

Lowtown Farmhouse, Walltown

Demolition of existing West extension, construction of new West extension, Internal Alterations and New Windows to North and South elevations.

Heritage Statement

1.00 The Nature of the Asset – Lowtown Farmhouse

Lowtown Farmhouse is Listed Grade II (Ref 11/83 List Entry 1303081). The features of note are all external and no internal features are mentioned in the Listing description.

The house has undergone alterations since construction in 1800 (date on lintel). This has clearly included renewal of windows, new internal walls and doors, new ceilings, fibre cement (likely to be asbestos containing material) dry lining, extension to the West, new flue and chimney and general alterations.

As part of the application documents, photographs have been included which show the various main areas where alterations are proposed. These photographs also show the general dilapidated nature internally.

2.00 The Extent of the Asset and its Setting

Lowtown Farmhouse is set on its own in the landscape located directly above Hadrian's Wall Vallum. There is currently no defined curtilage to the property but access to the property is clearly defined by the track from the public highway running initially in a Southerly direct and then travelling in a South West direction towards the property (the track also continues in a Southerly direction).

The Listing for the property is as follows;

“Farmhouse. Dated 1800 on door lintel. Squared stone and dressings. Stone-tiled roof with rebuilt brick and dressed stone chimneys. 2 storeys, 2 bays. Squared tooled quoins. Replaced door and 2-pane overlight at right. Doorway has raised alternating jambs and oval plaque on lintel with illegible initials and date 1800. Replaced sashes in raised surrounds. Roof has coped gables. Left end brick stack. Right end stone stack with top ledge. Lean-to addition on right return.”

The only current door to the property is on the Southern elevation but there is evidence of a previous door to the North elevation which has been previously stoned up. However both jambs and lintel to this door are clearly visible.

There are attached lean to outbuildings to the East and West elevations of the property. The East outbuilding is constructed of stone and corrugated fibre cement (ACM) whilst the West extension is of constructed of corrugated steel on a timber frame.

Internally, at ground floor there are virtually no remaining internal walls. The existing floor (believed to be concrete) is covered with debris and old manure. The only features remaining at ground floor are an old range to the West elevation, a cupboard to the South reveal of the range, a stone "larder" shelf and part of the East room wall (South jamb) along with a single internal door.

At first floor level there are remains of a landing and stud walls along with two fireplaces.

Generally, remaining ceilings and walls are a mixture of fibre cement boards and dilapidated lath and plaster including some areas of dry lining. External walls are either dry lined with fibre cement boards or lime / cement plastered. Photographs are included with the application illustrating the condition of the property.

In the wider landscape, the property is surrounded by grazing land all part of the wider Estate. There are limited views of the property from the wider landscape though long distance views do exist when travelling West on the Military Road.

In terms of public views, these are limited but a public right of way does run past the property to the East.

In terms of the wider area around Lowtown, Keys to the Past notes;

"Air photographs suggest that other buildings formerly existed at Lowtown in addition to the present farmhouse.

The first (1866) edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map appears to show at least one additional structure to the north-east of the house and field inspection noted the presence of a ruined field wall and building foundations which was formerly a combined byre and barn.

In front of the farmhouse is a level terrace with a boulder revetment. Towards the west end of this terrace part of an earlier wall foundation projects through the turf. The date of the wall is not known but it measures 1m thick and could suggest the presence of a bastle.

North and west of the farmhouse, the ground has been levelled to create what seem to be a number of platforms, possibly the site of former buildings. John Horsley noted remains here in the 1720s and although the earthworks are difficult to interpret, a settlement of some kind existed here which had evidently fallen into ruin by that time."

3.00 The Significance of the Asset and its Setting

As described above, the property, to a certain extent represents a typical Northumberland farmhouse in terms of both the wider area but specifically the Walltown area. The property is part of a larger holding including Walltown and has previously been part of the larger Estate.

The area surrounding the property and other parts of the Estate have a history going back to at least Roman times and perhaps further as there is evidence in the area of older settlement. Part of the building itself sits on the Scheduled Monument which defines the Vallum between Cockmount Hill and Walltown Quarry (26068) A copy of the description of the monument and a map illustrating the extent of the monument are attached to this statement.

The property has been altered over the centuries to meet the differing needs of different generations whether Estate workers, farm workers or to meet modern living standards (electricity connection is apparent). The natural progression of development is not an unusual feature of this type of property.

The most significant aspects of the property are set out in the Listing description and it is also noted that there are no internal elements of the property mentioned in the Listing or external elements such as boundary features etc. specifically Listed.

Overall, the property is in a good structural condition and the property has been re-roofed in the recent past. However, internally the property is very dilapidated and there are very few features which could be repaired and retained.

4.00 The Proposed Works and Impact upon the Asset and its Setting

All of the proposals for the alterations at Lowtown have carefully considered the important elements of the Listing and the relevant historic elements of the property.

There will be minimal loss of significant historic fabric through this proposal for the alterations to the existing dwelling. None of the elements which are being altered internally are mentioned in the Listing and they are not considered to be significant in term of historic importance (blank stone walls, old partitions etc.) Many of the areas being altered are of a later construction date than the original property. This includes for example alterations to the main fireplace at ground floor to reform the inglenook repair the lintel (subject to engineers confirmation) and install a wood burning stove.

Due to the nature of the alterations carried out previously there may be some work required to strip back the modern dry lining / plaster and later additions to get back to original structure. Decisions can then be made on the retention of existing features including;

- Exposing fireplace features such as lintels / jambs at ground floor and first floor with retention of fireplaces at first floor and new wood burning stove at ground floor
- Removal of cupboards and exposing original gable wall internal arrangements
- Exposing original walls behind modern / original plaster and dry lining (retention of decorative steel features to walls [see images])
- Removal of debris from ground floor and renewal of concrete floor (any stone found during works to be to be set aside for re-use)
- Remove rotten floors at first floor and inspect joists to ascertain which joists can be retained (retain steel hanging hooks).

- Removal of stone shelf and supports and set aside for reuse.
- Retention of existing doors where feasible (likely to only be first floor doors?)

A dialogue will be necessary with the LPA / Conservation Officer whilst these works proceed. It is acknowledged that a recording exercise will also be necessary during the initial “stripping back” works. Following these works, decisions can be made on reinstatement or permanent exposure / reinstatement of features.

The main alteration works will involve the removal of only small areas of historic fabric, none of which are considered to be of significance. Areas for alteration are shown on the accompanying photographs and existing / proposed plans.

- Reopen doorway to North elevation.
- New doorway to West extension to access extension.
- Form new opening for traditional double glazed timber sliding sash window to South elevation. Quoins, lintels and cill to match existing and window to sit in check reveals.
- Form new opening for contemporary thin frame double glazed powder coated aluminium window to North elevation. Quoins, lintels and cill to match existing and window to be recessed deeply into reveals.
- Removal of range and reconstruction of original inglenook.

It is proposed that the existing extension to the West elevation along with the brick flue and chimney stack will be removed. The stack will be rebuilt in stone to match the East stack. The proposed extension will be larger than the current extension but it is subservient to the dwelling and does not compete with the existing building. The materials and design are deliberately contemporary and will provide a contrast to the existing buildings and will not be seen as a pastiche.

The materials proposed for this extension are Corten steel cladding to the walls with a parapet of Corten steel hiding a single ply membrane roof such as Sarnafil. New powder coated aluminium screens / doors are proposed to the South and West elevations of the extension. When the property is not in use, Corten steel sliding shutters will be used to secure the property due to its isolated / exposed nature. Internally, the existing West elevation of the dwelling will be left as exposed stone and the new opening to the dwelling will have stone quoins and lintel to match existing. This proposed extension will be seen as a complete contrast to the existing dwelling.

It is proposed that corrugated fibre cement roof to the lean to on the East elevation would be replaced with corrugated Corten steel.

5.00 Summary

The proposals do not have a significant impact upon the character of the existing Grade II listed building and they do not diminish the understanding of the property. The proposals retain the “distinctiveness” of the property.

The works proposed will expose a number of currently hidden features and will potentially allow a much fuller understanding of the history of the dwelling.

A recording exercise will be carried out during the works to record areas exposed and any features found.

This statement is proportionate to the significance of the Grade II Listed building and also to the works which are proposed.

The proposals which form this application preserve the building, its setting and its features of special architectural or historic interest. This is in accordance with sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The level of detail submitted including this statement is proportionate to the assets' importance and is sufficient to assess and understand the potential impact of the proposal on the significance of Low Town and its setting. We have consulted the available historic environment record including Keys to the past, Listing description and Heritage Gateway in accordance with NPPF paragraph 128.

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