

**Case Officer:** Catherine Harker      **Recommendation:** Approve

**Applicant:** Sir Stephen Gomersall

**Proposal:** Relocation of staircase, minor internal alterations associated with staircase and alterations to a single window and external door

**Expiry Date:** 25 September 2020      **Extension of Time:** No

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## 1. APPLICATION SITE AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 1.1. The application relates to a Grade II Listed Building in the village of Sibford Gower, within a Conservation Area.

Listing Entry:

- 1.2. Originally listed 1988

- 1.3. *House. 3 builds. C17 with later additions and alterations. Squared coursed ironstone. Steeply pitched stone slate roof laid to diminishing courses. Stone end and brick ridge stacks. Stone coped gables with moulded kneelers. Situated gable end to road. 3-unit plan with addition forming roughly L-plan. 2 storeys plus attic. Entrance has C20 porch and plank door. Right end has 3-light metal casements in wood frames to ground and first floor. 2-light similar attic window. Wrought-iron casement fasteners, springs, lead comes and wood lintels. Left part has C20 windows and 2 half-dormers. Interior not inspected*

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1. This applicant seeks to relocate the existing staircase from its current position to a position which would replace a WC located behind an odd 'nib' of wall, in order to improve safety, as he and his family have suffered injury through falls on the existing stair, the relocation of a modern external double door and the provision of an additional window

## 3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1. The following planning history is considered relevant to the current proposal:

## 4. PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

- 4.1. The following pre-application discussions have taken place with regard to this proposal:

19/00003/preapp - Removal of elements of existing wall. Creation of modern extension. Replacement of existing patio area. Remove existing staircase and walling. Install new staircase. Removal and installation of gable window.

It was advised that a heritage assessment would be required in order to properly assess the internal alterations proposed.

## **5. RESPONSE TO PUBLICITY**

- 5.1. This application has been publicised by way of a site notice displayed near the site, by advertisement in the local newspaper, and by letters sent to all properties immediately adjoining the application site that the Council has been able to identify from its records. The final date for comments was 8 October 2020, although comments received after this date and before finalising this report have also been taken into account.
- 5.2. No comments have been raised by third parties.

## **6. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION**

- 6.1. Below is a summary of the consultation responses received at the time of writing this report. Responses are available to view in full on the Council's website, via the online Planning Register.

### PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL AND NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

- 6.2. Sibford Gower Parish Council wishes to acknowledge the high quality of the Heritage Statement submitted with the application.

### OTHER CONSULTEES

- 6.3. Historic England – no comments
- 6.4. CDC Building Control – A Building Control Application would be required
- 6.5. CDC Conservation –

#### Significance

The list description (first listed 20 September 1988) was for identification purposes only and merely describes the building 'House. 3 builds. C17 with later additions and alterations'.

The building is of significance for its vernacular form, its unusual plan form and development and the survival of historic fabric. The building contains fabric from different phases from the 17th century onwards with different interpretations of the phasing put forward by two different Heritage Consultants.

The Heritage Report accompanying the new application suggests the following phasing

- The single storey range to the west with the large chimney stack and deeply chamfered principal joist is the first phase 17th century;
- The two-storey range with attic range is the second phase, possibly replacing a previous range late 17th or early 18th century;
- The range to the south is the third phase early 19th century;

In relation to this suggested phasing is noted that the plan form of the eastern wing is not a true oblong, which it is highly likely it would have been, if built as a free-standing house. It runs off slightly obliquely from the western range. Also it does not have a principal fireplace.

The Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower and Burdrop Conservation Area Appraisal describes the building as being higher status and larger in scale as a 'statement of wealth and status in the 17th century'. Although the Heritage Report associated with the current application has an alternative suggestion. It is also thought that, in the absence of a principal chimney stack with only a small fireplace on the first floor, the second phase of building may have originally been for a non-residential commercial use undertaken in conjunction with the use of the farm holding. The absence of heating to a range of this size is uncommon.

The Conservation Area Appraisal also recognises the specific contribution the building makes to the character and appearance of the conservation area 'Streetscape of exceptional quality remains in pockets within the village, for example the grouping looking east from the cross roads and the cluster around Stickleys House'.

### Proposals

The proposals are for a number of alterations to the house including the removal and reinstatement of the staircase, the provision of an additional window and the change in location of a 20th century window and French door.

### Appraisal of issues

#### Staircase

The proposal relates to the eastern range, which is now understood to be the second phase of the building.

Comments on the previous application stated 'No evidence has been presented about the suggested location of the historic stair and unless further information is submitted it will be assumed that the location is historic. There are objections to this proposal.'

Further investigative work has now been undertaken into potential alternative locations of the stair with the Heritage Report stating 'There is a general agreement that the vast majority of the staircase from the ground to first floor, including the enclosure is all new work. Three treads show evidence of being older, however, they have newly sawn edges and are fixed into a completely new string. From this it cannot be confirmed that these treads represent a surviving element of an earlier staircase. Even if they were, the historic value that they now hold is negligible. Given they are also in softwood it is probable that the timber derives from the 19th or early 20th century'. 'Careful lifting of the floor boards at the top of the first flight of stairs shows that The floor joists, which are deeper than wider, and are not morticed and housed as would be expected, but rather crudely notched and laid over the structural transverse beams. This means that the joists were laid after the building had been constructed. The dimensions and spacing of the joists suggest they are not 17th century but later. The surface finish on the joists vary across the floor, again suggesting some level of reuse. The floorboards, which are wide and early, do not line through, with the undersides of those exposed covered in limewash. There is an area of modern chipboard, in the NW and NE corners of the first floor, almost certainly dating from the 1980s. This building sequence suggests that this area may have been the location for an earlier staircase, and would be a more logical location'.

This evidence alongside the revised understanding of the phasing of the building, the fact that the stair location is a non-conventional location for vernacular buildings

in the region and that only 3 stair treads remain provides sufficient doubt to allow the stair to be removed (subject to recording of its current location).

#### Reconfigured downstairs toilet / installation of new stairs

The previous application did not provide any evidence or explanation about the remaining nib of historic fabric to the south end of the 1980s downstairs toilet.

The current Heritage Report states 'The proposed new location will involve the removal of a small part of an existing wall currently projecting into the eastern range of the building to provide clearance for the staircase. It does not appear to have any structural role, and given the suggested phasing of the evolution of the house, it is possible that this is a piece of walling from a building which the eastern range later replaced? It does not appear to serve any obvious historic function.

While backing onto the stack in the western range there is no evidence of a fireplace in this location?

While the proposal will result in this small loss of fabric, it is not considered it will cause harm to the significance of the house'.

An addendum (submitted by email 29/09/2020) has also been submitted including additional photographs from the affected area particularly looking at the issue of whether the area of the proposed stairs could potentially have been a fireplace (as suggested by the question mark in the passage above).

The opening up work shows no soot / scorch marks on the upper floor nor any large stonework / soot / scorch marks around the historic nib of walling – and therefore nothing to suggest that there was an inglenook fireplace in this location.

There are therefore no objections to the granting of consent for a staircase in this location, but further recording work should take place during the course of works to ensure that any additional / new information regarding the stonework nib is recorded.

Further details are also required about the plumbing, drainage and ventilation for the WC, which should re-use existing routes wherever possible.

#### Relocation of window and French door

The proposed development relates to the late 19th century phase of the building.

There are no objections to the principle of the relocation of the window and French doors on the south and west elevations. It is understood from the Design and Access Statement that the existing doors will be relocated in the gable end.

#### Level of harm

The additional evidence and revised understanding of the phased development of the building indicate that there will be less than substantial harm caused to the significance of the building through the loss of the remains of the historic stairs and the potential remains of an earlier buildings on the site. These can be mitigated by recording prior to removal.

#### Recommendation

No objection, subject to additional statement on the investigative works

Conditions

Recording of historic stairs and stone nib before and during works.

Method statement for removal of existing stairs

Method statement for removal of historic nib

Method statement for insertion of new stairs

Details of plumbing, ventilation and drainage for WC.

Re-location of window / doors to re-use existing stone where possible.

Samples of any new stone to be provided.

## **7. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE**

7.1. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

7.2. The Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 - Part 1 was formally adopted by Cherwell District Council on 20th July 2015 and provides the strategic planning policy framework for the District to 2031. The Local Plan 2011-2031 – Part 1 replaced a number of the ‘saved’ policies of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 though many of its policies are retained and remain part of the development plan. The relevant planning policies of Cherwell District’s statutory Development Plan are set out below:

### CHERWELL LOCAL PLAN 2011 - 2031 PART 1 (CLP 2031 Part 1)

- ESD15 - The Character of the Built and Historic Environment

### CHERWELL LOCAL PLAN 1996 SAVED POLICIES (CLP 1996)

- C18 – Development proposals affecting a listed building

7.3. Other Material Planning Considerations

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment: Historic England Good Practice (2015)
- The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic England Good Practice (2015)
- Cherwell Residential Design Guide (2018)
- Cherwell Council Home Extensions and Alterations Design Guide (2007)

## **8. APPRAISAL**

8.1. The key issue for consideration in this case is the impact on the historic significance and setting of the listed building(s).

8.2. Section 16(2) of The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) states that: *In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.* Further, under Section 72(1) of the same Act the Local Planning Authority has a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

8.3. Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas are designated heritage assets, and Paragraph 190 of the NPPF states that: *Local planning authorities should identify*

*and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise.*

- 8.4. Paragraph 193 of the NPPF directs that: *when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.* Policy ESD15 of the CLP 2031 Part 1 echoes this guidance.
- 8.5. A thorough assessment of the proposals has been provided above by the Conservation Officer. I agree with her assessment that the works proposed would result in no harm to the significance of the listed building, subject to condition.
- 8.6. This is due to a detailed heritage assessment which has been undertaken since the last pre-app was received, which shows that the majority of the staircase is new work and provides doubt that it is original, or in its original location. This is considered to be adequate justification for its removal.
- 8.7. The new location of the staircase caused some concern at first, as it was thought that the WC behind the 'nib' of wall might once have been the site of a fireplace. However, upon closer inspection there is no evidence of soot etc on the wall as there would be if this were the case, and as such there is insufficient evidence to prevent the staircase being re-located to this site.
- 8.8. The new WC is considered to be acceptable but will require further info regarding pipework and vents.
- 8.9. The relocation of the modern french doors and window is also considered acceptable.
- 8.10. Provided adequate conditions are imposed to record the work and provide method statements, it is considered that adequate justification has been provided to show that the proposals would cause no harm to the heritage asset in accordance with the heritage test set out in the NPPF, and a positive recommendation is therefore made.

## **9. RECOMMENDATION**

That consent is granted, subject to the following conditions

1. The works to which this consent relates shall be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this consent.

Reason - To comply with the provisions of Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. Except where otherwise stipulated by conditions attached to this permission, the development shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the information contained within the application form and the following approved plans: Location and block plans and proposed drawing 6601 07 A and the Design and Access and Heritage Statement submitted with the application

Reason – For the avoidance of doubt, to ensure that the development is carried out only as approved by the Local Planning Authority and comply with Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. Prior to the commencement of works to the stairs, method statements for the removal of the existing stairs, removal of the historic nib and installation of the new stairs, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works thereafter shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved method statements.

Reason - To ensure that the completed development is in keeping with and conserves the special character of the existing historic building and to comply with Policy ESD 15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1, saved Policy C18 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

4. Any remedial stonework necessary for the repair or making good of the walls to the original building shall be carried out by re-using the existing stonework wherever possible, and where new stone is required, shall be carried out in natural stone of the same type, colour, size, shape, texture and appearance as the stone to the existing building and shall be laid, coursed, dressed to match the existing outbuilding walls. Any pointing shall be done using a lime based mortar to match the existing building and to protect the natural stonework.

Reason - To ensure that the completed development is in keeping with and conserves the special character of the existing historic building and to comply with Policy ESD 15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1, saved Policy C18 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

5. Prior to the installation of the bathroom, details of the new pipework for drainage, water supplies and soil stacks and details of any ventilation required, showing minimal harm to the historic fabric of the building, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works thereafter shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved plans.

Reason: To safeguard the historic and architectural significance of the existing historic building and to comply with Policy ESD15 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1, saved Policy C18 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Case Officer: Catherine Harker

DATE: 9 October 2020

Checked By: Paul Ihringer

DATE: 09/10/20