

APP/B1605/W/21/3273053

Land at Oakley Farm Cheltenham

Rebuttal Proof on Heritage Matters

Prepared by:

Friends of Oakley Farm Pasture Slopes

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This rebuttal proof of evidence contests the function attributed to the Hewletts Reservoir Pavilion by the appellant in their Heritage Proof of Evidence.
- 1.2 We would also like it noted that the appellant's effective dismissal of their own Built Heritage Statement, prepared for them by RPS Group as part of their planning application, is very concerning, particularly as our Friends group relied upon the content of this document and used it as a basis for our initial argument.

2 Reservoir Pavilion

- 2.1 On behalf of the appellant, Gail Stoten has gone to some length to establish a connection between the Reservoir's Pavilion and its purported function as a valve house. Ms Stoten has attempted to make a comparison with what she considers to be similar buildings in other locations which function as such. However, the comparison made is weak as no detail or evidence is offered on the history or usage of the building at Northfield reservoir, which in any case appears to be physically larger than Hewletts Pavilion with the capacity to contain valve gear. The Northfield structure is also more industrialised and utilitarian in appearance with what appears to be "obscured glazing" for windows. It should be noted also that the Northfield structure is not a designated heritage asset.
- 2.2 The Pavilion at Hewletts is small by comparison, has clear glazed windows installed on all elevations bar one where the entrance door is fitted and there are no witness marks anywhere within or without the building that would suggest it once contained heavy valve gear.
- 2.3 Within her Proof of Evidence Ms Stoten relies heavily on references to the authoritative book, *Troubled Waters*, by David O'Connor. Clearly this is regarded as a key document in her proof as it is referenced no less than eighteen times. However, the one reference in the book that would undermine her argument is the one that appears to have been missed, that of the Pavilion's function at page 8. Here the caption accompanying an image of the Pavilion describes the building as the "decorative Custodian's office". There is nowhere in this authoritative work where the Pavilion is referred to as anything other than this.

- 2.4 Our group is still of the opinion that the Pavilion's primary function was never anything more than that of a garden folly, a gazebo or a summer-house and this is evidenced in historic newspaper articles.¹ It was used as a shelter for visiting guests to the reservoir¹ and may also have been used as the custodian's office in later years as an external telephone ringer is still visible.
- 2.5 The building would have been strategically placed within the complex with its windows on all sides bar one, enabling close quarter observation of the reservoirs and also far and wide views of the countryside to the north and east and the wide expanse of Cheltenham and its suburbs to the west. It held a commanding position for all to see. Coupled with its ornate decorative finishes it would act as a show piece for visiting dignitaries. The Pavilion, entrance gates and boundary wall were built to impress.
- 2.6 As Ms Stoten suggests, had the Pavilion been a valve house then it would have been sited for the functional purposes of controlling water. As we have shown, however, there is no evidence whatsoever to demonstrate it has ever been a valve house. In fact, its siting was to impress not only from the outside but also from within and from its veranda with its all-round views of the magnificent landscape. Therefore, the intrinsic character of the wider landscape is not incidental to its siting as was suggested by Ms Stoten but was a fundamental reason for its positioning. Its significance is not only derived from its built form but also from its positioning where the setting makes a huge contribution to its significance.

3 Impact of the Development Proposal

- 3.1 Significant built form and development infrastructure will occupy the field immediately to the west of the reservoir complex, which comprises much of the complex's setting, and will be in very close proximity to the Pavilion where it will create significant harm to the significance of this heritage asset. The views from the Pavilion towards Cheltenham will be considerably narrowed and it will lose its sense of dominance. Furthermore, once the proposed tree mitigation is established, the views to Cheltenham as a whole will be lost. This proposal will cause significant harm to the significance of this Grade II listed building.

¹ Refer to pages 4,5 and 6 below.

4 Public Opportunities

- 4.1 This reservoir complex has in the past been open to the public to enable the appreciation, not only of its architectural and engineering achievements but also its setting. Currently the complex is closed to the public but there is no reason to suppose that in the future it could not once again be opened up out of historical interest and for the enjoyment of all. The Pavilion and its current setting should therefore not be harmed and should be protected for future generations.
- 4.2 In summary, the Pavilion was built as a summer house and the greatest contribution to its significance is derived from its position. Whilst it is agreed that the development proposal will cause no harm to the physical form of the Pavilion, the harm that will be caused to its significance by development in its setting is however significant. The Pavilion is a highly sensitive heritage resource. Development and tree screening mitigation as proposed in the south-eastern field and southern section of the site will substantially alter a key element of its setting. This would result in a significance of effect of major. In the context of EIA regulations this is a significant impact.
- 4.3 Whilst the development proposal will cause less than substantial harm to a heritage asset, the harm to the Pavilion will be at the highest end of the range and the proposed mitigation and public benefits suggested by the appellant will do little to overcome this significant harm.

Extract from the Cheltenham Examiner, Wed 27 Oct 1875 where reference is made to the summer house:

– A SANITARY CONFERENCE – (*First mention of 'summerhouse'.*)

“The seventh meeting of the District Committee for the Midlands of the Association of Municipal & Sanitary Engineers & Surveyors was held in the Cheltenham Town Hall on Thursday. The objects of the Association are to promote Sanitary Improvements throughout the country, and to extend information upon subjects of interest by an interchange of ideas and experience amongst the members; ...

... The party then adjourned, and went in carriages to inspect the **Water Works, at Hewlett's Hill.** Dr Wright had arranged to give an address on the Geology of Cheltenham from this charming spot, which commands a panoramic view of the district, but the rain fell in torrents, and when they reached the ground all were glad to retreat to the **summer house.**

The Doctor there briefly pointed out the position of the Springs that supplied the reservoirs, and the way in which they had been excavated out of the middle lias, exhibiting sections of the surrounding hills. He showed from the altitude (200 feet) of the reservoir above the town how easy it would be to adopt a system of constant supply.

The party then took to their carriages, and drove to the Arle tank and proceeded to examine the works.”

M EXAMINER, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1875.

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**THE LIBERAL CANDIDATURE OF
THE BOROUGH.**

A largely-attended and representative Meeting of Liberal electors was held in the Lecture-room of the Corn Exchange, on Thursday evening, on the invitation, by circular, of Mr. W. N. Skillicorne, and was a preliminary to the formal introduction of Sir

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Cheltenham Chronicle, Sat 9 Oct 1909 – TOWN COUNCIL – Reservoir Grounds suggested opening to the public. Reference to Octagonal Summer-House (Pavilion) and the fine views of the town (our bold):

“Mr Margrett, in accordance with notice, moved “That during the summer months the reservoirs be opened to the burgesses of the borough”. He had been induced to bring forward the proposition by the number of burgesses who had informed him how greatly they would appreciate the privilege of being able to use the walks around the reservoirs. To such he had always replied that he had no power himself, as chairman of the Water Committee, to allow them the privilege to do so, but that in process of time he trusted all restrictions would be removed...

... With regard to the reservoirs at the **Hewletts**, the broad walks there were scarcely ever trodden by anyone except the caretaker. From these walks fine views were to be obtained of the town, the Severn Valley, and Cleve Hill. There was also an **octagonal summer-house** that might be used as a shelter in case of storm. What struck him was the utter selfishness of the present condition of affairs, under which these grounds were practically reserved for the use of two or three town councillors. The reservoirs were within easy distance of the town. Those at Battledown marked the limit of a favourite easy constitutional on Saturday afternoon or Sunday...

... Mr Green, who thanked Mr Margrett for his whiff of the briny, thought that all objections might be overcome by limiting the proposal for the present to the reservoirs at **Agg’s Hill**, where the natural prospect was more beautiful and varied than at Dowdeswell, and where there was a **summer-house** to retire to in case of storm. ...

... the motion was adopted.”

the wood just described might be obtained. With regard to the reservoirs at the Hewletts, the broad walks there were scarcely ever trodden by anyone except the caretaker. From these walks fine views were to be obtained of the town, the Severn Valley, and Cleve Hill. There was also an octagonal summer-house that might be used as a shelter in case of storm. What struck him was the utter selfishness of the present condition of affairs, under which these grounds were practically reserved for the use of two or three town councillors. The reservoirs were within easy distance of the town. Those at Battledown marked the limit of a favourite easy constitutional on Saturday afternoon or Sunday. The one at Dowdeswell was a little further off; but was easily reached on Shank's pony by the comparatively young and vigorous, and might

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suggested that the matter should be referred to the General Purposes Committee.
Mr. Green, who thanked Mr. Margrett for his whiff of the briny, thought that all objections might be overcome by limiting the proposal for the present to the reservoirs at Agg's Hill, where the natural prospect was more beautiful and varied than at Dowdeswell, and where there was a summer-house to retire to in case of storm.
The Mayor suggested that Mr. Margrett should so alter his resolution as to permit the question being referred to the General Purposes Committee.
Mr. Hayward, in view of the legal questions that might arise as to the public use of the ground at Dowdeswell, suggested that the matter should be deferred until a committee had gone into the pros and cons, and presented a report with definite recommendations as to the days of opening, regulations, etc. He moved an amendment that it should be

Extract from minutes of the Water Committee meeting held 27th January 1910 - Admission of the public to Hewletts Reservoir:

“2—Admission of Public to Dowdeswell and Hewletts—The resolution of the Council referring it to this Committee to consider as to the advisability of admitting the Public to the Dowdeswell and Hewletts reservoir grounds during the Summer months was considered. Resolved, That the Committee recommend the Council to throw the grounds open to the public on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, from 2 p.m. to sunset, from the 1st May to the 30th September inclusive, children under 16 years of age not to be admitted unless accompanied by adults, the Borough Engineer to submit for the approval of the Committee any further regulations he considers necessary.”