

From: Thomas Whitfield
Sent: 29 June 2022 13:46
To: Emma Woodland
Subject: Case 22/00543/LBC - Cabinet Room, Castle Howard

Dear Ms. Woodland,

Thank you for notifying The Georgian Group of proposal 22/00543/LBC to undertake a scheme of works 'remaking' The Cabinet Room at Grade I Listed Castle Howard. The Group would like to register the following objections to the scheme.

Castle Howard is an exceedingly fine house of exceptional historic and architectural significance, as exemplified in its Grade I listed status. 'The Cabinet Room', is situated on the south side of the central block to the immediate west of the Garden Hall. It was gutted by fire in 1940 and exists today as a shell with floorboards (salvaged from Lowther Castle) inserted in 1988.

The Proposed scheme of works aims to return The Cabinet Room to an early/mid eighteenth-century appearance with a comprehensive scheme of renovation and restoration. This will involve the installation of new floorboards, wall panelling, dado rails, cornicing, and the insertion of a new fireplace. The decorative scheme of the room will also be remade based on historic photographs.

The Group takes this opportunity to echo and emphasise the comments offered by The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB).

Justification

The Group raises significant concerns that the justification and reasoning offered behind the proposed scheme of works is poor. Whilst we understand that the scheme is intended to allow the rehoming and display of the Four Seasons Tapestries, we advise that we do not find that this alone is a clear and convincing justification for the proposed scheme.

The Group recommends that the applicant must demonstrate that they have considered alternative and less intensive schemes of works which would facilitate the reinstatement and display of the tapestries within the room.

We furthermore echo SPAB's comment that the justification of reinstating the tapestries must be supported by an appropriate assessment of the condition and conservation needs of the tapestries (by a suitably qualified and experienced conservator).

We are likewise concerned that the applicant emphasises that the proposed scheme of works is justified by the precedent of other rooms (particularly the Canaletto Room) having already been remade. We must advise that The Group does not find that past works constitute an appropriate or convincing justification, and we must emphasise that any proposed works to the Cabinet Room must be individually justified as appropriate to the Cabinet Room.

We must therefore advise that the justifications offered fail to meet the requirements of NPPF (2021) paragraph 200, viz. 'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification'

Evidence Base

The Group commends the applicant for offering a detailed and informative Heritage Statement, however we retain significant concerns about the reliability of the evidence cited informing the

proposed early-eighteenth-century decorative scheme. The main sources of evidence offered are 2no. historic photographs dating from the early twentieth century, and a sketch drawing by Hawksmoor from 1706 showing the south-east corner of the room.

The Group registers concerns that the photographs only show the room's appearance as it was in the early twentieth century which does not necessarily relate to the appearance of the room in the early/mid eighteenth century. Whilst we acknowledge that some of the decorative fixtures and fittings shown i.e., cornicing and mouldings are likely unchanged from the original scheme, The Group is concerned that there is likely to have been at least one (and possibly more) phase of alterations/modifications around the time that the original fireplace was replaced in the later-eighteenth century.

It is further notable that the wall coverings and door-case shown in the photographs and the Hawksmoor sketch are different, and it is not conclusively apparent which was present in the early-eighteenth-century scheme of the room.

The Group advises therefore that we find the proposal fails to justify the proposed scheme of works as a *remaking* of a room for which there is scant evidence of its original appearance. We advise that we find that the proposed scheme is more an interpretation of the room as it *may* have been, but we believe that this is poorly articulated. The Group therefore recommends that any scheme attempting to create an interpretation of the room's past decorative scheme, must clearly read as such and should not masquerade as the original scheme.

Legibility of The Cabinet Room's and Castle Howard's History

The 1940 fire is a significant episode in the history of Castle Howard and must be understood and The Georgian Group is greatly concerned that by remaking the room, the proposed scheme of works would obscure the story of the fire and cause significant harm to the legibility of the history of the room and house.

We particularly advise that the proposed removal and replacement of the existing floorboards (as inserted in 1988) would harm the legibility of the history of the room. The Group recommends that the present floorboards are retained in situ. Their difference with the original wider floorboards elsewhere in the house provides a subtle distinction between original and restored elements of the building.

The Group recommends that the shell-like state of the room as is, offers excellent opportunities for interpreting and exploring the history and construction of Castle Howard as a great house and we are concerned that this scope of opportunity would be lost under the present scheme.

The Group here takes opportunity to emphasise SPAB's comment that *'The possibility of leaving the room in its current condition should form one of the options (i.e. with the shell of the room left exposed as existing and without any details such as panelling, cornicing etc re-introduced). Consideration might also be given to an option of leaving the room largely as existing and introducing an area of finishes (i.e. panelling, cornicing, dado, skirting etc) to illustrate how the room looked pre-fire and how the interiors of such rooms were constructed.'*

The Group believes that the room as it presently exists as a shell, relict testament to the 1940 fire, has significance to the special architectural interest of Castle Howard and we therefore advise that remaking the room as early-eighteenth century would harm this significance. The Group must advise therefore that we do not find that the proposed scheme of works pays sufficient regard to the conservation of the room as a relic of the 1940 fire and is thus contrary to NPPF paragraph 199 *'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated*

heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.'

Proposed Fireplaces

The Group advises that we do not find the proposed Vanbrugh style fireplaces to be appropriate to the room and are of the opinion that they are poor pastiche. Whilst we recognise that a similar 'Vanbrugh style' fireplace was installed in the remaking of the Canaletto Room we (as above) do not believe that previous works constitute convincing justification.

We advise that if a proposed fireplace is to be reinstated, that it should be a replica of the later-eighteenth-century example shown in historic photographs.

Conclusion

When making a decision on all listed building consent applications or any decision on a planning application for development that affects a listed building or its setting, a local planning authority must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Preservation in this context means not harming the special interest of the building, as opposed to keeping it utterly unchanged. This obligation, found in sections 16(2) and 66(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (1), applies to all decisions concerning listed buildings.

The Georgian Group advises that the proposed scheme of works has the potential to cause considerable harm to the special architectural and historic significance of Castle Howard as a Grade I listed heritage asset, and we are particularly concerned that the supporting documentation provided presently fails to convincingly explain or justify this harm. We therefore recommend that the application be **withdrawn** until such time as appropriate supporting documentation can be provided and the design amended. The Group would be pleased to attend a site visit and/or meeting to discuss the proposed scheme if the applicant or LPA would find it helpful. If the applicant is unwilling to address the issues raised in this letter of objection listed building consent should be **refused**.

Yours Sincerely,

Thomas Whitfield, PhD, MLitt, BA (hons)
(Conservation Adviser, Northern England)

