



SCHOOL COTTAGES, HELMINGHAM

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS



HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

and Design and Access Statement

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PART 1 - DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

This statement is provided in support of an application for Listed Building Consent for works at nos.93 and 94 School Cottages Helmingham, the purpose of which is to amalgamate two 2-bedroom cottages to create a single dwelling. The proposal is illustrated in the application drawings as follows:-

22045-001-PL3 - Location Plan
22045-100-PL1 - Site Plan
22045-110-PL1 - Proposed Plans
22045-200-PL1 - Elevations and Sections

AMOUNT

The proposal concerns amalgamating two two-bedroom cottages to create one dwelling having 3 bedrooms. No additional floorspace is created.

LAYOUT

The cottages form part of a late medieval hall house, now divided into three cottages. 92 is understood to occupy the former parlour bay, 93 the hall and 94 the service bay. The proposal relates only to nos. 93 and 94. No additional floorspace is created and the alterations are substantially internal.

SCALE

The scale pertains to a traditional farmhouse and the proposal to reunite the two cottages which currently provide two and one-bedroom dwellings would not result in additional bedrooms being created.

SETTING

The house has a rural setting, surrounded by open countryside and a small wooded area to one side. The house is set back from the highway and on lower ground, but with a full view of the principal elevation from the highway – a local B-Road. The local Primary School sits more or less opposite and there are estate cottages a few hundred yards to the north. It is likely that the house historically belonged to a farmstead, but there are no surviving farm buildings within its curtilage.

LANDSCAPING

There are no particular proposals for landscaping. The present arrangements will remain, with a gravelled parking area in front of the cottages and private gardens to the rear. Some clearance of undergrowth is expected.

ACCESS

Within the constraints of this historic building, and its rural location, there is little that can be done to improve accessibility but it should be made no worse. In the re-planning of the interior there will be a w.c. on the ground floor, as before.

PART 2 - RESPONSE TO PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

Advice was welcomed from Babergh Mid Suffolk Council in June 2023 under the reference DC/23/01340. Comments related largely to the heritage implications of the proposals and were generally supportive of the scheme. It was agreed that the amalgamation of the two cottages in the northern part of the farmhouse would assist understanding of the original spatial subdivision, and that the reinstatement of two former openings internally would be a satisfactory way of achieving this.

We respond to some other detailed comments as follows:-

The proposed timber frame repairs and addition of insulation to frame voids would be supported if breathable boards are installed over the frame provided the render finish is on timber lath and does not overhang beyond the plinth. The proposal to only re-render nos.93 and 94 could adversely affect the street scene and appearance of the farmhouse. If practical issues can be overcome and no.92 is re-rendered at the same time, there will be no objection on heritage grounds.

We agree that a consistent and unifying appearance should be maintained across the principal frontage as seen from the highway. We will propose that, following render repairs to 93 and 94, the whole of the east elevation wall be redecorated. However, the removal of existing render from no.92 may not be feasible. Although in the same ownership it has a long term tenancy and we will have to avoid disruption to the occupants. The render face is currently approximately 50mm back from brick plinth, so probably represents the original render line (unless the frame was once exposed). The render here is relatively new and may have followed removal of cement pebble dash and metal lath from most of the exterior. In the first instance we intend renewal of render only up to ground floor window cill level, on this elevation, sufficient to address low level timber repairs. The repairs to be in haired lime plaster on timber lath. It should be possible to finish the repairs flush to the surrounding work and with a similar finished texture.

More extensive render repairs are required on the rear elevation to no.93, where cracking suggests decay in the sole plate.

We would be happy for final details to be Conditioned once established on site.

The heritage team also recommends that further investigation be carried out to confirm the position of existing and historic frame members, and of later openings, so that the impact of the proposal can be clearly described...

We have revisited the building but have found no contrary evidence to the pre-existing doorways upon which this proposal is dependant.

Alongside submitting an application to notify Historic England of the removal of the staircases, the agent should also consider approaching Historic England separately for advice at pre-application stage.

Regrettably the opportunity has not so far been taken to engage with Historic England regarding these proposals but we propose to do so at the same time as submitting this application.

PART 3 - HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE HERITAGE ASSET

From its plan and general appearance the building is readily identifiable as a typical Suffolk farmhouse of the sixteenth century. Further inspection reveals a former open hall type having an arch braced tie beam and carved principal posts of particular quality – although the crown post no longer exists and most of the roof structure is later. We have not viewed the interior of no.92 but understand that the first floor joists are of high quality. This would be expected as representing the parlour and best chamber. 93-94 then occupy the hall (with its later inserted floor), the cross-passage, and the two service rooms. The plan form is simple and has only been extended to the rear in relatively modern times.

The building is Listed, Grade II, with the following description:-

Terrace of 3 cottages, subdivided from an early C16 3-cell open hall house with late C16 alterations. 2 storeys, partly with attics. Timber framed and plastered. Pantiled roof probably once thatched, with axial chimney of red brick rebuilt in mid C20; an internal end chimney of C19 to right. C20 casements. Each cottage has a half-glazed C20 panelled entrance door; at No.93 also with a pantiled-roofed porch.

No.93 contains the former open hall; No.94 the service cell; and No.92 the parlour cell, which was probably rebuilt in late C16 or C17 (not examined). The open truss of the hall has an arch-braced cambered tie-beam, hollow chamfered; at the base of one arch brace there survives a finely carved pilaster shaft, the upper half polygonal with a moulded capital, and the lower half in the form of a buttress with sunk traceried panels. Good close studding. In late C16, an upper floor was inserted in the hall, with closely spaced chamfered joists. The roof was rebuilt in C17 with principal rafters and purlins.

We assume that the farmhouse, in common with many others, was converted to two dwellings in the nineteenth century; each being provided with a brick out-house as seen elsewhere on the Helmingham Estate. The subdivision of 93 and 94 is modern, with a new stair being installed possibly in the 1970s. Connecting doorways at ground and first floor level have been filled in.

Although there is nothing nearby to suggest an historic farm layout, the house maintains its rural setting which is generally uncluttered by modern features. It is set in the river valley and is appreciated in its context from the highway past the village school.

SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HERITAGE ASSET

Although there are better-preserved examples of this type of Suffolk dwelling, the special significance of School Cottages is in the quality of surviving timber frame; much of which lies within no.92 but with 93 containing a carved principal post of rare quality supporting the arched tie beam of the former open hall (- the original roof structure rebuilt at a later date).

There is also some social and historical interest in the house having become part of the Helmingham Estate, its loss of status and its sub-division into three cottages reflecting changes in the rural economy.

Neither of these areas of significance is impacted by the proposals.

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS and OTHER WORKS

In terms of building alterations, the owner's brief for this project is to amalgamate the two two-bedroom cottages and create one dwelling having three bedrooms. Initial evidence indicates that this will be to reverse the twentieth century alterations that created the two present cottages. It is also desired that the bathroom be on the first floor.

We have approached the brief with the premise that no significant historic timbers should be cut. Given that the original hall house did not have a full first floor, low cross beams restrict the opportunity to create new openings between the two cottages. The placing of the vertical circulation within the plan is also constrained by the desire not to remove floor joists. These are assumed to date from the flooring over of the open hall, but have not yet been uncovered. Options to create a new stair within a new rear wing have briefly been considered, but would result in the loss of otherwise intact framing at first floor.

Assumptions were made that the ground floor layout of no.94 derives from the typical historic layout of pantry and buttery and that if the historic framing has survived there would be the often-found pair of doors either side of a central post. It was also noted that the first floor tie beam between 93 and 94 has a wide notch in the underside (approximately the width of a window, but not in this location) suggesting a former opening which might have a later and less significant infill. If this were to be the case, and the removal of both infills can be justified, then the brief may be achieved. Some minimal opening up has therefore been conducted at both of these locations. Both ground and first floor positions reveal a painted softwood door lining; probably 19th century. These will be lost in the proposals. That on the ground floor does not, however, exactly occupy the original service opening, and it appears that the framing has been altered here. It is desired to remove a stud that is nailed rather than pegged at the head. The sole plate at this doorway location is lost in the floor depth and is assumed not original.

Landing circulation can be achieved using the above opening and with a new stair occupying the same position as the existing. Subject to further detailed setting out and site investigation it should be that no first floor joists are removed.

In some interior areas the original timber frame is exposed and is of good quality close-studding. However, much of the interior of the cottages relates to the work of their subdivision and includes plasterboard partitions and ceiling linings. The inside of the external walls, on the ground storey, is formed with metal lath and plaster. Where inspected, the wattle and daub panels in the ground storey have been lost but there is no thermal insulation. Ground floors are of concrete. A general refurbishment is due. The condition of the timber frame has not been fully investigated, but repairs are anticipated.

SCOPE OF WORKS

Removal of 2no. staircases and construction of 1no. in existing location.
Infilling of stairwell in 94. New balustrade to landing / bathroom.

Removal of ground floor kitchen and bathroom partitions and fittings in no.93.

Internal alterations to convert ground floor bathroom, no.94, to utility room and w.c.

Alterations to first floor partitions to accommodate the new stair and circulation.
Opening up former doorways on ground floor and first floor.

Removal of front porch and entrance door to no.93 and installing window in adjusted opening.

Constructing entrance canopy to existing entrance door no.94. Replacing door leaf to revised design.

Taking out garden door to no.93 and installing window in adjusted opening.

Removing plasterboard ceilings on the ground floor of both cottages to expose historic floor joists to view and for repair.

Local repair to water-damaged plaster ceiling, no.94 first floor.

Removing plasterboard wall linings were present to external walls. Installing thermal insulation (wood fibre board) and non-gypsum plastering board with lime-based finish.

Forming new loft access trap in no.94.

Repairs to timber frame at low level, and associated render repairs.

Breaking out concrete ground floors and re-making with thermal insulation.

All new services including rationalised mains supplies. New external soil pipe.

Fitting out of kitchen, bathroom and utility room. New extract fans

Re-design of fireplace in no.93.

Interior and exterior redecoration.

Rebuilding of lost front garden walls and gate.

Replacing concrete yard at rear to include a breather margin.

Forming new bin enclosure.

IMPACT OF THE PROPOSALS UPON THE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HERITAGE ASSET.

We intend that these proposals should result in the enhancement of the character of the historic building.

JUSTIFICATION

There is limited heritage impact of the proposal with no significant historic timbers to be cut. Initial evidence indicates that this will be to reverse the twentieth century alterations that created the two present cottages supporting the significance of the heritage asset.

The proposed plan arrangement is practical, habitable and attractive for future tenants. The proposed building works will be beneficial to the long-term viability of this historic farmhouse, and justify the limited heritage impact. The proposed building works will be beneficial to the long term viability of this historic farmhouse, and justify the limited heritage impact.

MITIGATION

Through amalgamating the two two-bedroom cottages to create one 3 bedroom dwelling the original qualities of the farm house are being reinstated as well as upgrades and repairs to the property to be carried out.

PHOTOGRAPHS



School Cottages, Helmingham.



Staircase to be reorientated and replaced (No. 93).



Staircase to be removed (No. 94).



Carved principal post at ground storey. Later insertion of floor beam



Typical quality of the timber frame as expose on the first floor.



Arch braced tie beam and inserted first floor accross former open hall.



Rear view of the cottages.