

PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT AT BLUE PITTS FARMHOUSE

THORNHAM FOLD, METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF ROCHDALE



HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

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AUGUST 2023

GARRY MILLER

Heritage Consultancy

Crosby House, 412 Prescott Road, Eccleston Hill, St Helens, Lancashire WA10 3BT

Telephone: 01744 739675

garrymillerhbc@gmail.com

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GARRY MILLER HERITAGE CONSULTANCY

Garry Miller is a heritage consultant, 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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1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report supports proposed redevelopment at Blue Pitts Farmhouse, Thornham Fold, in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The property is a small farmhouse of 18th century origin which forms part of a moorland nucleus of farm buildings on Thornham Lane. Greatly altered, it has been unoccupied for several years. The property is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

Proposals have been submitted to Rochdale MBC for replacement of the existing farmhouse by a new dwelling. The heritage issue arising is the impact upon the significance (heritage interest and value) of the undesignated building. The scope and purpose of this report is to identify this significance and assess how the proposal will affect it.

The application property is the a small mid-late 18th century farmhouse which incorporates re-used elements of an earlier, probably early 17th century, building in the form of some internal beams. The property has undergone considerable modernisation and alteration in both the 19th and 20th centuries. The extent of these works has devalued the significance of the remaining fabric as it is no longer an intact and authentic example of its type. Its significance is therefore considered to reside in its historical role and associations as part of the nucleus at Thornham Fold, rather than in the interest and value of its fabric. It cannot therefore be considered a key non-designated asset, and hence in relative terms its significance is therefore low.

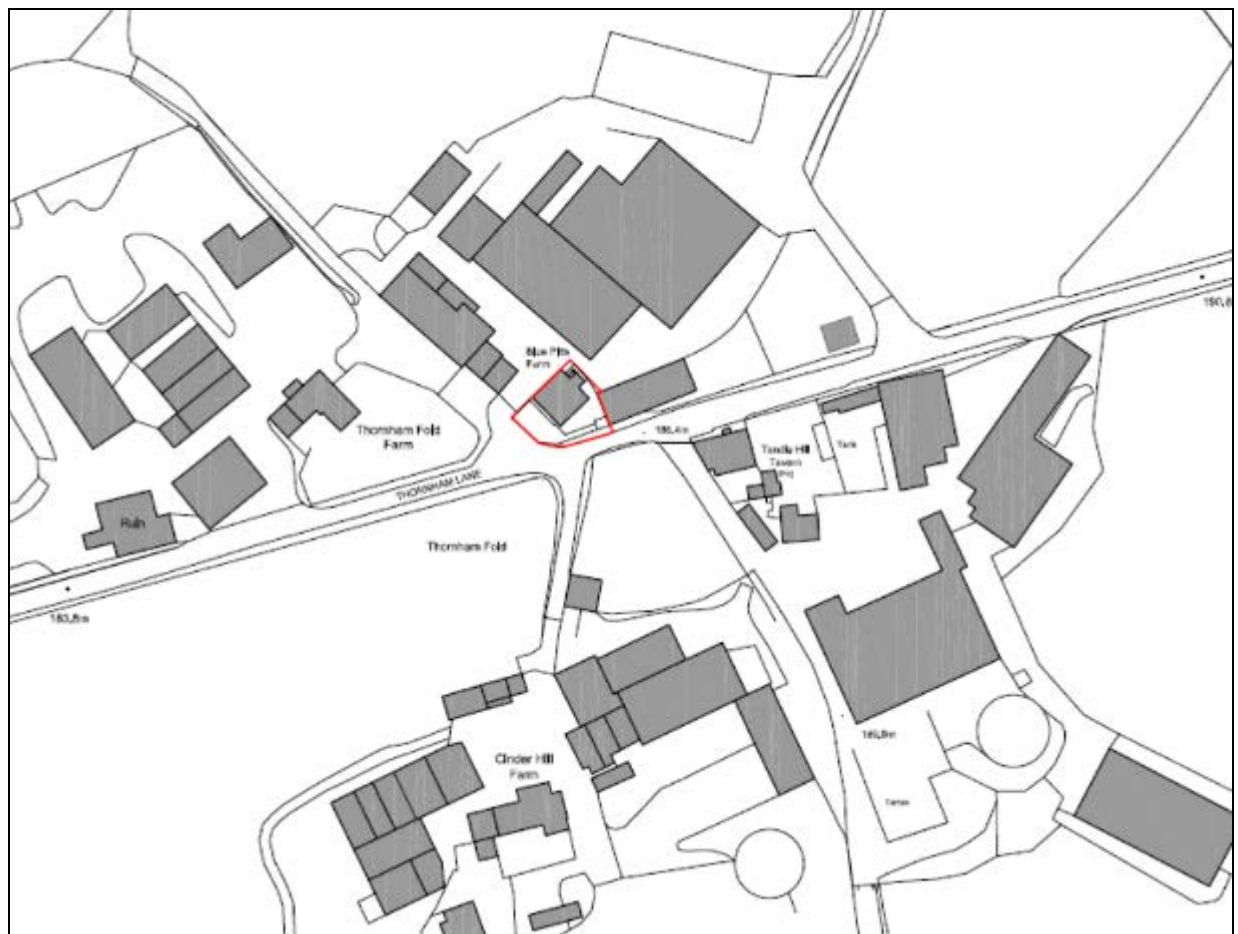
Where heritage assets are undesignated, national guidance requires simply a balanced planning judgment – without the presumption to preserve that applies to designated assets – that takes account of the significance of the asset and the scale of any harm or loss. The relevant local heritage policy goes somewhat further, stating that key non-statutory heritage assets will be conserved, enhanced and promoted. However it is demonstrated in this report that the application property has been subject to extensive alterations which have compromised its interest and authenticity and hence it is not a key undesignated asset.

The effect of the proposal would be the total loss of the application building. However, there is nothing in the altered, fragmentary nature of the building that provides a compelling reason to warrant its retention. It is further demonstrated in this report that its significance resides in its historic role rather than the value of its fabric. This historical significance will remain on record, via maps and other documentary sources, should the building be demolished. The proposed new dwelling meanwhile takes its design lead from the 18th century precedent set by the existing building, and hence represents an appropriate approach in terms of the wider character of the Thornham Fold nucleus.

To conclude, it is considered that in the final planning balance the proposed demolition is not unjustified. The proposal thereby merits approval.

2: THE SITE

Blue Pitts Farmhouse is located on Thornham Road, Thornham Fold, in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The property is a small detached farmhouse located within a moorland setting on the northern side Tandle Hill, where it forms part of a group of farmsteads and is adjoined by its converted outbuildings to the northwest. The property has been unoccupied for several years.



Map 1. Location of the application building



1. The application property, an altered 19th century farmhouse



2. Its setting within the Thornham Fold nucleus, with converted outbuildings adjoining

3: THE PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

3.1 Proposed development

Proposals have been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for replacement of the existing farmhouse by a new dwelling.

3.2 Designation

While neither statutorily nor locally listed, Blue Pitts Farmhouse House is considered by Rochdale MBC's conservation officer to be a non-designated heritage asset.

3.3 Heritage impact

The heritage issue arising is the proposal's impact upon the significance (heritage interest and value) of the undesignated building.

3.4 Scope and purpose of this report

Paragraph 194 of Chapter 16 (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*) the National Planning Policy Framework (as revised, July 2021) states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the particular significance of the heritage asset, including the contribution made by their setting. The scope and purpose of this report is therefore to identify the significance of the undesignated building, and to assess how this will be affected by the proposal. In accordance with paragraph 194, 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. The report is to be read in conjunction with other documentation submitted in support of the application.

3.5 Report structure

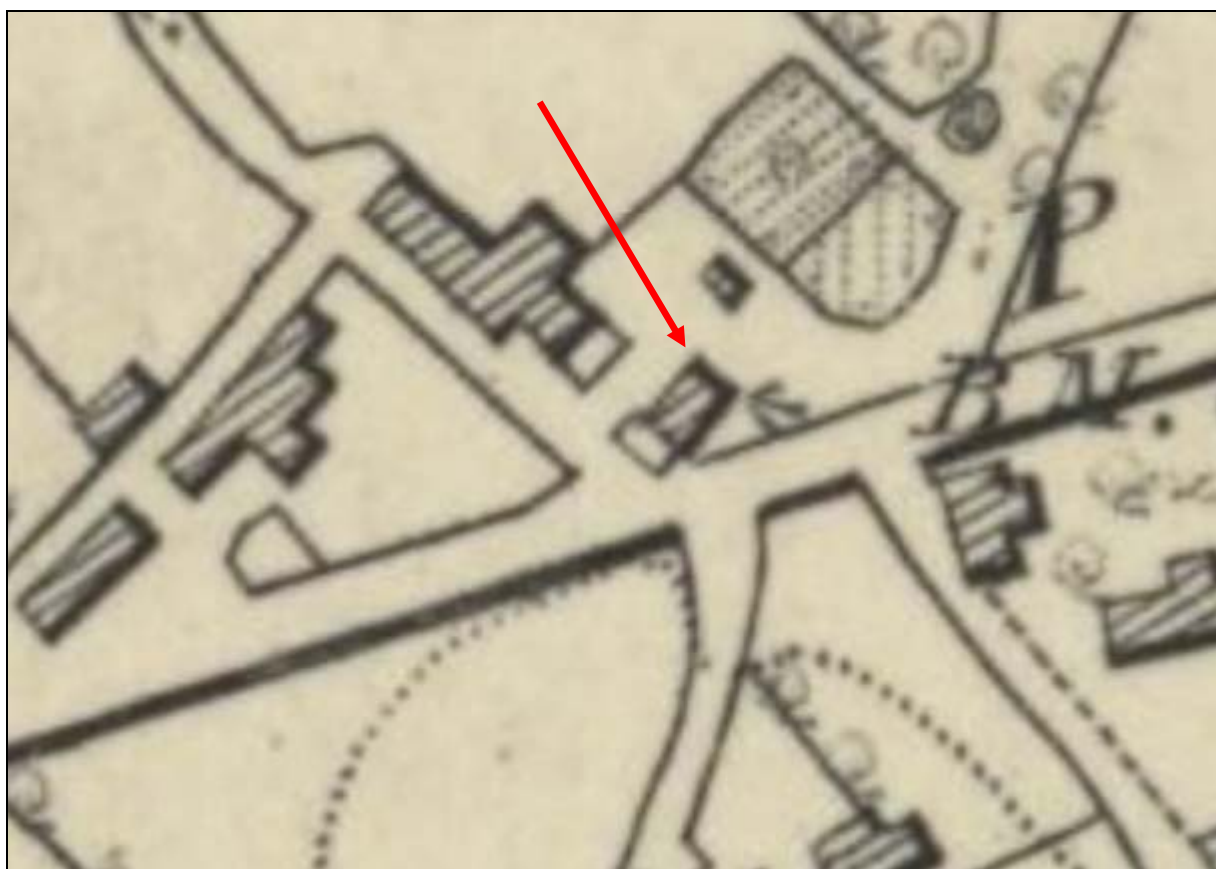
This is as follows:

1. A summary of the historical background relating to the site (Section 4)

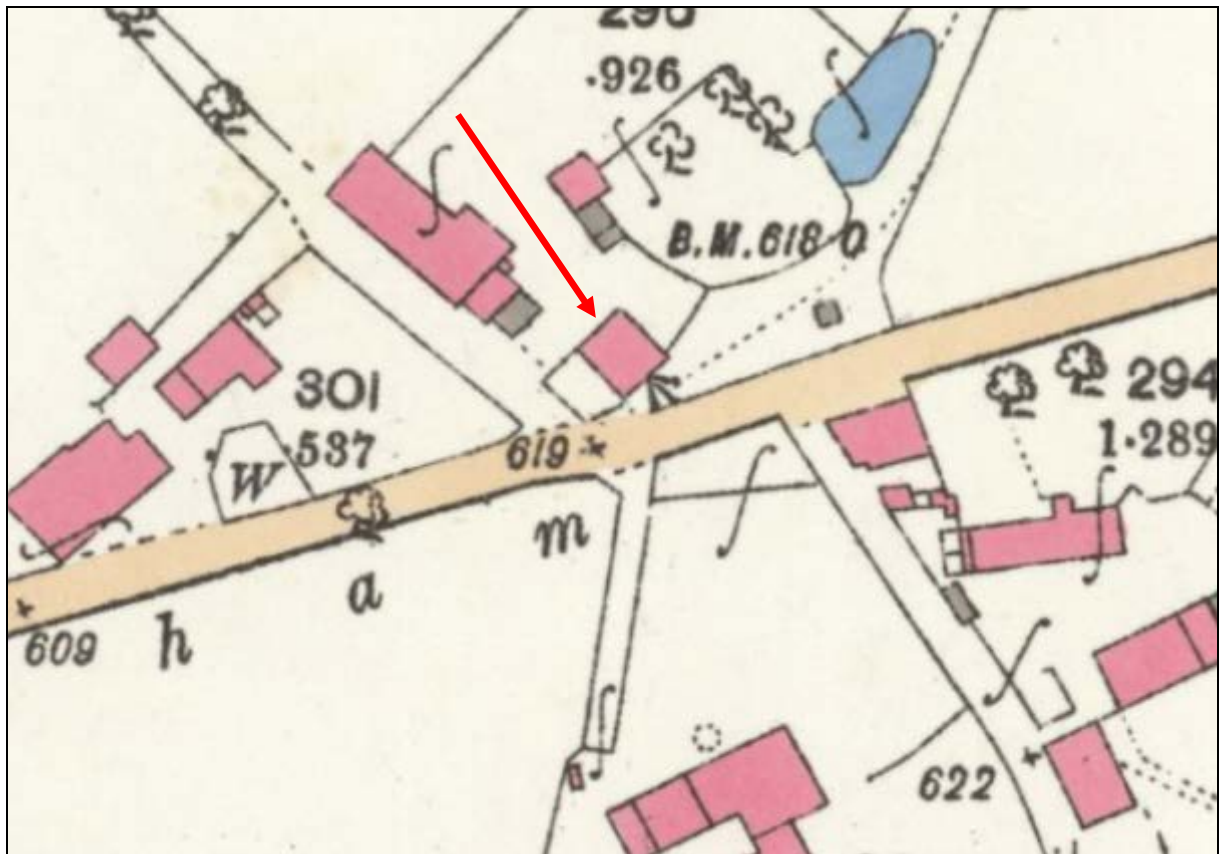
2. A description of the application building (Section 5)
3. A summary of its heritage significance (Section 6)
4. A summary of the planning policy context in which the application will be determined (Section 7)
5. Evaluation within this context of the impact of the proposal upon the significance of the undesignated building (Section 8).

4: HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The property was historically located in the township of Thornham, which was recorded in medieval times but ceased to exist in 1894 when divided between Rochdale, Middleton and Royton. The property is one of a group of farmsteads which by the first half of the 19th century comprised a settlement named Thornham Fold – the name *fold* referring to a nucleus of farm buildings, often in several ownerships, that is typical of Pennine districts – clustered around the junction of local lanes and tracks. The appearance of the property suggests it was of lower yeoman (i.e. rural middle class status) and of mid-late 18th century date, but reused 17th century beams suggest a substantial earlier house once existed close by. The OS mapping of the mid-1840s (Map 2, below) confirms the building has acquired its present footprint by this time and was adjoined by its outbuildings to the northwest. It thereafter remained relatively unaltered, apart from the appearance on the 1937 map (Map 4) of a lean-to, now gone, on the northwest elevation.



Map 2. The property depicted on the six-inch OS map surveyed 1844-1848



Map 3. No change is recorded by the 25-inch OS edition of 1891



Map 4. The edition of 1937 records a lean-to on the northwest elevation

5: THE APPLICATION BUILDING

5.1 Summary

Small double-depth moorland farmhouse of the mid-late 18th century, extensively altered externally and internally.

5.2 Form

A small two-storeyed double-depth house, with principal rooms to the front, service rooms to the rear and a staircase in the east side.

5.3 Exterior

The front elevation has a near-symmetrical appearance, with offcentre doorway and flanking windows, which, along with the double-depth plan, suggests the date is unlikely to be earlier than the mid-18th century. Most of the historical character of the southwest-facing front elevation has been erased by modern alteration, and only the stone door surround suggests its early origins. Windows are late 20th century replacements and there is a triangular door canopy of similar date, while modern render has been applied on the front and northwest elevations. The latter is blank apart from a small inserted ground floor window, and there is no trace of the lean-to shown on the 1937 map. The rear has exposed brickwork in English garden wall bond, along with a single-storey stone rear porch that is probably late 20th century. Windows are again modern, but that of the kitchen (right side of the ground floor) has been partly blocked, with a tall stone mullion remaining. The east elevation has stonework on the ground floor and brick above, but the stone appears 19th century and is more likely to be repair than the remains of an earlier phase of building. There are also two small areas of blockwork, one beneath a boarded two-light window whose location is unlikely to be original as it is probably associated with repositioning of the staircase within (see 5.4 below).



3. The door surrounds is the only visible historic feature in the altered front elevation



4. Rear elevation, with later stone porch



5. Kitchen window with mullion remaining



6. The northwest elevation



7. Stone and brick above on the southeast elevation



8. Blockwork on southeast elevation and boarded two-light window

5.4 Interior

- a. Layout.** The property has been subject to considerable alteration internally. The ground floor layout is that of two principal rooms at the front, and at the rear a large kitchen and what would originally have been a smaller service room (probably a dairy), now converted to a bathroom and WC. The staircase is located to the side, but is late 19th or early 20th century in appearance, and its position appears to have been switched around, as it rises from the far end of a narrow hall, facing the two-light window referred to above. The first floor layout is similar to below with larger rooms to the front and smaller to the rear.
- b. Features.** The principal features in an otherwise modernized context are some large deep-chamfered beams in the rear rooms, which suggest a 17th century date. These however appear to be reused as they are not stopped where they meet the walls. The front room on the right side has slimmer, rough-chamfered beams, while those in the left front room are plain. The only other pre-late 20th century features are the remains of a tiled late 19th/early 20th century fireplace in the front right room, a late 19th century grate in the left rear bedroom and some 19th century batten-plank doors.



9. Front room on the right side



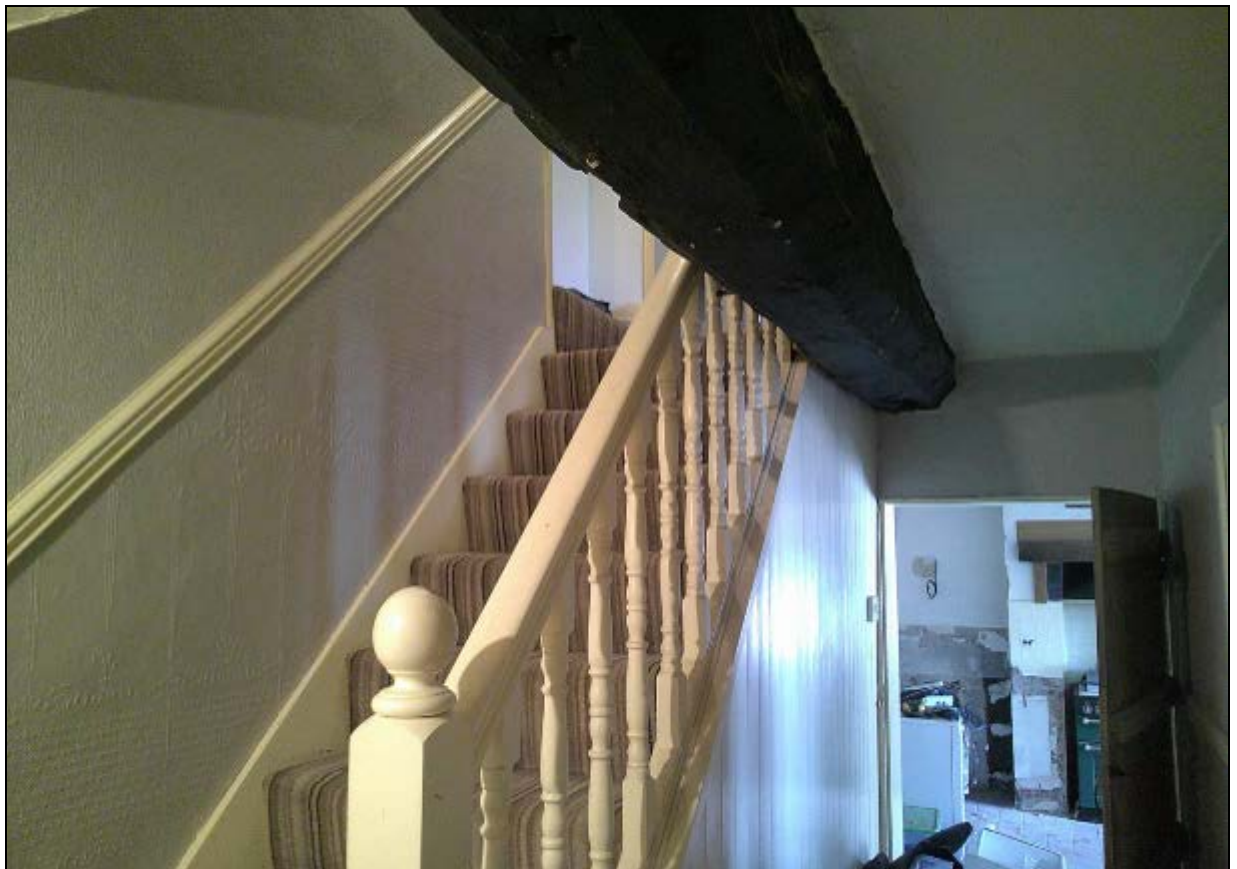
10. The left front room



11. The kitchen, with reused beams



12. Two-light window at foot of staircase



13. Staircase is late 19th/early 20th century; reused chamfered beam adjoining



14. Front bedroom on the left side



15. Rear bedroom with late 19th century grate

6: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE APPLICATION BUILDING

6.1 Rationale

Paragraph 195 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 minimize 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.

6.2 Summary

The application property is an small mid-late 18th century farmhouse which incorporates fragments of an earlier, probably early 17th century, building in the form of some internal beams. The property has undergone considerable modernisation and alteration in both the 19th and 20th centuries. The extent of this alteration has devalued the significance of the remaining fabric as it is no longer an intact and authentic example of its type. Its significance is therefore considered to reside in its historical role and associations, as part of the nucleus at Thornham Fold, rather than in the interest and value of its fabric. It cannot therefore be considered a key non-designated asset, and hence in relative terms its significance is therefore low.

7: PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework provides the guidance on how applications affecting the historic environment are to be determined. Paragraph 197 states that 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*

Regarding undesignated heritage assets, paragraph 203 specifically applies:

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

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.

