

Heritage significance

2.1 Heritage significance

In April 2008, English Heritage - now Historic England - published 'Conservation Principles', which provides guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment. The document sets out how to understand the values of a place, how to assess heritage significance, and how to manage change to significant places. According to the document, the value of a place/asset should be assessed according to the evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value of the listed building and its setting to arrive at an understanding of the heritage asset's significance. An assessment of communal value is usually reserved for public buildings. The other aspects of Mawles Farm heritage significance are considered below.

2.1.1 Evidential value

Evidential value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity. Mawles Farm provides a material record of farming and associated buildings in the heart of the settlement. The building group is the last remaining unconverted village farm in Sibford Gower. Taken together with the context of the fields to the north - which run all the way to the Banbury Road - the Mawles Farm site provides evidence of the physical characteristics of the earlier settlement when it existed as a looser agglomeration of independent farms.

The farm also provides evidential value of limited significance by illustrating the evolution of agricultural practice over time. The steel pole barn to the north



Fig. 26 - Steel pole barn and the piggyery

provides evidence of modern farming practice and brings the Site's lineage up to the present day. The steel barn's appearance is consistent with a functional farm unit and the Site's history of development over an extended period. However, conversion work does offer the opportunity for improving the visual impact on the setting of the undesignated heritage assets. The landscape immediately surrounding the barn, which is scarred and poorly integrated could also be improved. The resultant loose banking and spoil heaps mar the general setting within the application Site.

As well as the existing buildings themselves, evidential value may be stored on the Site in the form of archaeological deposits. The area is identified as having archaeological potential. However, there is presently no known archaeological interest in the Mawles Farm Site.

2.1.2 Historical value

Historical value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. Assets of "illustrative" value create a visual link which directly illustrates the history. Assets of "associative" value are those linked to notable events, people or previous structures or objects.

The farm has significant illustrative value serving to link the modern day settlement to the agricultural origins of Sibford



Fig. 27 - Inappropriate and substandard repairs

Gower. This significance is heightened by the relative lack of other examples in the village and the prominent position of Mawles Farm. The farm, of itself, has never been the centre of local, regional or national influence and nothing is known of any notable previous occupants or events that took place here. There is, however, some associative historic value in the links to economic prosperity that farming brought to the Sib valley and its geographical relationship to the pasture land and countryside to the north of the building group.

2.1.3 Aesthetic value and setting

Aesthetic value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place. This can be through the effects of conscious design or a fortuitous mix of factors in the creation and evolution of a building or place.

The aesthetic value of the Mawles Farm undesignated assets is found in fortuitous characteristics which derive from the forms, techniques and materials of agricultural buildings of that age. The stone buildings are of local vernacular design and were constructed and subsequently altered, adapted and extended in response to necessity. The construction is similarly pragmatic and robust, eschewing any form of decoration or ornamentation.

Although little consideration would have been given to the composition of the farm or its relationship with the surrounding buildings and streets, the stone barns nonetheless offer a valuable visual counterpoint to the surrounding houses. Austere elevations composed of different roof coverings and simply detailed junctions create a very strong aesthetic quality that stands in distinction to the neighbours. A contrast further reinforced by the limited number of openings along the street perimeter.

Alongside Carter's Yard and Gower's Close, the southern and western aspects of Mawles Farm contribute heavily to the character of the village when observed from the village crossroads and along Main Street. From the public realm, there are very limited views of the interior of the Site. The southern and western elevations of the stone barn range obscure views from the south and roadside field embankments and hedgerows screen views approaching the village from the north. The modern pole barn and interior of the Site are only readily visible from directly in front of the entrance gate on Pound Lane.

Assessment of proposals

2.2 Summary of significance

In summary, the special significance of Mawles Farm is derived from its:

- Evidential value as a material record of early farm buildings in the heart of Sibford Gower.
- Historical value illustrating the agricultural origins of the settlement and, by association, the development of Sibford Gower and its relationship with local and national agricultural economies.
- Aesthetic contribution to the village setting and character around the crossroads and Main Street.

2.3 Impact assessment

The proposal involves conversion of the existing barns at Mawles Farm to create two dwelling houses. The proposal includes the conversion of an undesignated heritage asset of local value and buildings within its immediate setting. The proposals also have the potential to impact upon adjacent listed buildings and the conservation area setting. The design has been developed as a three stage strategy articulated as follows:

1. Preserve and repair important historic fabric on the Site;
2. Reintroduce significant lost features; and
3. Enhance the farm's setting through development of a landscape proposal and the conversion of the steel barn.

A summary of the key components of the development proposal is presented below with commentary on the impact in each case.

2.3.1 Conversion of existing stone barn range

The undesignated heritage asset, the L-shaped stone barn range, is no longer used for agricultural purposes. To secure the long-term future of the building group, the proposal seeks to convert it into a single dwelling house.

The main changes proposed are to the interior of the barns to form rooms for domestic purposes. The main spaces have, however, been retained without subdivision to allow the original composition to be legible. The slope of the Site means that the south-western corner of the barns has sufficient space to incorporate a second storey of accommodation. Bedrooms are proposed in this area.

In general, existing structural openings have been reused to provide daylight and access. On the external street facades no new openings are proposed and the windows are detailed as large simple openings to retain the agricultural character. Open-sided sheds are proposed to be infilled using oak timber boarding which is sympathetic to the agricultural character while creating a clear distinction between old and new.

Stone walls are proposed to be retained in situ and repaired where necessary using natural stone from local sources. Slate tiles are proposed to be removed and re-used once the roof is insulated and any structural repairs

carried out. Corrugated metal roof sheets are to be replaced with new. The later, brick and timber lean-to extensions on the internal courtyard side are proposed to be demolished and rebuilt to the existing footprints.

The design proposal overall has limited impact on the existing building fabric. In relation to the heritage significance of the barns, the sensitivity is in the outward appearance of the barns with the emphasis being on the retention of the overtly agricultural visual character. The design proposal achieves this through the avoidance of new openings on these facades combined with repair and improvement works such as removing concrete block infills and rebuilding sections of damaged wall. The detailed proposals for the openings retain the existing large scale character and incorporate sympathetic new materials.

Roof lights are not typical for agricultural buildings and have been avoided except in the rooms where there is no alternative source of light and ventilation. The majority of these roof lights have been included on the hidden roof slopes facing the yard. There are, however, 3 that do face the street. Although undesirable, the visual impact of these 3 windows - when considered in the context of the large building range and the preponderance of unaffected roof slopes - will be limited. Roof lights in this location could be required to be in-line conservation type metal roof lights to mitigate the visual impact.

The retention of existing stone and roofing materials, as well as the incorporation of corrugated metal roofing sheet is welcomed as a positive enhancement, reinforcing the agricultural character of the buildings as distinct from the neighbouring thatched and slated dwellings.

2.3.2 Reinstatement of the split yard arrangement

The proposals include reinstatement of the historic subdivision of the Site into 2 yards. The removal of the sub-division was perhaps contemporary with the construction of the steel pole barn in the late 1990s. Fragments of the east-west wall remain on site: a full-height portion is incorporated in the brick lean-to next to the piggery; and a lower fragment abuts the stone barn range opposite. It appears from this evidence that the division would have originally been in stone. The use of free-standing dry stone walling on and around the Site would provide support for that view and we would suggest that any new wall should match that construction type.

The restoration of the Site's historic layout, which has only recently been changed would make a positive impact on the Site and improve the illustrative historic value of the undesignated asset and its setting.

2.3.3 Conversion of the steel barn

The steel barn can be considered as having useful evidential value as part of the development of the farm over time; however, its current unloved appearance and the raw-earth open cuts and banks in the land immediately around offer scope for enhancement. The sympathetic conversion of the barn and tidying up the surrounding earth formations, vegetation and stone walls would be viewed as a positive aesthetic addition to the Site, while retaining evidential value of the agricultural changes over time.

The proposals for conversion extrapolate from the materials and features found on the stone barn range and the steel barn itself. Use of natural stone and vertical timber cladding replicates and complements the colour, texture and hues of existing fabric on the Site. The visual separation created through the application of these materials in a horizontal strata formation serves to reduce building mass and helps to mediate differences in building scale. Large door and window openings and the use of a standing seam metal roof echoes the agricultural features found on the undesignated heritage asset. The utilitarian material palette proposed is suitable for the agricultural context and would serve to counterbalance any perceived gentrification.

Overall, the conversion will make a positive contribution to the setting of the undesignated heritage asset and, where visible, to the conservation area. Use of appropriate materials, applied in a complementary manner will improve the overall appearance of the building and, in turn, have a positive impact on the aesthetic value of the Site.

2.3.4 Reinstatement of roof abutment to terrace

The map regression studies show that the stone barn range once joined the residential terrace row to the east, forming an unbroken building line from the corner of Main Street and Pound Lane. The outer wall of the linking structure on Site today is of modern construction with a concrete blockwork construction to the yard side and a stone facing leaf to the Main Street side. The wall is in a poor state of repair with missing sections of capping and a bow in the middle. The proposal is to remove this section of wall and

reconnect the southern barn range on Main Street to the terraced houses on the east of the Site. A new vehicle access is proposed from Main Street with the driveway entrance going under the proposed new roof in a porte-cochere arrangement through an opening between the stone walls of the milking parlour and the cottage.

The proposed arrangement is analogous to the opposing wagon-doors in the threshing barn and therefore not alien to the Site. Successful examples of converted farm buildings and outbuildings using this arrangement for vehicle access can be found close-by on Main Street further to the west and in Burdrop off Hawk's Lane.

The loss of the wall is not considered significant from a fabric point of view - due to its modern construction type and poor condition. Thought must be given, however, to the wall's contribution to the impression of the street as a continuous block stretching back from the crossroads and including the terrace. In this respect, it is considered that the loss of the section of wall will be balanced visually by the introduction of the new joining roof structure to reinstate the historic, volumetric connection between the barns and the cottages. The visual presence of the barn roofs on Main Street is strong and the continuation of the lowest roof line to the adjoining gable will help visually reinforce the "strong edge" characteristic of Main Street and introduce a welcome visual continuity in the roofscape. The use of corrugated metal roofing for this portion of roof is also to be welcomed as a visual reminder of Mawles Farm's agricultural heritage.

The return to the lost historic building form would thereby have an overall positive impact on the Site and improve the illustrative historic value of the undesignated asset.

2.3.5 Impact on nearby listed buildings

Carters Yard and Gower's Close face the south elevation of Mawles Farm across Main Street. Carter's Yard is included in the listing for group value with Gower's Close and presumably for its significant contribution to the street scene at this important corner of the village.

Local group value could be taken to extend across the road to incorporate the stone barn range of Mawles Farm which together define the character of Main Street at the crossroads, presenting a delightful contradistinction of domestic vernacular and agricultural building styles in the

local stone. The street facades of Mawles Farm are the components that contribute positively to the setting of the local designated heritage assets. The austere facades with the few, large scale openings and simple, robust details bespeak the agricultural heritage of the farm buildings in contrast to Carter's Yard and Gower's Close. The design proposals retain the building fabric and agricultural character of the existing buildings. Window openings on the street elevations are restricted to those already existing and currently blocked up or boarded over. Details are agricultural in character.

It is therefore considered that the proposals do not reduce the significance of the undesignated heritage asset nor do they impact negatively on the setting of the adjacent listed buildings. The restoration work and improvements to the building fabric will improve the general appearance of the Site and help preserve the setting of the designated heritage assets over the longer term.

2.3.6 Retention of the piggery building

The piggery has no heritage status. Nonetheless, it has been identified in the design proposals as worthy of retention for its contribution to the setting and for its group value in tandem with the main stone barns. The piggery offers evidential value of the type of small-scale mixed farming carried out at Mawles Farm. It is possible that the piggery included a hen house in the loft accessed from the high level opening in the western gable. The proposal to take away the recent lean-to and surrounding brick wall structures is therefore welcomed as it will allow further investigations and a greater legibility of this handsome little building.

2.4 Conclusion

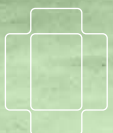
The development proposals at Mawles Farm will result in no harm to the adjacent listed buildings, Carter's Yard and Gower's Close. The design proposals respect the agricultural detail and character of the existing buildings and preserve the setting through a strategy of minimal interventions on the street elevations. There is potential for enhancement of the setting of the designated heritage assets through the proposed restoration of the buildings which are in need of some love and attention.

For similar reasons, the development proposals for the conversion of the locally significant stone barn range will

result in no harm to these undesignated heritage assets.

The setting of the locally significant stone barn range will be enhanced by the improvements to the steel barn, reinstatement of lost historical features and landscape improvements including the restoration of drystone boundary walls.

Mawles Farm was the last operational farm in the village and incorporates a built history that extends up to the end of the 20th century. The re-use of the steel, stone and barns will, taken together, allow the Site to remain as a visual reminder of its agricultural history and development over hundreds of years.



IAN O'BRIEN STUDIO