

CUMBERLAND COUNCIL
CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Proposal: Demolition of dilapidated former mill buildings and construction of new warehouse unit with ancillary offices

Address: Former Cleator Mills Site, Cleator

Reference: 4/22/2364/0F1

Date: 06/07/23

Description: Site formerly occupied by buildings of the partially cleared Cleator Mills complex

Conclusion: Request design revision

Previous Assessment:

- My previous consultation response highlighted a number of irregularities and missing elements of the application, and also identified that the proposed building could not be considered well designed, and therefore could not be considered sustainable development in accordance with national planning policy. Despite the omissions and lack of clarity in the supporting documentation, I therefore felt I had enough information to recommend refusal of the application.

Heritage impact

- Since revisions, some of the harm to the setting of the remaining mill building and chimney could be seen as less bad.
- I would not view this design, or its relationship to the remaining heritage assets as exemplary (see design section below) and it is unlikely to read as a coherent complex overall, but instead as what it is: a historic building left after clearance, surrounded by more recent buildings and clutter that, while superficially adopting some elements familiar to the heritage asset, are not complementary elements in a larger composition.
- I would view this is a small level of harm to the setting of the mill and chimney non-designated heritage assets, worthy of taking into consideration during the decision-making process.

Design quality

- The rewording of para. 134 of the NPPF 2021 revision was specifically intended by Government to close the door not only on poor development but on mediocre/middling development as well.
- The relevant question here, therefore, is whether the proposal can be seen as good, mediocre, or poor design.
- Previously, I came to the conclusion its design was poor and recommended refusal of the application.

- Fundamentally, the revised scheme is the same building, now with the addition of some red sandstone cladding.
- My concerns about the appearance of the building, its relationship to the mill building, and the security fencing remain.

Summary:

- The red sandstone cladding and addition of some planted elements have brought this proposal from a poor standard to a poor/mediocre one. However, there doesn't appear to be much scope remaining for improvement without substantive changes. Without substantive change, the proposal is unlikely to be supportable on design grounds.
 - I would recommend going back to the drawing board and developing a more bespoke and architectural solution that will build upon the value already present at the site while bringing new life to West Cumbrian industrial heritage – both new and old.
 - I note that the entire site is within the blue line, and therefore suggest making the existing mill building the starting point the starting point of this new development. Securing it should be both a priority in and of itself, which could be achieved through new development, and a way of strengthening the offer of the new development.
 - This could be done by treating the new building as effectively a wing of the existing mill building, creating a single new structure that works harmoniously. This could achieve considerable architectural effect, and remove the need for the security fencing to the frontage.
 - Currently, the new and existing buildings amount to less than the sum of their parts – a dilapidated heritage asset with a new metal shed next door surrounded by palisade fencing is not in the best interests of the site as a whole.
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Relevant Policies and Guidance (Existing local plan):

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...”

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)

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 emphasises 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 Copeland's settlements through high quality urban design and architecture that respect character and setting.
- DM10 emphasises 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".

Relevant Policies and Guidance (Emerging local plan):

Sammy Woodford

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