

# Heritage Statement

**Project:** Formation of new vehicular access

**Address:** Land adjacent Brandon House Farm, Foxt

**Client:** Mr & Mrs Hutchinson

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Hewitt&Carr Services has been instructed by Mr & Mrs Hutchinson to prepare a Heritage Statement to accompany an application for formation of a new vehicular access track to constitute the primary access for a new build dwelling.
- 1.2. This statement has been deemed necessary as the site is located within the Foxt Conservation Area and within proximity of a number of listed buildings.

## 2.0 PLANNING POLICY

- 2.1. The Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2014-2033 (adopted 2020), of which the Policy DC2 'The Historic Environment' is of particular relevance.
- 2.2. Policy DC2 states that "the Council will conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets, including their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance. This will take into account the desirability of maintaining and enhancing their significance and will ensure that development proposals contribute positively to the character of the built and historic environment."
- 2.3. Policy DC2 goes on to state that "all applications likely to affect heritage assets will require the submission of a heritage statement, including a qualitative visual assessment where appropriate."
- 2.4. Paragraph 200 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that "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."

### 3.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSET

- 3.1. The development site is located within the small hamlet of Foxt, approximately 1km northeast of the River Churnet.
- 3.2. The hamlet is roughly divided into two halves – the northern part being characterised by later 18/19<sup>th</sup> century development, while the southern area is more ancient. This southern half was designated a conservation area in 2018, and a Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) was completed by Mel Morris the same year.
- 3.3. The CAA summarises the key characteristics of the conservation area as:
  - a scenic, dramatic, wooded presence, with stands of trees (native deciduous and tall Scots pine), clinging to the steep slopes and dominating the Shirley Brook valley
  - an extensive network of public footpaths, narrow lanes and former packhorse routes, interlocking and providing a highly permeable public environment
  - very well-preserved physical evidence of ancient man-made settlement, with a timeless and organic, fluid character
  - rare, early drystone boundary walls made up of massive stones laid both on end and on bed
  - small clusters of farmstead groups of irregular courtyard plan
  - important early 17th century farmhouses, built from dark pink gritstone
- 3.4. While the earliest origins of Foxt are unclear, the CAA states that there is evidence, such as its strategically defensible location, to show that the historic core of the 'Old Town' is ancient in origin.
- 3.5. Though Foxt is not recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086, the CAA speculates that it may have been excluded for reasons other than there being no settlement present at the time, such as tenurial or landownership arrangements.
- 3.6. Earliest documentary evidence of Foxt dates to 1292, where it is referred to as *Foxwyst*. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Foxt was known as the *Liberty of Foxt*, which continued until 1897 when it became a parish in its own right (ibid).
- 3.7. Throughout this time, it appears that the 'Old Town' retained its agricultural nature and remained unaffected by the Churnet Valley's industrial expansion. Development in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was, instead, concentrated towards the north of the hamlet.
- 3.8. The proposed development site is situated within the centre of Foxt, towards the northern boundary of the conservation area. The site is delineated by a drystone wall to the eastern and northeastern boundary which follows the line of the adjacent lane. The drystone wall breaks at an existing farm entrance to the northernmost corner and then continues to define the boundary along the western edge before joining the boundary wall of Brandon Farm to the south. Brandon Farm consists of a stone farmhouse and outbuildings.

- 3.9. Beyond the western boundary, the landscape slopes down towards Gate Farm, with its Grade II listed farmhouse and barn, to the southwest. To the north and northeast are a number of modern residential properties situated just outside the conservation area. The Manor House is situated to the east of the development site. To the south, Town End Lane terminates in a group of buildings including 2 converted barns, now called The Grange, Grade II listed Bolton Farmhouse and the modern Yew Tree Cottage.
- 3.10. The site is subject to an extant planning permission, SMD/2021/0156, for the erection of a single storey dwelling with garage. This was approved in September 2021. As part of this application, a previous heritage statement was completed by Avalon Heritage, who undertook a cartographic appraisal for the development site.
- 3.11. Historic maps showed that the conservation area is characterised by a number of enclosures, or crofts, containing farmstead buildings. It's likely this plan form reflects that of a much earlier settlement layout (Avalon 2021).
- 3.12. At the time of the Tithe Map of 1843, the development site was divided into three individual parcels of land, the southernmost being associated with Brandon Farm. The easternmost plot was previously occupied by a 'house and garden.' This house had disappeared by 1881.
- 3.13. The 1881 OS map also shows a track running along the westernmost boundary, travelling north from Brandon Farm to join the northern end of Town End Lane. The easternmost parcel of land had been amalgamated by 1925, and the layout has remained largely the same for the following 100 years.
- 3.14. Of the buildings within the conservation area, the majority are 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century. There are five farms within the historic core of Foxt – Gate Farm, Bolton Farm, Manor Farm, Rock House Farm and Brandon House Farm. Gate Farmhouse (HE Ref. 1374660) and barn (HE Ref. 1038010), and Bolton Farmhouse (HE Ref. 1038009) are Grade II listed.
- 3.15. Gate Farmhouse is dated 1624 and is possibly the oldest of the buildings within Foxt (ibid.) The barn is described within the listing description as late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century with late 19<sup>th</sup> century alterations.
- 3.16. The stone-built Bolton Farmhouse is 17<sup>th</sup> century and was formerly associated with the, now converted, Grange barns.
- 3.17. Rock House Farm, to the northern end of Town End Lane, consists of a number of stone farm buildings and a 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse. The CAA describes the farmhouse as an important building deserving further investigation.
- 3.18. Brandon House Farm is stone-built and may have 17<sup>th</sup> century origins (ibid.) while Brandon House is mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and constructed in red brick.
- 3.19. Similarly, the Manor House was built in 1862 in brick with stone quoins. It replaced an earlier building within the farm complex, with brick being anomalous amongst the prevailing 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century stone buildings within the historic core.

- 3.20. The CAA makes reference to the drystone walls present within the conservation area as being *orthostat* walls. It is speculated that that these walls, comprising substantial blocks of gritstone with both vertical and horizontal stone at the base, suggest the boundaries may have prehistoric origins, as similar walls have been found surrounding Iron Age and Roman settlements in other parts of the country (ibid.)
- 3.21. Avalon describes the distinctively shaped enclosures and orthostat walls, alongside the network of passageways and sunken trackways, as representing a 'palimpsest' of human settlement potentially originating in prehistory (Avalon 2021).

## 4.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 4.1. Under the National Planning Policy Framework (2012), any alterations should seek to “conserve and enhance” the historic environment. Section 16 of the NPPF states that LPAs should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal, including any contribution made by their setting, with a level of detail proportionate to its importance (P200).
- 4.2. This document utilises the guidance set out within Historic England's 'Conservation Principles: policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic of the historic environment' (2008) to evaluate heritage significance. The guidance identifies four values – evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal; for consideration.
- 4.3. Evidential Value is described as “the potential of a place to yield evidence of past activity.” For example, archaeological deposits may provide clues in place of any written record. It is often proportional to the amount of material evidence that has since been lost or altered.
- 4.4. Evidential value within the conservation area is particularly high due to the potentially prehistoric origins of the settlement that are still visible within the hamlet today. The CAA states that “the bare bones of the ancient hamlet are readily understandable; although the earliest buildings date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or thereabouts, they sit within a much older framework of crofts and passageways, chiselled in part out of the bedrock and lined by walls of massive stones formed through field clearance.” This means there is also high potential for archaeological remains within the historic core, which may be of regional significance.
- 4.5. The farmhouses and their associated buildings are also of high evidential value, particularly those located within historic enclosures. The majority are of 17<sup>th</sup> century origin, but have the potential to yield evidence of much earlier buildings, either within the built fabric or below ground. Later buildings, such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century Manor House, retain fabric from the earlier buildings they replaced.
- 4.6. Historical Value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be illustrative or associative and may be closely related to whether an asset retains its original use.
- 4.7. Historical value is moderate to high. Often closely linked with evidential value, historic value relies on the legibility of retained historic fabric, in this case the orthostat walls and enclosures, which enable us to understand the past aspects of rural and agricultural history.
- 4.8. Aesthetic Value derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place. Whilst the farmsteads within the conservation area are not architecturally significant, their age and vernacular style contribute significantly to the character of the conservation area.

- 4.9. Communal Value is about the meaning of a place for the people who relate to it. This value tends to be moderate to high within conservation areas due to the number of people who reside, visit and relate to it. However, Foxt is a particularly small hamlet with very few dwellings, which limits this value.

## 5.0 THE DESIGN CONCEPT

- 5.1. As mentioned previously, the site is subject to an extant planning approval for a single dwelling with garage. This replaced an earlier scheme for a bungalow. Proposals for a garden store and greenhouse were subsequently approved in 2022 (SMD/2022/0147).
- 5.2. As part of the application, it was agreed that access to the new dwelling would be via the existing access to Brandon House to the south, which would necessitate removal of a large section of drystone wall.
- 5.3. The property is now nearing completion. It is now proposed to utilise the existing field access to the northernmost boundary as the permanent vehicular access for the dwelling.
- 5.4. It is proposed to retain an agricultural appearance, utilising Aco Groundguard, seeded with meadow mix to blend with the adjacent meadow paddock. Details can be found in accompanying drawing AW0084-PL-02
- 5.5. Retention of this access will negate the requirement for access via Brandon House.

## 6.0 THE IMPACT

- 6.1. The assessment of significance recognises that a high level of historic and evidential value lies with the legibility of ancient enclosures and the presence of orthostat boundary walling.
- 6.2. The previous proposals, which involved removing a section of drystone wall to create a new access between the site and Brandon House, had potential to negatively impact this value through removal of historic fabric.
- 6.3. The 1881 OS map shows a track running along the western boundary of the site, which sets an historic precedent for an access in this location.
- 6.4. The proposed access is extant and its retention, subject to the agricultural appearance being maintained, will have no impact on the conservation area or other surrounding heritage assets.
- 6.5. As such, it is felt that the current proposals represent an overall improvement, in heritage terms, over the previously approved scheme.
- 6.6. In conclusion, the proposed development can consequently be held to meet the requirements of policy DC2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan, together with the relevant provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework in respect of the historic environment.

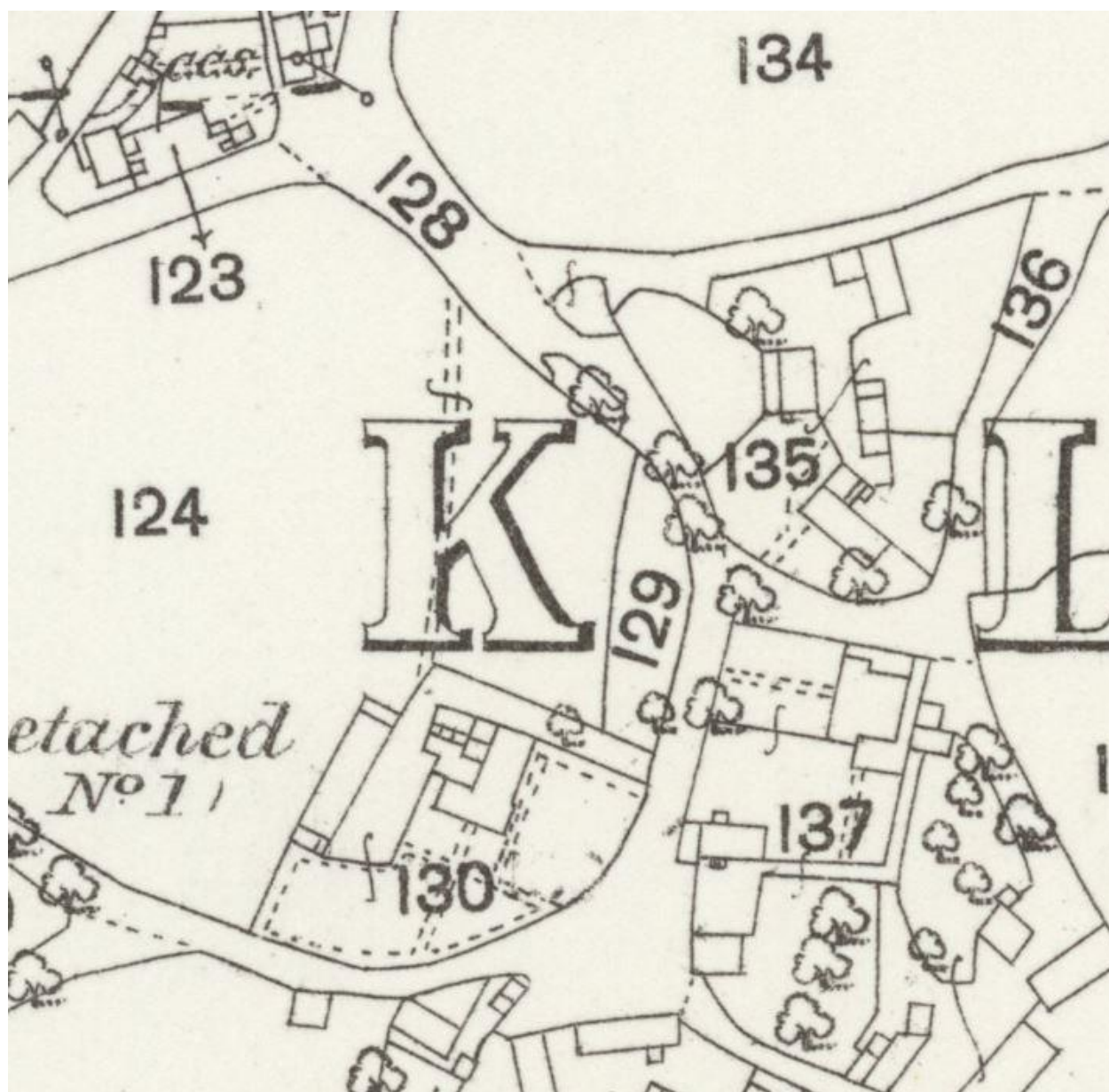


Figure 1: 1881 OS Map showing the proposed development site

## 8.0 SOURCES

Staffordshire Historic Environment Record  
National Heritage List for England - Historic England  
Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance – Historic England (2008)  
<https://maps.nls.uk/>  
Staffordshire Past Track  
National Heritage Gateway  
Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted September 2020)  
Foxt Conservation Area Character Appraisal (Mel Morris Conservation, April 2018)  
Heritage Statement for a new dwelling in the Foxt Conservation Area (Avalon Heritage, 2021)