

Southampton's Old Steam Mill Set For Restoration - 13/7/2010



A team of planning & flood risk consultants including WYG and Savills have assisted Dorepark Ltd, a company that specialises in regenerating distressed historic buildings, to gain permission for one of Southampton's most historic buildings to be restored and converted into offices and flats.

The Grade II* American Wharf building is an 'at risk' listed building but has now achieved full planning permission and listed building consent for restoration from the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government.

The planning proposal from Dorepark Ltd is to sensitively convert the building into six B1 commercial (office) units on the ground floor and 23 residential flats on the upper floors with associated car parking and facilities.

Justin Whitfield, Managing Director of Dorepark, said: "This was a wholly collaborative process which involved working closely with Southampton City Council planning, conservation and city development teams, alongside English Heritage, our planning and flood risk consultants, WYG, Savills and Opus International and the design team led by Roger Hill Architects.

"We would like to acknowledge the clear advice and professional guidance provided to us by Southampton City Council and English Heritage which was invaluable in assisting us to produce a proposal for this important building which was acceptable to the Secretary of State. I am personally very pleased to have been involved in a venture which stemmed from our common need to secure the future of American Wharf and which I have found to be wholly constructive in its process," he added.

WYG has been involved in the proposal from the beginning, ensuring that the historic integrity of the building is preserved.

Jeremy Heppell, Associate Director from WYG, said: "This is fantastic news for the City of Southampton. It guarantees the future of this nationally significant Grade II* listed building, without the need for public funds. The sensitive design solution follows detailed discussions with English Heritage, and will ensure that American Wharf continues to be a landmark on the river front."

Southampton City Council has been supportive of the proposals, but the application was called in for decision by the Secretary of State because the building lies in a flood risk area. WYG provided expert evidence at the subsequent inquiry, following which the Secretary of State confirmed the council's decision and granted planning permission on 12 July 2010.

The decision made by the Secretary of State balanced the heritage benefits of securing the future of the building against conflicts with PPS25 and the Development Plan for the Southampton City Council area in relation to flood risk. Having taken into account the heritage benefits of the proposal, in accordance with development plan proposals for enhancing important historic assets and supported by PPS5, he considered that those benefits outweighed the conflict with the development plan and national flooding policy. In coming to this decision, he had also taken account of the fact that the scheme provided only open-market housing, so that those choosing to live there would have an opportunity to make their own assessment of the risks and benefits involved.

The building dates from 1781 and is of national significance due to its historic associations with the American War of Independence. It is on the English Heritage 'at risk' register owing to its deteriorating condition.

Originally it was a steam mill and bakehouse, supplying ship's biscuits for the Royal Navy during the American War of Independence, and was pioneering in its use of steam power.