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Council of the Isles of Scilly

Town Hall Our ref: P00514443

The Parade

St Mary's

Isles of Scilly

TR21 0LW

Dear Mr King

**Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications Direction 2015 &**

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015**

**TREGARTHEN'S HOTEL, GARRISON HILL, ST MARY'S , ISLES OF SCILLY**

**Application No P/16/055**

Thank you for your letter of 14 June 2016 notifying Historic England of the above application. I have assessed the proposals and discussed them with my colleagues.

**Summary**

These proposals envisage a significant remodelling of Tregarthen’s Hotel, a complex of building centred around a much-altered large Victorian Villa in Hugh Town, St Mary’s. Although two cottages which form part of the hotel site are Grade II listed buildings, the principal hotel building is unlisted but is within the conservation area. The site is adjacent to the Garrison Walls, a scheduled monument, and the gatehouse to the Garrison which is a Grade I listed building. Tregarthen’s Hotel also sits within the setting of the Grade I listed Star Castle.

There is much to admire in the proposed reworking of Tregarthen’s Hotel, with several detracting elements of the building rebuilt, removed, or redesigned, in a manner sympathetic to the domestic character of Hugh Town. However, we are disappointed that the applicant has chosen to add a pitched roof to the existing staff accommodation block. The pitched roof will further screen the Garrison wall behind, in key views from the breakwater and in longer views from the area around the lifeboat station.

This will cause harm to the setting of highly-graded heritage assets, and means that Historic England is unable to support the proposals.

**Historic England Advice**

*Significance*

My colleague Keith Miller provided a detailed analysis of the significance of the heritage assets potentially affected in his letter of 24 September 2015, which provided a commentary on the previous proposals for the site. If you no longer have this letter please let me know and I will forward you a copy, as it contains much useful background information.

In summary however, Keith Miller noted that the Garrison wall developed from a curtain wall constructed across the neck of land between the town and what is now called Garrison Hill in 1601 and was extended and strengthened in stages between the 16th and the 18th centuries, until the defensive circuit encircled the Garrison promontory.

The Garrison wall forms one of England’s most impressive post-medieval defensive works. The part of the wall behind Tregarthen’s Hotel is the oldest section, and is of great historic importance. It has the densest concentration of batteries and a strong visual relationship with other surviving defensive structures and the wider landscape. Its strategic position across the neck of land between Porthcressa and the Quay remains especially clear. Open views to and from the wall allow an understanding of its military function and the clear sightlines are an essential feature of its design.

*Impact*

The Isles of Scilly Conservation Area has two distinct zones of differing character around Tregarthen’s Hotel. The area outside the Garrison Walls has an urban, domestic, character through its tight-knit clusters of cottages, the majority of which are two storeys in height and of a traditional appearance. The area within the walls has a defensive and open character with numerous military structures, albeit eroded to a degree by unsympathetic post-war development of chalet-style homes in a limited number of conspicuous locations.

The proposed development responds well to the domestic character of Hugh Town. The new-build guest accommodation will be housed in low-rise buildings of a form and scale which references the architecture of surrounding buildings. The visual impact of the main hotel building, which has a stark appearance in views from the quay, will be softened by the construction of the new guest accommodation of a sympathetic design ahead of it. Views towards the harbour from Garrison Hill will be preserved and enhanced by the provision of a green roof to the existing flat-roofed hotel entrance structure. The restoration of the garden area and removal of two small garage buildings built up against the garrison wall will provide an effective transitionary ‘buffer zone’ between the urban character of Hugh Town and the more open character of the Garrison.

The proposals also envisage the conversion of an existing flat-roofed staff accommodation block into guest accommodation, with staff facilities reprovided in a new building tucked behind. It is disappointing that the applicants have chosen to provide a pitched roof to the existing building, which will increase its height and partially screen views of the Garrison wall behind. As noted earlier, open views to and from the wall are an essential feature of its design and thus significance.

We do not see why the proposed addition of a pitched roof to the existing staff accommodation building is necessary. The existing building is of no particular architectural or historic merit, but could easily be improved with alterations to fenestration or cladding without the need for a new pitched roof.

*Policy*

There are a number of benefits associated with this proposal, and the harm caused by the addition of the pitched roof to the existing staff accommodation block would be less than substantial. NPPF 134 advises that the harm should therefore be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

However, we do not believe that this proposal should come down to a simple exercise of weighing benefits versus harm. Paragraph 132 of the NPPF advises that when considering the impact of a proposal on a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation, which the NPPF glossary defines as the process of managing change in a way that preserves and where appropriate enhance its significance.

Para 132 goes on to state that the more important the asset, the greater the weight that should be given to its conservation, and that significance can be harmed by development in its setting. In this context, the Garrison Walls are *heritage assets of the highest significance*, being Grade I listed and scheduled.

Paragraph 132 goes on to state that any harm or loss requires clear and convincing justification, and it is here that there appears to be a direct conflict between national policy and the proposed addition of a pitched roof to the existing staff accommodation building. There is no reason all the wider public benefits offered by this scheme could not be delivered without harming the setting of the Garrison wall.

**Recommendation**

I regret that Historic England is obliged to object to these proposals, on the grounds that they will harm the setting, and thus significance, of the Grade I listed and scheduled Garrison Walls.

We urge your authority to negotiate an amendment with the applicant, omitting the proposed pitched roof to the existing staff accommodation block. Should this amendment be forthcoming, we would be in a position to withdraw our objection and support the proposals.

We would welcome the opportunity of advising further. Please consult us again if any additional information or amendments are submitted. If, notwithstanding our advice, you propose to approve the scheme in its present form, please advise us of the date of the committee and send us a copy of your report at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely



**Simon Hickman**

Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

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