

Consultation Response from KC, Conservation & Design**2023/91452 Thorn Bush Farm, Miry Lane, Hightown, Liversidge, WF15 8JJ****Listed Building Consent for partial demolition and rebuilding of farm house and erection of extensions and alterations to farm house, outbuildings and barn/stable to form visitor attraction with cafe, shop, class rooms, children's play area and associated car parking****Date Responded: 30.6.2023****Responding Officer: Sue Brooks****Responding Ref:**

Thornbush Farm is a Grade II listed, two-storey building which was formerly a pair of cottages dating back to the late 18th century with later additions and alterations. It is constructed in stone and brick, with a stone slate roof and ranges of mullioned window and in recent years the west wing has been demolished. The farm has strong associations with the Bronte family, with Reverend Patrick Bronte occupying it in the early 19th century.

Within the curtilage of the former farmstead is a 20th century single storey agricultural building constructed in brick and block with a corrugated roof, along with two derelict brick ancillary buildings. Surrounding the site on all sides are open fields within the green belt, with clear views of the site from Windy Bank Lane to the south and west. To the north and east beyond the fields are predominantly modern housing developments with a few older properties to the east. A Local Plan housing allocation site (HS111) is identified on land to the north on the site of a former school and outside the green belt.

The cottages are currently in a derelict state following years of neglect and vandalism, with one entire wing demolished, and they are at serious risk of further decline and collapse.

Assessment

The Conservation and Design Team would welcome a sensitive proposal to restore the derelict listed cottages at Thornbush Farm which have fallen into a state of disrepair. However, we have concerns about the justification submitted for the proposed use of the building, the level of detail included within the application and lack of assessment against planning policies.

Justification for a visitor centre

The proposed use within this application is as a Bronte museum and visitor centre. This has the potential to restore the cottages to their historic condition and layout, with the application stating that this would give visitors the opportunity to see how people lived 200 to 300 years ago without the modern interventions related to comfortable living, which would be necessary for conversion to private dwellings.

We accept that this is an interesting proposal which could allow the restoration of the building. However, there is no evidence within the application to inform the historic detailing or show how modern interventions (such as mechanical and electrical installations, heating, etc) would be successfully and discreetly incorporated into the design. The proposed external landscaping, visitor centre, car park and play area are likely to be far more harmful to the character of the buildings and curtilage than the conversion to private dwellings.

The heritage statement states that a museum / visitor attraction will create an important asset in Kirklees as the applicant understands that facilities of this type are in very short supply throughout the Borough. It does not provide evidence of how the proposed use as a museum/ visitor centre is sustainable in the long term. This needs to be understood in context with other museums within the borough which have closed due to unsustainable costs and lack of income.

It also states that 'the costs involved in a development of this nature will be very costly and the

proposed end use will not necessarily generate the amount of income necessary to offset these costs. It states that the development of the adjacent sites to the north, north-west and north-east may become an important part as to whether the proposed works can/ will proceed.'

The Conservation and Design Team strongly objects to development on green belt land within the setting of the listed building and therefore this is not relevant to the determination of this application. In addition, no information has been submitted to allow us to assess the viability of the proposed restoration and visitor centre including the extent of enabling development required to fund this project (NPPF paragraph 208).

We consider the optimum viable use for the cottages to be private dwellings as this was their historic and most recent use before they became vacant. We would recommend that this is explored an alternative and potentially more suitable option, with the reduction in costs associated with the conversion of the piggery building and proposed landscaping works.

Proposals for the individual buildings are assessed below:

Restoration of the listed cottages

We accept that the cottages are in a derelict condition and therefore there will be a degree of rebuilding, fabric replacement and structural works to ensure their stability. Plans and elevations, along with a brief specification of works have been submitted but do not provide enough information to adequately assess the proposal.

A more substantial repair specification and details of the restoration and conversion needs to be submitted, including internal works and new interventions. Missing elements such as windows and doors should be reinstated based on historic evidence and photographs which should be submitted within the heritage statement. Joinery details and elevations of the windows and doors can be submitted by condition. Significant elements such as the historic structural roof timbers should be repaired, with any replacements justified and details of the repair methods and replacement timbers submitted for approval. The climate change statement refers to highly insulated construction methods, ground source or air source heat pumps and bat and sparrow boxes. Details need to be provided for assessment.

The applicant proposes artificial stone slates for the roof covering of the cottages as the existing covering has been removed. The heritage statement states that artificial slates are more lightweight than natural stone slates and could be laid on the existing structure without the need for extensive strengthening. Given the extremely poor condition of the roof structure, we would expect it to require strengthening and would recommend that structural recommendations are submitted for carefully designed strengthening works which would allow natural slates to be laid. We do not consider the current justification and level of information to be adequate.

The reinstatement of the demolished south-west wing of the cottages could be acceptable in principle; however, no evidence of the previous build (such as archive photographs) has been submitted for assessment and therefore we are unable to comment on this part of the proposal at this time. Further information on the design, materials and external detailing needs to be submitted.

The proposed drawing specifies brickwork for the elevations and cast artstone for the quoins, heads, jambs and cills. The stone detailing should be in natural tooled stone and this can be agreed by condition.

Piggery

This large single-storey farm building is in poor condition and makes a negative impact on the setting

of the listed cottages, and we would welcome a proposal that would enhance their setting, either by demolishing the piggery entirely, replacing with a more sensitively designed structure, or re-cladding and repairing.

The applicant proposes to convert this building, with the central projection demolished and a new extension built onto the southern end. As this structure already harms the setting of the listed building, we are unable to support further development of this building.

The replacement of the existing corrugated asbestos roof with a natural blue/grey slate roof covering is acceptable as proposed in the application form (not imitation blue slates as proposed in the brief specification). The proposal for off white render on the south elevations, along with the character and material of the openings on this elevation, needs to be reconsidered and this can be dealt with by condition.

Outbuildings

The two small outbuildings have a low level of significance, and we would have no concerns with their retention and conversion using traditional materials (natural blue slates, timber windows and doors, lime pointing). Further details could be submitted by condition.

Landscaping

Any landscaping, car parking and ancillary equipment associated with the proposed visitor centre and museum will harm the setting of the historic cottages by the introduction of an access road and car park, external play area, lighting and security works within the curtilage and in the wider landscape.

A brief schedule of works has been submitted but the details within this are limited. A carefully considered and sensitive scheme needs to be included within a heritage impact assessment which should assess the level of harm, mitigate it as far as possible and provide public benefits to outweigh it where it is unavoidable.

Policies

As recommend at pre-application stage, the proposals need to be assessed against Chapter 16 of the NPPF (particularly policies 194, 196, 199, 200, 202 and 208), as well as Policies LP24 and LP35 of the Kirklees Local Plan and Section 16 (2) and 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This is still required.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Conservation and Design Team would support the restoration of the cottages at Thornbush Farm and would welcome a carefully considered use for the buildings.

However, based on the limited information submitted and insufficient justification required to carry out an adequate assessment, we are unable to support the proposal at this time.

If the application is pursued, we would recommend that the comments above are taken into consideration, with a heritage impact assessment produced by a qualified Heritage Consultant and submitted for works to the listed building, curtilage and wider setting. It must include clear and convincing justification for the proposed use and physical works, with clear public benefits demonstrated to outweigh any harm to the significance of the listed building, including an assessment of enabling development.

The submitted drawings and brief specifications provide an overview of the proposal, but a higher level of detail is required to undertake an adequate assessment.