

PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE OF BARN AT SYKE HOUSE

METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF ROCHDALE

ADDITIONAL HERITAGE STATEMENT

OCTOBER 2023

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1. *The application property*

The application property is the barn at Syke House, an isolated moorland farm at Littleborough in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The barn is a large two-storeyed structure of 18th and 19th century date, adjoined by a freestanding late 20th century single-storey outbuilding. The barn is currently used only as stables and for storage. The house itself is unaffected by the application.

2. *Designation*

The barn is listed at Grade II, having been first designated in 1986.

3. *Proposed development*

An application has been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for conversion of the application building to residential and holiday use, along with associated works.

4. *Heritage impact*

The heritage consideration arising is the proposal's impact upon the significance (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the listed building.

5. *Significance of the listed building*

The April 2023 Heritage Assessment described the significance of the barn as follows:

The Grade II designation of the application building denotes it is of national importance for its special architectural and historic interest. Its significance essentially derives from this intrinsic special interest, and can be summarised as follows:

- *For its architectural and historic qualities as a moorland barn belonging to a laithouse of mid-18th century or earlier date that was subsequently gentrified in the mid-19th century*
- *The intricacies of its evolution, beginning with the original build of 1758 (which itself may have been the alteration of an earlier structure), remodelling to create the stables in the mid-19th century and the addition of the western stables in the later 19th century*
- *Its historical association with the Butterworth yeoman family*
- *Its isolated setting within surrounding Pennine moorland*

This significance is embodied within the various elements which belong to its respective building periods and, owing to alteration of the interior, primarily its external envelope. The various later alterations, such as the late 20th century stables and other interior fittings, are not representative of its core qualities and hence are of low significance in relative terms.

6. Purpose of this report

Rochdale's conservation officer has raised concerns over some aspects of the proposal. While the majority of these concerns were addressed following a site meeting held on September 25, 2023, the conservation officer has asked for further information on the heritage implications of certain elements of the works. The purpose of this statement is to address those matters, which are examined below. It is to be read in conjunction with the original detailed Heritage Assessment produced by Garry Miller Heritage Consultancy in April 2023 in support of the scheme. It is considered the present statement is, in accordance with paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework, proportionate to the significance of the affected heritage asset and no more detailed than is necessary to understand the impact of the proposal.

7. Alteration of roof trusses

The proposal requires alteration of the roof trusses (essentially, raising the tiebeams) in order to provide adequate headroom on the first floor. These trusses are not original: the easternmost appears the oldest, while the two others have timbers of a somewhat fresh appearance which suggests their date is relatively recent. The conservation officer has commented as follows on the proposal:

Even though they are not original, the loss of trusses, particularly if historic would result in some harm to the significance of the building. Their removal would also undermine the legibility of the original form of the roof space.

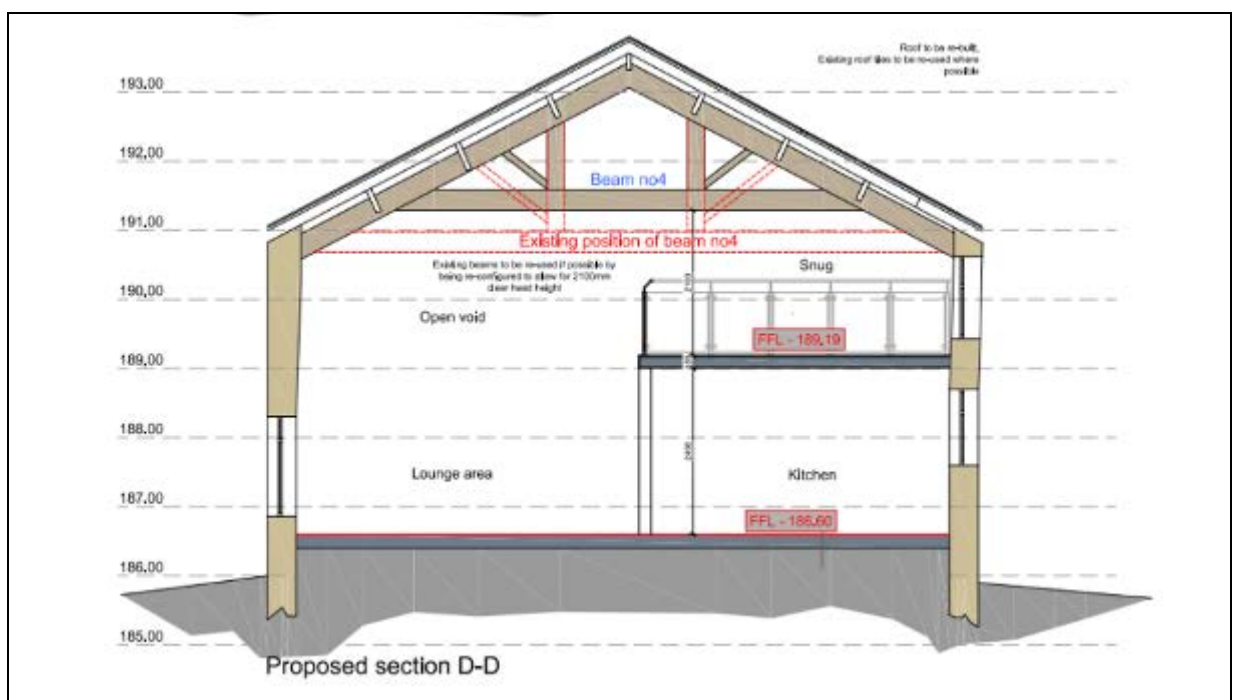
No details have been provided regarding the remainder of the roof structure – does this include any historic or original elements and how would these be affected by the works? A demolition plan is required along with method statements and sections of the proposed roof construction so that the extent of any loss can be properly understood.

The starting point should be for the existing roof to be retained and repaired as and where necessary. Any rebuilding would need to be clearly justified. If the harm is not outweighed by public benefits then this element is unlikely to be supported.

The additional justification and research into the existing remain outstanding. In my view the existing trusses pre-date the 1980s work. The metal work was rusted and the timber was a different colour to the timber work on the dormer which was installed in the 1980s.

None of the existing roof timbers appear 'historic' in the sense that they are contemporary with the barn, i.e., mid-18th century. All the timbers are machine-cut, which would not have been the case at that time. The easternmost truss is the oldest, probably mid- or later 19th century. The two other trusses are considerably later, perhaps the early or even mid-20th century, and the date of the purlins is probably similar. While they pre-date the 1980s work on the dormer, the two affected trusses are clearly not as old as the truss over the western stable, which is late 19th century. In comparison to this, the barn timbers look far less aged, so the early-mid 20th century date suggested above seems entirely reasonable. While the conservation officer has noted rusting, this cannot be taken as proof of any age as corrosion is bound to occur readily in the unheated loft of an agricultural building. The trusses therefore considerably post-date the 18th and 19th century periods from which the listed barn principally belongs, and while their appearance is typical of the roof structure to be found in a large barn, they belong to a non-historic, later intervention and hence cannot be considered as significant as original fabric.

Consequently their removal cannot be considered to undermine the legibility of the roof space as this legibility has been obscured because the trusses are not original and we cannot be certain what form the original 18th century trusses took. The conservation response suggests their alteration would be harmful, but given the relatively recent date of the trusses any harm can only be considered, in all reasonableness, as less than substantial. Under paragraph 202 of the NPPF this low level of harm needs to be balanced against the public benefit arising from the proposal. This benefit is clear: the return to active and sustainable use of an building whose original agricultural role has long since ceased to exist and is highly unlikely to ever return again. Without the increased headroom, the conversion would not be possible and hence the barn would remain in its present under-used state.



Proposed section showing alteration of the non-original trusses



Comparison of the late 19th century half truss over the western stable (above) and those over the barn (below) show the latter is of far fresher and more recent appearance, and therefore an early-mid 20th century date for the latter appears likely



8. Steel columns and joists

The conservation officer has suggested that the steel columns and beams, currently supporting the first floor ceiling but which are to be removed, may have significance:

The heritage statement indicates that the loft floor is supported on re-used steel beams and columns, with vacant joist housing indicating an earlier arrangement. The photos indicate that some of the floor joists at least are timber and may have also been reused. It is suggested that the steel beams and columns may have been imported from a mill or other industrial building. If so, they are likely to be of some significance in their own right and also provide evidence of the changing use and form of the building over time.

It is maintained that the posts and beams are not original to the building as their appearance is alien to a mid-18th century barn, and the vacant joist housings clearly suggests their reuse. Their introduction implies a strengthening of the floor was necessary and may have occurred at the same time as the roof over the barn was renewed or the present stables installed, i.e., in the 20th century. While the conservation officer suggests they may be of some significance in their own right, it is asserted this is not the case as they are of no special form or design and, being industrial, appear out of place in an agricultural structure. Any significance they have is merely in terms of a curious example of 20th century architectural salvage which does not make any contribution to the historic agricultural character and interest that the essence of the listed barn's significance. Their removal on this basis is not unreasonable. If however Rochdale MBC were to consider this removal to be harmful, then any harm (as in the case of the trusses) can only be at the lower end of the scale and therefore outweighed by securing the future of the listed building.

9. Window shutters

The conservation officer has queried the age of the various window shutters at the barn. These are recent, perhaps within the last 20 years. The shutters are of timber tongue-and-groove construction and have been fitted within what were formerly glazed openings, as part the frames of the latter (not original, probably 1980s) can be seen in situ. As non-historic items that only serve to hinder the legibility of the listed building, the shutters are of low significance and therefore their removal and reinstatement of glazing represents a profound enhancement.



Detail of hayloft shutter on front elevation, showing framing (indicated) still in situ of the probably 1980s glazing it replaced

10. Concluding statement

Inevitably, conversion of an agricultural building to domestic use involves a degree of change as the structure is adapted for a purpose for which it was never originally intended. At Syke House, the works affecting the trusses and columns represent examples of this change, as their alteration/removal is necessary to put the barn to an active and sustainable use. None of these items belong however original to the mid-18th century building, whose overall distinguishing character will remain under the wider scheme. In the final balance, securing the future of the listed barn represents the principal consideration which overrides the loss or alteration of these later features. It is concluded therefore that the scheme duly merits consent on this basis.