Development Management - Delegated Officer Report

Application Number: AWDM/0566/19 Recommendation – Approve

Site: Old Fort, Forthaven, Shoreham-By-Sea

Proposal: Application for permanent permission of WWII style Nissen hut and food hut to be used as education facility in connection with Scheduled Ancient Monument (previously approved for a 5 year temporary period under AWDM/1560/14).

Date of site visit: 12 April 2019

Neighbours checked: Y

Additional neighbour notifications: N

Proposal, Site and Surroundings

This application relates to Shoreham Fort, a Scheduled Ancient Monument located at the eastern end of Shoreham Beach adjacent to the Harbour entrance. It was built in 1857 as a response to the escalating fear of invasion by France. The fort was also in use during the Second World War when, amongst other modifications, three Nissen huts (tunnel-shaped sheds of corrugated steel) were erected to billet troops. They were removed in the 1950s, leaving the concrete bases that they were built on.

In 2013, a Nissen hut was donated to the Friends of Shoreham Fort for use as secure, dry, internal education space for schools and visiting groups. The hut was erected on the site in March 2014, together with a small food hut.

Planning permission was granted to retain these structures, on a temporary basis only, for five years in 2014 (AWDM/1560/14). This application now seeks to retain the buildings on a permanent basis.

Relevant Planning History

AWDM/1560/14 – Retention of WWII style Nissen hut and food hut to be used as education facility in connection with Scheduled Ancient Monument (5 year permission) (retrospective) – temp PP approved

Consultations

West Sussex County Council: The County **Archaeologist** has no objection. During construction, and in their existing operational use, the two huts have not caused any physical harm to the SAM. The visual impact of the two huts upon the setting of the SAM, and the degree to which they affect the visitor's experience of the SAM is considered to be minor adverse in scale, not involving substantial or any marked harm (NPPF para.194).

The positive enhancement to the Monument, brought about through the educational use of the huts to raise awareness of its significance, is welcomed.

Natural England: No comments to make

Ancient Monuments Society: Not received

Historic England: No objection to permanent retention provided they continue to be used for educational purposes. The proposal is for permission to permanently retain a WWII style Nissen hut and a food hut that were previously approved for a 5 year temporary period under AWDM/1560/14. Both huts are proposed to continue to be used as an education facility in connection with the Scheduled Monument.

When we were initially consulted on the installation of these two structures (under AWDM/1560/14), we advised that they did cause some harm to heritage significance, because they obstructed key views and appreciation of the morphology of the Victorian Fort. We did nevertheless acknowledge the value of the huts for educational purposes. We considered that this educational value outweighed the limited harm they caused to heritage significance and we therefore had no objection to their retention for five years. Our advice was that for as long as the huts retained an educational use they should stay; but if this use were to go then the huts should too.

The current planning application proposes to continue to use the huts for educational purposes; and to permanently retain them on the site. As per our previous advice, we do not have any objection to the retention of the huts - so long as their educational function/use is also retained. However, we think that if the huts are in the future not used for educational purposes they should be taken down. Similarly, if the applicant succeeds in gaining consent for a new (educational) building the huts should also be taken down, i.e. not re-purposed for storage or other function.

We do not have any objection to the retention of the huts; however we think that - if you are minded to grant permission - you should ensure that provision is made to enforce the removal of the huts, were their educational use ever to lapse. For instance, this may be achieved by explicitly conditioning the use/function of the huts; and ensuring that a change in use of these structures would require planning permission in its own right.

Representations

None received

Relevant Planning Policies

Adur Local Plan 2017 Policies 16, 17
National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)

Planning Assessment

Principle

The site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) and any development should not cause harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset.

Visual amenity and impact on Scheduled Ancient Monument

The buildings are very prominent and could be considered to contrast adversely with the architectural form of the Victorian fort and as such detract from the setting of the SAM. Both buildings have, however, been sited on existing hardstandings to the north east of the fort, with the Nissen hut very close to the original remaining walls of the fort.

The County Archaeologist acknowledges that they do have some impact upon the setting of the Monument. However, he states:

"*From outside and to the rear, the Nissen Hut appears half-sunken below the level of the access track leading past the Lookout Station; it is easy to look over and past it to see the interior of the Fort. The food hut is only slightly sunken, but its smallness and low height equally make it a minor obstacle to the view from outside.*

From the other side of the Harbour, the only prominent surviving feature of the Victorian landscape contemporary with the Fort is Kingston (now Shoreham) lighthouse. From the lighthouse, the Nissen Hut and Food Hut present no obstacles to the view of the Fort across the Harbour.

From within the Fort, the two huts stand to the rear and landward, outside the key seaward field of view of the fortifications and former gun emplacements. The lighthouse can clearly be seen across the Harbour, the harbour view itself being only slightly obstructed by the structures."

In his view, the huts have only a minor adverse impact upon the SAM.

Paragraph 196 of the NPPF states that "*Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal*."

In this case, the huts are used for educational purposes and, as such, provide a public benefit which is considered to outweigh any limited harm caused. However, as recommended by Historic England, the huts should be removed if their educational function should cease in the future. A condition is proposed to secure their removal in such a case.

Recommendation

APPROVE

Subject to Conditions:-

1. Approved Plans
2. The Nissen hut and food hut hereby approved shall only be used for educational purposes by the Friends of Shoreham Fort and for no other purpose. Should use of the huts for educational purposes cease, the huts shall be permanently removed from the site and the land restored to its former condition in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Is recommendation contrary to letter(s) of representation? N

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received and subsequently determining to grant planning permission in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Case Officer: Peter Barnett Date: 28 May 2019

Authorised by: Gary Peck Date: 31 May 2019