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THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

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Your reference: 23/01070/CCD
Our reference: 186226

31st July 2023

Dear Sir/ Madam

RE: Demolition of the former Bedlington Station Building (South) to accommodate works to construct the new railway station approved under 21/01106/CCD

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society about this application. We **strongly object** to the proposed demolition of the south building of the former Bedlington station.

Firstly, we want to emphasize our support for restoring this historic transport link and reconnecting former industrial communities along its route. However, it is crucial to ensure there isn't unnecessary destruction of a non-designated heritage asset.

Significance and Harm

The significance of Bedlington Station lies in its architectural and historical interest as a rare survivor of the Blythe and Tyne Railway, representing the growth of industry and infrastructure in the local area during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Out of the original 19 stations on the Blythe and Tyne Railway, only four survive: Bedlington, Hartley, Hepscott, and Morpeth stations.

Bedlington was subjected to less change than these other former stations, resulting in a greater level of preservation of both external features and internal spaces. The former station comprises two buildings: the north and south building, with the latter being the focus of this application. The north building, built in 1850, is a single-storey red brick building with a porch designed with a typically Victorian nod to classicism, featuring a blind gable roundel window, stone lintels, and cornice.

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The south building, built between c1895-1905, is also a single-storey red brick building in a restrained style similar to the north building. Originally connected to the north building via a now demolished glass canopy, it once housed the booking hall and waiting room, of which the two ticket windows, fireplace, roof lantern, and historic flooring survive.

Setting of the North Building:

The application states: "The intrinsic significance of the northern building as the original station building with historic and architectural interest as part of the original 19th-century railway development will not be affected." We strongly disagree with this statement. The southern building itself significantly contributes to the significance of the station by allowing an appreciation of its historic interest in the development of the railway in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The design of the building clearly takes reference from the 1850 north station building, providing both with group value and architectural interest. The north and south station buildings have formed a pair for over 120 years, with each contributing positively to the setting and significance of the other.

Underpinning:

The application goes on to speculate about the potential costs of the collapse of the south building from underpinning. Still, it does not speculate on the potential and unexpected cost associated with demolition. The building is in a poor but not ruinous state, and a good engineer should be able to carry out any underpinning works effectively. Clarity on the costs and impacts of underpinning should be sought in advance of approval for demolition.

Plaza and Accessibility:

The application further justifies the demolition of the south building is required to "shorten the distance passengers have to travel... to access the platform itself." The public benefit would amount to a negligible amount of time (20 seconds at most for an able-bodied person and slightly more for a less able-bodied person) saved for passengers approaching the station from a very specific angle and would, therefore, not negatively impact accessibility to the station.

Furthermore, it is claimed that the creation of an open plaza would reduce the 'potential for overcrowding' at the station entrance. This could be achieved by removing the fenced-off areas at platform level, instead of demolishing the south building. Moreover, the creation of a plaza in this location could result in a windswept and uncomfortable environment for waiting passengers perhaps even ultimately reducing the number of people potentially using the station.

Economic Viability:

The application claims that the "use of the building... (would not) ... be commercially viable given the existing alternative vacant premises near to the station." The reopening of the station will undoubtedly increase footfall in this area and, therefore, be attractive to businesses seeking to benefit from passing trade. The south building

would greatly benefit from this location at the entrance of the new station, making demolition a shortsighted economic choice.

Policy

Paragraph NPPF 203 states “The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.”

The application fails to preserve or enhance this non-designated heritage asset, provide substantial public benefits, or offer a convincing or adequate justification for the scheme and the resulting destruction of the non-designated heritage asset.

Emphasis needs to be put on the importance of reusing and recycling buildings such as this, following Historic England guidance (<https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/recycle-buildings-tackleclimate-change/>). The demolition of the former booking hall would be wasteful and generate significantly more carbon emissions.

Being a rare survivor as part of the Blythe and Tyne Railway, this building positively contributes to the local area, in addition to the support of over 1000 names signed in a petition against the demolition. We urge the council to reject this scheme.

I would be grateful if you could inform the Victorian Society of your decision in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Newton

Conservation Adviser