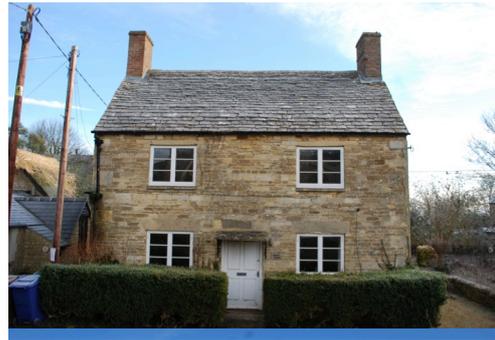


**CHANCEL COTTAGE
STEEPLE ASTON**



ADDENDUM

**HERITAGE
ASSESSMENT**

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Introduction

Planning permission and listed building consent were refused for a rear extension, internal and external alterations to the Chancel Cottage on the 11th May 2015. These revised planning and listed building consent applications seek to address the concerns raised in the reasons for refusal and this addendum heritage report has been prepared to assess their impact on the heritage significance of Chancel Cottage. The previous report (February 2015) is attached as it provides a history of the site and analysis of its context and setting and provides a useful context for this current proposal.

Since writing that report there have been some changes within English Heritage (now Historic England) and some changes in the published advice on the management of the historic environment, which are summarised here.

Policy

In March 2015 Historic England (previously English Heritage) issued new advice on the management of the historic environment in three 'Good Practice Advice Notes' (with a fourth one due shortly). The advice notes replace English Heritage's PPS5 Practice Guide, referred to in the earlier Heritage Report, which has now been withdrawn.

The historic environment policies of the NPPF are supported by these Historic England's Good Practice Advice Notes, which give more detailed advice about gathering the information on significance, assessing the impact and assessing harm with an emphasis on a proportionate approach and proactive and effective management of heritage assets.

Good Practice Advice Note 2 *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* is relevant to this proposal.

The Advice Note sets out a simple methodology for gathering evidence, understanding significance and assessing impact, assessing harm and measures to mitigate that harm. Paragraph 6 states:

- Understand the significance of the affected assets;
- Understand the impact of the proposal on that significance;
- Avoid, minimise and mitigate impact in a way that meets the objectives of the NPPF;
- Look for opportunities to better reveal or enhance significance;
- Justify any harmful impacts in terms of the sustainable development objective of conserving significance and the need for change;
- Offset negative impacts on aspects of significance by enhancing others through recording, disseminating and archiving archaeological and historical interest of the important elements of the heritage assets affected.

For the council the Advice explains in paragraph 25 that

*Local planning authorities will need to assess the particular significance of the heritage asset(s) which may be affected by the proposal and the impact of the proposal **on that significance** (emphasis added)*

And explains in paragraph 27 that

Substantial harm is a high test, which may not arise in many cases.

Adding in paragraph 29 that

Change to heritage assets is inevitable but it is only harmful when significance is damaged.

Heritage significance

The Heritage Report (Worlledge Associates, February 2015) summarised the significance of Chancel Cottage as:

- Physical evidence of the development of the village during the C18th and the subsequent adaptation of the building to meet the needs of contemporary society,
- The formality of its façade illustrates architectural fashions of the period, as interpreted by rural craftsman. The simplicity of its form and absence of elaborate decoration helps understanding of the status of original occupants,
- The plan form and earlier function of the various rooms can be interpreted from surviving evidence (internal and external) and helps to explain how the household operated,
- The house, along with others in the street provide a sense of enclosure to the street, framing the green space of the churchyard,

- The openness of the churchyard allows views across it where the cottages in the lane provide a backdrop or visual stop,
- The use of natural, vernacular materials, simply employed has aesthetic value, the patina and texture of the materials, along with the variety of other materials in the village, adding interest and texture to the informal compositions and helping to reinforce local distinctiveness,
- The cottage has lost internal features through phases of modernisation and upgrading through the latter part of the C20th.

The Council's conservation officer in her comments on the previous proposal stated in relation to this definition of significance:

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

- *Survival of the plan form with the 18th century single pile plan and the later incorporation of the stable building into the domestic accommodation.*
- *Simple vernacular form of the cottage and survival of historic fabric*

Though published after the building was added to the list the Historic England Listing Selection Guides (2011) offer some background for the reasons to include the building on the statutory list at this grade (Grade II) and is relevant to issues of defining significance. As a house type Chancel Cottage falls in the one dealing with Vernacular houses. The guide explains that the plan form of a house helps to reveal much about how a house was used and the social hierarchy within the household. It states:

'An exceptionally intact surviving plan form can play a part in assigning a higher grade, as where both the exterior and the interior of an early dwelling survive little altered its special interest is likely to be enhanced.' (Listing Selection guide. Domestic 1: Vernacular Houses, 2011)

Chancel Cottage is listed grade II. If it had been an exceptionally intact plan form and exterior then it would be listed grade II* or I. This is not the case and it would be reasonable to conclude that the plan form and fabric have less significance in their own right than as asserted by the Council. Having considered the selection guidelines it is reasonable to conclude that Chancel Cottage's inclusion in the statutory list derives from its age and vernacular characteristics, exhibiting a history of change.

Continuing with the conservation officer's comments she also states

In the case of Chancel Cottage the building has been little altered during the latter part of the 20th century. This contradicts the Heritage Report conclusions (which she agrees with), which includes that the building's significance has been eroded by later C20th alterations.

Assessment of impact

Having established that there is a degree of consensus about what is important about the building and its setting the Council's conservation officer then begins to consider the degree of change that the building could accommodate without compromising the building's significance stating:

It is fully acknowledged that change needs to occur within historic buildings [.....] A degree of harm to historic fabric and significance may be acceptable in order to ensure the property can remain in its optimum viable use. This should however be proportionate to both the scale of the building and the historic significance.

This commentary seems to suggest that change must involve harm. This is incorrect as a well conceived and executed development may not only sustain significance, but indeed add to it and that over time would become part of the building's history and special interest. Indeed, she accepts that this has already happened with the extensions that have previously been added and

that are now part of the building's significance (its evolved plan form and composition).

It is worth noting too that the degree of harm is measured in proportion to the level of significance that the building holds. This is an important concept which recognises that not all change need be harmful and that the level of harm of a particular proposal would vary depending on the level of significance. The Planning Practice Guide seeks to clarify this stating in paragraph 017

It is the degree of harm to the asset's significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed [.....] works that are moderate or minor in scale are likely to cause less than substantial harm or no harm at all.

Revised proposals

Whilst the Council appeared to accept that the applicant had properly understood the heritage significance that the cottage held and had properly articulated how this significance had informed the design of the proposals there was disagreement about the extent and nature of the impact, which resulted in the planning and listed building consent applications being refused for the following reasons.

Listed building consent application:

The proposed development, by virtue of its scale, form, massing and materials, and the insertion of six rooflights in the existing building, and the insertion of an internal doorway opening at first floor level, would result in 'substantial' harm to the character, setting and significance of the Grade II listed Chancel Cottage, and 'less than substantial' harm to the character and appearance of the Steeple Aston Conservation Area and the character, setting and significance of the Grade II listed St Peter's Church. The proposal would therefore fail to accord with Policies C28 and C30 of the Cherwell Local Plan, Policy ESD16 of the Submission Cherwell Local Plan, and paragraphs*

14, 17, 132 and 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and it is considered that this identified harm significantly and demonstrably outweighs the proposal's benefits.

Planning application:

The proposed development, by virtue of its scale, form, massing and materials, would result in 'substantial' harm to the character, setting and significance of the Grade II listed Chancel Cottage, and 'less than substantial' harm to the character and appearance of the Steeple Aston Conservation Area and the character, setting and significance of the Grade II listed St Peter's Church. The proposal would therefore fail to accord with Policies C28 and C30 of the Cherwell Local Plan, Policy ESD16 of the Submission Cherwell Local Plan, and paragraphs 14, 17, 132 and 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and it is considered that this identified harm significantly and demonstrably outweighs the proposal's benefits.*

As a summary the council's concerns relate to:

- The formation of a doorway at first floor level,
- The insertion of six rooflights in the existing building,
- The scale, form and massing of the proposed extension,
- Materials.

Arguing that this would result in substantial harm that is not outweighed by public benefits.

As explained earlier 'substantial harm' is a high threshold, intended to describe proposals whose impact would effectively erase the significance a place holds. This is not the case here. The Practice Guide also points out that it is not the scale of development but the impact on significance that is the measure of harm.

Nevertheless, the applicant has carefully considered these concerns and the basis for them and has sought to address them by redesign. Taking each of the issues in turn:

Forming a new doorway

A new doorway is necessary to bring a part of the building into use. The conservation officer previously commented on this aspect of the proposal that

There is evidence of a former opening at first floor level, which has since been blocked up. There would be some harm to the significance of the site if this element of the building were to be converted, but this would need to be weighed against the public benefit of bringing this section of the building into use with the associated benefits of better maintenance. It is a puzzle why she considers making the opening would harm significance (as she doesn't explain why) but her conclusion clearly shows that on balance the benefits would outweigh any harm. It is thus a bigger puzzle why this aspect of the proposal has been included in the reason for refusal.

It is important and beneficial that this part of the building is brought into use and this aspect of the proposal remains. The loss of some existing internal masonry in this later addition would not harm the significance of the building.

Roof lights

The conservation officer did comment that the proposed rooflights would be harmful and it is reasonable to conclude from her absence of comment that this element was considered acceptable. However, to address the reason for refusal the number of rooflights has been reduced and they will be 'conservation rooflight' to reflect historic precedents.

Proposed extension

The conservation officer previously commented that

The fundamental concern relating to the proposal is that the form, scale and massing of the proposed extension causes harm to the significance / special interest of the listed building. Chancel Cottage originated as a simple, single pile dwelling, which was subject to later modification to bring an ancillary wing into domestic ownership. Part of the special interest of the building, as identified above is the survival of the plan form. The proposed extension would completely alter the plan form of the building by creating a U-plan building based around a courtyard. The extension is only marginally narrower and significantly longer than the original cottage, thus fundamentally altering the experience of the building and creating a situation whereby the original cottage becomes subservient to its later extensions. The fact that the extension is single storey does not mitigate against its fundamental form and massing. A core principle of the management of sensitive change to heritage assets is that any additions are subservient to the principle building

Because the house and the existing extensions are only one room deep circulation routes around the building reduce the 'usable space'. The applicant is keenly aware of the need to respect this 'single pile' section, but that does create a challenge in creating usable space (i.e. not taken up by circulation space). In seeking to address the council's concerns about the length of the extension options for an extension on the gable end of the main house and on the gable end of the existing extension were explored. However, it was concluded these would be more harmful (than as proposed), to the building's significance or to the residential amenity of neighbours.

The solution has been to reduce the size of the extension by imparting an 'additive' nature to it, a part single storey with a ridge and a part lean-to with a sloping roof. This additive nature is characteristic of how the house (and many other historic houses) has evolved, changing to meet the needs of its occupants and represents the physical evidence of its history. Heritage management policies and practice seek to sustain this history and add to it, not 'freeze frame' it. It is important that our needs and aspirations are reflected in the buildings we occupy; it provides evidence for future

generations to understand the past and provides a context to understand their cultural roots.

The extension will be single storey and as an extension it will not alter the 'original' plan form – that remains intact and easy to understand. It adds to the plan form, but that cannot be objectionable otherwise the effect would be to prevent any extension. The plan form is not an exceptional survival (otherwise the building would be listed at a higher grade) and has already been altered. Just because the extension is proposed to be at right angles does not mean that the building will be interpreted as a U plan. It would not. The building would be interpreted as a main house fronting the road with subsidiary rear extensions, each one dropping down in scale, creating a pleasant courtyard. Rear courtyards are evident elsewhere in the village and would not appear out of place. The experience in passing views and views from the churchyard would be of a vernacular house with a series of joined 'outbuildings'. The house would not appear subservient to the outbuildings. It is and would remain the primary object in the views, with only glimpses of the rear extensions.

Materials

The conservation officer previously expressed concern about the proposed use of weather boarding stating:

There are significant concerns with the use of timber boarding in this context. The use of timber or weather-boarding appears to be the latest 'trend' in the district, but does not have historic precedent in the locality. The proposed use of timber boarding on an extension (as opposed to outbuilding) is considered to cause harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of the listed building. There is not perceived to be any public benefit to outweigh this harm.

The proposal has now been changed to employ natural stone, to overcome these concerns.

Conclusion

It is not the intention of government to stop change and freeze-frame our historic environment. Historic England recognises that changes are a part of our history and can add to the significance of heritage assets.

In relation to the (agreed) heritage significance the Chancel Cottage holds these proposals will

- Preserve the physical evidence of the development of the village during the C18th and the history of the cottage;
- Preserve the formality of its façade;
- Preserve the plan form and understanding of it;
- Preserve the sense of enclosure to the street, framing the green space of the churchyard;
- Maintain the role of a backdrop or visual stop in views from the churchyard;
- Continue the use of natural, vernacular materials, simply employed, adding interest and texture to the informal compositions and helping to reinforce local distinctiveness;
- Help conceal views of overhead lines and transformers;
- Avoid any unnecessary or unjustified loss of existing fabric.