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IHBC GUIDANCE NOTES

Alacrity and alternative proposals

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This is one of a series of occasional IHBC Guidance Notes published by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC). IHBC Guidance Notes offer advice on topics that we consider crucial to the promotion of good built and historic environment conservation policy and practice.

The IHBC welcomes feedback, comment and updates on our Guidance Notes to our consultant editor Bob Kindred, at research@ihbc.org.uk

Executive Summary

1. The two main issues explored in this brief Guidance Note are:

- 'Should heritage professionals test 'alacrity' in applicants'? and,
- 'What happens to development proposals in the absence of this desirable attribute?'

Lack of alacrity by applicants

2. An appeal was recently dismissed partly because the appellant had not demonstrated 'alacrity' and the Planning Inspector rejecting proposals for part of Rauceby Hospital, Quarrington, Lincolnshire in justifying the partial demolition of the remaining historic core. [\[1\]](#)

3. The generally accepted dictionary definition of alacrity is 'cheerful readiness, promptness, or willingness'. [\[2\]](#)

4. The redundant Edwardian building had originally opened as the Kesteven County Asylum on 1902 and had then been a specialist crash and burns unit for the Royal Air Force during the World War Two. The local planning authority had included it within a conservation area in 1992 but various permissions were granted subsequently resulting in the completion of over 700 homes and the demolition of around 70 per cent of the original outer buildings.

5. Further demolition of the six remaining ward blocks had been sought, along with the construction of over 100 further dwellings, commercial and retail units but this has been refused and a key issue for the Planning Inspector was an unwillingness by the appellant to exhaust an exploration of the alternative options to preserve the site including the possibility of mothballing, The Inspector and cited a recent appeal decision concerning the redundant Grade 2* Fulham Town Hall. [3]

Mothballing as development option

6. In the Fulham case, the building was not “at-risk” and not deteriorating rapidly but the Inspector had stated that “mothballing removes the urgency of accepting the first scheme to come along, which could cause significant harm”, in order to save a heritage asset from total loss. Mothballing could “throw the buildings a lifeline in the hope of an alternative solution” arriving.

7. While acknowledging that such a solution may never materialise, as “heritage assets are an irreplaceable part of the nation’s legacy” insufficient alacrity and flair” had been demonstrated in bringing forward proposals to avoid the proposed loss of the buildings.

8. With Fulham Town Hall the Inspector concluded that there was “no reason to accept the first scheme that comes along”, and alternative Optimum Viable Uses (OVUs) should be considered.

9. The appealed proposals were not the OVU but the other two possible alternatives considered at the inquiry were variously problematic as well, including viability, and lesser (but not insignificant) harm to the special architectural and historic interest. The Inspector concluded that even if the appeal proposal had been deemed the OVU for the building, the harm would be unacceptable, and that this must carry more weight than the potential public benefits of the scheme.

10. It may be concluded from this that local planning authorities should be confident in considering the bigger picture and not feel compelled to accept the only offer on the table at a particular time.

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Endnotes

1. Appeal Decision Ref: APP/R2520/W/16/3163460
2. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/alacrity>, accessed 21 November 2017
3. Appeal Decisions Ref: APP/H5390/W3140593 and APP/H5390/Y/15/3140594