

**BARNS AT OYSTERS FARM,
GUTCH COMMON,
SEMLEY, WILTSHIRE
SP7 9BE**

Heritage Statement



FORUM

Heritage
Services

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Heritage Statement

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FORUM
**Heritage
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The farm building range at Oysters Farm, Semley, Wiltshire, is unlisted but, as a traditional range of agricultural buildings, may be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). The owners of the property are seeking planning permission to convert the range to residential use.

1.2 Forum Heritage Services has been commissioned to make an assessment of the heritage significance of the buildings and the potential impact of the proposals 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 May 2025 and subsequently prepared this report.

1.3 This report will present:

- A brief background history to the site
- A description of the farm buildings
- Policy and guidance background
- An assessment of the significance of the buildings following Historic England's *Statements of Heritage Significance Assessing Significance in Heritage Assets* (Historic England Advice Note 12, 2019)
- An assessment of the potential impact of the proposals upon the significance of the building
- Conclusions

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The ownership of the land of Oysters, together with land known as Ansell's, can be traced back to the mid-14th century. The landscape of Semley reflects the process of medieval woodland clearance (assarting) to form relatively small, often irregular fields with wooded boundaries and small blocks of woodland, a field pattern typically associated with dispersed farmsteads. Lands belonging to Catherine Turney formed an estate called Oysters which was held in 1580 by her husband William Webb. There are various records dating from the 17th and 18th centuries relating to Oysters Farm in the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre (WSHC) including a mortgage document between John Croke of Chilton, Bucks and Gregory Wilshire of London, dated 1660 (WSHC 123/1).
- 2.2 The earliest map showing Oysters Farm in detail is the Semley Tithe map of c.1840 (Figure 1). This shows the farmhouse set close to and facing into a yard area enclosed by a linked range to the north-west, north-east and east.
- 2.3 The Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map of 1886 probably shows the north-west and north-east ranges still present (although there is a slight difference in the angle of the north-east range compared to the Tithe map), but the shorter element had been demolished (Figure 2). The north-west range is shown as being constructed in masonry (red) whilst the attached north-east range was probably timber-framed. Some additional buildings had been erected including a range of three units to the east of the yard, this building also being of timber construction.
- 2.4 The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1900 shows that the timber-built part of the main farmstead range had been replaced by the present brick ranges to create a regular L-plan yard (Figure 3).
- 2.5 By 1924 a new house had been built to the south-west of the farmstead group but the range on the south side of the yard remained but was shown as partly open-fronted to the yard (Figure 4). This range, together with the smaller buildings were demolished in the later 20th century.

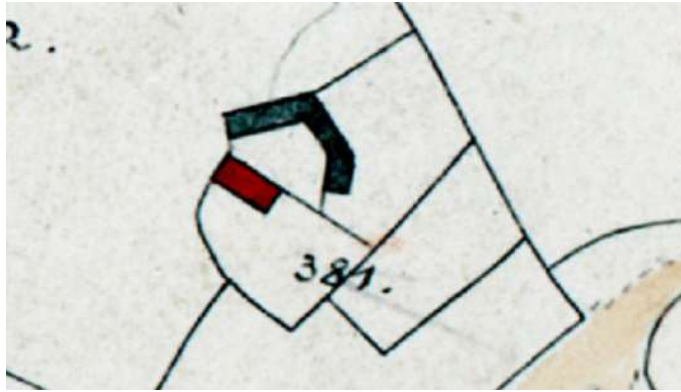


Figure 1
Semley Tithe map,
c.1840.
© WSHC

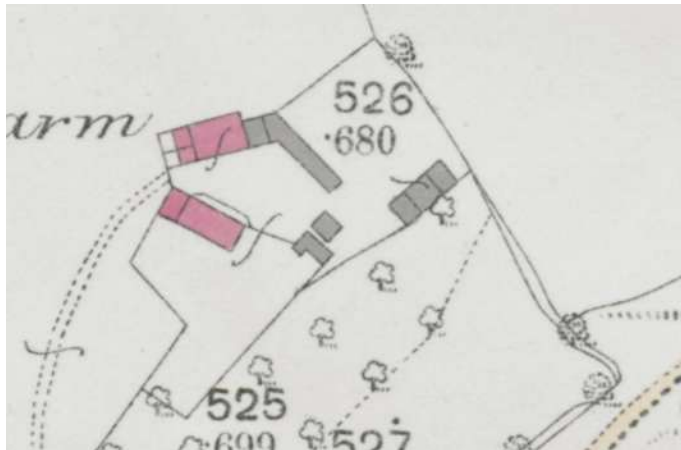


Figure 2
Ordnance Survey 1st
edition 25" map, 1886
© WSHC

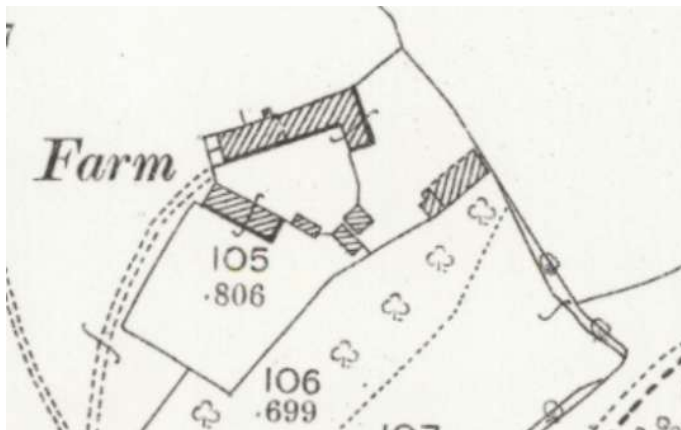


Figure 3
Ordnance Survey 2nd
edition 25" map, 1900.
© WSHC

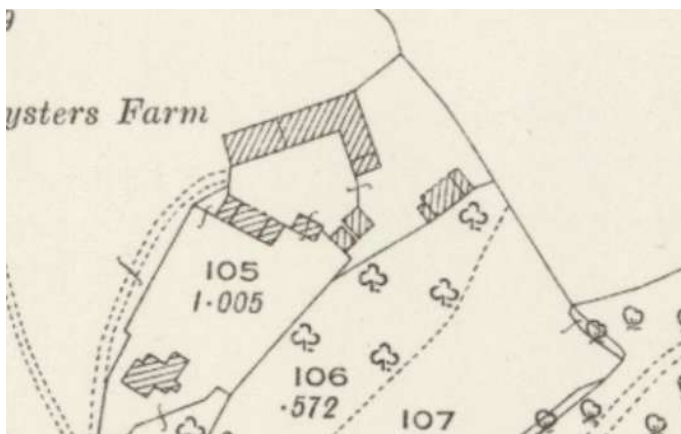


Figure 4
Ordnance Survey 1924
edition 25" map.
© WSHC

3.0

DESCRIPTION

3.1

The farm building range at Oysters Farm is a L-shaped range of three distinct builds (Figure 5). At the west end is a stone-built three-bay barn, the walls being constructed in coursed roughly dressed greensand with brick infill to the central threshing bay (Figure 6). The roof is gabled and covered in concrete fibre sheeting with clay ridge tiles. The eastern bay of the barn retains a narrow, slit opening in both the north and south west elevations, although that to the north is now hidden by a later brick buttress. The ventilation slits to the western bay have been infilled. The west gable elevation is blank and has later brick to the verge, the brick matching the type of brick used to infill the threshing bay (Figure 7). At the north-west corner the stonework is failing; there is a significant crack from eaves to ground level with some missing stone. The eaves line has been raised by two rows of concrete blocks.



Figure 5 Existing plan showing the principal phases of development.



Figure 6 The stone-built barn at the west end of the L-plan range, south elevation.



Figure 7 Barn, north and west elevations.

- 3.2 Internally, the walls of the barn are a mixture of exposed stonework on the south gable and rendered walls to the sides, with brickwork to the infill of the threshing bays. The area is subdivided by a 1.5 m high blockwork wall dividing the southern bay into a loose box and a similar blockwork wall to the western part of the northern bay, creating a second loose box (Figure 8). The eastern part of the northern bay subdivided by an earlier brick wall, rising to eaves level, which is a legend embraced vertical plank door. The two trusses of the roof of softwood and simple triangular trusses carrying softwood purlins with no rafters indicating that the roof was constructed in its present form to be covered in sheet material. The three sets of purlins, including those near the apex are set into later brickwork at the gables of same date as the infill to the threshing bays. The floor of the barn is concrete throughout.



Figure 8 Barn interior facing east.

- 3.3 Attached to the north gable of the barn and set at a slightly different angle is a late 19th century cow shed constructed in red brick which returns to the east at its northern end (Figures 9 and 10). The brickwork of this element is laid in English bond. In the east-facing elevation, there are two doors with segmental brick arches over. The southern door has small window openings to either side with bullnose bricks forming the sills. Both of these openings have lost their window frames. To the larger northern part of the range there is second door with two six-pane windows either side, also having bullnose bricks, but with a cement flashing covering his bricks. Two of these windows are of the hopper type with the top three panes tilting inwards, the other two are fixed steel-framed lights. The south elevation of the eastern wing consists of two phases of construction, the western part having a door which was probably converted from a window opening to the left, a blocked door now with a window inset and blockwork below, and a further window with a second door now boys over at the east end. The eastern bay of this range, which has a corrugated cement fibre sheet roof in contrast to the plain clay tile of the rest of range, is built in a Fletton brick laid in English bond with a single door opening with a concrete lintel over. In the gable end of this later bay, there is a blocked door now with a window to the upper part and an eight-pane hopper type window, both of these openings having concrete lintels over.



Figure 9 Cow shed range attached to the barn, south elevation.



Figure 10 The return of the L-plan cow shed range, west elevation showing the two phases of construction marked by the change in roofing material and brickwork.

- 3.4 The north elevation of the cow shed is of English bond brickwork divided into four irregularly-sized bays by brick pilasters (Figure 11). There is a single door opening in the second bay from the east, the opening having a segmental arch of two rows of header bricks and a high threshold approximately 0.5 m above external ground level. The roof of this section is of plain clay tile, hipped to the east.
- 3.5 The rear, east elevation of the return wing of the cow shed element is also laid in English bond with a door opening that has been infilled with concrete block work. At the southern end there is a lean-to shed forming part of the later addition which has a door and an iron-framed window with a concrete lintel over.



Figure 11 The north elevation of the cow shed range.

- 3.6 The east – west range of the cow shed range attached to the barn is divided into two with a separate stable element adjacent to the gable of the barn which has no internal link to the remainder of the range to the east. There are no fixtures or fittings within this space (Figure 12) although there are sockets in the side walls indicating the presence of a hay rack and probably a manger. The floor is of brick with a drainage gully at the end of the area of the stalls which runs east to west before turning alongside the barn wall to an opening in the front wall. The roof is of softwood with a ridge board and purlins and softwood rafters. The jambs to the door opening use bullnose bricks to the inner corners.



Figure 12 Interior of the stable adjacent to the barn, looking towards the front wall.

- 3.7 The northern part of the main range is a former cow shed of six bays in length defined by softwood king post trusses, the tie beams being formed by two 2-inch-thick timbers bolted to either side of the principal rafters and a central block into which the king post is also bolted (Figure 13). There are typical raking struts up to the principles which carry purlins on their backs. The walls are of painted brickwork apart from the lower part of the front wall which has a cement render. The floor is of concrete, probably of mid-20th century date, with a concrete manger set in front of a feeding passage that runs along the inside of the rear wall and which returns across the eastern end of the building, the passage being defined by a timber partition with stall dividers at the east end (Figure 14). The north side of these stalls has a rendered blockwork partition.
- 3.8 The main range was originally open to the shorter range but the two ranges have been divided by the insertion of a concrete blockwork wall with a door opening that has been boarded over (see Figure 14).



Figure 13 The interior of the cow shed within the main range of the building, looking east.



Figure 14 A section of surviving timber stalls with the feeding passage along the inside of the outer wall.

- 3.9 The southern arm of the late 19th century element of the range is of three bays defined by the same form of roof truss as in the main range (Figure 15). The walls are rendered although there has been some significant loss of render on the east wall exposing the brickwork. The floor is of concrete. Approximately half of the roof to the east slope has collapsed, and the upper courses of brickwork in the east wall are leaning out significantly. The south wall of this section has a large window opening high level which has chamfered vertical glazing bars with each light having six sections of glazing which overlap under segmental brick arch and there is a door opening into the later bay at the south end. This is presumably an inserted opening.



Figure 15 The interior of the east range looking north.

- 3.10 Within the eastern bay there are no features of interest other than a vertical plank ledged door into the small lean-to on the north elevation.
- 3.11 Attached to the east elevation of the late 19th century range is a large part open-sided shed of mid-20th century date with several telegraph pole posts and other slim square section timbers, the trusses being metal ties with metal posts to the apex (Figure 16). The roof is covered in corrugated metal sheeting. This structure was originally aisled both sides but the aisle to the east has largely collapsed.



Figure 16 The modern agricultural shed attached to the east side of the L-plan range, facing north.

- 3.12 To the north-east of the agricultural range is a further corrugated metal sheet clad shed of four bays with telegraph poles dividing three other bays with one pole missing (Figure 17). The other poles to the end and rear are tree trunks. There is a separate aisle to the south which is set at lower level. In the south wall of the main part of the barn there are three lights with timber sliding shutters.



Figure 17 The interior of the modern shed to the south-east of the L-plan range of buildings.

The farmstead in the landscape

- 3.13 The farm buildings lie approximately 75m from the lane that passes to the south-east of the farmstead. The location of the photos illustrating this description of how the farmstead is seen in the landscape are marked on Figure 18.



Figure 18 Aerial photograph showing the position of Oysters Farm and the location of the photographs illustrating this section. The line of the public footpath that passes the farmstead is marked.

- 3.13 Due to the extent of tree planting along the north side of the lane when approaching from the east there are no views towards the farmstead until the gate to the access track of the farmstead.
- 3.14 Viewpoint 1: The farmyard is approached by a rough concrete drive from the lane with the corrugated metal clad shed to the north, the gable end of the L-plan range partly visible and the red brick, east elevation of the late 19th century main range been partly visible (Figure 19). The area to the west of the track is part of the curtilage of the farmhouse and is screened by a beech hedge. The area to the east is largely overgrown nettles and briars with an historic boundary line separating this area from the pasture field to the east.



Figure 19 Viewpoint 1: The view along the access track from the lane to the farmstead.

- 3.15 Moving west from the entrance, the farmstead is largely concealed from view by the trees along the roadside boundary, allowing only minor glimpsed views through the trees: in summer there are very minor glimpsed views towards the gable of the east range and the metal roof of the shed which allow an appreciation of the presence of buildings, but not their form or character. In winter, with no leaves on the trees, it may be possible to see more of the buildings but there will only ever be partial, glimpsed views of little significance.
- 3.15 Viewpoint 2: Similarly, at the entrance to the drive to the farmhouse, views are generally heavily screened by trees although a gap allows a glimpsed view to the south elevation of the cow house range (Figure 20).



Figure 20 Viewpoint 2: A minor glimpsed view, mainly to the roof of the L-plan range is possible from near the entrance to the drive to the house.

- 3.16 A public footpath from the end of the drive to the farmhouse runs across the field to the west and north-west of the farmstead. Viewpoint 3: When entering the field, there are relatively close views to the gable of the barn and into the yard area (Figure 21). Viewpoints 4 and 5: Moving north-west the land falls away from the farmstead. Looking back to the south-east, the north elevation of the buildings is clearly visible, the stone barn being clearly distinct from the red brick cow house range (Figures 22 and 23).



Figure 21 Viewpoint 3: View into the yard area of the farmstead from the footpath to the west of the buildings.



Figure 22 Viewpoint 4: A view to the north elevation of the L-plan range from the public footpath moving closer to the buildings.



Figure 23 Viewpoint 5: A view to the farmstead from the public footpath where it enters the field north of the farm buildings. The modern house is largely hidden to the right of the farm building range.

4.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE BACKGROUND

4.1 Paragraph 208 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) states that:

'Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by proposal (including the development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary to expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.'

4.2 Paragraph 216 in relation to considering proposals for non-designated heritage assets states that:

'The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.'

4.3 The government's Planning Practice Guidance confirms that local planning authorities may identify non-designated heritage assets but clearly states that:

'A substantial majority of buildings have little or no heritage significance and thus do not constitute heritage assets.'

recognising that significance is not black and white and that some buildings will have a little (i.e. not no) heritage significance but:

'Only a minority have enough heritage interest for their significance to be a material consideration in the planning process.'

4.4 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 which has 'weight' following submission to the Secretary of State in late October 2024. The supporting statement of Policy 99 includes the following:

'Distinctive elements of Wiltshire's historic environment, including non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity will be conserved, and where possible enhanced.'

'The potential contribution of heritage assets towards wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits will be utilised where this can be delivered in a sensitive and appropriate manner in accordance with Policy 98 (Ensuring high quality design and place shaping). The sensitive reuse of historic buildings and spaces will be supported and opportunities for the historic environment to inform and shape new development and regeneration projects will be encouraged. The adaptation of heritage assets in accordance with Policy 85 (Sustainable construction and low carbon energy) using appropriate materials and techniques which conserve their fabric and significance will be encouraged.'

'Development proposals that improve the condition of heritage assets at risk will be supported.'

- 4.5 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.

- 4.7 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.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designations

- 5.1 The farm building range at Oysters Farm is unlisted, and the site does not lie within a conservation area.
- 5.2 Oysters Farm is located with the Cranborne Chase National Landscape.

Assessment of Significance

Archaeological interest

- 5.3 The farm building range at Oysters Farm incorporates a small three-bay barn of probably 18th century date although there are few datable features to the building. Its simple form of construction with stone rubble walling and the loss of the original roof structure means that this building has minimal archaeological interest in terms of its fabric having potential to add to the understanding of the building.
- 5.4 The late 19th century cow house is a standard building for this period and has no notable archaeological interest.
- 5.5 The modern sheds have no archaeological interest.

Architectural interest

- 5.6 The L-plan range of building Oysters Farm represent modest traditional farm buildings of several phases of a relatively small farmstead. The small size of the barn reflects the limited arable of the holding whilst the relatively large cow house indicates the importance of stock. The range contributes to the local farmstead character and so has a moderate level of architectural interest in a local context.

- 5.7 These are simple buildings architecturally, the barn, being clearly vernacular in character, and forming a remnant of a pre-1840 group of buildings. However, the loss of the roof structure means that this building does not merit designation as a listed building.
- 5.8 The late 19th century cow shed reflects the standardised design of farm buildings in this period. Farm buildings of post 1850, particularly those of the late 19th century, must be of high architectural interest or form part of an important group to merit designation as a listed building, and retain original features such as internal partitions or stalls. This example of a cow shed is not considered to be of sufficient architectural interest to merit designation in a national context.
- 5.9 The modern sheds are of no architectural interest.

Historic interest

- 5.10 The range of buildings at Oysters Farm allow an understanding that this was an historic farmstead located in relatively isolated position within the parish, forming part of the settlement pattern where there are several small foci of settlement intermixed with small, dispersed farmsteads. The form, size and materials of the buildings reflect the agricultural history of area and so have a relatively high degree of historic interest and contribute to the character of the landscape.

Condition

- 5.11 The masonry walls of the barn are showing some signs of significant structural movement, particularly at the north-west corner where there is a substantial vertical crack the height of the wall. The large buttress to the eastern part of the north elevation of the barn indicates that there are structural issues in this area as well.
- 5.12 The roof to the shorter arm of the L-plan range has partially collapsed and there is evident movement in the east wall.
- 5.13 Overall, it is evident that the farm building range would qualify as being regarded as a Building at Risk.

6.0 PROPOSALS & ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

- 6.1 It is proposed to convert the farmstead range into a single residential unit with the replacement of the modern shed to the east with a new structure which will provide parking and some additional accommodation (Figures 27 – 29).

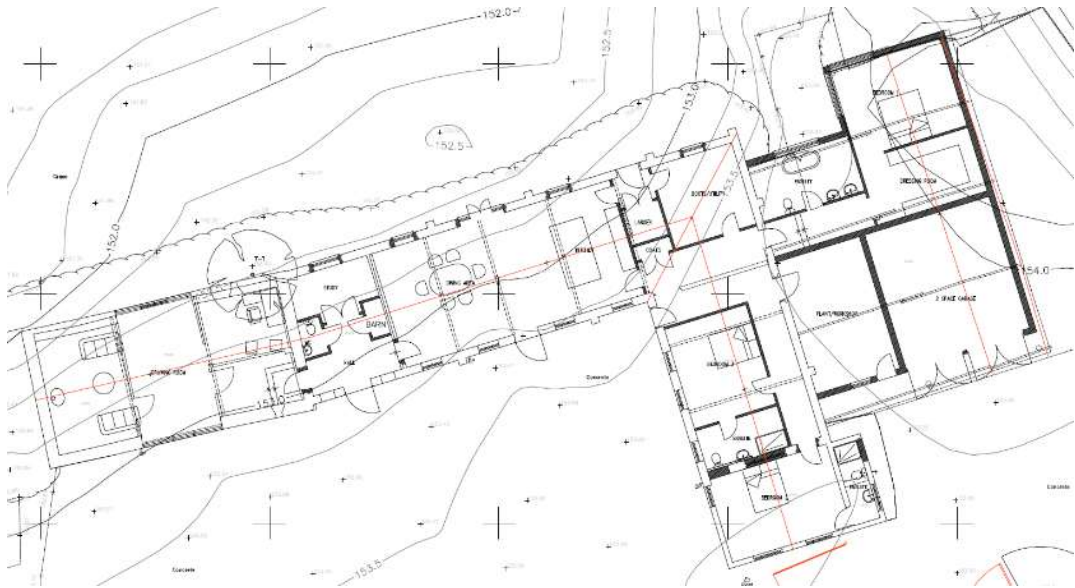


Figure 27 Proposed ground floor plan.

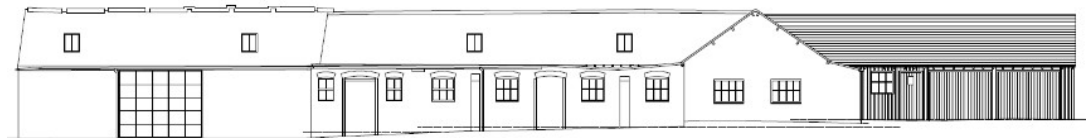


Figure 28 Proposed south elevation.



Figure 29 Proposed north elevation.

- 6.2 As a non-designated heritage asset, the principle of the re-use of this building range, which clearly contributes to a local character, is considered to be appropriate. The repair of this building, which is considered to be 'at risk', to maintain it as a feature of the landscape, and its new use which will ensure its long term viable future survival, is considered to be a

positive change which represents a public benefit and clearly accords with CP58 and Policy 99.

- 6.3 In relation to alterations to the external appearance of the building, the unblocking of the threshing bays of the stone-built barn and the installation of glazing typically used in barn conversions is considered to be in-keeping with the character of the barn, and will enhance its appearance. The replacement of the cement fibre sheeting to the barn roof with plain clay tile will also represent an improvement to the appearance of the building.
- 6.4 No alterations are proposed for the yard-side elevations of the brick-built cowshed range. The fenestration maintains the character of the existing windows. The main proposed alterations to the exterior of the cow shed range are to the rear, north elevation where a number of new openings are proposed to provide additional natural light to the interior of the building and also to allow a greater appreciation of the views of the landscape to the north. The majority the proposed openings in this elevation are standard window forms, using metal framed lights which will reflect the agricultural character, with one large area of glazing being inserted to allow more natural light into the eastern part of the building. With a feeding passage along the inside of this rear wall, the presence of window openings would not necessarily be uncharacteristic, and it is considered that the non-domestic form of the windows will not harm the general character of the building.
- 6.5 As an unlisted building, the internal changes to the fabric lie outside the control of the local authority. However, the proposal has been designed to respect the interior of the buildings as far as possible. In particular, the most important element, the three-bay barn, is being retained as a single space which will provide the main living area, the later partition walls being removed to return this into a single space as originally built.
- 6.6 The stable element adjacent to the barn will serve as a study with a passage along the south side of the bay, with new openings being formed in the gable wall of the barn and the partition wall between the stable and the cow shed to link the two elements.
- 6.7 The main range of the cowshed will serve as the kitchen, dining and family space, retaining much of this area as a single open space with the eastern part divided to form a boot room and larder off an entrance hall formed following the removal of the modern blockwork wall.

- 6.8 The return wing will be subdivided to form a bedroom with an ensuite bathroom and a corridor with a new opening in the former gable wall of the return wing to give access to the later bay at the south end of the range which will also be a bedroom.
- 6.9 To avoid the over subdivision of the farm buildings, an additional bedroom suite is proposed within the area of the re-built modern shed which takes pressure off the historic building. To achieve this layout the existing blocked door in the east wall will be reinstated and a second new doorway will be formed.
- 6.10 The relatively minimal level of intervention, having a low impact upon historic fabric, represents a conservation led approach to the conversion of these buildings. The proposals accord with CP58 and Policy 99 in that the scheme represents the sensitive reuse of historic buildings and spaces, the historic environment informing the development, and which conserves their fabric and significance.
- 6.11 A landscape plan has been prepared for the property which aims to minimise the impact of creating a domestic curtilage on the character of the setting of buildings. To the north, a native species hedge will be planted to define the northern boundary of the plot with a wild-flower meadow and a modest lawned area. There will also be some tree-planting in the area to the north-west and west of the barn. On the working side of the barn range, the character of the yard area will be maintained with the yard being predominantly gravelled. The only planting will be narrow beds adjacent to the barn range. The access track to the farmstead group will also be gravelled to maintain an informal, rural character.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The L-plan range of buildings at Oysters Farm represent a characteristic range of two principal historic phases: an 18th century stone-built three bay threshing barn and a late 19th century brick cow shed range. The buildings were part of a modest holding of less than 100 acres, typical of the Semley area. Whilst the original farmhouse has been replaced, the group still conveys a clear farmstead character and so it is considered to have high heritage value in terms of its contribution to the character of the National Landscape.
- 7.2 The farm buildings are of heritage interest at a local level and so are considered to be non-designated heritage asset. Their condition means that they are 'at risk'.
- 7.3 The proposed conversion to residential use has been informed by an understanding of the significance of the buildings, and the scheme represents a sensitive approach to the re-use of the heritage assets. The replacement of the modern shed to the east to provide some addition accommodation and parking is also in-keeping with the character of the site and will not result in harm to the heritage asset or landscape character of the National Landscape. The repair and improvements to the building, including the tiling of the barn roof, represent enhancements to the buildings and their character.
- 7.4 Overall, it is considered that the proposed landscaping will avoid over-domesticating the setting of the historic buildings and will preserve the rural character of the National Landscape.
- 7.5 Accordingly, I can find no conflict in the proposed development with National Policy in the NPPF, 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, and conclude that the application should be granted planning permission for this sensitive, heritage-led conversion from a vacant and dilapidated redundant barn to a long term viable residential use – a self-build family home.