

12.3.09.

Planning Department,
Oswestry Borough Council,
Castle View,
Oswestry.
SY11 1JR

For the attention of Mr. Peter Booth, Conservation Officer.

Dear Sir,

PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT OF BURBIDGE SITE.

Thank you for inviting me to accompany you and your colleague on a visit to Burbidge's site – it was a most interesting morning. In the light of what we saw, I now write with some corrections to my letter objecting to Listed Buildings Consent application 09/15870/LBC, and some further descriptions and comments.

Bays 1 and 2 (Wagon Shop).

The applicant's Conservation Statement includes a photo of the interior said to date from 1904, so I was apparently mistaken in assuming it was added after the GWR took over in 1923.

The roof and wall cladding are recent replacements, although translucent sheeting echoes the location of four of the five previous windows on the north-west elevation. The floor of course has also been replaced. However it is very misleading to state that "the historic fabric has been substantially lost" (Conservation Statement para. 5.5) because the original steel framework is virtually complete, including I-section stanchions, side sheeting angles, roof trusses, purlins, and even door hinges, – the only significant loss is where a larger doorway has been formed in the end elevation of bay 2. The trusses are lightweight assemblies using round bar for tension members and angle or T-section for compression members; they are very efficient in the use of material and elegant in appearance, especially the complex arrangement of half-trusses and braced principle rafters around the hips where bay 1 abuts the older building.

The loss of this steelwork is clearly unacceptable in conservation terms, and would also seem economically unjustified. The buildings would lend themselves to a use

where the roof structure remains a visible feature internally, rather than a cinema – perhaps a large retail unit. The exterior should be re-clad to more-or-less reinstate its pre-1965 appearance. In order to visually read the origin of the building, the series of large door openings for rail tracks should be apparent on the north-east elevation (which is the right position for a main entrance facing the proposed car park) and the north-west elevation should have the five large windows reinstated plus small doors if needed.

I will seek further historical photos and information, and let you know what I find.

Bay 3, paint shop.

The 1901 and 1902 OS maps appear to show this building, but separated from the main works by a traverser; the 1926 map shows the traverser gone and an extension built to link it with the main building – or so we assumed. However we were unable to locate any change in construction when we examined the walls on site, leading to the supposition that the whole building is post-1902, replacing an earlier one. But if its date is so close to that of bays 1 and 2, it raises the question of why they are of such different construction. In fact the 1902 6-inch map may have been based on out-of-date survey information.

The brick walls are of good quality, and in good condition. However the roof structure is a fairly recent replacement, with trusses fabricated from hollow box-section steel, and the padstones raised in concrete. The survival of the original three pairs of large doors is noteworthy.

As the application does not define the proposed use, or the alterations proposed, no further comment can be made at this stage.

Bay 4, foundry.

This is part of the 1863 brick building, but again re-roofed with fairly modern box-section trusses. Parts of the original door hinges survive.

Again there are no firm proposals to comment on.

Sheet room.

This is shown as a detached building on the 1875 OS map and presumably is part of the original 1863 complex. Its brick walls have been somewhat altered but are substantially intact, with round-headed window openings and a “clerestory” of large window openings under the eaves (some now bricked up); no original windows survive. There is a chimney at each end, one with what appears to be a blocked fireplace arch; they have been taken down below roof level but the trimmer rafters can still be seen.

The roof comprises impressive queen-post timber trusses, complete with original purlins, rafters, slates, and lead roll hips (but sadly turnerised) – all in reasonably good condition.

This is a substantial and attractive listed building, which could readily be converted for a variety of uses. The dismissive description in the Conservation Statement is very misleading. To agree to its demolition it would be unthinkable.

Gas Works.

This also appears to be part of the original 1863 complex. Some damaged brickwork at low level has been refaced, stone window cills have been replaced in concrete, and a couple of door openings have been enlarged. But most of the brickwork remains in a reasonable condition.

The fenestration is not “mainly lost”; in fact two of the four cast iron round-headed windows remain.

The roof structure appears to be original, with at least one timber monopitch truss (the other may have been replaced by the blockwork dividing wall – we did not have access to the interior). It is presumed that the corrugated iron roof cladding is not original (although an 1860 photo of Swindon Works shows minor buildings roofed with this material). The rooflights are also of some age but probably not original.

I see no justification for demolishing this listed building; it would not be difficult to repair it for a new use or for storage.

Block between Sheet room and Gas Works.

This part of the building would appear to date from the 1950's or 60's, but its date and purpose is not known. The walls are of engineering brickwork, with a low-pitched roof on steel portal frames. There are two large galvanised steel windows with sloping brick-on-edge cills.

It may be possible to make a case for retaining it because of the part it tells in the evolution of the site. On the other hand a case could be made for removing it to enhance the adjacent older buildings. Further research is desirable.

Loco Running Shed.

This building is contemporary with the railway works (or perhaps a few years older – 1860), in the same ownership, and within its curtilage, so we would strongly support your suggestion that it is included in the Grade II Listed Building status. Its survival is not apparent from the outside because of modern cladding and the more recent buildings surrounding it on three sides.

We looked at the main four-road shed, which is about 67 x 200 ft (20 x 61m.). The side walls are of 450mm thick brickwork with 560mm thick piers and decorative corbelling, and approx 12 blocked round-headed window openings each side. The south-west wall was removed when the building was re-roofed in 1939. On the north-east side brick piers remain between the lorry loading-bay openings, and a battered brick plinth can be seen; it is not yet clear what form of openings there were in this wall previously, because the railway tracks terminated inside the shed.

The floor has been built up to the height of lorry decks. The 1939 roof trusses are of steel angle, but the cladding is recent. I recall the large vents on the ridge still being visible in about the 1980's

Attached on the south-east side was a two-road brick-built shed of about 50 x 124 ft (15 x 38m.), which we did not identify on site – another look would be useful. It appears on the 1901 OS map but not the 1889 one.

Associated with it were a number of ancillary buildings such as stores, coaling stage, and offices. It is possible that some survive and further investigation would be useful. *[information from "An Historical Survey of Great Western Engine Sheds 1947", E. T. Lyons.]*

We have urged the developer to retain and make use of this substantial and impressive structure, but so far to no avail.

General.

None of the elements described above are particularly unusual or important in themselves. But they are good quality examples of typical structures of their period, and there are no similar large-scale industrial buildings in the northern part of Shropshire or for a considerable distance into Wales.

Their value lies in their survival as a part of a unique group forming the headquarters of a provincial railway company, and in this respect they are regarded as being of national importance. They are also of course of huge significance locally in the history of Oswestry and mid-Wales.

May I again urge that a conservation strategy should be put in place for the whole complex in order to understand what survives, and to avoid piecemeal treatment of its different elements.

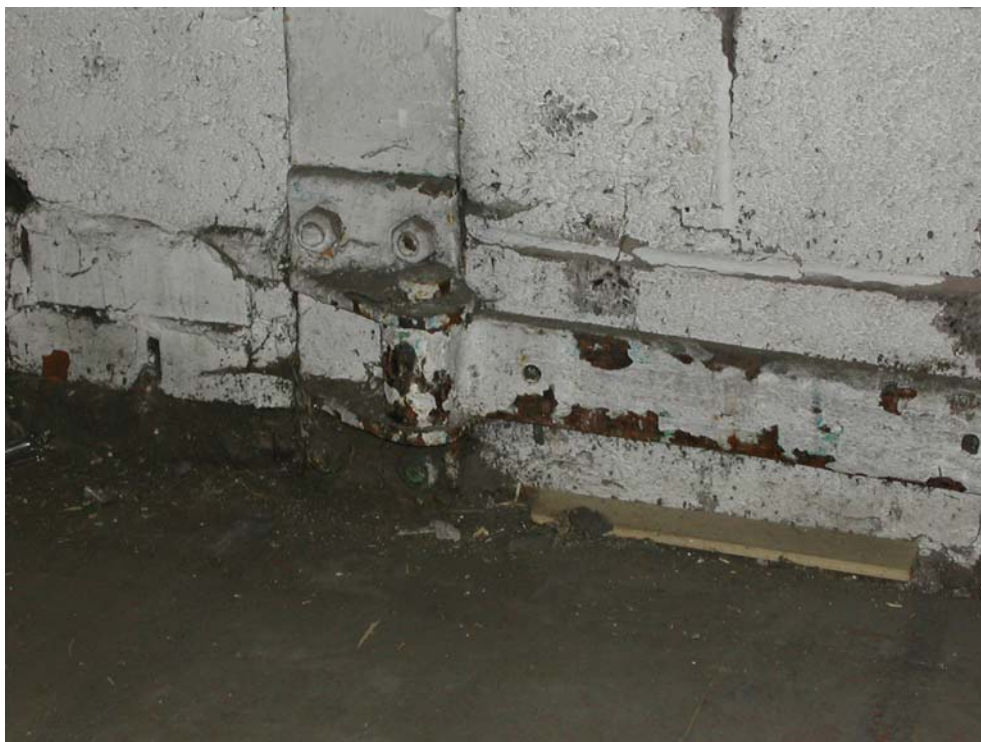
I have attached some photos which may be of interest.

Yours faithfully,

Henry Thomas (Trustee)
On behalf of the Cambrian Railways Trust.



A stanchion between bays 1 and 2. The Glengarnock Steel Co. Ltd. was trading from 1890 to 1915, the works being taken over by Colvilles Ltd. then British Steel.



An original bottom hinge to a blocked-up door opening, bay 1.



Half-trusses at hipped end of bay 1



Half-truss and braced principle rafters at hipped end of bay 1.



Loco shed window opening and eaves corbelling from outside (left) and inside (right).



1939 roof trusses of loco shed.



South-west end of loco shed, as altered for 1939 re-roofing (and again recently?), showing unpainted brick pier.



North-east end of loco shed, showing original openings adapted for lorry loading, and battered plinth.