

Somerton Castle Boothby Graffoe

New Energy Centre, Stables and Studio Building

Design, Heritage and Access Statement to accompany
applications for :

- Planning Permission
- Listed Building Consent
- Scheduled Monument Consent

5th March 2024

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Architects

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Introduction and Recent History

This statement describes a proposed new Renewable Energy Centre, Stables and Studio building at Somerton Castle, to be built on the site of an existing twentieth century Dutch Barn.

Somerton Castle is an important historic site whose history and heritage significance is described in Nicholas Cooper's 2014 report, the content of which still stands. Nicholas Cooper's report is being submitted along with this statement. A Written Scheme of Archaeological Investigation is also being submitted in support of the Scheduled Monument Consent application to Historic England.

The Castle was priority A on the Heritage at Risk register when the applicants acquired the castle in 2012. Over the last decade considerable research and archaeological investigations have been carried out.

Planning Permission, LBC and SMC were initially granted in 2014 and repairs and alterations to the buildings were commenced in earnest in February 2015. The first phase of work to the main inhabited part of the castle was completed in late 2017.

The 2015-17 construction work was followed by works to outbuildings, barns and towers during 2018-2023. All phases of work have included extensive masonry and timber repairs and newly designed elements. A high standard of work has been achieved throughout, and North Kesteven DC has nominated work from two phases in its Building Excellence awards; Phase 1 won in the council's 'best alterations or extension' category and went through to win at the LABC regional awards.

In November 2023 Country Life magazine described the alterations at Somerton as 'an exemplary essay in how to transform the jumbled remains of a complex and ancient building into a coherent, contemporary house.'



An overview of the outbuilding group from the restored South-East Tower in summer 2023. The Dutch Barn, which is the site for the new Energy Centre, is visible to the upper-right of this photograph.



The front castle courtyard viewed from the west - Summer 2023

Progress of Works and Planning History

Since 2015 construction and landscaping works have moved through the site working first on the main house and most vulnerable buildings, gradually working towards the northern end of the former farm building group so as to complete drive and yard surfaces once risks of damage from construction traffic have passed.

The most recent works completed include the reroofing and refacing of the North-East Tower (The Great Tower) which was completed in 2023, and the conversion of the North-West Barn and associated landscaping. The barn was completed in summer 2023 with landscaping to the south completed but yard surfacing to the north on hold until construction works related to this application have been completed.

Further to the initial works consented in 2014 the following works have been carried out (with relevant planning or SMC references):

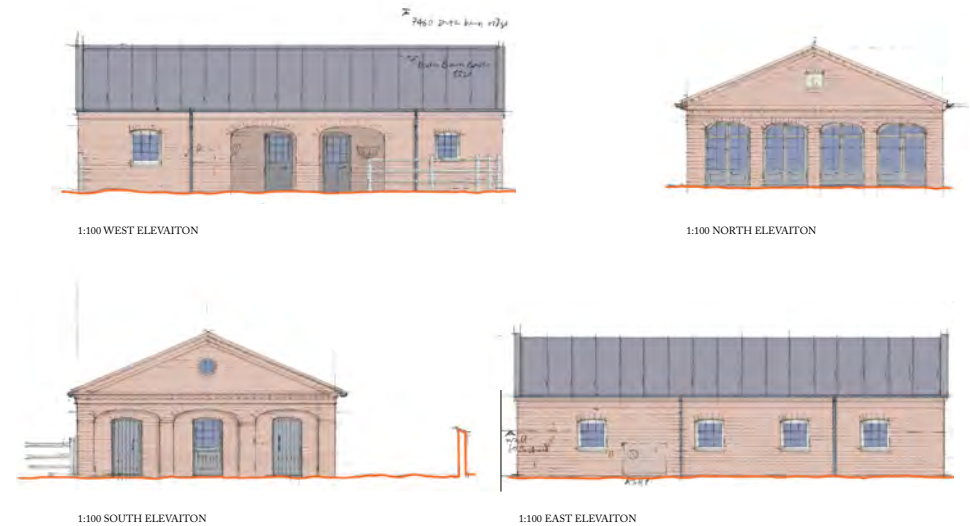
- Repairs to the NE Tower: (S00081817) Stone repairs and repointing carried out, joinery and flagstone floor installed. Additional works to the NE Tower were consented in February 2021, completed in 2023.
- Repairs and rebuilding to the outbuilding nearest the main house, for use as a garage (16/1515/LBC).
- Landscaping and below ground service routes (S00161366, 16/1522/LBC, 16/1573/HOUS). Work largely complete except final surfacing close to the NW Barn/ Cart Shed.
- New Cloister (17/1801/HOUS, 17/1802/LBC)
- Alterations, repairs and conversion of the cart shed/ NE Barn (16/1029/HOUS and 16/1030/LBC) - Work complete.
- Structural repairs, alterations and rebuilding to the SW Barn (16/1598/LBC) - Work complete.
- Archaeological investigations, repairs and alterations to the SW Tower (S00168551) - Work complete
- Repairs to the SW Tower, with formation of a flat roof above. (S00168551) - Work Complete
- Construction of a new garage range (17/1799/HOUS and 17/1800/LBC) - Work complete
- Alterations and Repairs to the North-East Tower, including refacing of stone and a new roof (S00240791) – Work complete
- Alterations and conversion of the North West Barn with associated landscaping (20/1550 HOUS and 20/1551/LBC and SMC as S00240790) – Building work complete, some landscaping still to be finished

Sustainability Review

During the decade during which repair and alteration works have been carried out, the applicants have become ever more mindful of the sustainability of Somerton; wherever possible energy efficiency within buildings has been improved as we have worked on them, but the applicants are eager to further improve the sustainability of the castle.

In 2023 an assessment was carried out by FLOH consulting as to what the options might be for reduction in fossil-fuel use and introduction of renewable energy. The conclusion was that heat-pumps would not be able to provide a viable or economic heating solution to the majority of the historic buildings, despite the insulation introduced in works so far, but that solar photovoltaics would make a valuable contribution to reducing fossil fuel usage for general power and lighting, and would provide sufficient energy for hot water heating and other electricity needs on site in summer.

The proposed new building has been designed following this energy assessment so as to optimise all day solar-generation, with shallow east and west-facing slopes. The proposed roof surface will be a fully integrated solar roof, in which the panels are the roof surface, not fixed above or through another roof. This will result in a building with a clean agri-industrial aesthetic in a fittingly updated evolution of the nineteenth century farm buildings. It will be lower and more discreet than the Dutch Barn it will replace.



Proposed elevations showing the integrated solar photovoltaic roof

Building Character and Siting

The proposed new building will replace the open-sided Dutch Barn, which was used for storage of straw during its agricultural life but during recent years has been used to provide semi-dry storage for building materials needed during the works.

The full solar photovoltaic roof will provide renewable energy for use in all buildings on the site. Solar photovoltaic roof panels are a material not currently on site, but the location chosen for the building is discreet, at the northern end of the building group and within the footprint of a modern and larger building with a fibre cement roof.

Other than the roof surface, the architectural language and the palette of materials is proposed to be the same as the nearby farm buildings and recent new buildings such as the New Garage Range, so the new building will be comfortable in its context of 19th Century 'model farm' buildings and a coherent addition belonging to this 21st century phase of development at the castle.

The new building will be substantially smaller than the Dutch Barn in both its footprint and height, so have less visual impact on the setting of the historic buildings and in views within and across the scheduled monument site. The building has been sited so as to relate comfortably to the cart shed (The North-East Barn) which it will face, and to allow an open northern view from within the middle and northern yards – allowing a distant view of Lincoln cathedral from within the historic site. The Dutch Barn prevents this view at present and cuts off the wider landscape views from within the central building group.

The usable floorspace of the building allows a plant room, a WC/shower, a tack room for horse feed and other equestrian equipment, and a covered outdoor shelter/ feeding space for horses. The remainder of the building will allow an open-plan studio, which will be fully insulated to new build Building Regulations standards and will be heated via an air-source heat pump. The heat pump is proposed to be discreetly sited on the east side of the building where it will be well screened by a nearby stone boundary wall which runs parallel to the east elevation of the new building and formed part of the nineteenth century



Existing Dutch Barn viewed from the south



Existing Dutch Barn to LHS, North-East Tower beyond and the Cart-shed (NE Barn) to RHS

Pre-application Discussions

Preliminary Proposals for the new building were shared with Tim Allen (Historic England Inspector) on site in December 2023. Mr Allen was positive about the design of the building and noted that it would be a considerable improvement for the setting. Additionally the proposal has also been discussed in principle with Tony Sargent of North Kesteven DC's planning department, who noted that the council's planning policies wish to encourage renewable energy. Although Mr Sargent had not reviewed drawings, he was hopeful that the proposals might be supported given the positive pre-application feedback from Historic England.

Accessibility

The building will be single storey and will have level access. A ground floor WC/shower room is being provided in the studio which will be large enough for a wheelchair user.

Area and Use

The footprint of the building is proposed as follows: 184m²

The internal floor area is: 144m²

The use of the building will be solely in conjunction with the existing residential property and activity on site. It will not include sleeping accommodation.

External Works and Landscaping

The yard between the cart shed and new building will be surfaced in 'tar and chip' gravel as already carried out to the other courtyard areas.

A small sand-surfaced winter paddock is proposed to be formed to the west of the new building to allow the overwintering of typically two horses as the grass paddock to the north becomes waterlogged in the winter months. The sand will be a similar colour to the surfaced yard. It is to be enclosed with cleft oak post and rail fencing as already used on site.



'Tar and Chip' gravel shown here elsewhere on site in already completed areas

Detail Design

It is proposed to follow the principles and details approved for other outbuildings on site in respect of new timber joinery, the most relevant of which is the adjacent Cart Shed, which has been converted to a residential annexe for the main house.

High quality traditional materials are proposed alongside the solar panels: a lead parapet to the gables, handmade wood-fired bricks for walls to match those already used on site, cast iron rainwater goods. Dentilled brick details are proposed similar to the eaves of the North West Barn.

Ecology

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal is being submitted with the planning application. Although not required as part of a Householder Application, a bio-diversity net gain calculation has been produced alongside this; four new native trees are proposed which will achieve a bio-diversity net gain of 16.06%.

No trees will be affected by the works; the nearest tree is to the east of the farmyard boundary wall to the east of the site, and the foundations of this wall provide an effective existing barrier to roots reaching into areas where excavations will be needed for the new building.



North West Barn - the existing eaves with diagonally set corbelling

Conclusion

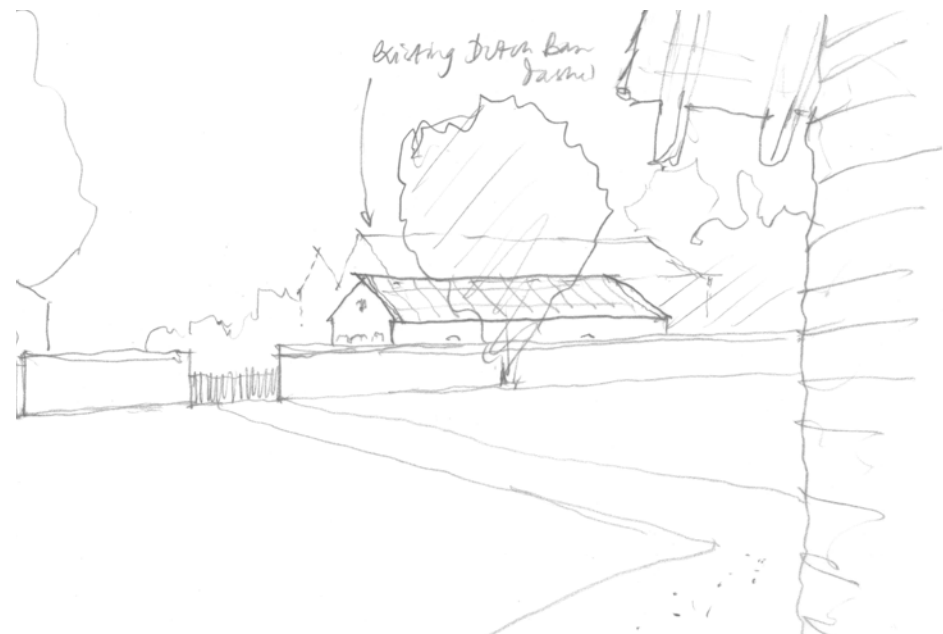
The proposed new building would make a significant positive difference to the sustainability of Somerton Castle, reducing reliance on propane and mains electricity; it would also tidily complete the northern end of the site and round off more than a decade of construction work in changing the fortunes of the castle from being Heritage at Risk to heritage in great health.

The new building has been considered with the same sensitivity to the heritage of Somerton as all the other work so far executed since 2015, and would be built to the same high standards. It would improve the setting of and views to and from the North East Tower.

It is hoped that the council and Historic England will support the applications for SMC, LBC and Planning Permission.



Existing View from the North East Tower looking towards the Dutch Barn



Proposed View from the North East Tower (for comparison with the above photograph) looking towards the new Energy Centre. The height of the Dutch Barn has been overlaid dashed for comparison