

**HERITAGE STATEMENT TO ACCOMPANY PROPOSED
NEW HOUSE AT CHEDDLETON PARK AVENUE,
CHEDDLETON, LEEK, STAFFS. ST13 7NS.**



Cover: General view looking south-east towards the existing new houses.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The writer was commissioned by Moorlands Homes (Cheadle) Ltd. to prepare a heritage statement as part of the application documents for a proposed new house at the west end of Cheddleton Park Avenue. A detailed site visit was made on Tuesday, 15th August, 2023.
2. This statement is prepared in accordance with paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF), which says:

“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.”

BACKGROUND

3. Cheddleton Park Avenue is the “host” development of the current proposal. The avenue is the most prominent part of a modern housing estate, originally built in the few years either side of 1980 and since extended, on land that had previously belonged to Grange Farm, Cheddleton. It runs along the hillside south of the Caldon Canal, considerably elevated above the canal, and roughly parallel to it.
4. In 2018, a further extension of eight houses (hereafter the “eight-house proposal”) was proposed at the west end of the avenue (SMD/2018/0174), but permission was refused on 22/11/2018. The conservation officer, during the consultation process, had noted the absence of a heritage statement among the application particulars; this was referenced in refusal reason no. 3 which is relevant to this present report, as it identifies the potential heritage sensitivities:

“The site affects the setting of both the Cheddleton and Cauldon Canal Conservation Areas and the setting of Grange Farm (Grade II Listed) and the locks on the Cauldon Canal. No Heritage Assessment has been provided by the applicant to assess the impact of development on these designated heritage assets. The steeply undulating fields between Cheddleton Park Avenue and Cheadle Road provide an important open space reinforcing the rural setting of the historic village centre of Cheddleton and Grange Farm, separating them from recent suburban development. The extension of this existing development on Cheddleton Park Avenue into rising and undulating ground levels would represent a harsh, linear intrusion into an attractive open landscape. It would have a harmful impact on the open, rural setting of nearby designated heritage assets. This harm is judged to be less than substantial but is not outweighed by public benefits that the scheme would deliver in terms of economic benefits and the provision of housing in circumstances of a significant undersupply.”

5. A detailed heritage statement / impact assessment was prepared by Mel Morris Conservation of Ipstones for the subsequent planning appeal (no. 3228503), dismissed by Planning

Inspector Jillian Rann in her letter dated 19/9/2019. Meanwhile, a revised scheme for ten dwellings had been submitted in 2019, comprising a more sinuous mix of houses and bungalows further down the site, but this was withdrawn in October 2019 following receipt of the appeal dismissal the previous month.

6. Ms. Morris's statement went into some detail about the background of the heritage assets mentioned in the refusal notice. Her document was reworked for the ten-house submission and again for the three-house submission which was eventually successful (see paragraphs 9 - 10 below). It remains valid so far as the historic evidence is concerned, and there is no need to rehearse it all again, particularly as both Ms. Morris and the Planning Inspector concurred in their opinions that the eight-house proposal would not adversely affect the character, appearance, setting or significance of either of the conservation areas. Instead, the background of the heritage assets is briefly summarised below at paragraphs 13 - 24.

7. The present proposal would bring the number of new houses up to four instead of three, on part of the same site as the previously-proposed eight, and therefore the Inspector's previous conclusion of "no harm" to the conservation areas still applies.

8. The fundamental point of disagreement, leading to dismissal of the eight-house appeal, concerned the setting of the two listed buildings at Grange Farm. Mel Morris concluded that "the application site per se contributes nothing to the significance / setting of the listed building[s]", but the planning inspector disagreed, concluding that the open land adjacent to the Grade II listed buildings at Grange Farm remained important to the historic isolation of the farmstead in the landscape.

9. A reduced development of three houses on a smaller site (SMD/2020/0365, the "three-house proposal") was considered by the local authority to overcome the objections made by the Planning Inspector, because they lay within a natural "bowl" in the landscape, as observed by the conservation officer. Containing the development within the bottom of this "bowl" gives a logical termination to Cheddleton Park Avenue and preserves the setting of Grange Farm.

10. It was suggested by the applicants that the spoil heap from the construction of previous houses on Cheddleton Park Avenue would reduce visibility of the three new houses, and thereby mitigate their impact, but this does not appear to have been a determining factor of the proposal, and in fact the spoil heap has since been largely removed. The application for the three houses was approved on 27/10/2020.

11. These three houses have now been completed, so their impact on the landscape can now be seen "in the flesh" from various standpoints, which enables a more confident and self-evident assessment than via a "paper exercise" alone. They are quite raw and bright at the moment, because there has been no time for the weather to mellow them, as of course it quickly will. Site inspection suggests that the spoil heap, whether or not it had been removed, would have made little difference to the overall visibility of the houses. It is the over-riding, large-scale landscape features that provide their essential setting, most notably the "bowl" in the hillside, within which the houses are seen to sit quite neatly.

THE HERITAGE ASSETS

12. The heritage assets concerned are:

- **The Cheddleton Conservation Area**

13. The Cheddleton Conservation Area was designated in 1970, but there is no adopted character appraisal.

14. The historic village is on Hollow Lane, on a north-west facing bank above the river Churnet. It lies largely on the west side of the A520 which intervenes between the main part of the village and the application site. The river valley appears to explain the name “Cheddleton”, whose etymology is believed to describe a settlement by a narrow valley. The lord of the manor granted an estate at Cheddleton to Dieulacres Abbey c1220, and the Abbey established a Grange there, now represented by Grange Farm, outside the conservation area.

15. There was a water mill on the Churnet at Cheddleton as far back as 1253, and many corn mills along the valley were converted for flint crushing alongside the development of the Stoke on Trent potteries. Powdered flint was added to potting clay to whiten it, and it also helped to reduce shrinkage during the firing process. Between the river and the Caldon Canal, a paper mill was set up in the early 19th century; its site is not included in the conservation area.

16. The general setting of the village remains pleasantly rural, although significantly affected by sporadic built development in all directions. The paper mill site is now redeveloped as the “Churnetside Business Park”. Its noise and bustle, as well as its general scale and appearance, impacts upon the present application site.

17. Regarding the relationship of the Cheddleton Conservation Area to the application site, the present proposal changes nothing. The Planning Inspector’s decision letter on the eight-house proposal noted that dense tree cover on the east side of the designated area prevented exchanges of view in both directions, and that remaining open land east of the conservation area would retain the sense of separation between the historic village and the application site. Therefore, it was concluded that there would be no harm to the character, appearance or significance of the Cheddleton Conservation Area.

- **The Caldon Canal Conservation Area**

18. The Caldon Canal was built in 1776-9 as a branch of the Trent and Mersey Canal, whose proprietors built it. It served as a water feeder to the Trent and Mersey Canal, and was also used to transport limestone from the Cauldon Lowe quarries into the Pottery towns.

19. The canal happens to pass through some attractive countryside, but this is serendipitous from the point of view of its modern leisure use, and is not related to its heritage significance.

20. In considering the site for the eight-house proposal (which included the application site), the planning inspector noted that the canal’s special character and significance was “drawn principally from its status as an example of innovation in engineering, and as a linear transport route associated with the industrial history of the surrounding area.” On this particular matter, the decision letter concluded that the proposed development would be seen as a continuation of the existing suburban housing on Cheddleton Park Avenue, and “would not harm the character or appearance, or the significance of the Caldon Canal Conservation Area.”

21. In reaching this conclusion, the inspector was well aware that the houses would be clearly visible: “The general absence of vegetation between the canal and the site would make the proposed houses more readily visible in views from the canalside footpaths than existing houses on Cheddleton Park Avenue, which are screened to a significant degree by intervening vegetation.” However, open land would remain below and above them, so they “would not necessarily appear unduly dominant when viewed in the context of that existing housing, which is already somewhat prominent due to its elevated position above the canal.”

- **Grade II listed house and Grade II listed barn at Grange Farm, Cheddleton.**

22. The house at Grange Farm was dendro-dated in 1995, giving dates of 1499 for the original construction and 1692-7 for a remodelling, including substantial rebuilding in stone. As such, it predates the Dissolution of the Monasteries. It was cruck-framed, and the main roof was formerly open to the roof. There is a timber-framed fire-hood.

23. The adjacent barn, 25 metres to the east, is 17th century, re-roofed and extended in the late 19th century.

24. There is no intervisibility between the listed buildings and the application site. However, the Planning Inspector in 2019 nevertheless pointed out the value of the unbuilt, elevated rural space that separates Grange Farm from encroaching suburban development to the south, east and north-east. This space may have been impinged upon by the eight-house proposal, but remains unaffected by the present proposal.

THE PROPOSAL AND ITS IMPACT

25. The proposal envisages a single new bungalow, filling a corner among the three houses approved in 2020 (see **Photographs 1 and 2**). Its western side projects only nominally beyond the building line set by the west wall of the existing house at Plot 2.

26. The appeal letter dismissing eight houses in 2019 represents a high and authoritative level of decision-taking, and was not all negative, despite the overall conclusion. It is therefore important to be mindful of its contents to guide the assessment process of the current proposal:

27. The three-house proposal, now complete, is clearly visible from the valley bottom, as the appeal inspector foresaw when considering eight houses there. But, as before, it remains the case that their visibility does not affect the historic significance of the canal, whose interest is mainly as a historic transport corridor, not designed to have a conscious aesthetic relationship to its surroundings. The inspector, and the applicant’s previous heritage consultant, were both agreed on this.

28. The new dwelling will make little difference to the existing perception of the three new houses in the landscape. It fills a corner, and the backdrop is composed of new houses already. More importantly, it sits within a natural bowl, whose banks make a strong break between Cheddleton Park Avenue and the setting of the listed buildings at Grange Farm.

29. From the Cheddleton Conservation Area, the space between the historic village and new development will still be maintained, and the very limited views out will not materially change. The planning inspector and the applicant’s previous heritage consultant were agreed that no harm would result to the Cheddleton Conservation Area either.

30. The setting of Grange Farm, which has been the main heritage issue with previous proposals, will also remain unchanged by the additional house. The relationship between Grange Farm and the application site is very tenuous to begin with, as there is very limited “co-visibility” in the wider landscape, and no “inter-visibility” at all. The new house is well-contained by the landform and does not encroach on the rising land that preserves a continued sense of isolation for Grange Farm in the landscape.

CONCLUSION

31. The proposal is part of a site where eight houses were previously proposed in 2018. Although the proposal was refused and dismissed at appeal in 2019, it was found that there would have been no detrimental effects on the Caldon Canal and Cheddleton Conservation Areas, and this conclusion holds good for the present proposal also.

32. The remaining issue, decisive in the 2019 appeal, was the setting of the listed house and barn at Grange Farm. By reducing the proposals to three houses, and setting them in a natural “bowl” at the end of Cheddleton Park Avenue, the conservation officer and District Council were satisfied that adverse impacts on the isolated setting of Grange Farm would be avoided.

33. The house now proposed is on the site of a spoil heap left over from a previous construction phase of Cheddleton Park Avenue, and now much reduced. Although it was suggested, by the applicants, that the spoil heap would reduce the visual impact of the three new houses, it is questionable how far this would have been successful, or indeed necessary, and I can find nothing online to suggest that the approval took any account of this point. As a topographical feature, the spoil heap was out of place, and paled into insignificance by comparison with the bold contours of the hillside rising to Grange Farm.

34. The house now proposed infills a corner and does not involve any further erosion of, or encroachment upon, the setting of the farmstead at Grange Farm. As a bungalow, it is lower than the existing houses, which offsets its higher slab level.

35. I conclude, therefore, that this application for an additional house will have no adverse effects on any heritage assets, and is suitable for a grant of planning permission in heritage terms.

Philip E. Heath, September, 2023.

PHOTOGRAPHS



1. The proposed new house fills the corner between the two new houses on the left of this photograph, and will not result in any apparent extension of the developed area in this view. To the right is the rounded hill that forms the “bowl” the new houses sit in, and which also cuts off any intervisibility between the application site and the listed buildings at Grange Farm. The building visible extreme right is just to the north-east of the listed Grange Farm buildings.



2. Two of the three newly-built houses. The proposed additional house is immediately beyond the house on the right.