

CONVERSION OF BARN AT LOWER TOWN HOUSE FARM

LITTLEBOROUGH, METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF ROCHDALE



HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

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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

The application building is a disused barn at Lower Town House Farm, Littleborough, in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The barn is one of a group of buildings within a nucleus centred on Town House, a small country house listed at Grade II.. The group forms the core of the Town House Conservation Area, within which the barn is an undesignated building.

Proposals have been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for conversion of the application property to two dwellings. The heritage issue arising is the impact upon the significance (heritage interest and value) of the conservation area, as regards the external works only. The scope and purpose of this report is to identify this significance and assess how the proposal will affect it.

The significance of the conservation area derives from its character and appearance as a fold (nucleus of moorland buildings) centred upon Town House, a 1798 remodelling of a 17th century predecessor. This significance is therefore embodied in those buildings – principally Town House itself, a former wool warehouse and cottage and the Lower Town House farm group of which the barn is part – and their relationship to each other within their wider moorland setting.

The significance of the unlisted barn is restricted to the local context only (i.e. to Littleborough) and resides in its collective value as the principal element of the agricultural building group at Lower Town House Farm. Given the loss/alteration of most of the interior, this significance is embodied primarily within the external envelope and presence of the barn, which also embody the essence of its contribution to the conservation area. However, the long disuse and subsequent deterioration of the building places this significance and contribution at risk.

The proposal will secure the future and sustainable use of the redundant application building and will enhance its appearance via a programme of refurbishment works. External changes will be limited to a number of new openings to light the presently-windowless first floor. The interior will inevitably undergo subdivision and change to facilitate the conversion, but as this is unseen it does not contribute to the significance of the conservation area. Consequently there will be no effect upon the latter.

In summary, the significance of the undesignated building will be sustained, and consequently that of the conservation area will be sustained also. The proposal thereby satisfies the requirements of national planning guidance, along with the local development plan, and therefore merits approval without delay.

2: THE SITE

The application building is located on the northeast outskirts of Littleborough in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The barn at Lower Town House Farm is one of a group of buildings within a fold – a moorland nucleus typical of the Pennine landscape – centred on Town House, a small country house rebuilt in the late 18th century. The group also includes a former wool warehouse, now converted to cottages, situated between Town House and the barn. The barn forms the main element of a U-shaped courtyard formation of buildings, with ranges at right angles on either side, that to the east derelict.



Map 1. Location of the application building



1. The barn at Lower Town House Farm: front elevation



2. The barn viewed from the rear

3: THE PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

3.1 Proposed development

Proposals have been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for conversion of the application property to two dwellings.

3.2 Designations

The building is itself undesignated but stands within Town House Conservation Area. Town House itself is designated Grade II.

3.3 Heritage impact

The heritage issue arising is the impact upon the significance (heritage interest and value) of the conservation area, as regards the external works only. Owing to separation distance and screening between the site and Town House itself, there is no impact upon the setting of the latter.

3.4 Scope and purpose of this report

Paragraph 207 of Chapter 16 (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*) of the National Planning Policy Framework (as revised, December 2024) states local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of the heritage assets affected, including their setting. The scope and purpose of this report is therefore to identify the significance of the conservation area, and to assess how this will be affected by the proposal.

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

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

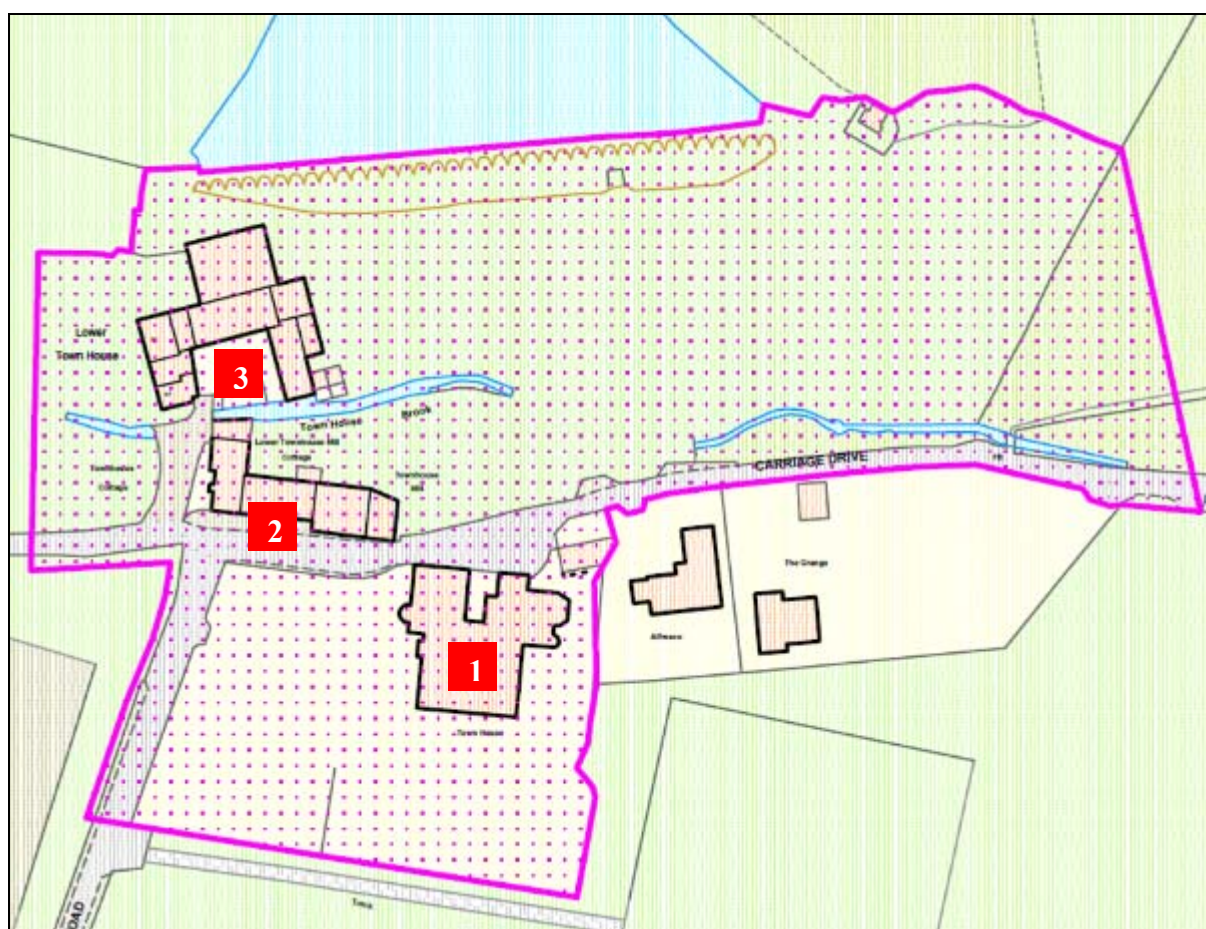
3.5 Report structure

This is as follows:

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

4: THE CONSERVATION AREA

Town House Conservation Area was first designated in 2009. A character appraisal, which would define its special interest for planning management purposes, has however not been produced by Rochdale MBC. The conservation area essentially encompasses a group of buildings centred upon the Grade II listed Town House amid a wider moorland setting. The settlement is of medieval origin although the existing buildings are later, mainly 18th/19th century. Town House, originally held by the Newall family, is a 1798 rebuilding of a 17th century predecessor, with additions of 1915. It is now converted to apartments. The other principal buildings of the conservation area are a former wool warehouse and attached cottage to the north, also now converted, beyond which is the U-shaped formation of former agricultural buildings at Lower Town House that incorporates the application property.



Map 2. Town House Conservation Area: 1= Town House, 2 = former wool warehouse, 3 = Lower Town House Farm buildings

5: THE APPLICATION BUILDING

5.1 Overview

Long-disused stone barn, the principal element of a U-shaped courtyard of former agricultural buildings of late 18th to mid-19th century date.

5.2 Form

The barn is of three bays, with the central forming the threshing floor and characterised by opposed wagon entrances. The first bay has a former stable on the ground floor, with hayloft above, open to the threshing floor. The third bay is now open to the roof but was probably a shippon with hayloft above. Attached on the west side of the barn is a separate two-storey cottage under a single-pitch roof, not part of the current application. On the east side is a brick outshut, part of the east courtyard range and not included in the proposal.

5.3 Date

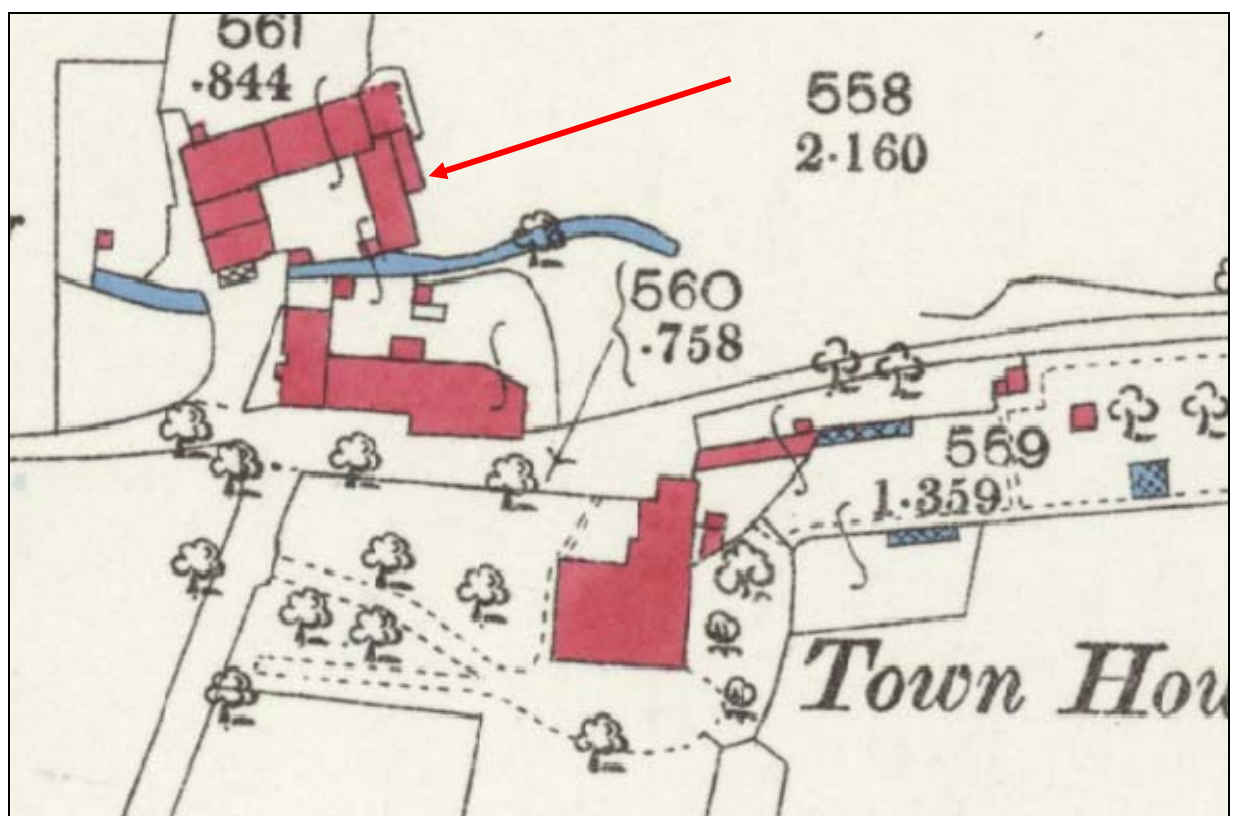
Probably late 18th century; possibly a rebuilding of an earlier structure.

5.4 Historical development

The barn existed by the early 19th century, and is shown on the six-inch OS mapping surveyed in 1847-1848 (Map 3, following page). The arrangement of the courtyard was then somewhat different, with a staggered range on the west side and the east side incomplete. An outrigger is shown at the rear of the barn, now gone. The formation thereafter assumed its present configuration by the end of the century (Map 4).



Map 3. The somewhat different configuration of the courtyard, as depicted on the six-inch OS map surveyed 1847-1848



Map 4. The courtyard has assumed its present layout by 1890-1891, as the 25-inch OS map of that period shows

5.5 Exterior

The barn is of typical rugged Pennine character, its rather blank front elevation dominated by the round-arched off-centre wagon entrance. To the left of this is a door and window to the stable in the first bay, while there are two ground floor doorways on the opposite side, the left one (probably a later insertion) blocked as is an adjoining small window. There are no first floor openings. The rear elevation is effectively a mirrored version of the front. The predominant feature is also its wagon entrance. There is a door to the stable and two doorways to the third bay, the furthest one blocked. Above is a loading door, the only first floor opening, which indicates this bay was originally lofted. The east elevation, above the added outshut, is blank apart from a gable owl hole.

5.6 Interior

The principal portion of the barn – the second and third bays – is now a single, stripped-out open space, latterly used for storage. The principal features are the three roof trusses, which have short kingposts rising from collars. The trusses are largely machine-cut, but have hand-sawn, and therefore reused, tiebeams. This combination suggests the barn may be a late 18th century remodelling (possibly heightening) of an earlier building. The first bay is served by sliding wooden feeding hatches from the threshing floor and apart from timber ceiling beams has no visible features of note.



3. Wagon entrance dominates the largely-blank front elevation



4. Rear elevation is similar apart from hayloft door



5. Threshing floor, showing stable feeding hatches



6. Kingpost trusses machine-cut, but with reused tiebeams



7. The third bay of the barn is open, but hayloft door indicates a floor once existed



8. Interior of the former stable in first bay

6: SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

6.1 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 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 The conservation area

The significance of the conservation area essentially derives from its character and appearance as a moorland fold centred upon Town House, a small Grade II country house remodelled in 1798 from a 17th century predecessor. This significance is therefore embodied in its buildings – principally Town House itself, the former wool warehouse and cottage and the Lower Town House farm group – and their relationship to each other within their wider moorland setting.

6.3 The application building

The significance of the unlisted barn is restricted to the local context only (i.e. to Littleborough) and resides in its collective value as the principal element of the agricultural building group at Lower Town House Farm. Given the loss/alteration of most of the interior, this significance is embodied primarily within the external envelope and presence of the barn, which also embody the essence of its contribution to the conservation area. However, the long disuse and subsequent deterioration of the building places this significance and contribution at risk.

7: PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

7.1 Statutory duty

Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of a conservation area.

7.2 Relevant policies

Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework provides the guidance on how the statutory duty is to be put into practice. 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*

Regarding designated heritage assets, paragraph 212 states that ‘*great weight*’ should be given to their conservation and the more important the asset, the greater that weight should be; and that significance can be lost through development within its setting. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

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.

8: IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

8.1 Summary of the scheme

The application seeks consent for conversion of the undesignated building to form two dwellings, as detailed in the submitted drawings.

8.2 Its effect

- a. Principle of the scheme.** The building has been disused for some time, the agricultural purpose for which it was originally built having long since ceased. The proposal seeks to put the barn to a sustainable alternative use that will secure its future.
- b. Design.** This report has demonstrated that the significance of the undesignated building resides in its group value as expressed by its external envelope, which forms the basis of its positive contribution to the conservation area. The external appearance of the barn will remain for the most part unaltered, as the conversion scheme largely makes use of existing openings. This report has demonstrated that there are no openings on the first floor, with the exception of the hayloft loading door on the rear elevation. Hence a limited amount of new openings are required to remedy this deficiency and make the floor habitable. This involves two small windows and one rooflight on the front elevation; two new openings, a rooflight and widening of an existing doorway at the rear; and a first floor window in the east elevation. The interior will inevitably undergo subdivision and change to facilitate the conversion, but as this is unseen it does not contribute to the significance of the conservation area and consequently there will be no adverse effect upon the latter. The roof trusses which form the principal internal features will however be retained.

8.3 Conclusion

The proposal will secure the future and sustainable use of the redundant application building and will enhance its appearance via a programme of refurbishment works. The significance of the undesignated building, which resides primarily in its group value, external attributes and presence as part of the Lower Town House Farm courtyard, will be sustained, and consequently that of the conservation area will be sustained also. The proposal thereby satisfies the requirements of national planning guidance, along with the local development plan, and therefore merits approval without delay.