

Introduction & Purpose of the Statement

This statement has been written by Helen Fearnley - the Applicant and sole owner of 26 Newcomen Road, a Grade II listed semi-detached home located inside the Limits to Built Development in Tunbridge Wells. At the time of this application, some works are partially underway as part of a maintenance programme to protect the building from damp and potential decay due to the use of inappropriate materials.

The statement is written in conjunction with Listed Consent Application PP-12751763, proposing the replacement of the existing defective rainwater system and the restoration and potential redecoration of the stonework surrounding the street facing windows and front door, possibly requiring the support of a Heritage & Design & Access Statement. In addition, at the end of this statement are details of a couple of minor deviations to works which were completed following the approval of Listed Consent Application PP-11229984, to serve both as a record of these and a means of updating the Conservation Officer.

Location & Context

26 Newcomen Road was Grade II listed in 2016, at the request of the previous owner. The semi-detached property is located on the south side of Newcomen Road, Tunbridge Wells.

The description and details below outline the historical and architectural importance of the property and are, predominantly, quoted from Historic England's official listing entry:

Listing Description

Nos. 2-28A Newcomen Road are a group of seven semi-detached pairs of cottages, designed Henry Roberts (1803-1871) and built between 1847-52.

In 1844 Roberts became Honorary Architect and later Vice-President of 'The Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes' with the patronage of Queen Victoria, the Prince Consort as President, Lord Ashley as Chairman and Lord Shaftesbury as original founder. The Society formed a branch in Tunbridge Wells in 1847 and Roberts was commissioned to build the row of model cottages along the south side of Newcomen Road. They are shown on the 1866 25" Ordnance Survey.

The Tudor style cottages were built to three designs. Nos. 26 and 28A were built as a symmetrical pair similar to nos. 18 and 20. The design was Roberts' Design no. 3 "for a pair of labourers cottages adapted to agricultural districts".

The cottages are listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

Architectural Interest: Two storey, semi-detached, Tudor-style cottages for agricultural labourers in Roberts' Design no. 3 which became prototypes for later working class housing elsewhere.

Date: The scheme commenced in 1847 and is now the earliest of Roberts' projects for SICLC to survive.

Rarity of Type: Only five other commissions by Roberts for SICLC survive, including both flats and houses, and all have been statutorily listed.

Innovation: Some cottages were constructed using Roberts' hollow bricks, patented in 1849. The three bedroom agricultural workers' cottages, with four heated rooms and internal WCs, were very advanced for their date and the attention to ventilation, sound construction and sanitation had a strong influence on later public housing.

Group Value: A group of semi-detached cottages which between them include three of Roberts' designs for SICLC.

Listing Details

The pair of model cottages Nos. 26 and 28A were built in 1850-2.

Materials: Red brick in Flemish bond with vitrified headers, sandstone dressings (now painted) and a slate roof with a central clustered red brick chimneystack.

Plan: A symmetrical T-shaped plan of one storey and attics with projecting front gables. This plan by Roberts is reproduced on page 134 of James Stephen Curl's 'The Life and Works of Henry Roberts 1803-1876 Architect' showing a front living room, side lobby with staircase, rear scullery with copper, pantry, WC and fuel storage on the ground floor, and three bedrooms to each cottage above.

Exterior: There are two central full-height gables with wooden barge-boards. No. 26 has a three-light ground floor casement window with hood moulding and a two-light casement above. No. 28A has a projecting C20 conservatory* to the ground floor and a larger two-light casement with hood moulding above, probably the original ground floor window reused. The doorcases are set back and have hood mouldings. The side elevations also have gables with a casement window on each floor. The side elevation of no. 28A has been rendered. The rear elevation has a central gabled dormer. No. 28A has a penticed C20 rear extension*.

Interior: Not inspected.

PROPOSED WORK

1. Rainwater System - Replacement

This application proposes the complete replacement of the existing defective rainwater system comprising a mix of cast iron and plastic guttering and downpipes.



Image 01 – Close up shows corrosion to existing cast iron goods

Image 02 – Existing corroded cast iron gutter

Image 03 – Irregular existing gutter

Functionality & Utility:

- The existing cast iron Ogee guttering is failing at the rear of the property. It has a cracked junction over the back door and the rest of the guttering doesn't align properly or have the correct fall to carry the water to the downpipe in the neighbour's rear courtyard – this leads to large quantities of water falling directly onto the decking outside the back door during rainfall which splashes onto the brickwork. In addition, the cast iron has significantly corroded over time due to rust (see Images 01, 02 & 03).

Replacing the defective rainwater system with a new system will prevent rainwater from falling into the rear courtyard and help to protect the property from potential damp and unnecessary spalling of the brickwork.

The Applicant proposes replacing the mixture of plastic and cast iron goods with cast aluminium goods. Cast aluminium requires little maintenance compared with cast iron as it has higher corrosion resistance – cast iron is prone to rust, more brittle at low temperatures and requires painting more frequently. Environmentally, cast aluminium products are lighter than cast iron, producing a lower carbon footprint, as less energy is required for its production and transportation.

Cast aluminium rainwater products are considerably more durable than plastic, which is susceptible to expansion and contraction with changes in temperature, which can cause buckling and cracking, ultimately leading to failure. Plastic also tends to discolour over time due to UV light. Plastic systems are expected to last only 15-20 years with joints requiring replacing approximately every 5-7 years, where cast aluminium products are expected to last 50 years or more and are supplied with a 25 year guarantee.

Design & Aesthetics:

- The existing, cast iron goods are in the traditional Ogee style (see Images 01, 02 & 03) with a depth of 110 mm, along with corresponding round downpipes. The Applicant proposes new cast aluminium Ogee guttering, hoppers and downpipes to replicate the existing system both in style and in size in order to retain the original character and intended aesthetic of the building (see example images 04 & 05).

The proposed new cast aluminium rainwater system will be black, to match the existing and will correspond with the rainwater systems among the same grouping of listed properties on Newcomen Road.

To onlookers the difference between cast iron and cast aluminium will be undetectable and the new system will provide a drastically improved aesthetic – with consistency in the use of materials and much smarter than the dishevelled, irregular existing system (see Image 03), which is long past its service life.



Images 04 & 05 – Examples of new cast aluminium guttering & downpipes in the traditional OGEE style

Significance:

It is not known whether the existing cast iron rainwater goods are original but having significantly perished, the Applicant is keen to protect the fabric of the building with a new, effective rainwater system, while retaining the original design and improving the overall aesthetic of the property is a matter of priority.

Impact of Adjacent Historic Fabric/Areas Affected by the Work:

The guttering will be fixed with nails into the existing brickwork. In the unlikely event any bricks are damaged as a result of this work, these will be replaced with bricks to match the original when the property is repointed with a lime-based mortar – likely in 2024.

2. Stonework – Restoration & Potential Redecoration

This application proposes the restoration and potential redecoration of the decorative stonework surrounding the street facing windows and front door, most of which are visible from the street. This includes the stone cills to these windows and the stone cill to the dormer window on the rear elevation.



Elevation 01 – Five of the property’s windows and the front door feature decorative stonework surrounds. These have matching stone cills (excluding the front door which has steps). This does not apply to the windows on the rear elevation but the dormer window has a stone cill

Please note: The doors shown above are not yet installed (these were approved under LBC 11229984) & it is hoped they will be installed in 2024

Functionality & Utility:

- When the Applicant purchased the house in June 2021, the stonework was decorated with multiple layers of white paint (see Images 06 & 07). Evidently the paint had cracked and flaked over time. There was also evidence of stone repairs in many areas, involving fillers consisting of unknown material.



Image 06 – Front elevation after Applicant’s purchased the property in 2021



Image 07 – Evidence of cracked, flaking paint

Non-breathable, cracked paint can trap water and cause the substrate to perish underneath, in this case the stonework. In a similar way, inappropriate materials used to fill cracks and holes can cause the stone to erode where the filler mix is stronger than the stone.

By removing the paint and any poorly selected filler, the stone would be allowed to ‘breathe’ and begin to release trapped moisture. In addition, paint removal would allow former repairs to be visually assessed, then treated correctly to help prevent unnecessary decay caused by poorly selected materials.

Design & Aesthetics:

- While the white painted stonework created a cheerful façade, it was not an original feature. Some of the buildings listed within this group on Newcomen Road have stonework which remains unpainted.

Originally, the Applicant intended to maintain the decorative stonework by removing the defective paint, assessing and undertaking any necessary repairs using the correct materials and then redecorating the stonework with a breathable paint, in order to protect the stonework from unnecessary decay caused by inappropriate materials. During the process, considering the labour-intensive process of removing the defective paint, it seemed a shame to redecorate the stonework again (albeit with a breathable paint or ideally a limewash) but at the time it was thought it would be necessary to do so in order to hide the stone repairs. However, the paint removal and subsequent release of moisture from the stone, paired with the stone repairs and repointing around the windows all contributed to improving the overall appearance of the decorative stonework and it regained its charm despite the tonal irregularity of the repairs (see example ‘Before, During & After’ - Images 08, 09 & 10).

The Applicant now proposes ceasing to redecorate the stonework – indefinitely, in order to allow it to continue to dry out, lighten in tone and settle in, until such time it might become apparent that redecorating would enhance the property’s appearance more than leaving it in its current ‘raw’ and natural state. If the stonework is redecorated at any stage, SPAB recommended the Applicant test a patch of breathable paint and a patch of limewash and leave the areas for twelve months to see how the stone reacts to each before committing to either option fully. The Applicant would follow this advice, preferring to use limewash due to the authenticity of the material, its temporal nature and the subtle effect it would create.

The stonemason undertaking the work was/is using a lime based stone mix to repair the stonework and a lime based mortar to repoint the stonework.

Significance:

The non-original paintwork, filler and cement pointing removed was of no historic significance.



Image 08 – Before

Image 09 – During

Image 10 - After

Impact of Adjacent Historic Fabric/Areas Affected by the Work:

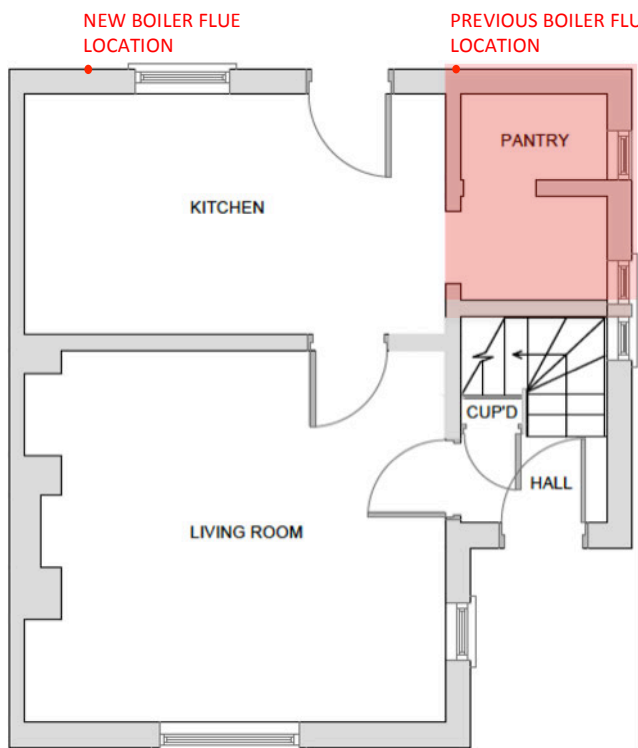
- The adjacent historic fabric relating to this work includes the original red brickwork surrounding the decorative. The non-original cement pointing immediately surrounding the decorative stonework was/is being removed and replaced with a lime based mortar. This will protect the stone and the brickwork from corroding unnecessarily because the lime based mortar is softer so temperature changes in the moisture would erode this first, rather than the stone or the brickwork.

LBC Application PP-11229984 – Notice of Deviations & Additional Work

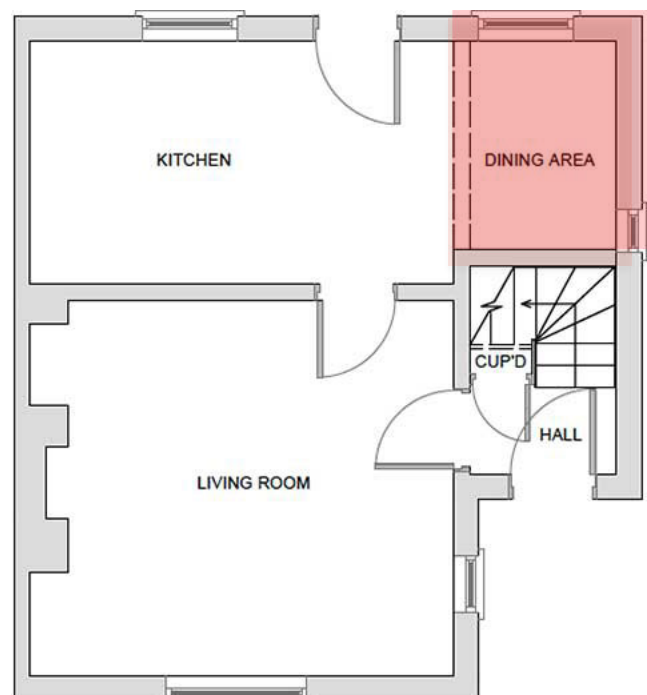
The following information is provided as a means of notifying the Conservation Officer of a couple of minor deviations and a minor addition to work previously approved under LBC Application PP-11229984.

Deviation 01 – Alternative Beam Installed

Listed Consent Application PP-11229984 proposed the removal of two internal, non-load bearing partition walls separating the kitchen and pantry, to create a kitchen diner (see Plans 01 & 02).



Plan 01 – Previous ground floor plan



Plan 02 – Proposed new/current ground floor plan

The proposal suggested retaining a visual downstand to preserve information as to the original division between kitchen and the pantry. As a result of a structural survey undertaken before the work began, it was known that the partition walls to be removed did not directly support the floor above. However, a shallow steel channel beam was proposed to support the retained downstand and act as a precautionary measure to safeguard against any potential risk from the pressure a filled bath in the bathroom above could assert on the joists, considering the room above would originally have been a bedroom, with no bath.

During the work it transpired that the area directly above the main partition wall was a gap between joists in the ceiling void, therefore a channel beam would have provided no support and was therefore redundant. It was decided in that moment that a reclaimed oak beam would be used to create the visual downstand instead, to add character to the space, while marking the original division between the kitchen and the former pantry area. In addition, the joists will be reinforced as a precaution.

Switching to a reclaimed oak beam instead of a steel channel beam created no affect on the surrounding fabric of the building.

Deviation 02 – Additional Boiler Flue Parts Installed

Under Listed Consent Application PP-11229984 the kitchen alterations included relocating the boiler (see Plan 01). On fitting the new boiler in the new location, the plumber decided the proposed boiler flue (see Image 11) would not comply with Building Regulations, so additional parts were fitted in order to resolve this (see Image 12).



Image 11 – Proposed boiler flue



Image 12 – Subsequently installed boiler flue with additional parts

Additional Work – Soldier Brick Lintel Replaced with Curved Brick Lintel

Listed Consent Application PP-11229984 proposed the installation of a new window on the ground floor of the rear elevation as part of the kitchen alterations. The new window was to have (and now has) a curved coarse brick lintel above to match the original lintel over the back door (see Images 13 & 14).



Image 13 – Existing kitchen window with non-original straight soldier brick lintel (now replaced), adjacent to back door with original curved soldier brick lintel



Image 14 – New kitchen window reveal in the foreground – now all three apertures have curved soldier brick lintels

Heritage, Design & Access Statement

Listed Consent Application PP-12751763

Submitted: 09 February 2024

The kitchen window that existed at the time the Applicant purchased the property had a non-original, straight soldier coarse brick lintel but historically, the lintel would have been formed from a curved coarse brick lintel, as seen over the back door (see Image 13).

During the works, the Applicant asked the builder to replace the non-original, straight lintel over the existing kitchen window with a new curved lintel while the builder was on site with all the relevant tools and creating the same curved lintel over the new window. Now the three apertures on the ground floor of the rear elevation have matching, curved coarse brick lintels - for consistency, based on the original design of the property (see Image 14).

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