

DESIGN + ACCESS STATEMENT (V1)

Bryntail Cottage, Llanidloes (Ref: 19/16 DAS)

Introduction

This Design and Access Statement accompanies an application for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent for the refurbishment, alteration, and extension of Bryntail Cottage, Llanidloes, SY18 6NU, and the adjacent building, referred to as 'The Miner's Cottage'. Its purpose is to explain:

- the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the proposed works; and
- the policy or approach to access

Background

Bryntail Cottage is a Grade II Listed building and a good example of a typical upland worker's small-holding. It has been used for approximately that past 100 years by Birmingham-based schools as a base for school trips, giving inner-city children an opportunity for new experiences, and to learn about an environment very different to that in which they have grown up. See <https://centralgrammarschool.org.uk/bryntail/> for a more detailed account.

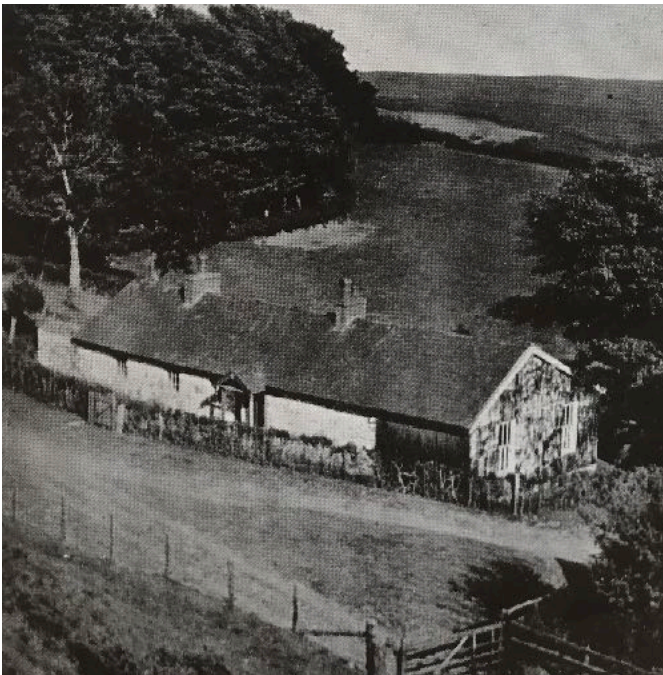


Fig 1. Bryntail Cottage, unknown date

In more recent years, visits to the cottage have become much less frequent, as a lack of funding has caused the building to gradually fall into a state of disrepair. In contrast the requirements for safeguarding the wellbeing of minors have become more stringent. The result of these factors is that the building has been rendered no longer fit for purpose. The building now lies unused, and is at risk of accelerated decay.

In summer 2020 The Bryntail Cottage Charity was established with the sole aim of restoring Bryntail Cottage, and giving it a new lease of life, once again affording inner-city school children unique learning opportunities in the Welsh landscape. Significant progress has already been made with acquiring funding from a range of sources, and it is hoped that, subject to a successful application, progress can be made with the building works, with the building being made useable again by summer 2022. See <https://centralgrammarschool.org.uk/bryntail-cottage-charity/> for more details of the charity's goals.

Design brief

The design brief for this project was actually relatively straight-forward. The charity wanted to preserve the cottage's rustic character, whilst creating robust, and adequately provisioned accommodation that is safe, yet exciting for young people to visit. The charity has been keen to stress from the outset, that the project is to remain somewhat utilitarian, not only to keep costs in check, but to remain true to the nature of the cottage and its history. This is not meant to be luxury accommodation. It does however need to meet certain minimum standards to ensure the welfare of visitors, and to remain inclusive to all.

Summary of the design evolution

The design evolution went through three main steps:

- Initial conceptual exploration and feasibility drawings to determine what would be possible
- Concept design development and heritage consultation with Powys County Council
- Design development, taking into account feedback received from the Heritage Officer and following additional site appraisals
- Finalising design details after receipt of information from various third-party consultants.

The feasibility study

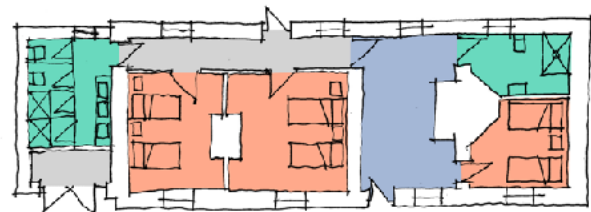
In winter 2019, prior to the formation of the charity, trustees sought an initial feasibility report. During this initial phase, a sketch scheme was developed which explored the feasibility of providing accommodation for up to 16 students, and 4 supervising adults. In this scheme, the student sleeping accommodation is divided into two, to allow a 50-50 split between male and female students. In the past, visits to Bryntail Cottage have been largely male-dominated, and the team has been keen to ensure the scheme didn't create an unfair split again.

The Miner's Cottage was indicated as having two storeys in both parts of the building. The kitchen is located upstairs above the staff bedroom, and the dining room is located on the ground floor in the existing dormitory. The scheme includes a new shower block on the ground floor of each building (one male, one female). At that time, the shower block proposed to be adjoined to Bryntail Cottage was intended to replace the existing metal-clad extension.

This initial scheme, whilst adequate for proving the feasibility of the project, was ultimately deemed to be less than ideal. Firstly, it fails to acknowledge the importance of the metal-clad extension, which though not original, is likely to have been present at least since Birmingham schools were making use of the buildings, and as such there is a cultural and even nostalgic value to it. Secondly, the scheme was somewhat clumsy in terms of the overall arrangement of spaces.

Concept design and consultation

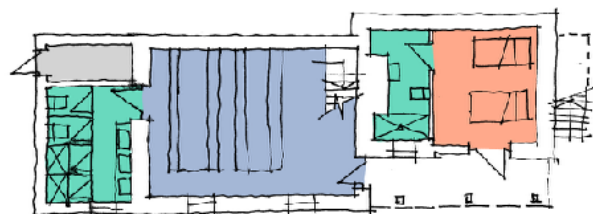
Following agreement on the overall direction of the project, and formation of the charity in summer 2020, an instruction was received to develop concept proposals for the scheme so that the charity could begin to seek funding for the project. A scheme was developed that attempted to address the shortcomings of the feasibility design, and this is ostensibly the same scheme that has been submitted as part of this application.



Bryntail Cottage - Ground Floor



Miner's Cottage - First Floor



Miner's Cottage - Ground Floor

Fig 2. Initial feasibility drawings

In summary, the concept design reduced the overall amount of work required to the existing buildings and retained the existing metal-clad extension. This scheme was subsequently submitted to Powys's Heritage Officer who provided detailed advice and feedback on the proposed design. In general the comments were favourable, but there were a few key areas identified that needed further thought, which are summarised below:

- Subdivision of rooms would be resisted unless absolutely necessary. Small extensions would be preferable
- Energy efficiency measures would need to be sensitively designed and detailed to ensure no harm is done to the historic fabric of the building
- The design of the toilet block extension is potentially over-complicated. However, in subsequent discussions, this objection was relaxed in light of the design logic behind it; namely, to provide a visual break between old and new
- Corrugated metal cladding would be more appropriate than timber cladding on extensions
- The proposed design of the reconstructed store at the north east end of Bryntail Cottage should be changed to a simple lean-to structure, rather than the proposed double-pitched roof
- The Heritage Officer also provided details of what additional information would be required with the application.

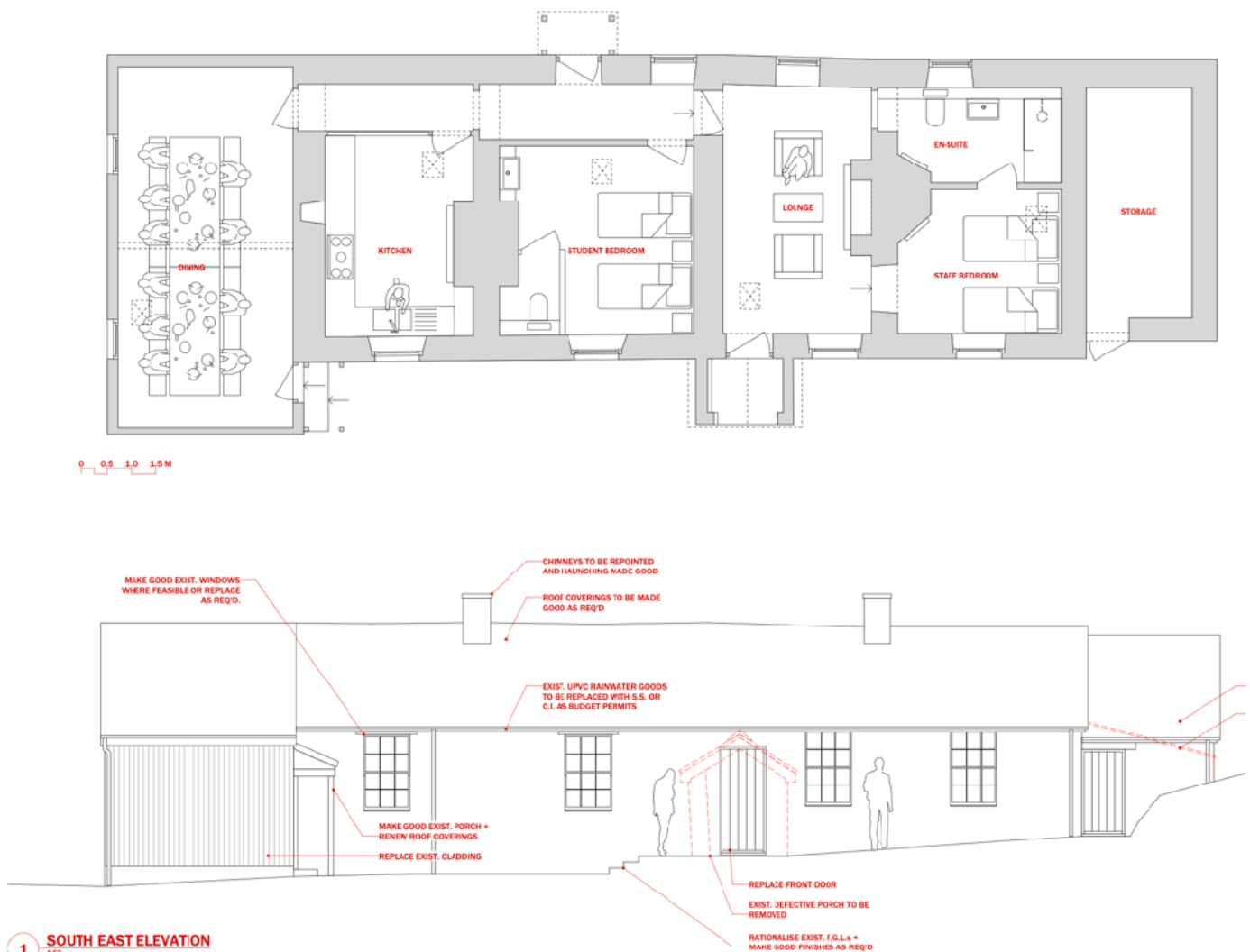


Fig 3. Concept design drawings, Bryntail Cottage

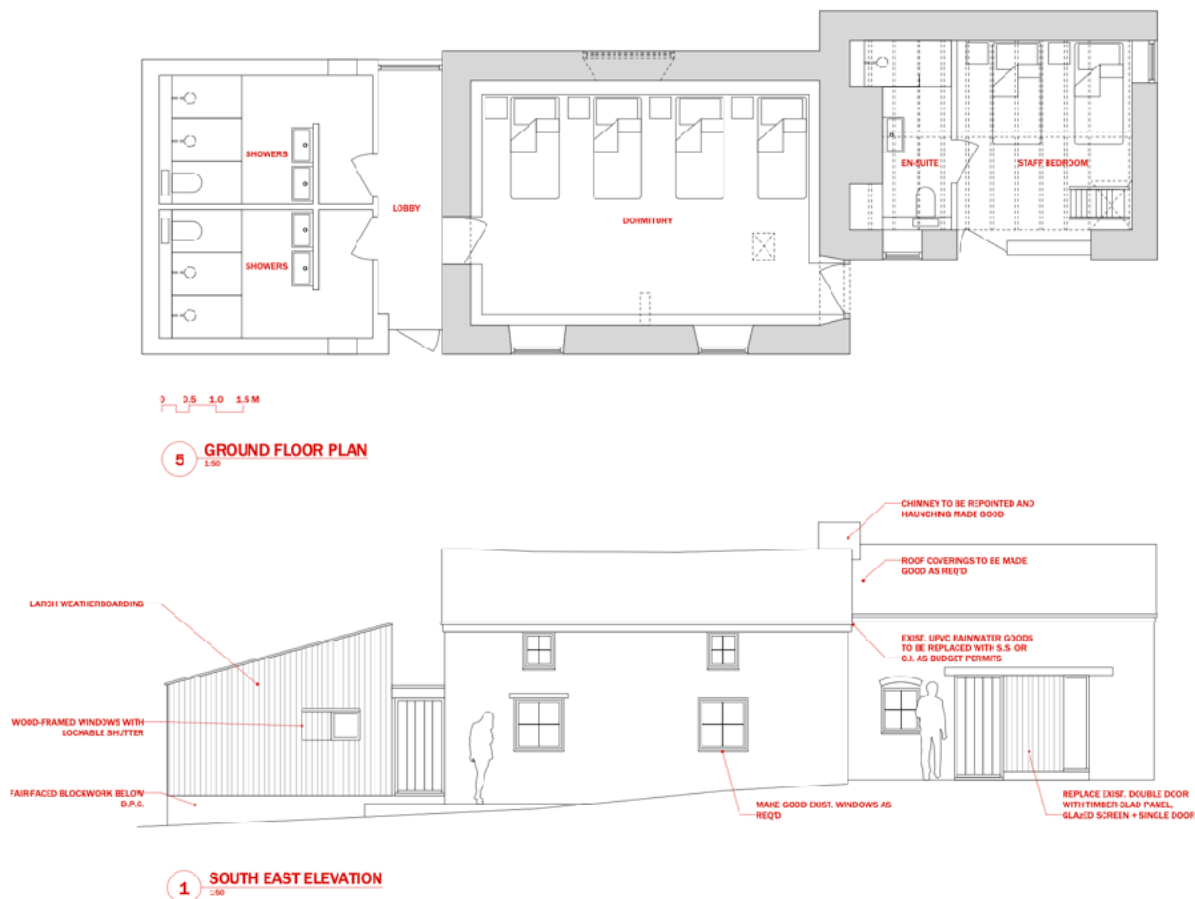


Fig 4. Concept design drawings, Miner's Cottage

Final design development

Following receipt of the above-mentioned feedback, and after good progress by the charity with acquiring funding, an instruction was received to develop the design and submit an application for planning permission and listed building consent.

In order to address the points raised by the Heritage Officer previously, the design was amended as such:

- The subdivision of rooms in the Miner's Cottage was removed by incorporating a small lean-to extension on the north east.
- The subdivision of rooms in Bryntail Cottage could not ultimately be removed altogether, but it has been adjusted so as to avoid subdivision of one of the primary rooms, and instead subdivide one of the smaller rooms. This subdivision is required to provide a student WC in this building. This is required for the welfare of students for whom it might be unsafe to cross the site to the Miner's Cottage at night to use the toilet facilities there.
- The rebuilding of the store in Bryntail Cottage has been adjusted to a lean-to structure.
- Corrugated metal cladding is specified in lieu of timber cladding specified previously.

The larger extension of the Miner's Cottage has been adjusted to a double-pitched roof form. This has been done for two reasons. Firstly, it simplifies the whole design of the extension, making it more easily constructed, more robust, and reducing the risk of defects. Secondly, it hopefully addresses any residual concerns the Heritage Officer may have had over the previous design. A lean-to design was also considered, however, without the design break, it had an overly bulky and dominant appearance. It is hoped that the design as submitted is deemed to be more 'in tune' with the existing buildings and the wider context.

Detailed considerations

Over the course of its history, the building has been subject to various DIY repairs, and whilst it remains substantially in good condition, some well-meaning changes are likely to be causing some issues within the fabric of the building (e.g. interstitial condensation, decay, etc.), or at the very least are diminishing the special historic character of the building. This project is an opportunity to correct mistakes, as well as make improvements that will have a long-term benefit to the building.

Following a further site appraisal, a detailed schedule of repairs has been drafted and is included as part of this application. A window schedule and door schedule have also been prepared indicating what the proposals are for each individual item. Where possible, repairs to historic features have been favoured over their wholesale replacement.

In order to improve the overall energy efficiency of the building, a number of upgrades are proposed, details of which are shown in the submitted drawings. Key to development of these details is an understanding of the characteristics of the historic fabric. It has been of critical importance to develop proposals that are sympathetic to these characteristics. As such the proposals broadly involve restoring the 'breathability' or vapour-openness of the building's key elements, and then retaining those characteristics with the introduction of materials that are similarly vapour-open and hygroscopic. The result is that the building will naturally regulate moisture levels both within the key building elements (i.e. damp) and within the internal environment (i.e. humidity), which will make for a far more resilient building in the long-term, whilst also reducing the energy required to maintain thermal comfort and air quality.

These upgrades in thermal efficiency also offer an opportunity to use renewable technology as the primary source of heating, and an air-source heat pump (ASHP) installation has been proposed. The ASHP is an affordable option that will work well with the expected intermittent occupation, as it can be controlled remotely and does not require frequent maintenance, unlike biomass for instance.

Access considerations

The building's rural location does present some challenges in terms of access, but ultimately it can be accessed with relative ease by vehicle along Glyndŵr's Way, which is a typical rural track and public right of way. Visits will always be made by mini-bus or similar, and where needed, less ambulant visitors can be easily assisted into the site from the farmers access. From here, it is proposed that there will be new pathways to each of the buildings, which will be formed to a consistent and gradual grade, with consideration given in the detailed design stages to the most appropriate materials for both the context, and accessibility requirements.

Permanent level access into the buildings is unlikely to be achievable due to the risk of damp and the likelihood of much higher costs (due to the requirement for drainage, etc). However, it is proposed that the charity will keep purpose-made ramps on site to create a temporary level access when required and whilst it is acknowledged that this is not necessarily ideal, it is considered to be a proportionate and practical solution.

It should also be noted that there is enough flexibility in the layout that it would be possible to accommodate less ambulant young people for whom use of shared washing facilities might not be practical, and who may require a bedroom with an en-suite.

In summary then, difficulties with access, and maintaining inclusivity are largely managerial issues.

Prepared by: David Holland, Architect

Date: 11th August 2021 (Version 1)