

Proposals for addition of Garden Room extension and remodelling of felt roof covering with Welsh slates and alterations to vehicular access at Harbinger House.

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

JUNE 2016



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Context
3. Pre-Application Enquiry
4. Response to Policies and Advice
5. Evaluation leading to Proposed Design
6. Roof Finish
7. Access
8. Conclusion

1. Introduction

This statement accompanies an application for Planning Permission to carry out alterations to Harbinger House on the West side of the Green at Elsdon. The alterations consist of:

- New extension to west to form Garden Room.
- Demolition of existing kitchen extension and replacement with reconfigured kitchen.
- Stripping existing bituminous felt roof covering and replacement with Welsh slates, also to be used on new extensions
- Formation of new vehicular access from existing track along the South side of the curtilage.
- Provision of grass reinforcement cellular mesh across green from highway.

The statement aims to provide supporting information not already included in the application form and to assist in an understanding of the accompanying drawings. It has been written in the context of the advice given in the NNPA response to a Pre-application Enquiry dated 4th May 2016 and will address issues set out in that advice.

2. Context

The green at Elsdon is a large space surrounded by diverse but largely harmonious one and two storey houses and cottages from the 18th to the 20th century in age. The open space has a significant shape and history: at its centre in an island churchyard is the Grade I Listed St. Cuthbert's Church, at least 12th century but much rebuilt in the 14th century and twice restored in the 19th. At the North end, at the head of the Green stands the prominent three storey fortified Tower also of the 14th century, though much altered and extended in later times including major restoration in the 1980's.

Immediately below the Tower on the West side of the Green is Townhead, a modest stone built 19th century house, and adjacent to this is Harbinger House (locally known as The Green Cottage) approached directly across the narrow strip of green between the highway and the boundary of the curtilage.

Constructed in 1932, the cottage is a simple structure of timber framed walls clad in painted boarding under a pitched roof with a North/South ridge between gables. The original roof covering is known to have been profiled asbestos-cement sheet removed later and replaced with bituminous felt. Other alterations have also been made in previous ownerships of date unknown:

- A small timber-clad Porch added facing the Green, with three steps up from the path.
- Three windows in the same elevation changed with double-glazed uPVC frames.
- On the West side the Kitchen extension with back door into the garden added at the North-West corner, with a flat felt-covered roof. (the original kitchen had been the central room of the cottage which still has a fine cast-iron cooking range).

In other respects the cottage has lately been rather neglected and the applicant has in hand a limited project of repair to external wall boarding and internal linings.

The cottage has been purchased as part of a parcel of land comprising the cottage with its curtilage together with the field immediately to the West with an access track from the Green running along the South side of the cottage garden. To the North and West of the field lie the garden and paddocks of Elsdon Tower. Townhead is in separate ownership.

3. Pre-Application Enquiry

On completing the purchase of the field and cottage, the applicant wrote to Northumberland County Council Planning Service asking for advice on his own preliminary thoughts for the addition of a Garden Room extension on the basis of "larger home extensions" rights and procedures. The County Council passed the enquiry to the proper Local Planning Authority, the Northumberland National Park Authority as Elsdon lies within the boundaries of the National Park.

The NNPA's advice in response to the approach was given in a letter of five pages dated 4th May 2016 signed by Rebecca Adams. The premise of the advice was that the property falls within the National Park which is designated by the 2015 GDPO as "Article 2(3) land" and is afforded special protection. On such land Part 1: Class A.2(a) of the GDPO states that: "development is not permitted by Class A if it would consist of or include the cladding of any part of the exterior of the dwelling house with stone, artificial stone, render, timber, plaster or tiles." Thus Planning Permission would be required for the proposed Garden Room extension as this would include timber cladding.

Part 1: Class A.3(a) states that in order for development to constitute permitted development the materials to be used must be similar to those used in the construction of the existing dwelling. However, as the property is on "Article 2(3) land 'even the use of timber to match the existing would require Planning Permission'.

It is interesting that the judgement of whether Planning Permission will be required is based largely on a reaction to the materials to be used for cladding any part of the exterior of the dwelling. Thus the same advice has been given in relation to the proposal to strip the BS747 bituminous felt from the existing roof slopes and cover the roof with Welsh slates. As this constitutes a change in material for the roof covering Planning Permission will be required for this change too.

Other matters covered in the Pre-Application response referred to the possible status of the property and its potential for use as "an affordable home for a new couple' or a holiday property. In this connection "the NNPA would not be averse to discussing the prospective construction of a replacement dwelling on this site, potentially something of more substantial construction (e.g. stone and slate) which is more in keeping with the village vernacular and up to modern standards for the needs of a new family, etc".

4. Response to Policies and Advice

The suggestion that the cottage might be demolished and replaced has been considered but not taken up. There are a number of reasons for this:

1. The cottage is not in such a bad condition as to prevent its being rendered suitable for occupation.

2. While the existing Bathroom and Kitchen are definitely in need of upgrading these are areas where a cycle of investment is commonly made and can achieve a significant benefit for the needs of a new occupant or family. In other respects the Bedrooms are satisfactory and the Living Room cosy with the big range which will be kept.
3. The principle short-coming is that the interior of the cottage is dark with windows only on the East side overlooking the Green while the West elevation has no windows. With little impact on the village, the cottage could be modified to allow natural light in and views out. The West side away from the Green offers an opportunity to open up the Living Room and add a small Garden Room.
4. Alterations to the cottage to upgrade the Kitchen, Bathroom and to add a Garden Room would be essentially economic. Demolition and replacement would inevitably be more costly without attracting a significantly better return on investment.
5. The implication of the suggestion that a new dwelling could be considered more in keeping with the village vernacular is that the cottage detracts from the setting of the Green. This is not a view shared by the village: the Green Cottage is regarded with some affection and its removal would not be appreciated. The largely harmonious assembly of dwellings round the Green includes some diversity in materials and form and it would be difficult to claim that only stone buildings would meet a predetermined vernacular character or that timber (whether natural or painted) was not part of the palette of materials native to the National Park.

5. Evaluation Leading to the Proposed Design

The original sketch proposal attached to the Pre-Application enquiry envisaged the construction of a glass-fronted Garden room projecting c.3.5metres from the West elevation with splayed corners and a low timber boarded plinth, a door into the garden was shown on the South splay. It was assumed that the extension would have a flat roof covered in a membrane. To the North of this the existing Kitchen was to be retained with a little adaptation to open into the new Garden Room with a small window in place of the present back door. The WC and shower behind the Kitchen would not be altered. Figure 1 shows a summary of this proposal in plan and two key elevations. No alterations were proposed to the East elevation facing the Green.

An appraisal of this proposal would acknowledge that both the Kitchen and WC/Shower appear very restricted in space just where a modern family expects more comfort and has more equipment. It would also be seen that the Garden Room occupies more than half the West elevation of the cottage and threatens to engulf the simple character of the original structure. Consequently the extensive wrap-around glass walls seen from outside the village from the West might present a significance variation along the visually quiet settlement boundary not least a larger night-time light source. In order to achieve sufficient height within the extension the flat roof must be raised above the eaves of the present roof and thus, as it projects forward, become the dominant feature on this side.

It was also seen that while the structure of the Garden room would be relatively easy to build, the form represents a departure from the existing timber framed and boarded type established in the original cottage.

It was a response to this last concern that suggested an alternative approach discussed with the applicant. This is based on an extension at right angles to the main axis of the cottage as a structure of the same character height, width and roof pitch as the existing so that the roof slopes meet in a conventional valley gutter and same level eaves and ridge. The external walls of this extension will be finished in timber boarding of the same width and profile as the existing and the roof will be covered with Welsh slates to match the proposed new covering of the existing cottage roof slopes (see below). The South wall of the extension will have a French window giving access to a terrace facing South-West while the West gable would have a timber frame window overlooking the garden and the fine view up Redesdale.

The internal ceiling height of the existing Kitchen and Shower Room extension is only 2150mm, very oppressive and unsuitable. Both are also extremely restricted in floor area. To make better use of this corner of the cottage it is proposed to allocate the whole of the space West of Bedroom 2 to a larger Bathroom within the original cottage footprint and to dismantle the existing Kitchen extension and build a new extension of the same width but slightly increased projection treating the roof as a subsidiary pitched roof and gable. The eaves of this extension will be the same level as the eaves of the original cottage and the Garden Room extension. Between these new extensions a back door and Lobby with a flat roof will provide a link to the Garden and the new vehicular approach for the occupants.

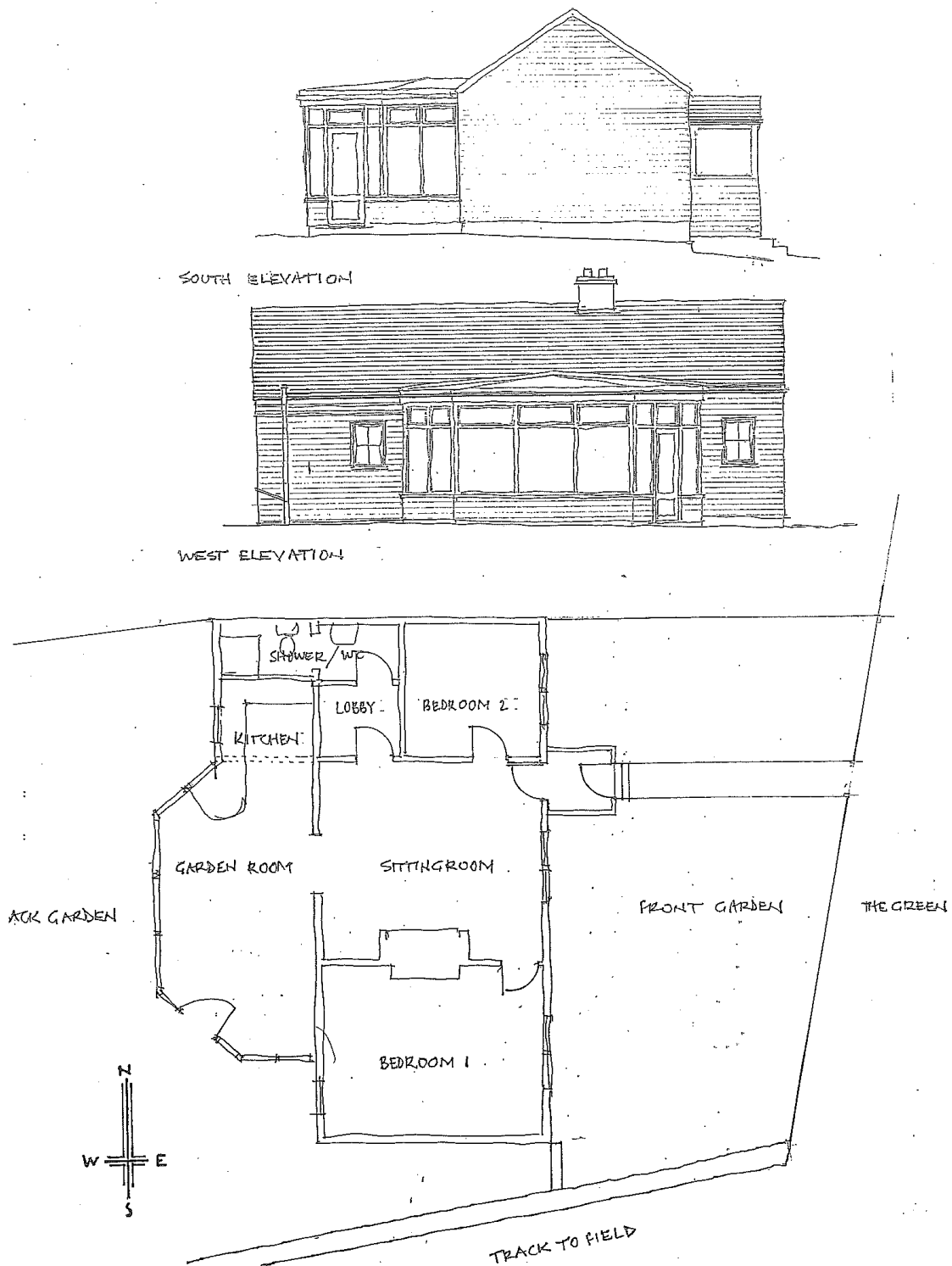


FIGURE 1. HARBINGER HOUSE ELSDON
 PROPOSAL SUBMITTED WITH PRE-APPLICATION ENQUIRY
 SCALE c 1:100

Figure 1

6. Roof Finish

It has already been noted that the original roof covering was corrugated asbestos cement sheet. It is not known when that finish was removed to be replaced with bituminous felt, but it can be said that both such coverings speak of a cheap, relatively short-life, option with poor long-term performance.

Looking around the village Green one can see bituminous felt in use on garages, outbuildings and sheds. Some agricultural buildings outside the main settlement have dark coloured profiled metal sheeting but the predominant covering for houses and cottages is Welsh slate. Looking down on Elsdon from the high ground above the village this seemingly and durable material provides a quiet, undemonstrative tone within the setting of field and garden and of the Green itself.

It is proposed to strip, the bituminous felt covering from the existing roof of the cottage, and to cover this and the new extension roofs with equal coursed second-hand slates (from roofers stock available) fixed to battens over counter-battens and vapour permeable membrane. The internal roof structure of the existing roof will be enhanced to carry the increased weight of the covering safely. The structure of the new extensions will be designed for the new covering.

7. Access

Current practice has accepted informal parking on the Green for the occupant and visitors to this cottage. There is no vehicular access or parking within the curtilage of the property. The difficulty has been that this arrangement was unsuitable for disabled access with a narrow steep path up to the Porch, three steps into the Porch and two steps from there to the Living Room. This entrance is also too narrow and the distance between doors too short. To reach the back door a narrow garden path with steps was carried round the South end of the cottage within the curtilage boundary, but the existing door into the Kitchen is also not wide enough and there is a high step.

As noted earlier, the applicant has purchased the field to the West of Harbinger House together with the track giving access to the field now incorporated in the curtilage of the cottage. It is proposed to use the track to gain access to the cottage via the West side where the new door and Lobby can be designed to suit disabled access. The rising ground of the site will solve the problem of the difference in level between the Green and the floor of the cottage without the need for intrusive engineering works at the front of the building. The ground to the West of the cottage is close to floor level within.

It is proposed to set back the field gate at the end of the track far enough to allow a three-point turning head so that a car can be driven into the curtilage, reversed when leaving and emerge onto the Green in forward motion. The track across the Green will be strengthened with Suregreen GR14 Grass Reinforced Mesh by Suregreen Ltd ([www. Sure-green.com](http://www.Sure-green.com)). This is installed directly onto existing grass areas and allows the grass to grow very quickly through the mesh. Its roots then intertwine with the mesh filaments creating a strong, reinforced invisible surface structure. A similar technique has been recently approved over the Green to serve the adjacent property to the South. The reinforced track will curve towards the South to induce

drivers to use the road down the West side of the Green with a safer exit onto the B6341.

It is hoped that the proposed rearrangement of the access to the cottage will achieve gain both in making provision for disabled access and in reducing the intrusive parking on the Green. Occasional visitor's parking would fall within current accepted useage.

8. Conclusion

This statement has set out the proposed changes to Harbinger House. The new configuration of Living, Kitchen and Garden Room accommodation is integral with the idea of improving disabled access by using the track (now in the same ownership) to bring access onto the higher level of ground to the West of the cottage. This will ensure that the East side of the cottage facing the Green will remain unchanged.