

MOORFIELD FARMHOUSE, 2, CHURCH STREET, STEEPLE ASHTON, WILTSHIRE

Heritage Statement



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**MOORFIELD FARMHOUSE,
2, CHURCH STREET,
STEEPLE ASHTON, WILTSHIRE**

Heritage Statement

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Heritage Statement

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Moorfield Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building located within the village of Steeple Ashton, Wiltshire. The property lies within the Steeple Ashton Conservation Area. The owner of the property was granted planning permission and listed building consent for an extension to the rear of the house in 2017 (17/01207/FUL and 17/01611/LBV). The extension has been built but there are some variations in the construction compared to the approved plans. Wiltshire Council has examined the works undertaken and is requiring regularisation or rectification of the works.

1.2 Forum Heritage Services has been commissioned to make an assessment of the heritage significance of the house and the impact of the unauthorised works upon that significance and to prepare a Heritage Statement in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Bob Edwards BSc (Hons) PG Dip. IHBC MCIfA, Director of Forum Heritage Services, visited the property in November 2025 and subsequently prepared this report.

1.3 This report will present:

- Policy and guidance background
- A description of the house and the works undertaken
- An assessment of the significance of the listed building following Historic England's *Statements of Heritage Significance Assessing Significance in Heritage Assets* (Historic England Advice Note 12, 2019)
- An assessment of the impact of the works that have been undertaken upon the significance of the listed building and also the character and appearance of the conservation area
- Conclusions

2.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE BACKGROUND

2.1 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the statutory approach to the management of historic buildings and areas and requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses, and its setting, under Section 66 – a matter the Courts have held should be afforded considerable importance and weight. Section 72, relating to Conservation Areas requires that ‘special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area’.

2.2 The statutory approach is reflected in Policy E9 of the Test Valley Borough Council Adopted Local Plan 2011-2029.

2.3 Paragraph 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF) states that:

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.

2.4 Paragraph 212 advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to its conservation whilst para. 208 states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

2.5 Historic England’s *Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2* (March 2015) states that understanding the nature of significance is important for understanding the need for and best means of conservation. Understanding the extent of that significance leads to a better understanding of how adaptable a heritage asset may be and provides the essential guide

as to how policies should be applied. The following descriptive appraisal will evaluate the building against Historic England's criteria for heritage values set out in *Statements of Heritage Significance Assessing Significance in Heritage Assets* (Historic England Advice Note 12, 2019):

Archaeological interest

There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

Architectural and artistic interest

These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can rise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and the creation of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills, like sculpture.

Historic interest

An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

- 2.6 The selection of buildings for addition to the statutory *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* is informed by a set of criteria set out in the revised *Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings*, (DCMS, 2018). These criteria have also been considered in this assessment.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The earliest map showing Moorfield Farmhouse is the Tithe map of c.1840 (Figure 1) which seems to show the house as a single-pile (one room deep) house with small, non-domestic additions (coloured grey) to both the front and rear elevations. The north-west gable was hard against the boundary with an adjacent property. There was a further non-domestic building on the street frontage which was attached to the neighbouring house to the south-east, but beyond this building, there is nothing to indicate that this was a working farmstead. The apportionment records plot 353 as being owned by Walter Long (lessor) and Simon Taylor (lessee) and occupied by Alfred Blake, the property being described as 'House and Garden'. Blake held numerous plots of pasture and some arable in the common fields, so he was evidently a farmer although no property can be identified as a farmstead.
- 3.2 The Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of 1888 shows the house as having a greater depth than the form shown on the Tithe map (Figure 2). At this date the plot to the north-west appears to have been amalgamated with the Moorfield Farmhouse plot although the house is still shown. Small timber-built structures (coloured grey) were attached to the north-west gable and there was also a narrow element along the full width of the south-east gable. What appears to be a pigsty with two small yards stood south-west of the house.
- 3.3 By the turn of the century the only evident changes to the house was the removal of the structures at the north-west corner, the presence of a slight projection to the northern part of the rear elevation, and the narrow strip at the south-west elevation is not shown as being divided from the house but the footprint remained the same.



Figure 1 Tithe map, c. 1840.

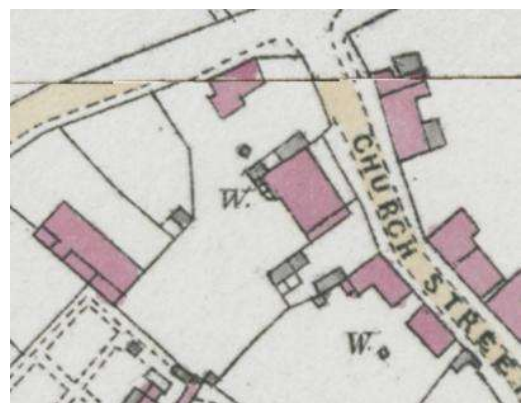


Figure 2 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map, 1888.

3.4 By the late 20th century the house had been altered with a garage occupying a lean-to against the south-east elevation, and a single-storey flat-roofed element occupying the northern part of the rear, this element extending beyond the line of the gable (Figure 3). The southern part of the rear elevation was a low two-storey wing at right angles to the main roof. Prior to the designation of the building, the house was subjected to a comprehensive refurbishment internally which removed all features of interest.

3.5 There have been several applications for alterations the rear (REFS) which were refused. The garage and flat roofed elements were removed as part of the approval to build a two-storey to the north of the existing rear wing, creating a valley between the roofs of the two wings (REF) (Figure 4).

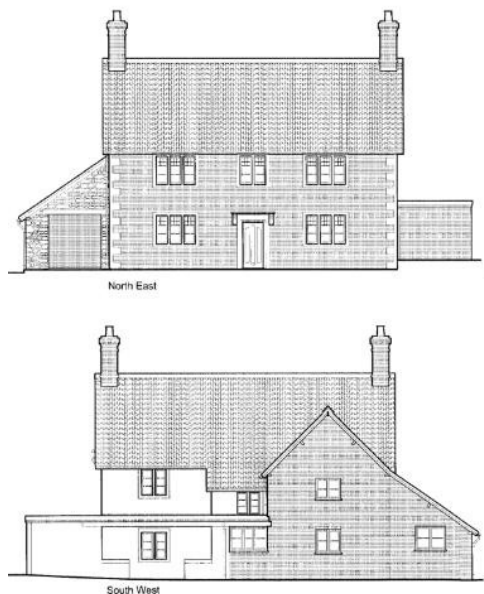


Figure 3 Existing front and rear elevations, 2017.

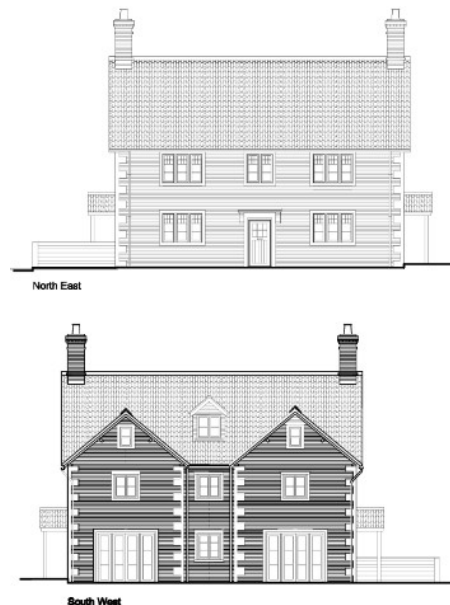


Figure 4 Approved elevations, 2017.

4.0 DESCRIPTION

4.1 Moorfield Farmhouse (Figure 5) was added to the *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* at Grade II in 1988. The building is described in the *List* as:

Farmhouse. Late C18. Flemish bond brick with stone dressings, Bridgwater tiled roof with gabled end brick stacks. Two-storey, 3- window. Central C20 glazed door in cyma-moulded architrave with flat stone hood on brackets, 3-light cyma-mullioned casement either side. First floor has 2-light mullioned casement over door with 3- light either side. Lean-to garage attached to left return. C20 flat-roofed extensions attached to right return and rear, gabled rear wing to left. Interior not inspected.



Figure 5 Front and south-east gable elevations.

4.2 With the approval of 2017, the garage against the south-west flank wall has been removed and an entrance door inserted (Figure 5). The rear elevation now consists of the earlier rear wing to the right, and the modern extension, presenting a matching gable to the left with a wide flat valley gutter between the two pitched roofs (Figure 6). When this extension was

added, dressed stone quoins were added to the south-west corner of the existing rear wing, with stone quoins also being added to the north-west corner of the new extension (Figure 7). There are no quoins at the line between the main range and the rear extensions. On the north-west elevation there has clearly been substantial rebuilding at lower level on the main gable.



Figure 6 Rear elevation showing the historic wing to the right and the modern extension to the left.



Figure 7 The north-west gable and modern rear extension.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designations

- 5.1 Moorfield Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building and so is regarded as a building of significance in a national context.
- 5.2 The house lies within the Steeple Ashton Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset.

Assessment of Significance

Archaeological interest

- 5.3 Moorfield Farmhouse is a building of wall late 18th century date at the earliest, and there is no indication in its external fabric to suggest that it incorporates elements of an earlier building on this site. The house has been subjected to considerable alteration internally, changes that have resulted in the removal of substantial areas of historic fabric, meaning that the building generally has very little potential to reveal information about the development or uses of the building in the past. The historic roof survives but, given the relatively late date and the overall lack of interest in this building, it is considered that the use of the dendrochronology to date of the building would add little to the understanding of the history of the house and so has limited potential to add to the significance of the listed building. The archaeological interest is low.

Architectural interest

- 5.4 The front elevation of Moorfield Farmhouse presents a relatively polite façade, the architectural interest of which is considered to be at the higher end of medium and this elevation in particular makes a positive contribution character and appearance of the conservation area. The rear elevation of the house has been subjected to considerable change from its original form and the historic rear wing has been altered by the insertion of the quoin stones at the south-west corner to elevate the architectural status of the elevation, a change which is considered inappropriate to the character of the listed building.

5.5 Internally, the house has been extensively 'modernised', alterations which are understood to have been undertaken before the building was listed. As the house was not seen internally when it was designated, the extent of loss of historic character through the wholesale removal of all internal fixtures and fittings and decorative detailing was not taken into account in the decision to list Moorfield Farmhouse. All surfaces are modern, the staircase is a modern replacement and all doors and skirtings are modern. The only historic fabric that is visible within the building are the trusses and purlins that are exposed within the converted attic space. In terms of plan form, the house still retains two principal rooms either side of the entrance hall, but the kitchen extended back into the historic rear wing and the sitting room extended back into the modern extension, so whilst there is a vestige of the plan form surviving, it is considerably altered.

5.6 The architectural interest of this building is solely related to its external appearance and its contribution to the street scene and the conservation area as, internally, the building retains nothing which may be regarded of special architectural or historic interest. It is considered that if this building was not in a conservation area, a full assessment of significance in relation to the criteria for the selection of listed buildings might be found that it does not retain sufficient special interest to merit designation as a listed building.

Historic interest

5.7 Moorfield Farmhouse has historic interest as an example of a late 18th or early 19th century village house, possibly associated with a farm, although not apparently being part of a farmstead group on this site. In terms of the illustrative of historic interest, the extensive alterations internally mean that there is little to directly illustrate the historic uses or status of the various rooms, and so overall, it is considered that the illustrative historic interest of this building is at lower end of medium at best.

5.8 There are no individuals of importance in a national context linked to this building and so, on the basis of current understanding, there is no associative historic interest.

6.0 WORKS UNDERTAKEN & ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

6.1 The works that have been undertaken without the benefit of planning and listed building consent include:

- The change of the approved dormer on the rear roof slope to a door giving access to a 'balcony' on the valley between the roofs of the rear wings with a metal balustrade between the gables.
- The placement of solar panels on the inner-facing slopes of the roofs of the rear wings.
- The installation of four rooflights to the rear roof slope of the main roof.
- Variations to the construction of the rear elevation.

Door to 'balcony' and railings

6.2 It has been advised that this element of the works that have been undertaken is harmful to the listed building and it is the intention to rectify these works by removing the door and installing the dormer as approved.

6.3 The metal balustrade between the gables will be removed.

Solar panels

6.4 Four solar panels have been installed on the inner-facing slopes of the roofs of the two rear wings. These panels are well hidden from view and cannot be seen in relation to the principal elevation. They have limited visibility when seen from the rear of the house, mostly when within the grounds of Moorfield Farmhouse (Figure 8). From the public realm there is a limited view to the rear of the house from the section of Church Lane leading to the south-west from the church in which the house is partly screened by trees above a tall masonry wall (Figure 9). It is considered that this minor glimpse of the panels on the right-hand gabled wing does not represent a harmful change to the listed building that will impact on the special architectural or historic interest of the heritage asset. The environmental benefits of the use of solar power is regarded as a public benefit.



Figure 8 The solar panels to the inner roof slope of the modern extension as seen from the grounds of the house.



Figure 9 A view from Church Street towards the rear of Moorfield Farmhouse in which the solar panels can be glimpsed.

Roof lights

- 6.5 Four small rooflights have been installed on the rear slope of the main range of the house. The rooflights have been fitted between rafters and so did not result in the loss of any historic fabric. Two of the roof lights are set between the two gabled rear wings and are only seen in direct views from the grounds of the house, as seen in Figure 6, above. The northern roof light is the only one that is visible from the public realm, but it is small and inconspicuous and does not harm the aesthetic quality or architectural interest of the listed building (Figure 10). Rooflights are a common feature of buildings in the conservation area, for example, as shown in Figure 11.



Figure 10 The limited view to the northern-most roof light from Church Street.



Figure 11 Rooflights to the rear roof slope of a house seen from Church Street.

Variations in the construction of the rear elevation

- 6.6 The 2017 approved scheme for the extension to the rear has not been constructed in line with the approved drawings which included quoin stones to both external corners and to the inner corners of the gabled wings and a section of recessed brickwork between the gabled wings. At the south-west corner this involved the addition of quoin stones to the otherwise plain brickwork at the corner of the historic rear wing. Instead, the extension and alterations incorporated the quoin stones at the outer corners only and the recessed central section was not included, instead the brickwork being flush between the two gable ends.
- 6.7 Firstly, it is considered that the addition of quoin stones to the historic wing to the rear, which was a plain, simple service range at the back of the house represented an aggrandisement of this element, changing its character from a simple service wing to a range of higher architectural pretensions, which was an inappropriate alteration which was not warranted. Only the front elevation was given quoin stones – not even the rear corners of the main range were given this detailing. The addition of quoin stones to the inner corners of the two wings would further raise the architectural status of the rear elevation, changing a simple, plain elevation to something far more grand and polite. It is argued that the approved scheme was mis-guided and inappropriate, and represented a degree of harm to the character of the listed building.
- 6.8 The omission of the quoin stones from the inner corners of the gabled wings has actually ameliorated the level of harm that was permitted by the Council in 2017 – the plain brickwork being far more appropriate in character than elevation peppered with highly prominent quoin stones. So, in terms of the impact on the listed building, it is considered that the alteration from the approved drawings in the construction by omitting these quoin stones has actually benefited the character of the listed building and so is regarded as a positive change.
- 6.9 The construction of the rear wall in a single plane rather than incorporating the slightly recessed central section has had no meaningful impact upon the character of the building. It is understood why the recessed section of brickwork was demanded by the council as it conforms to a simplistic rulebook of design, but in reality there is no particular benefit in terms of the special interest of listed building through not having the inner corners of the gabled wings defined by the recess (although it probably looked better on paper). The

presence of the two downpipes from the valley gutter provide vertical emphases at these points and, even if the brickwork had been recessed here, the downpipes would have still been the prominent feature of definition visually when seen in reality.

- 6.10 Whist not conforming to the 'design rules' often uncritically employed today, this is almost certainly the way the wall would have been constructed if it had been built in the 19th century, and there are many examples of gabled ranges projecting off the back of a house where the elevation is constructed in a single plane rather than as is now usually required by the simplistic application of design 'rules', that one element must be subservient to another element, etc.
- 6.11 This rear elevation is not visible from the public realm and, as the rear elevation to a relatively modest house which presented a fine elevation to the street but was of a plain and simple service character to the rear, the alterations that have been made to the south-west elevation from the approved drawings have in no way impacted upon the architectural significance of listed building, nor the character and appearance of the conservation area.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Moorfield Farmhouse is a listed building, but its designation was based on an external assessment only and so did not take account of the extensive alterations internally which have eroded the building of much of its special interest. It is questionable if, other than for the fact it makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, the building merits designation as a listed building. The actual significance of the building should be a material factor in decisions regarding changes to the building, not just that fact that it is listed.
- 7.2 It is considered that the use of solar panels on the inner slopes of the two rear gabled wings, and four rooflights to the rear slope of the main range do not harm the significance of the listed building. No historic fabric was lost by the insertion of the rooflights.
- 7.3 The approved extension in 2017 included the use of quoins that would have impacted the character of the rear elevation, making it compete with the principal elevation to the street frontage. This was a poor decision by the Council. The decision to not use quoins to the inner corners of the gabled wings is seen as a beneficial change as it limits the status and busyness of the rear elevation which was originally of a plain character. The failure to create a recessed section between the gabled wings has not resulted in harm to the character of the building – the definition of the gabled elements is clear and, in the context of a building with such limited significance, this minor change has in no way harmed the special interest or the character of the conservation area. There is no public benefit in requiring the significant change required to adhere to the approved drawings.
- 7.4 Accordingly, I can find no conflict in the works undertaken without consent with the statutory duty in Sections 66 or 72 of the Act, National Policy in the NPPF or Policy CP58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 (CS) and Policy 99 of the Draft Local Plan Review: Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. I regard the alterations to the design of the rear elevation as beneficial changes to a scheme that was not appropriate, and the use of solar panels as a positive change, both which may be regarded as a public benefit, and I conclude that the application to regularise these elements of the works undertaken should be allowed.