling house on land adjacent to The Tober, Farnah Green.

Please find below my response to the consultation concerning the above application. These comments will be passed to the World Heritage Site Conservation and Planning Group 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 maintain the Outstanding Universal Value of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site by protecting, conserving, presenting, enhancing and transmitting its culture, economy, unique heritage and landscape 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 2020. It has as the first of its nine aims to: "protect and conserve the Outstanding Universal Value of the DVMWHS to ensure its transmission to future generations." In accordance with this aim, and with reference to the operational guidance in Section 20 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:

The application site is adjacent to the Long House, originally a row of four cottages, which is a grade II listed building, dated 1771. It is located in the small rural hamlet of Farnah Green, outside Belper, within the market town's rural setting. This small settlement straddles Farnah Green Road and, historically, comprises dispersed cottages and rows of housing, presumably related to the agricultural community or past quarrying activity. Between the scattered cottages and farm buildings are occasional infill sites of 20th century detached dwellings. The modern development is of different periods and styles, although the houses are mostly in stone and, notionally, in a Derbyshire vernacular style. Typically these are set back from the road despite the all too common sub-urban development pattern and layout, which has little regard for context in all its facets. Despite these interventions into the place, the character of Farnah Green is decidedly rural. The surrounding open countryside belongs to the relict 18th century rural landscape, which forms the setting for the textile industry heritage of nearby Belper and the wider WHS.

A network of public footpaths from the west, from Hazelwood, Shottlegate and Blackbrook, through Lumb's Brook, lead to Farnah Green Road and encircle the application site (AV4/73/1 and AV4/71/3). To the east recreational routes connect from Belper, through Farnah Green and to the countryside to the west; public accessibility and experience of settlement is a material consideration for any development within this sensitive location.

The proposed development is for a detached dwelling in an uncompromisingly modern style. The house would be in a 1920's pseudo-Modern Movement style, comprised of abstract geometric forms and volumes, with a cubic expression of flat roofs, flat white rendered planes, with large areas of infill glazing and louvred infill panels, with small areas of feature stone panels at the main entrance. The design is described quite simply and briefly in the application documents and, while not without some appeal, displays no particular innovation in terms of design or construction, to justify its lack of contextual reference. The modern style appears to be applied to a relatively standard, loadbearing construction, in contrast to the expression and freedom of framed construction, with which the architectural style is more associated.

It is stated that the flat roof design would have a lower overall height than a traditional two storey property and would not be highly visible from the highway due to the set-back. The highly prominent, white appearance of the proposed dwelling, would be visible from a number of glimpse views, from Farnah Green Road and the surrounding footpaths. No reference is made to the adjacent listed building, The Long House, in terms of its impact on its setting; indeed the proposed dwelling is only assessed briefly in terms of the modern dwelling to the north, the inappropriately named Orchard Lodge.

In principle, a dwelling of some description and scale could be introduced into this small settlement, in heritage terms. As a historic settlement within the relict rural landscape setting of the WHS, which retains its traditional character despite successive inappropriate modern intervention through the second-half of the 20th century, the proposed development would represent an inappropriate and incongruous intervention into its character, having a distinct lack of any reference to local context or distinctiveness. The design is incongruous and would impact on the setting of the adjacent listed row of former cottages, the Long House, which is an element of the attributes that contribute to the wider significance of the WHS

The harm to the significance of the WHS, through the preservation of its setting contribution, and the setting of the Long House, would be 'less than substantial' as defined in the current NPPF (February 2019), although the great weight afforded to designated heritage assets would need a development that included significant public benefits, were it to outweigh the harm to an asset of national and international heritage value.

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

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Adrian Farmer

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