

HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT (V2)

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

This 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. Bryntail Cottage is a heritage asset and as such, it is necessary to properly assess the heritage significance and the impact of the proposed development upon that significance. This statement forms a written summary of those assessments.

Bryntail Cottage is reported to be a mine captain's cottage associated with the nearby Gundry's Shaft, a lead mine, which is located due south of the site. The adjacent stone building, which has historically been referred to as the 'miner's cottage' is understood to be curtilage listed and it comprises two interlinked gabled forms; one being a workshop, and the other currently being used as a dormitory. The latter part may have once been used as living accommodation, hence it has become known as the miner's cottage, but the evidence for this appears to be largely anecdotal and it is possible that it had another use associated with the mine. For example, it is quite possible that the north-eastern most part of this building was formerly a blacksmith's workshop. In any case, the buildings provide a good example of a typical worker's small-holding that would have once been found throughout this region.

The site also includes a more recent toilet block made of concrete blockwork with a felted roof, and concrete hardstanding with a temporary porta-cabin style building.

A visual inspection of Bryntail Cottage indicates that it may have originally consisted of a two-bay cottage with stone-rubble walling, a simple gabled roof with slate coverings, and perhaps some kind of additional structure to the north-eastern end. The two original bays are thought likely to be those which include the sash windows 03 and 04 to the south east elevation, and the casement windows 05 and 06 to the north west elevation. The sash windows have no horns and of the two casement windows, one has what appears to be a wrought iron opening casement set into a timber frame. The remaining opening casement (if indeed it ever was a feature) is missing and has been replaced with a large sheet of fixed float glass. Furthermore, these two casements are distributed evenly along this part of the north west elevation, which further reinforces that these two bays are more likely to have been the extent of the original building. Based on the presence of sash windows without horns, it is assumed that this part of the building dates back to the early nineteenth century or earlier¹. The simpler, ground-bearing floor (as opposed to the suspended timber floor found in the other parts of the building) is also potentially indicative of this being earlier.

The other two bays in the rubble-stone walled parts of the building contain an additional two sash windows, only they are horned, and possibly late 20C replacements, since they appear to be made from machined timber and contain only float glass. As mentioned above, the floor construction differs in this part of the building too. Fireplaces are more indicative of being late 19C/early 20C, and therefore it is assumed this is also the period this part of the building was constructed.

Finally, at the south-western end is a room that is most-likely an early-mid 20C addition. This part of the building appears to be timber-framed, is covered in profiled metal cladding, and is topped with an asymmetrical roof with slate coverings. The roof form creates a small outshot to the south-east. On the south-west elevation are two large sash windows (with horns, and seemingly of machined timber), probably installed at the same time as the two horned sash windows on the south-east elevation. It is possible that this addition was built when the building started to be used by schools.

For more than 100 years, the building has held a long-standing relationship with Birmingham-based schools, which have repurposed the cottage to provide enrichment and education of many inner-city children and youths, who may otherwise have not had an opportunity to experience the rural landscape. During this period, the buildings have undergone various regimes of ad-hoc amateur maintenance, presumably due to limitations in available funding.

¹ English Heritage (2018) Practical Building Conservation: Timber. Oxon: Routledge, p. 70.

However, on the whole, the character has largely been retained, and one could speculate that this may in fact have been inadvertently helped by the lack of funding, which, had it been more readily available, may have led to more drastic, and probably irreversible changes, or irreparable damage.

Internally and externally, the building is characterised by its utilitarian nature. Finishes are hard-wearing, and have stood the test of time. Where alternations have been made, they too have been largely utilitarian and so whether by design, or by accident, have not had an overly adverse impact on the overall character of the cottage.

In summary then, the historical significance stems from a combination of factors that encompass the architectural significance (including its development over time), its link with the lead-mining industry, and its remote setting, which makes its survival until now all the more significant, with many isolated properties falling to ruin and disrepair. The toilet block, concrete hard-standing, and porta-cabin are considered to be features which diminish the character of the building by adversely affecting its setting.

With only occasional and increasingly rare use, it is evident that the overall condition has begun to deteriorate and as such some basic refurbishment is now required in order to conserve the historic fabric. However, it will be important to retain the 'basic' nature of the building, and care should be taken not to 'over-modernise' it by introducing inappropriate domestic fixtures and finishes.

The element of the proposed development that will have the largest potential impact on the heritage significance is the removal of the toilet block and the two proposed extensions to the miner's cottage. The removal of the toilet block is itself an enhancement to the significance of the building on account of its rather incongruous nature. The new additions are an interpretation of vernacular styles. The smaller of the two extensions takes the form of a simple lean-to, whilst the larger is designed with a symmetrical double-pitched roof parallel to the two existing roofs of this building. The design of the extensions are intended to provide clarity as to the development of the site through introduction of external materials that are visually different, yet which are not incongruous. Corrugated metal cladding has been selected because it is widely available, and historically has been a common, low-cost material for extending buildings such as these, which has often needed to be undertaken on the smallest of budgets.

The porta-cabin and concrete slab have a negative impact on the site and as such their removal will significantly improve the setting and enhance the character of the site.

For Bryntail Cottage, the most obvious change will be the reconstruction of the derelict structure at the north east end. Photographic evidence shows that this was once a lean-to structure.

In both buildings, some internal changes are planned. However, the main changes only involve the subdivision of one existing room in Bryntail Cottage to create a student WC. Whilst it is acknowledged that such subdivision is not ideal from a conservation point-of-view, it should be noted that there are management requirements in terms of safeguarding the welfare of the students that will use the building. These requirements make it a necessity for there to be a student toilet in both buildings so that students are not required to go outdoors at night.

It should also be noted that such changes are reversible and they make a small but important contribution to ensuring the long-term viability of the heritage asset. Therefore, although it does change the character of the building somewhat, it is considered in this case to be an acceptable compromise.

At present, neither building incorporates a fit-for-purpose heating installation, with storage heaters and open fires being the only available options. The site does not benefit from mains gas, and fuel storage tanks are likely to be large and visually obtrusive unless installed underground, which is an expensive option, and is ultimately unsustainable as we strive for sustainability. It is therefore proposed that the development will also incorporate renewable heating technology in the form of an air-source heat pump. Siting of the heat pump is crucial not only to its performance, but also to reducing the visual impact it has on the development. It is acknowledged that a heat pump will inevitably have a small undesirable impact on the building. However, a careful balance has to be struck between the desire to conserve the character of the building (taking into consideration the other improvements that are being proposed), its long-term viability, and the wider social responsibility to pursue renewable and sustainable

heating technology where possible. It should also be noted that a heat-pump installation can be reversed should it no longer be required.

Other enhancements, such as the proposed energy-efficiency improvements, are all sensitively considered and designed to minimise the risk of any adverse impact on the character of the building. In any case, they are likely to improve the current condition of the building which is largely finished with non-breathable paints which may currently be causing unnecessary harm to the historic fabric. As such they will preserve the heritage significance, and ensure the buildings are fit-for-purpose for the long-term, which will help to secure their viability.

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