



Planning, Design and Access Statement

Stone Hill House, Stone Hill, Bloxham
Prepared for: Bloxham School
April 2021

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1 Introduction

Overview

- 1.1 Bloxham School have collaborated with a variety of technical consultants to develop a sensitively designed proposal to extend its property, Stone Hill House, which is presently its smallest boarding house. The extensions are required to accommodate the forecasted growth in pupil numbers – specifically girls' boarding – in the coming years. The proposed extension is set behind (to the north) of the remains of an old coach house, whose reinstatement also forms part of the proposals. A link will be formed behind the existing archway, to facilitate internal movement between the existing property and proposed extension. Existing outbuildings on the site will be demolished and removed as part of the proposal.
- 1.2 This proposal follows on from a detailed assessment of the schools' overall spatial and operational challenges and opportunities, which was undertaken in 2019 and 2020. This culminated in the preparation of a School Masterplan which has been discussed and shared with Cherwell District Council officers. The School Masterplan has been submitted for supplementary information with this application to provide a wider understanding of the spatial and operational challenges and opportunities experienced across the school's entire estate, and the way in which these have been strategically and logically worked through to provide a coordinated approach to the school's growth and development over the coming years¹.

Planning Application and Listed Building Consent

- 1.3 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Edgars Limited, on behalf of Bloxham School (hereafter 'the applicant'). It is prepared to accompany a planning application and listed building consent for:

'Extension of existing boarding house through the reinstatement of part of the former coach house, the demolition of outbuildings, the erection of an extension and link structure (with associated alterations to Stone Hill House), insertion of internal wall, and associated works.'
- 1.4 The purpose of this statement is to provide the planning rationale and justification for the proposed works. It is structured as follows:
 - Section 2 – Site context, access, surrounding uses and designations;
 - Section 3 – Planning history;
 - Section 4 – Proposed development;
 - Section 5 – Pre-application advice;
 - Section 6 – Planning assessment;
 - Section 7 – Conclusion.
- 1.5 The planning application and listed building consent are accompanied by a number of consultant reports and surveys. These provide an evidence base upon which design decisions have been made, and expand on the rationale of the scheme in the context of architectural design and heritage assessment. The application documents are as follows:

¹ To note, the School Masterplan is maintained as a 'live' document which is subject to change as necessary in light of the school's priorities and growth.



Report	Author	Date
Application Forms (FUL & LBC)	Edgars Limited	April 2021
Architectural Drawings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20_050-27 - 100 - Location Plan & Existing Plans & Elevations 20_050-27 - 201-208 - Proposed Plans & Elevations 	Acanthus Clews Architects	April 2021
Design Statement	Acanthus Clews Architects	April 2021
Heritage Statement	Heritage Collective	April 2021
Arboricultural Letter (AIA not required) and Survey	Tree Frontiers	April 2021
Ecology Phase 1 Survey (including Endoscope Survey)	Windrush Ecology	March 2021
Supplementary Document - Bloxham School Masterplan (Version 2020)	Various	2020

- 1.6 A clear and justified case can be made for the proposed alterations and extensions. Following a full assessment of impact and evaluation against relevant planning policy, it is our professional view that both planning and listed building consent should be granted. Edgars Limited are keen to engage constructively with the Local Planning Authority throughout the application as necessary and on the basis of the constructive pre-application discussions that have been undertaken to date.



2 Site Context, Access, Surrounding Uses and Designations

Location

- 2.1 The site of Stone Hill House is accessed from, and is located to the north of, Stone Hill road. This road leads westwards from the High Street of Bloxham and connects to the west with Little Bridge Road. The property which is the subject of this application is located approximately halfway along the Stone Hill road.



- 2.2 The existing property – Stone Hill House – has owned and used by Bloxham School since 1957. It is arranged over three floors, is semi-detached and built of stone. The building has a gable end fronting Stone Hill. Adjacent to the property and within the site ownership is an archway into the site. Furthermore, the remains of a coach house are present adjacent to the road frontage and behind this are garage and storage type structures. Historically there was more ancillary built form to the west of Stone Hill House; this is explored within the accompanying Heritage Statement (in particular: figures 2, 4, 20).

Site Visuals

- 2.3 The following photographs provide an overview of what the site looks like at present:



Figure 1 - Existing buildings to be demolished



Figure 2 - Stone Hill House, east elevation



Figure 3 - West side of Stone Hill House



Figure 4 – View across site from existing external staircase



Figure 5 - North coach house wall as existing (left) and retaining wall (right)



Figure 6 - Existing coach house wall (south facing)

2.4 Further photographs can be found in the accompanying Heritage Statement.

Designations

2.5 According to Historic England records, this property and the attached wall are Grade II listed. The property to the north (Stone Hill Cottage) is also listed. For further information on the historic background of the site and surrounding context please refer to the accompanying Heritage Statement (Heritage Collective). For completeness, the listing description is provided below:

Table 1 - Listing Description

List Entry 1046178

Statutory Address	STONE HILL HOUSE AND ATTACHED WALL, STONE HILL
National Grid Reference	SP 42982 36004
Grade	Grade 2 Listed
First Listed	1985



Details

BLOXHAM STONE HILL SP4236 (North side) 8/179 Stone Hill House and attached wall
GV II

Large House. C18. Regular coursed ironstone with fine joints. C20 tile roof. 3 stone stacks (triple shafts) of which 2 are rendered, to ridge and ends. 3-unit plan. 2 storeys plus attic. 6-window range. French door to right; 5 sashes to left and one to right. All have keystone stone surrounds and stone lintels. 6 similar windows to first floor; 4 hipped full dormers. Moulded stop eaves cornice. Stone copings. Entrance from Stone Hill: Recessed with elliptical archway, chamfered sides and keystone stone surrounds. 4-panelled door. Cast iron bootscraper to left. Attached wall with elliptical keystone arch to rear. Stone Hill House is part of Bloxham School. Interior not inspected.

Listing NGR: SP4298236004

- 2.6 The site is located within the Bloxham Conservation Area. The latest Bloxham Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) identifies this part of the Conservation Area as a 'School' character type. This is a change from the CAA in 2007 [Hill Lanes] and signifies the long-established educational nature of the site. This is explored further at paragraph 4.20 of the accompanying Heritage Statement.
- 2.7 The site is not located within the Green Belt or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 2.8 According to the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning the site is in the lowest flood risk category (zone 1).

Surrounding Uses

- 2.9 To the west of the site is Old Park Farm Annex, owned by Bloxham School. To the south on the opposite side of the road are residential properties. To the north of the site is Stone Hill Cottage, also owned by Bloxham School.

Access

- 2.10 The site does feature an archway, however this is not for parents to use as an access point to the site. The current protocol at the school is that pupils are dropped off at the main school car park and that they then walk to other buildings such as this, as appropriate. There is therefore no change to the main access arrangement in this site and proposal.



3 Planning History

- 3.1 According to the Cherwell District Council planning portal, the following planning applications and listed building consents have been subject of the application site:

Reference	Description	Outcome
20/01527/LB	Internal Alterations - formation of internal doorway, and replacement of internal door for fire regulation reasons, and associated works	Pending
19/01156/LB	Internal Alterations - removal of an internal wall and associated alterations	Permitted
16/02202/LB	Retrospective – internal alterations, chimney to be rebuilt, window refurbishment works, waste/rainwater goods replaced & extractor vents installed	Permitted
16/00088/LB	Internal alterations to layouts, one external window opening enlarged and adapted to form doorway and one external door opening adapted to form window	Permitted
15/00213/TCA	T1 x Sycamore - Crown reduction by 30%	Permitted
15/00183/TCA	T328 x Common Hawthorn - Fell T7330 x Wild Cherry - Fell T327, T329, T331, T332, T333 x Sycamore - Fell	Withdrawn
09/00208/TCA	1 x T1 (Holly) - Fell. 1 x T2 (Portuguese Laurel) - Fell	Permitted



4 Proposed Development

Development Context

- 4.1 The Bloxham School estate as a whole presents a number of spatial challenges and opportunities associated with its educational functions and the required services, facilities and built form that will allow its continued success.
- 4.2 The school started investigating the constraints and opportunities of its entire ownership in 2019. This included working with a number of professional built environment consultants to advise the school of how to most appropriately arrange its functions.
- 4.3 The investigations, and variety of consultations, including with the District, County and Parish Councils, steered the school to the production of a School Masterplan. This document demonstrates the variety of considerations and merits at play in the context of Bloxham School, and how these align with the spatial vision that the school has for the next years to come. The Masterplan is not a set plan of implementation, rather it is subject to change and evolution as the school grows and reacts to wider circumstances. It is, however, an evidenced technical baseline of the spatial and operational issues that are currently experienced by the school which have been incorporated into a logical, well-considered and strategic approach to the school's spatial needs and development in the coming years which make best use of its estate, its unique challenges and opportunities.
- 4.4 One of the key 'Visions' for the school is to have a more equal balance of male and female pupils; in essence to increase the proportion of female pupils at the school over time. This is an issue as the school needs to increase the number of female students to ensure continuity in recruitment and to maintain competitiveness in the market place. The School Masterplan has found that it is a very challenging time, with a number of factors influencing the cost pressures of running such a school – it is important for the ongoing viable running of the school to incorporate this objective in order to offer a more balanced co-educational experience. Currently only 39% of the student population are female, with the imbalance more pronounced among senior boarding pupils. The school has identified this as a particular issue that needs to be addressed in order to ensure continuity in recruitment and maintain its competitiveness within the independent school market. Currently, there is high demand for a co-educational independent boarding school experience. However, parents wanting this experience for their children are seeking schools with a more balanced cohort. With respect to sporting teams, each Senior School year group requires about 30 girls to facilitate sports teams, currently, some year groups are falling short of this number. As such, there is an urgent need to accommodate a greater proportion of female students and the school has set a target male to female ratio of 55:45.
- 4.5 The extension of existing boarding houses is the most sustainable and logical solution to the increased demand, rather than building a brand new boarding house that would be beyond the scale required and the cost that would be appropriate. Usually, Bloxham School operates boarding houses at around 40 pupils. This provides the right scale for effective mentoring and overseeing, whilst being of a small enough scale to complement the existing Bloxham School character. Stone Hill House presently serves 22-24 pupils (girls). This is the smallest of all the Bloxham School boarding houses. It is therefore the boarding house that would benefit most from extending, in terms of school gender mix and in terms of facility provision for boarding pupils.



The Proposal

- 4.6 The proposed development is for *'Extension of existing boarding house through the reinstatement of part of the former coach house, the demolition of outbuildings, the erection of an extension and link structure (with associated alterations to Stone Hill House), insertion of internal wall, and associated works.'*
- 4.7 The following bullet points provide more detail on each element of the proposed scheme, and are shown visually in the Design Statement and Architectural Drawings prepared by ACA:
- Demolition of outbuildings: Both the existing single storey outbuilding and single storey garage will be demolished as part of the proposal. These are shown in figures 1 and 4 above.
 - Reinstatement of part of existing ruined coach house: At present, as shown in figures 5 and 6 above, walls remains of a coach house, however this structure has no roof and is therefore open to the elements. Previously the walls were part of a building. The proposal includes restoration of the walling, infilling with materials to match where applicable, and providing a new pitched zinc roof.
 - Erection of extension: The extension is positioned to the west of Stone Hill House and to the north of the remains of the coach house. The extension provides two floors of accommodation. It sits within a low point of the site (2.5-3.6m lower than the Old Park Farm Annex site to the west), protruding from the Old Park Farm annex side as a single storey structure. A doorway and steps will be present on the west side. The main point of access will be from the ground floor. The extension and works are inspired by the historic evolution of the site – as shown in the accompanying Heritage Statement.
 - Erection of link structure: To ensure that the extension meets boarding standards a lightweight link structure is proposed to allow persons to walk between parts of the building. This is single storey and sits behind the existing wall.
 - Internal works: Within Stone Hill House itself the space will be maximised, through the insertion (re-provision) of an internal wall.

Architectural Design and Layout

- 4.8 The project Architect (Acanthus Clews Architecture (ACA)) has reviewed which rooms would be required to be within the new built form. It is the case that some areas of the new built form will need to be dormitory accommodation (in order to meet capacity requirements), and some areas can be ancillary support spaces (Matron, common room, toilet/shower facilities). The latter enables the original property to provide additional dormitory spaces. The internal uses are shown on the proposed plans provided and are also detailed in ACA's accompanying Statement. The room dimensions and massing have been reduced since an earlier pre-application stage, and now represent the minimum boarding house standard required for the school demand.



- 4.9 A specific Design Statement accompanies this application and has been prepared by ACA. This explores the design process, design considerations and design rationale. It explores the visual appearance and layout of the proposal, and how it sits within its context. It is of note that the land levels mean that the extension is single storey in appearance when viewed from the west.



Figure 7– extract - Site Sketch prepared by ACA showing east elevation of extension from Stone Hill House

- 4.10 The Design Statement evidences how the design process has been fully informed by the attributes of the site, the feedback received during pre-application discussion and the pastoral brief of the school, in order to provide a high-quality educational, boarding and working environment.

Access

- 4.11 There is no change to the site access. The site is not currently open for parents to drop off pupils; they are currently required to park at the main school car park and there will be no change to this arrangement. Pedestrian access will remain as existing from Stone Hill.
- 4.12 Doors are proposed on the western elevation of the extension, for fire exit purposes.



Provision of a 'link' to the original form of Stone Hill House

4.13 The plans demonstrate a proposed 'link' between the reinstated coach house part of the development proposal and the existing form of Stone Hill House. The location of the link was discussed at the pre-application stage. Initial plans had the link running through the middle of the site (please see Design Statement for further information), however a suggestion for investigation was put forward by Cherwell District Council to locate the link - if required - behind the archway.

4.14 The technical consultants and the school investigated whether the link was needed as part of the scheme. The evidence collated demonstrates that it is essential that a link is created between the elements of built form. This is from both a pastoral need perspective, and from a regulatory perspective. Without the link, the project will not be possible for the applicant. This is explored further as follows:

Pastoral Need

4.15 Bloxham School, like any boarding school, has an essential pastoral need to ensure that the accommodation which it provides to pupils is of sufficient and appropriate quality and design to foster an enjoyable, secure and safe boarding experience.

4.16 In order to deliver the number of bed spaces required, the extensions are designed to ensure a capacity of 40 pupils on the site overall, and dormitory accommodation is required to be split between existing and new built form. Notwithstanding this, there is a pastoral need to ensure that pupils are supervised appropriately. A link will ensure that pastoral needs are met, and that the accommodation is not of a lower standard than other boarding houses provided.

4.17 A link will also ensure that pupils remain inside, in a safe and secure environment when moving between their dormitories, communal spaces and toilet/shower facilities.

4.18 Furthermore, the right amount and type of ancillary spaces are vital to the provision of good boarding accommodation. Bloxham School has previously found exceptional value in the provision of common rooms and communal spaces, in fostering good internal relationships and reducing the potential for pastoral issues.

4.19 It is required, for the appropriate mentoring and supervision, that all elements of the building are together, and not separated. A link will make this possible. The form of the link would not be seen from the streetscene over the existing wall and archway.

4.20 In summary, there is an essential pastoral need for the additional accommodation and for the proposed link.



Boarding House Regulations

4.21 Furthermore, Bloxham School is required to ensure that its boarding accommodation complies with the relevant regulations.

4.22 In this regard, the following paragraphs of the Boarding Minimum Standards are of relevance:

15.4 Boarders are at all times under the responsibility of an identified member of staff who is suitably qualified and experienced.

15.7 There is at least one adult member of staff sleeping in each boarding house at night, responsible for the boarders in the house.

15.8 Boarders have a satisfactory means of contacting a member of staff in each house at night.

4.23 With regards to para 15.7 in particular, the sub-wording outlines:

B117 This standard is self-evident. It would not be appropriate for a school-leaver gap assistant to be in sole overnight charge of boarders. Where a House comprises more than one building, sleeping in cover from one of its constituent buildings can cover more than one building only if the buildings are immediately adjacent, the responsible staff member is easily contactable by boarders at night, staff supervision is fully satisfactory in practice, and the boarders are at the upper age level in a senior school – normally sixth formers.

4.24 The boarding pupils in this boarding house are not of sixth form age, and therefore the covering of adjacent but not connected buildings would not be suitable to comply with the *minimum* boarding standards within a link structure between the part of the development. A link is therefore essential and is required to meet the Boarding Minimum Standards.

4.25 Following pre-application discussions, Bloxham School liaised with the relevant authorities on this matter, and these authorities confirmed that there is an essential need for the link between parts of the building.



5 Pre-Application Engagement

- 5.1 Bloxham School, through the variety of technical consultants engaged to act on its behalf, has liaised at multiple opportunities with the Local Planning Authority and other key stakeholders, in the preparation of both the School Masterplan and this specific planning and listed building consent application. The following commentary describes, in high-level terms, the pre-application process that has been undertaken.
- 5.2 In December 2019, Edgars Limited and Bloxham School met with David Peckford of Cherwell District Council to discuss the concept of a School Masterplan, the aim of which was to be used to overcome a number of spatial challenges and identify opportunities across the school's estate in order to facilitate its existing and future operations. This was a constructive meeting and from here the consultant team undertook a number of types of research. This was collated and the findings and thoughts were presented in a pre-application meeting to the Planning Department of Cherwell District Council (Nathanael Stock, Jennifer Ballinger and Matthew Chadwick). Further communications occurred during 2020, as baseline technical evidence was produced and the ideas were refined.
- 5.3 In December 2020, the applicant, Edgars Limited, Acanthus Clews Architects and Heritage Collective held a pre-application meeting with Cherwell District Council regarding the specific proposals at Stone Hill House. A number of options were explored as part of this pre-application engagement. The principle of extending an existing school building was confirmed as acceptable by Cherwell District Council, subject to the design and the impacts on heritage. Further work was undertaken following this meeting.
- 5.4 In January 2021, Edgars Limited held a call with Nat Stock and Bob Neville. The planning officers reiterated that the principle of development was acceptable, subject to heritage and design. The planning officers outlined that some changes to the plans would be required. This included:
- removal of large panel glazing to the front gates,
 - reduction in the width of the new built form,
 - further recessing of the link between the new built form and the proposed reinstatement of the coach house to express the existing doorway externally, and,
 - further clarification on the need for the link.
- 5.5 Edgars Limited can report that following this call, all of the suggested changes and alterations expressed by the District Council have been incorporated into the proposal, as shown on the accompanying drawings, and the justifications for the link have been set out within this document.
- 5.6 Specifically, the width of the new built form has been reduced to be no wider than the slimmer part of Stone Hill House; the link between the coach house and new built form has been significantly recessed to allow for more of the coach house to be viewed externally; and the gates under the restored archway have been revised. In addition to this the massing has been altered and broken down with a focus on lightweight materials, and to assist in the appearance of the new built form as subservient to the original built form of Stone Hill House.
- 5.7 In essence therefore, Bloxham School have fully addressed the January 2021 comments of Cherwell District Council and have used best endeavours to further revise the scheme. The space provided by the new built form and reinstated floor areas is not able to be reduced any further, owing to boarding house space regulations and the associated operational requirements of the school. This demonstrates that the school have constructively considered Cherwell District Council's comments at an early stage and fully incorporated them into the final scheme.
- 5.8 The additional clarifications on the *need* for the link element of the proposal, i.e. the link back to the original property have been provided within this Statement (section 4, para 4.13 onwards)



6 Planning Assessment

Policy Context

- 6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that *'If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise'*.
- 6.2 In this case the 'development plan' comprises: Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1, Cherwell Local Plan 1996 Saved Policies, and the Bloxham Neighbourhood Plan.
- 6.3 'Other Material Considerations' comprise: National Planning Policy Framework, Cherwell Non-Statutory Local Plan, and the Bloxham Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 6.4 These documents and policies are explored in detail in Appendix 1. For conciseness, a table of the relevant paragraphs and policies is noted below:

Document	Relevant Paragraph / Policy
National Planning Policy Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities • Chapter 11: Making effective use of land • Paragraph 94: Sufficient choice of school places • Paragraph 109: Highways • Paragraph 184, 189, 193, 194, 196, 200: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
Adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 (2011-2031)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy ESD15: The character of the built and historic environment
Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy C18: Determining applications for listed building consent • Policy C23: Retaining features in the Conservation Area • Policy C27: Respecting historic settlement pattern • Policy C28: Layout design and external appearance of new development • Policy ENV1: Amenity/Pollution
Bloxham Neighbourhood Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy BL9: Regard for the Amenity of Existing Residents • Policy BL10: Conservation Area • Policy BL11: Contributing to the Rural Character of the Village • Policy BL12: Streetscene and Key Views

Considerations

- 6.5 The key issues for consideration in relation to this application are:



- Principle of development
- Design and Heritage – impact on listed building and Conservation Area
- Arboriculture
- Ecology
- Highways & Access
- Residential Amenity
- Public Benefits

The Principle of Development

- 6.6 The applicant, along with the consultant team, has constructively engaged in pre-application dialogue with Cherwell District Council. This included a meeting, a site visit by the Council, email exchanges and a phone call. It has been made clear by Cherwell District Council that the extending of an existing school building is acceptable in principle, subject to the technical considerations, including design and heritage.
- 6.7 The NPPF (Paragraph 94) states that it is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities, and that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. As such, the NPPF attaches 'great weight' to the need to alter schools. In this instance as set out above, the development would respond to demands for boarding pupil places at the school, as well as responding to one of the key vision points of the School Masterplan in terms of pupil mix and the associated ongoing financial viability of the school.

Locational Rationale

- 6.8 The School Masterplan identified a number of areas of opportunity. In terms of Stone Hill House, it identified that there was a sensitive development opportunity. Specifically, the heritage research undertaken has found that a number of heritage benefits can be brought forwards in the proposal. It was found that the siting of historic outbuildings could be applied to the proposal, so that the arrangement of buildings was akin to what was the historic layout of the site. It was also found that the reinstatement of the old coach house, and restoration works to the archway would be beneficial to the context and condition of the site in heritage terms. The proposal would also remove existing storage outbuildings on the site which are not of high architectural quality, and the proposal would contribute to maintaining the viable future use of the site (as supported by paragraph 196, NPPF).
- 6.9 As explored earlier in this Statement, the property of Stone Hill House is an existing girls boarding house. It is the smallest girls boarding house, and the one that could most benefit from new and enhanced facilities.
- 6.10 When reviewing all of the property assets that Bloxham School has (as reviewed as part of the School Masterplan) there was no other immediate opportunity to provide for a girls boarding house of a standard that would be appropriate for 40 pupils, along with associated staff members (i.e. there is no current building available for this function). Furthermore, should this opportunity have existed and the girls boarding house moved out of Stone Hill House, there are no other uses across the school site that would fit into Stone Hill House as well as a boarding house does/would. In terms of internal spaces, the property is set up very well as a boarding house. The applicant has a role, as the owner of the building, in seeking to ensure that it operates with the optimal viable use in mind. The property has long been owned and used by Bloxham School.
- 6.11 The property is outside of the main campus, away from other academic or sporting functions. It also within an existing residential area of Bloxham. It is therefore very appropriate that the use of the building continues to function for boarding pupils. Likewise, to move the boarding house out of Stone Hill House could undermine its effective use by the School for educational purposes, and as a listed building it is important that the optimum viable use is secured and maintained.



- 6.12 The most appropriate solution therefore for Bloxham School, but also in the matter of the custodianship of the property, is that the school makes excellent viable continued use of the building. The proposals set out in this application will ensure that it is fit for purpose for the future and that it meets required boarding standards and space standards to match the educational demands of the school.

Technical Considerations

Heritage

- 6.13 This proposal has been fully informed by a Heritage Statement, undertaken by Heritage Collective (HCUK Group). The accompanying Heritage Statement investigates the significance of the site and property, architectural and historical values, archaeological values, heritage setting and the context of the Conservation Area. The Statement provides commentary on how the proposal has been informed by the site attributes. In particular the proposal responds to the history of the site; the Heritage Statement reports that *'the area of former outbuildings and ancillary structures indicated on historic maps throughout the 19th century, and partially surviving as ruins on site, was considered to offer a logical and sensitive place to add additional new built form to provide the required accommodation and sustain Stone Hill House in its current use within the school's portfolio. Furthermore, the Statement comments that the current condition of some of the external areas of the site are 'neglected'.*' In our view therefore the proposal scheme is sympathetic to the architectural and historic character of the building (Policy C18, Local Plan 1996)
- 6.14 The Heritage Statement explores a number of heritage benefits, enabled as part of the proposals, including: clear heritage enhancement to restoration of the ruinous conditions of the coach house and strong heritage benefit to securing a future use for the derelict structure; contribution to the streetscene as something closer to the historic situation; and contributing to the existing boundary lines of this part of the Conservation Area, as well as restoration of the retained archway (*we consider that the proposal accords with policies C23 and C27 as a result*).
- 6.15 The Heritage Statement specifically finds that there would be no harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Accordingly, it complies with the relevant policy BL10, Neighbourhood Plan, as well as C23 of the Local Plan 1996 and NPPF Paragraph 200.
- 6.16 The proposal would not result in substantial heritage harm (Paragraph 194, NPPF); the Heritage Statement finds there would be low to medium level of less than substantial harm associated with the Listed Building of Stone Hill House. However, it also identifies heritage benefits as noted above, and as explored in detail in the Heritage Statement. Overall, it concludes with 'very low levels' of less than substantial harm in heritage terms.
- 6.17 The Heritage Statement does not in itself consider the wider planning public benefits of the scheme and this is considered below in the context of Paragraph 196 of the NPPF.

Design

- 6.18 Through the evolution of the architectural plans, and the evidence presented as part of the Design Statement, it is clear that the design is founded upon a clear understanding of the site, and that the proposal would complement and enhance the character of its context (Policy BL11, Neighbourhood Plan). The design submitted would provide a safe, attractive, durable and healthy place, in which staff can work and pupils can thrive. The design utilises the footprint of existing form, to make best use of the available space, whilst remaining subservient to the existing form of Stone Hill House.
- 6.19 Policy ESD15 of the Local Plan Part 1 address the character of the built and historic environment. The policy contains a number of development proposal criteria for 'successful design'. It is considered that this proposal will complement the site and the surroundings, and that a high design standard can and has been achieved in the proposal. The design has a clear and evidenced rationale, which is underpinned by both the Design



Statement and Heritage Statement. The form and layout of the proposal has been inspired by the historic context of the site and is considered to be a sensitive and logical approach, respecting the spaces and pattern of development of the site. The proposal includes for the restoration of the archway, and provides a viable future use for the currently ruined former coach house. The proposal clearly integrates with the public frontage in a sensitive way and the materials have been thoughtfully chosen to be ancillary to the main property (Stone Hill House). The proposal does not result in the removal of any trees and will provide a high quality, private outside space at Stone Hill House.

- 6.20 As a result of the evidence provided it is considered that the design accords with Policy ESD15 of the Local Plan and C28 of the 1996 Local Plan.

Arboriculture

- 6.21 An Arboricultural Survey has been undertaken on the site. The survey has steered the design and layout of the proposal. The final proposals do not encroach root protection areas, and the Arboricultural Consultant has confirmed that there will be no impact on the tree stock and that no Arboricultural Impact Assessment is required in this instance.
- 6.22 Notwithstanding this, the Arboricultural Consultant has provided a letter to confirm that an AIA is not required.

Ecology

- 6.23 A Phase 1 Habitat Survey was undertaken by Windrush Ecology, the results of which identified that there was limited opportunity for bats. Notwithstanding this, an Endoscope Survey was undertaken of the coach house and adjoining wall to be sure that there were no roosting bats. The results found no bats. An Ecology Report documenting this process accompanies this application.

Highways & Access

- 6.24 The NPPF outlines at paragraph 109 that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. Cherwell District Council included, as part of the pre-application service, internal discussion with Oxfordshire County Council. The District Council reported back to the applicant that there were no concerns in highways terms.
- 6.25 The existing property operates as a satellite site, within a walkable distance to the main part of the school campus. Pupils and staff already use the existing main car park for parking and for drop-off/pick-up. Therefore, in this proposal, vehicular activity will not be different – the school's internal policy is that parking should not occur at Stone Hill House directly, and that the existing main car park shall be used by parents/staff.
- 6.26 There will be some temporary and time restricted traffic movements associated to the construction process. This will only be for a short period of time. Following completion there will be no need for vehicles to attend this site. It is considered that the temporary and minor actions during construction are a usual and essential part of the built environment and this does not form a reason for refusal in its own right. The school will work with contractors and partners to ensure a safe and appropriate construction process.

Residential Amenity

- 6.27 The development proposal does not introduce a different use into the area. The proposal relates to the extension of an existing use by the applicant. The use of the property is for residential institution purposes (boarding house) and this type of use is considered to continue to be compatible with the other uses (residential) of Stone Hill. The proposal has very limited openings on to Stone Hill – utilising an existing opening and existing arch.



- 6.28 The proposal includes no first floor windows on the south elevation i.e. facing Stone Hill.
- 6.29 Policy BL9 of the Neighbourhood Plan asks that all development shall have regard to the amenity of existing residents. Policy ENV1 of the CLP 1996 states that the Council will seek to ensure that the amenities of the environment, and in particular the amenities of residential properties, are not unduly affected by development proposals which may cause environmental pollution, and Policy ESD15 requires for amenity to be considered in the design process.
- 6.30 The proposal would not interrupt any 'key views' (Policy BL12, Bloxham Neighbourhood Plan).
- 6.31 In our view, this proposal does not harm the living conditions of residents, impact on water supply capacity, or create traffic that adversely affects the highway network. In our view the proposal complies with Policy BL9, ESD15, and ENV1, and fully respects the amenity present in the streetscene.

Public Benefits

- 6.32 Paragraph 94 of the NPPF outlines the 'great weight' that is applied to the need to create, expand or alter schools.
- 6.33 It states that *'It is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education'. 'They should: a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and b) work with schools promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted'.*
- 6.34 At Bloxham School, a School Masterplan has been developed, investigating the overarching needs of the school in order to meet demands, and in order to facilitate their key vision of increasing the ratio of girls compared to boys.
- 6.35 Paragraph 121 of the NPPF provides support for making more effective use of sites that provide services for the community, such as schools, including where this leads to the improvement in quality of service.
- 6.36 The proposal will directly lead to an improvement in the quality of boarding accommodation, contributing to the required boarding standards, and providing a high quality built environment in which to stay and learn.
- 6.37 The proposal will also make more effective use of an area of ownership which is currently under-utilised, and which has been reported as having a neglected condition – indeed, when considering the impact of development proposals, paragraph 193 of the NPPF directs that great weight should be given to an asset's conservation.
- 6.38 NPPF paragraph 80 further supports that planning decisions should help create the conditions in which business can invest, expand and adapt. As a business in the educational sector, recent challenges have placed additional strain on the economic outlook of Bloxham School – it is important that the school plans for the future and adapts to the demands that are placed upon it.
- 6.39 The School Masterplan was designed to look ahead, with vision and an informed strategy, to facilitate and allow the school to continue to be an important local educational provider and local employer.
- 6.40 In light of the above, it is considered that significant public benefits exist in the proposed expansion of Stone Hill House and the restoration of some parts of the overall site. This includes for the purposes of meeting school placement demands, contributing to improving educational service quality, maintaining and improving on job opportunities (staff), and contributing to the economic viability of the school. The weight of these benefits are considered to be significant.



- 6.41 Paragraph 196 of the NPPF outlines that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
- 6.42 The accompanying Heritage Statement finds a very low level of less than substantial harm, with no harm to the Conservation Area. As noted, the scheme is considered to bring significant planning benefits, as well as securing the continued optimum viable use of Stone Hill House as a boarding house. It is considered that these combined public benefits outweigh the very low level of harm identified; as such the development proposal accords with paragraph 196 of the NPPF.

Planning Balance

- 6.43 In light of the technical considerations, accordance with planning policy, and public benefits of the development proposal, we consider that the planning balance is positive, and that planning permission may be granted for the extension and restoration works.



7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The proposed development is for *'Extension of existing boarding house through the reinstatement of part of the former coach house, the demolition of outbuildings, the erection of an extension and link structure (with associated alterations to Stone Hill House), insertion of internal wall, and associated works'*.
- 7.2 Bloxham School has identified a number of spatial challenges and opportunities associated with its estate, which have been addressed in a coordinated manner through the production of the School Masterplan. The masterplan represents a logical, well-considered and strategic approach to the school's spatial needs and development in the coming years which make best use of its estate, its unique challenges and opportunities while facilitating its continued success.
- 7.3 One of the key 'Visions' for the school is to have a more equal balance of male and female pupils. As such the school is seeking to increase the proportion of female pupils at the school over time in order to maintain the school's competitiveness and respond to existing high demand for co-educational boarding experience.
- 7.4 The masterplan identifies the extension of existing boarding houses as a logical solution to the increased demand and vision objective. Stone Hill House presently serves 22-24 pupils (girls) – the smallest of the boarding houses. This is therefore the boarding house that would benefit most from extending, in terms of school gender mix and in terms of facility provision to boarding pupils.
- 7.5 The extension of this girls boarding house does therefore represent a sustainable and logical opportunity. The project Architects have developed a sensitively design scheme which fully addresses suggestions made by Cherwell District Council at the pre-application stage.
- 7.6 During pre-application it was noted that the principle of development was acceptable subject to design and heritage. This Statement has found that the proposal accords with the relevant planning policies, and that there is a positive planning balance in favour of the development proposal. There are public benefits that outweigh the very low level of less than substantial heritage harm of the proposal, including both educational benefits for the school and the pupils it serves and heritage benefits for Stone Hill House which will continue to secure its optimum viable use into the future.
- 7.7 As well as a full drawing pack, this application is accompanied by evidence prepared by technical consultants (including a Design Statement, Heritage Statement, Ecology report and Arboricultural Survey). The applicant wishes to continue with constructive dialogue with Cherwell District Council and with all other stakeholders during the course of the planning application.



Appendices



Appendix 1 – Policy Wording

NPPF

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is relevant to the content of this report. The NPPF sets out a planning policy framework for England and how these should be applied. The latest version was published in February 2019. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment is located at NPPF Chapter 16.

In particular, the following paragraphs are of relevance:

94. It is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:

a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and

b) work with schools promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.

109. Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

184. Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value⁶¹. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations⁶².

189. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

193. 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.

194. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;

b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional⁶³.*

195. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and

b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and

c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and

d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

196. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

200. Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.

Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1

- 7.8 The relevant policy of this Local Plan is ESD15 which relates to the character of the built and historic environment. In its introduction it states that *‘Successful design is founded upon an understanding and respect for an area’s unique built, natural and cultural context. New development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high-quality design. All new development will be required to meet high design standards. Where development is in the vicinity of any of the District’s distinctive natural or historic assets, delivering high quality design that complements the asset will be essential’*. The policy also provides criteria for new development to be of a high quality, at page 117 of the Local Plan.

Cherwell Local Plan 1996 Saved Policies

- 7.9 Policy C18 is a ‘saved’ policy, relating to ‘Development proposals affecting a listed building’. This states that ‘In determining an application for listed building consent the council will have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. The council will normally only approve internal and external alterations or extensions to a listed building which are minor and sympathetic to the architectural and historic character of the building’.
- 7.10 Policy C23 states that *‘there will be a presumption in favour of retaining buildings, walls, trees or other features which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area’*.
- 7.11 Policy C27 states *‘development proposals in villages will be expected to respect their historic settlement pattern’*.
- 7.12 Policy C28 is a ‘saved’ policy, relating to ‘Layout design and external appearance of new development’. This states that *‘Control will be exercised over all new development, including conversions and extensions, to ensure that the standards of layout, design and external appearance, including the choice of external-finish materials, are sympathetic to the character of the urban or rural context of that development. In sensitive areas such as conservation areas, the area of outstanding natural beauty and areas of high landscape value, development will be required to be of a high standard and the use of traditional local building materials will normally be required’*.

Cherwell Non-Statutory Local Plan 2011

- 7.13 Cherwell District Council had been developing a Local Plan 2011. This did not progress to adoption however is regarded as a Non-Statutory Local Plan by the district. This plan is not afforded full weight in the decision-making process, as it had not been found sound.
- 7.14 Policy EN39 states that development *should 'preserve listed buildings, their features and settings, and preserve or enhance the character or appearance of designated conservation area. Development that conflicts with these objectives will not be permitted'*.

Neighbourhood Plan

7.15 The Bloxham Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in 2016. Pages 33-37 relate to protecting and enhancing rural heritage. Relevant policies include:

- BL9 - Amenity - *All development shall where appropriate: a. Ensure that the living conditions of neighbouring residents are not materially harmed b. Ensure that there is adequate wastewater and water supply capacity to serve the new development and to avoid the exacerbation of any existing problems c. Ensure that the impact of any additional traffic likely to be generated by the development has been satisfactorily mitigated and will not adversely affect the highway network. d. For new housing developments, ensure that a sufficient supply of local primary school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new residents*
- BL10 – Conservation Area – *‘Development shall be permitted within the Conservation Area (shown on Map 2) where it can demonstrate that it: a. Preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area; b. Takes account of the Conservation Area Appraisal (2007) or any successor documents’.*
- BL11 – Rural Character – *‘All development shall be encouraged to respect the local character and the historic and natural assets of the area. The design and materials chosen should preserve or enhance our rural heritage, landscape and sense of place’.* – [Criteria provided in policy].
- BL12 - a. Any development proposed within or near the key views identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal 2007 or any successor document must ensure that key features of the view can continue to be enjoyed and that any development has an acceptable impact in relation to the visual qualities of those views.
b. All development shall demonstrate that it does not result in harm to the rural or heritage character of the village. This will include consideration of the impact of the development on:
 - i. The key features of the views of the Church, the area fronting Bloxham School main buildings, towers or arches and views from Courtington Lane to Hobb Hill.
 - ii. The open character of the five amenity green spaces named and identified on Map 3.
 - iii. The key features of the views from, and the tranquility of, public rights of way within the Parish shown on Map 6.
 - iv. The historic and open character of the Red Lion garden.
c. Development on residential gardens will not usually be permitted.
d. Development on open spaces and sports and recreational land including those areas designated for amenity use through planning permissions, will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in a suitable location. This also applies to the country park at Tadmarton Road shown on Map 4 and the amenity space at the Bloxham Mill Business Park shown on Map 5

