

Heritage Statement¹

- ⇒ National Planning Policy Framework
- ⇒ East Herts Heritage Guidance Note 10: Windows and Doors
- ⇒ East Herts District Council local validation requirements for planning and other applications, Heritage Statements pp. 10-11

First stage:² Bennils as a historic asset

Bennils³ was listed on 14 January 1985 as an eighteenth-century cottage that is timber framed and rendered with a thatched roof, one storey and attics, casement windows, a porch on the west elevation, two gabled chimney stacks, and an outshut at the rear.⁴ That is its recorded heritage worth.

Under previous ownership during the 1990s and early 2000s Bennils was extended twice at the rear. The first extension can be seen from the “Existing North West Elevation” on JB5, being drawings dated 6/11/03 for the then proposed second extension, which was later completed in accordance with the then “Proposed North West Elevation”.

During 2010-11 the chimney on the north-east elevation failed structurally and had to be demolished and rebuilt. This was all done under and in accordance with all requirements of references 3/11/0420/LB and 3/11/0419/FP.

During 2018-19 the property was re-thatched with reed replacing straw in an area affected by the geometry of the previous extension pursuant to all necessary permissions and an East Herts District Council grant under reference 3/18/0032/LBC.

The door slab the subject of the present application is illustrated figuratively on both north-west elevations on JB5 as a boarded timber door just to the right of the centre-line of those elevations (i.e. it is not the stable door to the left).

The true appearance of the door slab however is as per photograph JB4 i.e. a modern “off the shelf” cut down door made out of mahogany or similar tropical hardwood and constructed with panels and mouldings held together by glue and dowel. This door slab is installed in the “new” (i.e. c. 1990s) extended part of the house and is used as it was intended to be as a new “front” door (albeit at the back of the house) – with use of the “old” front door at the front of the house discontinued.

¹ Amended to address points raised on behalf of the planning authority by Mr Ted Mead in his letter of 5 June 2023 and by Mr Paul Burt in his email of 6 June 2023.

² The 2-stage approach is that of East Herts District Council local validation requirements for planning and other applications, Heritage Statements pp. 10-11.

³ Sometimes spelled “Bennills” by others.

⁴ Historic England reference 1101865.

This “new” door appears out of character with the remainder of the property. Our best understanding is that it was fitted as part of the first extension i.e. in the 1990s. It was the front door in situ when we purchased Bennils in 2007. The door has recently been damaged irreparably – which is why it must be replaced.

The limit of the proposal for which listed building consent is sought is to replace this door slab with a traditional oak ledged and braced door slab which is appropriate to the property, made and installed by a heritage joiner in accordance with detail drawings JB1 and JB2. The replacement door slab will reflect the figurative depiction of the door slab on the drawing at JB5.

The door frame – which is a modern (c. 1990s) wooden door frame painted white – will not be replaced but will be refurbished, in terms of re-cutting appropriate positions for hinges and keeps and making good. The appearance of the door frame after the proposed work will be unchanged – it will still be the existing wooden frame painted white, albeit having undergone the minor refurbishment just stated. The frame will look the same as it does now from outside and inside and be substantially the same material as now.

Second stage: the potential impact of the proposal

The design of the new door can be seen from detail drawings JB1 and JB2. These drawings have been prepared by a heritage joiner, with whom we discussed an appropriate design having discussed the design in advance with the East Herts Conservation Officer, Emma Keller.

The proposal carries no negative heritage impact. The old door slab which is damaged irreparably and in any event inappropriate for the property will be removed and replaced by a heritage door slab made out of FSC certified oak by traditional methods in keeping with the rest of the property – and indeed being a far better match for its other doors. The door frame will be identical in appearance and fabric to before, albeit refurbished as detailed above.

If not neutral as to heritage impact then the proposal can only be positive: an inappropriate c. 1990s fitted door slab will be replaced by an entirely appropriate bespoke heritage and conservation piece.

For completeness, the proposal entails no archaeological impact.⁵

Jonathan Barnes
6 June 2023

⁵ This point was raised on behalf of the planning authority by Mr Mead on 5 June 2023.