



Catherine Bell, acting listed buildings caseworker for England at the Council for British Archaeology, presents examples from the council's files

51. Lowestoft Post Office



GOOGLE MAPS/HUDSON ARCHITECTS

Main picture: Lowestoft Post Office, built in the early 1880s and heightened in 1909, is a good example of a Renaissance-style civic building, with a fine limestone front. The curtilage (below) contains a sorting office and other structures



Proposals for 51 London Road North, Lowestoft echo those seen across the country. The dilapidated, grade 2 listed buildings are redundant, and their future can be secured only with appropriate adaptation to a new use. There is a large brownfield curtilage to the rear ripe for residential redevelopment. And the site's associations contribute strongly to Lowestoft's identity and heritage

Lowestoft Post Office was an early purpose-built development, following the arrival of a railway connection: it is a physical representation of the town's Victorian expansion and prosperity, and many residents and seaside visitors will have used it. The site's history is clear from later ranges that were added between 1873 and the later 20th century. The quality of these buildings varies, but together they have high historical and evidential value of the Post Office's growing and changing role in enabling fast and widespread communication.

The Council for British Archaeology (CBA) is broadly supportive of alterations to the site for residential and commercial uses. However, we have objected to planning applications for both listed building and full consent.

We know that adaptive re-use of listed buildings and sites that contribute to a place's identity, is best achieved through minimising harm to their significance. To achieve this while maximising potential public benefit, the CBA has recommended an approach which is more heritage led and encourages public participation.

We believe that this application, coupled with the imminent Heritage Action Zone in Lowestoft, presents a fantastic opportunity for heritage-led place shaping by the local community. Linking creative projects to the process of re-using redundant sites can strengthen a positive sense of identity with a place, along with a sense of community, ownership and empowerment. Creative place-shaping strategies around heritage and identity have been explored within Heritage Action Zones across the country. The Post Office site is owned by the local authority, which should remove many common obstacles to pursuing this approach.

Our advice to the local planning authority includes a proactive and inclusive strategy. It should be dynamic, allowing for creative responses to the

archaeology and heritage found, and should facilitate interaction with the archaeology to shape peoples' association with the site, giving it depth and meaning to the local community. The CBA fundamentally believes that archaeology, at its best, is not stored in a catalogued box but used to create connections between people and place. In this way archaeological strategies can move beyond mitigation and into creating genuine social value, meaningful impacts and lasting legacies.

The communal value of this once public building could be explored and enjoyed prior to its conversion to a new use, in a way that recognises local character and distinctiveness. Any permitted demolition and preparation for subsequent ground works offer a chance for community groups to investigate buried archaeology relating to the historic settlement of Lowestoft.

Purpose-built Post Office buildings, which are being decommissioned and sold off across the country, hold considerable significance in terms of their communal value and contribution towards 19th- and 20th-century social history. We'd love to hear about your local post office. Drop us a line! ■