



DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

Application Reference Number	16NP0084LBC
Description / Site Address	Listed Building Consent - Creation of visitor accommodation incorporating demolition and re-build of extension to west elevation and internal and external alterations including works to window and door openings at Lowtown, Walltown, Greenhead, Northumberland, CA8 7JD
Expiry date of publicity / consultations	13 September 2016
Last date for decision	13 October 2016

Details of Proposal

Listed Building Consent is sought for works to the property known as Lowtown, incorporating the demolition and re-build of an extension to the western elevation and internal and external alterations, facilitating the creation of visitor accommodation.

Lowtown is located within the open countryside approximately 2.5km (direct route; approx. 3.2km by road) north east of the village of Greenhead, approx. 120m south from the nearby unclassified public road.

The building, a Grade II listed former farmhouse, occupies an isolated position within the landscape atop the Vallum Scheduled Ancient Monument, within the setting of Hadrian's Wall. The property is understood to have been constructed in 1800 and has been unoccupied for some time, as evidenced by the overall condition of the building. The cottage is currently unserviced, with the track leading from the road to the property and surrounding agricultural land now partly overgrown.

Planning permission is additionally sought for the proposed works including the refurbishment of the existing track under application 16NP0083.



Fig. 1: *View facing north west towards Lowtown*

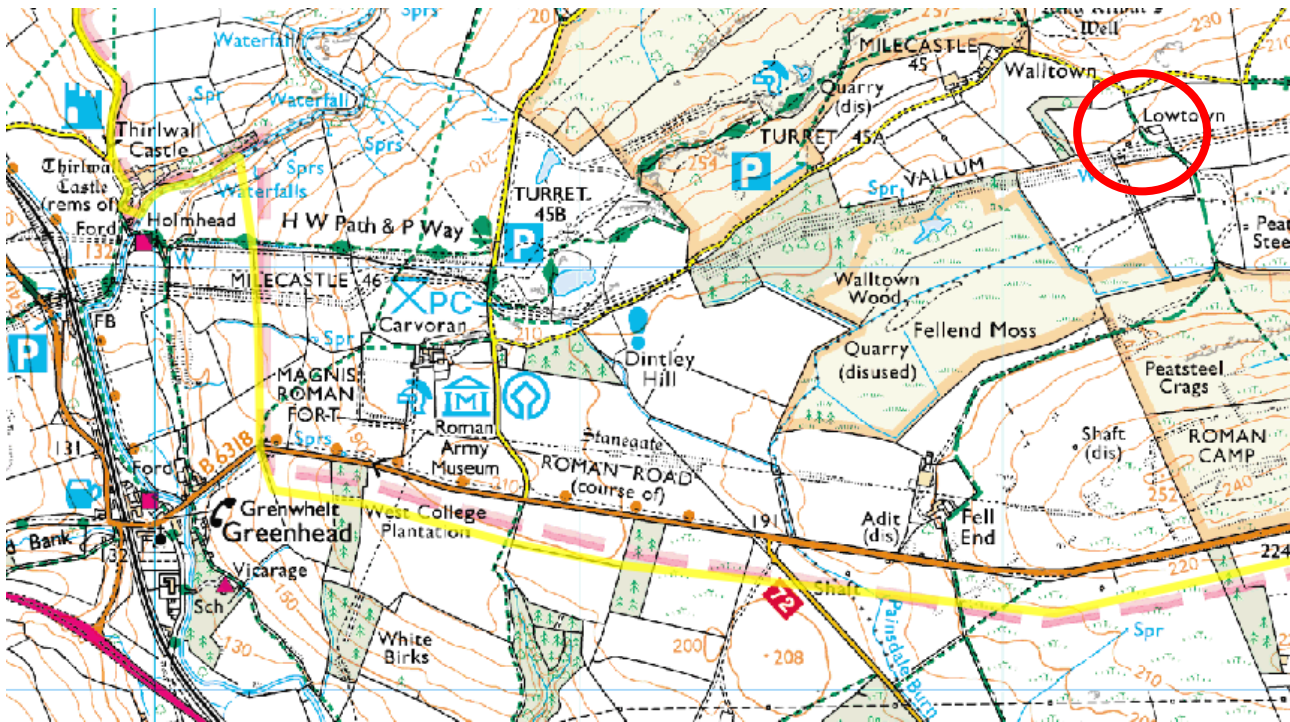


Fig. 2: OS Map showing proximity of Lowtown (circled) to Greenhead

Fig. 3: OS Map showing location of site within surrounding area





Planning Policy & Guidance

National Policies

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Local Policies

Northumberland National Park Authority Core Strategy and Development Policies Document (Core Strategy) (2009)

Policy 1	<i>Delivering Sustainable Development</i>
Policy 3	<i>General Development Principles</i>
Policy 15	<i>Sustainable Tourism and Recreation Development</i>
Policy 17	<i>Biodiversity and Geodiversity</i>
Policy 18	<i>Cultural Heritage</i>

Supplementary Planning Guidance

NNPA Building Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (Design Guide SPD)

Relevant Planning History

16NP0083 Creation of visitor accommodation incorporating demolition and re-build of extension to west elevation and internal and external alterations. *Pending determination*

Consultation/Representations

Greenhead Parish Council: No response received

Historic England: Comments made

Historic England are content to defer to NNPA's specialist conservation advisors with regards to this application however will be providing a response to accompanying application 16NP0083.

NNPA Historic Buildings Advisor: Objection

Lowtown and its setting as a rural isolated cottage are considered to have high historic and aesthetic significance. The Heritage Statement submitted has not sufficiently understood the significance of this building and investigations should be furthered in order to understand more about its development and significance in order to inform the proposals.

The proposed development is considered to be harmful and is not accompanied by sufficient evidence to justify the submitted proposals. Moreover, the same result could be achieved with a more sympathetic design following better analysis of the building. The proposals contained within the application therefore fail to accord with national and local planning policy.



NNPA Ecologist: Comments made

The proposed development will require a Natural England license. The mitigation and compensation strategies proposed within the Bat and Barn Owl Survey submitted are likely to be successful and should be conditioned.

No representations received in response to neighbour notification letters issued on 30.08.2016, a notice displayed at the site and a notice displayed within the local press.

Assessment

The matters to be taken into consideration in the assessment of this application are:-

- The Principle of the Development;
- The Impact upon the Character of the Listed Building; and
- The Impact upon the Special Qualities of the National Park.

The Principle of the Development

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear that a presumption in favour of sustainable development is at the heart of decision-taking. Policy 1 of the NNPA Core Strategy seeks to ensure that development proposals will conserve and enhance the special qualities of the National Park. These are defined within the Core Strategy as its biodiversity and geodiversity, cultural heritage, tranquillity and landscape character, and are specifically protected by policies 17-20. The proposed development as assessed below is considered to be detrimental to the cultural heritage of the National Park, one of its special qualities, and in this way would therefore be contrary to Core Strategy policy 1.

The Impact upon the Character of the Listed Building

Lowtown is a Grade II listed stone and slate former farmhouse situated within the open countryside north east of Greenhead. Originally listed in 1987, the building was recorded at this time as of unusual quality despite being in disuse, a state which appears unchanged given the lack of supporting infrastructure and its dilapidated condition.

The cottage, which is thought to date from 1800 by the inscription on the oval stone above the doorway, is attractive in its construction and appears little changed in the intervening 200 years, comprising 2 storeys and 2 bays with cut stone surrounding the door and window openings, alternating stone quoins and a protruding stone 'skirt' partially surrounding its base. In particular the cut stone around the door and windows and oval datestone allude to a sense of importance that the building may once have had, as noted by the listing description, indicating that this was not merely a rusticated cottage, given this attention to detail which is not commonplace among Northumbrian farm buildings.

The significance of Lowtown, whilst partly ascribed to the historic and aesthetic values of the building, is equally attributed to its unusually isolated rural setting. The cottage is set some distance from the nearby public road, obscured from view on approach by local topography, and is reached from the north via a well grassed-over track which provides access to the farmland beyond, adding



to its sense of general wildness, compounded by its abandonment. Once reached, the building is located within a field with no defined curtilage or nearby structures (excepting two small lean-to buildings), occupying a unique position atop the Vallum Scheduled Ancient Monument within the setting of Hadrian's Wall, with extensive views of the surrounding landscape.



Fig. 4 (clockwise from top left): *Oval datestone above entrance; alternating stone quoins to NE corner (stone lean-to visible); stone 'skirt' to foot of building; example of stone window surround*



Fig. 5: *View towards Lowtown on approach from north east*

Summary of proposals

The proposals seek the re-use of Lowtown as visitor accommodation, for which both planning permission and Listed Building Consent (LBC) are sought. With regards to this application, a summary of proposed works for which LBC is sought is as follows:-

- The removal and replacement of an existing lean-to structure to the west elevation (including brick flue and chimney, which is to be rebuilt in stone) including the formation of a doorway to provide internal access;
- The formation of a new internal layout and new window openings within the roof and walls;
- The installation of new timber double glazed windows, excepting the new north facing window (to be aluminium);
- The reroofing of the lean-to structure to the east elevation and installation of new doors; and
- The reopening of a doorway to the north elevation.

The western elevation of the building houses a dilapidated corrugated steel lean-to (footprint 3.6m x 2.8m) containing a brick boiler, from which protrudes a flue terminating in a chimney stack. The application proposes the removal of the lean-to, boiler, flue and chimney and construction of a replacement extension alongside the reconstruction of the chimney in stone to serve a new woodburning stove. An opening would also be created within the western wall to provide internal access into the proposed extension.



Fig. 6: View facing east towards existing corrugated steel extension

The proposed extension would project 5m from the side of the property for a width of 5.3m, incorporating a total height of 3m (3.5m including flue). The walls of the extension would be inset 0.25m from the corners of the cottage, with the overhanging roof inset by 0.1m. The extension would be clad in Corten steel incorporating a Sarnafil roof and powder coated aluminium doors and windows, proposed to be concealed by Corten steel sliding shutters when in disuse. The Heritage Statement submitted suggests that *“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 material and design are deliberately contemporary and will provide a contrast to the existing buildings and will not be seen as a pastiche”*.

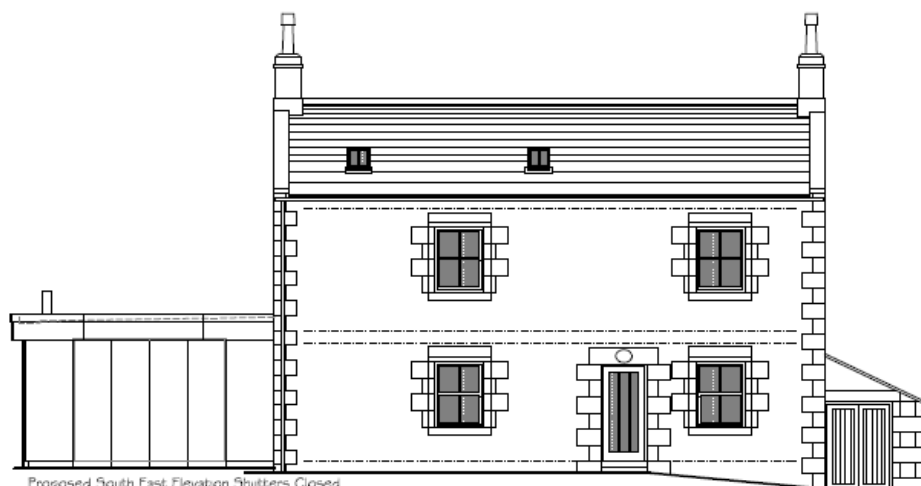


Fig. 7: Front elevation of Lowtown incorporating proposed extension



The former layout of Lowtown comprised a central staircase directly ahead on entering to the cottage, with one room on either side at both ground and first floor level, totalling 4no. rooms. There is now limited evidence of this former layout as the building is severely dilapidated internally however the Authority does hold photographs taken in 2012/2013 which provide evidence of this, as supported by the existing floor plans submitted.



Fig.8 (left): 2012/2013 photograph showing former staircase and ground floor partition walls;
(right): Current condition of cottage showing position of former staircase, as viewed Sept 2016

The proposed scheme seeks the re-configuration of the former layout of the building, repositioning the staircase to the north western corner and creating additional rooms using partition walls, incorporating the formation of additional window openings within the roof and to the south and north elevations. In addition, the application seeks the proposed replacement of all existing windows (presently unglazed and boarded over) with double glazed timber units, excepting the proposed new window to the north elevation which would be aluminium framed. The justification for this work is set out within the Heritage Statement which argues that *“the most significant aspects of the property are set out within the Listing description...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[s] of historic importance...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”*.



Fig. 9: *Internal images of property, showing severely dilapidated condition*

The existing lean-to to the eastern elevation comprises a stone structure with fibre cement corrugated roof, proposed to be replaced with Corten steel corrugated roofing and double doors installed. The northern elevation of the building evidences of a former doorway, now blocked up, its position marked by a stone lintel and variation in the pattern of stonework, which the scheme proposes to re-open.



Fig. 10 (left): *Location of blocked up doorway; (right): Roof of lean-to to be replaced*

Assessment of proposals

Section 16 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires Local Planning Authorities to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Core Strategy policy 18 seeks to ensure that protection is afforded to the National Park's cultural asset sites, giving particular protection to listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments by only permitting development which does not conflict with national policy.



Chapter 12 Paragraph 131 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that in determining applications, Local Planning Authorities should take account of a number of considerations, in particular the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. Within the NPPF, 'significance' is defined as the value of a heritage asset attached to its heritage interest (be it archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic) which can derive from both the asset's physical presence and its setting, and Paragraphs 132-134 introduce and discuss the concept of harm caused by inappropriate development (such as the alteration or destruction of the asset or development within the setting) which can affect this ascribed significance. In particular, Paragraph 132 highlights the irreplaceable nature of heritage assets and thus requires that any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification, in support of which Paragraph 133 advises that where a proposed development would lead to substantial harm, Local Planning Authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that substantial harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm.

The supporting Heritage Statement highlights the dilapidated condition of the property, noting that few features could be repaired and retained, further stating that the most significant aspects of the property are those which are included within the Listing description, which encompasses no internal features, and thus the proposals would not significantly impact upon the character or understanding of the building. The application additionally emphasises the benefits of restoring the property, in particular that this would increase visitor accommodation with the area.

The Authority is supportive of the proposed restoration of Lowtown, considering its use as holiday accommodation to be appropriate in principle and its conversion to constitute a public benefit in that this would aid the conservation of an at-risk building, in accordance with Core Strategy policies 15 and 18 and NPPF Paragraphs 132-133. The existing corrugated steel lean-to does little to enhance the appearance of Lowtown and does not contribute to its significance, and its removal is therefore supported along with the removal and replacement of the flue and chimney stack. It is furthermore accepted that any restoration would incur substantial intervention given the internal condition of the property and existing windows.

However notwithstanding the above, whilst the scheme would arguably achieve such public benefits in accordance with NPPF Paragraph 133, the application does not contain sufficient evidence or explanation to justify the harm posed by the proposed scheme, and does not demonstrate that this harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits (which would outweigh the harm), as expressly required by NPPF Paragraphs 132-133.

As aforementioned, the LPA acknowledges that substantial works would be required to re-introduce any internal layout within the building (be it a replication of the former layout or a new layout; both would require the introduction of new material) and such level of intervention is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle. However in failing to provide clear and convincing justification (as required under NPPF Para. 132) for either the modified internal configuration or formation of new windows openings or evidence that the existing layout could not be replicated to fulfil the desired space within the requirement for additional window openings, so as to minimise the loss of historic fabric and alterations to the external facade of the building, the proposed scheme pays no regard to the historic interest of the building, resulting in unjustified harm to its significance and thus fails to accord with NPPF Paragraphs 132-133.



In the absence of justification for the proposed extension to the western elevation, this appears to Officers to be borne from a desire for additional space rather than an understanding of the building and its significance, and the application is not supported by sufficient justification to demonstrate that an extension of this design and scale is necessary to facilitate the proposed conversion of the building.

The extension is considered to be inappropriate in the context of the building, being disproportionately large and of incompatible design, and consequently fails to reflect or respect the character and significance of Lowtown and its setting. The position and size of the proposed extension would dominate the building and would additionally obscure the attractive stone quoins to its corners, depreciating an understanding of the building; the design of the extension is considered to be too top-heavy and would unbalance the appearance of the cottage.

The proposed internal layout, formation of new window openings and extension would therefore be harmful to the significance and special character of Lowtown by virtue of design, scale and position and in the absence of clear and convincing justification to demonstrate that this harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm, the application fails to accord with Core Strategy policy 18 and the NPPF.

Given the present condition of the former windows, the installation of new windows to the property is considered to be reasonable and acceptable in principle, and the use of timber sliding sash windows could be supported. The proposed installation of double glazed window units is however considered to be without justification and is therefore unacceptable without such explanation. Additionally, there is no justification provided to support the proposed double glazed aluminium window to the north of the property.

Further considerations

The proposed alterations to the lean-to structure to the eastern elevation (comprising the re-roofing and installation of doors) are considered to be acceptable in principle in terms of their impact upon the character and significance of Lowtown.

The exact position of the doorway to be reopened to the northern elevation has lead to confusion over the plans submitted. This is due to an apparent inconsistency in terms of the position of this former opening as seen externally and what is visible internally. When viewed internally, it appears to Officers that the former doorway is directly ahead covered with timber boarding, close to a small window and aligned with the former staircase within a slight recess directly opposite the front entrance (see Fig. 8, above), however the plans submitted show this opening to be slightly offset from this boarding to the west, for which there is no obvious internal evidence of a former doorway. However as viewed externally, the stone lintel for this former door appears further away from the window as it does internally. As commented by the Historic Buildings Advisor, an investigative assessment of the development and significance of the building to inform the support the proposals would have identified and provided clarity on this matter. Notwithstanding this matter, it is however considered that the re-opening of this doorway would be acceptable in principle in terms of its impact upon the character and significance of Lowtown, however the exact location of the doorway requires further investigation and clarification.



The Impact upon the Special Qualities of the National Park

Core Strategy policy 17 encourages development which does not impact adversely upon biodiversity. The application has been accompanied by a Bat and Barn Owl Survey which includes proposed mitigation measures for both species, following examination of which the NNPA Ecologist considered to be proportionate and acceptable, further advising that a Natural England license will be required. The proposed development is therefore considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact upon ecology, in accordance with Core Strategy policy 17 and the NPPF.

Recommendation & Conditions

The application proposes substantial intervention to this listed building, the effects of which would be visible both internally and externally. It is however not considered that this desire to support the reuse of the building would outweigh the harm posed by the proposed scheme. Following assessment of the information submitted against the relevant national and local planning policies it is considered that the proposed development would be harmful to the significance of Lowtown and its setting and is not accompanied by sufficient evidence to justify the proposals, and would therefore be contrary to Core Strategy policies 1 and 18 and Paragraphs 132-134 of the NPPF.

It is therefore recommended that Listed Building Consent should be refused for the following reasons:

1. The proposed extension to the western elevation, by virtue of its design, scale and position which would obscure the stone quoins to the corners of the building and thus depreciate the understanding of the building, would be harmful to the significance and special character of Lowtown. Clear and convincing justification for the works as required by NPPF Paragraph 132 has not been provided and there is no evidence of the benefits of the scheme which would outweigh the harm identified to the heritage asset. The proposed extension would be harmful to the significance and special character of Lowtown and would therefore be contrary to Core Strategy policies 1 and 18 and Paragraphs 132-134 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. The applicant has failed to provide sufficient evidence to justify the proposed internal layout alterations or demonstrate that the existing layout could not be replicated without the requirement for additional window openings, in order to minimise the loss of historic fabric. The proposed internal layout and formation of new window openings are therefore harmful to the significance and special character of Lowtown and would therefore be contrary to Core Strategy policies 1 and 18 and Paragraphs 132-134 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
3. The proposed scheme fails to provide sufficient evidence to justify the proposed installation of double glazed timber and aluminium window units. The proposed installation of double glazed windows is therefore harmful to the significance and special character of Lowtown and would therefore be contrary to Core Strategy policies 1 and 18 and Paragraphs 132-134 of the National Planning Policy Framework.



Background Papers

Application file 16NP0084LBC
EIA Screening Opinion

	Signature	Date
Planning Officer		
Head of Development Management or Chief Executive		