

HERITAGE STATEMENT

HOPPER HUTS, THE GRANARY, ROCK FARM,
GIBBS HILL
NETTLESTEAD, KENT, ME18 5HT



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Listed Building Descriptions

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Heritage Statement has been produced to support a planning application and Listed Building Consent for the conversion of two blocks of hopper huts to two residential dwellings.
- 1.2 The huts comprise two single-storey L-shaped blocks that were originally divided into 10 huts each. They were built specifically for hop picker accommodation to house the seasonal labour that came to Rock Farm in the Autumn of every year for the hop harvest. They are classified as listed buildings on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE), designated at grade II for their special architectural or historic interest.
- 1.3 As the work affects a designated heritage asset, a Heritage Statement is required to support the relevant planning applications and this document has been prepared in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) (NPPF).
- 1.4 The purpose of a Heritage Statement is to identify the significance of any heritage asset affected by the proposed development, the impact the proposed development will have upon the identified significances and justification for the proposed development. The Heritage Statement also assesses the proposed work in accordance with the statutory tests provided in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990.
- 1.5 The proposed works to the hopper huts involve the renovation of the existing structures by underpinning and restoring the brick walls, replacing rotten and unsound timbers, replacing the roofs, glazing the majority of the apertures and excavating and constructing a basement living/kitchen room in the courtyard in front of each block. Service works required to convert the huts to residential use will also be undertaken.
- 1.6 An application under schedule 2, part 3, Class Q for a change of use from agricultural buildings to use C3 (dwelling houses) was submitted to Maidstone Borough Council in April 2019. The tests required for this permission had all been met, and the change of use was about to be granted when the buildings were spot listed by Historic England on 3rd June 2019.

- 8.1 Positive pre-application advice was received in October 2020 regarding the development proposal which stated that the changes proposed were broadly sympathetic to the buildings, and that it was considered that the simple, functional character of the buildings would be preserved.
- 8.2 This Heritage Statement should be read in accordance with architectural plans and other supporting documents, which form this planning application.

2. Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The Hopper Huts were originally part of Rock Farm which is situated in the parish of Nettlestead, a village in the Weald of Kent 6 miles west of Maidstone. The farm is located to the west of the village, and the huts can be found towards the end of a lane, 350m north of Gibbs Hill, or via a footpath 250m from the village.
- 2.2 The area is in a valley to the west of the River Medway and is characterised by arable farmland delineated by mature hedgerows together with belts of woodland. The settlement pattern consists of villages, hamlets and farms, most of which have diversified to provide residential and light industrial uses. The Huts lie within the Metropolitan Green Belt.



Fig.1: Location of Hopper Huts in Nettlestead.

- 2.3 The Hopper Huts are part of the original Rock Farm complex which comprised a grade II listed 17th century farmhouse, an oasthouse, stables, granary, barn and associated cottages.

- 2.4 Rock Farm was broken up in the late 20th century when the majority of the land attached to the farm was sold off and its associated buildings were converted to residential uses. The farmhouse is grade II listed and lies to the south west of the Hopper Huts.
- 2.5 The proposed development encompasses the two blocks of huts and their courtyard area which is laid to grass. The huts are of red brick construction with metal corrugated roofs. Several of the huts have been adapted to provide secure storage, and two were converted into stabling in 2010.
- 2.6 The southern boundary of the area is fronted by a tall leylandii hedge and stock fencing.



Fig.2: Location of Hopper Huts within Rock Farm.

- 2.7 The gradient of the site slopes down towards the east which has necessitated the huts being constructed on different levels with the result that the west elevation is partially underground whilst the east elevation is 2.5m high next to the lane and around 4m high at the southern most end.

3. Identified Heritage Assets

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that all heritage assets affected by the proposed development are identified and their significance, which includes setting is described. The level of harm the proposed works will have to the identified heritage assets also needs to be determined within the context of a Heritage Statement.
- 3.2 Rock Farm House is identified as a 17th Century building, also designated at grade II on the National Heritage List for England (List Entry Number 1060643). The house is two-storeys with an attic and basement. It is timber framed with a hipped clay tile roof, refaced in the 19th Century with red and grey bricks to the front elevation, wall hung tiles to the northeast and southwest elevations and rendered walls to the first floor of the rear elevation.
- 3.3 There is a two-storey 20th Century extension to the rear together with a brick-built lean-to. Irregular timber casement windows to ground and first floors and modern french doors at ground level. Brick chimney stack off centre at ridge level.



Fig.3: Northwest elevation of farmhouse.

- 3.4 As previously identified, the Hop Pickers Huts are designated at grade II for their historic and architectural interest. (List Entry Number:1464856). The listing description identifies that the buildings are also listed for group value, which includes Rock Farm House and the wider farmstead.
- 3.5 The huts are constructed from red brick, laid in a flemish bond with corrugated iron roofs. Originally, each of the 20 huts would have had a timber framed window and wooden boarded door, though many of these have now been lost and apertures have been bricked up or altered (stable doors were added in 2010). Internally, there are no historic features.



Fig.4: South and east courtyard elevations of huts looking west.



Fig 5: North and west elevations of huts looking east.



Fig.6: Clockwise from top left: North elevation looking east; North elevation looking west; west elevation looking south; toilet extension at end of west block.

4. Understanding The Heritage

Historical Context

- 4.1 The history of hop growing in England can be traced back to the Tudor period, and by the late sixteenth century, large tracts of farmland in Kent had been converted into hop gardens¹. By the seventeenth century, hop cultivation had become so widespread in Kent that new breweries were set up all over the county². By 1821, there were two breweries in Watlingbury alone, that were built to take advantage of the surrounding hop fields and ready supply of water.
- 4.2 By the beginning of the nineteenth century the extent of the hop gardens in Kent was recorded by William Cobbett who wrote a chronicle of England in about 1820. With regards to the environs around Watlingbury and Nettlestead he wrote “*These are the finest seven miles that I have ever seen in England or anywhere else...From Maidstone to Merryworth I should think that there were hop gardens on one half of the way on both sides of the road. Then looking across the Medway, you see hop-gardens two miles deep, on the side of a gently raising ground*”.³
- 4.3 The harvesting of such large areas of hops required a seasonal workforce to help with the picking. These pickers would be comprised of travellers, gypsies and a large part of the poor of the east-end of London who would treat the working holiday as a break from their slums in the city. Every September, there would be a “*mass exodus by thousands of London’s poorest...to the hop fields of Kent*”⁴ and when they arrived at their destinations, conditions were often unhygienic with the only accommodation provided being either in tents or animal shelters with no provision for washing or toilet facilities. In 1900, the vicar of Watlingbury, Greville Livett, estimated that there had been 3,300 such immigrants arriving in the parish that year to pick the hops, along with their children.⁵
- 4.4 So bad were the conditions that a mission was founded by priests to help the poor hop pickers of Kent. Their work led to The Society for Employment and Improved Lodgings for Hop Pickers that was established in 1866, and a subsequent byelaw covering hop-pickers accommodation in the 1874 Sanitary Acts Amendment Act,

¹ The Hop Bin.p12

² Ibid 13

³ Rural Rides, William Cobbett 1830

⁴ Ibid 15

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watlingbury>

which sought to improve the living standards of itinerant workers who had previously been housed in very poor conditions.

- 4.5 Consequently, more substantial housing was constructed by hop farmers in order to accommodate the seasonal workers that were so necessary for the harvest. Some were made simply of wood or corrugated tin whilst others were more substantial, constructed of brick and later breeze block with corrugated iron or tiled roofs.



Fig.7: Example of living conditions for hop pickers c.1910.

- 4.6 A late nineteenth century account of some hopper huts can be found in 'The Hop Bin'

"The huts for the use of the hoppers stand in rows of eight houses; with a cook and a wash house in the middle; and are divided into eight compartments, each about 12 feet square. One company, numbering (up to) ten persons, is assigned to each compartment. The floor is thickly littered with straw for sleeping, but no chairs, forms or tables are provided. Hanging on an iron nail in the wall is an old lantern, in which the Hopper burns a candle. Washing conveniences are found by the Hoppers, and in many instances they bring bedding with them to lay over the straw. The cook and wash-house is usually in the centre of

each row of huts. The front is open to the air; and there are three or four fireplaces... The farmer finds the Hoppers faggots for burning; affixes hooks on which to hang the kettles, and six pots can hang at one time over the fires. The huts are built with bricks, roofed with tiles and one storey in height...the washing...is done in the open air, and the hedges, or the grass, utilised for drying purposes.”⁶



Fig.8: Cooking facilities at the Whitbread Hop Camp, Paddock Wood, 1937. Courtesy Fred Morley, Fox Photos.

- 4.7 From the peak of hop production in the late 1800's, when almost 72,000 acres were being grown⁷ the hopping industry gradually declined. By the 1920's. many growers were unable to sell their hops due to a collapse in prices. The market recovered with the creation of The Hops Marketing board which regulated supply, and in turn, new investment led to the mechanisation of hop picking in the 1950's. The number of hop pickers required was thus drastically reduced and the familiar sight of thousands of hop pickers descending on the English countryside in

⁶ The Hop Bin

⁷ Ibid 215

September disappeared for ever. The advent of the Common Market in 1982 spelt disaster for the UK hop industry who could not compete with the Americans, Germans and Czech. Almost all growers found that they were unable to continue growing hops profitably at the prices stated by world markets and gave up.⁸

- 4.8 The Hop Farms consequently diversified further into arable and fruit farming. Hop gardens are a very rare sight in Kent today, and their associated buildings such as Oast Houses have largely been converted to residential uses. The hop pickers' huts became redundant, and although almost every farm still has some evidence of the structures today, many have been turned into animal shelters or storage. Some have successfully been turned into residential and holiday accommodation.

Rock Farm

Rock Farm House is identified as a 17C or earlier farmhouse on the National Heritage List for England, although it does not appear on The Andrews and Dury map of 1769 (Fig.9). It is designated at grade II for its architectural and historic interest (ListingNGR:TQ6818052613).



Fig.9: Andrews and Dury map of Kent 1769. Approximate location of Rock Farm indicated by red circle.

⁸ Ibid 217

- 4.9 The farm first appears on a map in 1789 (Fig.10). It is highly likely that the farm was used for arable cultivation, including hops. The granary barn is present but there are no hopper huts. It is likely that any pickers at this time would have been housed in tents or animal shelters.

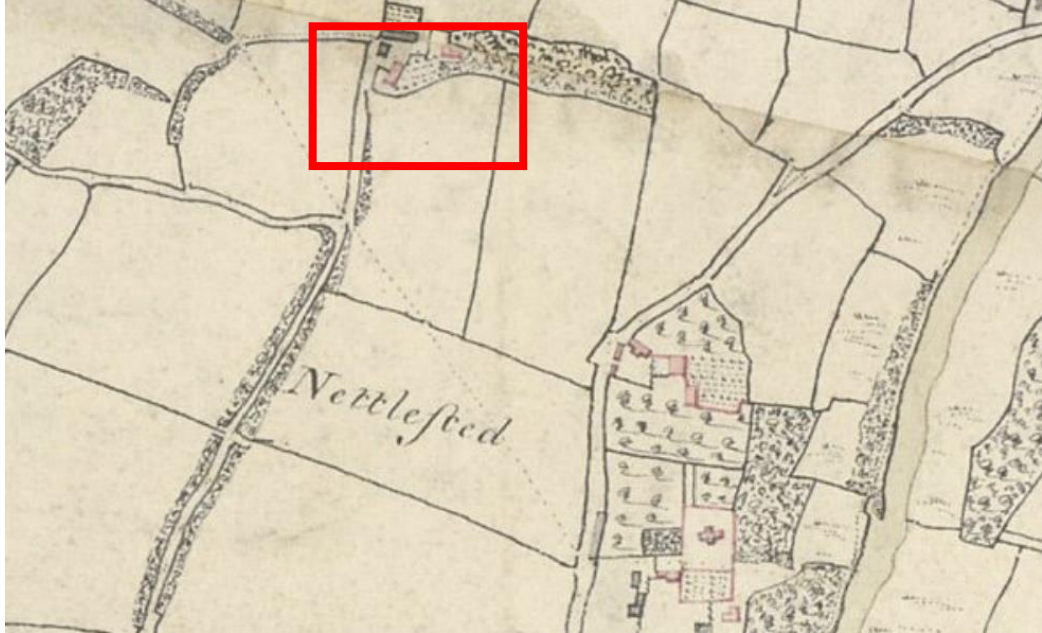


Fig.10: 1789 map of the fields around Mereworth. Unknown author. British Library. Rock Farmstead outlined in red.

- 4.10 By the tithe map of 1837, The Farm had expanded, and Figure 11 shows the new buildings that had been erected by this time. There is a new building to the south (A) where there are oasthouses today. Some stables have been erected opposite the farm house (B) and the barn now has the addition of 3 open cart barns (C). To the east is probably the original farm labourer's cottage which has now been extended and is known as 5 Rock Farm Cottages (D).

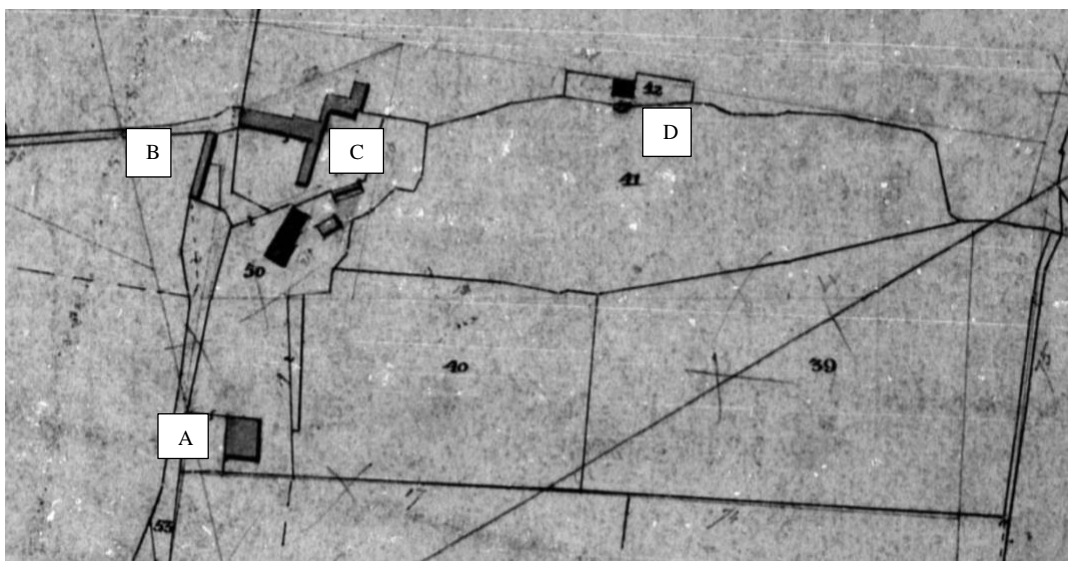


Fig.11: Tithe map of 1839.

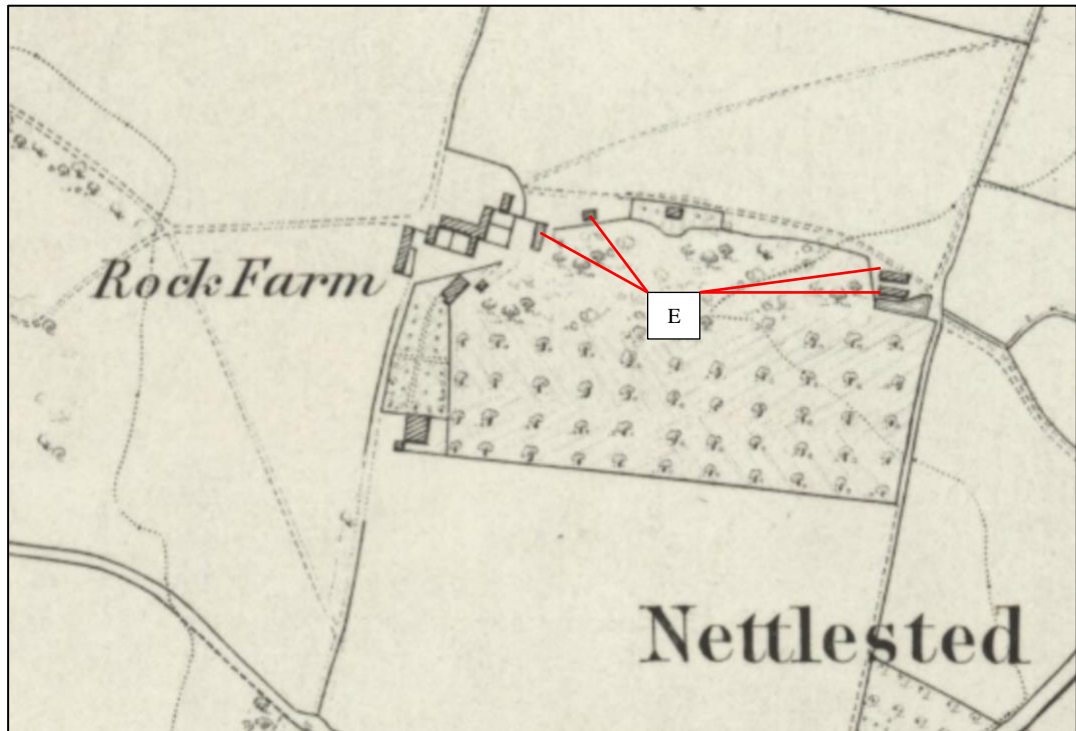


Fig.12: Ordnance Survey map, 1867-1872

- 4.11 The earliest Ordnance Survey map (Fig.12) shows that four more buildings had been erected to the east of the farm house. These have all since been demolished but may well have been linked to the expanding hop industry. The census of 1871 shows that 15 people were living at Rock Farm at this time. By 1891, this figure has tripled to 35 people – an indication of the growing prosperity of the farm.
- 4.12 The hopper huts were constructed after 1880, (Fig.13) in order to house the harvest workforce and no doubt in response to the society for Employment and Improved Lodgings for Hop Pickers that was established in 1866, and the subsequent byelaw in the 1874 Sanitation Act.
- 4.13 Rock Farm continued to grow hops through the first half of the twentieth century but increasingly, the farm began to diversify into apple growing along with hops and other arable crops. The need for seasonal workers reduced and the last of the hop pickers came and stayed in the huts in the late 20th century.
- 4.14 By the 1990's, hops had ceased to be grown on Rock Farm. In 1995, Rock Farm extended to 130 acres...of which 10 acres comprised woodland and other non-farmable areas, cropping of 16 acres of apple orchards (8 of which are under 5

years old); 13 acres of salad onions with the remainder being combinable arable crops – malting barley, oil seed rape and set aside⁹

Hopper Huts

- 4.15 Whilst hops have been grown in England since the Tudor period, and were widespread by the 18th century, the first reference to them being grown at Rock Farm is in the Villages directory of 1904, when Charles Gibbs is listed as a hop and fruit grower there. The Gibbs family occupied Rock Farm in the census of 1841, and continued to be listed by the Kent messenger directory as farmers here until 1904.
- 4.16 The Hopper Huts which are the subject of this statement were constructed in the late 19th century, probably in response to the byelaws covering hop-pickers accommodation in the 1874 Sanitary Acts Amendment Act, which sought to improve the living standards of itinerant workers who had previously been housed in very poor conditions.

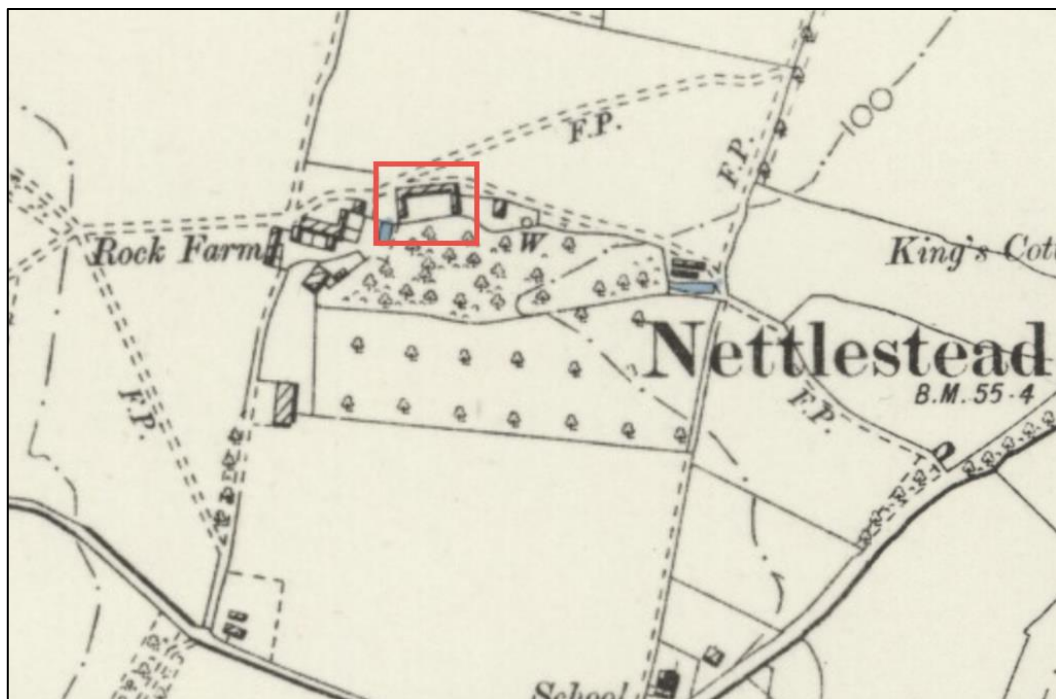


Fig.13: Ordnance Survey map 1895-1896. This is the first map since 1885 to show the huts.

⁹ Planning Application MA/95/0572. 13.04.95

- 4.17 Figure 13 shows that the huts may originally been constructed in a U-shape, but by 1908 (Fig.14), a central entrance to the north is shown, creating two L-shaped blocks of 10 huts each. Each block is constructed of red brick with a simple purlin roof supported by collar beams set into each internal dividing wall. The roofs are clad in corrugated metal. Vented openings exist between each hut and to the rear.
- 4.18 The huts were built to provide accommodation in family 'rooms', each one approximately 11ft x 9ft which would provide shelter for entire families. Some families came back to the same hut year after year, and painted them and added additions of their own. These 20 huts would have provided accommodation for up to 140 people.
- 4.19 Cooking facilities and latrines were outside, initially as open fires and pits, but later a cookhouse and two outside 'privvies' were provided.



Fig.14: Ordnance survey map 1907-1908. Hopper Huts circled in red.

- 4.20 Initially the huts had earth floors, but concrete flooring was added post construction to all of those in the western block (probably as a result of these huts being partly subterranean) and to a few of the eastern block as their use required.

- 4.21 The huts continued to provide very basic accommodation for hop pickers and their families until the late 20th century, with only the addition of ‘modern’ toilets in each of the privvy areas to improve the living conditions. The mechanisation of the hop industry in the 1950’s meant that the demand for seasonal workers gradually ceased, and the huts became redundant.
- 4.22 After the hop gardens were dismantled at Rock Farm, the hopper huts gradually fell into decline. Some of them were altered in the late twentieth century to create a teenage area with a bar. A further two huts were combined and refloored to create a workshop for a carpenter. New doors and windows have been installed, and old windows have been bricked up. Various sections of the corrugated roof have been replaced. Two other huts were combined in 2015 to provide larger stabling. New double doors and a window were incorporated into another hut to provide storage for a lawnmower. The remaining huts are empty save for rubble and dust and are suffering from varying stages of gentle decay.

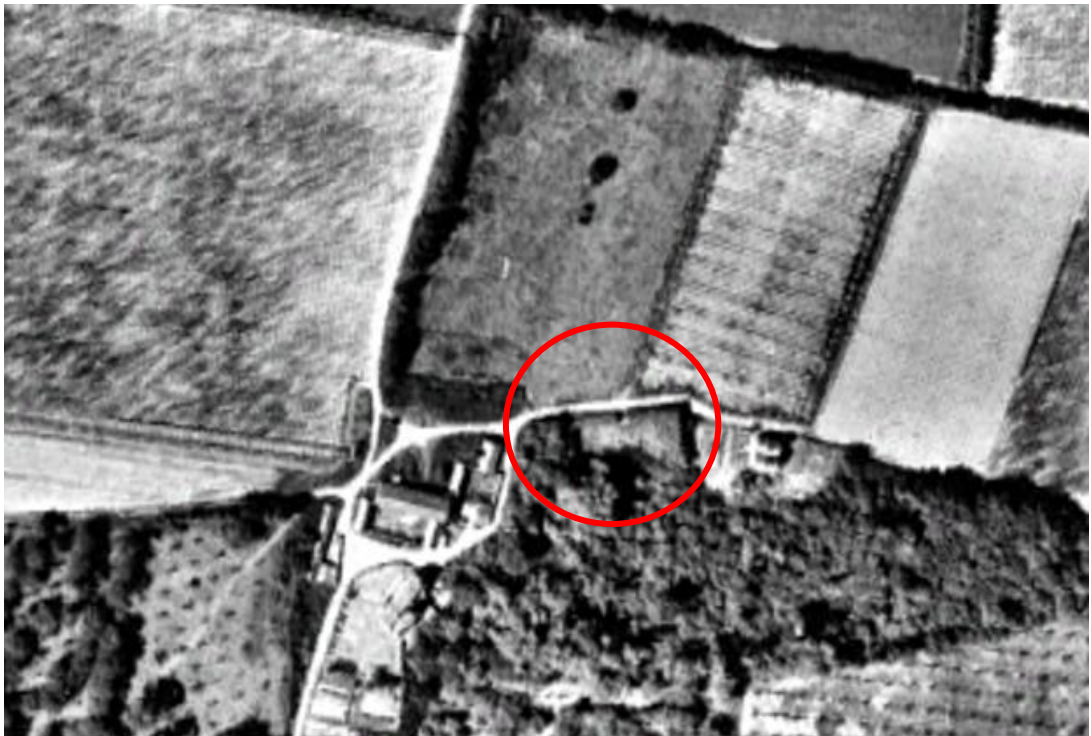


Fig. 15: Google Earth image 1960. Huts ringed in red.

5. Assessing Significance

- 5.1 Significance of a heritage asset is defined by the NPPF as the value of a heritage asset placed on it by current and future generations because of its heritage interest. This interest may be archaeological; architectural; artistic or historical. The setting of a heritage asset also contributes to its significance and is defined by the NPPF as the surrounding in which a heritage asset is experienced. In comparison, Historic England's Conservation Principles (2008) uses evidential; aesthetic; historical and communal values to define significance. These different set of values have been combined for the purpose of this report.
- 5.2 Part 4 of British Standard 7913:2013 *Guide to Conservation of Historic Buildings* provides information on heritage values and significance. In context, this document states, '*A wide range of factors can contribute to the significance of a historic building. As well as physical components, significance includes factors such as immediate and wider setting, use and association (e.g. with a particular event, family, community or artist and those involved in design and construction)*'.
- 5.3 Identifying the values of an asset allow us to understand the degree of significance and inform us of the potential impact the proposed works will have on the heritage asset and its setting. These values may be tangible, the physical fabric of the building, capable of being touched, or view such as its landscape. Also, the value may be intangible through a past event or an association with a person.
- **Evidential (archaeological) value** relates to physical aspects of the site which provide evidence from the past. This can be with built form or below ground archaeology.
 - **Historical value** is the extent to which the asset is associated with or illustrative of historic events or people.
 - **Aesthetic (architectural/artistic) value** includes design, visual, landscape and architectural qualities.
 - **Communal value** includes social, commemorative or spiritual value, local identity and the meaning of the place for people.

- 5.4 The assessment of significance draws upon information contained in the section on Heritage Assets and uses the values defined above to establish the level of significance detailed below:
- 5.5 Features of the asset which contribute to the principal historical and architectural interest are considered to be of **high significance**.
- 5.6 Features of the asset which noticeably contribute to the overall architectural or historical Interest and may include post construction features of historic or design interest are considered to be of **medium significance**.
- 5.7 Features of the asset which make a relatively minor contribution to the historic and architectural interest are considered to be of **low significance**.
- 5.8 Features which do not contribute to the historic and architectural interest of the asset, and in some cases may even detract from the significance are therefore considered to be either **neutral or detracting**.

Assessing Impact

- 5.9 In order to assess and quantify the level of harm to the significance of a heritage asset in context with the relevant Paragraphs in the NPPF, the NPPG, a web-based resource provides up-to-date guidance on NPPF policies. The NPPG provides useful guidance on assessing harm in relation to Paragraphs 199 and 200 of the NPPF. The NPPG states, *'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'*.
- 5.10 In defining what constitutes substantial harm, the NPPG identifies that the impact of total destruction is obviously substantial harm while partial destruction is likely to have a considerable impact but, depending on the circumstances, it may still be less than substantial harm or conceivably not harmful at all. Anything less than total destruction needs to be evaluated on its own merits, for example, the removal of elements to an asset which themselves impact on its significance may therefore not be harmful to the asset.

- 5.11 The NPPG advises works that '*are moderate or minor in scale are likely to cause less than substantial harm or no harm at all*'. However, it is important to consider each development in its own context as the NPPG identifies that minor works have the potential to cause substantial harm to the significance of an asset. This would be so if for example the works removed an element which contributed to the assets special architectural or historic interest.

Significance of the Hopper Huts

- 5.12 To a certain extent the significance of the listed building has already been recognised by its inclusion on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE). Historic England define grade II listed buildings as buildings of special interest.
- 5.13 The following part of this section examines the values of the building under the four bulleted headings detailed in paragraph 5.3.

Evidential (archaeological) value

- 5.14 The buildings provide evidence of late-19th century construction methods, fabric and the rural vernacular architectural style of hop-farm buildings in Kent. This value is considered to be of **medium significance**.

Historical value

- 5.15 The historic value of the buildings is derived from their survival as late 19th century hop picker's accommodation which were constructed in response to the act to improve conditions for itinerant workers in the mid 1800s. The huts also contribute to the evolving development of Rock Farm. This value is considered to be of **medium significance**.

Aesthetic (architectural/artistic) value

- 5.16 Aesthetically, the value of the building is in its vernacular appearance and simple plan form. The narrow, long structures with brick elevations and corrugated iron roofs which were once subdivided into individual hop pickers huts, each with one window and doorway, serve as tangible evidence of the basic accommodation provided for the hop pickers. This value is considered to be of **medium significance**. The internal plan form which has been largely altered is considered to be of **low significance**.

Communal Value

- 5.17 The property has communal value in relation to Nettlestead's historical and agricultural development. Therefore, the building contributes to a sense of place, the social, agricultural and architectural history of area. This value is considered to be of **medium significance**.

Setting

- 5.18 The setting of the buildings is defined by the layout of the huts in a courtyard arrangement and as part of Rock Farmstead and surrounding farmland. The path and tangible link between Rock Farmhouse and the huts was lost when a leylandii hedge was planted and a stock fence erected. The neighbouring cottages of 4 and 5 Rock Farm Cottages have been extended and redeveloped to such an extent that the setting to the east of the huts has been diminished. The creation of a garden and conversion of the barns to the west has changed the setting here also. Whilst farmland remains to the north, it is no longer cultivated as hop gardens. The loss of the cookhouse in the courtyard area has also lessened the special interest of the setting. The setting of the buildings is therefore considered to be of **low significance**.

Significance of Rock Farmhouse

- 5.19 The significance of Rock Farmhouse described above is defined by its architectural character, construction materials and association with Richard Gibbs, farmer and landowner, after whom Gibbs Hill is named. The building contributes to the wider setting of the farmstead, to the agricultural history of Nettlestead and the hop growing history of Kent.
- 5.20 Rock Farmhouse is considered to be of **medium significance**.

6. Planning legislation and policies.

- 6.1 As the proposed works affect a designated heritage asset, the impact of the development must be assessed against the relevant legislation and policies contained in the NPPF and policies contained in the local plan.
- 6.2 The legislative framework for the preservation and enhancement of listed buildings and conservation areas are set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Historic England, defines preservation in this context, as not harming the interest in the building, as opposed to keeping it utterly unchanged.
- 6.3 Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the above abovementioned Act are relevant to the proposed development. These Sections provide the statutory test against which planning permission affecting designated heritage assets should be assessed by the Local Planning Authority.
- 6.4 Section 16(2) relates to works being carried out to a listed building in context with a Listed Building Consent application and states, *'In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'*.
- 6.5 Section 66(1) relates to planning applications and states, *'In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'*.
- 6.6 In addition to the Act, The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are to be applied. The guiding principle of the document is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and the protection and enhancement of the historic environment is embedded in this approach.
- 6.7 Sustainable development is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF breaks down this definition into three objectives; economic, social and environmental. Within the

environmental objective, sustainable development needs to contribute to *'protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment'*.

- 6.8 Paragraph 20 of the NPPF contains Strategic Policies, which provide an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development and make sufficient provision for the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment.
- 6.9 Section 16 of the NPPF contains policies relating to conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Within this section (paragraph 189), the Local Planning Authority requires the applicant to describe the significance of any affected heritage asset including any contribution made by their setting as part of an application.
- 6.10 Significance is defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF, as the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its archaeological, architectural, artistic or historical interest. Significance also derives not only from the asset's physical presence but also from its setting. Setting of a heritage asset is the surroundings in which the heritage asset is experienced, the extent of which is not fixed and can change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to significance of an asset.
- 6.11 Impact from a proposed development to the significance of a designated heritage asset needs to be evaluated, NPPF paragraph 199, states, *'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'*. NPPF paragraph 200 identifies that alteration, destruction or development within the setting of a designated heritage asset can result in harm to, or loss of, the significance of the asset and that such loss requires a clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building should be exceptional and substantial harm or loss of grade I and grade II* listed buildings should be wholly exceptional.
- 6.12 NPPF Paragraphs 201 and 202 define the levels of harm as substantial or less than substantial. The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) provides useful guidance on assessing harm in relation to these definitions and gives the following 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.

6.13 Paragraphs 201 and 202 refer to 'public benefit' as a means to outweigh the loss of or harm to a designated heritage asset. The NPPG identifies that public benefit may follow many developments and as such this benefit could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental progress which are the dimensions to sustainable development defined by NPPF Paragraph 8. The NPPG states, 'Public benefits should flow from the proposed development. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to public at large and should not just be a private benefit. However, benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefit'. Public benefits may include heritage benefits such as:

- Sustaining or enhancing the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting.
- Reducing or removing risk to heritage asset.
- Securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long-term conservation.

6.14 The three points above relate to NPPF Paragraph 197, which requires the Local Planning Authority to take these points into account when determining applications. Although, there is no defined list of public benefits, examples of public benefit for a designated heritage asset may include:

- The restoration of a listed building.
- The improved setting of a listed building.
- The enhancement of a conservation area.

6.15 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF states that in rural areas, special circumstances for new housing include where development would represent the optimal viable use and help to secure the future of the heritage asset, re-use redundant or disused buildings and lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting.

6.16 Local Planning Policies relating to the historic environment and relevant for this application are contained in The Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2017, Policies include, SP18, DM30, DM31 and DM33. Only the sections relevant to this document are listed below.

Policy SP18 – The Historic Environment

To ensure their continued contribution to the quality of life in Maidstone Borough, the characteristics, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of heritage assets will be protected and, where possible, enhanced. This will be achieved by the council encouraging and supporting measures that secure the sensitive restoration, reuse, enjoyment, conservation and/or enhancement of heritage assets, in particular designated assets identified as being at risk, to include:

- i. Through the development management process, securing the sensitive management and design of development which impacts on heritage assets and their settings;
- ii. Through the incorporation of positive heritage policies in neighbourhood plans which are based on analysis of locally important and distinctive heritage; and
- iii. Ensuring relevant heritage considerations are a key aspect of site master plans prepared in support of development allocations and broad locations identified in the local plan.

Policy DM30 – Design Principles in the Countryside

Outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map, proposals which would create high quality design, satisfy the requirements of other policies in this plan and meet the following criteria will be permitted:

- i. The type, siting, materials and design, mass and scale of development and the level of activity would maintain, or where possible, enhance local distinctiveness including landscape features;
- ii. Impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape would be appropriately mitigated. Suitability and required mitigation will be assessed through the submission of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments to support development proposals in appropriate circumstances;

- iii. Proposals would not result in unacceptable traffic levels on nearby roads; unsympathetic change to the character of a rural lane which is of landscape, amenity, nature conservation, or historic or archaeological importance or the erosion of roadside verges;
- iv. Where built development is proposed, there would be no existing building or structure suitable for conversion or re-use to provide the required facilities. Any new buildings should, where practicable, be located adjacent to existing buildings or be unobtrusively located and well screened by existing or proposed vegetation which reflect the landscape character of the area; and
- v. Where an extension or alteration to an existing building is proposed, it would be of a scale which relates sympathetically to the existing building and the rural area; respect local building styles and materials; have no significant adverse impact on the form, appearance or setting of the building, and would respect the architectural and historic integrity of any adjoining building or group of buildings of which it forms part

Policy DM31- Conversion of Rural Buildings

Outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map, proposals for the re-use and adaptation of existing rural buildings which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

- i. The building is of a form, bulk, scale and design which takes account of and reinforces landscape character;
- ii. The building is of permanent, substantial and sound construction and is capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;
- iii. Any alterations proposed as part of the conversion are in keeping with the landscape and building character in terms of materials used, design and form;

- iv. There is sufficient room in the curtilage of the building to park the vehicles of those who will live there without detriment to the visual amenity of the countryside; and
- v. No fences, walls or other structures associated with the use of the building or the definition of its curtilage or any sub-division of it are erected which would harm landscape character and visual amenity.

Proposals for the re-use and adaptation of existing rural buildings for residential purposes will not be permitted unless the following additional criteria to the above are met:

- vi. Every reasonable attempt has been made to secure a suitable business re-use for the building;
- vii. Residential conversion is the only means of providing a suitable re-use for a listed building, an unlisted building of quality and traditional construction which is grouped with one or more listed buildings in such a way as to contribute towards the setting of the listed building(s), or other buildings which contribute to landscape character or which exemplify the historical development of the Kentish landscape; and
- viii. There is sufficient land around the building to provide a reasonable level of outdoor space for the occupants, and the outdoor space provided is in harmony with the character of its setting.

Policy DM33 – Change of Use of Agricultural Land to Domestic Garden Land

Planning permission will be granted for the change of use of agricultural land to domestic garden if there would be no harm to the character and appearance of the countryside and/or the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

7. Proposed development and assessment

- 7.1 It is proposed to convert the hopper huts into two single-storey cottages with lower ground floor kitchen/living areas.
- 7.2 Each L-shaped block will provide two bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms and dressing rooms, utilising the space available whilst removing as little historic walling as possible. A corner entrance hall will provide access to each wing and the kitchen/living area downstairs.
- 7.3 In order to achieve this, a new lower ground floor level will be constructed within the courtyard in front of each block to provide adequate living space for the needs of 21st century living without impacting upon the significance of the huts. Access to these lower ground floor areas will be provided by internal staircases leading down from the corner of each hut and from a separate access via the patios at lower ground floor level. The lower ground levels will be accessed by steps from the courtyard area above. Roof lights will be installed at ground level within the courtyard to provide natural light to the kitchen/living areas below. Retaining walls will be simple and will respect the rural character of the countryside.
- 7.4 As the roof structure is failing, the roof will be replaced using like for like timber purlins, wall plates and collar beams and it will be covered with heritage approved corrugated metal roof sheets and insulation to meet British Building Regulation Standards. New black aluminium guttering and downpipes will be installed. The roof pitch will remain the same.
- 7.5 All timber joinery to the windows and doors will be removed and replaced with oak frames and timber doors. Previously blocked up external doors and windows will be reinstated and new apertures will be reformed to match the original. Apart from the two corner entrance doors (which will be timber), all of the door apertures to the original L-shaped blocks will be half glazed, with the lower sections being vertically boarded like the lower half of a stable door.
- 7.6 The brick walls will be repointed in lime mortar in a colour and texture to match the existing. The two WC extensions to the south, which were 20th century constructions, will be rebuilt and re-roofed using materials to match the huts.
- 7.7 Internally, one wall will be removed in the west block, and doorways will be created in the other walls in order to allow access to all rooms internally. Plant rooms will be installed in each WC section at the south of each block. All pipes and wiring will

be brought in without impacting upon historic fabric. These alterations are essential to the function of the buildings going forward as residential units.

- 7.8 Two windows will be inserted into the post-construction openings to the north and west external walls. Neither of these windows will overlook neighbouring houses.
- 7.9 A timber framed garage is proposed in the courtyard area on the south boundary.
- 7.10 All landscaping and safety rails around the lower ground floor areas will be rustic and of a suitably rural appearance.

Assessment of Impact

- 7.11 The Hopper Huts of Rock Farm are an example of late 19th century vernacular farm buildings that were constructed specifically to house the itinerant workforce that was required to pick hops each Autumn.
- 7.12 The huts have retained their external plan form, but alterations and changes subsequent to their redundancy as hop picker accommodation has altered their internal plan form and external appearance to the courtyard elevations.



Fig.16: New windows and enlarged doorway to incorporate stable doors in the east block. Blocked up doorway and new window in the east block.

- 7.13 Due to their narrow size and basic construction, the buildings have failed to lend themselves to an alternative use over the years which has resulted in a gradual deterioration of their fabric and risk to their preservation. Putting the huts to a viable use will lead to the investment in their maintenance which is necessary for their long term conservation.
- 7.14 The individual huts will continue to be legible by the single door and window of each hut that will front the courtyard elevations. The removal of a small amount of internal walling and the insertion of internal doors in the remaining walls will not harm the significance of the buildings.
- 7.15 The restoration of doors and windows that have been lost or altered will enhance the significance of the huts by reinstating lost features. Each door will be timber framed and half glazed, with the lower section vertically boarded like the lower half of a stable door, and the windows will be replaced with timber frames. The glazing will be slightly recessed so as to reduce the visual impact
- 7.16 The creation of a lower ground floor has been carefully considered at the design stage so as to create additional adequate living space that will not harm the character or appearance of the huts. The sunken patio area that leads to the south elevation of the lower ground floor will not be visible from the public realm.
- 7.17 The replacement of the roof with like for like timbers and corrugated roofing material will prevent further decay to the fabric of the buildings caused by water ingress through holes in the roof and possible collapse of the roof due to structural failure. This proposed work will also enhance the appearance and character of the buildings by replacing a patchwork of roofing materials with a continuous corrugated roof that is sympathetic in form and appearance to the original.
- 7.18 The insertion of windows into the north and west external walls will recreate fenestration already in situ or present in the last 10 years. These windows will provide valuable natural light to the corner hut of each block.
- 7.19 The erection of a timber framed garage to the southern boundary will replace a building previously found on the site according to historic maps, (Fig.13), which was previously used as the cookhouse.

8. Justification

- 8.3 Paragraph 195 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) advises Local Planning Authorities that the particular significance, including setting of any heritage asset is assessed. This document has concisely described the heritage asset affected by the proposed works and assessed the significance of the designated heritage asset.
- 8.4 The aim of the works is to convert two dilapidated blocks of hop picker huts into two single-storey dwellings with lower ground floor living and kitchen areas. Residential use is considered to be the optimum viable use for the buildings which will fund their restoration and future maintenance whilst causing the least harm to the significance of the asset.
- 8.5 With regards to the restoration and conversion of the buildings, consideration has been given to the historical context of the huts and to their form and materials.
- 8.6 Externally, the building has been compromised by the changes and remodeling of the windows and doors and the proposals seek to redress the damage done by these earlier alterations.
- 8.7 The construction of the lower ground floor will provide adequate modern accommodation which will help to ensure the long term future of the heritage asset. Without these lower ground additions, the width of the buildings post servicing and insulation would be too narrow for their reasonable use and enjoyment.
- 8.8 With regards to the development meeting the statutory test provided by Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the minimum aim is to preserve the setting; building; features of special architectural or historic interest of a listed building.
- 8.9 The works are considered to meet the tests provided by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as the works will preserve and enhance the character and setting of the listed building and any features identified in this report, which are of special architectural or historic interest. The proposed works also preserve the character and appearance of the setting of Rock Farm House.

- 8.10 It should be remembered that Historic England defines preservation in this context as not harming the interest in the building, as opposed to keeping it utterly unchanged.
- 8.11 With regards the test provided by paragraphs 201-202 of the NPPF, the NPPG provides the following useful 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'.
- 8.12 It has been identified within this Heritage Statement that the proposed development will have no impact to the heritage assets or their settings but rather will enhance the significance of the Hopper Huts. As there is no harm, no public benefit needs to be proved, although this is provided by restoring a listed building, by removing risk to a heritage asset and by securing the optimum viable use of the Hopper Huts in support of their long term conservation. Therefore, the works are consistent with the building's conservation.
- 8.13 With regards to local planning policies, the proposed development meets these as follows:

Policy SP18: The proposal will secure the sensitive restoration, reuse, enjoyment, conservation and enhancement of the Hopper Huts which otherwise might become a designated asset at risk.

Policy DM30: The proposals will enhance the local distinctiveness of the area by restoring vernacular historic buildings to their original appearance. The lower ground floor is of a scale which relates sympathetically to the existing building and the rural area. It will have no significant adverse impact upon the form, appearance or setting of the buildings, and will respect the architectural and historic integrity of the Hopper Huts.

Policy DM31: The proposed works comply with sub paragraphs i-viii. In particular, with regards to sub paragraph vii, this application has shown that residential conversion is the only means of providing a suitable re-use for the listed buildings, as the cost of restoring them for any other use is prohibitive.

Policy DM33: The change of use from agricultural land to domestic garden will not harm the character and appearance of the countryside or cause the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

- 8.14 The proposed development will provide the huts with a new use that will finance their restoration and conserve them for generations to come. Without consent, the buildings are likely to suffer from further decay and will eventually end up on the 'Heritage at Risk ' register.
- 8.15 Positive pre-application advice has been received regarding the development proposal. The proposed application has addressed all of the LPA's concerns and the reports that were requested have been included with this application.
- 8.16 It is concluded that the proposed works preserve and enhance the significance and setting of the heritage assets identified within this report. The proposal satisfies the requirements for sufficient justification under the relevant sections of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, relevant policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021), and relevant policies in The Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017). It is therefore, requested that the proposed development be approved.

9. Sources

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British Library. Map of the irregular field boundaries enclosing land that dominates the Medway Valley in Kent. 1789

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English Hops. A History of Cultivation and Preparation for The Market from the Earliest Times. George Clinch.

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Appendix

Listed Building Descriptions

Name Hop pickers' huts at Rock Farm
Address Rock Farm, Gibbs Hill, Nettlestead, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 5HT
List Entry Number 1464856
Date First Listed 3rd June 2019

Summary

Hop pickers' huts, built between 1885 and 1895.

Reasons for Designation

The hop pickers' huts at Rock Farm, Kent, built between 1885 and 1895, are listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

Architectural interest:

as rare surviving examples of purpose-built late C19 hop pickers' huts; * as well-preserved examples of hop pickers' huts largely in their original materials and with earth floors, having undergone relatively few alterations; * for the survival of the original and fully legible plan forms, comprising buildings divided by internal walls into individual hop pickers' huts each with a single window and doorway.

Historic interest:

as a physical manifestation and tangible reminder of an important industry in the social and agricultural history of this country whereby huge numbers of working class families from London travelled seasonally to work in the hop-fields of Kent and south-east England; * as a good representation of the change in hop pickers' accommodation from tents or animal sheds to purpose-built brick huts following campaigns to improve the conditions of hop pickers in late C19 England.

Group value:

as hop pickers' huts surviving in their original farmstead context next to a C17 or earlier farmhouse (Grade II-listed, List entry 1060643) with which they share group value, as well as a former granary, converted oast houses, former stables, cottages and ponds, in the heart of Kent's former hop picking area.

History

Before mechanised picking was introduced in the 1950s, the harvesting of hops, used in brewing beer, was a very labour intensive process. Huge numbers of working class families from south-east and east London, and further afield, would leave their homes in the autumn to pick hops, particularly in Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire. Women and children often travelled independently of the men, who joined their families at the weekend. Londoners first walked, and then travelled by road or train to the hop fields. Many families returned year after year to the same farm, making friendships with fellow pickers and developing a sense of community (Cordle 2011, 138). Thus 'hopping' was also a social phenomenon, and hand picking hops lasted for 400 years as a way of life. The South Eastern Railway ran 'Hop Pickers' Specials' to transport Londoners to the countryside in the 1870s. Initially accommodation for workers included canvas tents, barns, stables, cattle sheds or pigsties. Dirty, overcrowded and unhygienic conditions led to health problems, including an outbreak of cholera at East Farleigh, Kent, in September 1849, which killed 43 hop-pickers (Sutherland and Walton 1995, 6). During the 1860s there were campaigns led by Reverend J Y Stratton and Reverend J J Kendon to improve the conditions of hop pickers. In 1866 the 'Society for Employment and Improved Lodgings for Hop Pickers' was formed. The first bylaws covering hop pickers' accommodation were adopted at Bromley, Kent under the 1874 Sanitary Acts Amendment Act, and subsequently many districts of Kent adopted laws. Purpose-built hop pickers' huts, or Hopper's Huts as they were also known, were erected. Towards the end of the C19, Father Richard Wilson founded hospitals for the treatment of hop pickers whilst the Salvation Army also attended to hop pickers' welfare (Filmer 1992, 44).

The standard size of a Hopper's Hut was 9 feet by 9 feet or 8 feet by 10 feet (Sutherland and Walton 1995, 9). Initially huts were constructed of timber but following the abolition of the brick tax in 1850 brick huts were built, often clad in corrugated iron sheets. It was unusual to have a single hut built; farmers most often constructed lines or blocks of huts. From about the 1930s, some Hoppers' Huts were also constructed of breeze blocks, whilst Nissen huts were another form of accommodation. Huts usually had an earth floor and were lit by candles or paraffin lamps. Eventually water was provided via a standpipe, dedicated toilets were erected, usually with an earth closet, and a dedicated cookhouse was often built. Furniture inside the huts was arranged by the pickers themselves, usually

with very basic beds; initially faggots (bundles of brushwood) placed under a bedding of straw but by the 1920s palliasses (straw mattresses) and ticks (linen mattress covers) were widely used (Ibid, 9). In the C20 hop picking eventually began to be looked upon as a holiday, offering a change of scenery for many Londoners. However, mechanisation in the 1950s led to a decline in the need for hop pickers or their huts. Surviving purpose-built huts are now rare; most have been demolished or converted to other uses.

Rock Farm, Nettlestead, includes a C17 or earlier farmhouse (Grade II-listed, List entry 1060643), a former granary, converted oast houses, former stables, cottages and ponds. The hop pickers' huts were built between 1885 and 1895 immediately to the north-east of the farmstead; they are not shown on an 1885 OS map (1:2500) but first appear on the 10:560 OS Map surveyed in 1895 and published in 1898. They are located in the heart of Kent's former hop picking area, being just over three miles from the former Whitbread Hop Farm at Paddock Woods, Beltring. The buildings comprise two L-shaped single-storey blocks divided into individual huts. They are an example of comparatively good accommodation for hop pickers in the late C19. These blocks may have replaced earlier huts sited on the farm near the granary and near the ponds. Two sets of lavatories were later added to the end of the blocks, possibly in the 1980s. One local account states that these Hoppers' Huts were still in use until 1997 when the last crop was grown on Rock Farm, which had not gone over to mechanised picking (Pers. Comm. May 2019). A family from Hackney returned to these huts - in which their grandmother was born - for holidays until 2005.

Details

MATERIALS: dark stock brick laid in Flemish bond, red brick dressings and corrugated iron roofs.

PLAN: two L-shaped single-storey blocks forming a courtyard, open to the south, situated on the north-east side of the farmstead. Internally they are divided into individual huts, each with a single doorway and window.

DESCRIPTION: purpose-built hop pickers' huts comprising two L-shaped single-storey blocks divided into individual huts. They have gabled corrugated iron roofs supported on timber purlins. There are ventilation holes in the brickwork of the gable end of the blocks. Each hut has a single timber-framed window and wooden-boarded door with red-brick jambs, although double doors have been inserted

into one hut. Some have stable type doors, which allowed light and ventilation into the huts through the upper part of the door whilst the lower section was closed. At the south end of each block are water closets, each under a lower gabled roof, added later. Internally the huts have white-washed walls, although some may have been painted. Most of the huts are approximately 3m long by 2.5m wide but those at the corner of each block are 4.5m long by 3.5m wide.

Name	Rock Farm House
Address	Rock Farm, Gibbs Hill, Nettlestead, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 5HT
List Entry Number	1060643
Date First Listed	14 th October 1987

Summary

Farmhouse. C17 or earlier, with C19 facade. Front elevation red and grey brick in Flemish bond. Left gable end has broadly-spaced studding with red and grey brick infilling to ground floor, and tile-hung first floor. First floor of rear elevation rendered. Plain tile roof. 2 storeys, garret and basement. Stone plinth to left gable end, brick plinth to front. Half-hipped roof. Multiple red and grey brick stack towards right end. Irregular fenestration of 5 casements; two three-light and one two-light to left of stack, one single-light under stack, and one three-light to right. Segmental heads to ground-floor casements. Door with four flush panels and two top lights, with splayed rubbed brick voussoirs, in gabled red brick porch with bargeboards under stack. Two-storey rear addition to right. Two-storey rendered rear wing or stair turret with half-hipped roof behind and to left of stack. Rear lean-to to left. Interior not inspected.