

Pls see response below and scan/lodge response to the file

From: Joanne Needham

Sent: 28 June 2022 23:01

To: Emma Woodland

Subject: Re: 22/00543/LBC - Castle Howard, York - SPAB Response

Dear Emma,

Application ref: 22/00543/LBC

Address: Castle Howard, York, YO60 7DA

Proposal: Restore the Cabinet Room to include the reinstatement of the panelling, cornices, skirtings, dado rails and chimneypiece.

Our ref: SPAB/JN/176513/22

Further to our recent email exchange I can advise that the SPAB's Casework Committee considered the above application at its meeting today and I now write with the Society's comments and advice.

SPAB Advice

The Society registers its **objection** to the current application. We set out the reasons for our position below.

The Society understands that the Cabinet Room has remained a brick shell since the devastating fire in 1940. The room, which is situated between the Garden Hall and the suite of south front state rooms which extend West to the Long Gallery, also forms part of the public route through the house.

From the information provided, we understand that the principal reasons for the proposals are as follows:

-to improve the state and appearance of the room which is seen by the applicants and their advisors as 'interrupting the sequence and flow through the building'

and

-to enable the Four Seasons tapestries to be reinstated into the room for which they were originally intended by Vanbrugh.

The proposed works are listed as including the reinstatement of panelling, cornices, skirtings, dado rails and chimneypiece. It is our understanding that the works would also include the removal of the

Cabinet Room's existing floorboards (salvaged from Lowther Castle in the C20th) and replacement with new wider boards to match those in neighbouring rooms. Drawings, photographs, and a Design, Access & Heritage(D,A&H) Statement have been provided. This suite of information sets out many helpful details, but it does not provide the necessary clear and convincing justification for the proposals. Indeed, the Society finds the case put forward for the proposals to be very weak. The chief ingredients missing from the application are:

-a careful review of the philosophical conservation considerations and possible treatment options for the room (incl. an Options Appraisal)

and

-an assessment of the condition and conservation needs of the tapestries (by a suitably qualified and experienced conservator).

While we recognise that some of the rooms/interiors (which were damaged/lost during the 1940 fire) have now had interiors reinstated, we do not believe that this should dictate what happens to the Cabinet Room and any other spaces that have not yet been restored/reinstated, and that the approach to such circumstances should be one that is regularly reviewed. In the case of the current application, we strongly advise that the philosophical arguments and possible room treatment options should be fully explored and appraised and form part of the justification. Unfortunately, the present application does not do this, the D,A&H Statement only discusses reinstating/remaking the interior of the Cabinet Room as has been done in other neighbouring rooms in recent times.

The Society does not believe that the proposals are a befitting and honest response. The scheme (if installed) would give the impression of a complete early eighteenth-century interior, something which it clearly is not, and that the proposals would result in harm as a result. The fire was a devastating event, but it cannot be erased from history, and it is now an important part of the building's narrative. The proposals would mean that the remaining evidence of the fire (in the Cabinet Room) would be lost. The SPAB's Casework Committee also noted that while the current condition of the room may present a displeasing aesthetic to some, the ability to see the bare interior (i.e. the construction and materials behind finishes, the original plan/design, and later alterations) is immensely interesting and a rare opportunity.

The D,A&H Statement provides some interesting and helpful information about the history of the tapestries including details of other locations in the house where they were hung, and the alterations undertaken to them. What is not provided however is a conservation assessment of the tapestries which considers their condition and future needs (in terms of conservation works, display conditions/requirements etc). For example, is the Cabinet Room (under the proposed scheme) the most suitable place for conserving the tapestries/is it capable of providing the necessary conditions? Additionally, do the tapestries have an interest in terms of their construction and details? And if so, does hanging them in a traditional manner (against the wall panelling - as proposed) display them in the best means possible?

The Society advises that alternative options (and the philosophical arguments) for the treatment of the Cabinet Room and the re-hanging of the tapestries should be explored. 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.

With regard to the floor of the Cabinet Room - the Society advises that the existing floorboards (salvaged from Lowther Castle in the C20th) should be retained in situ. While the Society does not generally support the use of salvaged materials, we believe that those in the Cabinet Room have now been laid for some time and the contrast between the narrow width of the existing floorboards in this room and those of a wider width in the neighbouring rooms, again speak of the building's recent history, the fire, and the recovery.

We recognise the importance of the enfilade and are sympathetic to the efforts to ensure it is maintained. However, we do not believe that it is necessary to restore the interior of the Cabinet Room (including the replacement of the floorboards) to achieve this. The strong physical and visual connection of the enfilade still exists and can be clearly 'read' and understood in the current arrangement and condition of the Cabinet Room.

Lastly, we suggest that the proposed restoration/remaking of the Cabinet Room represents a missed opportunity. In our view, the unfortunate events of the past now provide the house with numerous opportunities, including:

- telling another part of the building's history and story - the fire, the loss, and the recovery
- furthering knowledge, understanding, and interest, of the architecture of country houses (with access to areas/fabric not normally seen)
- adding a new meaningful layer to the building's narrative, perhaps creating a contemporary space or contemporary treatments/interventions. This may also provide further opportunities for exhibitions/displaying items/collections which may not 'fit' into other existing rooms/spaces in the house.
- provide a new way of displaying the tapestries (perhaps, if appropriate and of interest - enabling access/viewing of the rear of them), and (if needed) the right conservation conditions.
- engaging new visitors/audiences.

In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works Section 16 of the Planning(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a statutory duty on local authorities to 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. The authority must also consider if the relevant national policy requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have been met.

For the reasons outlined in this response, the Society advises that we believe the proposals would result in harm to the heritage asset and for which there is no clear and convincing justification. Consequently, we advise that the application be **withdrawn** and revised and re-submitted with the requisite clear and convincing justification. Should the application not be withdrawn then we advise that it be **refused**.

We trust that this response is helpful; please keep the Society informed of any developments in this case.

Regards,

Joanne.

Joanne Needham

Casework Officer

(Usual working days: Mon, Tues, Wed)