

Red House, Gomersal

Preliminary Design and Access Statement relating
to the proposed conversion to short-term lettable
accommodation

Kirklees Council

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Notice

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1. Introduction

1.1 Instructions

This Design and Access Heritage Statement has been prepared in response to instructions received from Kirklees Council relating to the conversion of Red House, Gomersal to short term lettable accommodation for the purposes of supporting a pre-application submission to the Local Planning Authority.

The objective is to present the approach to the design and accessibility of the proposed development in consideration of the Grade II* Listed building together with the application of good building conservation principles.

1.2 Report Format

This report has been prepared by the following contributors:

- Kirklees Council
- David Campbell, Simon Rolley – F&G Ltd

The report is sub-divided into the following principal sections:

- The Proposal
- Description of Buildings
- External Areas

2. The Proposals

The application will seek full planning permission for the change of use from the existing museum (D2) and existing cart shed to commercial short term residential accommodation for holiday letting (Listed Building and Suis Generis) and listed building consent for change of use from the existing museum (D2) and existing cart shed to commercial short term residential accommodation for holiday letting.

2.1 Background

The subject buildings are Grade II* listed and comprise a two-storey former house (Red House) that was originally constructed in 1660 and a detached single storey former Cart Shed. They have been extended and altered over the years and in the 1970's, the site was opened as a museum due to its association with Charlotte Bronte and the Taylor family.

The museum closed in 2016, and Red House remains vacant, albeit with a temporary partial residential use located in a flat at first floor level, to accommodate a live-in 'Guardian' in order to give some building security and reduce anti-social behaviour on the site. The coach house is also currently in temporary residential use for the same reason, being home to a further Guardian.

Both Guardians provide a degree of security to otherwise unused buildings.

A detailed condition survey was carried out by Faithful & Gould Ltd (F&G) in June 2020 which established that the buildings are maintained in a generally good condition in respect of their structure, external envelope, internal fabric and services.

3. Description of the buildings

3.1 Generally

Red House is a Grade II* listed building and located in Gomersal, West Yorkshire. The property has an historic association to the Bronte family and is mentioned in Charlotte Bronte's novel 'Shirley'. It is located immediately adjacent to the public highway of Oxford Road (A651) which is a main road running between Bradford and Dewsbury.

The property is built perpendicular to the line of the road with the principal front elevation facing south and overlooking a large garden with mature trees including a majestic copper beech. To the rear of property, the land comprises a large surfaced car park, beyond which is Gomersal Public Hall. A children's playground is located immediately adjacent to the car park.

The property is located approximately 10 minutes' drive from the M62 motorway.

The site on which the property stands is reasonably level although the land does rise to the west.

3.2 Listed Building Considerations

A Heritage Impact Assessment will be submitted to accompany the full planning application and listed building consent taking into account the historic significance of the building including its local historical associations and links with the Taylor and Bronte families, and providing a full analysis of the proposed works and the impact upon the historic fabric of the building.

A method statement is included at Appendix 1 to this document which provides an outline of the content of the HIA and the approach to be undertaken.

3.3 Red House Construction

The main house comprises a substantial detached two-storey traditionally constructed building originally erected around 1660, and subsequently extensively refurbished in the 1800's. It is built in an approximate rectangular plan configuration with a relatively small rear offshoot to the north east corner and a two-storey projection to the west elevation that appears to have been built as an extension to the original footprint. The property has also been extended to the east by means of a glazed single storey projection with a lean-to roof.

The external walls are primarily of solid brickwork construction although the rear offshoot is formed in coursed dressed sandstone.

The roofs are multi-pitched and covered in sandstone slates with lead lined valleys and hips weathered by segmental stone tiles.

The upper floors to the building comprise softwood boarding on timber joists whereas most of the ground floors are ground bearing concrete with timber boarded or stone flag coverings.

The property does not seem to have been the subject of significant structural alteration since its original construction.

3.4 Cart Shed Construction

The Cart Shed comprises of a single storey detached building with a traditional pitched stone slated roof. The walls are constructed, with a stone rubble infill and faced externally with coursed, dressed sandstone. A more recent extension has been added to the eastern end of the building; it is of cavity wall construction with dressed stone to the external face.

The property does not seem to have been the subject of significant structural alteration since its original construction although one of the large openings to the primary elevation has been infilled.

3.5 Barn

The barn is excluded from this proposal and does not form part of this pre-planning submission.

3.6 Toilet Block

The toilet block is a detached single storey structure to the north of the offshoot to the main house. The building has suffered the theft of most of its roof covering and is in a generally poor condition.

4. Management and Operations at Red House

4.1 Operation

The buildings outlined within the site are to be used for short-term holiday stays, providing a unique holiday stay experience, in buildings which are inextricably linked to Bronte provenance and heritage.

While occupying the same site, the Cart Sheds and Red House can and will operate independently of each other. The House will be available for short-term holiday lets as a single domestic unit, accommodating a single party, under a single booking, of up to 10 guests across 5 bedrooms.

The Cart Shed will comprise 4 self-catering apartments, which can be booked individually, and independently from the Red House. The two smaller apartments will cater for up to 2 guests; the larger apartments will be equipped with a sofa bed to cater for small families.

Because of its romantic associations with the Brontes, and the property's appeal to heritage-motivated visitors, we anticipate there may be demand from guests staying in Red House to combine their stay with a wedding ceremony within the house. We will therefore apply to license the main reception hall for small wedding ceremonies, so that guests staying in the house may get married as a part of their stay.

Red House will be available to book for weekly stays, but also short 3-night breaks, over both weekends and mid-week. This means at capacity, there will be a maximum of 2 guest changeovers per week.

In the Cart Shed, there will be a minimum stay of 2 nights, meaning that when operating at capacity, there will be a maximum of 3 guest changeovers per week, per apartment.

4.2 Management

The properties will be presented in a manner which is expected to appeal to discerning visitors motivated by their Bronte heritage. Nevertheless, there will be explicit booking restrictions which rule out stays from potential anti-social parties – for example stag and hen parties, and younger-aged single sex parties generally. The target markets for the house are predominantly extended family and friends groups and heritage-motivated visitors, and all bookings will require the payment of a good house-keeping deposit to help reinforce standards of expected behaviour.

The specialist Noise Report commissioned to accompany this application does not identify any loss of amenity for neighbours as a result of Red House being used as proposed. However, prior to any bookings going ahead, the applicant Council will develop a Noise Management Plan which will include various measures designed to limit potential disturbances to neighbours, and to identify suitable methods of reporting issues. These may include:

- booking policies and payment of deposits
- time limits on the use of outdoor spaces
- a limit of 40 guests attending a wedding ceremony or other private function at the house
- policies of amplified music within the grounds
- policy on provision of additional car parking

These measures will apply equally to guests using Red House and the Cart Shed for a holiday stay, and to those guests at the house, wishing to combine their stay with a small wedding ceremony within the house.

For clarification, nothing in this additional facility offered to holidaying guests should be construed to mean that Red House is to be operated as a wedding venue. It is primarily a domestic residence, used for short-term holiday letting, but with the advantage of being licensed for small wedding ceremonies for a maximum of 40 people.

This application for Change of Use affects only the Red House and Cart Shed. There is no change to the use of the Barn adjacent to the site, which is retained under its existing category of use.

5. Loss of Community Asset and on-going Viability

5.1 Loss of Community Asset

It is acknowledged the change of use of this property from a museum to short term residential let accommodation will necessitate an assessment under Local Plan policy LP48 – Loss of Community Facilities.

Red House has been designated as an Asset of Community Value, designated Red House Heritage Group. However, as the Council is not proposing to offer the buildings or site for sale then the considerations of this element of LP48 are not applicable in this case. The Council has worked collaboratively with Red House Heritage Group on the development of this proposal, and the group have been supportive of this new approach.

5.2 On-going Viability

In terms of viability of the existing museum use, Red House previously operated as a small community museum, open to the general public and school groups prior to its closure in 2016. The Council's decision to close the museum, was prompted by the unsustainable combination of spiralling operating costs, and consistently low visitor numbers, which meant the operation was financially unviable. The site was subsequently offered for Community Asset Transfer, but despite receiving Expressions of Interest and subsequent Business Plans, none of the proposals received were assessed as being realistically viable.

The House and gardens remain much-loved by the local community and Bronte enthusiasts alike, and there is much support for bringing forward an alternative operating model which can restore access to the site and buildings, for both public and private visitors, and ensure its refurbishment. But like many heritage buildings, the key to protecting the asset and ensuring access in the future is to establish a sustainable income stream which complements and sits comfortably alongside its heritage credentials.

The Landmark Trust's development of visitor accommodation has successfully shown how 'at risk' heritage buildings can be brought back into use for tourism purposes; effectively re-establishing access to the public, in return for the payment of a fee to stay.

This proposal for Red House follows this model; and in doing so, recognises the way expectations of today's tourism visitors have matured and moved towards wanting unique authentic and immersive experiences, as opposed to a passive visit a heritage site. Today's Bronte enthusiasts are much more likely to visit Red House if there's an opportunity for them to stay overnight, than they would be to visit it as a static museum site. We

expect there will be much interest in the prospect of being able to stay in a house where Charlotte Bronte was a regular guest; and that demand for this opportunity will deliver a stable and secure income into the future.

It is this income which enables the Council to keep the building within its portfolio, and to thereby continue to make the site and buildings available for managed community access, visits and activities at times when it is not being used by paying guests.

So, while it is true to say that the change of use will mean the loss of the building as a permanently installed museum, it is the new use of the building, which generates the income to secure continuing private and public access in the future, and also periods of managed community access within a wider programme which celebrates the site's heritage credentials.

6. Proposed Alterations

The room numbers used in this section of the report relate to the As Existing and As Proposed Floor Plan drawings.

Each significant proposal for the buildings is discussed below in respect of the justification, impact and mitigation. Further justification and its impact upon the listed buildings will be addressed in a full Heritage Impact Assessment.

6.1 Red House

New door opening between Rooms 102 and 103

This door opening is necessary to provide sanitary accommodation to the principal bedroom. It will be formed carefully ensuring the maximum retention of the historic fabric and the opening will be sized to suit the masonry and not cut oversized to suit a standard size door and frame. The installed door will be a purpose-made with 4 fielded panels and installed to the bedroom side with architraves to match the existing profile used elsewhere in the room.

Blocking up the door opening to Room 104

This infilling of this door opening is necessary to form a shower enclosure that can be effectively sealed. For sound insulation purposes and for the avoidance of differential shrinkage cracking, we would prefer to infill the opening with masonry. If, however it is felt that this former alteration should be evidenced and also have some ease of reversibility, we would infill the opening in a slightly recessed timber stud construction.

Blocking up the door opening to Room 115

Similarly, to Room 102, it is considered that this door opening is a later alteration to the layout and that this development proposal reinstates the original layout.

Fireplace to Room 007

The chimney breast has been concealed behind modern plasterboard dry lining. It is the intention of the project to remove this and expose the original plastered masonry construction. If the original fireplace remains, it will be retained but if there is merely an empty recess, a reproduction cast iron fireplace will be installed as a non-operational focal point for the room.

Removal of the stone sink to Room 003

The stone sink in the north-west corner of the room is judged to be a modern installation associated with the museum usage and needs to be removed to enable the room to be utilised as a Receiver Kitchen ancillary to the Dining Room.

Windows generally

The windows to the primary elevations are mostly Georgian pattern sliding sash which are mostly paint sealed and inoperative. It is proposed that most of these windows will be sensitively repaired and refurbished, the

windows will need to be removed and various components replaced including sash weights, sash chords and pulley wheels together with localised timber replacement where it has decayed or otherwise missing. Some windows are to be replaced due to their condition and to enable operable natural ventilation with 3 nr new escape windows are proposed to the first floor. The cost of this work will be considerable and only a proportion of the windows will be repaired with selection based on the necessity or otherwise to reinstate functionality.

Secondary double-glazing removal generally

It is proposed that the existing secondary double glazing which was installed as part of the building's conversion to a museum will be removed in most cases to enable the reinstatement of natural ventilation. With reinstatement of some secondary glazing to the lounge area. Detailed proposals for altering the existing timber windows to provide ventilation have been included as part of the listed building consent application.

Partial double-glazing retention

It is proposed that the secondary double glazing to the east elevation window of the lounge (Room 009) will be retained for road noise attenuation purposes. It will however be altered to 2No hinged panels that can be opened to facilitate cleaning of the cavity to the outer window.

Ceilings

The ceilings throughout the property appear to have been underdrawn or wholly replaced with plasterboard and skim construction and the disturbance that will be necessitated by the large-scale lighting reconfiguration will have no impact on the historic fabric.

Wall finishes

The inspection of the building to date has confirmed the property has been subject to wholesale re-plastering using a modern lightweight gypsum plaster, evident from the absence of any significant debonding that the property.

Internal Doors

The existing internal doors appear to be of modern construction. The provision of sleeping accommodation incurs a Building Regulation requirement for half hour fire resisting doors throughout and it is therefore proposed that new purpose made certifiable fire rated doors and frames are installed of a 4 panel type and featuring a painted decorative finish.

Main staircase

The main staircase is also of modern installation and will be retained although the elements composed of stained softwood will be provided with an opaque painted finish. The varnished mahogany handrail which might have been salvaged from the original staircase will be retained.

Timber Floors

The suspended timber floors at ground and first floor levels are formed with a combination of modern replacement tongued and grooved softwood boarding and wide plain edge boards. Disturbance of the historic wide boarding will be kept to a minimum and any necessary disruption for services will be coordinated and undertaken by competent joiners.

Mechanical extraction to sanitary accommodation.

This will be designed to minimise the impact on the heritage value and the proposals are as follows:

- Bathrooms 103 & 104 – Extract air will be ducted through the roof space to the redundant chimney flue formerly serving the fireplace in Room 102
- Sanitary Accommodation Rooms 103 & 104 – Similarly, extract air will be ducted through the roof space to the redundant chimney straddling the two rooms
- Bathroom 114 – This comprises an existing bathroom and the existing 3No. windows will be repaired and made operational so that a good level of natural ventilation is provided.
- Informal and Receiver Kitchens (Rooms 003 & 006) – These rooms will be mechanically ventilated and if the requisite performance standards permit, the exiting redundant chimney flues will be utilised.

North Basement

There is a basement below the paved area to the rear which is accessed via a lift-out panel and stone staircase to the rear of the Ceremony Area (Room 007) The basement is provided with a roof comprising large stone slabs supported on steel beams which has a very poor weathering performance. At the time of inspection, surface water was pouring into the space and the entire fabric was saturated. The basement has no foreseeable purpose. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this basement could have been the cause of floodwater entering the property. It is therefore proposed that a sump pump and ventilation is installed to this area to reduce flooding and moisture content to the basement.

South Basement

There is a basement located below part of the Seating Area (Room 001) which is accessed via a stone staircase below the ground-first floor staircase. There are no proposals to affect this area.

6.2 Cart Shed

Removal of the internal walls to the east section of the building

These modern non-load bearing partitions are of modern blockwork construction and of no architectural value.

Opening up the east arch to the south elevation

This proposal removes a modern intervention and is a restoration of the original structural layout.

Proposal for the south elevation arched openings

It is proposed that the glazed infill construction to the arches will be formed in dark coloured framing so that the pattern of the double doors and side panels will be discreet and thus emphasise the overall shape of the openings. The framing will also be recessed well back from the external face of the stone columns

Removal of the internal step to the west section of the building

The step constructed at the change in floor level appears to be a modern intervention and the infilling of the opening is considered to be a reinstatement of the original layout.

Formation of new window openings to the north elevation

It is proposed to form 3No new window openings in the rear (north) wall of the east section of the building to provide an improved level of natural illumination and a vista for the residents. These openings will be provided with flush stone lintels and projecting stone cills to accommodate 9 pane sliding sash timber windows with a vertical emphasis to the pattern of the glazing bars in accordance with accepted Georgian proportions.

Heating and Hot Water Installation

It is proposed that each lettable unit will be provided with self-contained heating and hot water systems operated by 4No condensing gas fire boilers mounted at high level on the rear wall. This will ensure that impact on the primary elevations will be avoided and the effect on the rear elevation will be limited to 4No fan assisted balance flues.

Reinstate window to the rear elevation of Flat 2

This will comprise the removal of the infill masonry and the installation of purpose-made timber framed windows which will be fitted into the retained stone surround and mullion.

New subdividing wall between the lettable units

These walls will be formed in studwork about 200mm overall thickness to comply with the fire and sound insulation requirements of the Building Regulations pertaining to party walls. The wall will be non-load bearing and will sit directly on the existing stone slabs.

It is also proposed to offset the wall between Flats 2 and 3 so that the large section timber truss can be left undisturbed.

Internal walls generally

The wall sub-dividing the living spaces, bedrooms and bathrooms will be formed in timber studding with plasterboard linings. Whilst the bathroom partitions will be built up to the underside of the roof lining, the other walls will be built to privacy screen height only and thereby reduce the extent of fixing to the historic fabric.

Existing stone floors

The existing sandstone floors to Flats 2 -4 will be retained but anywhere they are disturbed the slabs will be neatly lifted, cut and reinstated.

Foul Drainage Installation

The proposed foul drainage from the new bathrooms and kitchenette facilities will be run underground to the rear of the building where they will connect into a new shared drainage pipe running in a wet-east direction approximately parallel to the rear wall. Generally, air admittance valves will be employed on internally site stub stacks and the externally exposed above ground drainage will be limited to a single cast iron vent pipe fixed to the north-west corner of the building.

Mechanical ventilation to the sanitary accommodation.

In order to avoid potentially unsightly and unsympathetic grilles to the external elevations, it is proposed to ventilate the bathroom by means of vertical ducts terminating at purpose made lead vents through the stone slates.

6.3 The Toilet Block

Generally

This vandalised and dilapidated building will be repaired using the traditional materials employed in its original construction and will be used as a storage area. No significant alterations are proposed.

7. Mechanical and Electrical Installation

7.1 Proposal

The main house and cart shed shall undergo a full rewire. This shall entail the replacement of all existing electrical services within the buildings including lighting, emergency lighting, small power (i.e. sockets, switches etc.), fire alarm, intruder alarm and access control. Externally, new CCTV shall be installed to the perimeter of the main house and cart shed; these shall be installed just below first floor level so that all cabling can be contained within the floor void. Discreet architectural lighting shall be installed to illuminate the principal façade of the main house, along with functional heritage lighting to illuminate the access drive and pathways between the house and cart shed.

7.2 Justification

The electrical services within the buildings do not comply with current regulations regarding fire safety and circuit protection. The proposed change of use presents an opportunity to correct this, and to replace the 'commercial' installations currently present within the buildings in favour of more sympathetic solutions in keeping with the buildings' original and proposed use. There is a history of electrical issues across the site which have been flagged up on the periodic inspection reports, and the whole installation is of an age where it is nearing the end of its useful life.

7.3 Impact

A new electrical installation would enhance the existing buildings through improved internal function and environment and would help to maintain the optimum viable use of the site. The use of LED light fittings and automatic lighting controls would also help to reduce the buildings' carbon footprint.

7.4 Mitigation

- Disturbance of the existing historic fabric shall be kept to a minimum:
 - Wireless solutions shall be employed where possible (i.e. for lighting controls and the intruder alarm) so as to minimise the need to run new cables;
 - Services shall share common routes wherever possible, with existing routes being reused where feasible;
 - Existing holes and openings in walls/floors shall be reused wherever possible;
- Cables shall predominantly be routed in the void between the ground and first floors, and in the roof void above the second floor. A competent joiner shall be used to lift floorboards on the first floor, and the boards shall be numbered as they are lifted to assist re-laying in their exact previous positions. Floorboards shall be discreetly screwed down rather than nailed to facilitate future access and avoid vibration from nailing above potentially fragile ceilings. Timber or beeswax plugs shall be used where floorboards are exposed to reduce the visual impact of screws.
- Where wall chases are required, e.g. for new socket outlets or light switches, then they shall be carefully and neatly made by hand and run within round plastic conduits so facilitate future access and prevent further damage. Plaster shall be reinstated to match existing. Wiring accessories shall be carefully coordinated to minimise the number of chases required (e.g. socket outlets located back-to-back, below light switches, etc.).
- Any new or additional items of electrical equipment are to be located discreetly where possible and where their function is not compromised.
- Should any external cabling be required then this shall be fixed into sacrificial materials such as mortar joints between brickwork.
- All works to be undertaken by competent/suitably qualified contractors to ensure work is carried out with minimal harm to historic fabric.
- All works to be carried out carefully and under supervision.

8. External Areas

8.1 Guest vehicular access

It is considered essential that for short-term holiday guests, parking should be available within reasonably close proximity to their accommodation, to engender a feeling of safety and security. It is therefore proposed that parking will be provided adjacent to the north boundary and close to the east elevation of the Cart Shed. In this location it is envisaged that Grasscrete or similar non-visually intrusive surfacing will be provided to accommodate 9 private cars. These cars would access the site via the existing vehicular entrance from Oxford Road with the existing driveway re-surfaced in an architecturally sympathetic material.

8.2 The garden

The garden is a prime asset and will be protected and enhanced by the proposals. It is acknowledged that there is a designated TPO area alongside the boundary of the site. An arboriculturists report has been commissioned and it is proposed that the mature trees on the site will be retained with some judicious removal of some adjacent saplings to improve their setting.

8.3 Boundary treatment

The rear gardens of the adjacent properties at 22-32 Pollard Way share their rear boundaries with the subject site. It is envisaged that privacy screening in the form of a copper beech hedge or similar will be provided along this boundary to reduce the likelihood of guests disturbing the site's neighbours.

8.4 Additional Parking

At times when additional parking is required, for example, where the council opens the site for a community open day event, then parking for the general public will be accommodated using the large public carpark to the north of the site at Gomersal Public Hall.

8.5 Fencing

It is proposed that an architecturally sympathetic steel palisade style fence to be agreed with Conservation officers will be provided to the north boundary of the site extending from the wall to Oxford Road to the existing stone wall adjacent the cart shed. This will provide some essential additional security to the site.

9. Accessibility

9.1 Disabled access

It is not considered viable to provide wheelchair access from the north carpark as this would require the construction of a long and convoluted ramp or the installation of an external platform lift. It is however entirely practical that the proposed car park to be provided on site would facilitate access for a wheelchair user to both the Cart Shed and the ground floor of Red House. For this purpose, a designated disabled parking space would be provided with stone slabs of similar suitable hard paving. The ground levels are reasonable for wheelchair use with no requirement for steps between the parking area and the subject buildings. We would also adjust the ground level immediately adjacent the external door so that these can be readily negotiated by the disabled person.

There are also good public transport links to the site and the main Oxford Road immediately adjacent the site is a bus route.

10. Conclusions

10.1 Summary

We consider that the description of the proposal presented in the main body of this report satisfactorily demonstrates that the conversion to the new use is sustainable and can be completed in compliance with the principles of good conservation practice.

Externally to Red House there is very little alteration work proposed and to the Cart Shed, the external alterations are largely to the secondary rear elevation or a reversal of previous unsympathetic change.

The alterations to the internal layout are also in many cases a reinstatement of the original form and therefore constitute a positive contribution to the conservation of the buildings.

Our detailed inspection of the buildings has also confirmed that much of the original historic fabric has been lost in previous alteration projects for which records seem to be somewhat scant. Irrespective of this obvious loss, the scheme currently proposed respects the buildings and particularly in terms of Red House, the new use is highly sympathetic to the original function.

Overall, these proposals will improve the significance of the heritage asset both in terms of the special character of the listed building and its setting within the wider curtilage by giving it a viable new use.

10.2 Specialist reports

The full planning and listed building consent applications have been accompanied by a detailed Statement of Significance and Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by a specialist conservation architect, Richard Storah of Storah Architecture, as per the outline provided in Appendix 1; in addition this the specialist tree survey has been included alongside an acoustic report for the site.

End of Design and Access Statement.

APPENDIX 1

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY