

A DESIGN

1.0 Background

This statement is submitted on behalf of Westonbirt School, in order to seek listed building consent for the replacement of 5no existing dilapidated rooflights with 5no double glazed rooflights with safety glass to the north-east range of this grade I listed building.



01 Westonbirt House general view of the north elevation and forecourt, with symmetrical central range, five-storey tower with ogee roof and corner turrets. The similarities with Wollaton Hall in Nottingham are quite striking. Note: location of proposed works to the north east office range rooflights r101- r105 inclusive (circled in yellow).

1 Description

Westonbirt House is a grade I listed country house (NHLE: 1235736) constructed between 1864-72 to the designs of *Lewis Vulliamy* (1791-1871), set within extensive parkland which itself is registered a grade I listed park and garden (NHLE: 1000457). The house was converted to educational use in 1928 and is currently home to a Co-educational Independent Day and Boarding School.

The designed landscape and mansion at Westonbirt are the culmination of activity of three generations of the Holford family, from the early 1800s until the break-up of the estate in 1927. What survives today is primarily the work of *Robert Stayner Holford* (1808-1892) who inherited the estate in 1839 and immediately set about further development of the ornamental parkland and construction of new lodges and farm buildings. After more than a decade of planning, attention moved in 1863 to the demolition of *Weston Birt House*, a Regency-Gothic dwelling constructed c.1823 by his father, and its replacement on the same site with the Neo-Elizabethan country house we see today.

Built in the early Renaissance style, Westonbirt is an internationally important Victorian prodigy house and Vulliamy's most significant extant domestic building. Described by Jill Franklin as '*the last and largest of the Victorian Wollatons*', the north front is dominated by an imposing Bath stone ashlar façade, with its five-storey central tower and ogee-shaped fish scale roof **01** and symmetrical three-storey central range with corner turrets. The ensemble is adorned by decorative gables, strapwork, dormers, finials, obelisks and octagonal flues. Projecting lower wings extend beyond to the west and east, towards an orangery facing the south terrace and a more utilitarian office range grouped around a central court.

The house is characterised internally and externally by the finest craftsmanship and has remained virtually unaltered throughout its life as a school. Nicholas Pevsner notes that *'the interior is sumptuously classical, its spaciousness outdoing Paxton's Mentmore House, Buckinghamshire of 1850-5, a yet closer version of Wollaton which must have influenced its planning'*. After passing through the porte-cochere to the main entrance hall you are led directly to the principal room, a vast top-lit saloon at the centre of the house, serving as both living room and art gallery. Around it Vulliamy devised a series of reception rooms with the finest Renaissance decoration, including oak and walnut joinery, silk and leather wall coverings and elaborate decorative plaster ceilings. Accompanied by some of the most advanced technology of its day the fabric includes hot air heating, pumped hot water systems and pioneering fireproof construction techniques. At a cost of c. £200,000 it was one of the most expensive houses constructed in the C19.

ROOFLIGHTS

The works set out in this application relate to the replacement of five rooflights:

1. r101 - defective 4-light rooflight over an internal lightwell above the cloakroom, likely to be of original construction with inverted T iron glazing bars over uninsulated timber kerb. Glass has previously been replaced with Georgian wired glass (replacing fluted plate glass as noted elsewhere on site). Design has defective perimeter lead upstands, resulting in periodic water ingress and corrosion of iron trimmer beams to historic beam and infill roof construction. Rooflight has also been overlaid in Flashband to mitigate water ingress through defective glazing bars;

2. r102-r103 – 2no defective 4-light rooflights with replacement Georgian wired glass and iron inverted T glazing bars over a corridor and entrance porch. Rooflights are both subject to repeated water ingress. Inadequate upstands result in water ingress during in storm conditions due to surcharging of adjacent rainwater outlets.

3. r104-r105 – 2no defective 2-light rooflights with replacement Georgian wired glass and replacement timber glazing bars and perimeter frame, over a main corridor. Rooflights are both subject to repeated water ingress. Inadequate upstands result in water ingress during in storm conditions due to surcharging of adjacent rainwater outlets and silting up of narrow gutters resulting in blocked outlets. One glazed light to r105 has been replaced with an asbestos cement sheet (to be removed by a licenced contractor in association with the asphalt roofing works – see 04 beneath).

Rooflights (with exception of r101) are in public facing areas of the school, suffer from condensation and water ingress. The proposal is to replace all rooflights in their entirety with new bespoke fixed flat rooflights to minimal [height] profiles to identical proportions, retaining all original dimensions internally. They will however incorporate thermally broken frames and double glazed safety glass, to mitigate condensation and risk of falling glass. These rooflights have been chosen specifically for their narrow perimeter frames and minimal height, allowing more appropriate width asphalt finishes around the perimeter of the lights to roofing outfalls

4. Removal of existing mastic asphalt roof coverings throughout this area, which are now beyond their natural life and require replacement. Proposal is to integrate new rooflights and kerbs into complete replacement of mastic asphalt finishes and perimeter upstands throughout this area of the building to prevent ongoing damage and water ingress to concrete substrates. All works are to be in accordance with the recommendations of the Mastic Asphalt Council and executed by specialist Asphalt Roofing Contractors.

The design principle followed is one of minimal intervention, with care taken not to diminish or disrupt any fabric more than is absolutely necessary. The proposed design now meets technical requirements of the Mastic Asphalt Council for upstands to rooflights, removes asbestos risk, incorporates safety glass, improves energy conservation and reduces the risk of condensation. The design and structural solutions proposed have been established following extensive archival research and limited invasive investigations.

Existing elements of structure will be retained and all new work will be accommodated to fit the old. Materials will be reused where appropriate and any new materials will be compatible with the existing fabric. Asphalt roof coverings and abutments will be laid to current best practice.

2 **Amount**

On completion of the project it is anticipated that there will be minimal change to visual form of the rooflights visible from the ground. Rooflight r101 will be reconstructed on a lower timber kerb at roof level, matching the proposed installation of r102-r105.

3 **Layout**

See drawings **137/100** & **137/200** for location and details of proposed construction.

4 **Scale**

There will be no alteration to the scale of the rooflights. Rooflight r101 will be constructed on a reduced height timber plinth, other rooflights will be housed on 63mm height plinth at 5° pitch.

5 **Landscaping**

There are no landscaping works associated with the application. For site plans see 137/000.

6 **Appearance**

1. Reinstatement of mastic asphalt roof coverings as consented under 20/01956/LBC. New thermally insulated asphalt kerbs with solar reflective paint over. Polyester powder coated to RAL 9910 - white.

7 **Context**

a. Assessment

The property is defined as a grade I listed building (NHLE: 1333882); C2 Residential Institution; located within the defined boundary of Westonbirt Conservation Area; and within Westonbirt Registered Park and Garden (NHLE: 1000457) and within Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The principle of development falls under the auspices of:

Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990

16(2) Special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses

72(1) Special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of [conservation] area

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – December 2023

Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment: 205, 206 & 208

Cotswold District Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Adopted 3 August 2018)

- EC1 Employment Strategy
 - EC2 Safeguarding Employment Sites
 - EN1 Built, Natural and Historic Environment
 - EN2 Design of the Built and Natural Environment
 - EN4 The wider Natural and Historic Landscape
 - EN5 Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
 - EN10 Historic Environment: Designated Heritage Assets
 - EN11 Historic Environment: Designated Heritage Assets – Conservation Areas
- Cotswold Design Code (Appendix D)

Westonbirt Conservation Management Plan (June 2009)

7.2 Building Management Policies

b. Involvement

The project has not been subject to any pre-application advice from Cotswold District Council's Conservation Officer or Historic England.

c. Evaluation

Westonbirt is of significant cultural and historic interest, both as an exemplar of the Victorian fascination with Elizabethan prodigy houses and its highly successful integration within an internationally important designed landscape. The house is also noted for its high quality of craftsmanship and use of pioneering construction techniques and extensive building services. The proposals seek to respect the character and appearance of the historic fabric, whilst ensuring its long-term structural integrity and weather tightness.

d. Design

The principal philosophy has been to work within the constraints of the existing fabric as far as is practicable. The innovative nature of some of the construction technology have necessitated the introduction of remedial repair techniques and adaptation of existing details. Remedial repairs have been designed to be as conservative as possible, ensuring that when making new, piecing-in or adding to existing fabric, works are always fitted to the old and not adapted to accommodate the new. Any features of historic interest exposed during the course of the works shall be recorded measured and photographed.

The project has been designed by an AABC accredited conservation Architect conversant with the conservative repair of historic buildings. A detailed evaluation and description of the proposed works is also submitted as a parallel Heritage Statement - dated January 2024. Repairs and modifications have been specified following a detailed evaluation and understanding of the significance of the existing fabric, limited invasive investigations and completion of a measured survey.

The proposals aim to meet the detailed planning guidance of Cotswold District Councils Local Plan Policies EN2, EN 10 and EN 11 and within the spirit of 193, 194 & 196 of the NPPF – February 2019.

e. Use

The property will remain in use as a Co-educational Independent Day and Boarding School.

B ACCESS

1. General

The works do not result in any changes to the existing access to the building.

2. Public Transport

The house is served by Westonbirt Arboretum bus stop on *A433 Bath Road*, approximately 600m (0.4 miles) to the north west of the house. The *Stagecoach 69/620* service runs between Bath Bus Station and Stroud (via Chipping Sodbury, Tetbury & Minchinhampton) approximately every three hours Monday to Friday.

The nearest railways station is Kemble, which is 16km (10 miles) north east, providing regular services to Cheltenham, Gloucester, Swindon and London.

The house currently has car parking facilities for around 60 vehicles **01** to the north forecourt.

3. Disabled Access

There is ramped access to the main north entrance door from the forecourt, which is also forms the principal accessible car parking area **01**.

Internal works will result in no alterations to internal floor levels or door widths, which will have no detrimental effect on the existing disabled access.

4. **Emergency Services**

None of the alterations will diminish the existing access for emergency vehicles. Vehicular access to the site is via Bath Road A433.

simon cartlidge | a r c h i t e c t

january 2024