

Atkins Bros. Factory, Hinckley 2003–07

17th March 2008

The destruction of historic buildings is...more often...the result of failure to make imaginative efforts to find new uses for them... [ref. PPG15 3.16]



The 2002 'Druid Quarter Masterplan & Regeneration Strategy (Latham Architects) commented, "As the centre of the town's largest hosiery business, the Atkins Bros. factory is of pivotal importance in Hinckley's economic history and townscape... The 1870s building and its matching extension must be retained and refurbished. ...[it] is an important landmark."

For the purposes of this study, the former factory buildings being considered for new use are the 1875-77 (extended 1909-10) block that runs along Baines Lane before turning onto Lower Bond Street, and the 1909-10 extension that continues the factory along Lower Bond Street. In total, the two buildings measure approximately 3800m² over four floors.

The earliest block was designed by Joseph Goddard in partnership with Alfred Paget, and the later block by Henry Goddard in partnership with William Catlow. For convenience, this study refers to both buildings as the Goddard buildings.

Both buildings are now listed and development options have been prepared with reference to PPG15 - 'Planning & the Historic Environment'.

On the 8th February 2006, the Department of Culture, Media & Sport, under Section 1 of the Planning Act 1990 (Listed Building and Conservation Areas), added the Goddard buildings to the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. The principal reasons for listing were given (H&BBC Briefing Note 05/06) as:

- the buildings design coherence;
- the building as representative of the shift from domestic hand-powered and factory machine- powered hosiery production;
- the historic importance of the Atkins family to Hinckley's development;
- the wider site, including the nearby Grade II listed former framework knitters cottages on the other side of Lower Bond Street, as a picture of hosiery industry development in the town;
- the historic and architectural importance of the grouping of the Goddard buildings with the Great Meeting House (Baines Lane) and the Grade II listed former framework knitters cottages.

The plan attached to H&BBC Briefing Note 05/06 only highlights the two Goddard buildings. Although the courtyard and the issue of setting is mentioned in the DCMS schedule, other buildings and the idiosyncratic internal courtyard at the back of the Goddard buildings, are not shown as being covered by the listing.

The plan attached to H&BBC Briefing Note 05/06 may now need reviewing if the listing is to make maximum use of PPG15 4.4. Also, in line with PPG15 4.3, it may be prudent for H&BBC, or the Borough Council in partnership with others, to establish a conservation area advisory group "to assist in formulating policies for the conservation area...and also as a continuing source of advice on planning and other applications which could affect an area." [ref. PPG15 4.13].

In terms of Section 71 of the Planning Act 1990 (Listed Building and Conservation Areas), this study is evidence that H&BBC does recognise "that designation is not seen as an end in itself" [ref. PPG15 4.9]. This study should be understood as being part of the on-going policy development and area assessment necessary to flesh out the recent listing of the Goddard buildings.

The challenge to this study has been to identify design strategies that both balance and enhance the site-specific characteristics of fabric, interior and setting, as covered in the DCMS schedule.

Planning guidance acknowledges the difficulties involved in designing for change of use for a listed building. In this instance, the challenges have been centred on discovering best solutions for circulation (including the requirements of DDA), provision of specialist facilities, and introduction of services.

Beyond these obvious practicalities, the challenge has also focused on four other key issues:

- how to retain the internal courtyard, and give this positive expression in a change of use design. This is an important issue in the context of probable wider site demolition.
- how best to address some of the issues raised by the 2002 'Druid Quarter Masterplan & Regeneration Strategy (Latham Architects). Particularly, the improvement of site connections and enhancement of aspect from Dare's Walk to the north.
- how best to retain the integrity of the internal spaces within the Goddard buildings in line with PPG15: "The plan of a building is one of its most important characteristics. Interior plans...should be respected and left unaltered as far as possible. Internal spaces...are part of the special interest of a building and may be its most valuable feature."
- how to make the most efficient use of land to achieve the critical mass of accommodation necessary for a creative quarter.

In general, the indicative design solution for each of the three options shares a common approach based on respecting the historic diagonal field boundary between the earliest Goddard building and the Great Meeting Chapel on Baines Lane. Land for the early Atkins factory was purchased from the neighbouring Unitarian Chapel, and the line of the first factory building (and its subsequent replacement) follows an original field line at 80 degrees to Baines Lane, as shown on the 1818 Tithe Allocation Map. This diagonal finds expression in the angled termination of the 1875 Goddard building to the Unitarian Chapel.

The architectural strategy has been to extend this diagonal north to Dare's Walk, and assume that the creative quarter will mainly sit between this boundary and Lower Bond Street.

In general, the indicative design solutions also show circulation and necessary small scale facilities (ie. toilets, dedicated office accommodation, etc.) as a transparent new build wedge adjacent to the 1909-10 Goddard block. This acknowledges the importance of not subdividing the interior spaces of the listed building in line with PPG15 C.58. It also gives built expression to the idiosyncratic triangular courtyard space that may be lost as a result of wider demolition plans. It also helps, in line with PPG15 C.69, to mitigate the inherent risk of introducing any necessary services required to support change of use.

Finally, the architectural strategy reintroduces a small green space to the north of the Goddard buildings. This space existed before the 1970s factory building extended the Lower Bond Street facade, and is useful in terms of service vehicle delivery, opening up the aspect towards Dare's Walk, and in making visible the north facing gable end of the Goddard buildings.