

**CUMBERLAND COUNCIL
CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

Proposal: 4 no. detached town houses

Address: Hensingham House, Main Street, Hensingham

Reference: 4/23/2327/OF1

Date: 13/12/23

Description: The site is part of the garden of Hensingham House, and lies within Hensingham Conservation Area

Conclusion: Request further information and design adjustments

Preamble:

- Hensingham’s conservation area appraisal (2021) has the following to say about Hensingham House:

“Hensingham House, former seat of [influential local family] the Senhouses [is] one of the more interesting and unexpected gems of the conservation area. A late-18th century country house on a grand scale, facing away from public view with its frontage giving onto mature gardens and rolling open land, with views toward Whitehaven and the sea [...] The gardens and open ground in front of it contribute to its status – it is a frontage meant to be viewed in this context [...]”
- Indeed, the cover photo for the appraisal, selected because it shows off the one of the most attractive views within the conservation area, shows precisely this context.



Figure 1 View of the frontage of Hensingham House within its gardens

- I would expect the development of 4 no. detached town houses in the proposed location to harm the setting of Hensingham House by reducing the ability of its frontage to be appreciated within the setting of its garden.
- However, I would also give this harm limited weight as the building is not listed and the location within the conservation area is on private land and therefore not generally appreciate to the public. Once the proposal has been implemented (and there are additional proposals for the conversion of the main house to multiple flats and addition of further dwellings on the land to the west), more people will be able to access this area.
- Additionally, the distance between Hensingham House and the new houses is quite large, preserving the space between them but also making that space more likely to be characterised by parked cars.

Assessment:

- What impression of arrival is created by the south gable end of House 1? This will be the approach to the first development, and the view most residents and visitors will have of it. The south elevation of House 1 would appear to be rather nondescript, and certain a “side” rather than something that architecturally addresses the visitor.
- How does the orientation of the houses contribute to their ability to make use of PV generation, if desired. The roof pitches are orientated east and west. Would rotating these through 90° to provide a south-facing roof pitch be a good way of facilitating future PV capacity?
- The mid-19th century architectural style seems undermined by the lack of chimneys and the width of gaps between the houses, both of which are more late-20th century in character.
- Are the proportions and detailing of the proposed dwellings sufficiently refined? For example, the fascia detailing on the dormers looks clumsy and could benefit from further work. Should the quoins not also be present at the rear corners of the building?
- What is the reasoning behind one of the houses having a different facing material than the others?
- Examples of proposed materials should be supplied (These could be photos), such as the proposed roof slate, facing materials, surfacing materials etc.
- The site plan lacks enough detail on the context of the frontages, and the proposed front elevation drawings lack any context, meaning it is not possible to say what the overall effect will be from the front when built. For example, is the frontage surfaced with a continuous apron of setts for parking? What divides one house from another? Is it a fence, or a wall? Would hedges be a useful alternative, and if so, what sort?
- The heritage statement appears to be for a different project, and does not examine the contribution to the conservation area of setting of nearby heritage assets made by the current site, nor the likely impact caused by the development.
- Information should be provided on the trees to be removed, and account made for why the design is not responsive to existing site features. An as existing site plan would provide an opportunity to identify such features in red.
- Information should be provided on the proposed windows and doors. There is an expectation that these should be of timber construction in conservation areas.

Relevant Policies and Guidance:

Section 72 of the 1990 Act states that “special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of [a conservation] area.”

Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) asserts that “Development that is not well designed should be refused”.

NPPF para. 197 states that “In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation...”

NPPF para. 199 states, in the case of designated heritage assets, “great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation”, irrespective of whether potential harm is substantial, less-than-substantial, or total loss. Where harm to a designated heritage asset is less-than-substantial, it should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (para. 202).

Paragraph 203 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states the effect on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account when making decisions.

Opportunities should be sought for new development within conservation areas and the settings of heritage assets that enhances or better reveals their significance. (para. 206)

Referring to assets in a conservation area, NPPF para. 207 states that loss of an element that makes a positive contribution to a conservation area should be treated as either substantial (under para. 201) or less-than-substantial harm (under paragraph 202).

The former Copeland Borough Council’s Local Plan contains a number of relevant policies:

- Local Plan Policy ST1C(ii) highlights the importance of protecting, enhancing and restoring the Borough’s cultural and heritage features and their settings.
- ST1D emphasizes the council’s commitment to creating and retaining quality places.
- ENV4A stresses the importance of protecting listed buildings, conservation areas and other features considered to be of historic, archaeological or cultural value.
- ENV4B outlines support for heritage-led regeneration, ensuring assets are put to appropriate, viable and sustainable uses.
- ENV4C aims to strengthen the distinctive character of settlements through high quality urban design and architecture that respect character and setting.
- DM10 emphasizes the need for high quality design and quality places. Part B requires design to respond to local character at multiple scales, paying attention to plot size and arrangement, massing and scale, interstitial spaces, and materials. Part C requires the incorporation of existing features such as landscape and vernacular style.
- DM27A outlines support in principle for developments that “protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic, cultural and architectural character of the borough’s historic sites and their settings”.
- DM27C outlines the restriction in principle of development within conservation areas to that which preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area.

The Conservation Area Design Guide is a supplementary planning document adopted in 2017 that is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications within conservation areas in the legacy Copeland area. It is therefore applicable to this application.

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