

Bexhill Heritage

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Caring for Bexhill's past,
present and future.

25 March 2019

Dear Dr. Leonard; Cllr. Maynard; Cllr. Kenward; Ben Hook; Diane Russell,

Re: Destination Leisure – Drill Hall Retention:

Following our meeting on the 11th March 2019 we said we would write to give you our best estimate for the cost of moving the culvert to free up more developable land and as one solution to retaining the front section of the Drill Hall.

You will have received our letter of the 20th March with that cost estimate and also our request that the planning application be amended so as to enable the retention of the front section of the Hall, a request we repeat today.

At that meeting we also undertook to look for examples of drill halls or parts thereof retained adjacent to new build hotels, and to let you know of them. This has proved perhaps unsurprisingly, a more difficult task given the significant loss of drill halls in recent years such as the one adjacent which was demolished in 2006. Indeed, we have not found a parallel case.

However, our efforts have been extremely useful as we are now able to assert with even more confidence that all chain operators are capable of embracing minor challenges such as the Drill Hall and seemingly taking them on board as an opportunity rather than seeing them as an obstacle.

There are of course numerous examples of complete heritage buildings being converted into hotels with some operators notably Wetherspoons searching them out for conversion and upgrading. There are also plenty of other examples of heritage buildings being retained and extended or linked with a hotel - here are a few:

- Liverpool – Dale Street, heritage building retained as part of an Ibis hotel and major retail scheme.
- Scarborough – former Conservative Club becomes an extension to the Premier Inn.
- Eastbourne – Trinity Trees, a refurbished and externally clad building forms part of a Travel Lodge in a heritage building.
- Hastings – The Ridge, health and spa building/Bannantynes hotel blending heritage with new facilities.
- Finally an example of how a chain operator will take on a serious challenge – Premier Inn Bude, major demolition, need to blend in with heritage buildings, no car parking and risk of flooding.

Then, locally non hotel related drill halls reused:

- Horsham – built in 1927 for the Royal Sussex Regiment, a fine looking building of good proportions well regarded as part of the local scene.
- Seaford – prominent and well regarded, last used by Sussex ACF.
- Pevensey – used now by small businesses – a poor example architecturally compared to Bexhill.
- Hastings – Tower Road West, much of it in use by local builder hall itself separated by the good quality frontage by change in levels.

Finally, it is worth mentioning as an aside there is a charming house at the junction of Down Road and St. Frances Close with crenellations echoing those on the Drill Hall!

As we have previously said, we believe the Drill Hall front portion retained could be an asset to the site commercially even if only as a feature of interest, whether related to the hotel or not. We will not at this stage repeat what has been said about its substantial architectural merit, its place in the social and military history of the town, its rarity, or the regard in which it is held other than the demerit of the larger part diminishes the merit of the front part.

We hope this gives you the confidence to embrace it as part of the overall master plan.

Yours sincerely,



Raymond Konyn (Chairman)