

PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE AT THE CHURCH INN

BIRTLE, METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF ROCHDALE



HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

GARRY MILLER *HERITAGE CONSULTANCY*

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OCTOBER 2025

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Providing heritage planning advice since 2002

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Garry Miller is a heritage advisor, architectural historian and published author who has spent more than 40 years studying and working with buildings of town and countryside, in particular those of North West England. His career as a consultant began in the mid-1980s with the Preston-based Nigel Morgan Historic Building Consultancy, of which he became a partner in 1992 upon its rebranding as Datestone. In 1997 he was commissioned by the Heritage Trust for the North West, a buildings preservation trust based at Barrowford, Lancashire, to produce an in-depth regional study of vernacular houses in southwest Lancashire: the result, *Historic Houses in Lancashire: The Douglas Valley, 1300-1770* was published in 2002. The book was described as 'scholarship as its best' by *Country Life* (June 2003), and 'well analysed and presented' in *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* (Vol 48, 2004); and was widely cited in the 2006 Buildings of England volume on Liverpool and Southwest Lancashire. Extensive research on the houses of Georgian and Regency Liverpool has also been undertaken, with a view to future publication. Following the success of his Douglas Valley book, Garry Miller established his own consultancy, producing analytical and interpretive reports on historic buildings, in particular the heritage assessments required to support planning applications affecting the historic environment. His area of operation encompasses the North West, Midlands, North Wales and parts of Cumbria and North and West Yorkshire. Several local authorities have cited his assessments as examples of best practice, and reports on more than 150 buildings or sites are produced annually.

THIS REPORT

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CONTENTS

1: Executive Summary	5
2: The Site	7
3: The Proposal/Scope of this Report	9
4: The Application Property	11
5: Significance of the Application Property	18
6: Planning Policy Context	19
7: Impact of the Proposal	20

1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report supports proposed works at The Church Inn, Birtle, in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester.

The property is a rural inn, originally a modest farmhouse, of mid-late 17th century origin but has been greatly altered and extended in the late 20th century. It closed some time ago and now stands vacant. The property is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

An application has been submitted to Rochdale MBC for change of use of the application property along with associated works. The heritage consideration arising is the potential impact upon its significance (i.e. heritage interest and value). The scope and purpose of this report is to identify this significance and how the proposal affects it.

The property appears to have begun life as a small moorland farmhouse, perhaps of laithe house type with dwelling and barn under the same roof. It is named *Malkin* on the OS map of the late 1840, but is shown as an inn on the edition of four decades later. From the 1960s onwards it was extended considerably. This upgrading of the original humble rural inn would have been intended to attract a wider and more affluent clientele as increased motor car ownership made country pubs more accessible and fashionable.

As a non-designated asset, the application property is significant in the local context only, as the shell of a modest mid-late 17th century farmhouse, perhaps originally of laithe house type, later converted to an inn by the end of the 19th century. Owing to extensive alteration and its non-designation, this significance is embodied in the external envelope of the original mid-late 17th century structure and not the various later extensions and additions, which, to varying degrees, mask the legibility and significance of the original building. .

The proposal involves change of use of the vacant building from public house and restaurant to office. The major elements of the works involve:

- Demolition of later extensions containing fridge and store rooms
- Cladding of the large circa 1970s front extension
- Raising the roof of the main building to create greater first floor headroom
- Internal alterations.
- Single-storey side extension to house additional toilets/changing areas
- A timber-clad plant storage building
- A separate timber-clad amenity building to the south of the site.
- Extension of the store boundary wall, new entrance gates and alterations to the existing car park layout.

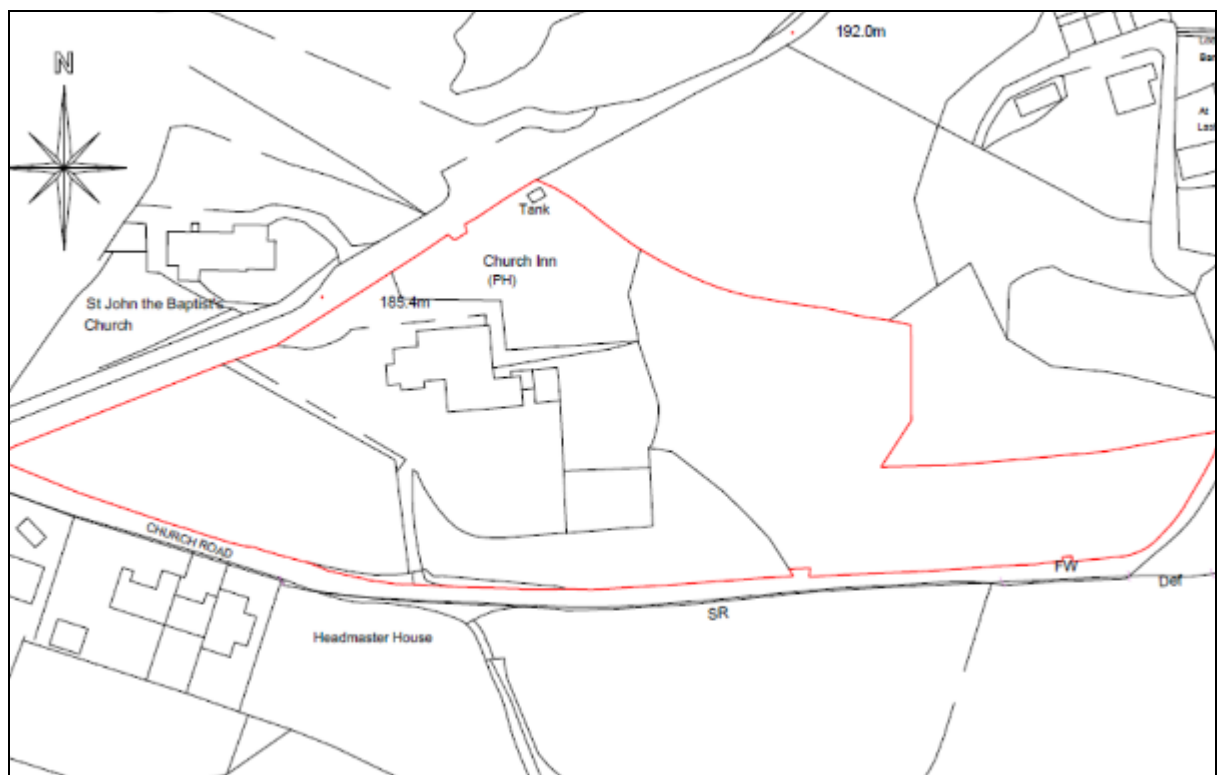
As the property is a non-designated heritage asset, national planning guidance requires simply a balanced planning judgement on the proposal, as opposed to those affecting designated assets, in which there is a requirement to preserve their significance.

As examined in this report, in making this balanced judgment, the present application should be considered favourably as it secures the future of the vacant building via an alternative use and sustains the core significance that resides in the external envelope of its original 17th century element.

The proposal thereby conforms to national guidance and local heritage policy and thus merits approval without delay.

2: THE SITE

The application property is the Church Inn at Birtle, a moorland village on the fringe of the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The property is a rural inn, originally a small farmhouse, of mid-late 17th century origin that was greatly altered and extended in the late 20th century. The property ceased trading some time ago and now stands vacant.



Location of the application building



The application property, originally a modest farmhouse now much altered and extended



The building in its moorland setting

3: THE PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

3.1 Proposed development

An application has been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for change of use of the application property along with associated works.

3.2 Designations

The property is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. The Church of St John the Baptist, Grade II listed stands around 100 metres to the northwest and the Birtle Conservation Area around 275 metres east.

3.3 Heritage impact

The heritage consideration arising from the proposal is its potential impact upon the significance (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the application building. Owing to clear separation distance, the setting of St John's and the conservation area are not affected.

3.4 Scope and purpose of this report

Paragraph 207 of Chapter 16 (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*) the National Planning Policy Framework (as revised, December 2024) states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the particular significance of the heritage asset. The scope and purpose of this report is therefore to identify the significance of the application building, and to assess how this will be affected by the proposal.

In accordance with paragraph 207, the level of detail is considered proportionate to the importance of the heritage asset, and no more than necessary to understand the impact of the proposal.

This report is to be read in conjunction with other documentation submitted in support of the application.

3.5 Report structure

This is as follows:

1. A concise, proportionate description of the application building (Section 4)
2. A summary of its heritage significance (Section 5)
3. A summary of the planning policy context in which the application will be determined (Section 6)
4. Evaluation within this context of the proposal's impact upon the significance of the application building (Section 7).

4: THE APPLICATION PROPERTY

4.1 Overview

Modest farmhouse, subsequently an inn, probably mid-late 17th century but greatly altered and extended in the late 20th century.

4.2 Historical summary

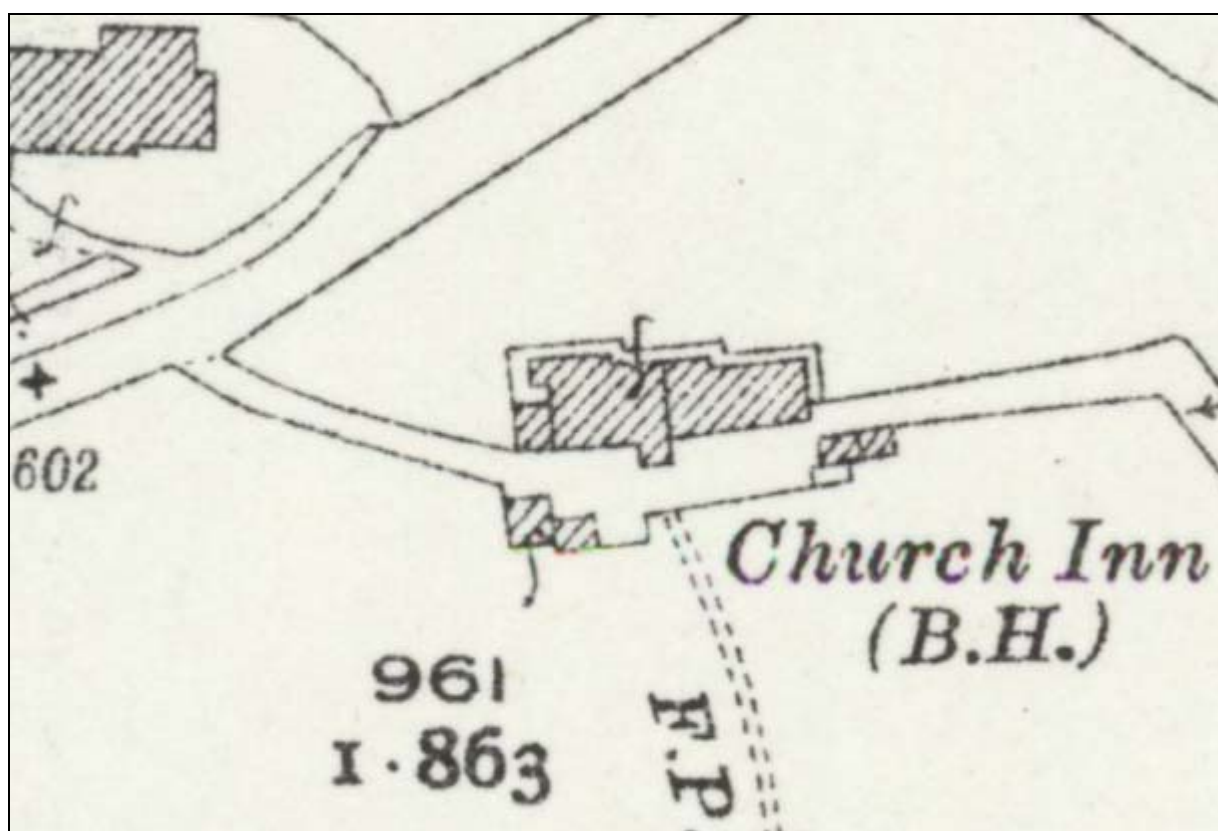
The property appears to have begun life as a small moorland farmhouse. It is named *Malkin* on the OS edition of the late 1840s, suggesting it still functioned as a farm, but is identified as an *inn* on the edition of 1889-1891 and as a *beerhouse* on the 35-inch map of 1908. Beerhouses were established under an Act of 1830 which permitted them to sell beer for consumption on the premises. Along with the nearby Church of St John the Baptist of 1845 and its former school of 1873, it would have formed a focal point of the surrounding scattered moorland community. Until the 1960s/1970s the property retained its original long, straggling linear footprint, but was then extended considerably. This upgrading of the original humble rural inn would have been intended to attract a wider and more affluent clientele as increased motor car ownership made country pubs more accessible.



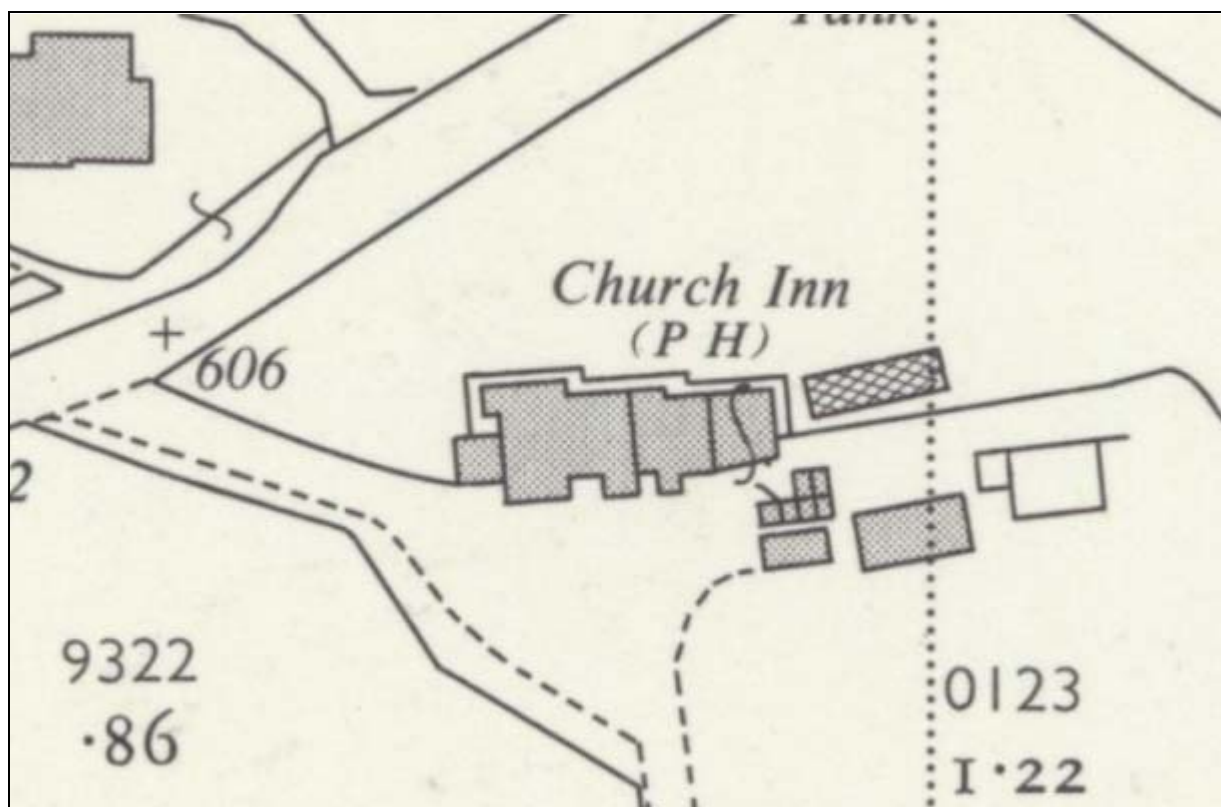
The property is named Malkin on the six-inch OS map surveyed 1844-1847



It is identified as a beerhouse on the 25-inch edition of 1908



Little change is recorded by the edition of 1937



By 1962, small extensions and new outbuildings had been added, the first stages in the extension of the property

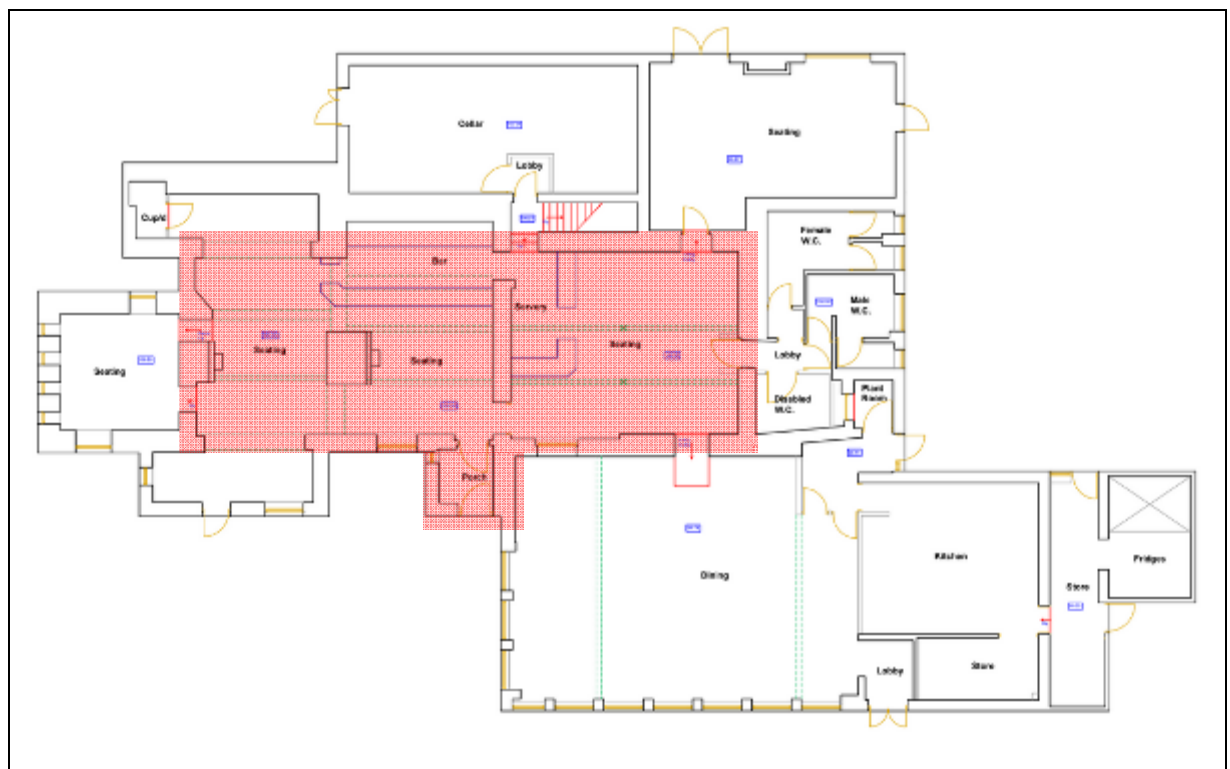
4.3 Present appearance

The original building is now swamped by a host of later extensions on all sides. The aerial image on the following page shows this original structure as a long low farmhouse that was probably of the *laithe house* type, i.e., with dwelling and barn under one roof. The original house element appears to have been of two bays, entered by a single-storey porch. Its mullioned windows, one on the ground floor with a hoodmould, suggest a mid-late 17th century date. The porch may be later as it sits uncomfortably close to this window. A further bay was added to the west end of the house probably soon after the original was built, as this has mullioned windows too. The interior is of no interest, having been opened up and refurbished in the late 20th century.

The many extensions are of little or no interest: all, like the original building, have been painted white. The earliest appear to be outshuts on the front, side and rear of the western bay, the first two perhaps early 19th century, the latter early-mid 20th century. The rest are late 20th century. The largest extension is a single-storey flat-roofed dining room built to the front of the eastern side of the original building and thereby concealing most of it from view.



Aerial view showing the original building surrounded by later additions



Shaded area shows the approximate extent of the original 17th century structure, which was built in two stages



Front elevation showing quoins marking end of the earliest phase of the 17th century house, the two-storey bay to its left is an addition also of the 17th century



The large probably 1970s dining room extension that masks much of the original building



Late 20th century extensions on the east side



Outshuts to front side and rear of the first bay are early 19th century and early-mid 20th century



Piecemeal extensions at the rear



The interior has been opened up and altered

5: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE APPLICATION PROPERTY

5.1 Rationale

Paragraph 208 of the National Planning Policy Framework states local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of a heritage asset, including its setting, and take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal in order to avoid or minimise conflict between the asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Significance is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

5.2 Summary

As a non-designated asset, the application property is significant in the local context only, as the shell of a modest mid-late 17th century farmhouse, perhaps originally of laithe house type, later converted to an inn by the end of the 19th century. Owing to extensive alteration and its non-designation, this significance is embodied in the external envelope of the original mid-late 17th century structure and not the various later extensions and additions, which, to varying degrees, mask the legibility and significance of the original building. .

6: PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework provides the guidance on how applications affecting the historic environment are to be determined. Paragraph 210 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- *The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation*
- *The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, and*
- *The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*

In the case of non-designated heritage assets, paragraph 216 requires simply a balanced planning judgment that weighs any harm or loss against the significance of the application property.

Locally, Policy P2a (Protecting and Enhancing Character, Landscape and Heritage) of the Rochdale Core Strategy, formally adopted on October 19, 2016, states that key heritage assets, both statutory and non-statutory, will be conserved, enhanced and promoted, including consideration of their wider settings.

7: IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

7.1 Summary of the scheme

The proposal involves change of use of the vacant building from public house and restaurant to office. The major elements of the works involve:

- Demolition of later extensions containing fridge and store rooms
- Cladding of the large circa 1970s front extension
- Raising the roof of the main building to create greater first floor headroom
- Internal alterations.
- Single-storey side extension to house additional toilets/changing areas
- A timber-clad plant storage building
- A separate timber-clad amenity building to the south of the site.
- Extension of the store boundary wall, new entrance gates and alterations to the existing car park layout.



Site plan as proposed



Proposed front elevation

7.2 Its effect

- a. **Principle of the scheme.** The application building has been disused for some time. The proposal will have the positive effect of securing the future of the vacant building by putting it to an alternative, sustainable use.
- b. **Removal of modern extensions.** These do not embody the significance of the original building, which will be better revealed by their removal.
- c. **Flat roof extension.** The cladding/remodelling of this element will enhance its appearance and render it more distinguishable from the original structure as both elements are currently painted white.
- d. **Raising the roof of the original building.** The present low pitch of the roof means additional headroom is required to make use of the first floor space, a key element of the proposal. The overall appearance and legibility of the building as a modest 17th century former farmhouse and inn will however remain. Should however this aspect of the works be considered harmful, then this needs to be balanced positively against securing the public benefit of securing future of the vacant building.
- e. **Internal works.** Owing to its non-designated status and the degree of alteration that has occurred over time, the internal works are not considered harmful given that the building's significance resides entirely in its external envelope.
- f. **Ancillary buildings.** These all adopt the timber-clad design approach which clearly differentiates them from the original building and therefore preserves its legibility. As regards the large plant building, this is clearly separated from the original building and tree screening will help to conceal its presence within its setting.

- g. Extended wall, new gates and altered car park layout.** These will have no harmful effect, given that the existing car park and boundary are long-established features of the site and the works will not alter how the immediate surroundings of the application property are characterised.

7.3 Concluding statement

As the property is a non-designated heritage asset, national planning guidance requires simply a balanced planning judgement on the proposal, as opposed to those affecting designated assets, in which there is a requirement to preserve their significance.

In making this balanced judgment, the present application should be considered favourably as it secures the future of the vacant building via an alternative use and sustains the core significance that resides in the external envelope of the original 17th century element.

The proposal thereby conforms to national guidance and local heritage policy and thus merits approval without delay.