

OUTBUILDING AT THE OLD POST, UPPER CHURCH STREET, CUDDINGTON

Heritage Statement



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Heritage Statement

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Old Post is a Grade II listed building located on the west side of Upper Church Street, Cuddington. The building is within the Cuddington Conservation Area. Associated with the house is an outbuilding which is curtilage listed. This building has been converted to provide ancillary residential accommodation by a previous owner without the benefit of planning or listed building consent. The current owners of the property are seeking to regularise the changes that have been made to the building. This application follows a previous application to regularise the works which received an objection from the local authority and was withdrawn (21/04640/APP & 21/04436/ALB) and consists of revised plans and a more detailed assessment of the significance of the building and the impacts of the proposals on the significance of the listed building.

1.2 Forum Heritage Services has been commissioned to make an assessment of the heritage significance of the outbuilding and the impact of the works undertaken upon that significance and to prepare a Heritage Statement in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Bob Edwards BSc (Hons) PG Dip. IHBC MCIfA, Director of Forum Heritage Services, visited the property in August 2023 and subsequently prepared this report.

1.3 This report will present:

- A description of the outbuilding
- Policy and guidance background
- An assessment of the significance of the curtilage listed building following Historic England's *Statements of Heritage Significance Assessing Significance in Heritage Assets* (Historic England Advice Note 12, 2019)

- An assessment of the impact of the works upon the significance of the curtilage listed building
- Conclusions

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 The Old Post was added to the *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* at Grade II in 1985. The front elevation of the house (Figure 1) is described in the *List* as:

House. Dated 1687. Rubblestone, some brick quoins. Left bay timber-framed with brick infill. Old tile roof. 4 bays and 2 storeys. Timber framed left bay has 4-light ground floor and 3-light first floor casement. Glazed door in left stone bay with flat hood on cut brackets. Single light casement over. 3-light casements to right bays. Dentil eaves, and stack between right bays. Right gable small tile roofed addition, a blocked first floor window and small 2-light attic window. Defaced date plaque above formerly inscribed 'I.R. 1687' (R.C.H.M.). Interior has chamfered and stopped spine beams. RCHM I. 113. MON.22.



Figure 1 Front and north gable elevations of The Old Post.

2.2 The north boundary of the plot of The Old Post is marked by a witchert wall, the witchert being exposed on its northern face. Against the south side of the wall is a lean-to outbuilding which is shown on late 19th century Ordnance Survey maps. The outbuilding presents its gable end towards the street, this wall being of rubble stone with brick quoins with weatherboarding to the upper part of the gable, and a slate roof (Figure 2). The stonework exposed in this gable end appears to be rebuilt apart from at the lower level. The front elevation has modern render to what is a rebuilt wall with two modern casement windows (Figure 3), the building formerly having an attached structure to the front when the south wall had been largely removed as shown on a plan associated with the planning application for the garage (Figure 4). Attached to the western part of the front elevation is a modern garage building with rendered walls matching that of the outbuilding with timber double doors and a half-hipped slate roof (Figure 5).



Figure 2 The outbuilding with the part-weatherboarded gable as seen from the street.



Figure 3 The front elevation of the outbuilding.

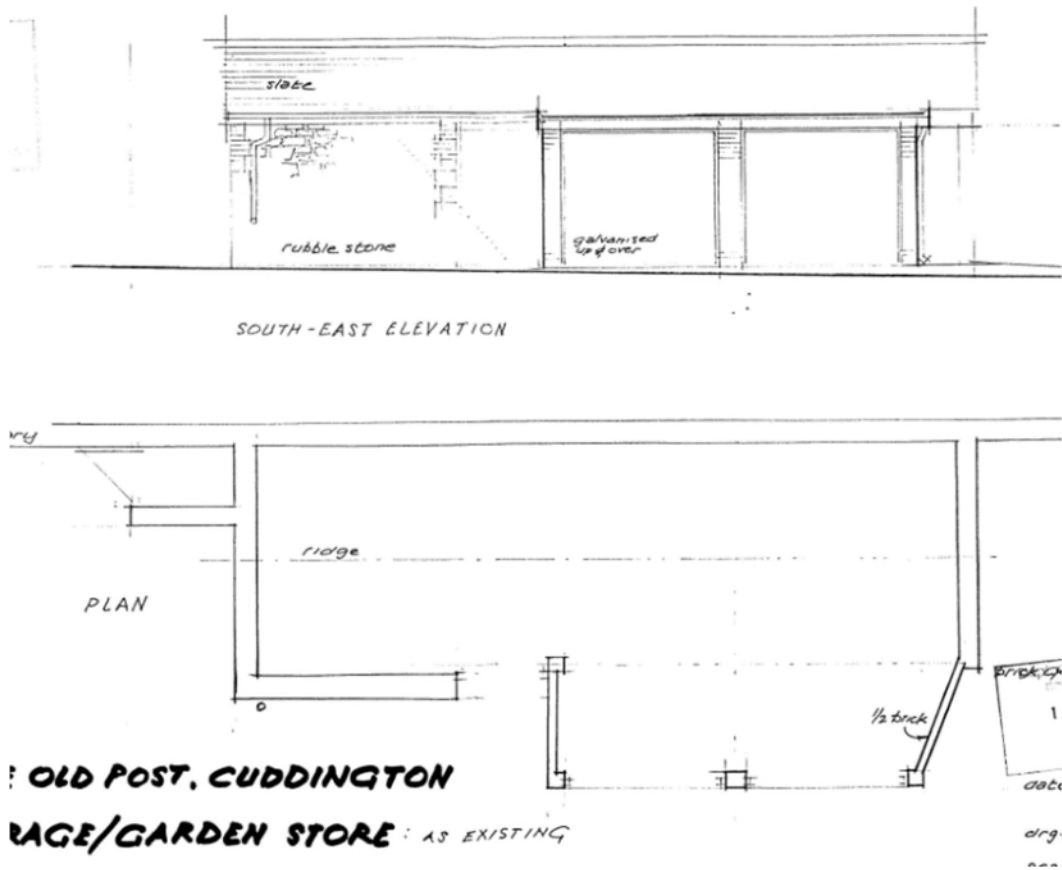


Figure 4 As existing plans submitted as part of the application for the garage (05/02086/ALB)



Figure 5 Modern garage extending off the front elevation of the outbuilding.

- 2.3 Internally, the outbuilding now provides a bedroom/sitting room and a small bathroom formed with modern stud partitions at the west end (Figures 6 and 7). The walls have been lined with plasterboard on studwork and there is a plasterboard ceiling.



Figure 6 Interior of the outbuilding facing east.



Figure 7 Interior of the outbuilding, facing west to the inserted bathroom.

3.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the statutory approach to the management of historic buildings and areas and requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses, and its setting, under Section 66 – a matter the Courts have held should be afforded considerable importance and weight. Section 72, relating to Conservation Areas requires that ‘special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area’.
- 3.2 The statutory approach is reflected in Policy BE1 Heritage Assets of the Aylesbury Vale District Council Local Plan.
- 3.3 Paragraph 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF) says when considering the impact of development on the significance of a listed building, great weight should be given to its conservation whilst para. 195 states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset)

taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

- 3.4 Historic England's *Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2* (March 2015) states that understanding the nature of significance is important for understanding the need for and best means of conservation. Understanding the extent of that significance leads to a better understanding of how adaptable a heritage asset may be and provides the essential guide as to how policies should be applied. The following descriptive appraisal will evaluate the building against Historic England's criteria for heritage values set out in *Statements of Heritage Significance Assessing Significance in Heritage Assets* (Historic England Advice Note 12, 2019):

Archaeological interest

There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

Architectural and artistic interest

These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can rise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and the creation of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills, like sculpture.

Historic interest

An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

- 3.5 The selection of buildings for addition to the statutory *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* is informed by a set of criteria set out in the revised

Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings, (DCMS, 2018). These criteria have also been considered in this assessment.

4.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designations

4.1 The Old Post is a Grade II listed building and so is regarded as a building of significance in a national context. The outbuilding is listed as it forms part of the curtilage of the principal listed building, pre-dates 1948 and was presumably in an ancillary domestic use at the date of listing of The Old Post.

4.2 The property lies within the Cuddington Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset.

Assessment of Significance of the outbuilding

Archaeological interest

4.3 The outbuilding is a simple structure built as a lean-to against an earlier witchert wall. The building structure constructed against the boundary wall has been substantially rebuilt in the late 20th century and has no archaeological interest meriting further expert investigation or analysis.

Architectural and artistic interest

4.4 The outbuilding is a simple ancillary lean-to structure built off an earlier, locally characteristic witchert boundary wall which is probably the element of most significance within this structure. The character of the building has been harmed by the garage structure that has been built against the western part of its front elevation. The walls of the building have also been partly rebuilt; the rebuilt section of the front elevation being rendered whereas it is probable that this would have originally been of stone rubble. The render is, therefore, not particularly positive in terms of the aesthetic qualities of the building. Internally there are no features of interest and only a modern sub-division creating a bathroom. The building has very limited architectural interest.

Historic interest

- 4.5 The building can be understood as being an ancillary structure to the main house, but its original function is not evident. The pattern of openings to the south elevation is modern, created following the reinstatement of much of the wall in 2005. Therefore, the illustrative historic interest is low.

Summary of significance

- 4.6 Assessing the heritage values of the outbuilding, it is clear that it is a building that does not have sufficient architectural or historic interest to merit designation as a listed building in its own right due to the extent of rebuilding, lack of original character, even prior to the recent conversion and common form.
- 4.7 The building is associated with The Old Post and so forms part of the setting of the listed building but its contribution to the actual significance of the principal listed building is very limited.

Conservation Area

- 4.8 In relation to the character and appearance of the conservation area, the outbuilding makes a limited contribution – its gable end is visible from the street, and so is seen as a modest ancillary outbuilding associated with The Old Post. Its positive contribution relates to the scale and use of vernacular materials.
- 4.9 The witchert boundary wall is not visible from the public realm and so its contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area is limited other than it is an example of the locally characteristic witchert building tradition.

5.0 WORKS UNDERTAKEN & ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

- 5.1 The unauthorised works undertaken relate to the conversion of the outbuilding to provide ancillary residential accommodation including the insertion of partitions to form a bathroom, and the formation of a new door opening into the garage.

Principal of conversion

- 5.2 As a simple outbuilding that had no evident defining characteristics internally to allow an appreciation of the original function of the building, it is considered that the principle of conversion, enabling the building to have a viable use which maintains its external appearance, is acceptable. The use of the building to provide ancillary accommodation is likely to relieve pressure to extend the house.

Linings to walls

- 5.3 The Conservation Officer raised concerns regarding the use of impermeable materials to the walls, in particular, the north wall being the boundary wall to the plot which is constructed in witchert. The concerns regarding the impermeability of the materials used on the historic walls to the north and west are valid. In response, it is proposed to remove the impervious plasterboard linings to these walls but retain the studwork, installing a vapour permeable board and a lime plaster finish with vapour permeable insulation and a suitable ventilation gap between the wall and the insulation. This will ensure that the historic fabric is able to 'breathe' adequately and so there will be no harm to the historic fabric. It is not known how the walls of the outbuilding were treated prior to the installation of the linings – it is likely that they were rendered and so the linings will have had a limited impact on the appearance of the interior. As a probable mid- to late 19th century building, the roof structure, which is understood to have not been altered, is unlikely to have been of particular interest in terms of the overall significance of the principal listed building and so the insertion or replacement of the ceiling is not considered to have caused harm to the listed building.

Installation of the shower room

- 5.4 The Conservation Officer raised concerns about the introduction of a shower room into this building on the grounds that it is a small room and increased moisture levels could harm the historic fabric, especially the witchert wall to the north.
- 5.5 It is considered that the introduction of a shower unit into this space is not particularly problematic in terms of the impact on the historic building. The shower enclosure itself is set away from the historic walls with modern stud work to the east and south and so, if there was to be water ingress into the walls of the shower enclosure, it would only affect modern fabric of no significance. The shower room benefits from a window in the west gable of the building and there is consent for an extractor fan to this space, both of which will provide ventilation. The fact that this shower is within an ancillary building used for occasional visitor accommodation means that the intensity of use of this space will be relatively light in comparison with, for example, a family bathroom within the main dwelling which may be used numerous times during the day and probably in concentrated periods when moisture levels might be relatively high. Such facilities are both commonly found and regularly granted consent in historic buildings without undue concern for the fabric of the walls. Given the adequate ventilation and the relatively light use of this shower room, it is argued that the use itself will not present a risk to the witchert, particularly with the use of vapour permeable linings and insulation. Lime plaster will be capable of absorbing moisture from the air and then allow it to evaporate, so protecting the witchert of the boundary wall.
- 5.6 Whilst the Conservation comments cite harm to the historic fabric as a reason for refusing the application, it should be noted that no harm to the historic fabric has been identified: the risk to the fabric is theoretical. With the use of appropriate, vapour permeable linings to the historic walls, any very minimal risk of harm to the witchert due to moisture caused by the shower is considered to be adequately mitigated.

Concrete floor

- 5.7 A new concrete floor has been formed in the outbuilding. It is not known what the present floor replaced – it may be that it was previously concrete. Without clear evidence of what this floor replaced, it is not possible to categorically state whether the present floor impacted

a historic or modern floor or whether it presents a significant change to the functioning of the fabric of the building.

Opening in the outbuilding wall to the garage

5.8 A new opening has been created in the original front wall of the ancillary building to give access into the garage. The external part of the front wall is rendered where the wall has been rebuilt and the original pattern of openings has been lost. As the section of wall which has been affected by the new opening is hidden within the garage, a modern building which has compromised the aesthetic appearance of the former garden store, which was a long, narrow building built against the boundary wall, the issue caused by the unauthorised work is the probable loss of a section of stone rubble walling. It is considered that this low level of impact on the fabric of this outbuilding, which has limited heritage value, has not caused harm to the overall significance of the listed building.

5.9 It is important to recognise that the former garden store is covered by the listing of the principal building, The Old Post, due to it being within the curtilage of the principal building, presumably serving an ancillary function to the house, and pre-dating 1948. This does not actually confer special interest upon the curtilage building itself. Therefore, as stated by Mynors and Hewitson (2017, 4-053):

The practical effect of the inclusion in the listing of ancillary structures is limited by the requirement that listed building consent is only needed for works to the "listed building" (to include the building in the list and all the ancillary items) where they effect the special character of the listed building as a whole."

5.10 In terms of the special character of the listed building, the creation of the new door opening, hidden by the modern garage, means that there is no harm to the setting of the understanding of the principal listed building or its relationship with the former garden store, nor to the aesthetic qualities of the outbuilding. The loss of a relatively small area of presumably plain rubble walling has had no impact upon the significance of the principal listed building and has not harmed the character, appearance, or the ability to understand the function of the former garden store.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The outbuilding to The Old Post is a simple ancillary structure that has been partly rebuilt and extended with a modern garage that has impacted harmfully on its external appearance. The original function of the building is not known, and it does not have special architectural or historic interest such that it would be considered meriting designation as a listed building in its own right. It lies within the setting of The Old Post, but its contribution to the special interest of listed building is minimal. The contribution to the character and appearance of the Cuddington Conservation Area is also limited.
- 6.2 It is considered that the conversion of the building to ancillary residential use has not caused irreversible harm to the listed building as previously claimed. The replacement of the plaster board and Gyproc plaster linings with vapour permeable board and lime plaster to the witchert rear wall and stone gable walls will ensure that there will be no harm to historic fabric and represent reversible alterations that could be removed with no impact on the historic building. The detail of the proposed linings and insulation can be satisfactorily managed by a condition should consent be granted.
- 6.3 The conversion of the outbuilding will not cause harm to the character and appearance of the Cuddington Conservation Area as there are no external changes proposed.
- 6.4 Accordingly, I can find no conflict in the proposed development with the statutory duty in Sections 66 or 72 of the Act, National Policy in the NPPF or Policy BE1 Heritage Assets of the Aylesbury Vale District Council Local Plan and conclude that the application should be allowed.