

19 September 2023

Savannah Cobbold
Planning Officer
West Suffolk Council
West Suffolk House, Western Way
Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Dear Ms. Cobbold,

DC/23/1356/FUL Planning application - conversion and extension of dove/pigeon cot into dwelling (class C3)

DC/23/1357/LB Application for listed building consent - a. remove and replace floor; b. repairs and render and insulation to walls c. re-lay roof covering and re-tile; d. insertion of two conservation roof windows; e. install replacement windows onto existing timber frame; f. install lightweight partitions and independently supported first floor; g. install heating, hot and cold water system and sanitary ware

The Dovecote, Thurlow Hall, Bury Road, Great Thurlow, Suffolk.

I write on behalf of the Suffolk Preservation Society to object to the proposed conversion and extension of a grade II listed dovecote in Great Thurlow, which sits within the Great and Little Thurlow Conservation Area. The dovecote is a rare example of this building type in Suffolk which, in common with most post-medieval dovecotes, is located on a prominent site visible from the road. The conversion to a three-bed dwelling, associated internal subdivision, additional fenestration, and proposed extension will materially harm the significance of this small, simple and symmetrical building. Furthermore, we note that no Heritage Statement or Impact Assessment has been provided with the application and suggest that the heritage significance of the building has not been considered adequately.

The dovecote is included in John McCann's book '*Dovecotes of Suffolk*' published by the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History in 1998. This county-wide survey of surviving historic dovecotes enables analysis of them as a building type, and identification of features which are of particular significance and which aid accurate dating. Contrary to the listing description of 1961, the dovecote at Great Thurlow Hall is identified as being a late 17th century structure. It is one of only seven surviving timber-framed dovecotes in the county.

Historic dovecotes were free-standing buildings sited in open space at a distance from adjoining structures and tall trees in order to afford a clear sight line for the pigeons. The addition of an extension and the enclosure of a plot of land around the dovecote with hedging, a high fence and associated domestic paraphernalia will erode the historic setting.

While we support the removal of the current cement render and replacement with lime render, we are concerned that other important material evidence will be lost. John McCann noted that the high quality oak timber frame had remnants of pine boards lining the interior, and fragments of pine nest-box fronts. The use of pine at this date, imported from Baltic ports, would have been costly and attests to the status of the owner of the estate and to the social and economic value placed on this building. It is not clear from the proposals whether this evidence will be preserved. The opening on the north elevation – noted in 1998 as being in original condition - incorporates horizontal iron bars installed to prevent birds of prey and vermin entering the dovecote. Similar bars survive in situ on just two other dovecotes from the 30 historic dovecotes identified in Suffolk. This feature is removed in the current proposals. An original flight platform and funnel-shaped pipe were observed in the interior in 1998, the latter formed of one-inch pine boards. These features are significant survivals, and the pipe was identified as being one of only four which survived in good order in the county. It is not clear from the section drawing provided whether the pipe is still present and, if so, whether it will be retained.

The statutory test set out at S.66 of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990 requires the LPA, when considering proposals for development which affects a listed building or its setting, to *“have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses”*. The tests set out in paras 190, 197, 199, 200 and 202 of the NPPF, and Local Plan Policy DM15, are relevant to assessing this application. Furthermore, local Plan Policy DM18 stipulates that adaptation of an historic building to sustain a new use will be permitted *“where the proposal will protect the special significance of the building, and would not have a detrimental impact on: a. the character, appearance and setting of the building or significant elements of the building’s historic fabric; b. the scale, height, massing, alignment, style and materials of the building; c. the form, function and manner of construction of the building”*.

The dovecote is in a prominent position within the Great and Little Thurlow Conservation Area, and in this respect *“special attention should be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area”* in accordance with S.72 of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990. The relative significance of the dovecote and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area has not been demonstrated, as required in paragraph 207 of the NPPF, and the proposal does not meet the criteria set out in Local Plan Policy DM17 for proposals for development within, adjacent to or visible from a Conservation Area.

In summary, no assessment of significance or detailed assessment of the potential impact of the proposals on significance have been provided with the application. While we welcome proposals which will preserve the structural integrity of a designated heritage asset, the proposals would not

sustain or enhance the significance of the dovecote and are detrimental to its character and setting. The linear extension significantly detracts from the square, symmetrical form of the dovecote, and the partitioning of the dovecote interior to provide a three-bedroom dwelling significantly compromises the historic internal layout.

A clear and convincing justification has not been provided for the harm to significance that these proposals will cause, and we do not consider that the public benefit of providing a single dwelling in this location outweighs this harm. For these sound planning reasons we urge that the planning and listed building consent applications are resisted in their current form and a less intensive scheme is sought which safeguards the historic fabric, character and appearance of the affected heritage assets. We trust that you will find these comments helpful and ask that the Society is reconferred on any amended scheme.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Forrest
BA (Hons) MA FSA
Heritage and Research Officer

Ccs:

Ward Councillor

West Suffolk Heritage Team

Great Thurlow Parish Council

Ancient Monuments Society

Council for British Archaeology

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings