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Cowley Farmhouse, Preston Bissett, Buckinghamshire. MK18 4DR. Design, Access & Heritage Statement

This report provides a historical assessment and supporting information for consideration of the planning and listed building submission for the replacement of a lean to garage with a new single storey extension to provide a new Kitchen, Boot Room & WC/Larder alongside re-allocation of room function at Ground Floor to Cowley Farmhouse.

The fabric of the listed building is largely unaltered and alterations are concentrated on the relatively recent garage addition.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Cowley Farm lies in a rural position to the South of Preston Bissett and the larger centre of Buckingham. Cowley Farm comprises a number of properties in the vicinity including the Grade II listed farmhouse which is central to this application, farmland (approximately 489 acres) and a number of traditional and modern farm buildings, some of which have been converted into separate dwellings.

The site is not located within a Conservation Area or situated within an AoONB.

Cowley Farmhouse is Grade II listed as follows;

SP 62 NE PRESTON BISSETT COWLEY

3/90 Cowley Farmhouse - II

25.9.51

House. Late C17 altered. Timber frame now covered with planking in rear gable wall, remainder brick with dentilled eaves. Old tile roof, central chimney stack of thin brick has 2 rectangular shafts with pilasters to sides and off-set head. T-plan. 2 storeys and attic. S.E. front has gabled cross wing projecting to left. Gable wall has some stone quoins to base at right, C19 3-light casement with cambered brick head to first floor, matching C20 casement with flat head to ground floor, and 2-light casement to attic with Phoenix fire insurance plaque below. Centre has lean-to in line with chimney. Right-hand bay has C19 3-light casements, the upper partly in the roof, and half-glazed door in wire porch to right. Lean-to garage to right. S.W. front has similar casements and 6-panelled door with rectangular barred fanlight and flat wooden hood on cut brackets. Some leaded casements to rear.

Listing NGR: SP6639928159

PROPOSAL/DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

The application seeks consent to remove the circa 1950s mono-pitch lean to garage that is currently used as a Games Room & Gym and reconstruct a new single storey extension that will provide a new Kitchen and Boot Room entrance/Larder/WC.

The farm has diversified and now requires a functional farm office and Laundry which will occupy the original Kitchen area. No historic features will be removed in this area & stripping out will extend to the removal of the modern kitchen units only.

The proposed extension will utilise traditional materials including re-claimed brick under a natural grey slate roof. The First & Attic Floor are un-altered in this application.

Site Accessibility

The new accommodation being created will be accessed by the existing gravel drive which leads to the principal elevation of Cowley Farmhouse.

In this rural location there will inevitably be a reliance on vehicle transport, however, rural bus services do run from nearby villages with onward links to trains services at Bicester, Aylesbury and Milton Keynes.

Site Ecology

Using Buckingham County Council Ecology & Trees Checklist & Natural England's Standing Advice, we have determined that no bat surveys are required for this application as follows:

There are **no** records showing bat roosts on the site or in the immediate area.

There are **no** historic records indicating that bats are nearby or present.

Extensive HS2 ecological reports have **not** identified bats in the site area (HS2 runs approximately 400m SW the application site).

There are **no** signs of bat droppings in the Games Room/Gym.

There are **no** underground structures or mines.

There are **no** mature/ancient trees close nearby.

There is **no** sign of discarded bat food matter (butterfly wings/moths/lacewings).

The roof comprises no membrane and tightly fitting slates

The garage is used extensively for gym/Games purposes which involves high levels of artificial lighting and human activity alongside reasonable levels of noise (music) which is unlikely to support bat presence.

In accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust Guidance, it is proposed that roof works will be undertaken (2022) under the close supervision of a registered Ecologist during Autumn months and that any further ecological requirements or surveys could be conditioned prior to works commencing.

Site Landscaping and Trees

There are no protected trees (under a TPO) within 50 metres of this site.

Site Planning History

Planning history relating to Cowley Farmhouse itself is outlined below;

12/02451/ALB	Internal alterations to enable change of use of annexe to separate unit of accommodation. Permission not required.
12/02277/APP	Change of use of annexe to separate unit of accommodation Permission Granted.

11/01706/APP	Change of Use and alteration to outbuildings to create ancillary residential accommodation. Approved.
11/01394/APP	Alterations to outbuildings to create ancillary residential accommodation. Approved.

PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE AND ADVICE

The National Planning Policy Framework, in paragraphs 189 and 190, expects that both applicant and local planning authority take responsibility for understanding the significance of a heritage asset and the impact of a development proposal. Local authorities should, the NPPF explains, consider the significance of the asset in order to 'minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal'.

It is not the intention of government to prevent change or freeze-frame local communities. Current policy and good practice show that change, if managed intelligently, can be successfully accommodated within the historic environment. This not only sustains significance but can add to the way we experience and understand historic places.

The NPPF states that planning authorities should encourage the use of re-using land that has been previously developed which applies to this application.

Local Planning Policy/Guidance

The Adopted Local 2013-2033 forms the basis of determining applications alongside the NPPF. Relevant Policies that have been adhered to are:

Section 8 of The VALP - Built Environment

Heritage assets

- 8.1 The historic environment is an asset of great cultural, social, economic and environmental value. It contributes significantly to our quality of life and to the character of Aylesbury Vale, representing a non-renewable resource that once lost is gone forever. Heritage assets are defined as those parts of the historic environment that have significance because of their historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest, over and above their functional utility. Significance can be made up of many different aspects of an asset's interest, and may be harmed by development directly affecting the physical fabric of the asset or within the setting of the asset. Government planning policy sets out that local planning authorities should set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. The following paragraphs supporting policy BE1 'Heritage assets' are the response to that requirement.
- 8.2 There are many different types of heritage asset; some are formally designated, others are non designated. The council's aim is to protect and enhance Aylesbury Vale's heritage assets through the identification of those of local significance and through ensuring that development is managed in a way that sustains or enhances their significance and setting. The effect of a planning application on the significance of a designated or non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining any application. The LPA will require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage asset affected including any contribution made by their setting. As a minimum the Historic Environment Record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise.
- 8.3 In weighing up applications that affect directly or indirectly non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Listed Buildings

- 8.7 The special interest of a listed building may be adversely affected by alterations or extensions to its physical fabric, or by development within the curtilage or development within the setting. The objective of listing buildings is to ensure their protection for future generations to enjoy. In addition to the normal planning application process, listed building consent is required for all works that would affect a building's special interest.
- 8.23 An understanding of the significance of any heritage asset, whether designated or non designated, lies at the heart of all decision making. Without understanding the significance of an asset it may not be possible to make an accurate assessment of the impact that a development will have on that significance. The significance of a heritage asset is based on its key heritage values. These values are defined by Historic England as the historic, evidential, aesthetic and communal values. By understanding the heritage values of an asset it is possible to assess the archaeological or architectural interest of a building, structure or site. Finally, the setting of an asset can contribute a great deal to its significance, by virtue of its positive impact on understanding the heritage values and interest of the asset as a whole. The definitions of heritage values and interest below have been prepared with specific reference to Historic England's Conservation Principles – Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment and Good Practice Guide for Local Heritage Listing.

Evidential

- 8.24 Evidential value is the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity. This can include land use, the hierarchy of places, historic building techniques, fashion and trends in architectural design. The setting of places, for example the rural hinterland of the Vale's villages, can contribute to this value as it shows historic linkages between places and economic functions.

In this application, the building and land use is fully preserved. The immediate and wider setting of the listed asset is unaltered and the evidential value is maintained.

Historic

- 8.25 Historic value lies in the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present and is often illustrative or associative. The links between places and people or events in history feeds into this value, and the tangible way in which modern day settlements have been affected by historic events (such as the setting up of a mediaeval market square) is key to understanding the development of a place.

The continued use of the farmhouse to service the evolving needs of modern farming activity ensures that the historic value of Cowley Farmhouse is preserved. The plan form of the original house is preserved where a new opening is made to the proposed new Kitchen.

Aesthetic

- 8.26 The intellectual and sensory impact of a place creates its aesthetic value. This may be as simple as the appreciation of a historic house and garden for its beauty, or the less formal glimpsed views around an historic settlement.

The farmhouse, its immediate and wider setting are preserved in this application.

Communal

- 8.27 The collective experience or memory of a place and the meaning that it holds for people who relate to it form the communal value of an asset. In terms of publicly accessible places and spaces this is often fairly easy to define, but is harder to interpret for areas that are not easily visible to communities. Neighbourhood plans and associated documents offer a good opportunity to try to define the communal value of a place or heritage asset.

Archaeological interest

- 8.28 There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially may hold, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point. Heritage assets with archaeological interest are the primary source of evidence about the substance and evolution of places, and of people and cultures that made them. Identification of archaeological interest will be made in conjunction with the Council Archaeological Service. Sub-surface archaeological interest is considered and advised on separately by the service.

Architectural interest

- 8.29 The architectural interest of a building or structure may be aesthetic, based on the intrinsic design value derived from local styles, materials, workmanship or any other distinctive local characteristic. It may be in part derived from the local context of a place, or an association with a known architect or designer of regional or national note.

The submitted proposal ensures that the existing farmhouse vernacular is respected through the use of sympathetic materials, building scale, form and traditional details.

- 8.30 The integrity of a building or structure may add to its interest – a degree of intactness and lack of harmful external alteration may make a building more significant. Equally, the ongoing organic development and growth of a building over centuries may be what gives it its value and interest.

We consider that the replacement extension to the farmhouse provides an opportunity for a clear and distinct evolution of the farmhouse. The scale, form and materials proposed all contribute to the natural growth and the next phase of a vernacular farmhouse addition.

- 8.31 If a building sits as a landmark, by virtue of its design, age, innovation, construction, position, use or communal associations contributes, within the local scene or as a valuable member of a group of buildings this may also add to its interest.

Setting

- 8.32 The setting of a heritage asset is the surroundings within which the asset may be experienced. It is not fixed and may evolve over time. Elements within a setting may be positive, negative or neutral, and so the ability to appreciate setting may be harmed or improved by development within the setting of an asset. Setting must not be confused with curtilage, to avoid confusion with residential curtilage for permitted development rights as this may differ.

The overall setting and experience of the listed farmhouse is enhanced by this proposal. The principal entrance elevation is put back to use and the farmhouse is reconciled with the front garden and original/intended approach.

Curtilage

- 8.33 Curtilage in heritage terms, refers to an area around a building and, with listed structures, the extent of curtilage is defined by consideration of ownership, both past and present, functional association and layout. The setting of a historic asset will include, but generally be more extensive than its curtilage.

BE1 Heritage assets

The historic environment, unique in its character, quality and diversity across the Vale is important and will be preserved or enhanced. All development, including new buildings, alterations, extensions, changes of use and demolitions, should seek to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, including their setting, and seek enhancement wherever possible.

Proposals for development shall contribute to heritage values and local distinctiveness. Where a development proposal is likely to affect a designated heritage asset and/or its setting negatively, the significance of the heritage asset must be fully assessed and supported in the submission of an application. The impact of the proposal must be assessed in proportion to the significance of the heritage asset and supported in the submission of an application. Heritage statements and/or archaeological evaluations will be required for any proposals related to or impacting on a heritage asset and/or possible archaeological site.

Proposals which affect the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be properly considered, weighing the direct and indirect impacts upon the asset and its setting. There will be a presumption in favour of retaining heritage assets wherever practical, including archaeological remains in situ, unless it can be demonstrated that the harm will be outweighed by the benefits of the development. Heritage statements and/or archaeological evaluations may be required to assess the significance of any heritage assets and the impact on these by the development proposal.

The council will:

- a. Support development proposals that do not cause harm to, or which better reveal the significance of heritage assets
- b. Require development proposals that would cause substantial harm to, or loss of a designated heritage asset and its significance, including its setting, to provide a thorough heritage assessment setting out a clear and convincing justification as to why that harm is considered acceptable on the basis of public benefits that outweigh that harm or the four circumstances in paragraph 133 of the NPPF all apply. Where that justification cannot be demonstrated proposals will not be supported, and
- c. Require development proposals that cause less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset to weigh the level of harm against the public benefits that may be gained by the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

Development affecting a heritage asset should achieve a high quality design in accordance with the Aylesbury Vale Design SPD and the council will encourage modern, innovative design which respects and complements the heritage context in terms of scale, massing, design, detailing and use.

In this instance the fabric, setting and legacy of this listed asset is fully preserved. The works extend to the formation of an opening within an existing wall, however, the plan form of the retained room is fully preserved so that it remains clearly visible and distinct in its original form.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

Significance is defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (Feb 2019) as: 'The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'. Placing the asset in its historical context and describing its characteristics and appearance is an important component of the evidence gathering exercise. This both informs our understanding of a site's significance and the contribution of its setting to this significance.

Cowley Farmhouse was included in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest on 20 February 1985. See below;

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The significance of Cowley Farmhouse relates primarily to the origins of its function and use as a farmhouse of typical vernacular in the local area along with its relationship with the surrounding agricultural farmland.

Of relatively humble origins, the farmhouse has been altered over the centuries and provides evidence of the prosperity of farming in the area in the late 17th century and into the 18th & 19th century, which provided sufficient resources to build and then extend the farmhouse, and build the outbuildings to the rear, (now converted) and the ongoing prosperity of farming which sustained the farmstead until today.

The farmhouse has no village or public presentation but nevertheless provides an excellent example of local materials and farm building vernacular with its steeply pitched clay roof and mellow red brick construction.

The lean to mono-pitch roof that houses the Gym & Games Room (in contrast) is by design a much later addition (circa 1950's) built in single skin with far inferior brickwork evident. The use of local materials contributes to local distinctiveness and helps to place the house geographically.

The original outward appearance, massing and plan form of Cowley Farmhouse is fully preserved in this proposal. We would submit that by virtue of its scale, proportions and design, the proposed extension to the listed structure would result in no harm to the character and spatial plan form of the property and would therefore preserve the character and appearance of the original farmhouse and its setting.

The proposals have minimal impact on the fabric of the farmhouse and are clearly identifiable as an addition clearly de-marking the evolution and history of the listed asset.

Conservation principles, policy and practice seek to preserve and enhance the value of heritage assets. With the issuing of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in Feb 2019, the Government has re-affirmed its aim that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations.

This modest extension will extend the quality of life to the next (3rd) generation of the applicants family that has maintained and protected this historic asset for over 80 years.

In relation to development affecting a designated heritage asset the NPPF (Feb 2019) states in paragraphs 193 and 194 that: '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. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.'

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (March 2014) seeks to provide further advice on assessing the impact of proposals explaining that what matters in assessing the level of harm (if any) is the degree of impact on the significance of the asset. It states:

'In determining whether works to a listed building (or its setting) 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 proposals in this instance can be assigned as 'less than substantial harm' and that there is no demonstrable harm caused by the extension to any key element of the special architectural or historic interest of the farmhouse.

The NPPF explains in paragraphs 195 and 196 the differences between 'substantial' harm and 'less than substantial' harm, advising that any harm should be justified by the public benefit of a proposal. In cases where there is less than substantial harm, paragraph 196 states:

'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use'.

The PPG also seeks to provide a clearer understanding of what constitutes 'public benefit', as it is the public benefit that flows from a development that can justify harm. In weighing the public benefits against potential harm, considerable weight and importance should be given to the desirability to preserve the setting of listed buildings.

Public benefits can flow from a variety of developments and could be anything that delivers economic, social, or environmental progress as described in the NPPF, paragraph 8. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the 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 benefits. It explains that public benefits can include heritage benefits, such as:

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

Historic England explains its approach to managing the historic environment and how we experience places stating in 'Conservation Principles' (April 2008) paragraph 88: 'Very few significant places can be maintained at either public or private expense unless they are capable of some beneficial use; nor would it be desirable, even if it were practical, for most places that people value to become solely memorials of the past'.

In this instance the proposed extension secures the optimum viable use for the farmhouse by maintaining its use and function as the nucleus of the farm business administration whilst also operating as a successful family home for multi generational use.

The proposed extension secures the continued investment, preservation and maintenance of the farmhouse and surrounding vernacular buildings.

It also comments in paragraph 86: 'Keeping a significant place in use is likely to require continual adaptation and change; but, provided such interventions respect the values of the place, they will tend to benefit public (heritage) as well as private interests in it. Many places now valued as part of the historic environment exist because of past patronage and private investment, and the work of successive generations often contributes to their significance. Owners and managers of significant places should not be discouraged from adding further layers of potential future interest and value, provided that recognised heritage values are not eroded or compromised in the process'.

We would submit that this extension fulfils Historic England's advice in this respect by being a clear and evidential layer of evolution.

CONCLUSION

It is not the intention of government to prevent change of historic assets. Current policy and good practice show that change, if proposed sympathetically, can be successfully accommodated within the historic environment.

This application proposes a modest replacement extension using sympathetic materials and traditional building techniques and details. The extension presents as subservient and in sympathetic character with the existing farmhouse which remains overwhelmingly dominant in its current form and character.

We would conclude that the alterations preserve the historic asset and its immediate/wider setting and that the proposals fulfil all aspects of Local/National policy and wider guidance on historical conservation. We make specific reference to BE 1 which states that the Local Authority will support development proposals that do not cause harm to, or which better reveal the significance of heritage assets and we suggest that this important criteria is met by this submission.