

Online Comment

Application H16-0209-25
Location THE SESSIONS HOUSE SHEEP MARKET SPALDING PE11 1BB
Proposal Removal of tiered benching viewing gallery in the old courtroom

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For/Against Comments

Address: Sessions House, Sheep Market, Spalding, PE11 1BB
Application Ref: H16-0209-25

Proposal: Removal of tiered benching viewing gallery in the old courtroom.
Statutory Remit: Historic Buildings & Places (formerly the AMS) is a consultee for Listed Building Consent applications, as per the Arrangements for handling heritage applications - notification to Historic England and National Amenity Societies and the Secretary of State (England) Direction 2021. We are concerned with historic assets of all types and all ages, including conservation areas and undesignated heritage.

Comments: Thank you for notifying HB&P of the above application for listed building consent.

The viewing gallery is part of a 'set piece' of former court furniture and fittings that, as a collection, are important to understanding the history and original use of this heritage asset, and therefore its significance.

However, there also appears to have been alterations in the past and the viewing gallery may not be original. Based on limited images of the building, externally it appears the rear window may have been altered and partially infilled and the window to its side also appears to be a later addition, given it is inconsistent with other windows in the building. The use of cement to create the tiers would also seem uncharacteristic. What is the purpose of the small room to the side? Is this a later addition? We suggest that the heritage statement is revised to properly investigate the original form of the courtroom, any later changes, and determine the age and significance of the fittings.

The above issue aside, the removal would leave the horizontal window to the left side of the main window somewhat jarring with the appearance of the rest of the room, and the side door would be left out of context, isolated up the wall.

HB&P recommend investigating options to retain at least some of the gallery to maintain the sense of enclosure currently provided by the courtroom fittings around each side of the room. Subject to further investigation, the first two tiers appear to align with the height of the rear doorway, and as a compromise, repositioning these tiers to the rear wall may result in a satisfactory outcome that balances heritage and alternative uses of the room.

HB&P therefore recommend submission of an updated heritage statement and an options appraisal and amended plans.

Policy: Chapter 16 of the NPPF (2024), particularly paragraph 212, states: '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'.

Section 16 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that, in considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority shall 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.

Ross Anthony
HB&P Casework