

**HERITAGE STATEMENT TO SUPPORT PLANNING APPLICATION
FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW DWELLING
AT FIR TREE HOUSE, 51 DOWNHAM ROAD, CHATBURN**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This heritage statement has been produced to support a planning application to Ribble Valley Borough Council, for the construction of a new detached dwelling in the grounds of Fir Tree House, Chatburn, with new highway access. It has been written by Stephen Haigh MA, on the instruction of the applicants Duncan and Jackie Gavan. A site visit was made by the writer on 6 December 2021.
- 1.2 This statement relates to the scheme drawings dated 6 November 2022, which were extensively revised to take account of the council's Pre-Application Enquiry Response of 18 May 2022¹.

2 Relevant heritage assets

- 2.1 The site lies within the Chatburn Conservation Area, designated in 1974, and a designated heritage asset under the terms of the NPPF. Its special interest is described at length in the adopted appraisal².
- 2.2 Within the conservation area appraisal, both Fir Tree House, and the neighbouring house at 53 Downham Road (to the other side of the proposed development), are noted on the appraisal map as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, and are otherwise identified as "Buildings of Townscape Merit".
- 2.3 The appraisal identifies a number of "important views" within the conservation area: none of these take in the application site.
- 2.4 "55 and 57 Downham Road" is a grade II listed building³, comprising a pair of houses of circa 1800. They adjoin the east end of no. 53.
- 2.5 Planning law places a statutory duty on decision makers to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. The NPPF states that "When considering the impact of a

¹RV/2022/ENQ/00008

²The Conservation Studio 2005/6 *Chatburn Conservation Area Appraisal*

³National Heritage List, entry 1072167

proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation".

- 2.6 This statement assesses the significance of the relevant parts of the conservation area, and the impact of the proposals on them.

3 Heritage assessment of the existing property and other relevant buildings

- 3.1 The site lies towards the eastern edge of the village, on the south side of Downham Road (NGR: SD 77238 44216). Fir Tree House is a substantial, detached, two-storey dwelling, likely to be early nineteenth century or perhaps slightly earlier in origin. It has a large garden to the south, which is informally but clearly divided into two parts by a tall stone wall running perpendicular to the house, and which contains a detached garage and other outbuildings, as well as a tennis court to the south-east of the house, which is the approximate location of the proposed new dwelling.

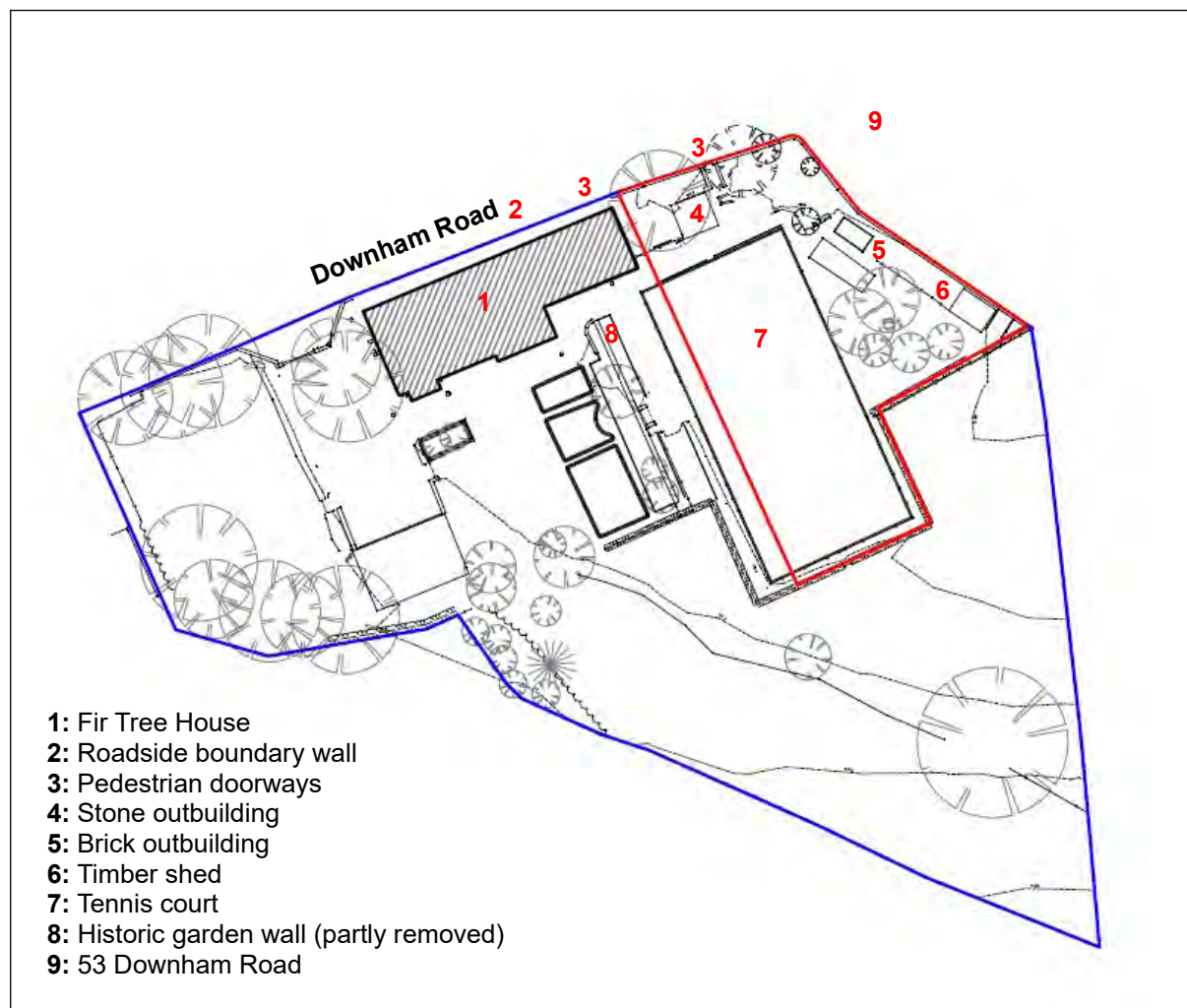


Figure 1: Site plan, existing

- 3.2 The rear of the house stands close to Downham Road, separated from it by a stone boundary wall with triangular coping, which steps down to the main gateway to the west of the house, whose ornate stone posts are set back from the road (photo 1 below). Two pedestrian gateways to the property are located to the east of the house, within the full-height part of the boundary wall, which continues to meet a similar wall, close to and adjoining 53 Downham Road (photos 2 & 3 below).
- 3.3 The rear of Fir Tree House is rendered, and contains a number of windows of different forms, some with plain mullions, and which include the prominent, arched, stair window.
- 3.4 The south front (photo 4) is of coursed limestone with sandstone dressings and stone slate roof, and is generally fairly plain except at its west end, where there is a prominent bay window of sandstone ashlar with moulded parapet to its flat roof, and with a large tripartite opening on both floors. A narrower, single-storey wing projects eastwards from the gable; historic maps indicate that this has been extended to its present length, and some aspects of its appearance are indubitably modern.

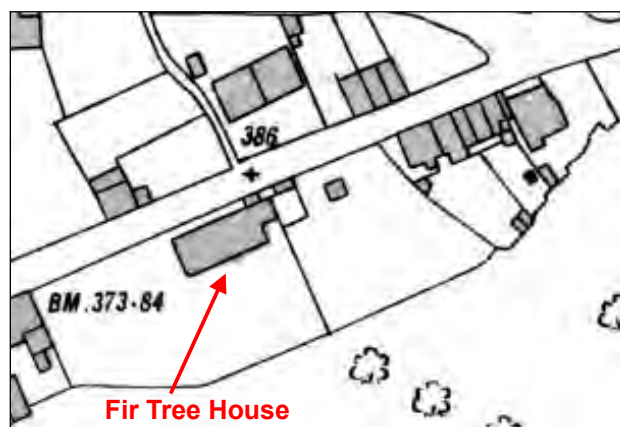


Figure 2: OS 1:2500 map, 1932

- 3.5 Within the grounds, the main gateway leads to a gravel drive, with modern detached garage to the south-west of the house. There is a patio to the front of the house, and a stone boundary wall aligned perpendicular to it which formerly continued up to the single-storey wing, but the removal of the wall's northern end means that it is now detached from the extended house; its south end ramps down to terminate within the garden, where it formerly adjoined another boundary (now removed). The surviving part of this wall (photo 5) is approximately 2m tall and of traditional construction with triangular coping, so closely resembles that to the rear of the house along Downham Road, and is an

important historic feature of the site, which formerly separated the main garden from an enclosure (such as a paddock) to the east.

- 3.6 To the east of the garden wall is a disused tarmacadam tennis court, surrounded by a high chain-link fence (photo 6), and three garden outbuildings. One of these, between the tennis court and Downham Road, is stone-built with blue slate roof, and can be dated by historic maps to the period between 1884 and 1910 (photo 7). It is plain, with a single door and window in its south side, and may have been a garden store or suchlike. Another outbuilding is of brick and twentieth century with no architectural merit, while the other is a modern timber shed.
- 3.7 The east side of the garden adjoins that of 53 Downham Road, and there is a plain stone boundary wall about 1.4m high between the two. The boundary continues further south as a timber fence.
- 3.8 53 Downham Road is a two-storey, stone-built house, typical of the local vernacular style, but otherwise unremarkable. Its rendered rear elevation backs directly onto the street and has traditional window surrounds; the west gable is partly visible from the street and the garden of Fir Tree House. The south front is well concealed from public view and from the application property.
- 3.9 Further from the application site, 55 and 57 Downham Road form a pair of cottages, each of one bay, which face north onto the street. They appear to date from about 1800, but the east part of 57 has a modern garage entrance to its ground floor. The intervening house at 53 clearly separates the listed building from the application site, and it is not considered that the proposed development would affect its setting.

Significance

- 3.10 Aspects of the application property and vicinity which confer significance on the conservation area (positive aspects) are:
- Fir Tree House, a detached two-storey dwelling of about 1800, which contributes to the character and appearance of the conservation area through its architectural form, especially at the rear and front.
 - Boundary walls. The north side of the property is enclosed from the street by a stone wall which appears essentially contemporary with the house, and has pedestrian gateways through it. To the west, the wall has been partly reduced in height and realigned, to create the present

recessed vehicular gateway to the west of the house. It is similar in construction to a second, incomplete boundary wall to the south-east of the house, which forms an obvious division within the present grounds, and screens the modern tennis court from the existing dwelling.

- The small, plain, stone outbuilding to the north of the tennis court and road, which is essentially traditional in form but dates from about 1900, makes a very small positive contribution to the conservation area.
- 53 Downham Road and its boundaries are traditional structures which make a positive contribution to the conservation area.

3.11 Aspects of the application property and vicinity which are considered negative in relation to the conservation area are:

- The tennis court, with high chain-link fence to all sides.
- The modern brick and timber outbuildings to the east of the tennis court have a slight negative effect on the appearance of the conservation area.

4 Proposed development

- 4.1 A new access to the highway would be created through the boundary wall to the east of Fir Tree House, and a gateway created by re-aligning the wall to either side of the opening. This would not affect either of the two existing pedestrian doorways, and the width of the opening would be the minimum required to achieve the necessary visibility splay.
- 4.2 The three detached outbuildings on the site would be demolished and a new dwelling constructed, approximately on the site of the present tennis court and the garden to its east. On the south side, the curtilage of the new dwelling would be enclosed by the existing boundaries.
- 4.3 The new dwelling would comprise a two-storey range, built parallel to Downham Road, but set back from it by about 16m, with single-storey garage on its north side, and a single-storey pavilion-type garden room to the south, attached by a glazed link. The house is of a size appropriate for the plot and neighbouring properties, and is of a high quality design, which would enhance the appearance of the conservation area.

- 4.4 The design of the main block is very different from that originally proposed and submitted for pre-application enquiry. The new proposals have at their core an essentially linear plan to the house, which respects the grain of the historic settlement pattern, but is set back from the road, so as not to impinge on the older buildings at 51 and 53.
- 4.5 The north side is the most visible aspect of the new house within the primary street scene, and care has been taken to design this to take into account the character and special interest of the conservation area. It would be slate-roofed and stone-faced for the most part, and has a low density of windows, features which would be concordant with the traditional appearance of the conservation area. It breaks forward at the east end as a short cross-wing, whose street-facing gable adds texture and interest. The single-storey garage projecting from the west end is also stone-faced, although this would be largely concealed from the street by the boundary wall.
- 4.6 The other elevations of the dwelling would be much less conspicuous within the conservation area, and partly screened by the existing boundary wall on the west side of the new plot. Stone and slate remain the dominant materials within these elevations, and low-key interest and variety are created by the linked garden room.

5 Impact on heritage assets

- 5.1 The construction of the new dwelling would preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area, and would enhance its significance through sympathetic and concordant placement and confident design, which respect the existing linear settlement pattern and traditional building forms within the village.
- 5.2 The new dwelling would be set back from Downham Road, in a way which would not challenge the historic street scene, near the edge of the village. Its siting, design, and scale all respond positively to the setting; it occupies a discrete plot, and would be laid out to respect the existing boundaries, with space around the building which would create a similar density of development to the neighbouring properties.
- 5.3 Given that the existing tennis court and garden site do not contribute positively to the significance of the conservation area, their loss would not cause harm and some benefit would accrue from the removal of the tennis court and its replacement with the new dwelling. There would be a small negative effect on the conservation area, through the creation of a new highway entrance through

the existing boundary wall, and the demolition of the stone outbuilding. This would amount to less than substantial harm, and would be mitigated to a large degree by careful design of the new entrance, so as to be in keeping with the existing wall.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 Overall the development would have a neutral effect on the conservation area, by the creation of a new dwelling which would be concordant with the character and appearance of the conservation area. Less than substantial harm would only arise from changes to the boundary wall and demolition of the small stone outbuilding. In weighing this harm against the public benefit of a new dwelling, and securing the optimum viable use of the existing, discrete plot, the impact on the historic environment would be entirely acceptable.

Stephen Haigh, MA
Buildings Archaeologist
17 November 2022



Photo 1: Boundary wall on Downham Road, reduced in height. Rear of Fir Tree House to right.



Photo 2: Boundary wall on Downham Road.



Photo 3: Boundary wall on Downham Road, number 53 at left.



Photo 4: Fir Tree House: south front.



Photo 5: Historic boundary wall separating garden from former paddock to east.



Photo 6: Disused tennis court, with outbuildings beyond.



Photo 7: Outbuilding proposed for demolition.