

MERRYBENT HILL, CATLOW ROAD, SLAIDBURN, LANCASHIRE:

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT

REGARDING PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO EXISTING CONSENTS 3/2010/1019 & 3/2010/1020

21 JUN 2013	
FOR THE	ATTENTION OF

1 Introduction

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- 1.1 This heritage statement has been produced at the request of the applicant Mr E Strachan via his agent Sunderland Peacock Architects, to accompany a planning application to Ribble Valley Borough Council for amendments to existing planning and listed building consents at Merrybent Hill, references 3/2010/1019 & 3/2010/1020.
- 1.2 This statement is provided because the site constitutes a heritage asset, by virtue of the fact that it includes a grade II listed building and falls within the Forest of Bowland AONB. It provides a summary of the significance of the asset and its setting, in accordance with Paragraph 128 of the *National Planning Policy Framework*:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 1.3 In particular, the statement aims to demonstrate how the proposed amendments to the approved scheme will reduce the overall negative impact on the heritage significance of the buildings, and in sum outweigh this negative impact by providing practical and viable uses for all parts of the historic structures, by better preserving the barn's existing internal proportions, and by restoring some aspects of the original circulation pattern within the house.
- 1.4 This document has been produced by Stephen Haigh MA (a buildings archaeologist with 20 years professional experience of investigating and recording historic buildings in the region), following a pre-application meeting with Adrian Dowd of RVBC on 2 May 2013¹, and the submission of a Historic Building Record report carried out by this author in October 2012, produced in response to a condition of the existing consent.

¹ Together with Mr Strachan and Alasdair Harrison of SPA

2 The heritage assets at Merrybent Hill

- 2.1 Merrybent Hill, a former working farm, comprises a single, linear range of buildings of various dates, which together form a small upland historic farmstead typical of the Bowland uplands and more widely of the mid Pennine region. The grade II listed farmhouse is the earliest of the group and bears a datestone of 1688. It has been extended to the south by a single bay, probably in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, and this may have held a stable on the ground floor with loft over, though it was altered in the 1950s to a garage and the first floor now contains a bedroom and bathroom reached from an inserted corridor within the main house. The small combination barn added to the north of the farmhouse is of a broadly similar date to this and is of three bays, the southern two open to the roof but the northern one forming a shippon with hay loft over. It was itself extended to the north in the nineteenth century by the addition of a narrow lean-to containing a single row of stalls and loft over, and in 1988 by the construction of a modern shed with single pitched roof.
- 2.2 Given the listed status of the farmhouse, all parts of the range can be deemed to be structures within its curtilage, and so likewise subject to equivalent planning constraints. They may also be seen to contribute to the setting of the listed building.

3 Statement of heritage significance

- 3.1 The principal heritage significance of the buildings undoubtedly arises from the farmhouse's late seventeenth century date, and surviving aspects of it which relate to that early period. These include:
- The largely unaltered front and rear elevations of the house, their patterns of openings, and the projecting front porch
 - Individual features within the house elevations, including the door surround to the porch entrance with datestone and chamfered mullions to the windows
 - The historic plan form of the house, in which housebody (now kitchen), parlour (now dining room) and rear outshut are still distinct
 - A small number of surviving internal fixtures, principally two doors within the rear outshut
- 3.2 The house has been subject to limited modernisation in the twentieth century (or possibly slightly earlier), and individual features which arise from that phase cannot be considered to have heritage significance, though as a group they are acknowledged as forming part of the building's history.

- 3.3 Heritage significance is also contributed by the traditional buildings which have been added to either side of the house, particularly the barn, which is believed to be of c.1800 (+/- 50 years), but their later dates, and the fact that they are examples of building types which are much more common in the region, limits that significance. The modern shed dated to 1988 at the north of the range has no heritage significance.
- 3.4 The most significant aspects of these other buildings are:
- The unaltered front elevation of the barn, with a pattern of openings which clearly indicates its intended use, and is characteristic of the building type
 - The essentially open form of the barn's south and central bay, and the partial separation of the north bay, to form the shippon and hay loft
 - The lean-to at the north end of the barn, as a traditionally built addition illustrating the piecemeal development of the range
- 3.5 The southernmost end bay of the range, perhaps a stable originally, has modern first floor windows which imitate the seventeenth century openings of the main house. This bay contributes to the buildings' significance only in broad terms.

4 Impact of proposed alterations

- 4.1 The proposed scheme seeks minor internal amendments to the existing consents. These consents establish that conversion of the agricultural parts of the range to additional domestic accommodation is acceptable, and the present proposals aim to reduce the overall impact of domestic conversion on the barn, both in terms of its historic fabric and its internal space and proportions. They also aim to preserve the plan form and existing circulation within the farmhouse, albeit with the replacement of the present, modern staircase by one in the position where the former seventeenth century stair is believed to have been located.
- 4.2 The proposed amendments which are considered to have a significant impact on the heritage asset are:
- The construction of a staircase within the rear outshut, to approximate the position and form of those typically found in seventeenth century farmhouses of this type
 - The removal of the existing early twentieth century pine staircase from the original central passage. This is considered justifiable on the basis of its recent date and lack of distinguishing features
 - The retention of both historic doors within the rear outshut, in their present positions, is made explicit

- The first floor doorway between farmhouse and barn, for which consent has been granted, is removed from the new scheme, and a small en suite bathroom to serve Bedroom 2 will be created in its place, with no impact on historic fabric
- In the barn, the biggest change from the existing consent is that the approved Bedroom 3 is removed from the proposals altogether, so that both the southern and central bays of the barn remain open to the roof, as at present, thereby retaining much of its present agricultural character. This reduction in the accommodation from four bedrooms to three is included so as to follow the spirit of the Ribble Valley Districtwide Local Plan, which states that "it is possible to convert farm buildings without changing their character by... not trying to achieve maximum possible floorspace."
- Also in the barn, the existing hay loft within the northern bay will be retained as an open mezzanine floor, to preserve more of the building's visible historic aspects. To enable this upper space to be used, new openings will be required at ground and first floor level within the barn's north gable, and a staircase will be created within the lean-to beyond. It is considered that these would have minimal visual intrusion and impact on historic fabric and would represent best use of this small lean-to. By relegating the stair to this small, later addition, the more significant open space of the barn is retained

4.3 Overall, these amendments to the approved scheme will reduce the negative impact on the historic fabric, on the internal circulation patterns, and on the spatial proportions of the buildings, thereby allowing their historic origins and functions to be "read" more easily, and ensuring that their most significant aspects are preserved.

Stephen Haigh, MA
21 June 2013