HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In respect of:

PROPOSED REPAIR/REBUILDING OF THE FRONT WALL

At:

WOLESLEY HOUSE, 79 HIGH STREET, MARKET LAVINGTON, SN10 4AQ

On behalf of:

Tuttle Architectural Services

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ELAINE MILTON
HERITAGE & PLANNING LIMITED
t: 07979 942042
e: emilton@emhp.co.uk
w: www.emhp.co.uk

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report accompanies proposals for the repair and rebuilding of the front wall of Wolesley House, a Grade II listed dwelling within the Market Lavington Conservation Area.

1.2 A historic building study was produced by Wiltshire Buildings Record (WBR) in April/May 2017 (updated May 2023). It identified that the house originated as a late 16th or early 17th century single-storey timber-framed cottage and was rebuilt in brick and raised to two storeys in the early 18th century.

1.3 The house is clearly of special interest as a historic vernacular village dwelling, the significance of which derives largely from its materials, method of construction and evidence of its evolution over the centuries.

1.4 The front wall of the house forms part of the early 18th century rebuild and is constructed of rubble stone/chalk with brick facing. The brickwork is painted and laid in mainly stretcher bond incorporating some queen closers. The brickwork rests on a rendered and painted sarsen stone plinth, possibly the original supporting wall for the late 16th/early 17th century timber-framed cottage.

1.5 According to the WBR report, approximately 600mm of the left-hand end of the front wall was rebuilt in brick in 1957 and a new southern gable constructed following the removal of an extension (as evidenced by the ragged joint adjacent to the left-hand downpipe).

1.6 The windows within the front elevation were altered in the early 19th century (as demonstrated by the scars on the jambs). The ground floor windows have flat brick arches, not gauged. Many of the timber cills have been replaced. The six-panel door with flush lower panels is of the mid-19th century. The doorcase has been altered and the console brackets and the shell hood canopy were added in the mid-20th century.

1.7 Accordingly, while the front wall is of some value for the evidence it provides of the evolution of the house, because of the degree of alteration the legibility and significance of the frontage have been diminished.

1.8 The structural engineer's report (Structural Solutions dated 22 June 2023, updated 14 December 2023) explains that the front wall has been underpinned to the right of the entrance door (where the cellar exists), which has allowed this section to remain stable. To the left of the door, however, the wall has moved visibly outwards, it is surmised due to a combination of subsidence and rotation of the foundation acting

together with a lack of connection to the first floor. The subsidence is believed to have been caused by water run-off from the roof having washed out the fines in the subsoil below the shallow foundations and having run through the stone plinth, causing the friable rubble stone/chalk backing for the wall to disintegrate. The wall ties that were inserted historically are not fixed all the way through and do not offer meaningful structural restraint.

1.9 The structural movement has reportedly increased between the structural engineer's initial survey in March 2021, particularly at first-floor level where a significant bow has developed.

2.0 Proposals

2.1 The continued subsidence and movement of the front wall means that in the structural engineer's professional opinion, the health and safety issues associated with propping the roof and wall would be so significant that retention and repair of the whole wall is no longer a viable option.

2.2 The proposal is for taking down and rebuilding the front wall to the left of the entrance door (see marked up elevation on p5 of the Structural Solutions report). To begin with, the floors, roof and adjacent walls would be propped to ensure the rest of the house would remain stable during the work. The left-hand section of wall would be taken down by hand with as much of the brick and stone that is salvageable to be set aside for reuse (NB any disintegrated chalk blocks, however, would not be capable of reuse). A new concrete foundation would be built to support the reconstructed wall, which would ideally be a cavity wall construction with wall ties and movement joints. The new wall would be tied into the existing walls at both ends with concealed metal strapping. The existing floor joists would be 'extended' with supplementary timbers and metal straps to create a bearing into the new wall and to provide the building with lateral restraint. A new wall plate would be installed to provide further restraint and support the roof structure.

2.3 Due to the amount of decay to the roof timbers, the structural engineer recommends the replacement of timbers that have lost their structural integrity but the retention of any sound timber. The precise work to the roof would need to be evaluated after the front wall has been rebuilt.

3.0 Policy Framework

Primary Legislation

3.1 Statutory duties exist under sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act') for the local planning authority in considering whether to grant listed building consent or planning permission for development that affects a listed building or its setting 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.

3.2 Section 72(1) of the Act requires the Council to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Development Plan

3.3 The statutory duties are reflected in the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS), which was adopted by Wiltshire Council on 20 January 2015. Core Policy 57 of the WCS seeks to ensure high quality design and place shaping. Core Policy 58 of the WCS seeks to promote the conservation and, where possible, enhancement of the county's historic environment.

National Planning Policy

3.4 National planning policy relating to the historic environment is provided within section 16 of the NPPF (revised December 2023). It advises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

3.5 Paragraph 205 of the NPPF 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. Any harm or loss to a heritage asset's significance should require clear and convincing justification and needs to be weighed against identifiable public benefits. Substantial harm or loss of a Grade II listed building should be exceptional.

3.6 Paragraph 207 of the NPPF advises where proposals would lead to substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the proposals should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of four listed criteria therein apply.

3.7 Paragraph 208 advises that where proposals would 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 proposals, including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

3.8 Paragraph 212 of the NPPF advises that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within conservation areas or the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance.

3.9 The setting of a heritage asset is defined on p72 of the NPPF as 'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced'. The NPPF advises the extent of setting is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

National Guidance

3.10 It is advisable that proposals for repair, restoration and alteration should follow the guidance within the *Historic England Advice Note 2: Making Changes to Heritage Assets* (HEAN2, February 2016). The document acknowledges (paragraph 3) that the best way to conserve a building is to keep it in use, and that a *'reasonable and proportionate approach to owner's needs is therefore essential'*.

3.11 As a general principle for adaptation, HEAN2 advises as much of the historic fabric and plan form that contributes to the significance of a heritage asset should be retained as possible, with new work ideally being reversible. Harm to significance may be justified on grounds of overriding public benefit that may accrue including maintaining the building in its optimum viable use.

3.12 HEAN2 advises that issues to consider in respect of new additions to heritage assets are proportion, height, massing, bulk, materials and setting, and that new work should not dominate the existing in terms of scale, material or siting. The guidance advises that an assessment of the asset's significance will usually suggest an appropriate form of any extension.

4.0 Heritage Impact Assessment

4.1 The house has been unoccupied for approximately 12 years and has been recently acquired by new owners who hope to restore it. The whole building is in perilous condition, with the front wall being particularly precarious. Action is clearly necessary to prevent collapse.

4.2 The contractor, architect and structural engineer's advice is that retention and repair of the left side of the front wall is unfeasible on health and safety grounds due to the high risk to contractors during propping and repair.

4.3 Moreover, propping and repair of the front wall are likely to result in a greater loss of wall fabric than the dismantling and rebuilding of the left-hand end with potential collapse threatening to bring down the right-hand end of the front wall and the south gable.

4.4 In the words of the structural engineer, the partial demolition and rebuilding of the front wall is the minimum necessary to secure the preservation of the building.

4.5 The lower significance of the (altered) front wall should be taken into account when weighing up the proposals while also noting that the wall would be reconstructed on a like-for-like basis and using as much salvageable material as possible, with any new fabric matching in substance, texture and quality to maintain the visual integrity of the building.

4.6 The proposals would also form part of a wider scheme of refurbishment for the building by the new owner. The loss of historic fabric would be proportionate to the significance of the wall and the nature of the works.

4.7 The new work would be tied into the existing structure in a light-touch manner thereby minimising the impact on the remaining historic fabric. The metal strapping would be concealed within the walls and would not be visible.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The current proposals have been guided by specialist advice and have been arrived at following the investigation of options to retain and repair the front wall.

5.2 The structural engineering advice is that the partial dismantling and reconstruction of the front wall is the only feasible option on health and safety and on fabric retention grounds.

5.3 While there would be a level of harm from the partial demolition of the front wall, this would be outweighed by the benefits to be gained from the overall restitution of the building.

5.4 The structural envelope and character of the house would be preserved thus maintaining the significance of the listed building and its contribution to the conservation area.

5.5 The works would be undertaken following best practice guidance for repairs to heritage assets within HEAN2.