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Heritage Report

The Old School House, 25 Glebe Road, The Weald

Report prepared by Chilcroft Heritage Planning
July 2021



Corporate members of:
The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
Historic Houses Association
The Georgian Group



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1) INTRODUCTION

- 1.1) I am Haig Dalton, founder of Chilcroft Heritage Planning, an established independent heritage consultancy since 2012. In the 3 years before this, I was a local planning authority Design and Conservation Officer, within development control departments. I have worked on a wide range of projects throughout the United Kingdom, predominantly (but not exclusively) for private sector clients.
- 1.2) I hold a masters degree in Historic Building Conservation (MSc); a postgraduate qualification in Architectural History from the University of Oxford (Oxon); I am an Affiliate member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC).
- 1.3) Over the last 17 years I have specialised in the historic environment, both in terms of understanding and analysing physical fabric, and in terms of policy application, specifically by assessing impacts, providing advice and supporting development proposals. My experience includes a diverse range of cases relating to the assessment of physical changes to, and development affecting all manner of heritage assets, and their settings.
- 1.4) I have undertaken numerous impact assessments where I have considered the impacts of new development on the historic environment (dealing with physical impacts, setting, townscape, views and inter-visibility), including dealing with the effects of development on heritage assets in urban settlements.
- 1.5) I have provided expert written evidence for planning applications and appeals, including public inquiries, on behalf of both appellants and local planning authorities.

- 1.6) I understand my role in compiling this Heritage Report; to give independent and objective evidence on matters within my expertise, based on my own independent opinion and uninfluenced by the instructing party; the applicant. I confirm that I have stated the facts and matters on which my opinion is based, and that I have not omitted to mention facts or matters that could detract from my conclusions.
- 1.7) I believe that the facts stated within this Heritage Report are true and that the opinions expressed are correct. I have drawn attention to any matters where I consider I lack sufficient information to reach anything other than a provisional conclusion. I have adhered to the standards and duties of the professional bodies I am a member of, and will continue to adhere to those standards and duties.
- 1.8) I was first approached in relation to the proposal in March 2021, when I was asked to provide a heritage report in relation to the planning application on behalf the applicant. My quote was based on several stages/elements, the first of which was an initial case review, including a site visit during April 2021. At my site visit there was still some permeability to the deciduous trees, and I was able to form an impression of the extent of permeability in leafless conditions. I confirm that I am able to act as the applicant's heritage expert following this initial work and a site visit.
- 1.9) As an independent expert professional, I have formed my own opinions and have come to my own conclusions about the effects of the proposed development on heritage assets.
- 1.10) I have included in my heritage report photos taken on my original site visit. The photos were taken with a compact digital camera and they have not been digitally altered, aside from cropping superfluous areas of sky and/or foreground. This visual assessment is intended to be informative, but it is not intended to be exhaustive.

1.11) This report will describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by the setting, as required by Para.189 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (2019). It will assess the significance of the heritage assets by way of Historic England guidance *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2015) in accordance with their preferred five-step procedure, identify, assess and explore the significance of their setting and consider the applicant's scheme in relation to them.

2) LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY

- 2.1) Legislation relating to listed buildings and conservation areas is contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Sections 16 and 66 of the Act place a duty on the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their settings.
- 2.2) Section 72 of the Act places similar duty on the decision maker with respect to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas, however this does not extend to the setting of conservation areas.
- 2.3) The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** constitutes the Government's current national guidance and policy regarding development in the historic environment. It is a material consideration and includes a succinct policy framework for local planning authorities and decision takers. It relates to planning law by stating that applications are to be determined in accordance with the local plans unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 2.4) Paragraphs 189 to 192 of the NPPF deal with conserving and enhancing the historic environment with emphasis on "significance", defined in Annex 2 as:

"The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. For World Heritage Sites, the cultural value described within each site's Statement of Outstanding Universal Value forms part of its significance"

- 2.5) Annex 2 of the NPPF defines the setting of a heritage asset as:

"The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral"

- 2.6) Paragraph 189 of the NPPF places a duty on the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal, providing a proportionate level of detail. The effects of any development on a heritage asset therefore need to be assessed against the four components of its heritage significance: its archaeological, architectural, artistic and historic interests.
- 2.7) Paragraph 190 of the NPPF notes that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.
- 2.8) Paragraph 193 applies specifically to designated heritage assets. It states that great weight should be given to their conservation (requiring a proportionate approach) irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial or less than substantial harm.
- 2.9) Conservation (for heritage policy) is defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF as:
- “The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance”*
- 2.10) The importance and relevance of this definition is that it does not suggest conservation to be the same as preservation. Indeed, what sets conservation apart is the emphasis on proactively maintaining and managing change and not on a reactive approach to resisting change. In its simplest interpretation conservation could amount to a change that at least sustains the significance of a heritage asset.

- 2.11) Paragraphs 194 to 196 describe two levels of potential harm that can be caused to the significance of designated heritage assets, namely substantial harm and less than substantial harm. These effects are to be weighed in the planning balance according to the guidance set out within paragraphs the paragraphs, bearing in mind the statutory provisions above. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, including grade I and II* listed buildings should be wholly exceptional.
- 2.12) Paragraph 196 deals with cases of less than substantial harm and notes that any such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Heritage protection and the conservation of heritage assets are recognised as of benefit to the public.
- 2.13) Harm is defined by Historic England as a change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.
- 2.14) Paragraph 200 of the NPPF notes that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.
- 2.15) **The National Planning Practice Guidance** provides advice on enhancing and conserving the historic environment in accordance with the NPPF. The PPG currently relates to the 2012 version of the NPPF but will be updated in due course to reflect NPPF 2019.
- 2.16) With regards to the setting of heritage assets the PPG notes:

“The setting is the surroundings in which an asset is experienced, and may therefore be more extensive than its curtilage.”

2.17) The guidance notes that a thorough assessment of the impact on setting needs to take into account, and be proportionate to, the significance of the heritage asset and the degree to which proposed changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it.

2.18) In relation to harm the guidance states:

“Whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision taker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. In general terms, substantial harm is a high test, so it may not arise in many cases. For example, in determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key element of its special architectural or historic interest. It is the degree of harm to the asset’s significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed. The harm may arise from works to the asset or from development within its setting.”

2.19) Paragraph 020 of the document notes that public benefits can be heritage based and can include:

- Sustaining or enhancing the significance and the contribution of its setting;
- Reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset; and
- Securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset for the long term.

2.20) The **Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning** Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2017) is a document published by Historic England as a second edition in December 2017, replacing the earlier 2015 setting guidance. The document provides for a thorough understanding of the setting of a heritage asset and the relationship of the setting to curtilage, character and context.

2.21) The guidance document notes, in paragraph 18, that the protection of the setting of heritage assets need not prevent change. The document recognises that not all heritage assets are of equal importance and states that the contribution made by their setting to their significance will also vary. Not all settings have the same capacity to accommodate change without causing harm to the significance of the asset.

2.22) As per earlier Historic England guidance, the document advocates a stepped approach to assessing the impact of change within setting on the significance of heritage assets. This stepped approach is:

Step 1: identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected;

Step 2: assess whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s);

Step 3: assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance;

Step 4: explore the way to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm; and

Step 5: make and document the decision and monitor outcomes.

2.23) Guidance under Step 2 notes that the asset's physical surroundings and how the asset is experienced (such as views, noise, tranquillity, sense of enclosure etc.) should be taken in to consideration.

2.24) Step 3 is also important in making it clear that a proposed development should not be assessed in terms of its impact on setting; instead it should be assessed in terms of the impacts on significance. That is to say, what matters is not the extent of visibility of the development or change to the setting of an asset, but the extent of change to its archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interest. In some circumstances, this evaluation may need to extend to cumulative and complex impacts which may have as great an effect on heritage

assets as large-scale development and which may not only be visual. At the very least the assessment should address the key attributes of the development in terms of its location and siting, form and appearance, additional effects and permanence.

- 2.25) Paragraph 39 notes that options for reducing the harm arising from development may include the relocation of elements of a development or changes to its design. It notes that good design may reduce or remove the harm.
- 2.26) **Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** requires great weight to be given to preserving the setting of a heritage asset. In *Jones v Mordue [2015] EWCA Civ 1243* the court confirmed that if the decision-maker has worked through the relevant heritage paragraphs in the NPPF, they will have complied with the s66 duty.
- 2.27) In *Barnwell Manor [2014] EWCA Civ 137* the court confirmed that great weight should be attached to the desirability of preserving the setting of a heritage asset.

3) ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 3.1) The Old School House, otherwise known as 25 Glebe Road, is a mid-19th Century building of the Victorian period. As the name suggests, it was formerly the local school house and is situated between two flanking Almshouses on either side, that comprise a group. It is located to the east side of Glebe Road and outside of the Sevenoaks Weald Conservation Area.
- 3.2) The Old School House is a Grade II listed building (**List No. 1243534**) and consists of a one storey symmetrical building, with a central high gable and attic. The side wings have low pitched slate roofs with two stone chimney stacks at the centre. The building is galleted with roughly course rubble, freestone quoins and dressings, set on a stone base with lancet casement windows and stone mullions. The windows exude slender lead glazing bars with arched tops and a central stone porch with coat of arms above and a timber plank door (**see Fig 3**). To the sides, there are matching stone arched entrances between it and the adjacent Almshouses, providing passageways to the rear curtilage space.
- 3.3) The principal significance of the listed building extends to its symmetry and originality, remaining largely unchanged throughout with few alternations. The building has never been directly extended, save for curtilage outbuildings. The most notable external alteration is the insertion of a first floor casement window in the rear elevation of the building (**see Fig 2**), believed to date from the 1950's, before the building was listed. It is an unsympathetic change and one that is at odds with maintaining the symmetry of the rear elevation of the building. Any proposals here should therefore seek to reinstate a sense of symmetry, that will accord with the overall significance of the listed building.
- 3.4) Although the development proposals do not propose any changes to the interior of the building, the author of this report has carried out an assessment as part of understanding the overall significance of the listed building. The floorplan throughout the building remains almost entirely unchanged, particularly on the ground floor where all of the principal rooms, layouts and doorways remain true to the original 19th Century building. This contributes to the buildings overall significance.

- 3.5) Whilst the frontage of the building remains unchanged from the aspect of Glebe Road (see **Fig 1**), the curtilage space to the rear has evolved and changed as part of the listed buildings transition from a school into a dwelling. The most notable changes are those of the curtilage outbuildings, including a garage and timber outbuilding. The existing garage to the far north-east of the curtilage consists of a concrete breeze-block made building, with brick lined internal walls and a timber frame roof. It has wooden doors to the front (see **Fig 7**) and metal casement windows to the rear (see **Fig 8**). Although at first glance, the timber entrance doors appear to have some age to them, the construction of the garage itself is very clearly from the late 20th Century and the doors have simply been recycled. The existing garage is of no historic value to the site of the listed building, both historically or in historic fabric terms and is therefore capable of improvement. Likewise the smaller timber outbuilding (see **Fig 5 and 6**) is from the late 20th Century and consists of a timber framed building, clad in timber with a tiled roof. It too is of no historic connection or historic fabric value to the setting of the listed building and could be replaced.
- 3.6) The setting of The Old School House shares its setting with a number of other heritage assets, albeit it is not within the Sevenoaks Weald Conservation Area. The Almshouses that sit to each side of the listed building hold group value with the listed building, as identified in the listing description of the building. The Almshouses contribute to the streetscape of Glebe Road and the historic setting of which The Old School House forms a part. This significance is greatest when viewed from the frontage of the listed building and from Glebe Road itself (see **Fig 4**). From the rear curtilage setting of the listed buildings, the Almshouses play a peripheral and yet important broader awareness, which is more attributed to their flanking presence alongside the listed building than anything else. This is emphasised by the fact that The Old School House and its curtilage make up the rearmost space behind the Almshouses themselves and that the Almshouses and their settings do not contribute by way of a rearmost curtilage space of their own. This is particularly evident in the case of the northernmost Almshouse, which is surrounded by the existing curtilage of The Old School House, including that of its driveway entrance from Glebe Road as well as the existing garage that sits directly behind it.



Fig 1: The Old School House is a Grade II listed building and displays a strong sense of symmetry, most notably its front elevation as shown here from Glebe Road. It has two arched stone entrances to each side.

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Fig 2: The rear elevation would see a single storey extension added, to sit between the side wings of the building and would be entirely symmetrical, made of a timber frame in a traditional vernacular style.

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Fig 3: The Grade II listed building dates from the mid-19th Century and uses galleted roughly coursed rubble with stone quoins, a gable end central attic and porch with two low pitched hipped side wings topped in slate.

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Fig 4: The listed building is flanked by a pair of Almshouses, which together with The Old School House, contribute to the streetscape and their setting albeit, it is not within the Sevenoaks Weald Conservation Area.

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Fig 5: The smaller of the two existing outbuildings dates from the late 20th Century and is not of any significance to the setting of the listed building or has any historic fabric value of its own.

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Fig 6: "The Old Outbuilding" dates from the late 20th Century and would be replaced as part of the proposals along with the existing garage, by a traditionally designed building that would better enhance the setting.

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Fig 7: The existing garage consists of a building built of concrete breeze-blocks and dates from the late 20th Century. Although the front timber doors appear traditional, they have been previously recycled.

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Fig 8: The existing garage is a modern building built of concrete breeze-blocks, metal casement windows and a timber framed roof. It is of no significance to the setting of the listed building and can be replaced.

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4) IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 4.1) Whilst the living arrangements of an owner cannot be a primary consideration in the case of a listed building, they will undoubtedly feature in any residential improvements and done sympathetically, can also preserve or enhance the significance of a heritage asset. Chilcroft Heritage Planning has worked closely with the applicant to facilitate this and ensure that the listed building and its setting, remains the primary consideration.
- 4.2) The proposal will seek to extend the building to the rear with the creation of an orangery style extension. In addition, the existing two outbuildings will be removed and replaced by a single outbuilding of a traditional style. The extension to the main dwelling would be sighted on the rear elevation of the building and be centrally placed between the two existing wings of the building, to keep the overall symmetry of the listed building. The proposed extension would be single storey and would be balanced in size to meet with the proportions of the existing side wings, extending by the same measurement from the rearmost wall of the side wings as the width of each wing themselves. In so doing, this not only maximises the internal space of the extension but also purports to the existing historic proportions of the listed building itself.
- 4.3) The overall height of the proposed extension would sit comfortably between the existing ground and first floors of the building, allowing the first floor central window to remain the focal point within the stone gable. A simple lantern would sit atop the extension to provide natural daylight and be of a traditional style that is commensurate with the overall style of the extension and main dwelling. Although the building dates from the Victorian period, the early Victorian period continued to use many carryovers of design from the Georgian period and this can be seen in many of the broader elements of the design of the listed building. The proposed extension will attempt to adopt this with a tradition timber framed construction, set on a stone base, with glazing bars designed to emulate the lancet windows of the existing historic building. The proposed extension has been designed to sit harmoniously with the existing profile and materials of the listed building and to enhance it overall.

- 4.4) The proposed extension is capable of being realised without the need to harm the listed buildings historic fabric and would be achieved as an extension to rather than an alternation to the building and its existing structure. The essential elements that make up the listed buildings core significance, including its windows, stonework, doorway and symmetry would all be respected by the proposal and left unchanged. Access to the proposed extension would be via the existing rear door leading off the kitchen and the historic floorplan of the listed building would also be respected. The proposed extension, although of a traditional style, material form and appearance, would still be capable of being clearly read as a later extension and is a reversible intervention, in accordance with Historic England guidance.
- 4.5) The removal of the existing outbuildings within the curtilage of the listed building are broadly welcomed and offer the opportunity to be improved upon. The proposals seek to replace this with a single outbuilding to provide garaging and ancillary use to the main dwelling. The proposed building would be single storey and consist of a low pitched hipped slate roof, to match the listed building, ensuring that the overall height and profile would remain subservient to that of the listed building itself. It would be of a traditional style, built on a stone base with timber weather boarding, timber casement windows and timber planked garage doors. Although a sizable building in its own right, the timber finish and orientation of the building would still allow for the building to read as subservient to the more substantial and prominent building of the listed building itself and the design of the proposed outbuilding has been carefully worked up with this in mind.
- 4.6) The proposed extension and replacement outbuilding would both be centred on the curtilage to the rear of the listed building and would not be visible from Glebe Road. The group value of the Almshouses to the listed building would remain unchanged, with no loss of significance to their setting.
- 4.7) The existing metal gates under the archways to the side of the building date from the late 20th Century and do not constitute historic fabric. The proposal would replace these with timber plank gates, to match the style of the front door of the listed building, better preserving the significance of the building.

5) SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

- 5.1) The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 contains a statutory duty to give considerable importance and great weight to the desirability of preserving the setting of a listed building in the planning balance. Preserving means to do no harm.
- 5.2) The NPPF lays down an approach that corresponds with the statutory duty of the 1990 Act. In cases where harm occurs, the NPPF requires balancing the benefits of a proposal against harm resulting from it.
- 5.3) The Sevenoaks District Council's adopted Development Plan policies require development proposals to conserve heritage assets (such as listed buildings), and their settings.
- 5.4) The guidance in Historic England's GPA3 provides a framework for considering and assessing effects on the setting of heritage assets.

Conclusions

- 5.5) The proposal would not result in any loss of historic fabric to the listed building as a result of the proposals. The proposals would respect the existing structure of The Old School House and the elements that comprise its significance, as identified in this Assessment of Significance.
- 5.6) The heritage report has carefully considered the implications of the proposals upon the setting The Old School House and the group value heritage assets of the adjacent Almshouses. The proposed extension and replacement outbuilding would not harm the setting of these heritage assets and is considered to have a neutral impact upon the Almshouses, whilst being capable of enhancing the immediate setting of the listed building of The Old School House itself. This conclusion is based upon Historic England guidance *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2017).

- 5.7) The design of the proposed extension to the dwelling has been carefully drawn out around the significance of the listed building and its historic fabric. The design would be centred on the rear elevation, between the existing wings of the building and be single storey, so as to leave the principal central first floor attic gable as the focal point. The proposed design would enhance the overall symmetry of the dwelling that is so core to the significance of this listed building and reinforce this perception through the quality of its design. It is a design that would not compete with the significance of the existing historic building but would rather pay homage to it and allow for views from it and through it to still be enjoyed. Overall the proposed extension is capable of enhancing the significance of the listed building and how it is appreciated.
- 5.8) The proposed replacement outbuilding would improve upon the existing two poor quality outbuildings that make no contribution to the significance of the listed building or its setting. The proposal would replace these with a single building of notably higher quality and one that has been designed to sit harmoniously within the setting, whilst remaining subservient to the host building of the listed building itself. The proposed building by virtue of its design and material finish would represent a significant improvement over and above the existing outbuildings and is capable of enhancing the overall setting of the listed building as a whole.
- 5.9) The proposal would improve upon the existing modern gates found at the side of the listed building and replace these with timber planked gates to match the style of the historic front door to the dwelling. Not only would these replacement gates afford better security and privacy, the proposal would not result in any loss of historic fabric and the proposed design is reflective of a historic door style already found at the listed building.
- 5.10) The design proposal has been lead from the outset by a detailed heritage assessment, as outlined in this report, to ensure that the heritage assets and their settings remain pre-eminent and that the needs of the applicant are formed around this, rather than being the primary consideration. This is approach is informed by IHBC best practice.

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