

WHITLEES, ELSDON, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, NE191BT

Planning Statement

Background

1. Whitlees is a former shepherd's cottage (Location Map Reference NY9600092600), south east of Elsdon and within Harry's Wood on the edge of Harwood Forest.
2. The cottage is situated immediately adjacent to an unclassified public road, which dissects the property as a whole, and leads to one further dwelling before terminating (a 'no-through' road). It is a little-used single-track road with an estimated 4 – 5 vehicle movements per day.
3. There is a PROW running along the south west boundary, but otherwise the immediate surrounding forest (Northumberland Estates) is not open access land.
4. The property comprises a modest stone single-storey cottage, a stone-walled paddock, one side of which is bounded by a Grade II listed former bastle and attached stone sheds (numerous references online), and a further 7 acres of grazing land.
5. The property has, for about 30 years, been used as a second, holiday home, but has, anecdotally, stood largely unoccupied for long periods and is therefore needing remedial work. It will now once again be a permanent home, and the overall aim is to make the necessary improvements which will, within the limitations of its age and basic structure, make it energy-efficient and comfortable without compromising its character or its rural setting.
6. Whitlees has no mains electricity, water or sewage disposal. Electricity is now provided by a new off-grid battery system, and 100% of water and space heating is provided by renewable energy (pellet boiler). It is planned to add, if permitted, solar PV panels which will produce up to 2.5 kw, a modest amount which will nevertheless reduce the use of non-renewable fuel. Whitlees will therefore be substantially reliant on renewable energy. Improvements and – if permitted – additions, will incorporate, as a minimum, current insulation standards, which will also help minimise use of non-renewable energy.
7. There have been three small additions to the original dwelling: an off-shoot stone-built porch to the front elevation and an off-shoot stone-built entrance/utility-room to the rear elevation (permission granted as part of planning approval 86NP0004); and a flat-roofed, pebble-dashed, single-storey bathroom extension at the rear (no planning permission traced).
8. As this is a relatively undisturbed location there is evidence of a good variety of both flora and fauna as there are mature hardwoods, some dense shrubbery and the softwood plantations where there is a large proportion of larch. There are bats – the bastle and stone sheds have a lot of crevices and cracks which are housing them, as well as accommodating nesting birds.

Outline Proposal

The proposals for Whitlees comprise three discrete elements, and the design for these is guided by the intention of retaining the integrity and modest proportions of what is essentially an agricultural dwelling, with associated buildings which likewise

reflect the agricultural associations:

- a) Removal of a derelict railway goods van sited adjacent to the cottage and its replacement by a car-port/garage, the roof of which would enable provision of solar PV panels, and which would be open-fronted, timber-framed with timber-cladding sides (the material selected to fade to a silver colour rather than more brash cedar), and have some form of aggregate floor to avoid a large concrete foundation pad. To avoid any sense of 'massing', this structure would be set back behind the line of the cottage, and would be separate from it, but with a short covered link between it and the cottage (see plans).

The south western facing side of the roof would incorporate integrated solar PV panels, which negate the use of a roofing material beneath. Further information about these is being submitted separately (electronically) directly to the Northumberland National Park Authority. The other side of the roof will be finished in slate, as are the roofs of all the outbuildings and the cottage itself, allowing a harmonious appearance to this group of buildings.

The timber cladding to the sides and rear of the car port, used on the link between the car port and the house, and across part of the rear extension, and on the fuel hopper is likely to be – subject to cost – Thermowood (see <http://www.vincenttimber.co.uk/products/thermowood/> , and which includes a data sheet describing the properties of this heat-treated softwood cladding).

The surface of the access from the highway to the garage will be permeable, and the type of material subject to final agreement by the NNPA.

- b) An enclosed walkway would lead to the second element of the proposal, which would allow the demolition of the current bathroom extension and is a single-storey addition to accommodate a kitchen and dining area (the existing kitchen would then provide a downstairs toilet/shower room for use by the two downstairs bedrooms, and a small utility area).

This new extension would not extend beyond the current side elevation, nor the current kitchen extension at the rear; its height would be less than the current eaves height. The bulk of the structure would be of glass and timber (which would match, or complement, that used for the garage), which, again, is intended to avoid a sense of massing.

As this would be the main living area, the optimising of natural light in what is currently a dark dwelling would reduce the demand for artificial light (of special interest in the Dark Sky Park); a small overhang on the north western side of the extension would help to minimise the impact of any artificial light.

The roof would be single-pitch but because of the nature of the elevations it is planned to make this of zinc rather than slate and there would be a row of roof lights at the junction of the new roof with the existing rear wall.

Further information about the zinc roofing can be found at <https://www.rheinzink.co.uk/products/zinc-roof-systems/roof-covering-systems/standing-seam-zinc-roofing/>

The window and glazed doors would be aluminium (external) and wood (internal) composite framed units, finished in an understated colour to complement the grey stone of the surrounding stone buildings. Similar units are shown at <http://velfac.co.uk/domestic/windows-doors/Case-studies/old-barn/>

- c) The third element is a 'hopper' for the storage of pellets for the biomass system. This would be located in the return between the gable wall and stone (1.4 m high) garden wall at the north eastern end of the house. Siting it here would allow bulk delivery of pellets, which would then be transported to the boiler along a duct attached to the house wall.

The cladding of the steel hopper (the overall dimensions of which are 2.4m x 2.4 m by 2.8 m high) would be of timber boarding (again, of a type to match timber being used elsewhere in the car-port and at the rear of the single-storey extension).

As this is visually a very functional item, it is planned to plant a row of pleached trees immediately behind the garden wall, to provide early screening.

External lighting

At present the only external light at Whitlees is a lantern at the front porch, directing light downwards, 10w LED and 4000k. It is proposed to put a similar light (though in line with the NNPA guidance the wattage will be lower than 10) at the current rear entrance. No other external lighting is planned, since the occasional illumination which would be required in the garage can be fully within the building.

Sue Finch
130916