

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**PROPOSAL : EXTERNAL ALTERATIONS AND WORKS TO
GARAGE AND COACHHOUSE**

**ADDRESS : MANOR HOUSE, FOXT, STOKE ON TRENT,
ST10 2HN**

APPLICANT : MR & MS LEE

DATE : JUNE 2024 JOB No.: 2024-2892

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This statement is submitted in support of a householder planning application which seeks external alterations and works to the garage and coach house at the Manor House, Foxt. The application has been submitted by Sammons Architectural Ltd on behalf of Mr & Ms Lee and is accompanied by drawing numbers 2024-2892-02, 2024-2892-03, 2024-2892,06B, 2024-2892-07A, 2024-2892-11 all of which should be read in conjunction with this statement. This statement has been requested by the Local Planning Authority following submission of the householder planning application to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, which has been registered under reference SMD/2024/0279 as the site is located within the Foxt Conservation Area and within proximity to a number of listed buildings.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSET & SURROUNDING AREA

The application site lies within the small hamlet of Foxt, which lies approximately 1km northeast of River Churnet. The hamlet is roughly divided into two halves – the northern part being characterised by later 18/19th century development, while the southern area is significantly older. This southern half was designated a Conservation Area in 2018 and a Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) was completed by Mel Morris the same year. The Foxt Conservation Area Appraisal (FCAA) states that the key characteristics of the Foxt conservation area include:

- 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

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.

The FCAA goes on to advise that Foxt is special for the rare surviving relationship between farmstead and enclosure or croft within the earliest settled part of the village (para 6.8). It is from such features and characteristics that the significance of the FCA is derived. 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 tenorial or landownership arrangements.

Earliest documentary evidence of Foxt dates to 1292, where it is referred to as Foxwyst. By the 16th century, Foxt was known as the Liberty of Foxt, which continued until 1897 when it became a parish in its own right (ibid).

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 18th and 19th centuries was, instead, concentrated towards the north of the hamlet.

Of the buildings within the conservation area, the majority are 17th or 18th century. The Manor House is one of the few earliest surviving buildings in the area. It along with Gate Farm, Bolton Farm, Rock House Farm and Brandon House Farm comprise the five principal farms within the historic core of Foxt. Gate Farmhouse (HE Ref. 1374660) and barn (HE Ref. 1038010), and Bolton Farmhouse (HE Ref. 1038009) are Grade II listed. 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 17th or early 18th century with late 19th century alterations. The stone-built Bolton Farmhouse is 17th century and was formerly associated with the, now converted, Grange barns. Rock House Farm, to the northern end of Town End Lane, consists of a number of stone farm buildings and a 17th century farmhouse. The CAA describes the farmhouse as an important building deserving further investigation. Brandon House Farm is stone-built and may have 17th century origins (ibid.) while Brandon House is mid-19th century and constructed in red brick. In contrast a new single storey dwelling permitted under SMD/2021/0156 has recently been constructed directly opposite the application site on the opposite side of Town End Road.

The Manor House comprises of a double fronted house which has an imposing design with raised stone quoins, Flemish bond brickwork to the front, stone coped gables, mullioned windows (removed) with chamfered brick surrounds. It is very old-fashioned for its day and there was a clearly conscious effort to design a house which reflected the antiquity of the family, as the Ball family inherited the freehold from 1649, although were not named as one of the ancient tenants.

To the south west of the Manor House lies a detached coachhouse which has shaped stone coped gables and contains a small and quaint dovecote in the gable end with three flight holes and ledges. This building is probably slightly later, circa 18th century in origin, than the Manor House. Beyond this lies a further detached outbuilding which is now in a parlous condition with the roof fallen in and walls partially collapsed.

Originally there was a more extensive of farm buildings, including pigsties, dairy and potato store or ice house of substantial construction which had been buried by a previous owner. Further to the south east and outside the applicant's ownership lie a range of dark pink gritstone buildings, the lower part of which probably date back to the 17th century. Owned by the adjacent property Bolton Farmhouse these were severed from the principal holding by a narrow cow lane and formed part of dispersed farm plan. At the time of the FCAA they were assessed as being in a dilapidated condition and had been for over 40 years. They were considered to contain the usual combination of cow byres, hay lofts and upper floor store houses although it was considered that some of the buildings were too ruined to identify their original condition.

The application site is relatively centrally located within the village towards the norther boundary of the Conservation Area and is bounded by a narrow and curving country lane (Town End Road) that runs contiguous with the western boundary of the application site. The application building is set within formal gardens and the site is delineated by a distinctive coursed stone wall with half round coping stones which sets it apart from others in the village. It leads from the north western corners of the application building along the western boundary of the site to the detached coachhouse to the south where the wall returns and the gable of the coachhouse forms the boundary at this point. A small section of formal walling albeit with a more rudimentary topping continues from the coachhouse in a southern direction alongside Town End Road where it is punctuated by an agricultural access the other side of which is then formed by the gable of the dilapidated outbuilding which in turn leads to a more traditional drystone field boundary which returns along the narrow cow lane.

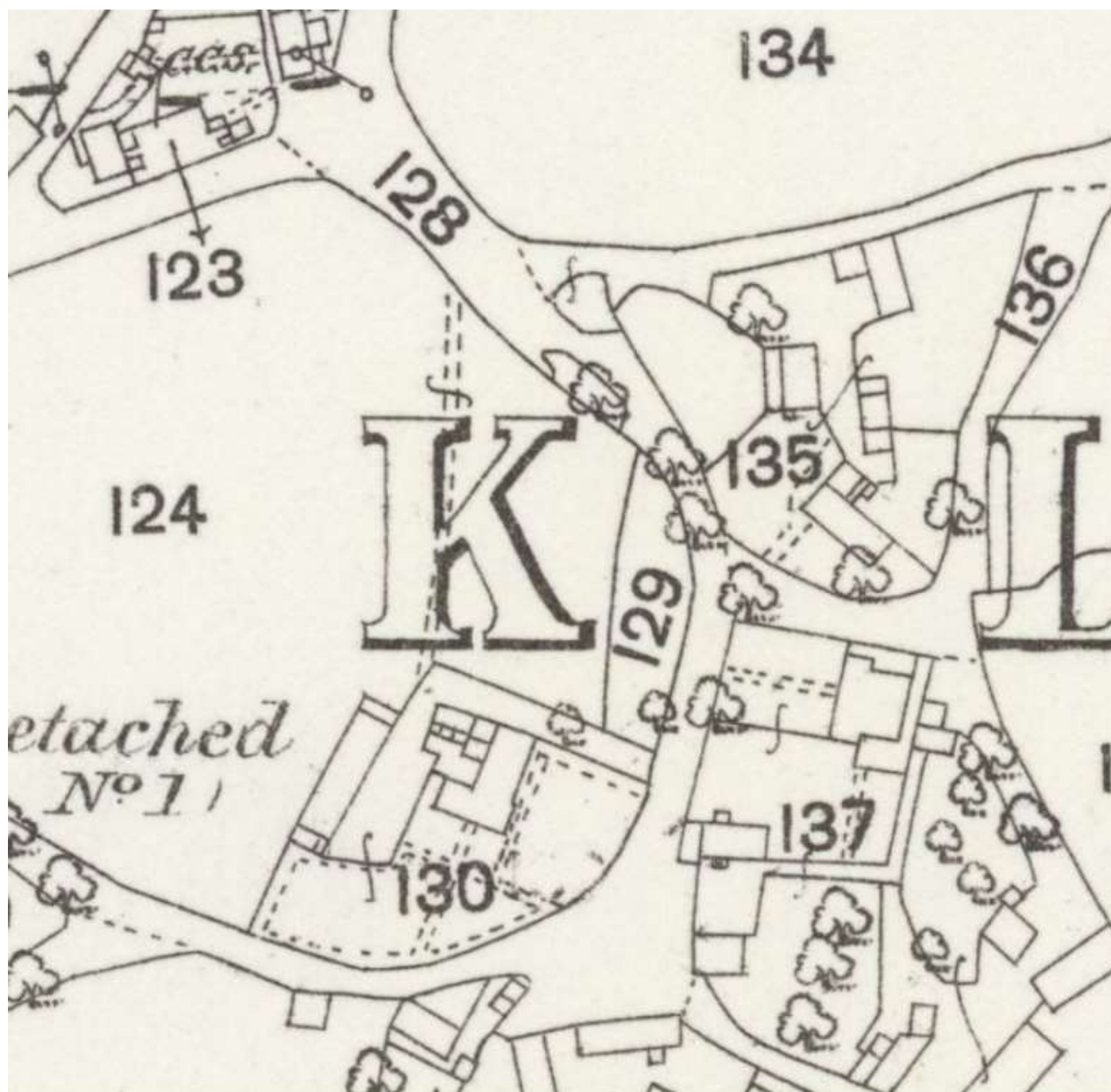
The CAA makes reference to the drystone walls present within the conservation area as being orthostat walls. It is speculated that that these walls, comprising substantial blocks of gritstone with both vertical and horizontal stone at the base, suggest the boundaries may have prehistoric

origins, as similar walls have been found surrounding Iron Age and Roman settlements in other parts of the country (ibid.)

The central location and elevated topography of the site means that there is substantial intervisibility of the site and the surrounding heritage buildings, including the non designated Brandon House Farm and the Grade II listed Gate Farmhouse and barn.

Historic maps show 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.

Figure 1: 1881 OS Map showing the application site and its surroundings.



3.0 PLANNING POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was revised in December 2023. It is the Government's clear intention that the document should be considered to be a material consideration and as such carries particular weight where development is not addressed by planning policies in the existing Development Plan.

Whilst the recently published NPPF does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making it does provide guidance to LPA's and is a material consideration in determining planning applications. The NPPF confirms that at the heart of the guidance is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (para 11) and that for decision making this means approving development proposals that accord with the Development Plan without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan for the Staffordshire Moorlands comprises of the adopted Local Plan (September 2020) and the Saved Local plan Proposals Map / Settlement Boundaries (1998). The most relevant policy of the adopted Local Plan is considered to be DC2 (The Historic Environment) Policy DC2 which requires heritage assets and their setting to be enhanced and gives protection to designated and non-designated heritage assets. It specifically states that "the Council will conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets, including their setting in a manner appropriate to the significance. This should 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.

Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty upon the local planning authority in determining applications for development affecting conservation areas to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of such areas.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides the Government's national planning policy on the conservation of the historic environment. In respect of information requirements for applications, it sets out 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

Paragraph 200 of the NPPF requires 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. 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.

Paragraph 201 goes on to state that "Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a

proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal."

Paragraph 205 advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.

Paragraph 206 makes it clear that "Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of: •grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional; •assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional."

"Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss or significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply: •the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and •no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and •conservation by grant funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and •the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use" (Paragraph 207).

Paragraph 208 states that "Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use."

Paragraph 209 states, 'the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset'.

4.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This document utilises the guidance set out within Historic England's 'Conservation Principles: policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment' (2008) to evaluate heritage significance. The guidance identifies four values – evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal; for consideration.

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.

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 17th 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.

The Manor House and its associated buildings are also of high evidential value, particularly those located within historic enclosures. The majority are of 17th century origin, but have the potential to yield evidence of much earlier buildings, either within the built fabric or below ground. The Manor House is one of the few earliest surviving buildings in the area. It along with Gate Farm, Bolton Farm, Rock House Farm and Brandon House Farm comprise the five principal farms within the historic core of Foxt.

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.

Historical value is also 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. Despite it being later than the other 17/18 century buildings the Manor House retains the fabric from the earlier buildings it replaced. Built in 1862 for Thomas and Elizabeth Ball (a datestone – AD 1862 T & E B survives in the rear gable). It replaced an earlier building within the farm complex, with brick being anomalous amongst the prevailing 17th and 18th century stone buildings within the historic core. The site also by virtue of its historic agricultural form within the cluster of traditional farmsteads and its intervisibility with the other historic farmsteads and outbuildings contributes positively to the surroundings in which those listed buildings are experienced. Some of the best panoramic views are from private properties, particularly Bolton Farmhouse and Manor House, and in the case of Manor House this is part of its significance and status.

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.

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 PROPOSAL

The proposal seeks consent for external alterations and works to two detached structures within the application site, namely the garage and the coach house in order to facilitate their use as a home gym and a pottery barn with office above. These comprise of the following:

Garage – Reinstatement of existing walls with stonework to match. Provision of a traditional pitched roof with Staffordshire Moorlands plain clay tiles. Reinstatement of rainwater goods, installation of new timber and doors.

Coach House - Provision of a new pedestrian doorway within the eastern gable with the existing aperture above infilled in stonework to match. Fixed glazed panels to be fitted deep within the existing ground floor door recess with timber doors externally.

6.0 THE IMPACT

The assessment of significant recognises that a high level of historic and evidential value lies with its historic form within the cluster of traditional farmsteads and its intervisibility with the other

historic farmsteads and outbuildings which contributes positively to the surroundings in which those listed buildings are experienced. Some of the best panoramic views are from private properties, particularly Bolton Farmhouse and Manor House, and in the case of Manor House this is part of its significance and status.

The FCAA acknowledges that “the nature of the settlement, with its large, relatively inaccessible crofts for modern farming practices, tractors and machinery has both preserved the settlement patten but also led to the lack of viability of farms, as their land locked nature has prevented expansion. The lack of modern farm sheds is indicative of non working farms. This has in turn affected the character of the settlement and may of the farm buildings have fallen out of use, some are in a ruinous state. Manor house in particular has four or five historic buildings which have no viable use, several are in an advanced state of dereliction, with the heightened risk that they will be lost forever.”

It goes on to state that “in view of this set of conditions, it will be important that future viability of these groups of buildings recognises the intrinsic value of the particularly important historic farm buildings (which may be beyond normally accepted conversion criteria), prevents fragmentation of the crofts, formal subdivision, and breaches in the boundary walls, whilst enabling uses which preserve the buildings, their relationships and plan form. It is important to recognise that here at least agricultural use for all the buildings is unlikely to be tenable; home-based businesses are ideal for new uses but the hamlet is unlikely to be able to sustain holiday cottages throughout. The more significant farms are those where the whole farmstead can still be understood. For example, new uses have been found for the farm buildings at Gate Farm and Rock House Farm.”

The alterations to the garage to provide a home gym will enable the rather ruinous and dilapidated structure to be bought back into an appropriate and suitable re-use which will safeguard the future of the building. The building will be re-built using its historic plan form and provided with a traditional pitched roof which would have originally been in situ. The large door openings are synonymous with its previous use and the glazed panels will be recessed back well within the opening allowing it to remain legible. The proposed development will retain a high solid to void ratio and the overall form, character and appearance of the outbuilding will be that of a valued vernacular building within the Staffordshire Moorlands.

The alterations proposed to the coachhouse are modest and essentially relate to the provision of a new pedestrian door way and the installation of fixed full height panels in the front elevation of the building. The new doorway will be off set in the gable and will be provided with a stone head above the door. The new fixed glazed panels would be recessed well back within the aperture thereby allowing the origins of the original opening to be read. The use of the building as a pottery studio for the applicants with a home office above is considered to be appropriate and will ensure that the future of the building is safeguarded.

The proposed development will reinstate and safeguard two important outbuildings which will contribute positively to the character and appearance of the application site and its wider setting within the conservation area.

On this basis it is considered that the proposed development would meet the policy requirements contained in Policy DC2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan as well as guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework which aim to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.