Heritage Statement: The White House, Gillow Heath, ST8 6RS

The White House (also known as Whitehouse Cottage), Gillow Heath is a cruck-framed, thatched building with external walls of timber in an area where this type of external detail rarely survives. The earlier part of the building has two bays defined by three raised crucks with a half-hipped roof and a plan which is typically medieval. An additional bay with box framing has been added to the upper (North) end. Early photographs show a rear wing of uncertain date.

Externally the building represents an irregular appearance. Due in part to an irregular ground plan, it has been exaggerated by the failure of the post and cruck-spur on the corner of the lower bay which has allowed a section of the front wall to lean inwards. Most of the square framing on the front has survived, as has the original doorway, which is now blocked. A thick layer of tar makes it impossible to see many of the pegholes and masks surviving details of former window openings, apart from those indicating an applied window below the eaves on the lower gable. Internally, little detail is visible on the front wall, although much of the rear timbering can be inspected from both sides. The lower part of both the end crucks is masked by later building.

The house was originally of two bays with a half-hip at each end. The ridge purlin is supported on the central cruck and a pair of small crossed principal rafters trusses rising from the side purlins to support its ends. These are carried on the backs of three cruck trusses of which only the central one rises to full height while the end pair are each topped with a wide collar. An added bay with principal rafter and tie-beam truss has higher walls than the original building and masks one of the half-hips. The roofing is of thatch carried on split rafters which, in the additional bay, are laid broadside to allow the flat surface to be uppermost. Between the rafters are split laths and the lowest layer of the surviving thatch is tied in place with rope.

The walls are square-framed and stand two panels high in the older part of the building and three in the later extension. The houseplace was originally open to its rafters and contained a timber-framed firehood resting on a substantial bressumer supported at the wall by a shallow bracket. A beam added above the bressumer takes one end of the main beams for the inserted floor; the other ends are supported by brackets pegged onto the tie-beam of the middle truss.

The lower bay appears to have combined parlour and service rooms, indicated by mortices in the main beam and one of the joists which, together with stave holes, give a clear indication of the position of the interconnecting doorways.

The plan has opposed doorways at the lower end of the houseplace, now both blocked. This, together with the two doorways through the central truss to smaller rooms in the end bay gives a typical medieval ground plan.

The current application seeks approval to:

a) prevent deterioration in the fabric of the building by replacing the decayed softwood window frames in the two gable ends with oak-framed equivalents;

b) repair of the chimney stack pointing using lime mortar; and

c) the installation of a flue-liner so as to prevent possible future damage to the interior of the chimney brickwork that might be caused by use of the fireplace and hearth.

No heritage assets will be damaged or altered by the proposed works. (The existing window frames are 20th Century-manufactured items, with modern glazing and self-adhesive lead tape decoration). This application does not propose making any changes to either the external appearance or internal structure of the building and its only impact will be to better preserve the fabric of the building.