

5. Impact Assessment

5.1 This chapter of the report provides an assessment of the effects of the proposals developed through the pre-application process and now presented to WODC. The scheme is detailed within the planning drawing pack prepared by Woldon. The effects on the designated heritage asset at this site – Asterleigh Farmhouse and extending to its associated agricultural buildings of converting the farm buildings to form three individual residential units.

5.2 The proposals have been informed by an understanding of the historic development of the farm, and by the contribution to significance made by the farm buildings to the farmhouse. The three proposed units are covered individually but broadly the following list covers a summary of general principles applied to the conversion approach:

- The scheme seeks to celebrate the agricultural nature of the buildings, not changing their nature or rendering them overly 'domestic' in character.
- The conversion has sought to preserve the external envelopes of the historic buildings with no structural additions except for one connecting passage in Unit 1.
- New openings into the buildings have sought to be as minimal as possible, to reuse existing openings, or evidence for past openings. Where they are new, they seek to be simple and of a scale appropriate to agricultural buildings rather than a domestic architectural language.
- Wherever possible existing structure is retained and left exposed and legible. This is true of roof trusses, the open roof forms in all buildings, and the practical hard wearing nature of the walling materials.
- Amenity space has been provided within the three extant and historically defined 'yards' not carved out of the wider surroundings.
- Where formerly open structures see partitions inserted they seek to respect their frequently linear character and the cellular nature of the buildings' structures, respecting bay divisions and leaving that legible.

- Structures being removed have been minimised and removal of structures sees impact to either very late structures of no innate interest, or to later adapted and rebuilt structures (Building 6) which on close inspection retains little historic integrity.
- Car parking is provided in an area of existing hard standing, away from the historic building. Drop off points close to the entrances of the converted units facilitate easy access but mean that generally, cars will not be visually prominent in views around, past and towards (or out of) the buildings.



Figure 45: Proposed site plan with the residential Plot numbers (Woldon).

5.3

The modern structure of Barns 5, makes no contribution to the significance of the listed building with no innate architectural interest and limited historic interest pertaining only to the last phases of agricultural practice here. The removal of Barn 5, covering the eastern most yard, will be a positive change, better revealing the historic structures in this area and restoring the historic layout of the farm group and its yards as a whole. Its loss will not erode the significance of the listed farmhouse and will better reveal the historic farm layout that does contribute to its special interest.

Plot 1 – western stables

- 5.4** This will incorporate the westernmost yard and see conversion of the two low stable ranges which will be connected by a single linear corridor. The corridor will end short of the larger barn. The western yard will become an amenity space for this unit with storage in the small building on its southern edge, retained unaltered.
- 5.5** This proposal has responded to pre-application advice in reducing the length of the joining corridor to leave separateness between the historic structures, and in providing a pitched form at the point where the two ranges are connected making a corner entrance.
- 5.6** Internal changes include the conversion of spaces to form new uses and the removal of the low cement rendered partitions in Building 1B to facilitate an open plan kitchen/living/dining space. Removal of the walling between two existing doors creates a broad opening onto the courtyard. The layout of the northern range seeks to replicate historic divisions, preserving this older building's historic fabric and sense of cellular division. The southern doorways and windows into the stables are either used in the new scheme or blocked in such a way that their historic presence remains legible, the existing open bay – a probable tack store – is retained as open to the corridor as a snug. The provision of a new corridor structure, though enclosing the southern façade of building 1A, enables access to the new rooms in this range through the existing doors and without requiring the loss of fabric between the rooms. This preserves a greater sense of the historic access patterns through this building. New windows in the northern elevation are based on extant examples within the building, low horizontal forms hard beneath the eaves.
- 5.7** In preserving the historic yard and principal external forms and materials of these stable ranges the way that the listed building to the west is experienced and understood will change only to a small degree. The retention of access points into the buildings and courtyard area preserves circulation patterns and though the buildings will see some elevational changes the ability to understand their former stable use will remain legible, albeit in a context of changed use. The removal of low stalls in the western range (1B) will see some later 19th/early 20th century fabric of no particular architectural or material quality removed but the continued

exposure of the roof trusses as today. Other features such as the brick and stone dressings to openings will also remain exposed and legible.



Figure 45-46: Open roof space and trusses to remain within building 1B and (right) typical red brick doorway features, including stone detailing for pintle hinges to remain with building 1A, elevated stone coping to gables also to be retained and restored.

Plot 2 – central threshing barn and covered yard

5.8 Unit 2 incorporates Barn 2A, Building 4 the covered yard and the connecting link building in the centre of Barn 2. The covered yard will become amenity space with two bays of the roof structure retained at the southern end as well as the covered aisles, but removing the central and northern roof coverings and trusses to re-expose the southern elevation of the former threshing barn.

5.9 This part of the scheme has responded to pre-application advice in retaining a substantial portion of the late 19th century covered yard, including the side and southern roofed areas, as an enclosed amenity space which will be both private and sheltered but striking. Though this will see the loss of some of the iron braced roof structure, two bays will be retained, along with the aisles and dramatic arched entry, restored to its full opening width and profile. The form, materials and layout of this former covered yard will remain understandable. In addition, the new proposed use as enclosed amenity space partly open, restores a degree of legibility

to the fact that this space was once a fully open yard, and the ability to see and understand the former threshing barn, where the openness on either side of the former barn was an important functional feature.

5.10 Internally the main former barn already features floor structures to either side of the open threshing bay, this facilitates conversion with minimal further vertical subdivision. These areas are linked by a single new walkway on the southern side, meaning only one stair is required within the space. Wherever possible roof trusses, which make up an important part of the character of this building, are exposed within the new rooms and spaces. This barn is already vertically subdivided. The proposals seek to maintain the openness in the centre, preserving the legibility of the threshing floor, and use the extant structural division to provide new bedrooms. A new living space is provided in the link structure, which already features openings and windows to the north side.



Figure 47: The central linking structure between threshing barns to become part of Plot 2, featuring extant window openings that can simply be reused, including the former hay loft door, now missing its external steps.

5.11 At first floor there will be necessarily a degree of subdivision to provide suitable bedroom accommodation in terms of privacy, noise, etc. Where possible the roof trusses and full heights of the buildings will be retained, securing ongoing legibility

of the buildings' open character today. There will necessarily be a requirement for the removal of redundant equipment and again, the later inserted pig sties will be removed from the ground floor areas. The removal of more recent pigsties will not erode fabric of positive architectural quality though will see loss of features pertaining to later use for specific animal accommodation.



Figure 48-49: Pigsties to be removed, block work partitions, galvanised manger, note blocked window cut across by stall divider on left of image; (right) narrow 'candle' opening in threshing barn to glaze internally and replicate/reinststate where blocked.

- 5.12** The proposals avoid and minimise the creation of new openings in the walls, which will be limited to two new narrow windows serving the bedrooms on first floor where the proposals are based on the qualities of existing openings in the elevations, preserving the architectural qualities of the buildings in marked contrast to the domestic farmhouse.

Plot 3 – eastern barns

- 5.13** This unit incorporates a reconstructed Building 3, currently collapsed and beyond repair, and the eastern of the two threshing barns as well as utilising Building 6 as an ancillary domestic space. Building 5, a later reconstructed structure, albeit on an earlier footprint, is to be removed down to sill height, retaining the gables, to

enable open views out from the amenity space created in the historic yard through the removal of the modern shelter Building 5.

5.14 Removal of fabric in this plot relates to pigsties within the former barn and material currently blocking the threshing doors, the roof and upper walls of Building 6, and parts of the internal floors in the former Barn and Building 7 where the current occupant recorded that he rebuilt the floor structure between the historic joists on taking occupancy to secure safe access to the first floor former hayloft.

5.15 Removal of fabric in the blocked former threshing barn doors is considered a positive change, better revealing the historic function and original architectural form of this building. The same applies to the removal of the central floor structure and internal subdivisions into pig-sties which although reflect the later use of this building, actively obscure the original use as one of the earliest surviving barn structures in the group. To provide additional light to the first floor, replication of extant windows on the southern elevation is provided. This acknowledges and reflects some of the mid 20th century changes in this building and secures a simple approach to new fenestration that is based upon the specific details of this building, rather than introducing yet another window form.



Figure 50: view to the southern façade of the eastern threshing barn which will be re-exposed with the removal of Building 5 and re-opening of the former threshing door opening.

5.16 Building 6, though on an historic footprint, does not survive with a high degree of historic integrity. Though it's external form and materials are generally traditional close inspection reveals substantial amounts of change suggesting it is mostly a mid 20th century rebuilt structure, as shown in Figures 34-35 it features substantial amounts of concrete blockwork and a modern damp proof course. It is not possible to know whether or not it was historically a stable or animal stall at all though this appears to have been its use when rebuilt. The latest map obtained for this research show no building in this location in 1925 (figure 9) or on the 1955 edition¹³ this suggests that this structure does not meet the criteria of section 1.5(b) as it would appear to be a reconstruction of post 1948 and thus not be part of the listed building. In retaining the footprint of the building the echo of the former structure, which does appear to have some historic relevance is retained but the amenity area of this plot is opened out to take advantage of the open views to the south. Though these views are not strictly of relevance in heritage terms it is a valid consideration for creating the most viable and attractive residential unit to secure the future of the former farm buildings.

Impact assessment

5.17 The proposals will see direct physical effects on structures which are considered as part of the listed building, though no physical changes will arise to the main listed building which is the former farmhouse. There will be a change of use from agricultural to domestic. The buildings have not been functioning as farm buildings for many years and they are no longer viable as agricultural buildings – a point acknowledged by the conservation officer during the pre-application process. For these buildings to see a halt in their active decline a new use must be found and any such use which secures a viable future for the historic buildings and halts their ongoing decline is considered to offer a great heritage benefit.

5.18 The design and details of the conversion have sought to minimise or mitigate any harmful effects to the heritage values of the listed farmhouse and its former farm buildings by working within the historic character and structural parameters of the group to offer a sensitive conversion proposal that sustains the heritage significance of the listed farmhouse. The scheme does this in the following ways:

¹³ Not included within this report but freely viewable at: <https://maps.nls.uk/view/189236691>

- The buildings remain without structural extension with the exception of one modest additional corridor to Plot 1. In this the historic legibility of the footprints, scale, heights, layout and arrangement of the farm buildings in relation to the farm house remains fundamentally unaltered and preserved. This sustains the architectural interest of the group and its historic interest as a clearly understandable former farmstead with practical buildings arranged around yards east of the house.
- Where the single extension is proposed its addition actively reduced the amount of other intervention that might have been needed to secure circulation through the northern part of Building 1A so the extension minimises the loss of historic fabric to work with this building sustaining its values and contribution to significance. The single proposed extension is simple, diminutive and the minimum necessary to achieve a workable circulation pattern, it is not excessive or over balancing to the host historic structures. It does not block or prevent views towards the stables or farmhouse, and although it encloses one elevation the fabric will remain visible and understandable within the property and potentially through the largely glazed light weight extension. This extension is not considered to erode architectural values or cause harm.
- Materials chosen throughout are founded on the traditional vernacular materials already present within the farmstead. The roof trusses and other material characteristics will be retained as expressed and exposed wherever possible preserving their contribution to heritage significance. Specific details, such as the two forms of historic ventilation slits within the threshing barns, have been picked up on and incorporated so that the unique nature of each building is reflected in the scheme, sustaining the particular architectural and evidential values of each individual part of the farmstead. Later insertions to create necessary domestic rooms and spaces work with the buildings as much as possible, particularly with the regular exposure of full heights to the roofs, and in using the existing bay divisions of the buildings.
- The historic values of the farm buildings contribute to the significance of the listed farmhouse through illustrating a variety of farm buildings present over time with the group functioning as an agricultural complex together. The proposals fundamentally sustain this historic interest by re-using historic buildings, including some of the later structures such as the large covered

yard although it is acknowledged that this structure will be reduced in terms of the extent of its roof. Though the roof structure is partly truncated fundamentally its overall form, extent and past function will remain understandable – the retained structure will enable the legibility of the former roof scale and materiality as well as the qualities of the timber arcades. The grandeur of the former arched opening to the south will be reinstated, restoring the architectural aesthetic of the southern gable of this structure.

- Where historic structures are proposed for removal they seek to either better reveal historic forms and fabric that are considered of importance to historic or architectural values (such as reinstatement of some sense of the historic threshing barn, doors and internal height and openness in the eastern threshing barn) or to be removed only in part (such as the covered yard) so that the structures remain legible, albeit altered, and still contributing to the heritage values of the farmhouse and its farmstead group. This minimises erosion of historic illustrative and evidential values. The most substantial area of fabric removal within the group pertains to the internal brick, blockwork and cement lined pig-sties which were installed in the middle to later 20th century throughout the older barns and buildings. Though this will erode one strand of evidence within these buildings for later use and animal accommodation, the materials are not rare, unusual or unique to this area, they are standardised structures which has, in most cases, changed the nature of older buildings that have a greater historic interest in relation to their earlier layout and form rather than the mid 20th century pigsties. In prioritising the earlier surviving fabric rather than the standardised pigsties and in removing them, though there is a small degree of erosion of later historic evidence, it is not considered of such magnitude of a loss that would be considered to constitute harmful to the overall significance of the listed farmhouse and its coherent group of farm buildings.
- Amenity spaces are carefully provided within the historic planform and layout of the buildings, they are not added around the perimeter, or carved out of surrounding spaces and fields. They do not extend towards the historic drives so that the approach to the farmhouse and practical buildings remains little altered. In contrast to the historic farmhouse, where the garden surrounds the structure, the amenity spaces of the converted barns are internalised into the historic yards. This sustains contrast between the historic farmhouse and

practical buildings and preserves the architectural values of the wider site as well as the way in which the individual buildings are understood and experienced together.

- Car parking has been deliberately pushed away from the historic buildings and although drop off points are provided for all three plots, long term parking is kept away from the historic group so that cars do not affect the aesthetic qualities of the traditional architecture. Historic access routes are preserved with no change other than a minor upgrading of the approach drive to repair potholes.

Effect on the setting of the listed building

5.19 The setting of the listed farmhouse will remain clearly identifiable as a farmstead, with open yards defined by stone and brick built agricultural buildings in close proximity and rural agricultural land in the wider surroundings. The heritage benefits of restoring a series of failing agricultural buildings that currently have no viable use and are in active decline within the setting of the listed building, is considered a great and significant benefit that is capable of offsetting any identified harm that might be seen as arising from their conversion. Without conversion to some new use these buildings will be lost and all the contribution that they currently make to significance also lost.



Figure 30: Barn 4 currently filling the central of the historic open yards and the southern elevation of the 18th century Barn 2 from the south.

- 5.20** The conversion of the historic farm buildings has sought to preserve their unique characteristics as agricultural buildings and ensuring the group as a whole retains the sense of the practical farmyard associated with the domestic farmhouse. Retaining the three yards as amenity spaces preserves historic layout and planform of the farm group, sustaining the illustrative historic values and architectural qualities of a semi planned farmstead without undue domestication or extension into the open countryside with additional enclosures for gardens.
- 5.21** Limited additional structures and new openings into the external facades will sustain the existing architectural qualities of these buildings as farm buildings in contrast to the domestic style of the house. The reinstatement of the former threshing doors to the eastern end of Barn 2 restores a lost feature and enhances the traditional architectural values of this part of the site and the legibility of this building's historic function. Other new window openings have sought to be directly inspired by the specific nature of the buildings into which they are inserted responding to unique qualities of the buildings rather than applying a blanket approach to all.

Summary

- 5.22** Historic England's guidance on the conversion and adaptation of traditional farm buildings acknowledges that:

"adaptation, or an appropriate use within a sympathetic development scheme, will be the only means of funding maintenance and repair, the lack of which will lead to further deterioration and eventual loss of heritage assets from the landscape"¹⁴ (page 4)

- 5.23** The proposed scheme has been shaped and revised through a pre-application consultation, and through a detailed understanding of the nature and interest of the traditional farm buildings, considered to make a positive contribution to the significance of the adjacent listed building, Asterleigh Farmhouse. They have sought to sustain heritage values and minimise harm, offering a careful adaption that minimises any harm through careful repurposing, retaining distinctive features, minimising extension, minimising new openings and carefully considering the provision of new light into the buildings, the careful consideration of subdivision

¹⁴ Historic England (2017) Adapting Traditional Farm Buildings Best Practice Guidelines for Adaptive Reuse

within historically open spaces. Structures which have already failed (middle of Building 2 and Building 3) will be restored with their historic appearance, scale and footprint reinstated as part of the scheme. If historic materials can be reused they will be.

5.24 The traditional farm buildings are not listed in their own right, but they are traditional agricultural structures of heritage interest and if considered as part of the listed building Asterleigh Farmhouse they do make a positive contribution to the unique heritage values of that building by illustrating and giving evidence to past agricultural practice within a mixed farming group, with a discrete farmhouse at the eastern end and the farm buildings arranged around three courtyard areas.

5.25 The proposals, because of the reasons described above are considered to sustain and preserve the heritage values of the listed farmhouse, and will continue to enable future users, visitors or researchers to see and understand the group and their various past functions in a meaningful way. The changes proposed will have the great benefit of ensuring that the farm buildings which directly contribute to the significance of the listed building, are retained and given a viable future use into the future.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1** The proposed scheme for the conversion of the historic farm buildings at Asterleigh Farm are based on a careful understanding of their significance and heritage values, and their contribution to the significance of the listed Asterleigh Farm house. The farm buildings are considered to meet the tests of section 1.5(b) of the Act and be considered as part of the extent of listing as well as making up a core part of the listed building's setting as individual structures of historic interest and traditional architectural merit.
- 6.2** Through careful design solutions the proposals minimise adverse changes and preserve the significance of the listed farmhouse creating opportunities to better reveal its historic nature with improvements to material quality and the legibility of historic agricultural buildings within its setting. The listed farmhouse see no specific change, nor will its domestic curtilage, but the former farm buildings do contribute to its heritage values and this is already recognised within the decision to utilise the traditional buildings to be converted to form new uses that will sustain their material qualities, layout, and contribution to the listed building's special interest.
- 6.3** Changes at the site will of course occur but the proposal preserves the sense of an isolated rural farmstead around an historic farmhouse and to secure a viable use for the farm buildings which are currently in active decline and structural decay. Without a viable new use, these buildings which make an important contribution to the special interest of the listed farmhouse are at risk of being lost, to the detriment not only of the listed building but the historic environment in this part of rural West Oxfordshire in general.
- 6.4** The proposal carefully uses the existing qualities of the farm buildings to inspire the specific design solution which retains the historic farm group with few external changes, and which utilises the existing layout around three courtyards to provide three unique future dwellings. These dwellings, though they see a change from agricultural to domestic use are considered capable of sustaining the significance of the listed farmhouse and preserving those qualities that render it of special interest.

6.5 As no harm has been identified to the listed building sections 200-202 of the NPPF are not engaged and there is considered to be preservation for the purposes of the decision makers duty under sections 16 and 66 of the Act. The proposals secure a viable future use for the vulnerable agricultural buildings at Asterleigh Farm and remove the imminent risk of the structures falling victim to further decline or total collapse through the lack of a use as agricultural buildings. There is a strong heritage benefit to their re-purposing for a new use.

7. Bibliography and references

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Appendix 1

Scale of Harm (HCUK, 2019)

The table below has been developed by HCUK Group (2019) based on current national policy and guidance. It is intended as simple and effect way to better define harm and the implications of that finding on heritage significance. It reflects the need to be clear about the categories of harm, and the extent of harm within those categories, to designated heritage assets (NPPF, paragraphs 201 and 202, and guidance on NPPG).¹⁵

| Scale of Harm | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Total Loss | Total removal of the significance of the designated heritage asset. |
| Substantial Harm | Serious harm that would drain away or vitiate the significance of the designated heritage asset |
| Less than Substantial Harm | High level harm that could be serious, but not so serious as to vitiate or drain away the significance of the designated heritage asset. |
| | Medium level harm, not necessarily serious to the significance of the designated heritage asset, but enough to be described as significant, noticeable, or material. |
| | Low level harm that does not seriously affect the significance of the designated heritage asset. |

HCUK, 2019

¹⁵ See NPPG 2019: “Within each category of harm (which category applies should be explicitly identified), the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated.” Paragraph 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723.

Appendix 2

GPA3 Assessment: Historic England’s guidance on setting

In assessing the effect of the proposals on the setting and significance of the designated heritage asset Asterleigh Farmhouse, it is relevant to consider how the following factors may or may not take effect, with particular reference to the considerations in Steps 2 and 3 of GPA3. The following analysis seeks to highlight the main relevant considerations. The farm buildings are considered capable of meeting the tests set out in Section 1.5(b) of the 1990 Act and be considered as part of the extent of the listed farmhouse. This section has also been completed in acknowledgement that as separate free standing structures the farm buildings are also an intrinsic element of the setting of the listed building.

| <i>Relevant Considerations</i> | Asterleigh Farmhouse, Grade II (TBC) |
|---|---|
| <i>Proximity of the development to the asset</i> | Closest range c.15m east of the farmhouse’s rear elevation, extending eastwards around a series of courtyards |
| <i>Proximity in relation to topography and watercourses</i> | Topography of barns and house are consistent. Land slopes away to the south, and rises to the north. |
| <i>Position of development in relation to key views</i> | The development has sought to limit and prevent any substantive change to any views towards the farmhouse, or the group, by retaining the external envelope of the group with minimal alteration and almost no extension. |
| <i>Orientation of the development</i> | With no change over the existing. |
| <i>Prominence, dominance and conspicuousness</i> | With no change over the existing as all new uses accommodated within existing buildings. |
| <i>Competition with or distraction from the asset</i> | None over the existing. |
| <i>Dimensions, scale, massing, proportions</i> | Only one extension is proposed in Plot 1 and this will be subservient to the host stables and change no element of how this part of the farm buildings are understood alongside the house. |
| <i>Visual permeability</i> | No change over the existing. |
| <i>Materials and design</i> | To be sympathetic to the existing, reusing materials wherever possible and preserving the traditional vernacular palette with |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>simple new additions and light weight modern glazing solutions that will be sympathetic to the host buildings and their proximity to the listed building.</p> |
| <i>Introduction of movement or activity</i> | <p>This will see a change with the new domestic uses. The yards will also become domestic amenity areas. Impact on the farmhouse will be limited as the new amenity spaces will remain divided and enclosed by historic yard layouts. The surrounding agricultural fields, tracks and footpaths will remain unaltered.</p> |
| <i>Diurnal or seasonal change</i> | <p>Greater activity arising through the new uses and of a domestic character rather than agricultural. This will be most apparent in winter months when the former farm buildings will be illuminated through their new uses.</p> |
| <i>Change to built surroundings and spaces</i> | <p>Minimal as the design seeks to situate the new uses within the extant built forms and limit changes to the surrounding open spaces.</p> |
| <i>Change to skyline, silhouette</i> | <p>None over the existing. The large covered yard will see a reduction in the roof form, with greater space in this area. This is not considered to erode the architectural values of the farmhouse, or the group as a whole as the former scale, ridge line and roof form will remain legible and fully understandable. The skyline of the farmhouse and the group over all will remain consistent, the dominant gable to the covered yard on the southern elevation will not be altered and will preserve this aspect of the farm's character.</p> |
| <i>Change to general character</i> | <p>A change from agricultural to domestic use, but with a high degree of consistency in built form and aesthetic qualities.</p> |