



Delegated Report

Householder Planning Application

Planning Application No: 20230940

Location: Main House Owletts The Street Cobham

Description: Application for Listed Building Consent for necessary repairs to the structure and integrity of the property, including repairs to Store 3 within the basement, repairs to the ground floor library, dining room and front porch and replacement of drainage hopper on rear elevation.

Applicant: Mr Jason Le Mare, National Trust Kent And East Sussex

Site Visit Date: Desktop

Submitted Documents/Plans

- Application form;
- Drawing no. 001 Rev. P2 – Site Location Plan;
- Drawing no. 002 Rev. P1 – Existing and Proposed Block Plan;
- Drawing no. 011 Rev. P1 – Existing Ground Floor Defects & Relevant Drawings;
- Drawing no. 010 Rev. P1 – Existing Basement & North East Elevation Guttering Defects;
- Drawing no. 020 Rev. P1 – Proposed Basement & North East Elevation Guttering Repairs;
- Drawing no. 021 Rev. P1 – Proposed Ground Floor Repair Drawings; and
- Heritage Statement (including Method Statement).

Relevant Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
20110507	Application for Listed Building Consent for removal of the existing internal blockwork partitions and replacement with timber studwork.	Permitted	09.08.2011
20100946	Application for Listed Building Consent for alterations to two windows on north and east elevations on the out-rigger, alterations to internal layout on ground, first and second floors; reinstatement of library and secondary stair on ground floor; replacement of heating, hot and cold water, plumbing, electrical and alarm installations; renewal of kitchen and bathroom fittings; structural repairs to basement; specialist conservator repairs to main staircase ceiling and internal and external repairs to building fabric.	Permitted	20.12.2010
19870978	Application for Listed Building Consent for internal alterations at basement ground and first floor levels and installation of an external door on the south east elevation	Permitted	08.01.1988
19860983	Application for Listed Building Consent for internal alterations and installation of a new window in the	Permitted	18.02.1987

	eastern elevation.		
--	--------------------	--	--

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (September 2014):

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale & Distribution of Development
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development & Design Principles
- CS20 – Heritage and Historic Environment

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- TC2 – Listed Buildings
- TC3 – Development Affecting Conservation Areas

Paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2023) sets out that policies within adopted local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years, and should then be updated as necessary. Such reviews are also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

The Council undertook such a review in September 2019 and found that the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy is in need of a partial review in terms of Policy CS02, due to the increased need for housing since the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted and the need to ensure that a sufficient land supply exists to meet this need. Whilst saved policies from the Local Plan 1st Review (1994) generally conform with the NPPF (2023), the Council will also seek to replace these.

Other material considerations

Section 16 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special regard to be had to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses when considering whether to grant listed building consent.

Section 72(1) of the Act requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area.

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

- Section 2 – Achieving sustainable development
- Section 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
- Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- Cobham Village Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2016)
- Rural Conservation Areas Management Plan (2016)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

Consultees

GBC Conservation Officer

Various repairs are proposed that relate to water and damp in external walls. These are set out in the heritage statement and drawings and the following comments follow the order in the HS.

Basement

It is important to establish the cause of the damp basement wall and to address this before building walls to conceal the damp wall. The lowering of external ground levels, grading falls away from the building or the installation of external French drains should be considered first.

It is advised that the installation of the inner wall should not form part of the proposals.

Dining Room

The cause of the damp ingress needs to be understood and rectified. As above the proposals need to include this understanding in order to reduce the likelihood of a recurrence of the problem of damp internal walls. External works should form part of action required to address this problem.

Recording, removal and storage of panelling requires further information which can be conditioned.

Porch

The cause of the mould has been established but it is possible that moisture is transferring from the house into the porch as well as from outside. There are two options, improve the ventilation within the porch and enhance the draft exclusion on the double inner doors, or to introduce heating to the porch, which must be run during the winter months. The latter is likely not to be adopted due to the cost of running the heating in an uninhabited space. The preference would therefore be to improve the ventilation in the porch to ensure moisture can escape and air can circulate. The draft proofing of the double inner doors would reduce external airflow into the house.

External brick repairs need to be specified.

Library

The proposed lime fillet to the flat headed plinth may not be a long term solution. Should the flat headed plinth be properly protected with a lead flashing?

Is there an issue of ground levels, falls towards the wall? Should French drains be introduced if there are ground level issues?

Further detailed specifications required for roof leadwork and patch repairs.

Historic England

Historic England provides advice when our engagement can add most value. In this case we are not offering advice. This should not be interpreted as comment on the merits of the application.

We suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation and archaeological advisers. You may also find it helpful to refer to our published advice at <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/find/>

It is not necessary to consult us on this application again, unless there are material changes to the proposals. However, if you would like advice from us, please contact us to explain your request.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)

I am afraid that the submission as it stands raises considerable concerns. Whilst some of the repairs-based proposals seem sensible, most have the potential to cause unnecessary harm to the significance of the building while not in fact addressing the cause of the damp issues. Overall there appears to be a poor understanding of what is causing these moisture-related issues. We would comment as follows:

C17 Basement

An invasive system involving tanking and drainage channels is proposed. While this can be appropriate in certain circumstances, it should not be the first line of defence. It is possible that the solution proposed will actually create problems in adjoining areas and there may be other less invasive ways of dealing with the issues. The applicant should be asked to determine the exact cause of the water ingress: it is not enough for the application to state that the problem occurs in bad weather and provide a list of possible causes - none of which are seemingly to be investigated further. All of the possible causes listed ('lack of

ventilation, the gulley and downpipe located on the external wall, the outside pavement gently sloping towards the wall, as well as vegetation and soil directly abutting the external wall') should be thoroughly investigated and can if necessary be addressed through relatively simple conservative repairs which may well render tanking unnecessary.

We would dispute the assessment of significance of the basement as being 'the lowest significance area within the house'. As the application states, the basement retains the original C17 fabric and plan form and is therefore an important intact survival from the earliest phase of the house, the 'utilitarian' nature of which in no way diminishes its significance.

C17 Dining Room

Permission is sought for investigative works including removal of a large amount of panelling (the age and significance of which has not been established; while the panelling above the dado is relatively recent, the lower level panelling may be much older. Removing this would be very difficult to do without some destruction of historic fabric). There is no investigation of the cause of moisture ingress / mould. Although the external wall has apparently been surveyed, the application does not include the relevant drawing and no commentary is provided in the heritage statement. Without this information, it is difficult to establish what the cause of the damp might be, however we struggle to see why the applicant is seeking permission for the invasive step of removing the panelling in advance of a proper understanding of possible external causes. The application proposes 'if the wall is saturated, all the plaster will need to be removed' but this is addressing symptom rather than cause. Possible external causes of water ingress should be determined and addressed first, and the wall then left to dry out for an extended period of time. Once dry, it is difficult to understand why replacing what may be ancient, even original, lime plaster with new lime plaster would be necessary.

C17/C20 Library

We have no objection to what are appropriate external works to address damp.

C20 Porch

The porch is C20, but nonetheless significant, and is suffering from mould that the applicant attributes to condensation. The proposals will limit drafts (fixed secondary glazing and door brushes) which will make it warmer but heating the porch and restricting air flow will simply result in a warm damp space if there are causes of water ingress that have not been investigated and addressed.

The application does not include a specification or schedule of works. We would expect to see a specification for the works which explains in detail the full extent of the works to be carried out and the materials and methods that will be used. In the absence of this information it is not possible to arrive at an understanding of how the work will impact on the interest of the historic building or whether the approach will be conservation led. Given the early date of the building, we consider that the availability of such information is essential before the application is determined.

In summary, in a traditional solid walled building correct investigation and identification of the causes and sources of damp is imperative. If the source of damp is identified as damaged or incorrectly functioning elements of the building, such as failing windows or rainwater goods, good maintenance can often lead to marked improvements. It is strongly recommended that the applicant engage an independent historic building surveyor or conservation architect who is appropriately qualified and familiar with traditional building typologies to investigate the issue and present an appropriate course of action. The SPAB's Technical Advice Line can provide recommendations for independent damp specialists as well as further advice. Alternatively, the applicant might wish make use of SPAB's free Technical Advice Line. Tel: 0207 456 0916. Opening hours – Monday to Friday 9.30am – 12.30pm.

We object to the application as it currently stands.

Historic Buildings and Places (HB&P) (formally The Ancient Monuments Society)

Thank you for consulting HB&P on this application. We have reviewed the documentation available online and while there is no objection to most of the repairs and remedial works, HB&P do have some concerns and provide the following comments for consideration in determining this application.

HB&P note that much of the repair work is to rectify damage caused by moisture within this grade II* building. However, we do have concerns with the proposed tanking of the basement. The water infiltration is identified as being caused by *'lack of ventilation, the gulley and downpipe located on the external wall, the outside pavement gently sloping towards the wall, as well as vegetation and soil directly abutting the external wall'* and that it is particularly bad during wet weather. The plans indicate a pea shingle trench is proposed outside the library, as well as repairs to the mortar/ brickwork and an upgrade of the rainwater goods. Tanking should only be a solution of last resort as it risks trapping water within historic building fabric, and potentially causing unintended decay and other problems in the future. HB&P therefore recommend a more cautious approach, implementing the external repairs and the external drain and then monitoring future water ingress to see if those measure address the problem. The proposal does not appear to provide any additional ventilation in the basement and should be given further consideration.

The extent/ length of the proposed external drainage trench has not been specified and therefore it's unclear if the other rooms that are suffering damp will benefit from the drain. Likewise, the porch and dining room also suffer from mould and damp caused by condensation, but there does not appear to be any proposals for rectifying the ventilation or source of moisture in these spaces.

These issues should be clarified and in doing so, we recommend consideration be given to Historic England's advice note on damp in buildings: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/buildings/damp-in-historic-buildings/investigation-of-moisture-and-its-effects-on-traditional-buildings/>

Neighbouring properties

No surrounding properties were consulted as not required for LBC applications.

Site and press notices were carried out with an overall consultation expiry date of 20.10.2023 – no responses received.

The consultation specifically to Historic England expired on 13.12.2023.

Officer's Analysis

Owletts is a Grade II* listed building which is also situated in the Cobham Conservation Area. This application relates to the main Owletts mansion as opposed to the North Wing.

The principle issue is whether the proposal would preserve the special architectural or historic interest of this grade II* listed building and whether it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Cobham Conservation Area.

Owletts is a two storey dwelling built in 1683 – 84, of five bays with a tall hipped roof, red brick, with two large symmetrical chimney stacks and a deeply moulded stringcourse between the ground and first floors. In c. 1700 single-bay projecting wings were added at either end of the main front. In 1754 the original eaves were replaced with a panelled brick parapet and various additions added to the rear in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The proposal relates to repair works to the building in respect of three elements:

- Repairs to 'Store 3' within the basement
- Repairs to the ground floor library, dining room and front porch
- Replacement of drainage hopper on rear elevation

Existing issues/repair works required

The existing plans and Heritage Statement show in detail what the current defects and areas of repair that are needed which are as follows:

Basement

Wall in store 3 – the entire wall is suffering from damp, mould and spalled brickwork and an area of the internal flooring in front of the wall is damp.

Ground floor

Porch

There is light mould and peeling of paint to walls and panelling due to interstitial condensation;
There is external damage to brickwork on the eastern porthole window;
The door leaves a significant gap by floor, letter and frame allowing draughts into porch.

Dining room

Western wall is suffering from water damage to timber panelling and to corner of the wall and there is water damage and mould on wall finish behind bookcase.

Library

Internally the western wall is suffering from peeled lining paper and water damage which is said to be caused by the flat headed plinth externally;
Externally there is spalling brickwork and improper mortar repairs. The flat headed plinth which is causing the water ingress problems is an area which catches debris, vegetation and holds water and there is a line where an extension was added where the bricks were attempted to be keyed in but there is improper mortar in certain areas.

Rainwater hopper on north-east elevation

Is not sufficient in capacity to take rainwater run-off from valley gutter supporting 3 adjoining roofs and is also suffering with building up of debris;

Proposed works

The proposed plans and Heritage Statement detail what the proposed works are to address these issues:

Basement

New independent tank wall to be constructed in front of existing, cavity to have self-draining protection;
Cause of damp flooring to be investigated and rectified;
Entire wall to be investigated for cementitious mortar, any found will be raked out to 20-30mm and repointing carried out with a suitable lime mortar as specified in HS (ratio of 1:3 lime to sand with crushed chalk additive mortar – a sample would be submitted for approval);
Spalled brickwork to be repaired where possible and replaced with suitable brickwork match where unsalvageable. Following repair work, white lime paint to be reapplied as existing.

Ground floor

Porch

Panelling to be carefully removed to rectify condensation issues on wall. Walls, ceiling, decorative

panelling and door to be repainted;

External brickwork surrounding porthole window to be repaired and secondary glazing to be installed in both portholes and fanlight above door;

Groove created in existing frame for installation of brush to limit draughts, gap underneath door to be minimised using a door sweep and brush installed in letterbox opening;

Electric radiator installed.

Dining room

Panelling to be removed where necessary and wall behind to be repaired and repainted, panelling to then be replaced as existing;

Shelving to be carefully removed and wall to be repaired/repainted, shelving to be reinstated as existing.

Library

Internally the wall below dado rail to be cleaned and lining paper removed, following the external repairs new lining paper to be applied and painted to match existing;

Externally the spalled bricks are to be repaired where possible and to be replaced with a suitable brick match where unsalvageable;

The debris and vegetation along the flat headed plinth is to be cleaned and NH2 mortar filler applied, areas of cementitious mortar to be raked out and replaced with a suitable lime mortar. A pea shingle trench in front of the plinth is proposed;

The line where the extension is added, the cementitious mortar is to be raked out and repointed with suitable lime mortar.

Rainwater hopper on north-east elevation

Rainwater runoff capacity to be calculated and existing rainwater hopper to be removed and replaced with a larger rainwater hopper to suit. Debris to be removed from valley gutter and lead flashing investigated and repaired where required.

Main analysis discussion

Historic England have not offered advice on this occasion. The Council's Conservation Officer, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and Historic Buildings and Places (HB&P) however, all have concerns with the proposal.

In respect of the basement works, all of the above three heritage consultees consider the proposed construction of the tank wall in front of the damp wall in the basement to be unacceptable. They advise that the exact cause of the damp needs to be determined and that it is not enough for the applicant to provide a list of the possible reasons of what the cause of the damp could be but that all of the possible causes should be investigated as it may be that the cause/s of the damp could be addressed through less invasive measures than what is currently proposed. They advise that the proposal could risk trapping water within the building fabric and cause unintended decay and other problems in the future including to surrounding areas. The Conservation Officer suggests that works such as lowering of external ground levels, grading falls away from the building or installation of French drains should be considered first.

Similarly, with the works to the dining room, the Conservation Officer, SPAB & HB&P all advise that further investigation needs to be carried out to establish the exact cause of the damp ingress/mould. Without this understanding of the cause, the proposal for the removal of a large amount of panelling (some of which may be original/period fabric) as well as the potential removal of the plaster (which may be original/period fabric) is considered to be too invasive and that once the exact cause of the damp ingress is found it may be that there are less invasive works that would address the issue.

Regarding the porch, SPAB advise that although C20 it is still significant and that although the applicant attributes the cause of the mould to be condensation, other causes need to be properly investigated and

addressed if needed, as the proposal for secondary glazing and brushes will limit drafts and make the porch warmer, but restricting air flow will result in a warm damp space if there are other causes not determined. Similarly, the Conservation Officer advises that it is possible moisture is transferring from the house to the porch as well as from outside and therefore states that the preference would be to improve the ventilation within the porch and enhance the draft exclusion of the double inner doors. Also that heating in the porch could be an option but it would have to be run through all the winter months and due to costs that may not happen all the time.

Regarding the library, SPAB have no objections to the works proposed here considering them to be appropriate. However, the Conservation Officer states that the proposed lime fillet to the flat headed plinth may not be a long term solution and suggests lead flashing instead and whether there is an issue with ground levels, falls towards the wall, whether French drains should be introduced if there are ground level issues.

No objections are raised by the Conservation Officer, SPAB or HB&P to the proposed replacement of the rainwater hopper and repairs to lead flashing.

The majority of the works proposed to address damp/mould/water ingress in the building are considered invasive and may result in the loss of original/period fabric which would be harmful to the architectural and historic interest of this listed building. The Heritage Statement for example, does not sufficiently confirm the age or significance of the panelling in the dining room to be removed nor the plaster which may be removed. The overall harm identified relates to areas of high significance in the building - the C17 basement, C17 dining room, C17 & C20 library and C20 porch. The works proposed may be unnecessary and not actually address the damp/mould/water ingress given that the exact causes of these issues have not been investigated and identified, and it may be that once they have been there are other less invasive methods to address the issues which would not be harmful to the architectural and historic interest of this listed building.

Due to the location of the works, the majority of which are internal and where external they would not be particularly visible from a public vantage point, it is considered there would not be any harmful impact on the character or appearance of the Cobham Conservation Area, which would be preserved.

The harm identified to the listed building would be less than substantial. Paragraph 202 of the NPPF (2023) establishes that any harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The proposal is to address matters of damp/mould/water ingress in areas of the building which it is stated in the Heritage Statement would ensure the longevity and retention of historic building fabric and future performance of the building. However, for the reasons given above it is not agreed that this would be the case and it has not been demonstrated that the methods proposed are the only methods of addressing the issues. It is therefore considered that on the basis of the submitted information this proposal would not be a heritage related public benefit.

The harm identified is given considerable importance and weight in the planning balance of this application in accordance with paragraph 199 of the NPPF (2023) which establishes that great weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset. There would be no public benefits to outweigh the degree of harm identified.

The proposal would fail to meet the requirements of Section 16 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as it would fail to preserve the architectural and historic interest of this grade II* listed building. It would therefore be contrary to Policies CS19 and CS20 (LPCS), saved Policy TC2 (LPFR) and section 16 of the NPPF (2023).

Any Other Material Planning Considerations

None.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The majority of the works proposed to address damp/mould/water ingress in the building would be invasive and may result in the loss of and harm to original/period fabric which would be harmful to the architectural and historic interest of this listed building. Such works may be unnecessary, may inadvertently cause further issues and not actually address the damp/mould/water ingress given that the exact causes of these issues have not been investigated and identified, and it may be that once they have been there are other less invasive methods to address the issues which would not be harmful to the architectural and historic interest of this listed building. As such the proposal is contrary to Policies CS19 and CS20 (LPCS), saved Policy TC2 (LPFR) and section 16 of the NPPF (2023).

For the above reasons it is considered the application should be refused.

Recommendation: Refusal

(For detailed reasons for refusal and informatives, see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Ms Rebecca Harrison	Team Leader:	Richard Hart
Signed:	<i>Rebecca Harrison</i>	Signed:	<i>R Hart</i>
Dated:	28 December 2023	Dated:	28th December 2023