



Heritage Assessment

The Old Vicarage,
High Street,
Sevenoaks

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HCUK Group is a multi-disciplinary environmental practice offering expert advice in archaeology, heritage, landscape, arboriculture, and planning. It began life in 2010 as Heritage Collective LLP, before becoming Heritage Collective UK Limited in 2014. In the coming years diversification saw the addition of Archaeology Collective, Landscape Collective and Planning Collective, before all strands came together to be branded under a single umbrella: HCUK Group, based on the acronym for the original company. A home working company since the beginning, we are pleased to employ a talented workforce of consultants and support staff, who are on hand to advise our clients.



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1. Introduction

- 1.1** This Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared by Dr Jonathan Edis, Director of HCUK Group, on behalf of Mr and Mrs Goddard, the owners of The Old Vicarage, a detached grade II listed building with early 18th century origins within Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area. The Old Vicarage and its garden stand to the north of the Church of St Nicholas, which dates in part from the medieval period and which is listed grade II*. The churchyard is separated from the garden of The Old Vicarage by a narrow lane.
- 1.2** Pre-application discussions have taken place with Sevenoaks District Council. I attended virtual meetings on 16 February 2021 and 9 March 2021 which were based on information supplied by HCUK Group and a Pre-Application Planning, Design and Access Statement, and proposed drawing pack, which were produced by Studio Hudson of Tunbridge Wells. My assessment was based on a site visit on 3 December 2020. Photographs from that site visit are contained in the figures at the end of this report. This assessment should be read in conjunction with the structural report by TSC Consulting Engineers Limited, which confirms that there are no structural implications that would harm the special interest of the building.
- 1.3** Mr and Mrs Goddard have significantly scaled back their proposals following the Council's pre-application responses, including a letter dated 16 March 2021 (PA/21/00014). It is now proposed to undertake minor internal works, to provide a new flat rooflight to the larder, and to install replacement metal gates.
- 1.4** My observations on the effect of the proposals are based on experience of more than three decades during which I have advised on change affecting listed buildings and conservation areas. For the first decade I was a conservation officer working for Bedfordshire County Council, for the second decade I was Director and Head of Historic Buildings at CgMs Limited (now absorbed into RPS) and for the past decade I have been a Director of HCUK Group.
- 1.5** In my view, the proposal is based on sound architectural principles, is reasonable, and will preserve what is significant in The Old Vicarage and its surroundings.

2. Relevant Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1** The Council is required by sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building and its setting when exercising planning functions. The Council must give considerable importance and weight to the desirability of preserving the significance of the listed building, and there is a strong presumption against the grant of permission for development that would harm its heritage significance.¹
- 2.2** There is a broadly similar duty arising from section 72(1) of the Act in respect of planning decisions relating to development within conservation areas.
- 2.3** For the purposes of this statement, preservation equates to an absence of harm.² Harm is defined in paragraph 84 of Historic England's Conservation Principles as change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.³
- 2.4** The significance of a heritage asset is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as being made up of four main constituents: architectural interest, historical interest, archaeological interest and artistic interest. The assessments of heritage significance and impact are normally made with primary reference to the four main elements of significance identified in the NPPF.
- 2.5** The setting of a heritage asset can contribute to its significance. Setting is defined in the NPPF as follows:
- "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** Setting is relevant to this assessment insofar as minor works are proposed in the grounds of the listed building. For present purposes I do no more than refer the

¹ Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Limited v East Northamptonshire District Council and others [2014] EWCA Civ 137.

² South Lakeland v SSE [1992] 2 AC 141.

³ Conservation Principles, 2008, paragraph 84.

Council to Historic England’s guidance on setting in GPA3, a document with which officers will be familiar.

2.7 The NPPF requires the impact on the significance of the designated heritage asset to be considered in terms of either “substantial harm” or “less than substantial harm” as described within paragraphs 195 and 196 of that document. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) makes it clear that substantial harm is a high test, and case law describes substantial harm in terms of an effect that would vitiate or drain away much of the significance of a heritage asset.⁴

2.8 Paragraphs 195 and 196 of the NPPF refer to two different balancing exercises in which harm to significance, if any, is to be balanced with public benefit. Paragraphs 193 and 194 of the NPPF state that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset when considering applications that affect its significance, irrespective of how substantial or otherwise that harm might be.

2.9 This assessment has regard to local heritage-related planning policy and to the Council’s appraisal and management plan of Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area dated 2008.

⁴ Bedford Borough Council v SSCLG and Nuon UK Limited [2013] EWHC 4344 (Admin).

3. Statement of Significance

Introduction

3.1 This chapter of the assessment establishes the heritage significance of The Old Vicarage, with reference to the components of significance identified in the NPPF – that is, architectural interest, historic interest, archaeological interest and artistic interest. The building was first listed on 13 April 1951, and it is officially described as follows:

"Early C18. 3-window facade. 2 storeys. Stucco with stucco plinth. Modillioned cornice, eaves and gutter. Ridge tile roof. End stacks. 2 hipped tiled dormers containing casements. Centre panelled door with rectangular fanlight over Gothic leaded tracery. Pilasters on either side of door with grooved rustication supporting entablature with grooved voussoir lines and flat projecting moulded hood over. Sash windows in exposed frames with glazing bars. Projecting one-storey rendered additions to right."

3.2 Sales particulars dated August 1939 contain a photograph of The Old Vicarage showing a significant two storey extension projecting forward as far as the pavement edge (Figure 3). This extension had clearly been demolished by the date of listing in 1951, but it appears on a plan dating to the 1940s, which has been used as the basis of a phasing plan to indicate how the building may have developed from the early 18th century to the mid-20th century (Figure 1).

3.3 In essence, the core part of the building, including the stair tower at the back (west) seems to date from about 1720 (Figures 1). There was a detached coach house to the north, apparently of a similar date, set at an angle. An extension was added on the north side of the Vicarage, possibly in the late 18th century, and at any rate by the time of the glebe survey of 1816 (Figure 2). This extension may have been single storey; the flat-roofed first floor element over the top was probably a 20th century addition. It is thought that the large extension at the front, demolished c.1950, was added around 1820. This extension probably joined the Vicarage to the coach house, and (although the extension itself was later removed)

led incrementally to the removal of much of the ground floor structure of the coach house.

3.4 Photographs of the main elevations appear in Figures 4 to 9.

Architectural interest

3.5 The Old Vicarage dates from the early 18th century, built in a vernacular style with early Georgian elevations seeking to display a generally Classical appearance, at least on the eastern façade facing High Street. The building does not fall exactly into any particular architectural style, and was almost certainly the work of local masons, bricklayers and carpenters. The timber roof structure is of staggered butt-purlin type, c.1720 (Figure 11). An apparently original stair tower rises the full height of the building at the rear, containing a fine staircase (Figure 10). The former coach house, though, has been altered to the point where it cannot be regarded as being of special interest in its own right.

3.6 It is self-evident that The Old Vicarage is a building of special architectural interest.

Historical interest

3.7 There is clearly a strong historical relationship between The Old Vicarage and the adjacent Church of St Nicholas, and the building has a longstanding relationship with High Street. It is a cherished and familiar part of the streetscene, albeit the appearance of the building has radically changed within living memory through the demolition of the 19th century front extension. Nevertheless, the building is clearly of special historical interest.

Archaeological interest

3.8 Archaeologically, the building has a relatively simple phasing sequence (Figure 1). The most interesting part of the building, in terms of fabric, is the butt-purlin roof, albeit not wholly visible in its presently ceiled form (Figure 11).

Artistic interest

3.9 There is an inherent degree of artistic interest in the architecture of the building as a whole, but the principal feature of note is the carefully crafted staircase in the tower at the rear, which has a particularly fine (yet plain) handrail (Figure 10).

Setting, character and appearance

3.10 The Old Vicarage is set within a spacious garden, which has an obvious relationship with the church and churchyard to the south. The front garden is not deep, but it is protected and separated from the pavement by a low wall and railings, giving the building an air of authority in the streetscene. The Old Vicarage makes an important contribution to the character and appearance of Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area.

Summary of significance

3.11 The Old Vicarage is an important building, central to the functioning of the parish church, and at the heart of communal life in Sevenoaks for centuries. It is aesthetically pleasing to look at, and it has a full-height stair turret on the rear elevation, which is relatively rare (Figure 8). The staircase itself is of a fine quality (Figure 10). Much of the interior is plain, and has been altered in detail, but parts of the original floor plan remain and there is a well preserved roof structure of staggered butt-purlin type (Figure 11). The Old Vicarage is essentially a vernacular building with an early Georgian Classical-style frontage, and it is evidently of special architectural and historic interest. The building makes an important contribution to the character and appearance of Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area.

4. Heritage Impact Assessment

Introduction

4.1 This chapter of the assessment describes the impact of the proposed alterations, and it should be read in close conjunction with the Design and Access Statement and proposed drawings prepared by Studio Hudson. For ease of description, and because most of the proposed works are internal each floor is taken in turn, starting at the top of the building and working down.

Proposed second floor plan

4.2 It is proposed to remove modern plaster ceilings on the second floor so that the roof structure can be exposed to the apex of the ridge, as was originally the case in the 18th century. There is clear evidence that the present ceilings are later additions (Figure 12). It is also proposed to create a shower room will be created within the landing area at second floor level. Pre-application advice from the Council was as follows:

"The proposed shower room on second floor would likely to be considered acceptable. Services need to be reversible and floorboards should not be cut into to run services. The installation of services would need to be carefully routed to make sure they wouldn't damage any important features or structure, and they should be reversible. If new pipes and cabling are to be run under floorboards, then care would need to be taken lifting old boards and beams should not be cut into. It is not known whether any strengthening works would be require to take the extra load.

It is proposed to remove the existing ceiling of the attic bedroom ceiling to be and vaulted to full height with new internal fanlight. The Heritage Statement explains that the ceilings are modern and there is evidence that rooms at this level historically had vaulted ceilings (with reference to lath and plaster). A full application would need to demonstrate evidence of lath and plaster in the attic and the historic roof structure should not be altered."

4.3 Taking these points in turn, there should be no need to cut into historic fabric (floorboards, beams) because the floor will be locally built up in order to

accommodate level access to the new shower room. Therefore, there should be no physical impact on historic fabric arising from the creation of the shower room.

- 4.4** Regarding the evidence of the original plaster ceiling to the apex of the roof, Figure 12 shows traces of nails for the laths on the soffits of the common rafters. There is no proposal to alter the historic roof structure, which will be left in place. The fabric to be removed is a later alteration.

External changes

- 4.5** It is proposed to remove a small area of high level flat roof at the rear of the listed building and to alter this to a monopitch, thereby improving the appearance of the Old Vicarage. The Council's view of this proposal, during pre-application discussions, was as follows:

"The proposed catslide roof to rear extension would be on a later extension to the rear elevation; this small intervention is likely to be considered acceptable in principle subject to matching materials and detailing."

- 4.6** On this basis, it would seem that there is no objection to the improvement of the appearance of the rear elevation.

- 4.7** A new skylight is proposed over the larder compartment of the forward projection of the kitchen, dating to the mid-20th century. This will be hidden behind a parapet, and will not affect the special interest of the listed building.

Gates

- 4.8** Metal gates are proposed for the southern entrance into the garden, off the lane beside the churchyard. These will restore (but not replicate) metal gates for which there is certain photographic evidence in the past (Figure 16). The return to the original character will be a material improvement, given that metal gates are historically appropriate for this particular opening. They will be more in context with the character of the adjacent churchyard, and will be better suited than the inappropriate timber five bar gate currently in position, which appears to be too wide for the opening (Figure 15). The Council's view on the matter during pre-application discussions was as follows:

"It is proposed to replace the existing timber five-bar gate with a black painted metal double gate. The Heritage Statement provides a historic photograph showing a simply detailed metal gate. This proposal would be considered appropriate. A metal gate should be of restrained design (informed by the historic photograph and historic metalwork to nearby properties), have slender proportions to reflect ironwork to the front of the Old Vicarage and to neighbouring properties, and be painted black (i.e. with no gilt detail). The proposed design could be acceptable; care must be taken that the design does not appear suburban in style."

- 4.9** Notwithstanding the Council's comments about the relative suitability of (1) the historic photograph of the gate and (2) the proposed design, it is submitted that the proposed design is acceptable.

Summary of effects

- 4.10** The proposed alterations to the listed building are minor, and constitute improvements to its character, fabric, use and viability which are in the public interest. There will be no harm to the significance of the listed building and paragraphs 195 and 196 of the NPPF will not be engaged.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1** The Old Vicarage is an important building, central to the functioning of the parish church, and at the heart of communal life in Sevenoaks for centuries. It is aesthetically pleasing to look at, and it has a full-height stair turret on the rear elevation, which is relatively rare. The staircase itself is of a fine quality. Much of the interior is plain, and has been altered in detail, but parts of the original floor plan remain and there is a well preserved roof structure of staggered butt-purlin type. The Old Vicarage is essentially a vernacular building with an early Georgian Classical-style frontage, and it is evidently of special architectural and historic interest. The listed building makes an important contribution to the character and appearance of Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area.
- 5.2** Minor alterations are proposed which seek to improve the utility, maintenance and longevity of the listed building. These will preserve the character and appearance of Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area, and the significance of the listed building. Paragraphs 195 and 196 of the NPPF will not be engaged, and there will be preservation for the purposes of the Council's duties under sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Act.



Indicative dating and phasing of the Old Vicarage, Sevenoaks based on site observation, photographs and plans

Figure 1 – Phasing plan, based on a plan of the 1940s, when the front extension (yellow) was still in place. The former coach house is the long building to the right, on an angle.



Figure 2 - Extract from a plan of glebe land by Abraham Barham dated 1816, showing the Vicarage to the north of the Church of Saint Nicholas.



Figure 3 - Sales Particulars, August 1939, showing the front extension of c.1820, thought to have been demolished c.1950.



Figure 4 - Front and gable elevation, looking north.



Figure 5 - Front (east) elevation.



Figure 6 - Front elevation, looking south-west. The rendered projection dates from the mid-20th century, after the demolition of the forward-projecting extension of c.1820.



Figure 7 - Front elevation, showing the mid-20th projecting extension that replaced the earlier extension of c.1820 that can be seen in Figure 3.



Figure 8 - Rear (west) elevation. Note the stair turret.



Figure 9 - Rear (west) elevation. The hipped structure on the left is the former coach house, albeit the roof structure is now the only substantively original element.



Figure 10 - The 18th century staircase.



Figure 11 - Roof of The Old Vicarage. This is a staggered butt-purlin roof of early 18th century type.



Figure 12 - Roof of The Old Vicarage, above the modern ceiling. Note the carpenters' marks, and the absence of a ridge plate. The common rafters are lapped at the top, and are numbered, so they are in their primary positions. Where there are traces of nails those nails are on the soffits or undersides of the rafters (circled). This is clear evidence that a lath and plaster ceiling was once fixed to the rafters, and that the space was originally open to the apex of the roof. Therefore, the horizontal ceiling at the lower "collar" level is a modern insertion.



Figure 13 - Roof of the coach house, with evidence of lath and plaster, suggesting that it may have been habitable in the 18th century, perhaps for a groom.



Figure 14 - Summerhouse in the back garden, looking north.



Figure 15 - Entrance gate on the south side of the garden, looking west (December 2020).



Figure 16 - Mid-20th century photograph of the south gate into the garden, showing that it had metal gates at that time (see expanded detail of the right hand gate).