

BELSAY AWAKES

HERITAGE, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

IN SUPPORT OF EXTERNAL LIGHTING AT THE COACH HOUSE AND ALTERATIONS TO THE PLAY AREAS AFTER FURTHER CONSULTATIONS



Conservation and conversion of the Coach House to form a new café with ancillary accommodation and associated drainage and services. Formation of a new play area with outdoor seating adjacent to the café.

Supplementary document for external lighting for safe access and egress and alterations to the play area.

Belsay Awakes – inclusion of External Lighting at the Coach House

Note that this document is to be read in association with specialist consultant Hoare Lea's MEP Planning Statement for External Lighting at the Coach House, and their detailed drawings.

Background and overview to the Project

Belsay Awakes has been awarded NHLF funding for works in a number of locations throughout the site. The aim is to enhance the overall visitor experience and includes works to revitalise the Castle area, improve access for all through the gardens and carry out much needed conservation works to the Hall and North wing. Works to refurbish the existing WC block near the main Hall and provide a Changing Spaces WC's have already been carried out. These works were granted Planning and Listed Building consent in 2019, references 19/00662/FUL (granted September 2019) and 19/00663/LBC (granted August 2019)

The general visitor offer at the Castle end of the site is currently limited, with only a few areas being open to the public and no permanent facilities for the public's use at the end of a reasonably long walk through the quarry gardens. As part of the works consented in the original application the Coach House is to be converted into a café with W.C's and staff facilities..

In the wooded area to the West (rear) of the building, selective clearance of trees will allow a new external seating area to be formed adjacent to an exciting new children's play area. This is screened from the main Castle complex by the existing planting, but will provide an alternative focus to this part of the site encouraging visitors to linger and enjoy all that this area has to offer.

Statutory Listing of the Coach House is Grade 2

A brief history of the Coach House

The Gazetteer which forms part of the 2017 Conservation Maintenance Plan includes the following information on the Coach House:

Summary history

The history of the Coach House is obscure. In its present form it is probably largely of mid-18th century date, but it clearly incorporates much earlier stonework and brickwork, which seem to represent several different phases of construction. It may have originated as a northwards extension of the Old West Range (104), which was putatively a service range forming the western side of a quadrangle. Equally the older sections of wall may once have formed part of a defensible enclosure. A reference to the 'hunters' stable' being slated in 1769 (Hewlings & Anderton 1994, 47) may point to a major reconstruction of an existing structure at this date. Presumably it was superseded when the new stables (203) went up near the Hall. Latterly the building seems to have been used at least partly as residential

accommodation but by the time of the guardianship was very badly decayed and all the floors, internal partition walls and roof were dismantled, leaving only the masonry walls. The chimney stacks were cut down and the flues blocked. The existing roof has lightly-built trusses assembled from modern, machine-cut timber and covered externally in corrugated asbestos. The windows are all blocked and only fragments of historic interiors survive within. The building is semi-derelict and used only for storage. Public access is permitted only to the Coach House at the north end where portable toilets have been set up.

Brief description

The Coach House is a ten bay-long, narrow, two-storey structure with a continuous double-pitched roof, with a principal axis running north-south. Examined starting from the south end (and numbering the bays from here) there are several four cross walls: the first divides off bays 1 and 2 – the southern section. The second, which incorporates a chimney and has a ridge stack rising from it, divides off bay 3 and a third, which is slightly kinked and does not rise the full height of the building, divides off bay 4. Bays 3 and 4 form the middle section. Beyond is the four bay-long northern section. The three northernmost bays are separated off from the rest of the building by a fourth cross wall. The open arches suggest that this was formerly a Coach House and it will be referred to thus.

Significance

Moderate

EXTERNAL LIGHTING PROPOSALS

Proposed Works to the Coach House – already with planning consent

The proposed conversion of the Coach House to the north east of the Castle, will bring the building, which has been used for storage purposes for several years, back into use and accessible to visitors. This is a viable new use for this large building, one of several at this end of the site. It will ensure its long-term future. This conversion is a fundamental part of the wider Belsay Awakes Project, and will provide new café facilities and visitor toilet area associated with new external play area in a part of Belsay Gardens remote from Belsay Hall. Works in the 1980's included forming a modern, asbestos based roof following the collapse of the original roof. This, alongside blocking up windows have safeguarded the external fabric from further rapid decay, but have done little to enhance this important part of the site, and in the current form significantly limits the use of this building.

The existing external appearance of the building and proposed alterations

The South wall and North wall are not affected by the new lighting proposals

East elevation – minimal external lighting required for safety

The east elevation is a stark contrast to the west elevation. Whilst there is much evidence of earlier fabric in the other elevations, some possibly dating from the mediaeval period, an entirely new east elevation, facing the courtyard, appears to have been built in the mid-to-late 18th century. This is a result of re-fronting and possible re-purposing at that time. The ground floor windows at the southern end will remain blocked but others will be unblocked to allow six over six sliding sash windows to be reinstated at both ground and first floor level to serve the café area and

staffroom. All openings have ashlar surrounds and projecting keystones which will be retained and repaired as necessary. The masonry will be consolidated as part of the project.

West elevation – minimal external lighting required for safety

The west external wall is the result of what appears to be three separate building alteration phases of construction.

- First phase:
There are lower courses of irregular stonework. The ground level externally has become higher than the internal level. It is proposed that much of this overburden of soil against the wall will be removed and in the process of this work ground investigations will need to take place to ascertain the founding levels. This may help establish if the whole length of wall was founded at the same time whilst ascertaining if any further works need to be undertaken to stabilise what has already been in the past a partly unstable wall.
- Second phase:
The stone rubble wall appears to have been consolidated and heightened on its outer face with narrow red bricks of possible late 17th century, a material unusual in the context of the Castle complex. (The internal walls are stonework).
- Third phase:
The wall was further altered in the 18th century as part of the reuse of the north, west and south walls.

There are few window openings on this elevation and all have been blocked up. The first-floor windows at the northern end will be unblocked to bring a small amount of additional top light to the north west corner of the proposed café space below which would otherwise be very dark. Additionally, three smaller first floor windows at the south end of this elevation will be unblocked to provide light to a new first floor staffroom. One ground floor window will be unblocked to provide daylight to and views out from the servery. A large glazed opening will be formed in the area where the masonry is bowed and sagging providing a strong link between the internal area with the new external seating and play areas and allowing much natural light to flood into the café.

Proposed external lighting to the East and West elevations.

Illumination is required for people's safety in accessing and egressing the building on these two elevations as a result of power failure, when the building is used in the hours of darkness (mainly during the winter months) and for fire escape purposes.

Standards must be in compliance with BS5266 but lighting has otherwise been kept to a minimum in order to have least impact on wildlife and to retain the overall historical context of the Coach House itself, the Scheduled Castle alongside and the immediate environs of both. The external lighting will not be 'feature' lighting. It will only operate intermittently to allow the building to safely function or in the event of a power failure to ensure safe egress to occupants.

There are different lighting solutions for each of the two elevations:

- East elevation: Lighting is to illuminate only the three entrances into the building on this side. It will be recessed into the ground within existing stone

landscaped areas next to the building. This will limit intrusion on both the façade of the coach House itself and on the historic setting of the Castle.

- West elevation: There will be three types of lighting here. Two types will give safe access to and from the upper floor consisting of staff and service areas to which the public will not have access. This access is via an external staircase, in the handrail of which it is proposed to have an integral very discreet lighting strip directing light downwards. There will also be a simple wall mounted light adjacent the upper floor access door.
- The third type of lighting will be set away from the building within the new Caste Wood area landscaping. This will be in the form of two lighting bollards. The purpose is to provide safety lighting towards the area of the new very large glazed screen which has integral doorway access to and from the café.

All proposed fittings are modern low-key simple functional lights suitable for a historic context. They are illustrated within Hoare Lea's proposals.

Although some change is inevitable to allow a building to be converted successfully to a new use, we have tried to minimise the impact of the external lighting on the building and its significance and feel that the proposals conserve and enhance the main features of the building, whilst making these additional appropriate modifications that will allow the building to successfully enter its next phase of development. The options have been carefully considered by the M & E Consultant, the Conservation Architect and client, with advice from the ecologist, to ensure that a solution is functional, appropriate to the setting and creates as little intrusion as possible on fabric and wildlife. The project ecologist is aware of the lighting designs and has raised no objection to the proposals.

Taken as a whole the impact on significance is minimal, with a number of the changes fully reversible, but the proposals are essential for the safe running of the café and the benefits to the Castle part of the site in terms of aesthetic improvements and rejuvenation are significant. There will be no impact on the Castle itself due to retention of existing screening.

PLAY AREA

Background to the original Planning Approvals

It was decided that the Castle Woodland offered the most appropriate site for a new play area, discrete from the most sensitive parts of the historic landscape and with limited visibility in and out of the area due to the dense tree and shrub cover and the walls of the Coach House. Extensive visual images were produced for the original application to demonstrate the lack of impact of the proposals on the surrounding environment.

The play area is targeted at children ages 0 – 12, and the play proposals draw on the Interpretation of the wild man as the emblem of the Middleton family, which represents that family and its long history of association with Belsay and is used as a metaphor for the play area, embodying the other themes and narratives:

- The idea of the picturesque
- The history of the Middleton family
- Plant collecting from around the world

In order to support the diverse learning and play styles within the target age group, resources have been themed to support the following group breakdown, Under 2, 3-5 years, 6-8 years, 9-12 years. The project will celebrate and support the differences within each age group, allowing progression from resource to resource during repeat visits over a prolonged period of time. This breakdown will support the variety of needs, interests and comprehension levels in each age group

Context to Proposed Design Revisions

The proposed revisions will not undermine the basic approach that has been taken throughout the planned development, as set out above.

However, since obtaining approval for play area designs to planning in 2019, English Heritage have undertaken consultation on the proposed play area design including with children of the relevant ages. The recommendations from the consultation were that the scheme could be improved to provide increased value for children using the facility.

Belsay Hall is a nationally important garden and one of English Heritage's main visitor attractions. New play facilities are an essential initiative of 'Belsay Awakes', providing better facilities for the visiting public of all ages and encouraging repeat visits, ensuring funding for the upkeep of the site in the future. Therefore, it was essential that the results of the consultation were considered and changes made to the proposals to ensure the play area would be well used, and a popular new facility that held children's interest.

The opportunities to play and learn will spill out of the castle into the surrounding landscape. Inside and out, intergenerational play will be encouraged and facilitated both by the static, fixed equipment and displays, and a cadre of 'play rangers'.

Supporting Documents

1. Tame to Wild Layout.original layout
2. Tame to Wild - Wildmans lookout.originalapproved
3. Tame to Wild - Middletons Plant Collection.originalapproved
4. BA-WL_2 Wildman and wildwoman lookout.proposed
5. BA-MPC_2 - Middleton's plant collection play area.proposed
6. BA-PL_1.1 Belsay awakes play layout.original approved
7. BA-PL_6.2.proposed plan showing changes

Design Revision in Area: Tame to Wild – Wildman’s Lookout

The consultation identified that as this area is considered one of the main play features within the play area, it is likely to attract a greater number of children. Provision of additional climbing options below the existing which extend to the upper pod will improve the interest and value for children, whilst also providing lower climbing options which will appeal to younger children who are not ready to climb the higher areas. These changes have been incorporated within the confines of the original proposed structure, so there are no changes to the overall scale of the approved proposals in terms of height or changes to the overall plan.

The additional roped areas will be formed using the same design, materials and colours as proposed for the existing scheme, which have already obtained approval.

Design Revision in Area: Middleton’s Plant Collection

The review identified that almost all of the existing play features involve an element of climbing. It was found that whilst children enjoy climbing features, they also get a lot of value from moving elements such as swings, and that a combination of these features is preferred. It is proposed to omit two climbing features from the scheme in the Middleton’s Plant Collection area (the ‘gunnera rope structure’ and the ‘rope flower bud structure’) and replace these with two different swings, a senior flat swing, and a basket swing. The basket swing option also adds an accessible feature to this area of the play scheme, as the basket swing can be used by children who use wheelchairs.

It is proposed that the frames of the swings will be constructed from timber, and aim to resemble organic features and blend within the surrounding woodland landscape. In order to continue the links with the interpretation element of the play area (which are part of English Heritage’s obligations to the National Lottery Heritage Fund), it is proposed that the basket swing will be designed to resemble a gunnera, in keeping with the original climbing feature previously approved.

Summary - Play area

The proposed alterations to the approved play area are intended to improve the value and accessibility of the play scheme for the children who will be using it. The proposals reflect the same design ethos as the original scheme, including links to the historic stories of Belsay, materials and scale. It is felt that the alterations proposed will result in an improvement of the overall scheme and are fairly minimal in nature.

They will have no effect on the key design objectives which already have planning approvals. These are:

Screening; Views from the play area; Retention of woodland character and tree works; Accessibility; and Play Zoning.

Photographs



General View of the Coach House from the South East



Southern end of the East Elevation



Central Section



Southern end of the East Elevation



Rear of the Coach House