AHR Building Consultancy Ltd

Kirklees Council
Oakwell Hall

Oakwell Hall – Building Fabric Repair Works

Heritage Impact Assessment

2024.00049.010

January 2026

1.00 INTRODUCTION

The assessment relates to the proposed repairs to Oakwell Hall, Birstall. The proposals are detailed in drawings prepared by AHR Building Consultancy Ltd and Mason Clarke Associates.

The Heritage Impact Assessment has been produced for the client to meet the requirements of paragraph 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and inform them, their agents and the planning authority of the historical significance of the site, together with the impact of proposals on its heritage value and significance.

This statement has been prepared by Richard Storah of AHR.

Oakwell Hall is Listed, Grade I. The historic background and significance are described in the statement of significance prepared by Richard Storah and Chris Mace of AHR in 2025.

2.00 PROJECT OUTLINE

It is proposed to repair the hall to address issues regarding structural movement, water ingress and backlog maintenance issues, primarily affecting the external fabric of the building, but also specific internal areas where either movement has affected the structure, due to plumbing leaks, or wear and tear.

3.00 THE NEED FOR THE WORKS

3.1 Repairs

3.1.1. Chimneys

Chimneys have been repaired in the late C20 with new masonry elements inserted into several stacks. The chimneys to the east have been fitted with restraints to the roof trusses at some point likely in the late C19 as they are included in views c. 1900.

Repair is required to the masonry of the windows to address issues of water ingress and vegetation growth due to open joints and eroded pointing, eroded stones and damaged tabling and drip moulds.

3.1.2 Roofing

The existing roofs are in grey (riven sandstone) slates. They are unfelted, the majority are back pointed in cement mortar. Some slates have slipped and broken. Many particularly to the central area of the hall are out of alignment suggesting failure of battens or pegs. Some of the back pointing has broken away, in other areas slates are salting or eroding alongside the impermeable mortar. There have been roof leaks in localised areas. Repair is difficult as the cement pointing prevents removal of individual slates without consequential damage.

Slipped and broken slates lead to water ingress. Where back pointing is missing there is a further risk of windblown snow or rain.

There has been damage to the roof timbers leading to movement of the slates. The brittle nature of the cement pointing has led to further cracking of slates.

The roof needs to be weathertight to protect both the structure of the listed building and also the museum collection housed in the building.

There is a need for sarking felt/roofing membrane to provide a secondary means of waterproofing in the event of slate failure and to prevent ingress of blown powder snow, water ingress, falling debris and the ingress of insects and dust.

The roof structure has been damaged by past water ingress. Timber repairs are required. Those will also require removal of roofs to provide access, particularly where historic plaster may otherwise be affected.

3.1.3 Rainwater Goods

Valley gutters to the rear of chimneys are undersized and prone to blockage. The length of the gutters exceeds that recommended for single lead sheets. It is proposed to raise and increase the gutter widths, adding a roll joint to longer lead lengths to reduce the risk of thermal movement cracking.

It is proposed to introduce a hopper and spitter to the valley over the porch on the front elevation. This is required as any blockage to the outlet in this location results in water ingress inside. In photographs c.1900 the hall had a much larger outlet forming a chute into the hopper, it is proposed to reintroduce this

Outlet with lead chute above.

The lead lined timber gutters are in poor condition as the gutters have leaked into the timber enclosures leading to rot. The gutters require replacement. Use of cast iron will be more durable and of increased capacity, leading to greater climate change robustness. In photographs c.1900 the hall had cast iron gutters

Photo c. 1900. Cast iron gutters and pipes with cast iron swan necks.

The lead swan necks at the top of the existing rainwater pipes are in places damaged or holed. This may be due to damage during cleaning or expansion of ice whilst blocked.

It is proposed to change to cast iron swan necks to link to cast iron rainwater pipes. In photographs c.1900 the hall had cast iron swan necks to some pipes whilst those to the east were offset from the building. It is proposed to introduce swan necks to allow all pipes to be fitted tight to the masonry as they are pre-existing in these locations and as this is a more discrete solution.

Photo c. 1900. Cast iron gutters and pipes set proud of the wall without cast iron swan necks.

Rainwater pipes are cast iron. Anti-splash shoes are proposed where pipes currently fail to discharge to gullies.

3.1.4 Stonework

The stonework has open and eroded joints and cement over-pointing which is causing degradation of building stones. Localised movement has also led to cracking.

In many locations facing stones are eroded due to a combination of factors. These include erosion due to moisture and salt damage from water ingress or cement pointing, loss of faces due to poor bedding, clay holes or atmospheric solution or crush damage due to movement, particularly to window surrounds.

Repointing is required to prevent water ingress and further erosion of the stones. There is also a need to defrass and redress some walling stones to reduce the risk of further delamination and loss of fabric. There is also a need for stone indents to replace stones which are either heavily damaged, excessively porous due to face loss or which affect the weathering of other stones. Partial (external to glazing) indents are proposed to window surrounds to address past movement cracks and crushing and to address deterioration where cement or mastic oil migration has affected weathering and led to accelerated erosion.

It is proposed to lead clad the spitter to the rear chimney which is a change and may be defined as minor harm, this is offset by the improvement to the weathering of the building and the prevention of decay due to the water ingress occurring in this area.

3.1.5 Glazing

Glazing repairs are required where panels are excessively distorted due to structural movement of the surrounding masonry. Glazing panels will also need to be removed to facilitate stone repairs. There are also occasional broken panes and treatment to ferramenta / saddlebars which are intended to put and keep the windows in good repair.

Removed panels will be straightened, released and glazing cement reapplied to seal joints prior to refixing.

Refer to specialist glazing / leaded light report prepared by Dennis Eckersley for full scope of repairs.

3.1.6 Internal Structure to Partitions

The timber panelling between the stair and grand parlour is deformed and bowing excessively as the masonry partition behind is deflecting pushing into the timber work. There is a need to repair the wall to prevent further damage to the panelling and reduce the risk of collapse. To repair the wall the timber panelling will need to be removed. The wall must then be rebuilt to support the structure over. The panelling should then be fixed back.

3.1.7 Drainage and Underpinning

There are damaged drains in the vicinity of the hall. It is considered that these may contribute to the softening of the ground and loss of fines, leading to some of the structural movement. The drains require repair to ensure the long-term stability of the hall.

Movement is being monitored. Where movement is ongoing underpinning or structural ties may be required to restrain and stabilize the structure.

3.2 **Alterations**

3.2.1 Relocation of Toilets

The existing toilets are at first floor level. Pipe blockages and leaks in the past have led to the escape of water which has affected other elements of the structure. Historic fabric has been damaged, including the lath and plaster ground floor ceiling which has detached and holed as a result of overflowing water in the past. There is also a requirement for an accessible toilet within the building, particularly if the hall is used for events.

It is proposed to remove the toilets from the first floor and to provide a ground floor accessible WC with level access. This will reduce the risk of overflows and leaks affecting any significant historic fabric.

4.00 THE IMPACT OF THE WORKS

4.1.1 Chimneys

Repointing and repair will help preserve the historic fabric. Although the indent repairs will be visible until they weather in, there is a benefit in maintaining the building in a stable and weathertight condition.

4.1.2 Roofing

Reslating in traditional slates on pegs will protect the building and is a maintenance task with neutral impact.

The introduction of aluminium in place of oak pegs is minor harm, which is offset by benefits in allowing easier less disruptive future repairs and in allowing the introduction of an underslate membrane in place of the previous cement back pointing.

The introduction of a breathable underslate membrane is minor harm, which is offset by benefits in reducing cold bridging with insulation, whilst also providing a secondary means of waterproofing in the event of slate failure and in preventing ingress of blown powder snow. The membrane also reduces the risk of insect, dust and vermin infiltration, which may affect the structure and the historic collection within the hall. The new membrane is considered of less than substantial harm which is offset by benefits

in providing a greater environmental buffering of the interior and providing better conservation conditions for the historic collection within it.

4.1.3 Rainwater Goods

Renewal of valley gutters in a wider pattern with steps to reduce lead lengths provides climate change resilience and helps to protect the fabric below from damage. The change is minor harm, which is considered to be offset by the benefit in the greater weather protection offered to the building.

The reintroduction of a chute or hopper replaces a lost detail and is considered neutral in its impact. The extension of the hopper to a spitter beyond the cast iron rainwater head is a minor change, which provides an indication of any blockage and should the outlet block deflect water away from the historic building. The change is minor harm, which is considered to be offset by the benefit in the greater weather protection offered to the building.

The change from lead lined timber to cast iron gutters and swan necks returns the gutters to a pre-existing, more durable and greater capacity form. The change is of neutral impact but offers the benefits of increased gutter capacity and reduced maintenance.

4.1.4 Stonework

Repointing and repair will help preserve the historic fabric. Although the indent repairs will be visible until they weather in, there is a benefit in maintaining the building in a stable and weathertight condition.

Lead cladding of the spitter to the rear chimney is a change and may be defined as minor harm, this is offset by the improvement to the weathering of the building and the prevention off decay due to the water ingress occurring in this area.

4.1.5 Glazing

The glazing has been replaced or released in phases throughout the C20. Although glass exists of different ages, the majority of lead cames are modern. The releading therefore does not result in a loss of historic fabric. The change is of neutral impact but offers the benefits of improved weathertightness and the opportunity to reduce the size of the lead in some of the less sympathetic past repairs.

4.1.6 Internal Structure to Partitions

There is a need to prevent the continuing movement of the internal wall. This work is of repair and has neutral impact on the significance of the building.

Removal of the timber panelling to access the partition is a risk and there is the potential for damage to the joints, panels or timbers. There is a need to mitigate against this damage, through the recording of the panelling prior to the works and the preparation of agreed method statements which protect the panelling prior to and during installation. As the panels are now distorted, the extent of deformation or straightening of the panels when refixed needs to be agreed. Archive material suggests that this panelling was successfully removed and reinstated in the past when extensive floor repairs were carried out in the Great Parlour.

4.1.7 Drainage and underpinning

Excavation and repair of the drains and for underpinning once backfilled should not affect the understanding of the standing structure. It is of neutral significance not impacting on the heritage of the building. However due to the historic nature of the site and the potential for underground archaeology, if excavation is being carried out a watching brief should be considered to ensure anything unknown but evidential value is not lost.

4.2 **Alterations**

4.2.1 Relocation of Toilets

The relocation of the toilets to ground floor level will sub-divide and affect the layout and understanding of the dairy and buttery areas to the rear of the hall. This change is considered of less than substantial harm, affecting the layout, internal volume and understanding of these areas. It is considered that this harm is offset by the benefits in removing the toilets, internal drainage and pipework from the first floor, significantly reducing risk of water damage and rot to the timber and plasterwork. There are further benefits in allowing the removal of external drainage and vent stacks from the rear elevation.

To ensure that the benefits are realised, the relocation of the toilets to the ground floor should be conditional on the removal of all water services, plumbing and drainage from the upper floor.

5.00 CONCLUSION

The proposals should be considered in the context of national guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Paragraph 212 of the NPPF states that *'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.'*

Oakwell Hall is listed at grade I and is therefore acknowledged to be of national or greater importance. Conservation of the historic significance of the building should be taken into account in consideration of any change. Likewise, its contents are those of an Arts Council England Accredited museum service and require protection and good conservation conditions to be maintained.

Paragraph 215 of the NPPF states that '*Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'*

The proposals respect the significance of the existing building, its setting, and its historic features. The majority of the works, including roofing, stonework and glazing are of repair rather than alteration with neutral impact on significance. Likewise renewal of rainwater goods in cast iron is based on past precedent and though a change is considered of neutral impact.

The introduction of small scale changes to the fabric, including aluminium slate pegs, underslate membrane and wider gutters do not affect the significance nor understanding of the building, but by definition may be considered minor harm as they represent change. This harm is offset by the public benefits in maintaining the listed structure in a more weathertight and stable condition and assisting in the conservation in stable conditions of the museum collection within it.

Larger scale changes are proposed including the relocation of the toilets which are considered of less than substantial harm. In the case of the relocation of the toilets there is significant benefit in protecting the historic fabric from water damage and further public benefit in increasing access provision to toilets, assisting in the letting of the building for events and adding to its long-term viability.

Some of the proposed works are necessary to maintain the structural integrity of the building, these include structural repairs to roof timbers, masonry, foundations and drainage. All these involve the introduction of new materials and have the potential for

minor harm. This is offset by the need to maintain buildings in a stable condition, with discrete interventions to prevent structural failure or collapse with consequential damage to surrounding historic fabric.

The proposed works enhance the functionality to the existing building and assisting in maintaining it in its existing and optimum viable use.

The impact on the heritage asset (the listed building and curtilage) are minimal as has been demonstrated. There are benefits in the proposal in terms of replacing damaged fabric and stabilisation of the structure, increasing weather protection and providing climate change robustness, and in the case of the relocation of the toilets in improving the potential for wider more accessible use of the building.

The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of the NPPF, as there is no negative impact on the significance of the heritage asset and that the listed building will be in a better maintained and more robust condition as a result of the works, assisting in its long-term care and viability.

It is considered the proposals meet the requirements of the NPPF and Local Plan Policies.

Report prepared by:

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