

SMD/2021/0718 and SMD/2021/0719

**Planning permission and listed building consent for internal and external alterations to Oldridge farmhouse and associated outbuildings
Oldridge Farm, Ashbourne Road, Whiston**

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On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands DC – Conservation and Design

7th February 2022

Thank you for consulting me on this application.

I am making an initial holding **objection** to the proposals, on the grounds that several aspects of the application will cause 'less than substantial' harm to the listed building, which is not outweighed by public benefits.

There are also insufficient details for determination of this application in key areas. I am recommending in the first instance a joint site visit, in conjunction with the owner/s and architect, to discuss the areas of concern, to seek solutions.

I had a very useful site visit with one of the owners and looked at a large number of proposals, a number of which are not included in the current application. There needs to be further information supplied prior to determination. A number of alterations are acceptable, subject to further clarification.

Application - Alterations which are not acceptable

The following proposed alterations are harmful and considered to be not justified:

- Double-glazed 'faux leaded-light' windows to replace existing single-glazed metal windows to C17 cellar and proposed 'faux leaded-light' windows to early C18 mullioned window to proposed snug.
- Insertion of enlarged opening to proposed snug with bi-fold doors.
The proposed solid-to-void ratio is not in keeping with the special interest of the listed building. It will draw the eye to an alteration in a part of the building which is very prominent, as seen from the public right-of-way. This part is early C18 and C19 and is of historic and architectural interest in its own right. I have an alternative suggestion, to make the most of the view, which is less harmful.
- Removal of sections of masonry wall between existing kitchen and dining room, creation of opening to back of hearth between kitchen and dining room and enlargement of doorway between kitchen and dining room. The alteration of the plan form and attempt to create a more open-plan character is considered to be unjustified, harmful and changes the C17 cellular form of the listed building.
- Showers to attic bedrooms removing original fireplaces

- Certain alterations to the 'cellar' (see detailed comments below)

Insufficient information

We need more information on the following:

- Removal of the floor between the existing kitchen and the cellar and full details of all tanking
- Windows
- Floors
- Plumbing Details
- Structural Repair
- Attic Rooms

Summary of Special Architectural and Historic Interest - Significance

The building has been subject to considerable alteration over the years, and has a complicated evolution, but it retains a very high impact and high architectural value from its typical Moorlands minor gentry house appearance and the highly conscious architectural improvements of 1723: a single cross-wing house, coursed large-block ashlar, a chamfered plinth, mullioned windows and shaped coped gables with ball finials, and a large number of authentic leaded-light windows.

The significance of this building relates to its C17 fabric and plan form, its extensive 'architectural' modifications dating from 1723, and a number of historic 'features', including evidence for an integral C17 dairy, and to a lesser extent the C19 alterations, which are of evidential value and part of the story.

The datestone of 1723 (and the list description) suggest perhaps that the whole building dates from 1723 but that is not the case. What is apparent is that an earlier two-storey C17 house on this site was extensively remodelled and extended in 1723 and then in the mid C19 it was remodelled internally. All three phases of the house incorporate elements of historic value although many historic fixtures and fittings (including early doors) have been removed. The few fittings that survive, therefore, have an enhanced value. The lower ground floor Dairy which was later converted into a meat cellar is very rare "Complete surviving examples with original fixtures, such as slate or stone shelves for cooling the milk, are very rare." (Staffs. Farmsteads Character Statement – SCC/ EH).

The path of its evolution is difficult to unravel because there is evidence that some of the alterations have been quite radical, such as changes in floor levels and reconstruction of chimney stacks, extensive removal of hood moulds and alterations to mullioned windows.

The west wing of 1723 probably displaced an earlier 'wing' and at the same time a third storey was added to the north-south range. The C17 house may have originally been of a similar plan form with a cross passage plan separating the Hall from the parlour and service room. The plan form is described by Cleverdon as a hall and single cross wing type. It represents a high number of the middle status minor gentry and yeoman farmer houses in the C17 in the Moorlands.

The chimney breast and hearth suggests a new 'kitchen' wing. Rather than add a kitchen, it appears that because the house is so tightly constrained by the bedrock and being built against a hill, there was no room to build out other than rebuild on the same footprint.

Analysis of Evidence (for information)

The original mid C17 house appears to have been an east-west houseplace / hall (possibly with a chamber over), with a single cross wing comprising a parlour and small service room (the current north-south range). This had a second storey with bedrooms and a lower ground floor dairy. The parlour and service room probably survived when the house was remodelled in 1723. It is also possible that the internal walls were oak framed (as was traditional in the early-mid C17) and these may have survived until the C19 (some may still survive). The service room was probably originally unheated.

The rebuilt 1723 wing incorporates deeply chamfered mullioned windows to the south (front) elevation and to the west gable and a small arched window set into the masonry. These and the stepped dressing on the dated door lintel are typical of the early C18. They are all in-situ. The quality of the masonry and size of the windows are representative of a yeoman gentleman farmer. The plan of the 1723 range is typical of a 'back-house', cross-passage form, which is a much earlier C17 plan form (see Cleverdon¹, 2007 - Fairboroughs, Heaton). The west wing still incorporates a cross-passage with staircase (replaced in the mid C19) and a purpose-built two-storey (with attic) kitchen wing, with a very slightly later attached single-storey scullery. It seems most likely that this wing of 1723 replaced the earlier 'houseplace'. This would have had a very substantial chimney breast, probably located on the outside gable. There is fragmentary evidence of earlier C17 masonry (and altered early windows) on the north wall and there is evidence on the early plans that this was hidden within another extension.

The current chimney breast and hearth within this 1723 'kitchen' indicate a range cooker was once inserted here and there are no indications that it was used as a parlour. That seems to have been retained above the cellar. It is normal to have a cellar underneath a parlour, but this is not a true cellar, having a former external doorway, large mullioned window and being used historically as a dairy.

The southern elevation of the scullery (or back kitchen) also has a chamfered mullioned window of roughly the same date (missing its window fittings, but retaining a single vertical saddle bar). The door connecting the kitchen to the scullery is still evident inside the scullery, and this was originally an outside door, but the lintel has been raised at some time and the

¹ Faith Cleverdon, (2002) 'Landscape with Buildings: A North Staffordshire study based on the medieval parish of Leek', PhD thesis, University of Sheffield.

opening re-formed in brick, whilst retaining the early C18 stone masonry to the door jambs, with pintles still in-situ. There is no evidence now of a hearth within this space. The scullery (or back kitchen) was remodelled (possibly in the early C19) and the north and west walls were rebuilt. It appears to have been originally much deeper on plan (sockets for timbers and a straight joint for a blocked door can still be seen in the external wall). The scullery was remodelled and the masonry to the north wall is, therefore, a combination of brick internal skin with stone ashlar face.

The original 1723 staircase to this part of the house has been replaced with a High Victorian staircase and the interior was remodelled at the same time. It is tricky to try to establish how many alterations were undertaken in the C19 but it was extensive, as there is little in the way of C17 evidence left visible inside the house, with the exception of the 'cellar'. In the west wing the ceiling to the first floor bedroom over the kitchen has been raised, which has intersected the gable window and removed the original attic room. These alterations may have been undertaken in the 1860s or in the early C20. The roof to this kitchen wing is probably C20, even though the laths are torched.

The **north-south range** has had a significant number of alterations. Its origins are a two-storey C17 house and the chamfered plinth and the windows to the east elevation are part of that phase. There is a subtle change in the stone masonry on this elevation, a few courses below the eaves, where the courses are thinner, broken with some larger blocks. This is probably the original height of the two-storey C17 house. The east elevation incorporates two sets of 3-light double-chamfered windows (one with the mullions removed) which are not central to the chimney breast and are skewed internally. Given their location, these are likely to be either former staircase windows and in-situ, although the original staircase has been removed, or the C17 plan form was slightly different.

The off-centre chimney breast appears to have been largely rebuilt in the 1860s, which would also suggest that the central stone ridge stack is a reconstruction based on a much earlier style. There are two identical cast-iron fireplace surrounds to the attic floor with arched register grates which are typical of the 1860s. The fact that they are both in-situ indicates a single phase in conjunction with the chimney stack. The chimney breast is also more typical of the mid C19, with no signs of earlier hearths. The roof to the attic is also a replacement with C19 purlins and soffit and raked ceilings underdrawn in lathe and plaster. Floor boards to the attic floor are also C19. The floors to the original kitchen and according to the owner the dining room both have C19 red clay quarry tiles.

The surveyed plans prepared for the application contain evidence that the second floor masonry walls within the main range are not as thick as those to the ground and first floor. This also points to the building having been heightened. The internal north-south staircase wall is, however, much narrower on plan. It is difficult to say whether this is part of an earlier C17 3-bay house (oak-framed), or was rebuilt in 1723, or was part of much later mid C19 modifications. Further evidence would be dependent on removal of plaster.

All of the masonry details of the hog-backed, shaped, stone-coped gables to the west wing and the main range suggest that they are coeval and date from 1723. The windows to the

north and south attics also share the same deep-set chamfers although they are not identical, and also indicate remodelling in 1723.

The C17 house still retains a number of its windows in-situ; these are recognisable by the double-chamfered (or stepped) mullions, where the mullions are set back. Most of these windows are a slightly paler pink / buff sandstone. Local dating evidence is set out in Dr Cleverdon's thesis; "Two styles of window were in use in the seventeenth century, one with the mullions set back from the outer face of the wall, and the other with them set on the outer face. Both have wide date ranges. The earliest date known for a 'set-back' example is at Harracles Mill where a single window dates to c. 1570. The latest example is at the Friends Meeting House in Leek, dating to the 1690s. For the 'outer-edge' variety, the earliest is 1628 and the latest 1742..... Whichever form the window took, the vast majority of the mullions were truncated diamond in section." In fact, a number of the diamond mullions in the house have been cut back in the C19 or C20, in conjunction with replacement timber windows.

North-south range windows:

Ground floor south gable window has been considerably lowered down to the plinth with two replacement mullions. The masonry to the lintel is late C17 or early C18 – heavily modified.

First floor south gable window is C17, in-situ, but the chamfer on the cill has been cut out and the mullions part replaced.

Attic south gable window – 1723 (plain chamfers throughout)

Cellar window north gable – five-light diamond-section mullioned window. In original location with chamfered plinth – C17. Original mullions have been chopped back and an inserted oak lintel provided.

Kitchen window north gable – ground floor – two-light C17 double-chamfered mullioned window IS.

First floor north gable – two-light C17 double-chamfered mullioned window IS.

Attic floor north gable – 1723 or C19 (plain chamfers throughout)

Insufficient information

We need more information on the following:

1. Removal of the floor between the existing kitchen and the cellar and reinstatement and full details of all tanking.

The floor to the present kitchen is a replacement for the original timber joisted floor and is either late C19 or early C20. I-section steel / iron joists were inserted into a combination of existing masonry and new stub brick walls before applying a shuttered concrete finish. The metal has corroded and in my opinion the floor structure is of no value and considering the future life of the building it should ideally come out and a new floor be inserted. This does not appear in the proposals. This will also form part of the justification for the removal of the brick 'bulkhead', which is in the application. The bulkhead appear to have been inserted with the new floor and new steps. Although the winder steps down into the cellar are in the original location, they have been altered in the late C19 with brick and timber nosings. The original steps must have been very worn and solid stone. In terms of levels, the floor

between the cellar and the kitchen appears to have been lowered, which is why the kitchen windows are so high and why the floor is obscuring the cellar window.

The cellar is of considerable interest. It has a large five-light mullioned window. It is extremely rare to find such a large window lighting a cellar and having looked at the levels and all of the evidence, including the evidence for a blocked external doorway to the north, it seems clear that this wasn't really a cellar; it was a working 'dairy'. The large window was needed to provide good light levels (all north-light), and was off-set because there was a door to the outside. This blocked door is now buried under the raised path. The level of window cill is now flush with the outside path. Consideration should be given to lowering this path enough to clear the window, to prevent further deterioration and splashing when new windows are inserted. We can also consider the part removal of the large external wall as an option, although the map evidence suggests that this was added at the end of the C19. I think that this needs to be factored into the treatment of the cellar and the proposal for tanking.

Consideration could be given to raking back the new floor slightly to improve the light levels into the cellar and to make the windows accessible, as this will become habitable space in the proposals. If this is inside kitchen cupboards, this may be workable.

There is a very interesting feature within the cellar which is a massive stone trough built into the east wall, which was inserted in conjunction with two massive stop-chamfered stone lintels, the chamfer to the inside face, all C17. This stone trough (of high historic interest) has been partially hidden by a stub-brick wall, which is supporting the steel joists. The trough was probably built into the wall when the building was erected, rather than being an afterthought. The evidence suggests it was located close to a fresh water supply (necessary for dairying), in the form of a spring-fed source (diverted via a piped supply). Sometimes they are located with a pump beyond the outside wall. I note that there is a well located just to the east on the old OS plans. I have seen these wall-inserted troughs before, and they are difficult to deal with, but are very important historically as early dairies were located inside farmhouses but evidence is ephemeral and extremely rare across the UK. It is not a salting trough as it is far too large and deep, and impractically located at a high level, and it was clearly designed to contain water. It seems most likely that in the C17 the attic floor of the house would have contained cheese rooms. The existing brick mass thrawls inside the cellar are cold stores for dairying and replacements for the original stone thrawls. The brick floor is also a replacement floor. They are of moderate interest.

My concern is that the proposed tanking will hide the more important original features, including the trough and lintels, the coursed stone masonry to the chimney wall and the stone screen to the steps and I don't think that is justified. The brick floor can be left in-situ and a new floor laid over it. However, we need to consider practical ways of upgrading the space and making it workable without losing this historic fabric evidence. We can also look at removal of the stub brick wall which is sitting on the edge of the trough and which has cement mortar and is contemporary with the concrete floor.

2. Windows

My recommendation is that we meet on site and agree the approach to the windows. I noted on my site visit that a number of the double-glazed windows appear to be unauthorised. There is no evidence that the double-glazed windows were inserted prior to listing in 1986. The evidence suggest that these are modern DG sealed units, installed post 1986. It would be very helpful if the previous owners have photographs of the building taken over the years as this could help all of us and I asked the current owner if he could make enquiries at my site visit. The windows incorporate a mixture of C19 or C20 diamond lattice leaded-lights, plain timber fixed lights and casements, and a number of double-glazed timber windows, which may have replaced earlier leaded-light windows, or may have replaced timber single-glazed windows, and one double-glazed faux-leaded light metal window to the modern replacement porch. This is not the same detail as that approved under the condition discharge. That was a plain hardwood window without any leading.

I am recommending that we have a strategy for all of the windows, in one application, with all of the windows numbered on plans and in elevation and cross-referenced to a window schedule. At the moment the approach is ad-hoc and not clear enough. A comprehensive approach will also help to regularise all of the potentially unauthorised windows. One of the issues which will need to be addressed is how to upgrade and install secondary glazing. This is going to be essential if the owners are going to rely on a Ground Source Heat Pump. The introduction of slimline double glazing to timber or metal or bronze windows also needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. We (the architect and the LPA) do need to look at each window in turn and agree the approach, and where the secondary glazing is fitted without causing any harm. The use of double-glazing may be justified in certain locations, but again we need to review this on an elevation-by-elevation approach. It is not going to be acceptable to install faux leaded-lights into double glazed sealed units, as found on the modern porch. This is not approved, and would not normally be approved where a building is significant for its authentic historic fabric, including a large number of true leaded lights.

We will need drawings of joinery / windows, including full-size sections, as part of the application for LBC, and not as a condition, in order to have certainty about impacts.

3. Floors

The intention of the owners is to install a Ground Source Heat Pump. This will be in a nearby field. This may require an archaeological DBA, given the sensitivity of the Scheduled Monument nearby, but this will depend entirely on which field is chosen and that has not been included in the application.

The provision of a GSHP will require a location for a plant room / new boiler / pump (close to the building or inside it) and will require the upgrading of the ground floors to the listed building in order to install a wet system of underfloor heating. More details are required to understand which floors and finishes are going to be removed, where any plant is going, what is proposed for the new floor finishes, and what impacts the potentially larger-bore pipework may have on the upper floors, which won't have underfloor heating.

We can consider the removal of the red quarry-tiled floors but a holistic approach is needed which is for the benefit of the building as a whole. Consideration of whether to use a 'Limecrete-type' floor and a "Glapor"-type recycled foamed glass sub-layer to enhance

insulation values, which can be used in conjunction with lime plaster finishes to walls and natural paving and breathable floor finishes, or whether a concrete-type floor with insulation such as Kingspan is preferred. Budget will be a consideration as will the holistic treatment of damp.

4. Plumbing details

Although I have no objections in principle to new bathrooms and toilets, this will have an effect on the location of pipework and soilpipes can be very obtrusive. Impacts on cutting through beams or pipe runs, boxing, location of drains, soil stacks and pipes, any interventions through the roof or external pipework all need to be submitted with full details in order to understand impacts. This cannot be left to a condition. For example, the provision of a new external soil stack to the prominent east wall of the listed building would not be acceptable in my view, so where is the soil stack going to go to serve the new bathrooms on this side of the house?

5. Structural repair

There are a number of fractures and cracks in the plaster, which suggest some localised structural issues. Depending on what is proposed, these may need to be included with the application. Some of the mullions need to be looked at more closely. The 'cellar' mullions for example, were quite crudely cut back when the concrete floor was inserted and the mullions may have lost their integrity. These need close examination as part of any window refurbishment. I suggest we look at this more closely on site with the architect.

6. Attic rooms

Full details of the method of upgrading these spaces must be included with the application. As the north-south range already incorporates habitable spaces then there is no requirement to upgrade the walls and raked ceilings. However, the use of a GSHP system is likely to require some upgrading in these attic rooms. Insulation in the ceiling void may not be adequate on its own. At present there are lime-plastered walls and lime-based lathe-and-plaster soffits to the raked ceilings, with lathe-and-plaster soffits to the flat soffit. When we know what is proposed for insulation we can comment on the impacts. Lime-plaster should be retained to walls and the chimney breast wall probably does not need to be touched. Lime-plaster to the walls can be 'enhanced' with insulating plaster. There are various types, including hemp, cork and recycled aggregate. All insulating plasters need to be finished with a fine-stiff / fine-finish lime plaster to replicate the finish of the existing plaster walls. We would need to consider any method of insulating the raked soffits. Removal of lathe-and-plaster will cause a degree of harm, so needs further consideration.

The roof space over bedroom 2 is open, with no plaster finishes to the rafters. Details are needed of the proposed method of upgrading the proposed raised ceiling, including finishes. There are unusual stepped masonry blocks and the treatment of this external gable wall needs further information. Nothing is shown on the drawings.

Summary of acceptable alterations, subject to further details

7. Removal of ceiling joists to bedroom 2.

Having assessed the date of the ceiling to this space (see my summary of historic development), I consider that this is an acceptable alteration and will not harm the significance of the building, subject to further details.

8. Partition to bathroom and new doorway to bedroom 2.

It seemed odd that the first floor has three bathrooms and only two bedrooms, but the owner has clarified that this will be revised and the partitioning of the bathroom to bedroom 2 does not need to take place. However, they would still like a Jack-and-Jill bathroom with a new door directly from bedroom 2. This is acceptable in principle, but we will need details of the new door (this can be conditioned if necessary). This also means that the rooflight to the ensuite becomes redundant and I recommend that it is omitted.

9. Partitions to first floor to create bathroom and ensuite to bedroom 1

This is acceptable and does not cause any harm, subject to agreement over pipework. The proposed new doorways are not shown on the proposed section. Please can these be added. Full details of new internal doors will be required, subject to a condition.

10. Toilets to attic floor bedrooms 3 and 4

The provision of toilets with washbasins does not cause harm, subject to details of pipework. However, the provision of showers involves removing the 1860s cast iron register grates. This is not justified and as these are the only early fireplaces surviving in the house, I cannot support the provision of showers against the chimney breast and an alternative needs to be considered.

11. Reconstruction of lean-to, to create laundry and W.C.

The lean-to is in poor condition and this is an acceptable alteration, subject to agreeing the new window and doors. Full construction details are required. The side elevation suggests a boxed eaves, which is not going to be acceptable, but clarification of the eaves and verge details should be provided now. The window is shown without either a proper stone lintel or stone cill. This is not acceptable. Details of the window joinery have not been provided. This could be anything as proposed. The casement and frame must be flush and must be set within a good reveal 50mm-10mm. We will also need a condition on pointing and a condition on cast-iron guttering and downpipes. I can provide these later on.

12. Reinstatement of door to connect Living Room and proposed snug

The original stone masonry doorway is clear from the evidence, although the lintel has been raised in timber and brick. We need to agree the treatment of this internal wall and door details as the pintles survive in-situ.

13. Provision of a Snug to the former Scullery

In principle, conversion of this space is acceptable although there are a number of issues which arise (see my objections to the proposed enlarged opening and bifold doors). The room was used as a scullery in ca. 1723 and had a domestic function, but appears to have been used as a coal store and stable at a later date. When it was adapted the original stone

masonry was altered and the structure was partially rebuilt in brick and stone. We do need to resolve what happens with all of the internal wall finishes as part of this application. The stone masonry to the south wall, which contains the original stone mullioned window appears to have been plastered and a small space, perhaps a coal store, retained with its stone door threshold and internal brick walls (since demolished). The remaining walls have been whitewashed although this has deteriorated. In bringing this into the dwelling, there will be Building Regulations considerations. The floor is comprised of multiple blue bricks, many damaged when used by animals. My preference is for this floor to be recorded photographically and then it could be lifted, a new floor slab created, with blue bricks reinstated and gaps made up with reclaimed blue bricks. The ceiling to this room is missing but did have a flat soffit to high level joists/ collars. The proposed new ceiling height seems to be based on the desire to incorporate rooflights but in my view this is not justified and is not based on the historic evidence. I suggest we review on site.

14. Reconstruction of outside farm building to create an office

This is acceptable in principle, but we will need details of the metal profiled roof, whether this is to be corrugated to copy traditional profile corrugated sheet or large-section. We also need full details of the 'glazed screen'. This could be any material, as proposed, as nothing is specified on the drawing or application form.

15. Rooflights

With the exception of the ensuite to Bedroom 2, which is unnecessary, we can consider rooflights to the attic WCs, but the southern rooflights to the scullery need further justification when the interior arrangement is agreed.