

Appendix E - Conservation comments of appellant's statement of case

Chancel Cottage, Steeple Aston - appeal statement

Condition of cottage

The cottage has been subject to a lack of maintenance since the death of the previous owner in September 2012 and repair works are required.

There are no objections to the repair and refurbishment of the property and no reference is made to the repair works in the reasons for refusal. The repair element of the application was not fully detailed – this could have been dealt with by additional information submitted during the course of the application or by condition if necessary, but the application was refused on the basis of the works of extension and alteration.

There is very little reference throughout the correspondence on the application to the repair works with the focus of attention being on the proposed alterations.

- A separate listed building consent could have been submitted for any repair and restoration works to the property, but this has not happened.
- Like for like repair works on listed buildings do not require consent and it is possible that repair work has been carried out without the need for consent, but it is usual for there to be correspondence with the local authority over such works particularly where there are ongoing applications on the property. I am unaware of any correspondence of this nature.

The appeal statement indicates that the property has been vacant since September 2012 and owned by the appellant since January 2014. It is unclear how much repair and maintenance work has been undertaken to the property since January 2014, but at the time of an internal site visit to the property on 13th March 2015 and an external inspection from the road frontage on 15th December 2015 it appeared that very little substantial work had been undertaken.

The National Planning Policy Framework is clear about how the condition of a property should be considered within the planning regime

Paragraph 126 ‘Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of or damage to a heritage asset the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision’.

It is appreciated that the property was vacant for sixteen months prior to purchase by the existing owners, but it is unclear why significant repair and maintenance work has not been carried out in the past two years.

The cost of repairs to the property are not considered to be relevant. The state of the property should have been reflected in the market value.

Harm versus benefit

It is considered that the harm to the heritage asset is 'less than substantial' and this is the stance taken by both myself and the previous Conservation Officer.

The term 'substantial harm' has been used in the reasons for refusal of the planning applications and these were written by a former planning officer who may not have been fully aware of the nuances and implications of the term.

The 'less than substantial' harm needs to be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme, including securing its optimum viable use.

The optimum viable use is as a single family dwelling and the building clearly needs repair and maintenance in order to be put to this use. It is, however, considered that the property could be made into a single family dwelling suitable for modern day use without the need for the large extension. Cherwell District Council has indicated that there are compromises that can be made to ensure the dwelling is suitable for modern living.

There are not considered to be any public benefits to the proposal. The repair and maintenance works are considered to be the responsibility of the owners of the property and should be seen as a separate issue to the proposed extension works.

Significance

Historic England's Good Practice Advice in Planning 'Significance in Decision taking in the Historic Environment' provides advice on how to assess significance in decision taking. To this end a Heritage Statement was prepared and I broadly agreed with this, but had some additional points in relation to Chancel Cottage as a listed building. These comments were made during the application process and are repeated here for clarity.

- *Physical evidence of development of village during 19th century*
- *Formality of façade as interpreted by rural craftsman, simplicity of form and absence of elaborate decoration.*
- *Plan form and earlier function of various rooms can be interpreted from surviving evidence*
- *House along with others providing a sense of enclosure to the street, framing the green space of the churchyard.*
- *Views from churchyard where cottage provides a backdrop or visual stop*
- *Use of natural, vernacular materials*

I would agree with all of these elements, but would also add that the following also contribute to the significance of the building.

- *Survival of the plan form with the 18th century single pile plan and the later incorporation of the stable building into the domestic accommodation.*

- *Simple vernacular form of the cottage and survival of historic fabric*

My assessment at the time of the application focused on the impact on the listed building of Chancel Cottage itself. The Planning Officer in his Reasons for Refusal also, correctly, separated out the impact of the proposals on Chancel Cottage as well as the character and appearance of Steeple Aston Conservation Area and the character, setting and significance of the grade II* listed St Peter's Church.

The existing property of Chancel Cottage makes an important contribution to the significance of the church and the character and appearance of the conservation area by its unspoilt rural, vernacular appearance. The specific contribution is detailed below in a section on setting.

Scale, form and massing of the proposed extension

The proposed extension by virtue of its scale, form and massing is considered to cause harm to the significance of the listed building, its setting, the character and appearance of the Steeple Aston Conservation Area and the setting of the grade II* listed St Peter's Church.

The harm to the significance of the listed building itself is to the substantial alteration of its plan form, by the provision of an extension of a form and scale that is not in-keeping with the remainder of the building.

- It is not asserted that the plan form of the building has remained unchanged and indeed the Historic England Listing Selection Guide states that *'Hardly any vernacular houses have escaped alteration over time, and many will have undergone several phases of change, reflecting altered concepts of privacy and hygiene, as well as the impact of other social and economic changes..... The evidence of change, important in any building type, has particular value in those that have adapted incrementally over hundreds of years'*.
- The designation of the Chancel Cottage at grade II rather than grade I or II* does not mean that the current configuration or plan form of the building is not of significance.
- Chancel Cottage originated as a rectangular lobby-entrance house, which is a characteristic building type of the region. The provision of a wing to the rear to form an L-shaped or T-shaped plan form was also a characteristic development to provide additional accommodation
- The Heritage Statement prepared for the appellants identifies that the plan form development of Chancel Cottage is representative of the 18th century development of Steeple Aston. *'Chancel Cottage is such an example of this 18th century architecture of the village, displaying many of the common features including a central front door with symmetrical windows either side; upper windows arranged symmetrically as with the ground floor; chimney stacks positioned on both gable ends and an L-shaped plan to the rear'*.

- The proposed development provides a U-shaped plan, which is an entirely non-traditional plan form for an individual property, both in the locality and nationally.

The harm to the setting of the building itself, the setting of the grade II* church and the character and appearance of the Steeple Aston Conservation Area is based largely on its visual impact, although it is acknowledged that setting is all *'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced'* .

- The proposed extension by virtue of its scale, form and massing would have a detrimental impact on the setting of Chancel Cottage and St Peter's Church from the east. The current setting from the east is a particularly historic, rural and tranquil setting on the village edge. It is appreciated that this is largely a private setting, although the site is visible from the allotment gardens to the rear of the property, but in any case Historic England's Good Practice Advice in Planning 3 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' clearly states that setting *'does not depend on public rights or ability to access it'*.
- The setting of Chancel Cottage from the west (from within the churchyard) and of Chancel Cottage, other buildings in the streetscape and the grade II* St Peter's Church from the south would also be compromised. These impact on the public realm and are important views within the area.
- Chancel Cottage is on the eastern edge of the built up area of the village and can be clearly seen in views of the church from Cow Lane and the public right of way to the south and east. Chancel Cottage also lies in sight lines from the Eye Catcher to the Church of St Peter and St Paul. The Management Plan of the Steeple Aston Conservation Area Appraisal states *'The importance of views into, out of and within the Conservation Area, in particular those of the church and eye catcher, are essential to the special quality of the place. Their protection and enhancement will be an important consideration in the determination of any proposed development'*.
- The proposed planting along the road frontage to 'screen' the development should not be seen as mitigating the impact of development. The form of the development should be acceptable so that screening is not required. Similarly the existing trees and shrubbery to the south of the cottage along the road side and the trees and shrubs around the allotment and garden area to the rear should not be considered as 'shielding' the view of the proposed development as these could be subject to removal or significant alteration.
- The overhead wires to the east of the area have been identified as having a 'significant negative impact', but screening them behind non-traditional development is not considered to be an appropriate response.

Use of timber boarding

The use of timber boarding on principle buildings (or extensions to buildings) does not have historic precedent in the locality. The use of timber boarding on detached outbuildings and buildings of a specific function such as mills, coach houses, cart sheds is seen within the district and there undoubtedly will be the odd building constructed with timber elements, but on the whole timber boarding is restricted to wide waney-edged boarding on ancillary agricultural buildings. Traditionally this is a 'stone' region. The principle building material is stone and therefore even ancillary buildings tend to be constructed in stone. The form of the proposed development to Chancel Cottage is as an extension to the existing building not a detached outbuilding. The use of planked doors elsewhere in the village is not considered to be relevant. Doors are traditionally timber planks. Door construct and wall construct are completely separate items.

The Steeple Aston Conservation Area Appraisal refers to a wide range of building materials, but this is a specific reference to the range of stone types in the village. *'One of the defining features of Steeple Aston is its diversity of building materials, in comparison with other rural villages in the district. Traditionally the local limestone and marlstone were used for buildings, including the church, manor houses, cottages and walls. In some cases both stones have been used in the same building either randomly or deliberately to form a pattern or to emphasise architectural details'*

Insertion of an internal doorway opening at first floor level

The proposal would cause some harm to the significance of the building, but in this instance it is considered that in an acceptable scheme this could potentially be outweighed by public benefit.

This statement was not intended to be used as a 'bargaining chip', but to outline one of the compromises that the local authority has identified could be made in order to bring the building back into use as a single family dwelling.