

Ubbeston Hall Farmhouse



Design, Heritage and Access Statement
To accompany applications for
Listed Building Consent and
Planning Permission

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Appendix (separate document)

Heritage Impact Assessment

Introduction

Ubbeston Hall Farmhouse sits to the east of Ubbeston Hall.

The 'Farmhouse' is a much altered remnant of an 18th century stable block formerly serving the Hall and is visible to the south of the Hall's outbuilding group. It is considered curtilage listed in connection with the Hall, which is listed Grade II.

The former stables were remodelled in the 19th century, when the Hall was rebuilt, and then in the 1970s the old stable building was converted to residential accommodation. It has been occupied independently of the Hall since the 1970s and has been, and remains, a formally independent residential unit.

There has been little or no investment in maintenance or improvement to the Farmhouse since the major alterations of the 1970s. The Hall by contrast has benefitted from secure ownership and investment by its current owners since 2008.

In spring 2023 the Farmhouse and its curtilage was purchased by the owners of the Hall, thus re-uniting buildings and landscape in a single ownership, as they had been until 1969. This re-unification allows an opportunity to achieve a more holistic vision for the all the buildings and landscape which will offer improvement to the setting of the listed Hall, and enable a sustainable and beneficial use for all the historic buildings on the site. Separate applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent are being submitted for the Hall, the main Barn and other ancillary buildings. This statement supports an application for alterations to the Farmhouse.

The intention is not to 'merge' the properties but to retain the Hall and Farmhouse as two independent residential units. However, it is hoped that the Farmhouse will be occupied by a member of the applicant's family so that landscaping changes can be introduced which would re-establish a more open relationship between the two houses without changing their independence in law or planning use.



Ubbeston Hall Farmhouse to the right with the Hall in the distance to the left



OS Map showing the overall building group of Ubbeston Hall and Ubbeston Hall Farmhouse (without topographic detail)

Planning History

East Suffolk Council's records show that there is planning history for the Hall and possibly for the farmhouse dating back to 1970. The earlier records do not have documents associated with them so it is difficult to be certain which applications relate to the Hall or to the Farmhouse.

A pre-application submission was made to East Suffolk Council in July 2023, and a pre-application response received in October 2023. The proposals now being submitted for Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission have been developed on the basis of the advice received.

Planning Policy

National planning policy is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This states in paragraph 197 that:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a). 'the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b). the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c). the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.'

Local planning policy is contained in the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan adopted in September 2020. This has policies 11.1 on Design Quality, 11.3 on Historic Environment, and 11.4 on Listed Buildings. These policies seek to encourage locally distinctive and high quality design, and protect the character of historic buildings.

The farmhouse is impractical in terms of its layout and requires updating to bring it up to the standard required of a family house of its size. The proposals seek to make practical changes whilst protecting and enhancing the character of the Farmhouse and the setting of the adjacent curtilage listed buildings.

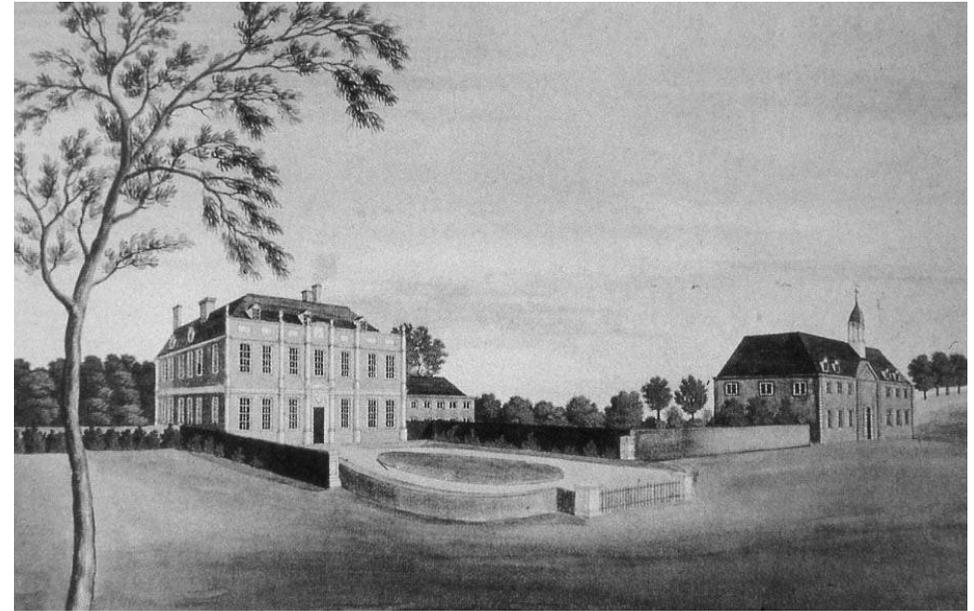
Setting and Approach

Ubbeston Hall and Ubbeston Hall Farmhouse sit on the north side of an enclosed valley, visible from the Barrel's Hill road below. They sit with their south elevations broadly aligned, giving the Farmhouse greater status in relation to the Hall than one would typically expect, and addressing a shared landscape frontage.

The Hall as it stands now is a building of the 19th Century which replaced a 17th Century house, likely remodelled in the 18th century and then demolished prior to rebuilding with the house of today. An intriguing gouache of c.1770 shows the Hall from the south-west, with a generous forecourt to the south of the house and, to the east, a grand stable block with belfry and pedimented entrance. A third significant building is shown, set back behind the Hall and Stables, and apparently midway between them.

Although this image may not be reliable and may include a considerable degree of artistic licence, it is thought that the Farmhouse contains a remnant of this stable block, albeit the current Farmhouse may occupy only one third of the original stable block footprint, and was then much altered in the 19th and 20th centuries. The 1770s Hall, as shown in the image, sits further back than the current Hall in relation to the stable, and has a gently sloping forecourt reflecting foreground topography which has probably altered little since the 1770s. Gates or railings are indicated at the south of this forecourt but with no obvious route into the forecourt; this may be an error as one would expect an axial and linear approach to an ostensibly 17th or early 18th century house and forecourt such as familiar from the views of Johannes Kip and Leonard Knyff, however exaggerated their views often are.

It is possible that this 1770s view was painted at a transitional point in Ubbeston's development or even as a proposal for a more romanticised 18th century approach to landscape design, as the influence of Capability Brown and others spread – and it is worth noting that when the Hall was rebuilt in the 19th century, the enclosed forecourt was replaced with a ha-ha; this would have had the effect of creating a small front park and connecting the Hall more directly to its landscape.



Ubbeston Hall c.1770, "Viewed from the south west of the Hall, close to the location of the current back drive". The Farmhouse is in the location of the Stables on the right



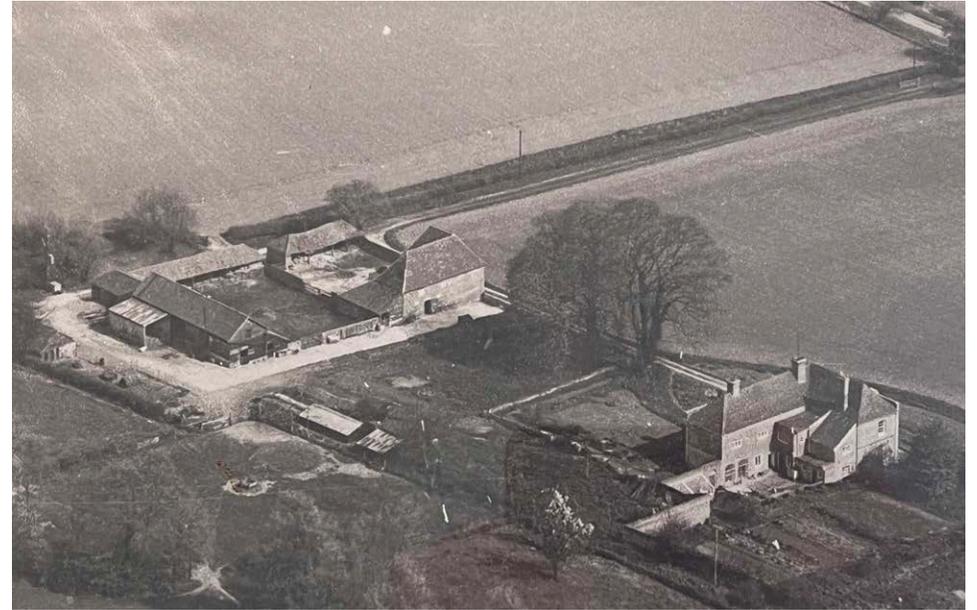
View of the Hall and Farmhouse from the Hall's current 'back' drive entrance

In tandem with the arrival of a ha-ha one might have expected a more meandering drive to have been introduced and it is puzzling not to see more obvious parkland in evidence today; however, elsewhere in Suffolk there were heavy parkland losses in the 20th century in a drive to increase arable production and it is possible that a 'front park' was ploughed and cultivated then or even earlier. A grainy aerial photograph from some point between 1950 and 1970 shows the front field as bare soil almost certainly in arable production (illustrated adjacent).

The location of the Hall's front drive is not shown on the Tithe map but it is hard to conceive of it not having had one. On the 1883 OS map a drive is visible running through what appears to be a small park between the Hall and the lane to the west. A secondary track runs parallel to this within the meadow to the south, connecting this lane with the Hall's farm buildings. By 1903 this western drive has disappeared from the OS map.

It is possible that an earlier parkland approach came from the south as it probably had in the 1770s but if the front field had been ploughed and cultivated it would have been maddening for the farmer to work either side of the drive – so in all likelihood the drive was rationalised with easier farming practice and productivity prioritised over aesthetics. The lack of tree planting in the front field would also support this interpretation, but what is not known is at what point arable production started in front of the Hall, and when it reverted to grassland as now. In the grainy black and white aerial photograph referenced above, the field is cultivated and a track runs tight to the south side of the stables. Following the reversion to grassland, a more sweeping eastern approach to the hall was created or re-instated. This is shown in a colour aerial view of the 1970s/80s (illustrated adjacent). The Hall has maintained this right of way in the intervening years albeit it has not been much used recently and the stone or gravel surface has been overgrown by grass. A separate application for reinstatement of this drive but with a minor alteration to its route forms part of a separate application for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent for Ubbeston Hall. It will not have any significant impact on Ubbeston Hall Farmhouse.

The Design Statement accompanying the Ubbeston Hall applications has more historic and background information on the evolution of the site.



Aerial view from the north west showing the stables prior to conversion. Date unknown, assumed 1960s



Aerial view from the north east showing the Hall's front drive and new back drive. Date unknown but assumed 1970s or 1980s. The Farmhouse is the building with the north-facing conservatory

Historic Landscape and Site arrangements

The 19th century arrangements are shown on the 1839 tithe map and the 1883 first edition OS map. Prior to that our only useful glimpse of what might have been is the 1770s gouache previously mentioned.

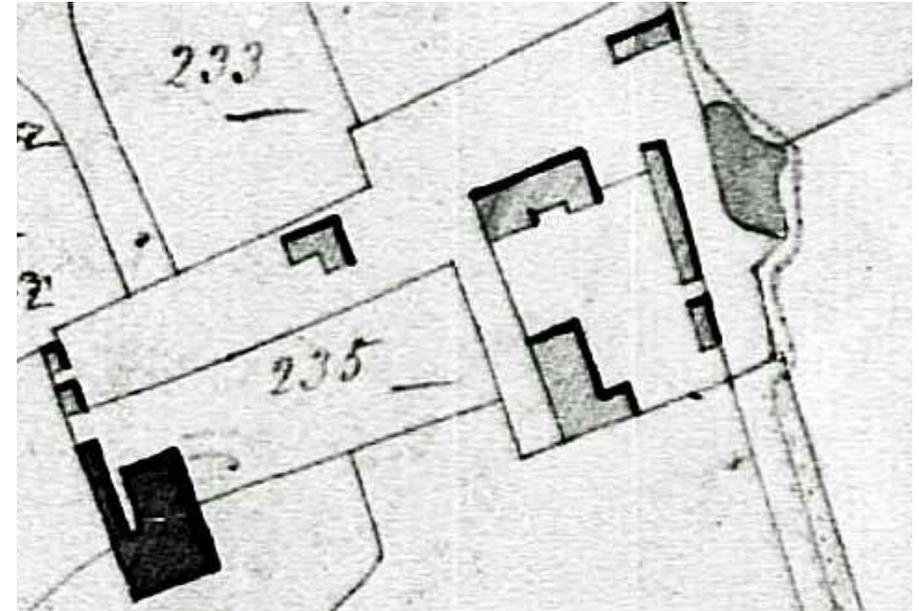
The 1839 and 1880s maps broadly correspond, but with minor changes which may in part be explained by the greater detail of the 1880s mapping. It is apparent that there was a 'back of house' service area which connected the back of the Hall and its farm yard – allowing a service and trade route to what was presumably a kitchen yard at the north end of the Hall.

To the south of this service area ran an area of garden projecting east of the Hall almost as far as the stables (now the Farmhouse) where it stopped at a garden wall alongside a track running north-south to the west of the stables. This wall survives in part: partly rebuilt, low (assumed lowered) and in poor condition. The boundary wall ceased to have any practical purpose or meaning when the Hall and farm group were severed in 1969 as a new boundary was created closer to the east elevation of the Hall. Planting of shrubs was then carried out along this post-1969 boundary so that the openness and visual relationship between the Hall and former stable block was reduced; some of the shrubs have already been pruned or thinned to allow more of a view through between the two buildings but more could be done to re-establish a visual relationship.

We have worked with garden designer Isobel Bilgen and our clients to explore options for how to reconnect the Hall and Farmhouse visually whilst maintaining the privacy of two independent houses (as they now are).

It is proposed to repair and rebuild the low wall mentioned above, which runs close to the west elevation of the stables, and to use it (as previously) as the formal boundary/separation between the Hall and Farmhouse. A new opening in this wall is proposed so as to allow a garden path connection between the buildings, as it is likely that the Farmhouse will be occupied by a member of the applicant's family (so a more 'permeable' boundary is desirable here). Fully private garden areas would remain, as currently, for the Hall on its west side and for the Farmhouse on its east side.

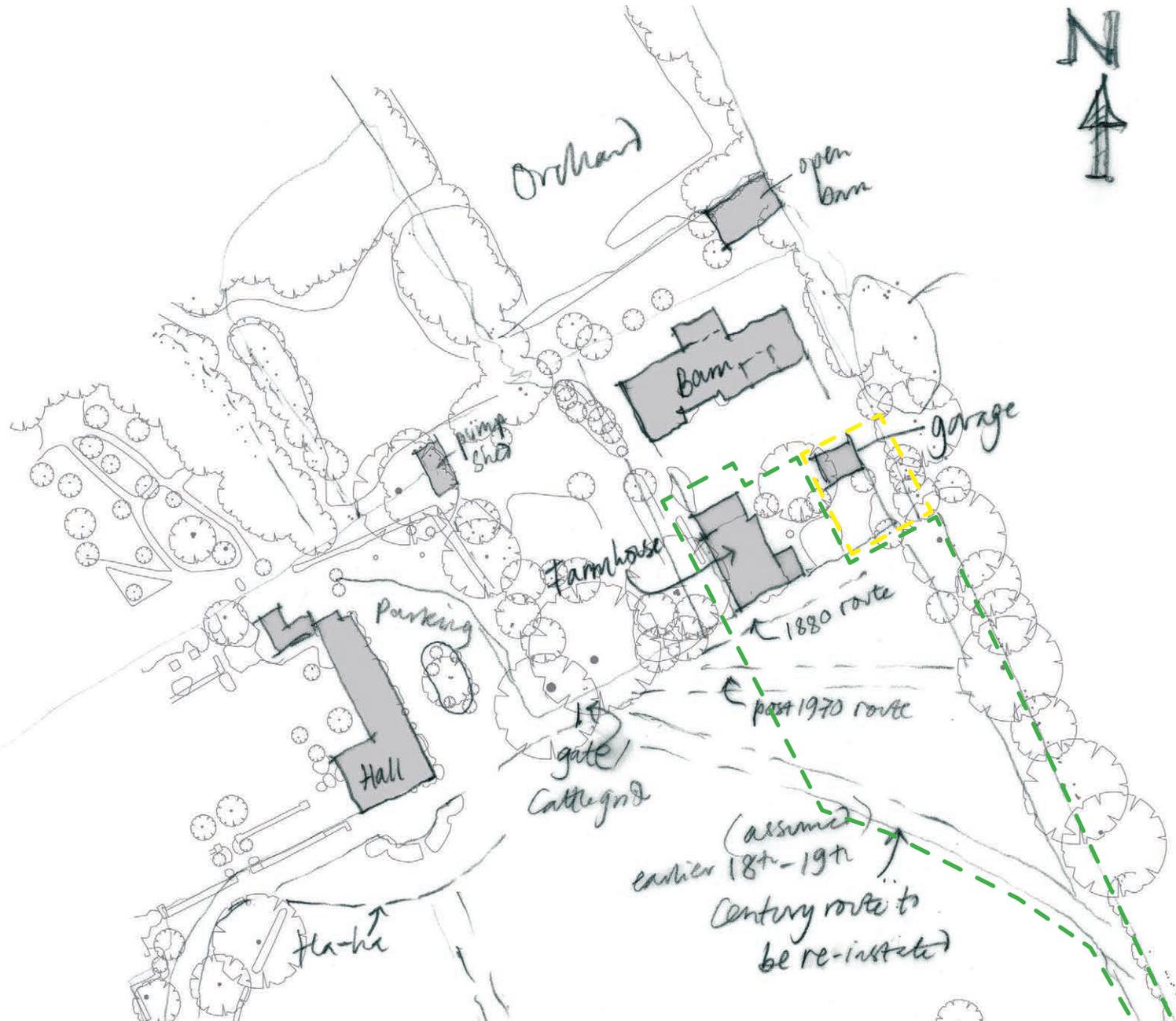
Our proposals for the Hall's barn and outbuildings are shown in the separate application for Ubbeston Hall.



1839 Tithe Map



1880s First Edition OS Map



Existing Site Masterplan Overview (NTS here) Please refer to 212. PL22



Proposed site Masterplan (NTS here) also showing the Hall and new landscaping, parking arrangements and outbuildings. Please refer to 212. PL25. The area edged green relates to this application

Proposed Alterations to the Farmhouse

The Farmhouse is considered to be curtilage listed by virtue of having formed part of the historic group of buildings around Ubbeston Hall.

The Farmhouse as it is now reflects a 1970s farm building conversion where the objective seems to have been to create a relatively smart house, perhaps with the status of a minor gentry farmhouse, not a barn conversion. In this objective the alterations were relatively successful, as the origins of the building as a former stable have been almost entirely erased. Sash windows were introduced on the east and south sides, in a 'Georgian farmhouse' arrangement complete with a 'front door'; reclaimed floor beams and joists were used to give character to the new interiors on the ground floor, although upstairs veneered flush doors are more typical of 1970s housing. Bathroom arrangements are rather substandard compared to current expectations. Comparison with the post-war black and white aerial photograph included earlier in this statement shows how much the building has changed during and since its conversion.

There is no joinery predating the 1970s and much of the brickwork has been altered or rebuilt. The accompanying heritage report gives a fuller assessment on this. It is worth noting that the main roof structure has escaped much alteration and so our proposals avoid any changes to this, for example avoiding any attic conversion proposal, rooflights or dormers. In other areas of the building there are few heritage constraints to changes being made, and the house would benefit from refurbishment and alteration to improve the energy efficiency of the building and the quality of the accommodation.

Our proposal would allow a more open plan kitchen and dining arrangement, which is a common requirement in most family houses today, reflecting the almost universal change in social attitudes to the kitchen as now the centrepiece of family life, and the desire for cooking to be a sociable experience. This may have been hard to predict in 1970, just as it may have been hard to predict in 1870 that anyone would one day choose to live in a barn or stable.



The farmhouse as existing: West Elevation



An interior view in the first floor of the farmhouse - showing 1970s joinery, plaster and partitioning



The south elevation of the Farmhouse



View towards proposed secondary gable replacing modern roof structure and part of current catslide roof. Electricity pole also intended to be removed and lines to be routed underground



The Farmhouse from the south near the Hall Farm road entrance, with the barn visible behind and Ubbeston Hall to the left



UPVC conservatory to be removed and replaced with new brick walled back hall

It is proposed to remove the modern outshots and conservatory/sun rooms at the east and north end of the building, and to rebuild these in brick, with doors and windows more consistent with the domestic design approach used for the 1970s conversion, albeit this time with slim-section double glazed units incorporated. It is also proposed to replace the existing doors and windows with new better insulated replacements: double glazed but typically maintaining the general pane sizes and arrangements of the existing, whilst improving proportions and detailing. Joinery details are included in the application drawings.

In the area of the current kitchen, which is a single storey addition post-dating the original building envelope, we propose to remove the roof structure (all 20th century) and extend the building upwards so as to form a secondary hipped gable providing a more central stair location and the creation of a further bathroom. This will allow the house to have three bedrooms and bathrooms, and reduce the amount of circulation space compared to the 1970s layout. The new hipped gable will be hidden behind the existing roof so as not to be visible either from the front field or the Hall.

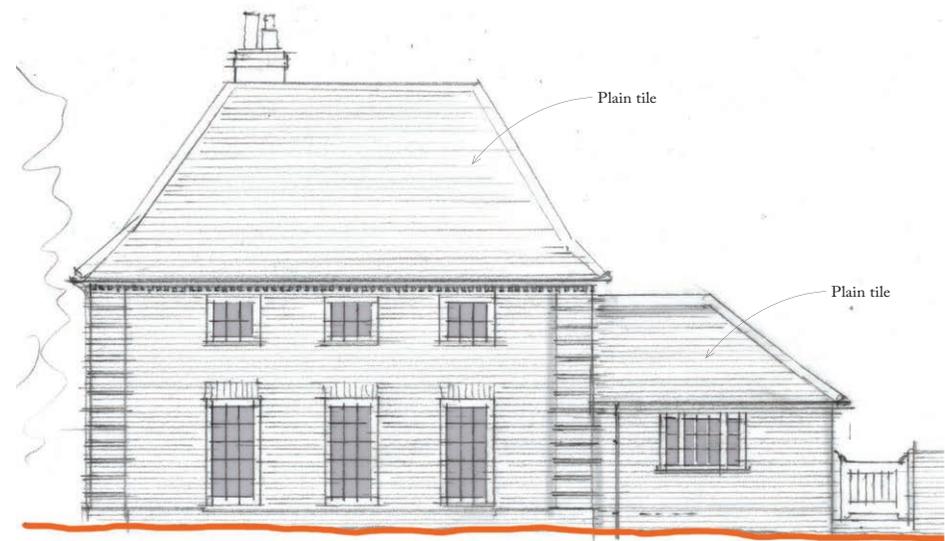
Three new openings are proposed between rooms, but in no cases are walls proposed to be ‘knocked out’, thus maintaining the legibility of the current plan form whilst achieving a more open-plan relationship and new connections between rooms.

The upstairs studwork walls (all 1970s) are generally proposed to be removed and rebuilt on slightly different lines to achieve an improved room layout in conjunction with rewiring and replumbing. Modern plaster finishes (which are throughout) are to be removed and replaced with breathable internal woodfibre wall insulation and lime plaster finishes on the external walls, this being a proven and environmentally responsible way of upgrading traditional buildings without introducing condensation risks or other unintended consequences. There are no historic features (e.g. cornices, panelling or shutters) which might pose a challenge to this, as the interior and fenestration is entirely a construct of the 1970s. The 1970s staircase, internal doors and skirtings will be replaced with new bespoke doors and architectural joinery.

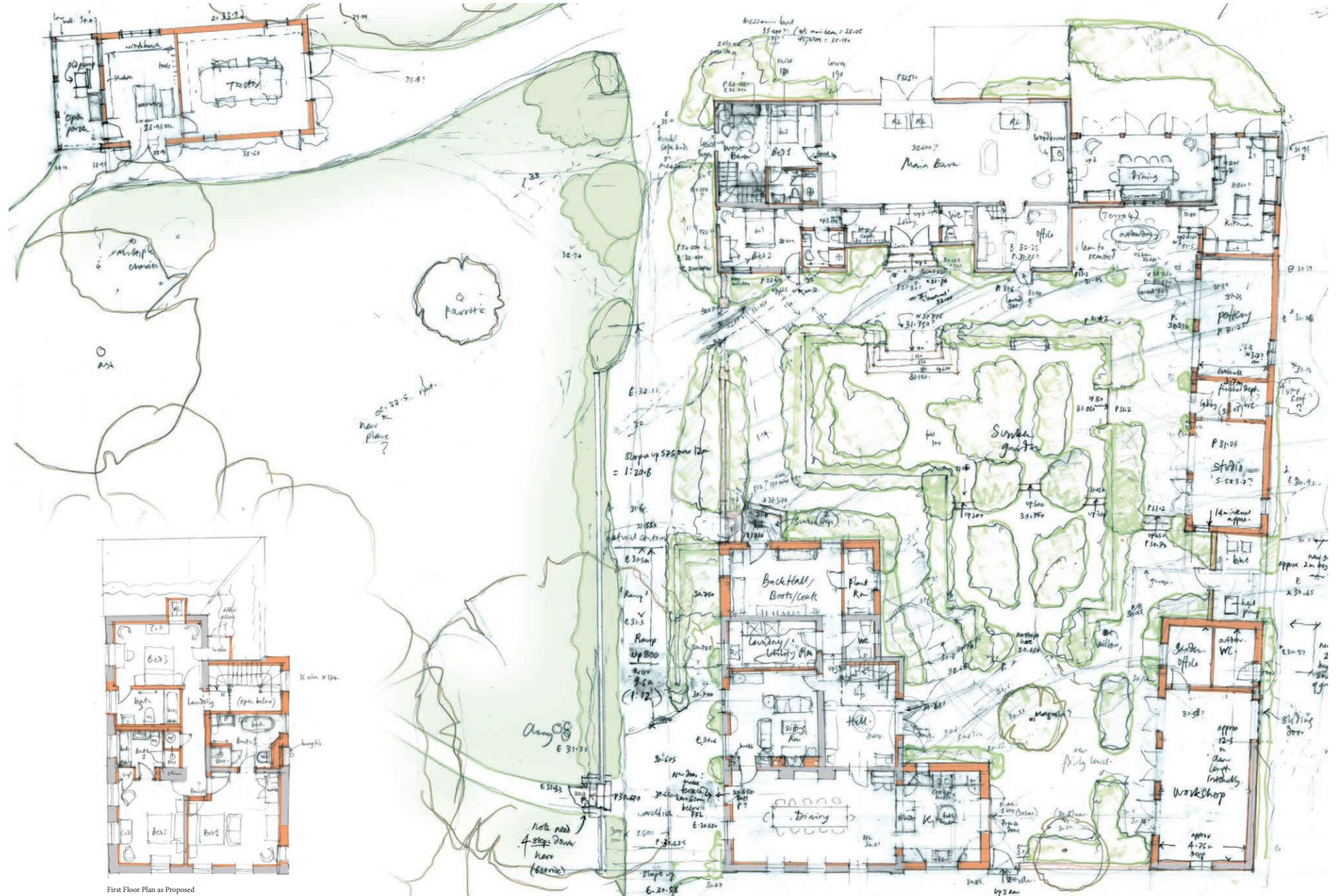
The house will continue, as at present, to have a private garden to the east of the house.



1970s sun room to be removed and replaced with new kitchen extension



South Elevation as proposed, with replacement side extension



First Floor Plan as Proposed

Proposed Pre-application Plans of Farm House, Main Barn, and Pump House: see following page for developed site plan and building plans

Pre-application Advice Received and Changes Made

Preliminary plans discussed at pre-application stage are illustrated on the previous pages, along with an updated plan.

The pre-application feedback was positive, noting that the proposals for the Farmhouse and the separate proposals for the barns and landscaping would conserve the setting of Ubbeston Hall and its curtilage listed buildings.

In relation to the Farmhouse, the pre-application advice suggested that plain tiles should be used for the northern slope of the farmhouse including the lean-to - however the pitch of the catslide lean-to is too shallow for plain tiles so it is proposed to use pantiles as are currently used on the northern slope.

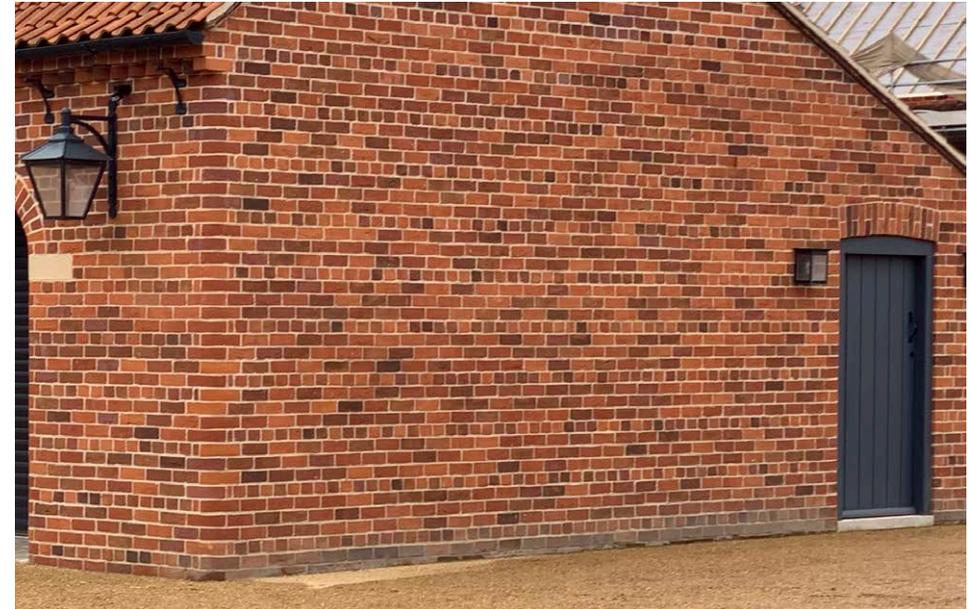
It was noted that the bricks of the current sun room are a poor match for the main house. It is proposed to use handmade woodfired bricks from HG Matthews as a much better match - an example is illustrated adjacent.

The pre-application advice suggested several changes in relation the barns; these have been implemented in the proposals and are noted in the accompanying Ubbeston Hall applications.

A significant change since the pre-application submission has been the reduction in proposed planting in the barn courtyard to maintain more openness in the yard and a degree of separation and contrast between farmhouse garden and yard, closer to the current arrangement.

The proposed new eastern ranges have been amended in the light of the pre-application advice. Proposals for the new South-East Range are not yet finalised and so will follow as a separate application, along with demolition of the current garage whose footprint it will overlap. The intended plan form and anticipated arrangement is shown in sketches in this application. The new South-East Range will provide an ancillary studio space serving the farmhouse.

Tree protection measures were discussed at the pre-application meeting. An arboricultural assessment has now been carried out and a scheme developed to avoid adverse impacts on trees.



Woodfired handmade bricks as proposed for use on alterations to the farmhouse, manufactured by HG Matthews in Buckinghamshire



The bricks on the current sun room and the older 18th and 19th century bricks on the older part of the Farmhouse, illustrated on the left

Trees and Ecology

Separate reports are provided covering ecology and trees. The recommendations of individual consultants have been followed.

None of the Farmhouse proposals affect any trees.

Accessibility

The Farmhouse will have a level access into the main living and kitchen area via the stair hall door, but the ground floor WC remains as currently two steps up from this level. At present there is no step-free route into any part of the house, so the proposal represents an improvement. A temporary ramp could be installed in the stair hall to provide access to this upper ground floor level, but would impede access between sitting room and stair hall. However an alternative route to the sitting room would be available via the kitchen.

Creation of step-free access to the entire ground floor would probably entail underpinning of the uphill part of the house and would require major excavation.



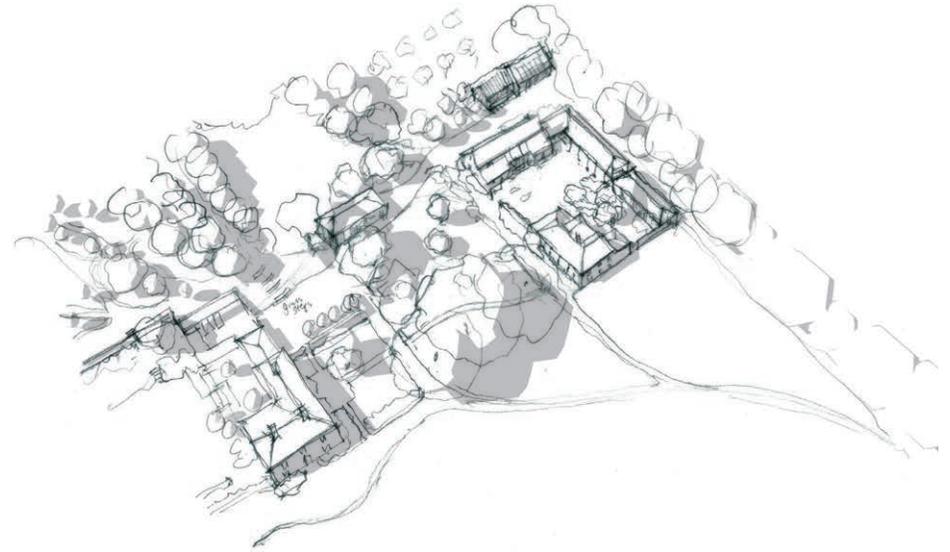
Proposed aerial sketch view of the Farmhouse and barns showing the open character of the courtyard as proposed.

The Proposed South-East Range (bottom right in this sketch) will be subject to a future application as the layout and fenestration has not been finalised; however, the overall form will be as illustrated here

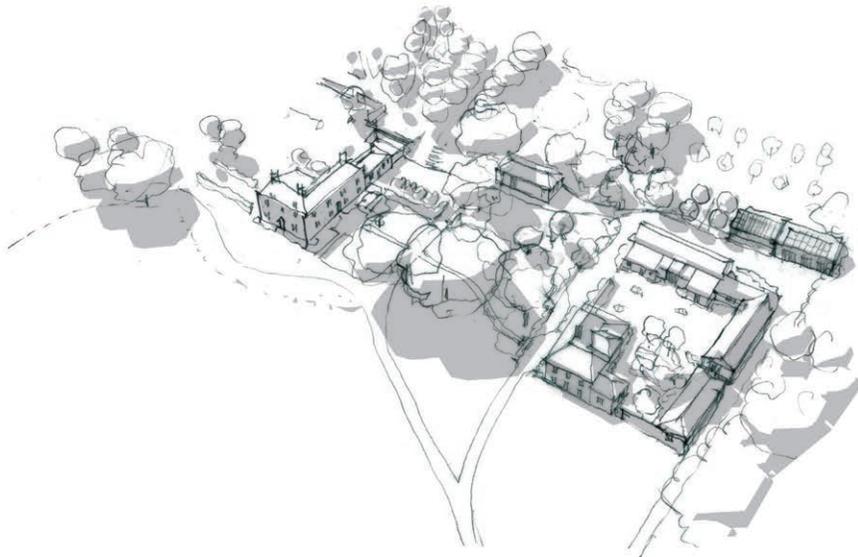
Summary

The potential changes outlined in this statement and the accompanying drawings are generally modest; however, they represent an opportunity to improve Ubbeston Hall Farmhouse whilst also contributing to a wider vision to improve and enhance the setting and historic outbuilding group of Ubbeston Hall.

East Suffolk Council provided helpful and positive advice at pre-application stage and we have amended our proposals in response to the key points made where changes were suggested. Our hope is that the amendments will be welcomed by the council and that the scheme will attract the support of council officers, Ubbeston Parish Council and neighbours alike.



Proposed aerial view as seen from the South



Proposed aerial view of Ubbeston Hall and Ubbeston Hall Farmhouse as seen from the South-East