

Lamb Hotel
Nantwich
Cheshire

SAVING THE LAMB HOTEL: A FUTURE ASSURED BY BENEFICIAL RE-USE AND REDEVELOPMENT

November, 2002



Report prepared on behalf of

London and Palatine Estates

By

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Commission

The David Michelmore Consultancy for Conservation was commissioned to review proposals for planning application and development of Lamb Hotel, Nantwich. Initially it had been proposed that the Lamb Hotel might have been completely demolished and replaced by a new structure of contemporary design. Subsequently, a proposal was prepared which combined the retention of the front range and a rear structure based on the original proposal. This application has been recommended for refusal by Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council and by English Heritage. The design which had been submitted for the new extension was considered both inappropriate and out-of-keeping with the urban fabric of Nantwich and also to be too large.

Initial consultation with officers of Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council and English Heritage and an examination of previous proposals suggested that it would be possible to develop an application for Listed Building Consent, which would be likely to receive approval. In order to inform the process of developing new proposals, the building has been examined and its architectural development has been evaluated.

Following a number of discussions and three meetings with English Heritage and discussion with the Local Authority, after careful consideration of their requirements and the possibilities for an acceptable compromise, Barrie Newcombe Associates produced an amended scheme for enabling development of modest architectural pretensions which should serve as enabling development to save the front façade while at the same time replacing existing undesirable features such as the metal shed behind the hotel. In addition to consultation with the statutory authorities, proposals for the retention of the front range and redevelopment of the rear ranges were tested against public opinion at a meeting in Nantwich.

Expert qualifications

The Consultancy has wide experience in the documentation and conservation of historic buildings and ancient monuments and has won five Design Awards for conservation projects. In addition to work in the UK, the Consultancy's specialists have worked in a total of twenty-one different countries, extensively for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) the World Bank and national governments, especially in Europe and Asia. David Michelmore, the Principal, has been assisted in the preparation of this report by Vardan Mkrtychyan Dip.Arch., Dip.Trans., Associate Monuments Conservation Expert, who formerly worked as Conservation Architect for the Commission for the Protection of Monuments (the equivalent of English Heritage) in the Republic of Armenia



Hospital Street elevation



The Lamb Hotel when still in use, showing the dominance of its façade in the streetscape

The form and development of Lamb Hotel

Original function and subsequent decline

The Lamb Hotel is a purpose-built 19th-century hotel facing Hospital Street in Nantwich. The function and its name is indicated by the carvings of lambs above the ground-floor windows of the main façade. As a public meeting place, it formerly served an important function as a focus for the social and business life of Nantwich. By the end of the last century, however, its status had declined and internal planning as well as considerable structural problems suggested that redevelopment within the present overall envelope would be impossible for financial reasons.

The front range

The front range is a large, three-storey structure of seven bays, with the three central bays recessed and the two end bays at each end of the façade forming shallow projections, to provide a variety and interest



Elevation to Hospital Street as existing



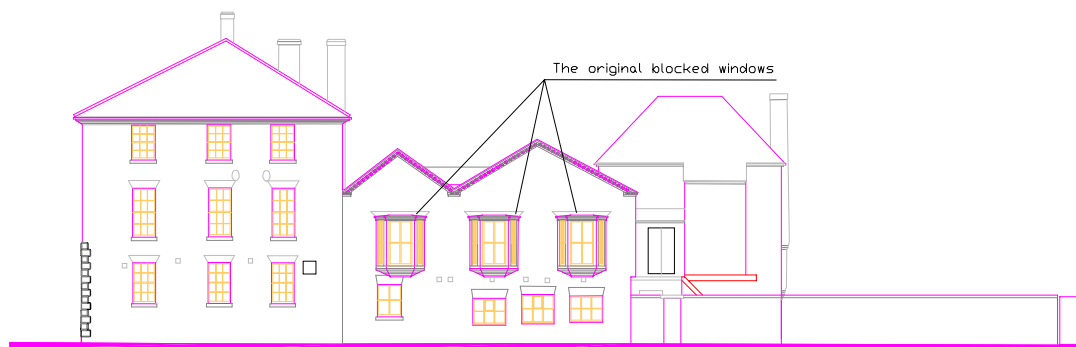
Tower at the western end of the façade



Church Lane: View from Hospital Street

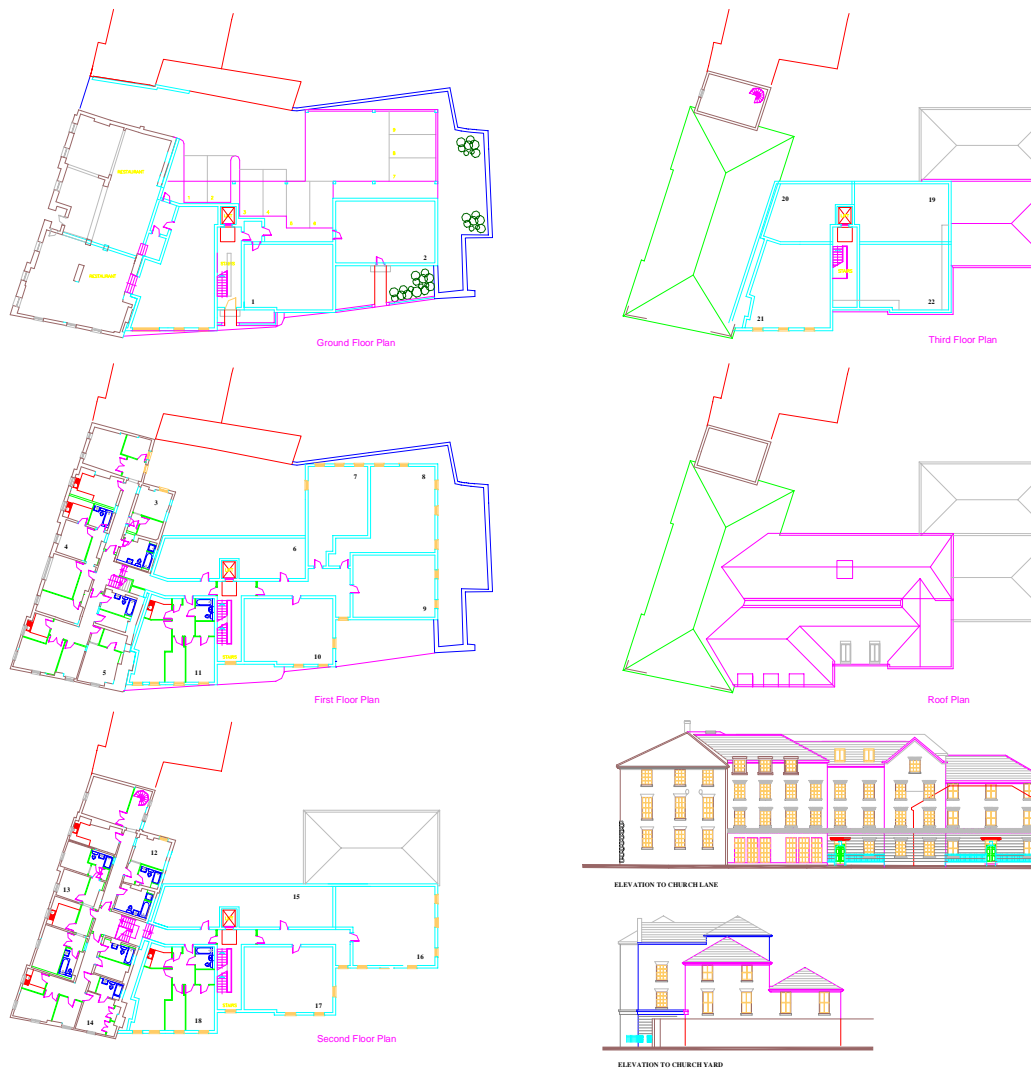
to the front elevation. Although the front range appears to be of a single build, it presents an idiosyncratic mixture of forward-looking and archaic details. The ground-floor windows have arched heads and those of the second floor segmental heads. In contrast, the windows of the first floor, which have square heads topped by a heavy roll moulding, refer to early 18th-century window forms, although the central window has a broad central sash with narrow sashes either side, typical of the early 19th century. The windowsills of the first and second floor are carried through to form a continuous stringcourse, but not the sills of the ground-floor windows. The projecting ‘wings’ at either end of the façade are defined on the ground floor by rusticated stone quoins, but these are not continued up the corners of the top two storeys. A later Italianate tower was added to the western end of the façade, with a carriageway on the ground floor providing access through to the rear courtyard.

The bulk of the façade of the front range of the Lamb Hotel dominates the street and its loss would result in a large gap in a historic street frontage. Nevertheless its preservation presents considerable challenges. A cellar under the centre of the front range has acted as underpinning and the range has subsided away from the centre towards the ends of the façade. However, the flexibility of the lime mortar has enabled the masonry to accept this movement without signs of major distress.



ELEVATION TO CHURCH LANE

Elevation to Church Lane as existing



The proposed scheme.

The interior of the ground floor is largely open and will adapt to alternative uses without any great problem. The timber cantilevered staircase has a simple balustrade typical of the late-Regency early-Victorian periods and is without special architectural merit. The upper floors consist of rooms sensibly accessed from a rear passage, which can also provide a workable plan for new uses. Although floors slope as a result of the subsidence, it will be possible to level them by furring them out and fixing new level walking surfaces.

The rear ranges

In contrast to the front range, the rear ranges represent a jumble of structures of comparatively little architectural merit which have been altered and added over time.

The range facing Church Lane now has two gables of unequal width and irregular fenestration, including three timber oriel windows on the first floor and four windows with segmental-arched heads on the ground floor. The façade as it exists at present is relatively recent – dating to the first half of the 20th century – and evidence of blocked windows on the first floor shows that it originally had a more classical (although utilitarian) appearance, presumably contemporary with the Hospital Street elevation. It is also possible that the roof form has been changed and that originally it was covered by a roof parallel to Church Lane.



Elevation to Church Lane

However, the plan indicates that the front wall facing Church Lane and the rear wall facing the courtyard are not parallel, suggesting the possibility of a series of alterations which might be impossible to interpret without stripping off the wall finishes. Internally, the rear range contains a single room of some pretensions, entered through a doorcase with the same archaïcising 18th-century detail as the first-floor windows of the front façade, but in timber instead of stone. This room is, however, part of the building worst affected by subsidence. It is proposed that the doorcase itself will be retained and reused in the conversion scheme.

Otherwise, the rear ranges are, for the most part, a maze of small rooms at different levels, with little or no architectural detailing, as a result of successive *ad-hoc* alterations to the service rooms of the hotel. To the service ranges and stabling of the 19th-century hotel, a large steel-framed shed was added in the early 20th century, to form a covered space which cars could be parked and washed. The removal of this structure would greatly enhance the Conservation Area.

The side is bounded by a brick boundary wall, which is undoubtedly historic in origin but which has received a number of alterations, mostly comparatively modern, so that it now contains fabric variously dating to the 19th and 20th centuries.



View from Churchyard

Finding a viable future

The economic and structural problems

Historic town-centre hotels such as the Lamb Hotel in general no longer provide the prestige accommodation and social focus which they provided in the past. As such, its historic use is redundant and in these circumstances, the Lamb Hotel requires a new function in keeping with the social and economic requirements of the 21st century.

Although the front range has a plan and overall layout which present comparatively few problems for a beneficial new use, the existing form of the rear ranges is highly impractical, since they have resulted from successive adaptations to provide service accommodation to the redundant hotel. In-depth analysis of the possibilities of re-use demonstrated that the complex as it currently exists did not have a viable future.

The problem of re-using the structure of the Lamb Hotel is compounded by the historic problems of subsidence. Although the structure has accepted the considerable amount of movement which has occurred surprisingly well, especially with regard to the external brick masonry, any new use will require level floors and the owners and tenants of any new businesses or domestic accommodation will require assurance that the structural problems have been solved and that movement will not continue.

The cost of converting the building to a new use will be increased by the work required in providing level floors and in any underpinning which the Structural Engineer may consider necessary in order to ensure the future safety of the structure.

The solution

In order to ensure the preservation of the front range, which is the portion of the building which has remained relatively little unaltered and which provides the façade that contributes so much to the streetscape of the Conservation Area, sufficient funds are required not only for routine repairs, but for essential conversion costs and the major works required as a result of subsidence damage. To lose the front range would be a



Metal frame shed in the courtyard



The rear ranges from courtyard



Church Lane: View from car park

great loss to Nantwich and its retention requires beneficial re-use which will provide a secure and long-term future.

Redevelopment of the relatively uninteresting rear ranges is proposed in order to provide sufficient enabling development to fund the repairs necessary to repair and retain the more important front range. The existing unusable and architecturally unimportant jumble of buildings will be reconstructed to provide new domestic accommodation, which will serve not only the cause of conservation but also have a social function helping to bring back new life to the town centre.

Architectural considerations

The importance to Nantwich of the Lamb Hotel is provided by the long and imposing façade to Hospital Street and to a lesser extent by the more modest and architecturally restrained return to Church Lane.

The rear ranges open onto a courtyard which is not visible from Hospital Street, while the bend in Church Lane behind the front range of the Lamb Hotel makes them invisible from the main street. It should therefore be emphasised that the proposed rear ranges for which Listed Building Consent is being sought will be extremely difficult to see from any position on Hospital Street. The narrowness of Church Lane means that there will only be a side view of the replacement structure. From the Churchyard, the proposed

addition will only result in a more interesting elevation being visible over the existing garden wall, rather than the existing gable to the present metal shed.

The proposals for the new rear range are designed in a modest architectural language so as to be subservient to the original front range. Although considerable new floor space is required to finance the costs of repairing and retaining the front range, any impression of bulk is reduced by breaking up the forms into a number of smaller ranges which reduce in size as they step down towards the church.

Acknowledgements

The officers of the Planning Division of the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich have been unfailingly helpful when discussing this case and their co-operation has contributed to what it is hoped will be a satisfactory solution to finding a long-term use to save the Lamb Hotel. Peter de Figueiredo (England Heritage) has extended his utmost co-operation by reviewing proposals on a number of occasions, both during face-to-face meetings and by telephone and correspondence.

The drawings which illustrate this report were prepared by Barrie Newcombe Associates.