

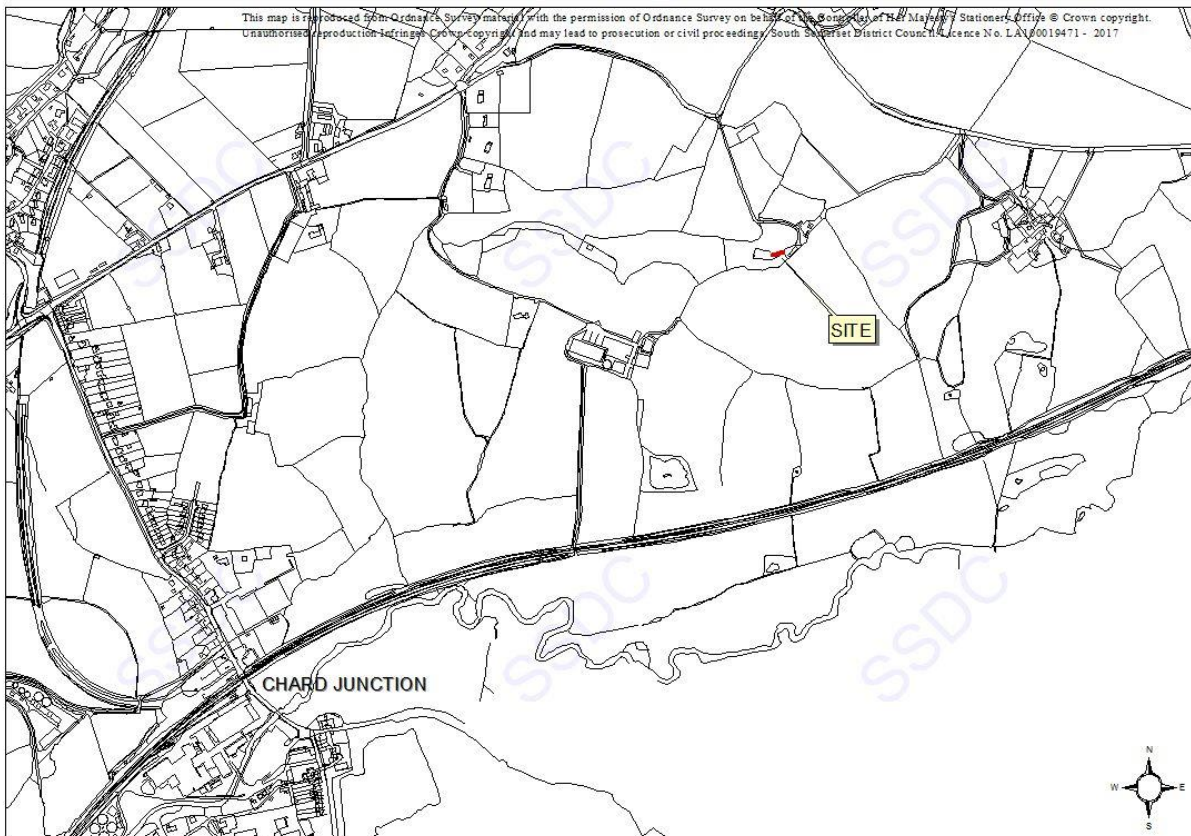
Officer Report On Planning Application: 17/00177/LBC

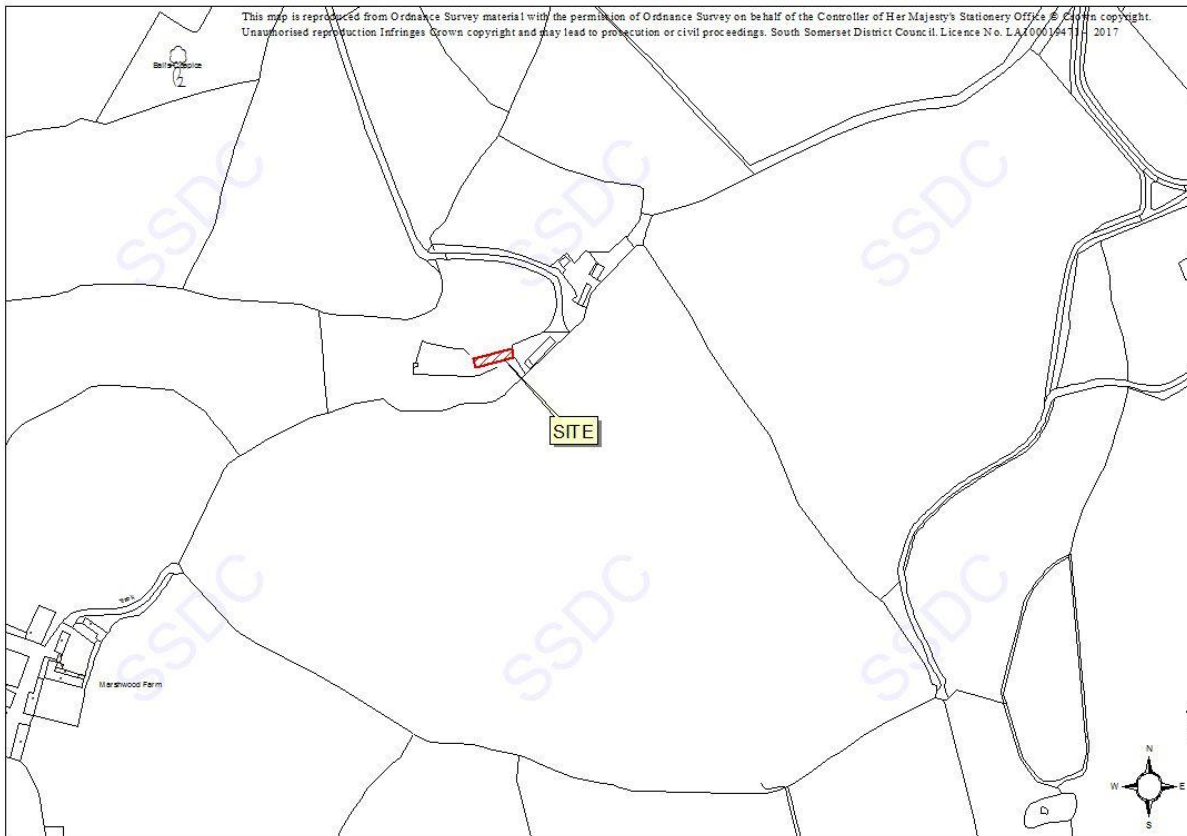
Proposal :	External alterations to windows and doors, replacing soil pipes and rebuilding of east chimney. Various internal alterations to include removal of staircase (part implemented)
Site Address:	Tithe Barn Pye Lane Forton
Parish:	Tatworth & Forton
TATWORTH AND FORTON Ward (SSDC Member)	Cllr A Turpin
Recommending Case Officer:	Rhiannon Selley Tel: (01935) 462510 Email: Rhiannon.selley@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	17th April 2017
Applicant :	Mr & Mrs Pike
Agent: (no agent if blank)	
Application Type :	Other LBC Alteration

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

At the request of the Ward Member and the agreement of the Area Chair this application is referred to committee to discuss the merits of the replacement of the staircase.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL





This application is for the retention and regularisation of unauthorised works to this Grade II listed building.

The Tithe Barn is a stone built vernacular farmhouse set under a thatched roof.

This application was submitted as the result of an enforcement case and subsequent pre-application discussions. Consent is sought to retain previously completed internal and external alterations and to complete uncompleted works, including:

External Works

- Moving kitchen doorway from east gable to south (front) elevation and providing new door
- Removing window from west gable and sealing opening with stonework
- Providing new opening and French doors in west gable
- Changing door to French doors at west end of south elevation
- Replacing majority of timber windows with timber double-glazed windows
- Removing pitch fibre soil pipe and providing cast-iron soil pipes and painted plastic waste pipes on south elevation
- Rebuilding of east chimney and addition of one chimney pot
- Internal Works
- Removing stud partition walls forming cupboards in the kitchen
- Removing staircase from kitchen to upper floor
- Removing partition between west end and central room
- Removing modern wooden winder staircase from south-west corner
- Removing section of floor to central room and insertion of new staircase
- Lining rear of ground floor fire places with brick and covering jambs of west fireplace with brick
- Replacing plasterboard ceilings with new plasterboard ceilings

- Re-plastering and tanking rear wall
- Re-arranging partitions at west end of first floor and re-siting bathroom 17/00760/FUL

RELEVANT HISTORY

15/00189/LB - Enforcement Enquiry

POLICY

Section 16 of the Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act is the starting point for the exercise of listed building control. This places a statutory requirement on local planning authorities to 'have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'

NPPF: Chapter 12 - Conserving and Enhancing Historic Environment is applicable. This advises that 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building; park or garden should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.'

Whilst Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning Act is not relevant to this listed building application, the following policies should be considered in the context of the application:

Policies of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006-2028)
Policy EQ3 - Historic Environment

CONSULTATIONS

Tatworth and Forton Parish Council: Recommend approval

SSDC Conservation Officer: (summary) Much of the work undertaken would be acceptable, or have been justified through this application. The matters that remain an issue are as follows:

The removal of the staircase:

The staircase was in the southwest corner, adjacent to the fireplace. This is a traditional position for a staircase. The walls within the stairwell are curved to accommodate the half spiral of the staircase.

The applicants evaluation of the building indicates that there has been a staircase in this position since approximately 1590, but that the staircase in the stairwell dates from the 1970s.

Provided the staircase did date from the 1970s, there is no loss of historic fabric. What has been lost is the significance of the position of the staircase. This position, at the end wall adjacent to the fireplace is very typical of the 16th century plan form of houses. Historically many have been lost as staircases have moved to other positions in the house, as such the survival of a staircase in this historic position is of great significance. It is unlikely if the staircase, the carcass, replaced in the 1970s would have dated from the 1590's and therefore was one of a number of replacements. Just because the staircase itself was not original does not diminish the significance of the fact that a staircase in that position is historic and is of great historic and architectural interest.

The applicants view is that the remaining circular profile and evidence of the window at floor level on the gable end are sufficient to show their part in the development of the house, and that a more modern style of staircase is likely to have been inserted at some point in the past.

I do not agree that this justifies the removal of the staircase from this position. There are occasions that both staircases survive in the building, the older spiral is not automatically removed. This house has been through its unique evolution, and we should not superimpose a theoretical or typical evolution on this building. There is no evidence that the building could not function as a dwelling with a staircase in this position, and to that extent I consider that this alteration is not justified and is harmful in that it removes a feature of special architectural and historic interest.

Insertion of new staircase and removal of floor:

As indicated above, staircases have been historically inserted in buildings as the use of buildings has evolved. To that end, it may be possible to insert a new staircase.

The new staircase is sited centrally to the house. It is in an open stairwell. That is the area opened up is larger than the staircase, and forms a well in the centre of the house. This has resulted in a loss of fabric in relation to the floor. The elevation states that the floors are mostly modern, but does not elevate the area lost. It would appear that the floor structure could have dated from the late 16th Century.

Whilst I feel that it would be feasible to agree an additional new staircase in the house, without prejudicing my objection the loss of the histrionic position, the position and design of the proposal is sensitive. The opening up of the floor to form an open stairwell that is only partly occupied by the stairs is out of character with this dwelling. It is atypical of buildings of this form to have an open stairwell. There is no justification for this intervention, and whilst the fabric may be 'modern' the final effect is harmful to the significance of the building, which is two storey house with discreet ground and first floors, without the ability to stand on the ground floor and look up without obstruction to the second floor ceiling.

Removal of Ground Floor Partition:

There was a partition between the west room and central room. This appeared to be of modern construction and to be part of the 1970s alterations.

The submitted evaluation has been informative in this respect and shows the line of the wall removed to be consistent with the line of the wall which was part of the three room house in the 1590 to 1599 phase. The wall remained on this line, perhaps replaced in the 1970s, until it was removed in the last few years.

The line of this wall is of significance to the historic plan form of the building. Whilst the wall may not have been original, its position was historic and was part of the significance of the house.

The harm to the building overall is less than substantial. We need to make that judgement. Harm remains harm and there is a statutory bar in place, and the NPPF's requirement that great weight should be given to the conservation of the asset.

Overall the applicant has undertaken a large amount of acceptable work to this building, albeit without consent. For me the cumulative levels of harm from the three identified elements to the special architectural and historic interests of the building are such that the impact is towards the higher end of less than substantial harm. I am of the view that alterations undertaken are harmful and not justified, in the context of the statutory requirements and those of the NPPF. I consider that features of special interest which the building possesses have been lost and that these changes are harmful to the significance of this listed building.

Historic England: The removal of the staircase and floor are defined as substantial demolition within

statute. We are therefore required to consult Historic England.

(Summary) The heritage significance of the Tithe Barn is derived from the evidence that survives within the fabric, the form the building takes and its layout. The historical, evidential and aesthetic interest of the building contributes to its overall significance as a multi-phased former farmhouse and agricultural building with historic links to nearby wealthy and influential landowners.

We previously advised that alterations to the western stone stair access that involved the removal of a winder staircase, the filling in of a window opening and the insertion of a double door at ground level has caused significant levels of harm by removing an understanding of the function of the staircase in providing access to the first floor and that these unauthorised works have negatively impacted on the way the historic use of the building is appreciated. We acknowledge that based on photographic evidence supplied by the applicant that the staircase that was removed is likely to have been a modern timber replacement that probably little resembled the original, but its position and continuing use indicated the historic relationship between the two levels and the form and function of the stair turret. There is some doubt whether the window opening was historic but in the absence of any evidence to the contrary it must be assumed that it is. The net result of the works has been to diminish the character of this part of the building and to obscure its legibility therefore we advise that they are reversed and a staircase is reinstated in materials and of a design to be mutually agreed between the local authority and the applicant.

Our advice regarding the addition of a central staircase is that its location, scale and appearance is not in keeping with the proportions indicated by the ground floor ceiling heights and floor levels and is contrary to the historic plan form and hierarchy of space congruent with a modest farmhouse. The cellular plan form has been all but lost by the removal of internal partitions, and it is noted that in recent estate agent particulars that masonry wall nibs had been retained in principal rooms indicating the position of the main partitions but they have now been removed and this is regrettable. This, in conjunction with the other works detailed above has contributed to a loss of legibility of individual spaces within the building.

The removal of the winder staircase at the western end and the insertion of a feature stair case in a prominent central position within a large ceiling void, seen as a whole, have served to erode and undermine the Tithe Barn's inherent character causing considerable harm to the overall heritage significance of the asset. These are works that would not have been supported at a proposal stage.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Paragraph 132 states that 'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.' The level of harm is considered to be less than substantial but we have not been made aware of any public benefits that would accrue from the regularisation of these unauthorised works to outweigh this level of harm.

Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds.

We recommend that the unauthorised works detailed above are reversed reducing the harm caused to the heritage asset. We acknowledge that the previous first floor configuration and stair access was not conducive to family life but consider that an alternative form and position be sought under advisement from the local authority which is more sympathetic to the character of Tithe Barn.

REPRESENTATIONS

One representation was received offering support for the proposal.

CONSIDERATIONS

As can be seen from the comments of Historic England and the Conservation Officer, there is concern about the proposed and implemented internal works and the subsequent impact upon this historic listed building. Both of these commentators agree that the level of harm is considered to be less than substantial but is not justified in the context of the statutory requirements and those of paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Less than substantial harm is not a less than substantial objection and should not be taken as an indicator that consent should be granted.

It is noted that the applicant considers the proposals are justified to facilitate family living. However; the conservation officer is of the view that they are harmful and this does not constitute a clear and convincing justification as required by the NPPF. Whilst he is, in general terms, amenable to change to buildings to allow them to be relevant to the 21st Century, these changes should be based on what is appropriate for the building, not changes imposed on them on the basis of the owner's desires.

As per the Conservation Officer's comments, the majority of the works would gain consent however, the harm from the removal of the staircase at the western end of the building, the removal of the floor and insertion of a staircase in the centre of the building; and the removal of the cross wall to the west end have such an impact that consent should not be granted. I also note the proposed painted plastic waste pipes; during pre-application advice the conservation officer confirmed that these should be metal. To clarify, the conservation officer's position is that the timber winder staircase to the south west has been in position for over 400 years; this is highly significant and should be replaced. He does not object to the new staircase within the centre of the building to facilitate family living, he does however object to the large hole left in the floor and would close the void and relocate the staircase.

The applicant has been offered the opportunity to revisit the internal works to the building with a view to negotiating an acceptable way forward, but they have indicated that whilst they are happy to discuss the application, they do not wish to amend the location of the staircase. To address the Conservation Officer's concerns regarding the removal of the staircase at the western end of the building, the applicant has proposed the positioning of sections of limestone stepped into the plaster of the former stairwell. This is to give an indication of the existence of a former winder staircase in this position. In addition to this the applicant has suggested installing a timber head plate with mortices at the approximate frequency of studs, to be fixed to the underside of the ceiling in the position where a former partition existed. This is with the aim of addressing the Conservation Officer's concerns regarding the removal of the cross wall to the west end of the building. Verbal comments from the conservation officer note that these proposals do not adequately address his concerns. Any detailed comments received from the Conservation Officer will be relayed verbally at committee.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons considered above and in accordance with Section 16 of the Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act, Policy EQ3 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006), and Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012. It is not considered that the application can be supported.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse for the following reason

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The proposed alterations by reason of the loss of loss of the historic plan form, and the introduction of an alien open hallway in the centre of the building would be detrimental to the special architectural and historic qualities of the Grade II listed building. There is a lack of clear and convincing justification to demonstrate that any benefit outweighs the great weight to be given to

conservation of heritage assets. The proposal is therefore contrary to Section 16 of the Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act, policy EQ3 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006) and Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.
