



DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

THE COVE,
PREVIOUSLY SECRET SEAVIEW CAFE
ROBIN HOODS BAY

NYMNP

02/04/2020

Replacement of timber picket fence to the sea facing terrace and garden of the old chapel above the sea wall and promenade with a mix of glazed balustrade and "cast iron" railings.

10.01.2020



SITE AND LOCATION

The site, outlined in red, is located at the north eastern corner of Robin Hoods Bay high above the beach and promenade. (The promenade is approximately 18m above beach level and ground floor of the chapel approximately 3m above the promenade which actually terminates close to the old site boundary) The village is an historic settlement along the coastline and it is wholly contained within a Conservation Area. The site supports just one building, an early Victorian Methodist Chapel, a large simple cubic building with double pitched roof. Its eastern elevation sits 3 metres above the promenade below which itself is approximately 18 metres above the beach. The eastern elevation is 5 metres back from the promenade retaining wall which marks the boundary of the site. It is the treatment of this boundary together with an adjacent boundary behind a narrow strip of garden a further 2'5 metres higher which is the subject of this application. Both boundaries face eastwards towards the sea.



BACKGROUND AND INTENTION

The applicant wishes to replace the modern wicket timber fences (erected in 2006) with a glazed balustrade to the terrace and with simple “cast iron” railings to the boundary in front of the garden. The railings will be more in keeping with the architecture of the chapel and the simple glazed balustrade will allow visibility into and out from the terrace.

The chapel itself, built in 1841, ceased to operate as a chapel for the local community sometime in the late 1930s. It is a simple but large building with a rectangular plan form 15m x 12m initially built as a single storey space 6m high. The principal facade faces west into the village containing large vertical windows which are the focus of internal chapel space. A significant U shaped tiered gallery addresses these windows and this gallery has two stair access points from ground level to its’ uppermost tier.

The chapel was subject to a radical reconfiguration in 2004, which was supported by the planning authority. In essence this introduced a new suspended floor at the bottom

of the gallery, effectively creating a smaller volume for the chapel and creating a new ground floor which has been used as a cafe since the building works were completed in 2004.

In volumetric terms the cafe only occupies 20% of the total building volume and a significant proportion of the income from this cafe supports the wellbeing of the overall building which is a Grade 2 listed structure. It has proved very difficult to find a sustained commercial use for the first floor chapel. It is registered for wedding ceremonies but the accommodation is far from ideal largely because access is massively compromised by the two poor external stair accessways to the raised floor of the chapel and the upper tier of its gallery. Disabled access is not possible and access for able bodied people is far from ideal. Furthermore guests need to park at the top of the village, half a mile walk away down the steep narrow lanes through the town. Consequently the venue cannot charge commercially viable fees and it is always at risk of claims under the Equality Act (previously DDA) because many disabled people cannot access the chapel itself. (The current owners

explain to customers that the listed status of the building limits its access arrangements)

From a commercial viewpoint therefore the cafe is supporting the entire building and this is proving difficult to sustain. There have been three owners in the last three years. Increasing footfall and income is vital to the long term viability of the old chapel and to do this visibility of the cafe needs to be improved. The Secret Seaview Cafe - its old name- tells us all we need to know - it is hidden. From the west it is found on a hidden alleyway at the northern edge of the settlement and from the east the largely blank wall elevation and terrace sits high above the promenade. Apart from signage there is no possibility of improving visibility from the west but from the east, visibility can be significantly improved by replacing the opaque timber picket fence with a transparent glazed balustrade. This would make the terrace much more visible creating passive signposting of the cafe. Additionally by improving sea views from the terrace will also add to the appeal of the cafe improving footfall as people would as well as visiting the cafe access the higher garden to see the impressive sea view'

The applicant is confident that by making these changes to the boundaries:

- 1 The commercial viability of the site will be improved thus supporting the sustainment of the old chapel structure in its current form
- 2 In overall architectural terms the proposal will be more in keeping with the character of the Victorian Chapel building and the modern sea wall than the rather crude timber picket fences.



DESCRIPTION OF THE TWO BOUNDARIES

There are two distinct sections of boundaries, both facing the sea, whose current timber picket fence protection is proposed to be changed in this application:

1 HIGH LEVEL - a long level linear stretch of timber fence, 14m long, with a height of approx 1200mm. It is the most visually prominent of the two boundaries being located approx 5m above the promenade. It protects a narrow sloping garden area which runs parallel to a narrow truncated roadway providing limited vehicular access to the Chapel. In its current configuration the garden is not very useful, the slope being too great, but it is used by smokers who are not allowed to smoke on the cafe terrace (With significant reconfiguration including much earth retention it would be possible to improve the accessibility and use of this garden but this is not currently proposed.)

2 LOW LEVEL TERRACE- the lower boundary is smaller protecting the modestly sized cafe terrace which can accommodate 20 seated visitors. It is 3m lower than the high level gar-

den boundary and approximately 3m above the promenade.

The boundary and current fence are in two connected sections meeting at an obtuse angle - 5.8m to the south and 3.8m to the north.



Key:

 Glass Balustrade

 Cast Iron Railings

VISUAL IMPACT

Protection to the two boundaries is visible from two key viewpoints, looking into the site:

- 1 Promenade. - close view
- 2 From the beach - distant view

Views from the promenade are important and although the promenade terminates close to the site, it is well used. Currently the timber fence completely obscures the terrace. It is visually prominent above promenade benches but its overall length is visually diminished by the angled nature of the fence (in plan). The high level fence is equally strong from a visual point of view but it is more dominant being a long straight length of 14m closer to the skyline.

Distant views from the beach are very important at low tide when relatively small numbers of visitors access the slippery wave cut platform (most visitors access beach areas to the south of the village towards Boggle Hole.) The massively dominant visual form from this position is the enormous modern concrete sea wall which is almost 20m tall. It is badly



stained and weathered. Above this wall we see the whole north side of the town and the large 19th century chapel building looks moderately small on top of this piece of 20th century civil engineering. The relevant boundaries here are clearly visible but the dominant one is the high level linear fence which presents its full 14m length to the onlooker. The lower fence from this angle appears just above the promenade, even though in reality it is almost 3m higher than the prom. Visually the angled nature of the fence /boundary reduces its visual appearance to approximately half the length of the higher fence, ie 7m rather than its actual linear length of 8m



DESIGN CRITIQUE OF EXISTING FENCES

Both lengths of fencing to the exposed boundaries are protected by 1200mm high timber wicket fences, fairly crudely built and really only visually appropriate to the rear gardens of suburban domestic gardens. They are certainly not appropriate to the setting of the listed chapel. We do not know how the original enclosures to the chapel were dealt with in 1790. It is highly likely that like most other 18/19th century non conformist chapels, both here and across the country, they would have been simply detailed cast iron railings. Countless examples still remain and we illustrate a number below. There are many fine example of other fences and iron railings in Robin Hoods Bay, a particularly fine one being very close to the site. We would contend that railings of this character would be visually more appropriate than the existing timber fence, although to copy the excellent example near the site would give us safety concerns.



DESIGN CRITERIA FOR REPLACEMENT

High level fence. The brief is to replace the timber fence with a more historically and visually appropriate solution. The replacement must allow standing visitors a view of the sea (casual visitors and smokers from the cafe). In our view, given that children may be there, we must meet the requirements of Building Control which require a height of 1100mm and to ensure that a 100mm sphere cannot pass through any part of the protected area.

The lower level fence must meet the same Building Control requirements but here the applicant requires complete visibility into the cafe from the promenade to present its existence and to give cafe users on the terrace an uninterrupted sea view when seated at cafe terrace tables.



DESIGN RESPONSE

High Level balustrade - for this boundary the applicant is proposing continuous steel railings, painted black, to copy a fine example of a simple 19th century cast iron fence. This will be split up at 1.5m centres with simply detailed 'cast iron' posts as we want to use the same posts on the lower terrace to bring some design consistency between the two boundaries.

Lower level balustrade - for this smaller, less prominent length of fence we are proposing laminated glazed panels, approximately 1.5m x 1m in size, fixed between 'cast iron' posts as referred to above.

JUSTIFICATION

The glazed balustrade to the smaller lower terrace will meet the applicant's requirements whilst visually connecting appropriately to the cast iron railings above by using the same posts. Visitors on the promenade will be able to see the cafe terrace and this will increase footfall to the facility which is badly

needed. Experience of cafe users will also be enhanced by providing good views from a seated position encouraging more customers and return visits. The new high level cast iron railing will be much more in keeping with the heritage values of the chapel.

Together the two replacements will support the continued wellbeing of the historic chapel building, by replacing the inappropriate crude fencing with more carefully design considered railings and crucially increased footfall will improve the commercial viability of the business, thus helping to sustain the well being of the chapel building itself.

PRECEDENTS

There are many local examples of glazed balustrading in Robin Hoods Bay. - see attached photographs. Many of these are on domestic properties and this has been mentioned to the applicant in pre application discussions. The applicant would argue that if their use on domestic properties is justified, when the only need is to enhance the domestic owners visual appreciation of the views, surely a commercial property, trying to sustain the well being of a listed building has stronger justification for a limited amount of glazed balustrading.



OVERALL CONCLUSION

The applicant and his architect strongly contend that in overall terms the replacement of two significant sections of crude timber fencing with more appropriate railings and limited glazed balustrading greatly enhances the heritage value of the site and further assists the heritage asset in giving the cafe a stronger commercial proposition.

HERITAGE STATEMENT

The proposed development, to replace the timber picket fences to sea facing terrace and the garden of the old chapel building, with a mixture of 'cast iron railings' and a glazed balustrade, is described fully in the preceding pages of this design and access statement.

Following the guidelines set out in Historic England's advice note "Statement of Significance for Heritage Assets" the following assessment will consider:

- 1 A description of the heritage asset and its setting
- 2 Assessing the significance
- 3 Describing the design concept – actually covered in pages of the D and A Statement
- 4 The impact of the proposed development
 - 4.1 Direct or Indirect
 - 4.2 Level of Heritage Significance
 - 4.3 Magnitude of Impact
 - 4.4 Significance of Effect
- 5 Conclusion

1 DESCRIPTION OF THE HERITAGE ASSET AND ITS SETTING

The former Methodist Chapel (List Entry 1167318) is a grade II listed building first listed in October 1969 (latest amendment, according to Historic England, 4 Jan 1990). Location NZ 95283 04956

The Wesleyan Chapel dated 1779, (date stone on south wall panel), has a square plan form with a dual pitched pantiled roof. The walls are of a soft coursed sandstone typical of other buildings in the village. When first built the chapel was separated from the cliff top by a row of cottages, a road and a grass bank but in 1780 a major cliff fall brought the cliff edge very close to the edge of the building. A major reinforced concrete sea wall constructed in 1975, a promenade and further large retaining wall, presumed also to be 20th century, now separates the edge of the building from the sea almost 19m below the ground floor and terrace of the chapel. Most services were moved to a newer Chapel built in the upper village in 1936. Since its closure as a chapel the building has been used as a fisherman's store, an artist's studio, exhibition space and a second hand bookshop. A converted ground floor has been used as a café in its current form since 2006 when it is believed the floor of the chapel was raised to the bottom of the upper gallery.

The relatively large plan form of the building blends well with the domestic vernacular character of the surrounding properties, aided largely by the double pitched roof form which gives the building a more domestic scale. The windows to the north elevation are the original openings being two long vertical windows now bisected internally by the new raised chapel floor. Critically the ground floor windows to the south elevation, facing the sea view, appear to be later introductions as they do not have proper stone lintels as they would have had had they been the original openings. The upper parts of the south elevation are visible from the promenade and from the wave cut platform. At sea

level most of this southern elevation is visible but only from a long distance. Views of other elevations of the chapel are largely hindered by the close proximity of other properties and until recently it was known as the Secret View Café.

The site and chapel are within the Robin Hood's Bay Conservation Area, designated in 1995. The Conservation Area Management Plan makes reference to the general walling materials of the settlement, coursed sandstone and red clay pantiles. There is a section on boundaries which lists wooden picket fence and wrought iron railings as part of the character of the area. Reference is also made to the 'unfortunate' reinforced concrete sea wall which is described as "not very picturesque but necessitated *****". This is important as external views of the relevant boundaries are seen against this wall. No reference is made in the Conservation and Management Plan to the slightly higher retaining wall above the major sea wall, flanking the promenade, which must have been built at the same time, 1975. The proposed balustrading and railings sit within this wall which itself is unsympathetically faced with a random stone split faced stonework more reminiscent of suburban domestic properties of the 1960s and 70s. (This would surely have been faced with coursed stonework had it been built since the introduction of the Conservation Area in 1995)

2 ASSESSING THE SIGNIFICANCE

The chapel is a valuable asset to Robin Hoods Bay being one of only two religious buildings located within the heart of the lower village. The size of the building is non-domestic but, as noted above, the dual pitched roof allows it to blend well with other surrounding properties possessing a more domestic scale. (The roofscape of the village is part of the charm of the settlement.) Although not used as a chapel for over nine decades it has retained its original character, the only major external wall changes being on the south façade where new window openings appear to have been introduced later.

The building is a Grade II listed structure and, apart for significant internal changes and, we presume later lower fenestration on the south elevation, it retains its character.

3 DESCRIBING THE CONCEPT

The applicant wishes to change the two lengths of timber wicket fencing to the southern boundaries of the property with a simply detailed "cast iron fence" to the higher more visually prominent boundary (approximately 14m linear) and a glazed balustrade to the lower shorter boundary in front of the terrace (9m linear). Importantly the latter balustrade fronts the south elevation of the chapel. These are described in the D and A statement above.

The design for these two lengths of boundary has been chosen because a simple cast iron railing would have been more appropriate as a boundary for a 18th/19th century chapel building and the lower glazed balustrade, which includes regular "cast Iron" type posts similar to the higher level railings, allow views of the chapel from the promenade and better views out for building users.

Clearly when first built there were no railings here as a row of cottages directly faced the south face of the chapel. It is not known how these boundaries were dealt with after the landslip which took away these cottages but it is strongly felt that a timber wicket fence would not have been appropriate at that time for a proud Wesleyan Chapel of the period.

4 IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 DIRECT OR INDIRECT

The higher, longer length of railings has an INDIRECT relationship to the Chapel, its nearest point to the Chapel being 1.5m away from the building and 6m forward. The railings do not touch the building and are visually remote.

The shorter lower balustrade is 6m in front of the south wall of the chapel and the two will be seen together. However it is still considered that the relationship to the Chapel is INDIRECT as it does not meet the building and is read externally as part of the 20th sea wall random masonry of the promenade wall and not the chapel wall.

4.2 LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE

This is a Grade ii listed chapel but, in relation to this application the significance of the Chapel would be regarded as MEDIUM (Extremes would be Highly Significant to Negligible)

4.3 MAGNITUDE OF IMPACT

On a scale ranging from HIGHLY BENEFICIAL to HIGHLY ADVERSE we believe that the two separate lengths of railings would be as follows

Higher level railings – VERY BENEFICIAL to the setting of the chapel

Lower level balustrade- VERY LOW ADVERSE IMPACT to the setting of the chapel BUT significantly better than the current 'domestic' timber wicket fence.

4.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECT

Reviewing the level of significance against the magnitude of impact we conclude that overall:

the higher level railings will have a POSITIVE impact and

the lower level glazed balustrade will have a NEGLIGIBLE impact

on the setting of the heritage asset.

CONCLUSION

In overall heritage asset terms, taken together, the lower glazed balustrade and the higher "cast iron railings" will have a positive affect upon the setting of the heritage asset – the old Wesleyan Chapel.

It should also be noted that the upper railings do enhance the boundary characteristics of the Conservation Area in line with the Management Plan and also the smaller glazed balustrade, set in 1970s stonework of the promenade wall, will aid views of the sea as also listed of value in the plan.

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THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The applicant wishes to replace two sections of timber fencing, erected in 2006 when the ground floor of the chapel was converted to a café, with simple cast iron railings to the longer, higher section of fencing and a glazed balustrade to the lower, smaller section of fencing. It