

PROPOSALS FOR
WOODFOLD VILLA
nr. BLACKBURN, LANCASHIRE
SPECIALIST DESIGN REVIEW COMMENT
PARA 80e



WOODFOLD VILLA - NORTH ELEVATION

Jeremy Musson, MPhil, FSA

August 2022

JEREMY MUSSON

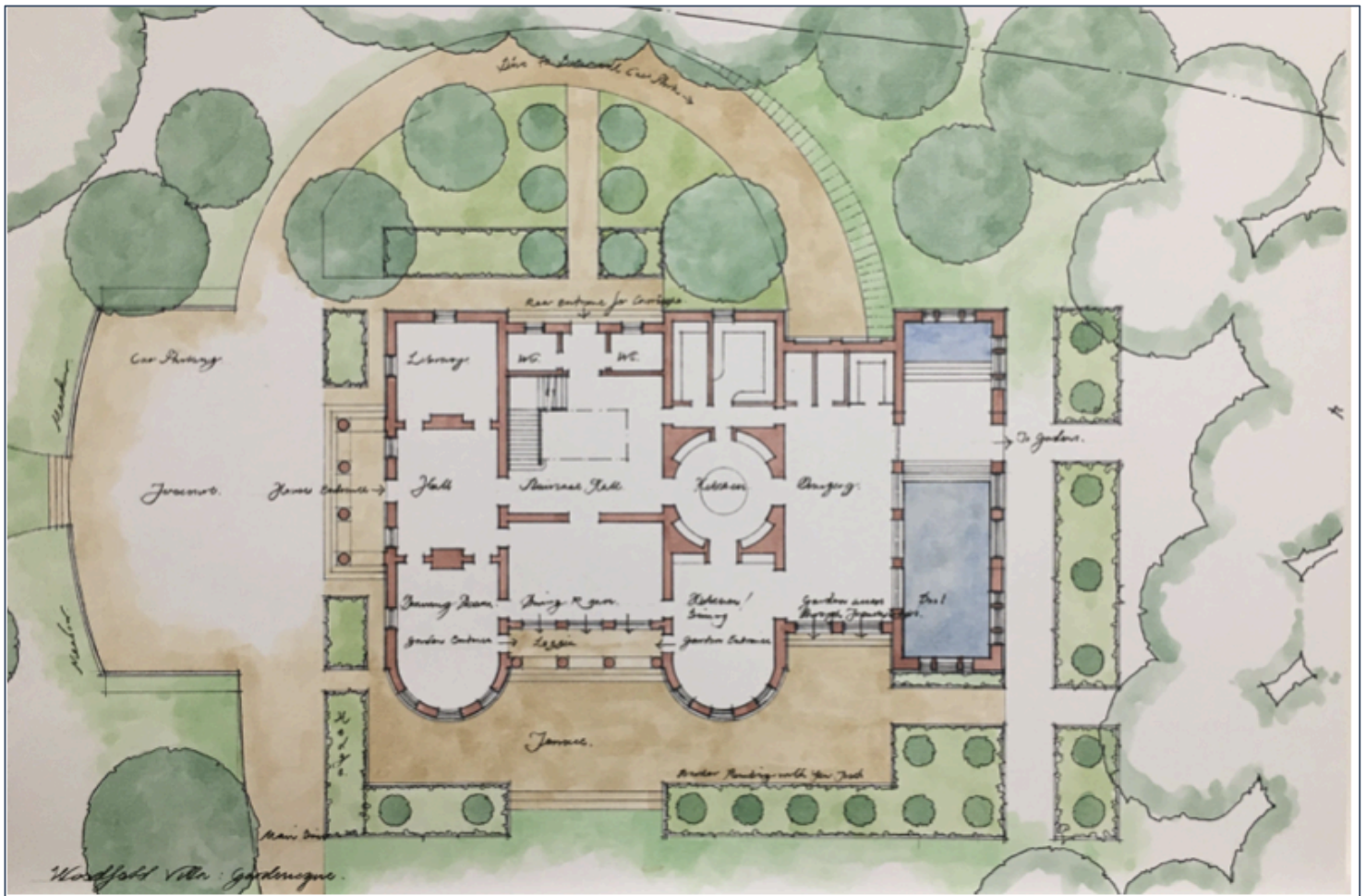


Figure 1: The gardenesque setting of the proposed Woodfold Villa.

THE REPORT AUTHOR

Jeremy Musson, LLB, MPhil, FSA

Jeremy Musson is an architectural historian, author and a design and historic buildings consultant, with a special expertise in the English country house. He studied at UCL and the Warburg Institute, London. Architectural Editor of *Country Life* 1997-2008, since 2008, he has worked on major advisory projects including on Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire. He is author of many books on country houses including *The English Manor House* (1999), *How to Read a Country House* (2005) and *The Country House Ideal* (2015) and am a trustee of the Historic Houses Foundation. He has been giving expert opinion on proposals under para 80e and its predecessors for a number of years.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report gives a specialist design review of the proposed new house, Woodfold Villa, for the specified site, and for which permission is sought under the provisions of NPPF para 80e; I have been asked to review the revised designs developed by Francis Shaw of Shaw and Jagger. As a result of this review, I write therefore in support of the current proposal as an example of truly outstanding architecture, as required by the NPPF para 80e.

The analysis I give is also rooted in a review of the defining characteristics within the local area for some distance around, informed by the excellent character assessment by Ian Dieffenthaler, as well as by an assessment of the outstanding country houses of the region, locally and further afield. NPPF Para 80 e, rightly sets the highest bar requires the architecture to be exceptional and outstanding. The report also considers the experience and track record of the designer involved in the evolution of the current proposal, its landscape setting and environmental credentials.

2. MY LOCUS TO COMMENT AS DESIGN REVIEWER

I am an architectural historian, author and a design and historic buildings consultant. I studied at UCL and the Warburg Institute, London. Architectural Editor of Country Life 1997-2008, I have worked, since 2008, on major advisory projects including Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire. I am also author of many books on country houses including The English Manor House (1999), How to Read a Country House (2005) and The Country House Ideal (2015) and am a trustee of the Historic Houses Foundation. I have been giving expert opinion on proposals under para 80e and its predecessors for a number of years. In the preparation of this report I have been supported by Helen Bradbury, Heritage and Design Consultant.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Having reviewed the preliminary studies and reports, and the design documentation, and the 2022 TAG review, and having visited the site and surrounding area in August 2022, I now write in support of the current para 80e proposal for a new house, Woodfold Villa, which fulfils the criteria of NPPF para 80e guidelines.

Namely I find that the design is 'of exceptional quality, in that it is truly outstanding, 'reflecting the highest standards in architecture', and would 'help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas'.

I note that the architect is a versatile and experienced practitioner, with a proven track record of designing and constructing exceptional new country houses in the traditional spirit with a good understanding of historic architecture generally. Mr Shaw has taken a deeply researched approach and his developed a 'narrative' which sets out the idea for the proposal, which gives confidence in this elegant design.

The traditional rules of classical design and proportion inform this contemporary neo-classical design. Both elevation and plan form, echo the finest traditions of country house design, as realised in the original 1790s Woodfold Hall, and other works of James Wyatt, and his nephew Jeffry Wyatt, later known as Wyatville.

Numerous classical country houses were sadly demolished across the county of Lancashire in the twentieth century, and part of the excitement of the current proposal is the opportunity is to create a new landmark building in this tradition, which does honour to those lost houses, once such an integral part of Lancashire heritage.

Around 75-80 country houses are listed as demolished on the Lost heritage website, and these include such prominent local classical houses as Fennisowles Hall and Pleasington New Hall, only a few miles from the current site, as well as other examples further afield in the county such as Aldington Hall, Hulton Park and Duxbury Hall.

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There have been very few modern neo-classical country houses of this design ambition realised in the later twentieth and early twenty first century, and an exemplary project which should be a reference point for new domestic work in traditional styles. Within the locality is an especially fine classical mid twentieth century country house, Gledstone Hall, designed by Lutyens in around 1925, which speaks of classical continuity.

It is also clear that the proposed house, with its fine stonework and detailing, and the carefully considered proposed new landscaping in the Reptonian spirit, 'would significantly enhance its immediate setting', which currently is a modest field with modern timber stables and a backdrop of trees, themselves the remnant of a planned park landscaping of a former era.

It is proposed that the house will be faced in locally quarried stone. Furthermore, by placing the design in the long classical tradition, which percolated into the vernacular stone farm house and village houses of the north-east of England, with deep plans and low-pitched roofs, echoed in the refined proposal. It can be said be 'sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area'.

For the reasons set out above in this report, I would commend this project for approval.



Figure 2: Proposed landscape plan, 2022.

4. PARA 80e DESIGN PROPOSAL FOR WOODFORD VILLA, 2022



Figure 3: The site and surrounding landscape today.

The proposal under review is for a substantial new neo-classical residence, under the provisions of NPPF para 80e, in a rural location in the Lancashire countryside close to Blackburn. The design has been drawn up by Francis Shaw of Shaw and Jagger, a well-established Yorkshire-based practice with a good track record of new build and renovation of historic buildings in the region. The house will be for occupation and use of the client, Majid Hussain from Blackburn.

I visited the site in August 2022, and walked the area of the proposed buildings to ascertain its relationship to the established treeline and the views, across the 17-acres subject to this application site, and beyond; and its wider relationship to the existing buildings associated with the former Woodfold Hall estate.

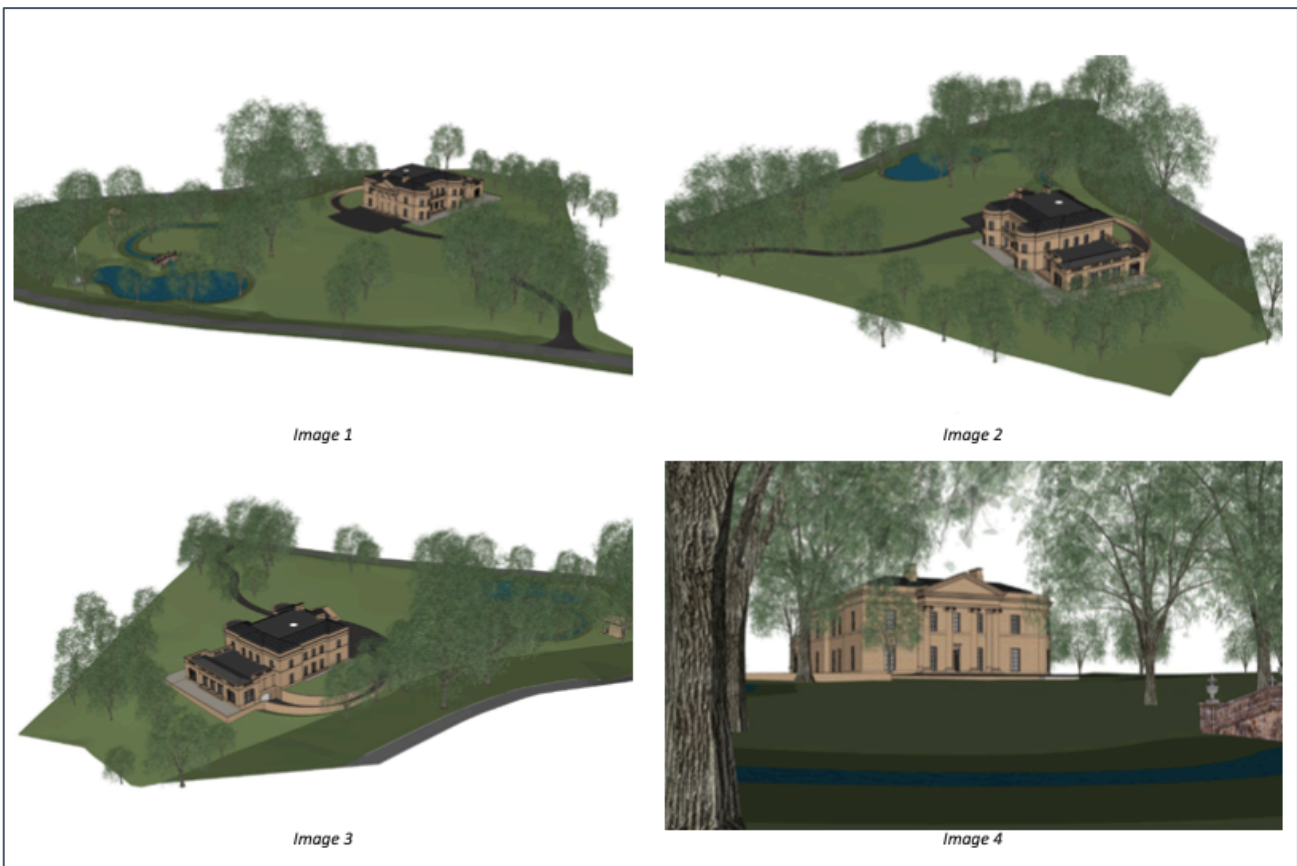


Figure 4: CGI of the five acres around the house (within the 17 acre proposed renewed parkland).

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During this visit, I also viewed several of the villages associated with the former estate, Pleasington, Fenniscowles and Samlesbury Bottom, and in the locality generally, Hoghton, Riley Green and others, including the nearby outskirts of Blackburn itself, to make an additional assessment of the defining characteristics and local building traditions. This experience emphasised the quality of the landscape too – its particular undulating and well tree-ed landscape, and the sensation of sudden reveal and enclosure which this type of landscape brings.

I noted especially the strong stonemason tradition, and the loosely neo-classical character of much local vernacular architecture, village houses and terraces, and the presence of surviving well designed gate lodges associated with the Woodfold Hall estate.

I also observed a number of late Georgian, Regency and Victorian classical houses, including Hoghton Hall, and Spring Mount, Pleasington, as well as the principal farmhouse on Peel Green in nearby Hellifield, all examples of the long classical vernacular tradition of the region. I have previously studied and visited several Georgian country houses in Yorkshire and Lancashire and am familiar with several of best examples of the period.



Figure 5: The stonemason tradition of local village houses.



Figure 6: Classical gate lodges associated with Woodfold Hall



Figure 7: Larger stone houses in the surrounding area.

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In addition to the site visit, I have also read and referenced the submissions of Shaw & Jagger, prepared for the pre-app and additional papers since, and the review by the peer review design panel report (May 31, 2022) of the TAG group of RIBA, which clearly recognises the outstanding and exceptional quality of the design.

The choice of style for such houses is much debated, but it is clear that style is not defined or prescribed in any way in the NPPF para 80e guidance, rather, and rightly, it is the order of excellence achieved in any given style or design approach. This provides a special emphasis on quality, on raising standards of building in local areas, and the degree of appropriateness demonstrated to local building traditions and defining characteristics of local architecture.

This always presents an interesting challenge, to be both outstanding, and to be contextual to a place. It is in some cases clear that the more traditional designs, engaging with the latest technology and up to date approaches to sustainability, actually provide some of the best opportunities to reflect local building characteristics and traditions.

The ‘narrative’ which has informed this design is one rooted in the story of Blackburn, and in the story of the former Woodfold Hall estate, a huge estate founded by a Blackburn ‘merchant prince’, Henry Sudell - the house was reduced to a shell in the twentieth century and nearly demolished, but in the end was restored and converted to flats.

Mr Shaw provides an engaging account of the key story of Woodfold Hall itself, a nine-bay house of the 1790s, with a fine classical portico. The design of Woodfold Hall has been traditionally been attributed to James Wyatt, including by the late Giles Worsley, in *Architectural Drawings of the Regency Period*, 1991, p.68) where he notes the influence of Wyatt’s late style on his nephew Jeffry, who he thought might have assisted on the Woodfold Hall drawings and execution of the work there.



Figure 8: Drawing of Woodfold Hall from the 1831 sales particulars.



Figure 9: Woodfold Hall, as recently converted into flats after a long period of dereliction.

More recently Woodfold Hall has been ascribed to a Charles McNiven, a local surveyor whose name is associated with the project in a contemporary newspaper notice. McNiven may have, perhaps, just been the executant architect-builder and landscapist, executing a plan by drawn up James Wyatt.

The documentary evidence for this is lost, but Mr Shaw makes a good case in his extensive report. I also note that in the recent *Buildings of England; Lancashire North*, 2009, (p.454), the attribution to McNiven is still given by revising author Clare Hartwell, but with the explicit question as to whether such an assured design could be the only known house designed by a surveyor.

The significant point is that the proposed new house is conceived as a ‘entertainment villa’ to the Woodfold Hall estate, imagined as an additional house built for entertaining on the extensive estate, with its various late-Georgian buildings including stables and lodges.

The seventeen acres subject to this application are to be landscaped in the Reptonian manner entirely suitable to a neo-classical house, which will not only be of merit in themselves but also restore something of the lost parkland of the Woodfold Hall estate. This landscaping is devised by Mr Shaw and Ian Dieffenthalle, with advice from landscape consultant DRaW (UK) Ltd, who also produced the Landscape View Assessment (see overleaf).



Figure 10: Proposed landscape plan, 2022.

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Woodfold Villa should be the villa architecture of James Wyatt’s nephew, Jeffry Wyatt (later Sir Jeffry Wyattville) who had worked for his uncle James, possibly even on Woodfold Hall itself, but was also at the height of his reputation in the 1820s. It is suggested a new additional ‘entertainment villa’ might have been added to the estate by Sudell at this date, had he not had to sell up his extensive estates.

The chosen style of the proposed house is self-consciously within the well observed neo-classical style of the early nineteenth century, a time when the country house enjoyed perhaps its greatest reputation. Indeed, it echoes closely attractive houses designed by Jeffry Wyatt, namely Dinton Hall, Wiltshire— now known as Philipps House - and Stubton Hall, Lincolnshire.

The design aims at a refinement in architectural quality, and a generous organisation in plan which reflects the best of the neo-Classical country house tradition; this was, after all, as explained in John Martin Robinson’s *The Regency Country House*, the era when the pattern of country house life and entertainment reached a form which persisted well into the twentieth century, and indeed still informs it today.

The narrative also draws on the association with a lost manor house near this site, Shorrock Green Hall, and that there is also a good amount of surviving woodland planting associated with the eighteenth-century landscaping of Woodfold Hall, presumably introduced by Charles McNiven for Sudell. Thus, the new house is proposed as offering a new focal point, with glimpses of other elements associated with the former Woodfold Hall estate. Substantial area of new planting in the Reptonian manner will screen the house from the former stables, now converted into several residences.

The principal front, of five bays with an Ionic portico, is a subtle and harmonious composition, deriving its quality from careful proportions, and a studied neo-classical plainness. It faces north towards the long horizon views. The west elevation is in effect a five-bay core, framed by single bay pavilion style ends with double-height bows with three tall sash windows to each bow.



Figure 11: Proposed north and west elevations. Francis Shaw, Shaw & Jagger, 2022.

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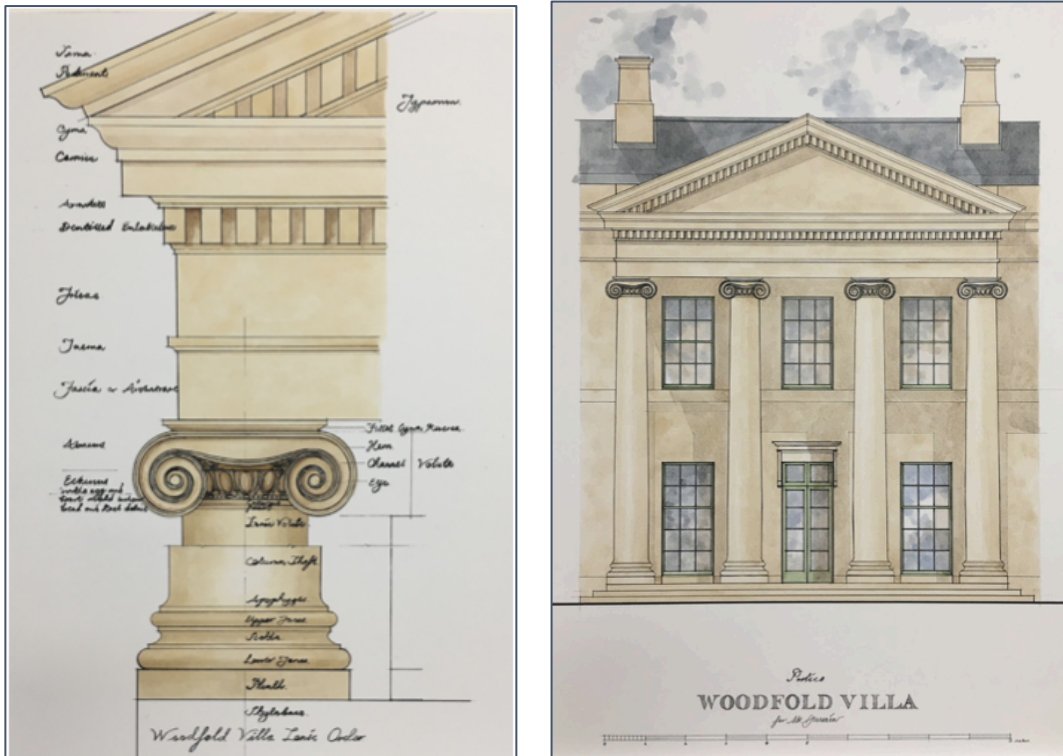
This elevation is elegantly modulated with the glazed in loggia - echoing the open loggia of the G.S.Repton-designed Sheringham Hall - allowing enjoyment of distant views. The roof of the loggia, behind a stone parapet with decorative open ironwork panels, forms a balcony for rooms on the first floor.

A third element, fully engaged in the house, but distinct when seen from the exterior, is an orangery and pool house combined, which echo the plainly detailed but often extensive conservatories which were popular in the early nineteenth century, not only as winter gardens but as homes for collections of birds - as for instance at Wyatville's Stubton Hall – Wyatville also designed the conservatory at Longleat.



Figure 11: Above: proposed south elevation with pool and conservatory combined. Below: Proposed west elevation. Francis Shaw, Shaw & Jagger, 2022.

This part of the building reads as an extended winter garden/conservatory and is kept to a single-storey across the southern face of the proposed house, with a central glazed Ionic loggia, framed by the characteristic tripartite windows of the Wyatt dynasty, as seen at Wyatt's Heaton Hall and Wyatville's Dinton Hall. The need for further garaging and outbuildings is dispensed with by the use of a basement level of parking.



Watercolour of the Ionic Order detail and full portico for Woodfold Villa , by Francis Shaw.

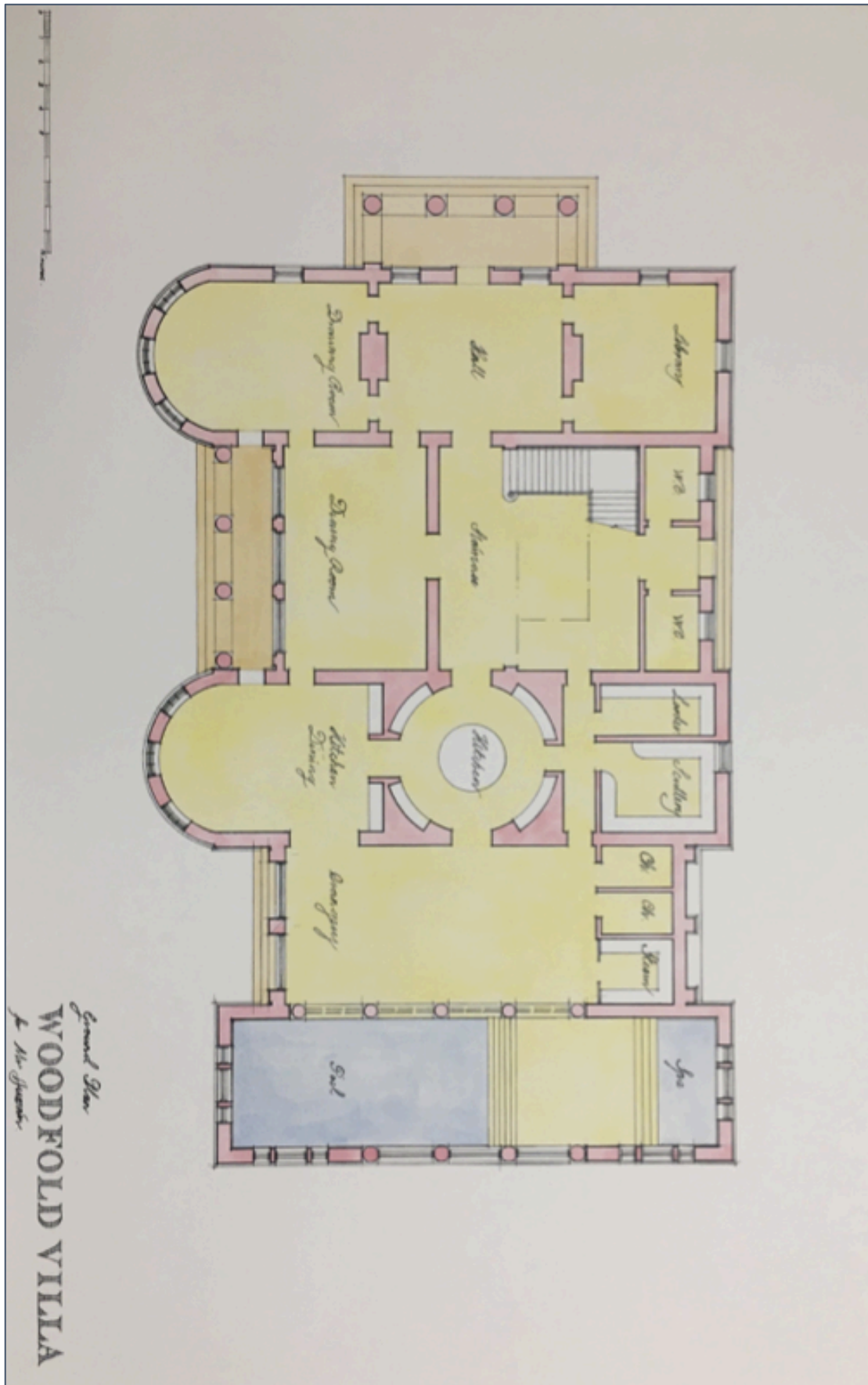
The interior plan is an exemplary arrangement broadly in the Regency country house tradition around a full height, galleried top-lit staircase hall, with a library, entrance hall and drawing room on the north side, and the dining room, kitchen/dining room (to the west) and orangery for informal social gatherings, and this is open to the pool house making a very pleasant and modern interior on the south side of the house (see overleaf).

The proposed landscape plan makes full use of the existing tree back drop and introduces a substantial amount of new planting around the boundary of Woodfold Park Farm, and creating a new area of park with informal planting of single trees, between the site of the proposed house and Cook's Farm, all framed by the lane on the north west side.

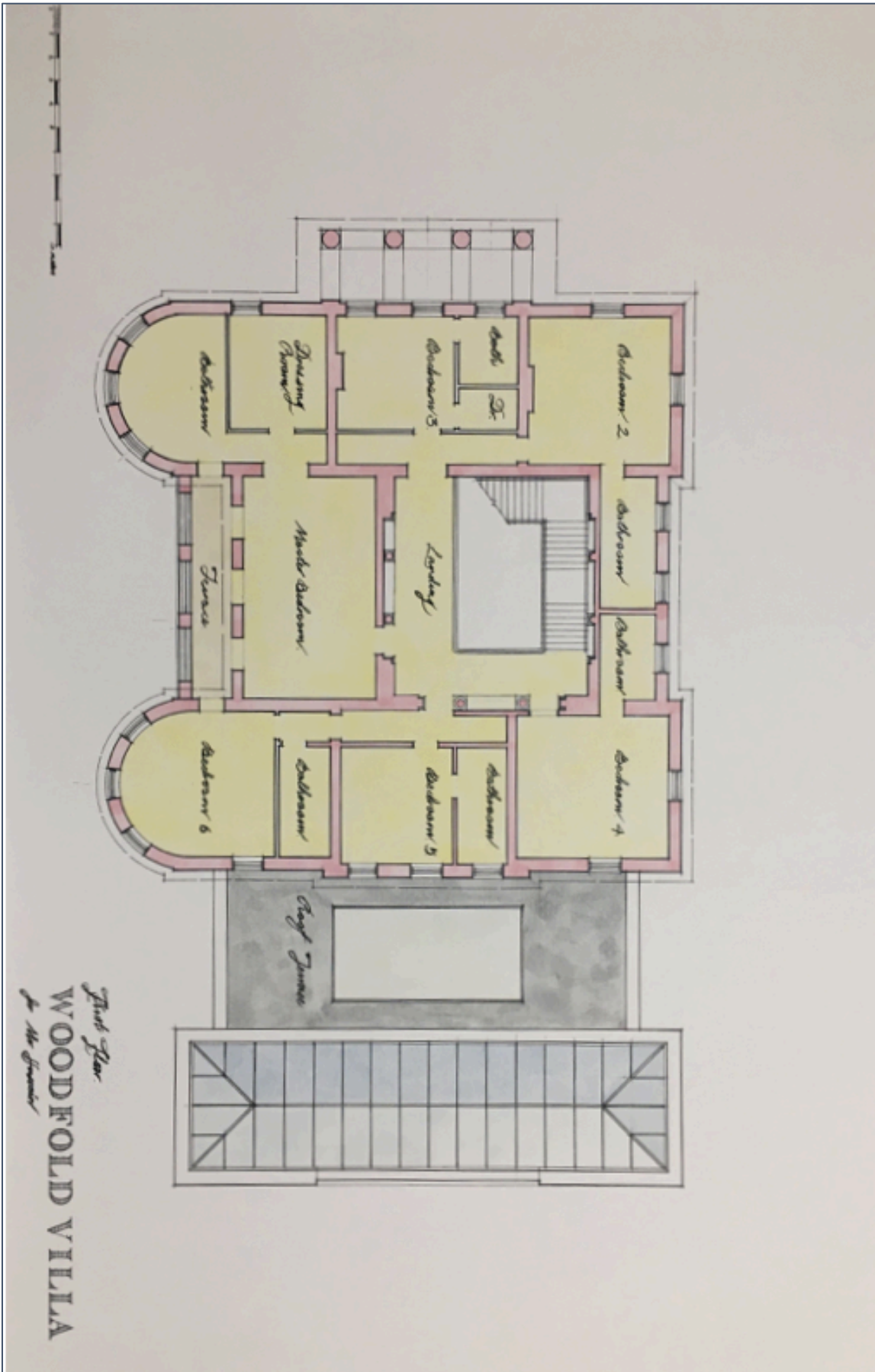
Two garden buildings are proposed, and a lake and serpentine stream are proposed around the east and north of Woodfold Villa. Formal flower terraces are to be kept, in the Reptonian manner, only in the immediate vicinity of the house, ornamental shrubbery is proposed to enhance the setting of the new lake.

The house as proposed would, of course, be the principal eye-catcher in itself, a fine neo-classical form to be glimpsed from distant points and through trees. It would be both a dream house of a family, and a homage to the historic Woodfold estate. The elevations, in local stone ashlar, will be plain and elegant, only the upper register of the bows enlivened centrally with a coade stone type relief.

All in all, this a carefully wrought and thoughtful neo-classical design, aiming to be the equal of the fine Regency houses which have inspired it in architectural presence and character, which combined with the landscaping, would form an outstanding ensemble.



Proposed Ground Floor. Francis Shaw, Shaw & Jagger, 2022.



Proposed First Floor. Francis Shaw, Shaw & Jagger, 2022.

5. THE DESIGNER

The designer of the Woodfold Villa proposal is Francis Shaw, RIBA, managing director of Shaw and Jagger. Mr Shaw trained in architecture at Bristol and Edinburgh Universities, and has worked on a number of award-winning large commercial and retail mixed use schemes, across the UK and in the Middle East. He formed Shaw and Jagger in 2011, with Ed Jagger RIBA, and they work across a range of styles and types of projects.

Mr Shaw has also been responsible for the renovation of a number of ruined historic buildings, notably his own Hellifield Peel Castle, which was featured on Channel 4's Grand Designs. The latter has the distinction of being the first recorded example of a scheduled ancient monument to be converted to a private residential use. He has also restored the eighteenth-century accommodation of the ruinous Mingary Castle, the works there completed in 2016.

Mr Shaw has also designed an Arts and Crafts-inspired country house in Lancashire, Crossley Hall, on an estate where the historic house had been demolished in the 1960s, leaving an extensive stable yard. The new house, completed in 2018, was constructed partly within the historic walled garden.

Thus it is clear that Mr Shaw is a highly experienced and versatile architect, with an acute sense of historical tradition, and a track record of delivering buildings of scale and character.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Having reviewed the preliminary studies and reports, and the design documentation, and the TAG review, with some understanding of the work of Mr Shaw, and having visited the site and surrounding area, I now write in support of the current para 80e proposal for a new house, Woodfold Villa, which fulfils the criteria of NPPF para 80e guidelines.

Namely, I find that the design is 'of exceptional quality, in that it is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas'. There have been few neo-classical houses of this design ambition realised in the later twentieth and early twenty-first century, and an exemplary project should be a reference point for new domestic work in traditional style.

It is also clear that the proposed house, with its fine stonework and detailing, and the carefully considered proposed new landscaping in the Reptonian spirit, 'would significantly enhance its immediate setting', which currently is a modest field with modern stables and a backdrop of trees, themselves the remnant of a planned park landscaping of a former era'.

By being built in locally quarried stone, and by placing the design in the long classical tradition associated with the north-east of England, it is evident it will be 'sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area'.

As mentioned above, numerous classical country houses were sadly demolished across the county of Lancashire in the twentieth century, and part of the excitement of the current proposal is the opportunity is to create a new landmark building in this tradition, which does honour to those lost houses, once such an integral part of Lancashire heritage.

Some 75-80 country houses are listed as demolished on the Lost Heritage website, and these include such prominent local classical houses as Fennisowles Hall and Pleasington New Hall, as well as other examples further afield in the county such as Aldington Hall, Hulton Park and Duxbury Hall (Woodfold Hall is also listed no doubt reflecting its sad history of decay and conversion in the twentieth century.

For the reasons set out above in this report, I would commend this project for approval.

Jeremy Musson, August 2022



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