

Conduit House, Cowdray Park, Midhurst, West Sussex – New Downpipes and Masonry Repairs**LBC Application – Heritage and Design and Access Statement - November 2023****1. Site Address**

Conduit House, Cowdray Park, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9DW.

2. Works Proposed

The Conduit House or ‘Round Tower or Water Tower’, as it is referred to in the listing description, is an octagonal two storey stone structure with a clay tile covered pyramidal roof, located in Cowdray Park, and is in use as a single dwelling of two bedrooms. There are two strands of work proposed to the dwelling, both of which arise due to the design of the current rainwater disposal system, only installed in 2007, which comprises 4no lead chutes projecting through the parapet wall and beyond the face of the building on four sides. Water is blown onto the stone elevations as it leaves the chutes, eroding the stone and pointing, which is leading to damp ingress internally.

The proposed works comprise the provision of a downpipe beneath each of the four lead chutes, with a cylindrical sleeve formed in the lead to funnel water into the top of the downpipe, so that rainwater is safely conveyed from the roof into the ground without coming into contact and harming the historic masonry. It is proposed that the downpipes be square section as they were to the main house, in cast iron as a high quality traditional material suitable for the historic importance of the building but also to demonstrate they are a later addition, rather than lead as those to the house are. The other reason for not using lead is that the downpipes would be highly vulnerable to theft.

The existing lead chutes would be adapted such that a new cylindrical outlet would extend down from the chute base into the downpipe to channel the rainwater suitably. A lip would be formed to the outer ends of the chutes to prevent water running off the ends, except in the case of a blockage to the outlet in which case water would still flow over the lip, which would be acting as an overflow, rather than water building up on the roof. A separate scheduled monument consent application has been submitted to the Historic England for the provision of the necessary below ground drainage to convey the water from the downpipes to a new soakaway to the south west of the building.

The other strand of work is masonry repair, comprising stone indent repair or stone block replacement where areas of stone are felt to have eroded too far, and repointing in a suitable lime mortar mix, with the intention that the worst stone erosion is remediated and any eroded pointing is renewed, to prevent damp ingress and simply to repair the damage sustained by the stonework due to the action of water washing down its walls. The 2007 conservation work is felt to have been well considered and suitably researched, with the stone and lime mix used recorded in the Health and Safety File, so this will be followed for this new work. This is like for like maintenance and it would be our understanding LBC is not required, but we refer to it here for information.



The sandstone is good quality and hard wearing so there is no technical reason not to use it, and although the original locally sourced stone is not commercially available, it is possible to source it nevertheless due to the Trust's connection with the estate's owners. Accordingly the proposal is to source replacement Midhurst stone from the dormant quarry on the Cowdray Estate. For the lime mortar the proposal is to use a mix based on that used during the 2007 conservation work on the building, albeit slightly revised as Singleton Birch are no longer producing lime so the closest match will be sourced. Essentially this is like for like repair, the extent to be only that which is necessary, ie where it is felt the erosion presents a risk of moisture ingress, to be assessed on site.

3. Heritage Asset

The Conduit House is grade II listed, with the original entry date given as 18th June 1959 as for the Cowdray Ruins within whose curtilage it sits, and an amendment date of 26th November 1987, also as for the Ruins. The building is described as originally a conduit house, which is understood to mean that it performed a function that was part of the water supply system to the house, but at the time of the original listing it was a custodian's house for visiting the Ruins. The listing simply states it is an octagonal stone conduit house with a pyramidal tiled roof and ball cap, and is of one storey. It has since been converted into a two storey dwelling for let.

4. Impact

The conservation plan for the Ruins site as a whole prepared in 1999 by Broadway Malyan Cultural Heritage included in its appendix a condition survey of the whole site undertaken by Cultural Heritage Consultants (CHC) in 1997. Section 21 of the survey report covered the Conduit House and sub section 21.4 covered rainwater disposal, in which CHC stated 'the lack of a proper rainwater disposal system on this building is the greatest threat to its general condition', as well as referring to the damage caused by water washing down the wall. However, CHC note that downpipes would represent a visual change, and suggest a French drain to the perimeter draining to a soakaway.

It is accepted that downpipes would be a change to the appearance of the building, but due to its octagonal footprint whether one, two, three or no downpipes are visible would depend from which direction you approached the building. A square section downpipe has been selected to match the provision that there was on the Ruins and which is typically found on this age of building. The downpipes will be painted grey so there is a visual resemblance to lead, the material used for downpipes on Tudor buildings and the one visually most appropriate. This application is based on the carefully considered conclusion that water must be prevented from continuing to cause damage.

The erosion has been caused by the presence of the chutes and general weathering over the centuries, and there have been countless repairs to the stonework over that period, with varying degrees of success. Repair will only be undertaken where it is felt the existing stone has simply eroded too far, to the extent that it is leading to ingress and the building is not sufficiently protected. There is always a visual impact when stonework is repaired but there is ongoing moisture ingress and repair is necessary. With the correct stone used, ensuring it is shaped, sized, bedded and tooled suitably, and pointed in suitable mortar in a sympathetic style, the visual impact will be minimised.