

Heritage Statement

Introduction

This statement is written in support of a Listed Building consent application for alterations to a first-floor window at East Court.

Background

There have been two recent applications for works of repair and renovation at East Court. Refer to applications 233044, 8th February 2024 and 240202/240203, 25th March 2024 for further information.

This application covers the following work:

- minor internal alterations on the 1st floor, including removal of a section of masonry wall and the unblocking of an existing opening
- altering an existing window head to be arched rather than flat. Note LBC consent was previously granted for the widening of the same window – see 240203.

The nature, extent and significance of the asset

East Court is a private residence in the village of Finchampstead, which lies around 5.5km south-west of Wokingham and around 13km south-east of Reading.

The property is bounded on the south by Jubilee Road, B3348 and Church Lane to the north-east. To the west is East Court Farm and beyond that the village playing fields. East Court enjoys views of the spire of the Norman church, St James' which is around 500m to the north-west. East court is a large property within grounds



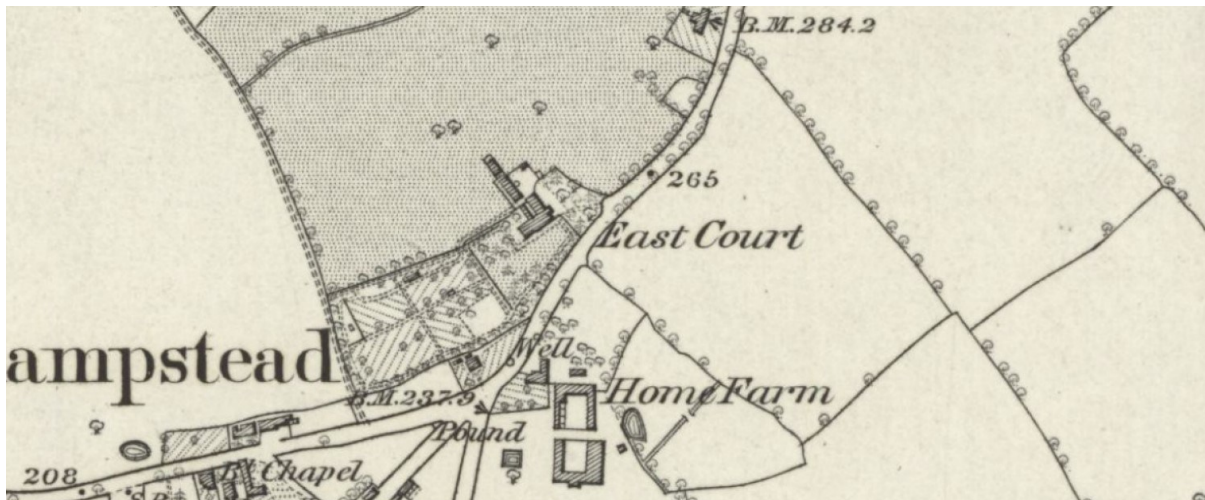
of approximately 0.6 hectares.

The property is a grade II listed building. The English Heritage entry is at the following link- <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1118091?section=official-list-entry>

The property comprises the main house, a separate converted stables and coach house wing, a detached office and store building and a garage with attached chicken coop.

The main house is part two and part three storey with a small basement area below the main staircase.

The converted stables is single storey and the former coach house two-storey.



OS map from 1878 - source The National Library of Scotland - <https://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch->

Development at East Court

17th Century

The Manors of East and West Court were dynastic formations which trace back to the late 13th century. East Court was at that time located close to St James's church in Finchampstead. In the early 17th century East Court relocated to its current site.

The origins of the property are unclear, however the oldest part of the house (shaded red on plan), a two-storey timber frame construction is probably late 16th or early 17th century. This structure has been considerably altered, with major extensions and remodelling in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Evidence of the way that East Court has been adapted and extended is revealed through a variety of indicators, such as its irregular plan, suggesting organic growth and including the variation in external wall thickness and materials. The house is largely built of facing brick, with clay lump used on the 19th century extension to the south-west. There are also sections of vertical hung tiling interspersed with courses of shaped tiles. Some of the facing brickwork has been lime-washed and other areas including the vertical hung tiling have been painted. Window openings have been altered both in size and style.

Traces of the oldest structures (shaded red on plan) are evident in the surviving painted exposed timbers visible to the front north-east elevation. The roof structure over this part of the house is generally well preserved. It comprises hand hewn oak timbers, rafters, ties and purlins of varying thickness which have been packed out to align the roof to form the contiguous and level ridge line visible today.

The substantial brick chimney on the north-west (8 pots), through this section of the house has some 17th century brickwork.

It is likely that the secondary stair as well as internal beams in this part of the house are 17th century. Over time, the extensive remodelling and enlargement of the house, including the formation of more generously proportioned rooms has relegated this area of the house to that of a service wing.

18th Century

Enlargement during the Georgian era almost doubled the size of the original house. This development was carried out whilst in the ownership of the Fyshe-Palmer family, who owned East Court as part of their estate from the late 17th to mid-19th centuries.

This segment of the house (shaded blue on plan) contains the hall, stair and stairwell and adjacent drawing rooms. They are reflective of their age in that they are larger and more generously proportioned than the early parts of the house. The hall and stairwell are timber panelled as is the main staircase. The panelling to the hall is 18th century.

The windows on the ground floor south-east and north-west elevations appear to be Edwardian enlargements, compared to those at first floor above them. The south-east facing five pot chimney structure may have been a later addition. The passage that leads off the stair hall between the rooms would then have continued to the external wall. There are two central windows at this location, on the south-east elevation, the one at ground floor has been bricked in and at first floor the window remains in place but has been infilled from behind.

The origins of the Doric porch are unclear, but it is to be expected that it was built as part of the Georgian enlargement works as it is centred on this element of the house and aligns with the panelled hall beyond. It was re-built sometime during the 1990s following the discovery of dry rot. The roof is currently finished in felt, which would almost certainly have been metal originally and most probably lead.

At second floor, the accommodation comprises rooms in the roof, which were likely to have been servants' quarters.

The roof structure, painted timber truss sections and purlins are visible in several locations. It has been suggested that the roof timbers here pre-date the 18th century, although no testing has been undertaken to confirm this.

The roof over the main stair has been altered with the insertion of several large rooflights. Two of these sit on either side of the inner ridge, with a further rooflight in line with these, which provides daylight to the first-floor landing.

19th Century

The 19th century additions to the south-west and north-west increased both the main and ancillary accommodation.

The two-storey accommodation on the south-west comprises a Drawing Room on the ground floor with Master Bedroom above. Both rooms are much larger than those added during the Georgian period with proportionately higher ceilings. The Master Bedroom is divided structurally into three bays, with large windows within each bay facing south-east. The two windows in the outer bays extend up into hipped dormer structures.

The master bedroom has a part vaulted ceiling that shows the roof trusses which define the structural bays.

Late 19th century photos show that there was another large two-storey element to the house on the south-west side. This no longer exists and it may be that during the periods of the 20th century when the house was untenanted and it was not being regularly maintained, that this wing fell into serious disrepair and was demolished. The kitchen extension that was built around 2017 (under consents 160243 and 160244) occupies the same footprint.

Additions to the north-west include the two-storey add-on to the 17th century part of the house and the single storey service wing.

20th Century

A single storey kitchen extension was added to the rear/side of the house in around 2017 following the granting of planning permission and LB consent, reference 160243 and 160244. This also granted permission to reinstate the pitched, hipped roof over the single-storey north-west service wing.

The Significance of the Asset

Like many historic properties, the significance of East Court is that it illustrates the development of a building through time. It embodies how the resources, materials and construction techniques of different eras were employed to affect changes reflecting the aspirations of its owners and of society more broadly.

Proposed Works:

The proposed works are all at first floor. With reference to the existing first floor plan D03 and the proposed first floor plan D13, the scheme is to open up the current narrow and poorly used storage area in the south-west corner of Bedroom 1. This would entail removing a short section (approx. 1.5m in length) of the internal masonry wall. A new steel beam will be required to support the remaining masonry/roof structure above.

Opening up the existing storage area enables built in wardrobes and storage to be built directly accessible from the within the bedroom.

It is also proposed to reinstate the existing opening between the 1st floor stair landing and bathroom by removing the 20th century plasterboard and timber frame infill.

At first floor permission was granted (240203) to widen the bathroom window facing north-west (WF20).

We are requesting a further change to this widened window which is to alter the window head from being flat to semi-circular. There is a semi-circular arched window on the north-west gable of the converted Stable block which provides a precedent – see drawing 2023-ST-E.

Benefit: The proposed works are of a minor nature and entail minimal loss of historic fabric. The window alteration will improve daylight into the bathroom, which with the other proposed alterations is aimed at improving the layout, use and facilities of the bedroom and bathroom to safeguard the long-term sustainability of East Court as house and home.

Relevant Planning History

240202/240203 - Householder/Listed Building Consent applications for the proposed alterations to internal stairs, formation of internal screen, alterations to external joinery and terrace, changes to fenestration.

1833349/183450 - Householder/Listed Building Consent application for the proposed changes to fenestration to main dwelling house. Raising of the garage roof to create habitable accommodation, changes to fenestration and erection of covered area for storage to side of garage – Approved: March 2019

183451 - Householder application for the proposed erection of tennis court including perimeter fencing 2.75m high - Approved: February 2019

160243/160244 - Householder/Listed Building Consent application for single storey side extension and pitched clay tile roof over service wing with conservation roof lights plus changes to fenestration - Approved: April 2016

960300 - Proposed Erection of Detached Bungalow - Refused: June 1996

43374 - Conversion of existing stables to Kitchen, WC & Dining room - Approved: August 1994

Relevant planning policies referred to:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- NPPF section 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- NPPF section 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy:

- Policy TB24: Designated Heritage Assets (Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Areas)
- CC01 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CC02 - Development Limits

The Impact on the Asset

The proposed works are minor in nature and will have only a limited impact upon historic fabric.

Design and Access Statement:

Use:

Existing long established residential use.

Amount:

Not applicable, no alteration to existing.

Layout:

Not applicable, no alteration to existing.

Scale:

Not applicable, no alteration to existing.

Landscape:

Not applicable, no alteration to existing.

Protected Species:

Not applicable as the proposed works will not impinge upon bat roosts. However, a copy of Spires Ecology Final Bat Survey Report of October 2023 has been included for information.

Access:

Not applicable, no alteration to existing.

Flood Risk Assessment:

A flood risk assessment is not required. The environment agency website notes that the application site is within Zone 1 and has a low probability of flooding from rivers and the sea.

Structural survey:

A specific structural survey has not been carried out.

Transport assessment:

Not applicable, no alteration to existing.