

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/01582/FP & 24/01583/LBC

Date: 23/08/2024

Planning Officer: TR

Address: The Farmhouse at Redcoats, Stevenage Road, Redcoats Green, Little Wymondley, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 7JR

Subject: Alterations to covered oak frame structure providing external cover to courtyard area.

On 24 January 2024 I commented on appn refs: 23/02518/FP & 23/02519/LBC for the '*Retention of covered oak frame structure providing external cover to courtyard area*' for which I raised an objection, and the applications were subsequently withdrawn.

The description for the new applications does not in my opinion adequately describe the proposed works and a more appropriate wording maybe as follows: ***Retain oak-framed pergola in front of rear midstrey to Barn 3 but with gable section above removed. Erection of oak-framed lean-to's either side of midstrey with corrugated metal roofs.***

Before commenting further please note:

- Drawing no.03 is entitled 'Floor Plan'. I advise that this is retitled 'Floor Plan – as built.'
- Drawing no.04 is entitled 'Elevations Existing/Proposed'. I advise that this is retitled 'Elevations – as built.'

Context

Redcoats is a particularly important grouping with a grade II* listed house standing alongside 3no. separately grade II listed former agricultural buildings. The proposal should be considered in the context of Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990, the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031. The proposal does not affect Redcoats Farmhouse Hotel itself but could be considered to affect its wider setting where the barns are an integral part of that setting.

The large L-shaped group of barns seen when approaching the site are grade II listed and described as: ***2 adjoining barns. C17. Timber frame on brick sills, dark weatherboarded with steep-pitched roofs now slated. An L-shaped range of barns in NE corner of yard to E of Redcoats Farmhouse Hotel. Longer N barn probably of 5 bays has several boarded doors. 4-bays E barn has double doors on W in 2nd bay from S and E outshut projection in same bay under catslide continuation of roof. Jowled posts and mid-height rail.*** In terms of its framing, the frontage barn (which was apparently enlarged 60 years ago) is of lesser quality when compared with that of the barn standing perpendicular to the road and has been converted to hotel rooms. The earlier barn forming part of the L-shape range and sitting perpendicular to the road has been converted to the principal function room and is an impressive internal space. The smaller barn directly to the south of the main barn is described in the listing as:

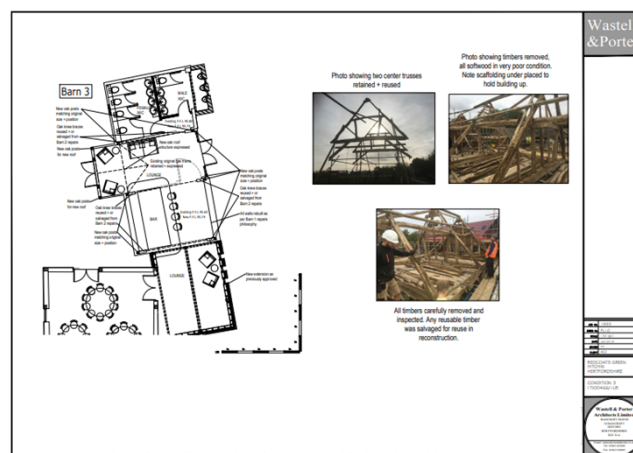
Barn. C17. Timber frame on red brick sill, frame exposed at rear with sandy red brick infill, dark weatherboarding elsewhere. Steep-pitched roof now of corrugated iron. A 3-bays barn facing W with double doors in middle-bay and rear outshut in same bay. Lean-to extension at N end. Jowled posts, straight tension braces, single purlin to each roofslope clasped by inclined straight queen-posts. Included for group value.

On 27 March 2018 under ref: 17/02088/1DOC the following formed part of an 'Approval of Details' letter:

On 3 January 2018, I note that Kate Poyser, Senior Planning Officer, emailed you stating the following:

".... As part of the planning permission and Listed Building Consent, Refs: 17/00465/1 & 17/00466/1LB a Building Survey and Heritage Statement rev C was submitted as part of the proposal. In this document the condition of Barn 3 is described as having deteriorated to the point where reconstruction of the external walls are required. Condition 3 of the Listed Building Consent requires approval of frame members to be replaced or removed. The report for Barn 3 is still outstanding. I therefore consider this matter could be dealt with under Condition 3 and that a new planning or listed building application would not be required....."

The same day you replied by email stating that you would prepare a report to deal with this. On 12 February 2018, drawing no. 1893-PL10 was received, and which sets out the extent of timber retention/replacement and which appears to have been submitted as a substitute for the anticipated report.



As noted, this barn required significant works and was effectively dismantled and rebuilt incorporating a rear midstretey. It is to this building and to the southern gable end of the main barn that the unauthorised covered oak frame structure is attached.

The Local Plan and NPPF

Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 is relevant as are the following paragraphs of the NPPF (2023 version):

- 200 (local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)
- 203 (desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),
- 205 (great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),
- 206 (clear and convincing justification), and
- 208 (harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).

The Proposal

The current unauthorised covered structure sits between the listed barns and another grade II listed building that is the granary. The submitted Design & Heritage Statement says:

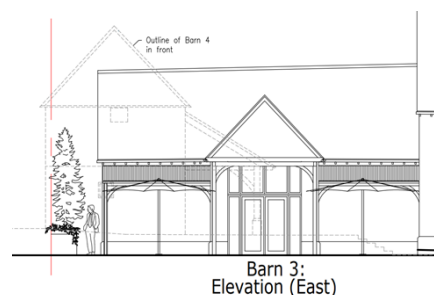
"In October 2023 following discussions with enforcement an application was submitted for the retention of the covered area reference 23/02519/LBC & 23/02518/FP. On the 20th March 2024, these applications were withdrawn as conservation could not support them. We then arranged a meeting on site with conservation and enforcement on the 14th May 2024. At the meeting alternative options were discussed to retain some of the oak structures and the introduction of corrugated roofs to either side of the new section of building. The principal of what might be agreed was then drafted and submitted for further comments. On the 3rd July 2024, comments on the proposed drawings were received with only a few minor alterations to be amended."



I previously inspected the way in which the structure abuts both buildings (see comments under refs: 23/02519/LBC & 23/02518/FP. I previously stated that the functional design and form, materials and scale of the existing structure are visually obtrusive, and the structure fails to respect the historic setting of Redcoats Farmhouse. I previously said that there would be a public benefit in facilitating and maintaining the effective and viable operation at Redcoats and in helping to secure a long-term viable future of these listed buildings and continued public appreciation of their agrarian historic interest. There are also economic benefits from employment opportunities in the business and local spend.

As stated in the DHS, *'the proposed alterations to the existing covered area is to remove the pitched section of roofing and the two sided thus producing a pagoda style structure giving a visual connection between the barns and the granary building. There is an infill with corrugated roofs either side of the gable structure. These will incorporate metal gutters that will be connected via new RWP to the existing soakaway drainage system. The pagoda structure will incorporate a material cover that can provide shelter in the wetter months. This will be incorporated within the structure and the cover will be designed to be retractable.'*

This is illustrated in the plan extract below. The corrugated roof lean-to's either side of the midstreys appear as outshuts and have an agrarian character whilst removing the apex of the tented structure will reveal the weatherboarded gable of the midstreys as originally intended.



Suggested conditions

**** Assuming that if Condition 1 below is ok and the works are then undertaken, there would be no need to impose a 3-year condition on the remainder of the scheme as material start would have been made. If, however, the lean-to's require a time condition then the unnumbered condition below could be added as Condition 2.**

1. The following items shall be removed within 6 months of the date of this decision notice:
 - i) The canvas covering to the existing structure as-built;
 - ii) The oak-framed gable structure above the pergola (which is retained under this consent); and
 - iii) The oak corner posts at the front of the structure as-built and which no longer serve a purpose in the scheme as hereby granted.

Reason: To ensure the removal of unauthorised works within a reasonable period and to ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

2. Details of the roof material for the lean-to's shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the development hereby consented. Thereafter the lean-to roofing shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

3. The new rainwater goods shall be black-painted metal or black metal-effect unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

**** The erection of the lean-to structure either side of the midstrety to Barn 3 shall be begun by not later than the expiration of the period of 3 years from the date of this notice.**

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Recommendation

Paragraph 203 of the Framework states the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Having placed great on the asset's conservation (para 205) and deciding that there is not a clear and convincing justification (para 206) it is then for the decision maker to determine whether the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its

optimum viable use outweighs any harm that may be occasioned to the heritage assets (para 208).

This is a significantly better proposal and the positive engagement with the applicant's architect is welcomed. Unlike my previous reason for refusal, the latest proposal would see a sensitively handled scheme which will sit well against the rear elevation of Barn 3. What is important now is that the works to partially remove the structure as built and to carry the scheme as submitted are controlled via conditions.

Redcoats Farmhouse is grade II* listed and standing alongside are 3no. separately grade II listed former agricultural buildings (an L-shaped barn range, a smaller barn (now rebuilt) and a granary. The proposal will see the removal of a structure that substantially detracts from the appreciation of the weatherboarded built forms behind. The replacement scheme is visually sensitive rather obtrusive respecting the historic agrarian setting to Redcoats Farmhouse and would make a more positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. As such, I raise **NO OBJECTION** as the proposal will satisfy the provisions of Sections 16(2) (LBC) & 66(1) (FP) of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990, the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer