

Conservation Response.

Date: 22/02/2023.

File/Application ref: SMD/2021/0844 & SMD/2021/0845.

Case Officer: Rebecca Bowers.

Proposal: 'Proposed conversion of existing buildings to form private ancillary leisure/recreation accommodation, construction of an additional bay to an existing garage building, and recladding and increasing height of existing log store' , &
'Listed building consent for a proposed conversion of existing buildings to form private ancillary leisure/recreation accommodation, construction of an additional bay to an existing garage building, and recladding and increasing height of existing log store'.

Address: Gratton Hall Farm, Gratton Hall Lane, Gratton, Staffordshire, ST9 9AW.

Dear Rebecca,

The hamlet of Gratton, forms part of the wider medieval parish of Horton, 4 miles west of Leek. Both Horton, Gratton, and other placenames contain the old English word Tun, (now modern day *ton*) meaning a settlement.

Pastoral farming, the land workers and estate owners dominated historic parish lands, and the pattern of rural farmsteads typically follows development of the estates and type of agricultural works. Much of this can be read in the types and sizes of farm buildings, including the principle houses which were sometimes more ornate or consciously designed where wealth was higher and estate more prosperous. Historic farmsteads are typically listed due to their social significance, as well as architectural merit and historic interest.

Evidence suggests Gratton Hall forms part of a collection of historic farmsteads in the wider vicinity, where respective families moved from one to the other in some circumstances. Houses that contain '*hall*' often indicate the site of an earlier manor house. (*Not all are listed here due to the amount*). Horton Hall; GII*, Blackwood House; GII, Blackwood Hill Farmhouse; GII, Fields Farmhouse; GII, Boot Hall; GII, Dairyhouse Farmhouse; GII*, Heath House; GII, Harracles Mill; GII, Harracles Hall; GII*, Dunwood House Farmhouse, GII, Trees Farmhouse; GII.

These in particular are within an approx. 2.5 mile radius of Gratton Hall, and have relative build dates, sizes, and architectural features. Where there are some rebuilt or reimagined structures, many have original cores. Many of these individual houses and sites form part of smaller hamlets scattered across the landscape, though from a wider standpoint they form fundamental relationships with the



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field systems and networks across the rural area. To this end I disagree that the site and farmhouse have low significance, as Gratton Hall farm remains part of a wider structure within Horton. This area sees quite a proliferation of heritage assets and the collection that remains equates to high evidential value in the rural setting.

I would consider the historic outbuildings and barns to be curtilage in this instance, as they are character buildings that make up the identity of a farmstead alongside the respective main house, though the modern post 1950s structures would not be included. The tarmac on entry and modern green shutter doors on the barns lessen the quality of the setting, though I disagree that the site isn't unique. It forms part of a multitude of heritage assets within the area, and consequently it remains part of a wider setting, and is seen to be a part of a good surviving example of a historic rural parish.

The site of Gratton Hall farm has progression of change over the years, one that is organic and well read. The existing material palette is relatively cohesive despite modern repair methods. Metal corrugated sheeting is expected to make an appearance at rural sites such as this, nevertheless the patina across these elements affords them to be fairly subtle and remain understated against the historic fabric of their counterparts.

The scheme shows a multitude of items of which I will focus predominantly on the areas of concern for this initial response. I have no issue with reusing traditional farm buildings in principle.

See drwg ref: *AL134 Log store height increase as proposed*. The existing structure is quite ugly, understandably it is a functional structure and offers little to the vicinity, except the existing height does afford it to be subservient and marginally neutral. The height increase and clad elevations look to exacerbate this and create a much more obvious structure causing some visual conflict in the setting.

See drwg ref: *AL129 26 Shed, The Barn, and 40 Shed short elevations as proposed, AL139 South east elevations as proposed with materials, AL140 North east elevations as proposed with materials*. This shows quite a mixture of materials, and there looks to be a lot going on. I am surprised the green modern doors are being retained, and would have expected their removal and the reinstatement of traditional features of plain timber doors. The existing character is fairly primitive which affords it historic interest, the contemporary materials look to sanitise this.

See drwg ref: *AL128 26 Shed, The Barn and 40 Shed long elevations 'as proposed'*, 'W.0.17' sees new double height glazed pane to NE elevation – I presume the concertina timber doors would be functional and not cosmetic? It is preferred if this large expanse of glass has the ability to be concealed.

See drwg ref: *AL127 26 Shed, The Barn and 40 Shed roof plan 'as proposed'*, the proliferation of rooflights makes for a cluttered roofscape at the '26 Shed'. The irregularity of the existing rooflights as seen in drwg ref: *AL110 26 Shed, The Barn and 40 Shed roof plan 'as existing'* creates interest. Whereas the forced symmetry through addition of lights looks to create a generic 'cookie-cutter' roofplan, which I don't feel is best suited to a structure currently containing natural irregular features.

I recognise there is corrugated sheeting on the '40 Shed', though with its patina it sits marginally comfortably and is not particularly obtrusive. I note the proposed use of pale timber cladding on some portions, this looks to eliminate organic elements and introduce more alien materials. It should also be noted the use of timber cladding is ill advised as per the Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD.

There is an opportunity to reign in the level of modern intervention seen in its existing status. I would be keen to see some uniformity in the materials and for the bright green doors and shutters to be in a more submissive colour, as currently this risks the main house and farm buildings visually competing.

Regards,

Miss E Holland.
Conservation Officer.