

Great Offley House
Window Repairs and Replacements
Great Offley
Hitchin
SG5 3EA

Design & Access Statement
Incorporating Heritage Statement

May 2026



Prepared for:

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1.0 Introduction & Site Context

Executive Summary

This document forms the Design & Access Statement incorporating Heritage Statement for the proposed window repairs and replacements at Great Offley House, being submitted for Listed Building Consent.

Its purpose is to explain the proposed works and establish the significance and details of the heritage asset in line with Historic England’s Conservation Principles and assess the level of impact of the proposed works upon it.

Historic England defines conservation as the process of managing change to a significant place in its setting in ways that will best sustain its heritage values, while recognising opportunities to reveal or reinforce those values for present and future generations.

Location and Context

Great Offley House is located to the south of the village of Offley/Great Offley in North Hertfordshire, south west of Hitchin. It is within the Offley Conservation Area.

Great Offley House is a grade II listed house which the client currently lives in and is looking to refurbish the windows of.



Aerial view of Great Offley House

2.0 History & Significance

Listing Description of Great Offley House

Grade: II
List Entry Number:1295486
Date first listed:24-Oct-1988
List Entry Name:Great Offley House
County:Hertfordshire
District:North Hertfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:Offley
National Grid Reference:TL 14569 26485

Details
OFFLEY KINGS WALDEN ROAD TL 1426 (West side) Great Offley

13/107 Great Offley House - GV II

House. Late medieval former open hall house now middle range, floor and chimney inserted in hall in early C17, rear extension mid/late C17, new brick E range early/mid C18 with front re-windowed and modernised 1802 (date on rainwater heads). Timber framed middle range and part of W range cased in red brick, E front of red brick with some blue brick, tuck pointed. Steep old red tile roofs. A larger rectangular house of 2 storeys, cellars and attics facing E, comprising 3 parallel ranges. E front 3 windows wide with flat gauged arches to each floor. 3 gabled dormers on roofslope with 2-lights casement windows. Triple-sash windows with small panes on both floors, but single sash window with 6/6 panes over the central entrance. Pilastered doorcase with fluted consoles, entablature and round headed fanlight to half-glazed double doors in panelled reveals. Dated rainwater heads. E range has internal gable chimneys and 2 rooms separated by the entrance and stair hall. Entrance at rear to middle range on line of original cross-passage. This range is of 3 structural bays originally with hall bay central and service bay to S open to the roof, and 2 storeys N parlour bay. Clasp-purlin roof with smoke-blackened rafters and long curved wind-braces. Stair probably in NE corner. When internal chimney built blocking cross-passage and hall floored it became a lobby-entry house and S room became parlour with fireplace and N room a service room. A low single-storey service wing was later added at SW. C18 E range addition was first use of brick walling. Newels to attic stair have ‘patera’ finials also found at Wards Farmhouse, Lilley.

Listing NGR: TL1456926485

Nearby Listed Buildings

West Barn at Great Offley House, Grade II (Listing Number: 1175047) sits to the rear of Great Offley House and in the same ownership.

Other local listed buildings nearby include Offley Hoo, The Rookery and the Church of St Mary Magdalene, none of which are visible from the site of application.

2.0 History & Significance

History of Offley

Taken from the Offley Parish Council website, the history of Offley is given as follows: The Domesday Census, completed in 1086, states that Offley was assessed as supporting 30 families therefore about 140 folk. In 1221 the Manor of Offley and Cockernhoe was held by Geoffrey St Legers. Geoffrey’s great grand daughter, Isabella, added her surname to Offley to ensure the family name continued so the estate became Offley St Legers. It was at about this time the church, St Mary Magdalene, was erected although not as it is today. Only the nave and porch are left of the original mediaeval building.

In the fifteenth century the manor was held by Isabella’s husband Thomas de Hoo but in 1543 the property was sold to Richard Farmer who in turn sold it to Sir John Spencer of Althorp, Northamptonshire. John’s youngest son, Richard inherited the Offley estate and built Offley Place in about 1600 although only a portion of that building stands today. The Spencers and their descendants by direct line or marriage (Penrices, Salusburys and Hughes’) owned the Offley Estate until 1929.

It was they who built the present Offley Place or Park and considerably altered the church by demolishing the Totternhoe stone chancel and tower and replacing them with a classical chancel and brick tower. The chancel is a mausoleum to the occupants of Offley Place and other village notables with its plethora of plaques and monuments from which one can read their family histories. The churchyard, too, with its many tomb stones tells of their passing. It was they who obtained an Act of Parliament for Enclosure of the Common Fields and also to change the course of the road from Hitchin to Luton which passed by the wall of Offley Place and then along West Lane.

They endowed the village school in 1841 which was 30 years before the government act made education compulsory for all. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, the Salusbury family who were also vicars of Offley Parish owned Wellbury Park, five farms, most of the cottages and all the large houses.

The one exception was Little Offley, an elegant William and Mary mansion with its Dower House in the village: Great Offley House. This estate was also handed down through one family either directly or through marriage until Richard Marsh sold the estate to Col C E Johnston in 1912.

History of Great Offley House

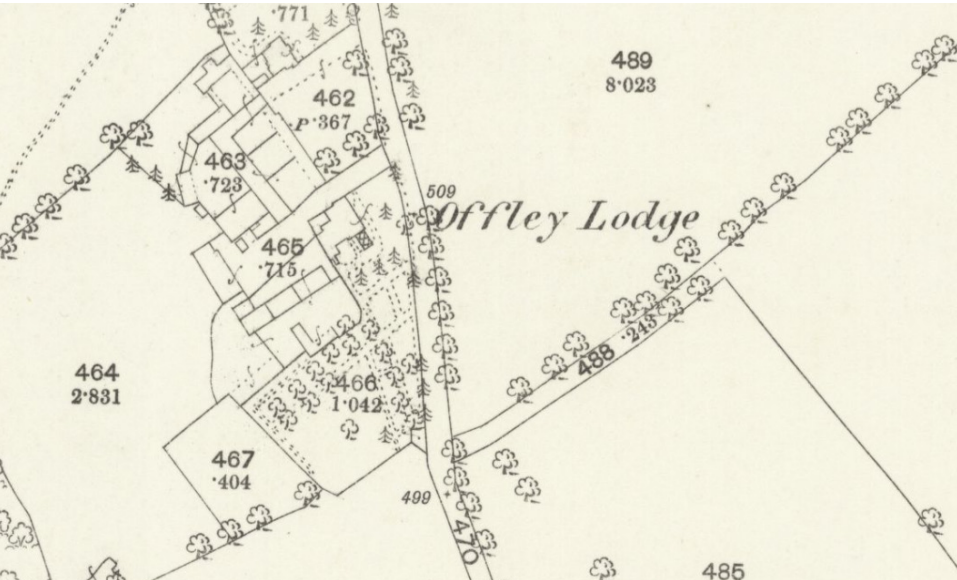
Great Offley House originally dates to late medieval period when it was an open hall house, which is now incorporated in the middle range of the house, the floor and chimney inserted into the open hall in the 17th Century. The rear extension was added in the mid/late 17th Century. These have since been cased in red brick in the 18th Century.

The front range (east) was added in the early/mid 18th Century and this was re fronted in the 19th Century (1802 as dated on rainwater hoppers) in the Georgian style which resides as the principle elevation seen from the public road (and wider Conservation Area) today.

Recent changes to the house include a modern conservatory, which was given permission in 2016, this replaced previous conservatories and the historic maps show glass roofed structures connected to the south of the house since at least 1880 (the earliest OS Map available) in similar locations.

The house forms a yard to its rear with a cottage and barns, one of which also built in the 17th Century is grade II listed and was altered in the 20th Century quite significantly.

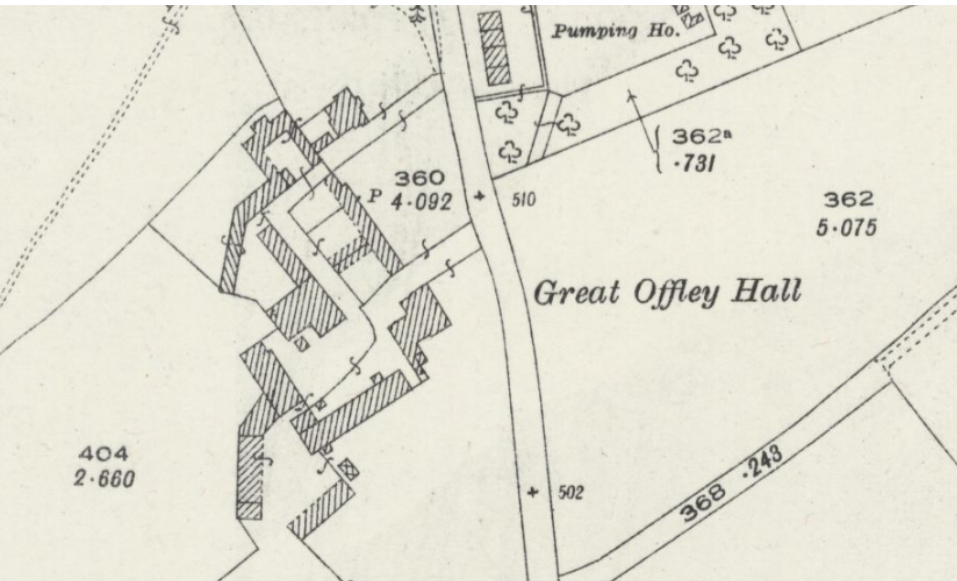
Historic maps indicate that the name of the house has changed, labelled as Offley Lodge and Great Offley Hall on various OS maps from the last few centuries.



1880 OS Map



1898 OS Map



1924 OS Map

2.0 History & Significance

Significance

Recognising the significance of a place relies on understanding the range of heritage values which may be attached to it. As set out by Historic England these are:

Evidential value: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.

Historical value: 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.

Aesthetic value: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

Communal value: the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

Great Offley House is Grade II listed which Historic England describe as follows: Grade II buildings are of special interest, around 91.7% of all listed buildings are in this class and it is the most likely grade of listing for a homeowner.

Great Offley House’s significance is predominantly in it’s visible evolution through the centuries, in particular its Georgian re-fronting which is today still its dominant outward appearance to the Conservation Area, and its retained historical relationship with its outbuildings and barns.

The significance of Great Offley House overall lies mostly in aesthetic value with the evolution of the house through the centuries evident in the differing architectural styles and features present internally and externally.

The expanding footprint of the house which has developed over time is clear from the volumes of each range, which in itself has high significance because of the unusual way the house has expanded over time, it has not been linear or sequential in a traditional way.

Internally there are features which date the ranges of the house or the point in time in which they were remodelled, such as the Georgian staircase. Externally, later additions and alterations to the house somewhat confuse the reading of each century of house expansion, especially to the rear.

The roof to the mid and front range of the house are red clay tiles, as is common of the historic buildings in Great Offley, the rear range although dating to the 18th Century has slate tiles which suggests it may have been re-roofed in the 20th Century, slate commonly used on roofs in the village from the 20th Century onwards, (source: Great Offley Conservation Area Character Statement). The roof therefore holds some significance in the way it relates to the trends of the local vernacular at points in time.

The east elevation, the Principal elevation, holds a high significance in communal value as it presents to the wider village today as was intended when it was re-fronted in 1802. Restyling the front of the house with grand windows and decorative front door in the Georgian style would have changed the character of the house at the time, presenting a wealthy and impressive outward appearance to the local area and the ability to keep up with the architectural styles of the time period. This elevation is predominantly unchanged (apart from some glass replacement) from that important point in time and has great significance in the more elaborate windows and front door style that have been preserved. The sash windows to the principal rooms have additional side sashes to the central six over six sashes, and the front door has beautiful pediment detailing and fan light with a second set of external French doors acting as shutters to the main door, these are all highly significant.

The rear and mid ranges of the property, and the south gable end of the front range, show evolution of the house through the centuries, of which the windows are the most significant part of that, but the mix of styles and age of materials of the windows confuse these elevations in terms of dating them and the changes, they are not as clearly presented (or documented) as the principal elevation and we can only surmise the time line of changes and additions.

Despite the mix of window styles at the rear of the property this is what gives the house its character today, we consider that they all contribute to the heritage asset as a whole by way of showing that the house has continually evolved over time.

There are several different types of window to the rear of the property, and its quite

possible that most of them sit within an original opening even if the window itself has been replaced, as evidenced by very little disturbance of the brickwork and arched brick lintels to most windows. The physical window openings within the walls of the rear ranges of the house (which date to 17th/18th Century) match similar proportions and with arched window heads, to that of several other listed buildings in the village that were built and evolved through the 17th/18th century; The Rookery, Vine Cottage and The Pond House, all have similar window openings with a mix of 6 or 8 light casements, 2 to 3 casements wide, some with a top hung opening casement of 2 lights. It would therefore seem likely that not only are most of the openings to the rear of Great Offley House historic dating to the casing in brick in the 18th Century, but the windows which are of the same style as those on the other listed buildings in the village are likely original to that time too or replacements that matched the originals, though there are some parts of the windows that have clearly been added such as mid transom weather bars.

There are a few casement windows to the rear of the house, to the north west corner, which differ, some are wider or part of a bay window and the casements themselves have larger panes of glass in them suggesting they are later insertions, the brickwork surrounding them would support this too, they hold less significance than the 6 or 8 light casements, these windows are rather crude in detail.

At the upper level of the rear range there are 5 sash windows which are at odds to the lower older style windows, these are in good condition and look Victorian in style, they have horns to the sashes but a strange configuration of 3 over 3 lights, they are of a slightly squashed height, possibly because they have been made to fit an existing opening, though the proportions of those openings are much larger than the older windows of the ground floor. Suspect they may be Victorian in style but might not be in age, the decorative outer frames may be older. These windows perfectly align to the centre of bedrooms and sit symmetrically on the elevation whereas the lower level windows of the same elevation are unaligned, have no symmetry and have grown out of functional requirement. Whilst the upper level windows have less significance by themselves, they form an interesting composition to the rear elevation which shows the evolution of the house.

The conservatories are modern and of no heritage value, but they are not overly dominant or detrimental to the heritage asset, for the most part because they sit to the least significant side of the house in terms of historic relationship with the outbuildings and hidden from the wider Conservation Area. There have also historically been glass roofed structures adjoining the house on the south side for at least 140 years, therefore they are not out of place.

Aside from windows there are some indications in brickwork on the west elevation of the rear range that indicate possible alterations and additions, such as a partial stringer course of bricks running mid way up the wall and a change in brick and bond pattern in the bottom left corner, but these are not clear and so hold a low significance in telling the history of the house.

3.0 Building Condition & Photos

Building Condition

The house is generally in good condition externally; the roof appears to be in good weather tight condition, brick walls appear in good condition with a few minor cracks to the north end gable and around the windows on the east elevation which may need minor conservation repairs in the near future. The rainwater goods are in working condition, in places in need of a repaint in the next maintenance cycle, there are some complicated gutter junctions where different phases of the house meet, which if not maintained well could cause damp issues.

The rear sash windows and conservatories to the south and west elevations are in good condition.

All other windows are in various states of poor condition, many rear and south side casements being effected by dry rot and the principal elevation windows in need of substantial repairs especially at the base of the window (the bottom sashes and cills).

Heavy, security focussed internal double glazing has been installed within the house which should be replaced for something more sensitive, especially to the principal rooms which have many original features still in place.



Photo of the principal elevation to the east and the north end gables, the Georgian re-fronting, visible from the road to the wider Conservation Area.



Photo of the rear elevation to the west, facing the yard opposite the grade II listed barn.



Photo of the principal elevation Georgian front door with canopy, decorative fan light over and outer French shutter doors.



Photo of the south elevation, with modern conservatories.



Photos of the north elevation at the rear of the house. Sitting adjacent to driveway access between front of house and rear yard and outbuildings.



Photo of the principal elevation Georgian sash windows, 6 over 6 central sashes with 2 over 2 side sashes.

4.0 Proposal

Proposed Works

The application seeks to refurbish the windows of the house and bring them back into good order, a series of repairs are outlined which aim to retain as much of the historic fabric as possible, however the extent of dry rot will require a high level of replacement and in which case the existing windows will be templated to achieve the exact same detailing.

The glazing approach varies dependant on the elevation, again with a priority to retain historic glass where possible, but where it must be replaced (because of the timber casement condition) the opportunity has been sought to improve thermal performance.

The condition of each window and its required repairs/ replacement are detailed in the accompanying documents produced by Sash Window Preservation Ltd.

A summary of the works is as follows:

Principal elevation (east and return gable on north side)

Georgian sash windows & dormer casements

Restore existing sashes/casements and frames retaining as much historic fabric and glass as possible. Some bottom sashes and cills need to be replaced as they are rotten. Overhaul pulleys and redecorate. Install new draft seals and replace existing internal secondary glazing with new thin frame heritage system.

Principal elevation

Front door

Install new internal secondary glazing to fan light over door. Redecorate door and outer French door shutters.

Rear Range

Upper level sashes (5no)

These will be redecorated only, they are in good condition.

South elevation conservatories

There are no works proposed to these.

Rear & mid range and south elevation

Casement windows

These windows are in poor condition with dry rot being identified in all and some too dangerous to open. The outer frames (minus the cills) are possible to retain and repair. The casements and cills too rotten for repair, are proposed to be replaced using the existing windows and cills as a template for the new to ensure exact replicas aesthetically. Given that this will require new glass the proposal is to use vacuum glazing with ‘true’ glazing bars. This glass is thinner than slimline double glazing at 8.4mm thick and therefore has a closer aesthetic to single glazing without the ‘double reflection’, it has better thermal properties than both single and slimline double glazing (and triple glazing) meaning that there is not a requirement for internal secondary glazing in rooms where this is less appropriate including bathrooms and the kitchen which need good ventilation.

South elevation glazed doors

No works are proposed to the doors.

Rear porch (west elevation)

No works are proposed to the rear porch door and windows.

Materials

Repairs to windows will be made in hardwood to match the existing. Where new windows are to be installed these will be in Accoya for longevity, all will be redecorated.

Secondary glazing will be painted aluminium frames.

Glazing will be replacement 4mm float glass to principal elevation and ultra thin Vacuum glazing to replacement windows on other elevations.

Access & Accessibility

There are no changes to access or accessibility to the house, the window repairs do not alter the openings in any way functionally.

5.0 Impact

Impact of design proposals on host asset and wider setting

1. Principal elevation (east and return gable on north side)

Georgian sash windows & dormer casements: Restore existing sashes/casements and frames. Install new draft seals and replace existing internal secondary glazing.

The approach to the principal elevation is to retain as much of the historic fabric as possible, as the sashes, frames and most of the glass are likely original to when the house was re-fronted in 1802. However the condition of the windows and cills are not good, especially the lower halves, it will be necessary to not only repair parts of the frame with hardwood but also to replace some sashes and cills where there is too much rot to salvage them and in which case the glass will be lost too. Replacement parts will be templated from the existing and replacement glass will be 4mm float glass as the best match for the historic glass. The works proposed do have an impact on the heritage of the building as there is loss of some historic fabric but that historic fabric is in a poor condition that requires a level of replacement in order to prevent further damage and loss of the windows entirely. Where possible to retain original fabric that is the priority and overall the restoration of the most significant elevation of the house will have a positive impact on the heritage asset and the wider Conservation Area.

Replacing the internal secondary glazing for more sensitive heritage focused thin frames will reduce the impact that the secondary glazing has on the aesthetic of the internal room and the panelling of the window reveals. The secondary glazing and the draft seals which will be carefully installed to the existing windows allow for improving thermal and sound proofing qualities without the need for greater intervention to the windows themselves such as replacement glass, aiming to retain as much historic fabric as possible with the least impact on the heritage asset.

2. Principal elevation, front door: Install new internal secondary glazing to fan light over door.

This is to reduce draughts through the hallway, the door with external shutters is fairly effective but the fanlight above is single glazed, the secondary glazing will be discreet, can't be seen externally and is reversible so is deemed to have no impact on the heritage asset or wider setting.

3. Rear & mid range and south elevation, casement windows: Repair outer frames, replace rotting casements and cills to match existing, with ultra thin vacuum glazing.

Whilst the approach as with the principal elevation is to retain as much of the historic fabric as possible, to the rear side of the house the frames are repairable but the casements and the majority of cills are in very poor condition suffering with dry rot. It is therefore necessary to replace the casements and any rotting cills. Replacement will be templated from the existing to retain the existing mix of styles that contribute to the

overall character of the house today.

Since all existing glass will be lost due to replacement casements, there is the opportunity to improve the thermal and sound proofing qualities of the windows without the need for internal secondary glazing which impacts on internal aesthetics of the rooms and the functionality of windows. To ensure that the detailing of the new windows which is being templated from the existing windows remains the same and to ensure that the reflection from the glass is not doubled, vacuum glazing is proposed, this has the closest visual aesthetic to single glazing and far out performs thin heritage double glazing from a thermal efficiency factor.

The works proposed do have an impact on the heritage of the building as there is loss of historic fabric but that historic fabric is in a poor condition that requires replacement. Templating the existing windows to make the new windows will retain the current aesthetic of the house and reduce the impact on the heritage asset as much as possible.

The vacuum glazing has a very low impact on the heritage asset and as it is not visible to the wider Conservation Area has no impact on the wider setting, in comparison to thin heritage double glazing which can produce a double reflection and internal secondary glazing which impacts on internal aesthetics and function, the vacuum glazing has less of an impact on the heritage asset than the alternatives for improving thermal efficiency of the house.

4. General redecoration of windows and doors.

Redecorations will be in white, as the existing colour this will have no impact on the heritage asset or the wider Conservation Area. The redecoration, restoring the windows to good condition will have a positive impact on the heritage asset and its setting both visually and protecting the fabric of the building/ensuring longevity of the windows and doors.

Conclusion

Overall, we consider that the proposals respect the heritage asset and the wider view of it within the Conservation Area, where possible every effort will be made to retain historic fabric and if not possible, retain the historic/existing detailing within the new replacement element to ensure the least possible impact on the significance of the building. Unfortunately replacements will be necessary due to poor condition.

New elements: Internal secondary glazing replacement to the principal elevation or vacuum glazing where glass is to be lost on the non principal elevations, balance impact on the heritage against the growing need to improve thermal properties of the buildings we live in. These two systems chosen appropriate to the location within the house, both creating a good improvement to thermal comfort (and sound insulation) with minimal impact on the heritage asset, certainly less than that of alternative methods which were explored or in the case of the secondary glazing an improvement on the existing.