

The Old Cottage

Pearson Road, Sonning, RG4 6UH

Heritage Statement & Design and Access Statement for Proposed Cork & Lime Plaster Panels to the Ground Floor of the West Gable

Document No: 1362-HR-A-HS-XX-03
Rev 02

Date: 29.07.2026



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Revision History

Rev 00	Issued 04.07.2026	FIRST ISSUE
Rev 01	Issued 24.07.2026	SECOND ISSUE
Rev 02	Issued 29.07.2026	FINAL ISSUE

This report is by Claire Truman RIBA Accredited Conservation Architect, IHBC Affiliate, of Heritage Revival, Reading.
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- 1.1 This Heritage Statement is submitted as part of a listed building application for proposed replacement infill panels to the Ground Floor (only) of the West Gable at The Old Cottage, Pearson Road, Sonning to the approved structural repairs to the timber frame, application reference 260979. The document is written to assist greater understanding of the impact of the proposal upon the heritage significance of the heritage asset - the Grade II listed property and the Sonning Conservation Area.
- 1.2 Listed buildings and conservation areas are considered 'heritage assets' as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework and therefore merits consideration in planning decisions (2024).
- 1.3 The submission draws upon the recent and relevant research carried out into the heritage significance of the property and environs by the applicant's Heritage Consultant Rob Workman of Lime and Listed. A redacted version of the Heritage Statement submitted for application 232299, which Rob Workman has provided to the applicant for their use as necessary to facilitate forthcoming applications associated to the refurbishment of this property, is referenced and included in the Appendix.

1.4 **Relevant Planning History for The Old Cottage, Pearson Road, Sonning:**

Application ref.	Summary	Date
260979	Application for submission of details to comply with Condition 4 (structural repairs method statement) of listed building consent 232278 dated 09/01/2024. (Granted).	16.06.2026
260838	The proposed demolition/removal of a single storey boiler house extension from the west elevation. (Granted).	03.06.2026
253038	Submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent (232278) dated 9/1/2024. Condition 4 relating to structural repairs safeguarding special architectural or historic interest. (Refused).	06.02.2026
232278	Application for Listed Building consent for proposed external alterations; conservation works including sensitive historic timber and masonry cleaning, cement and modern facing timber removal, structural repairs, installation of vapour-permeable wall insulation, lime rendering and breathable decoration to all elevations. (Granted).	09.01.2024
240474	Application for Listed Building consent for the proposed roof work to the East Wing and replacement roof covering, breathable roofing membrane and insulation, structural work to roof timbers if required and new MVHR unit to guest bathroom. (Granted).	29.05.2024

1.4	Application ref.	Summary	Date
(cntd)	232299	Application for Listed Building consent for proposed internal alterations to East Wing and Utility Room; conservation works including sensitive historic timber and masonry cleaning, cement and modern plaster removal, structural repairs, installation of vapour permeable wall insulation, lime rendering and breathable decoration to all rooms. (Granted).	09.01.2024
1.5	Heritage Significance		
1.5.1	Proposals relating to heritage assets are subject to the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF). Such proposals require to be justified under this legislation with respect to potential effect on the heritage asset. Consideration is given to the impact upon a heritage asset's 'significance' and its 'setting'.		
1.5.2	'Significance' is defined in the NPPF as: "The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting..." (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2024, Annex 2: Glossary).		
1.5.3	The 'setting' of a heritage asset is defined in the NPPF as: 'The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.' (MHCLG, 2024, Annex 2: Glossary).		
1.5.4	This Heritage Statement is written within the context of relevant best practice guidance: • Historic England (2008). Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance.		
1.5.5	The scope of the Heritage Statement is developed to be proportionate to the proposals in accordance to paragraph 207 of the NPPF which states, "The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance" (2024, para. 207).		
1.5.6	This Heritage Statement identifies the heritage assets with potential to be affected by the proposals, it then describes the heritage assets' significance, and the document then analyses the potential impact of the proposals upon the significance of the heritage assets.		

2.0 THE NATURE OF THE HERITAGE ASSETS

2.1 The heritage assets with the potential to be impacted by changes to The Old Cottage are as follows:

2.1.1 **Grade II listed, 'The Old Cottage'**

List Entry No.: 1117432

Date of listing: 26.01.1967

"The Old Cottage 26.1.67 GV II House. Early C15 hall house altered, 2 storeys, timber framed, painted brick infilling, old tile roof, central chimney inserted C17, and later chimney to east end. North front has gable to left, one bay of 4-light leaded windows, one irregular bay of 3-light leaded casements to right of gable, a small C20 single light and to right hand coupled 3-light leaded upper casements over a 3-light window on ground floor and C20 door in right corner. Large C20 extension to rear. Smaller gabled extension to east in painted brick. Interior:- most of timber frame visible including large roof purlins and wind braces heavily sooted. Large scissor brace truss in roof. Ground floor room right contains old carved heads and a carved panel, reputedly from the former Bishops Palace." (Historic England, 2026)

2.1.2 **The Sonning Conservation Area**

The property is within the 'Pearson Road' character area within the conservation area. The Conservation Area Appraisal highlights characteristics of this sub-area are:

- a number of age and style of properties are present in changing sizes of plots with diversity contributing to its 'charm'
- larger plots provide opportunities for glimpsed views between buildings which create a greater sense of openness
- Pearson Road contributes to a number of focal points within the conservation area

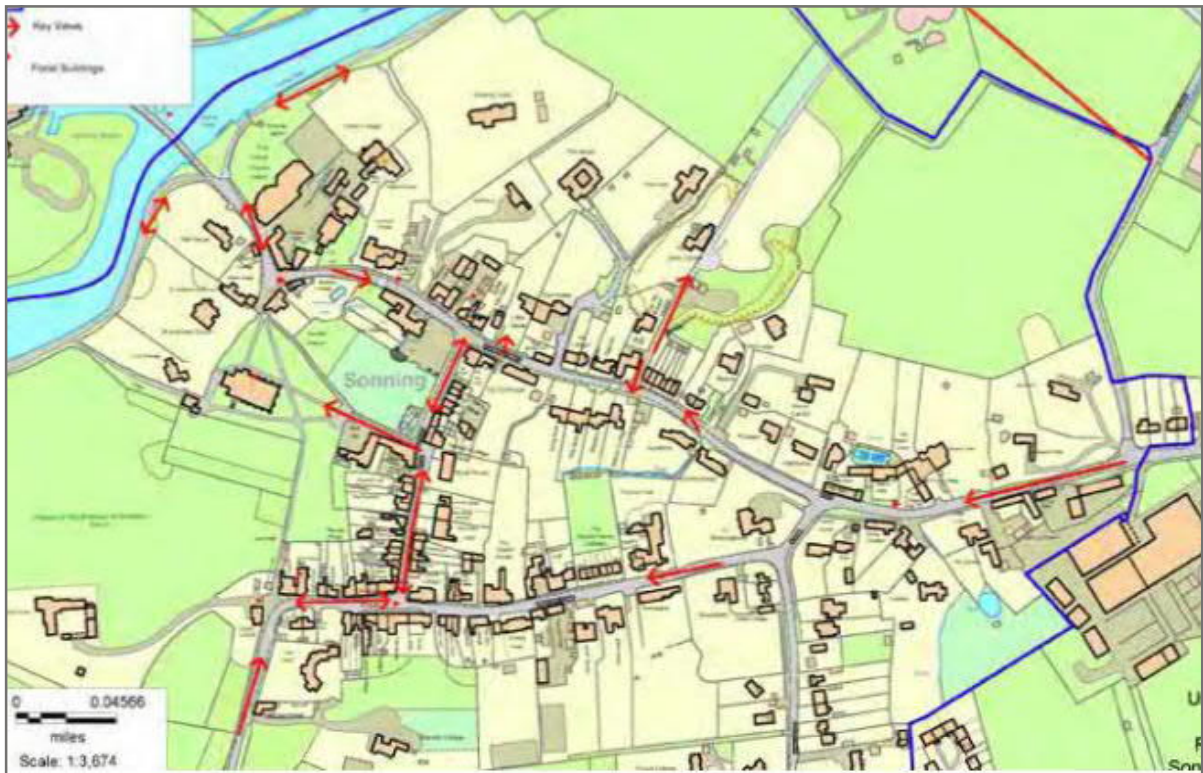


Image 01: Extract of the Conservation Area map showing focal points within the CA (WBC, 2017)

2.0 THE NATURE OF THE HERITAGE ASSETS (cntd.)

2.1.3 Listed buildings within the vicinity of The Old Cottage

These are summarised in the extract from Historic England's website below of the map of the immediate area (Historic England, 2026).



Image 02: Extract of map showing listed buildings in the vicinity of The Old Cottage (Historic England, 2026)

2.1.4 'Buildings of Traditional Local Character'

These are buildings considered “...important to the Borough’s heritage” (WBC, 2026). Those on Pearson Road within the scope of the map have been marked up with a red square on the Historic England map, above, namely:

- Clandon,
- Grove End
- Groveside
- Laundry Cottage

2.2 External Photographs



Image 03: View of North elevation along Pearson Road



Image 04: Rear (south) elevation

2.0 THE NATURE OF THE HERITAGE ASSETS (cntd.)

2.2 External Photographs (cntd)

(cntd)



Image 05a: View of West gable



Image 05b: Detail of revealed brick



Brick and cement
plaster protruding
past the timber frame

Image 06: View of south elevation of west gable return -
timber frame repairs due to be carried out as approved under
application 260979

2.3 The location of the external works

The brick infill panels are within the Phase 1 construction (likely 15th century, possibly 14th century).

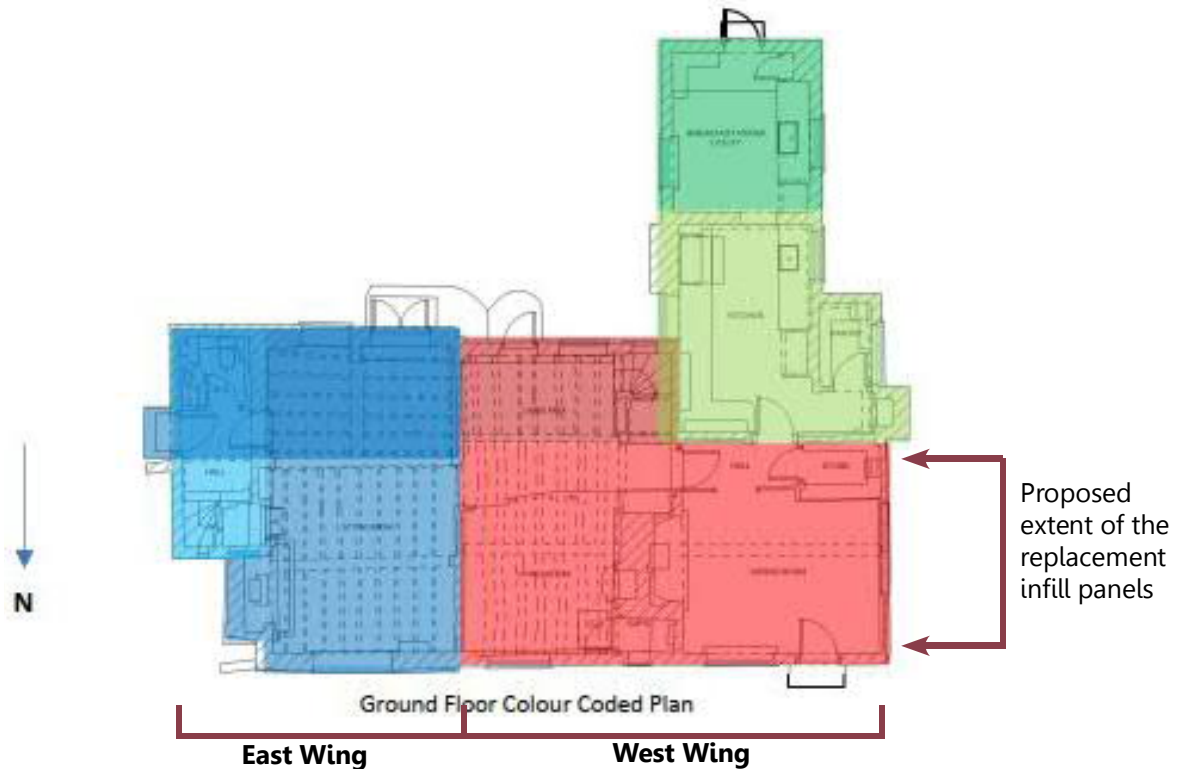


Image 07: Extract from the Heritage Statement showing the Phases of construction colour coded (Workman, 2023)

(red shades)

Phase 1: likely C15th (possible C14th). Predominantly timber framed with smoke blackened and scissor truss roof. The rear 'living area' ground floor element originally with a cat-slide roof may be a slightly later addition or contemporary to this original phase. The dressing room element on first floor is a later phase of historic alteration which likely removed the earlier cat slide roof some of which remains above the staircase. The central chimney stack, floors and ceilings would appear to be later insertion to the primary phase. The primary timber framing to the ground floor in front elevation has been lost and under built in brick, some of which appears to be C20th rebuild. It is possible wattle and daub infill panels may still exist within the primary phase but the majority do appear to have been rebuilt in brick.

Image 08: Extract from the Heritage Statement summarising the key for the colour coded phased construction plan (Image 07) (Workman, 2023)

3.1 Heritage Significance

3.1.1 The Heritage Statement has identified the following as being of heritage significance at The Old Cottage, and a review of the range of nearby heritage assets that has potential to be impacted by these proposed works has determined those identified below remain relevant:

The significance of The Old Cottage is currently masked by later modern coatings it can be summarised as follows based in the information known to date:

- The building is a good example of a 14th/15th century dwelling (exact date TBC following dendro/isotope dating), with multiple later additions to the east and south of the primary phase. It is likely heritage significance reduces to a degree as the phases progress.
- Historically the building was possibly two separate units/plots, now combined into one.
- The plan form of the more significant primary and secondary phases is still largely legible, some of the rooms have lost their historic proportions having been 'opened up' or have had the interconnection altered and/or infill panels removed in the past.
- Most rooms retain at least some of their architectural features although modern inappropriate finishes may be disguising earlier more significant features. (Plan form is significant in understanding how buildings were originally occupied so some significance has been lost by the opening up of room plans and alterations to interconnection which does lower significance).
- The building's architectural form expresses its history and the narrative of its development. However, there is more to understand following the removal of inappropriate materials.
- Changes over time, including the connection between the two buildings, opening up between rooms and the alterations to the windows are all responses to changes in the occupant's living standards and lifestyle. As such, they add to the narrative of how the building is now experienced.
- Other alterations during the 20th century, such as the garage, bathroom extension and some of the modern Crittal windows, are less successful and may be considered to contribute negatively to the significance of the listed building.
- It is highly likely the building incorporates locally distinct vernacular building materials under modern finishes and coatings. The primary timber framing including a scissor truss provides evidence of local materials and local craftsmanship, so it is of high significance. It also contributes to local distinctiveness and character.
- Examples of other skilled trades such as internal carpentry, joinery and ironmongery all add to the significance of the listed building although provenance of some mouldings and carvings in dining room is questionable and requires further assessment. Historic timber framing and finishes such as wattle and daub and lime plaster should be preserved where they survive.
- The house makes a positive contribution to the character of Sonning Conservation Area. Conversely, the immediate surroundings of the house contribute positively to the value and significance of The Old Cottage.

The building's architectural and historic significance is formally recognised in its statutory designation as a Grade II listed building.

3.1.2 Identified within this list above are alterations made during the C20 that are considered to contribute negatively to the significance of the listed property. Workman suggests for the Phase 1 construction, the north elevation may have been under-built in the C20 - the brick infill panels to the West gable elevation are a later change, and may have been carried out with the C20 alterations.

4.0 THE PROPOSED WORK AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE HERITAGE ASSETS

- 4.1 Historic England and the NPPF offer guidance on how to approach the assessment of the impact of proposed works upon the significance of a heritage asset. In particular the following are considered relevant to The Old Cottage, the Sonning Conservation Area and the setting of those listed buildings and 'buildings of traditional local character' in the vicinity of The Site.
- 4.1.1 "When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance", (MHC&LG, 2024, para.212).
- 4.1.2 "Each generation should therefore shape and sustain the historic environment in ways that allow people to use, enjoy and benefit from it, without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same", (Conservation Principle 1.3, Historic England, 2008, p.19).
- 4.1.3 "Conservation involves people managing change to a significant place in its setting, in ways that will best sustain its heritage values, while recognising opportunities to reveal or reinforce those values for present and future generations", (Conservation Principle 4.2, Historic England, 2008, p.22).
- 4.1.4 With regards to the consideration of the effect of authenticity upon a heritage asset Historic England comment, "A desire to retain authenticity tends to suggest that any deliberate change to a significant place should be distinguishable, that is, its extent should be discernible through inspection. The degree of distinction that is appropriate must take account of the aesthetic values of the place", (2008, para. 93, p.45).

4.0 THE PROPOSED WORK AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE HERITAGE ASSETS (cntd)

4.2 Current Situation

- 4.2.1 The West gable is Phase 1 construction, and has deteriorated substantially, such that wholesale repairs are required, and have been approved to be carried out under application 260979.

In carrying out these timber repairs the Ground Floor level of the gable shall have a new cill plate installed, and vertical and horizontal rails replaced as per the agreed scope. This will require the brick infill panels to be removed to the Ground Floor - the First Floor has 2no. shallow (60mm) deep face repairs (only) to the end girt.

- 4.2.2 The brick infill panels were commented upon in the structural engineer's report (January 2022) on the condition of the West gable and stated:

"The brick-infill panels are ½ -a-brick thick (i.e., single-skin) and are rendered and painted. (Internally the infill panels are plastered on the ground floor and exposed on the first floor and within the roof space.) The infill panels appear to have been built using a lime-based mortar that has subsequently been re-pointed using cementitious mortars. (We would assume the infill panels would have originally been lath and plaster, or the elevation would have been lathed and lime rendered with the timber framing hidden / largely hidden from view.)"

The report goes on to advise:

"While it is not a structural issue per se, it is clear the brick-infill panels have been rendered using sand:cement renders and painted using relatively impermeable masonry paints. This is not a good detail from a historic building's perspective as it will prevent the natural flow of moisture through the material, which in turn can lead to 'damp' issues and the acceleration of any decay that may be present (primarily at the junctions of the brickwork and the timber framing). It should be noted blistering and bubbling were prevalent in the low-level panels (Fig. 7). While it is not a structural issue per se, we would strongly recommend consideration is made to removing the impermeable renders, mortars, and plasters, and to use more traditional and breathable materials."

- 4.2.3 The bricks are have been identified to be a modern change to the original infill material and have no heritage significance to the property. They have directly caused moisture to be trapped within the wall which has driven the moisture into the timber frame and caused deterioration to the extent much of the Ground Floor requires careful replacement - and has therefore caused harm to the heritage significance of the property as held in the Phase 1 fabric (the original timber frame)

4.0 THE PROPOSED WORK AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE HERITAGE ASSETS (cntd)

4.3 **Proposal**

- 4.3.1 Where appropriate to the ground and first floor of the West gable, replace the brick infill panels with lime rendered cork panels as part of the process of repairing the timber frame.

4.4 **The Challenge**

- 4.4.1 The repair of the timber frame of the West gable, as approved under application 260979 will require the infill brick panels to the ground floor to be removed. The condition of the brick infill panels to both the ground and first floors to this gable elevation have been reviewed by the timber frame repairer and the lime plasterer together on the 16th July.

The plasterer is concerned about the existing brickwork: it projects beyond the face of the timber frame and has a noticeable bulging appearance once rendered. If some panels were replaced with cork and lime render, those panels would sit flush with the timbers, while the retained brick panels above at the first floor would continue to project outwards. The resulting mix of profiles across the gable end may not create a desirable aesthetic outcome.

- 4.4.2 The timber frame repairer advised the extent of the necessary brickwork removal will not really be known until the frame is opened up and the repair work to the timbers starts. Depending on what is uncovered, it may be possible to retain most of the existing brick infill. Equally, it may be necessary to remove substantial sections of the upper infill panels in order to gain access for repairs and undertake the required timber works. It may be established that no additional panels need to be removed, or it may be found that much of the West gable brick infill panels require to be removed and reinstated than currently anticipated.

- 4.4.3 This application, therefore, proposes the replacement of the brick infill panels to the West gable with cork panels if this proves to be the best solution once more is understood upon opening up.

4.0 THE PROPOSED WORK AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE HERITAGE ASSETS (cntd)

4.5 Proposed Cork Infill Panels

4.5.1 The cork panels where installed are proposed to be as per the diagram below:

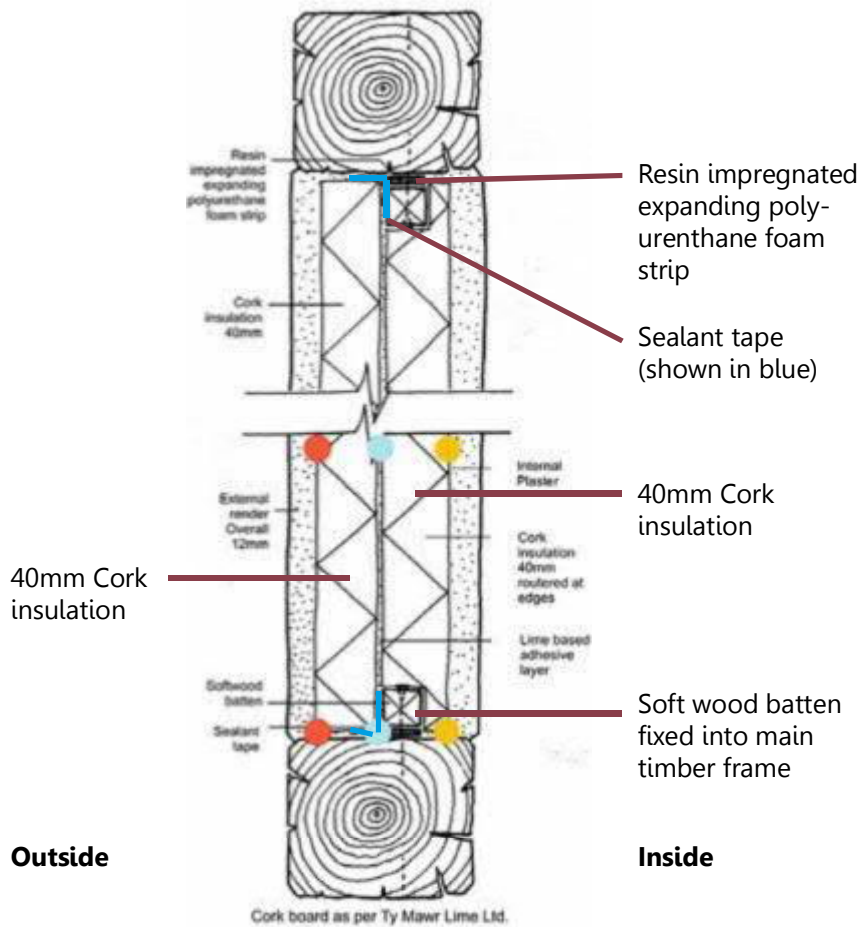


Image 08: Extract from the Historic England research document for a cork-insulated panel with an external lime render, and an internal lime plaster (2025)

4.5.2 Rationale

At the timber when the brick infill material shall be removed as part of the timber frame repair works, this presents an opportunity to improve the choice of material for the infill to one that present a lower risk of harm to the timber frame. This would be a material which is hygroscopically 'open' allowing moisture to wick out of it, both internally and externally, thereby moving moisture out of the wall construction to reduce the amount of moisture being potentially driven into the timber frame - as is currently occurring with the brickwork.

Additionally, the first floor brickwork infill panels have been repointed in cement internally making the bricks susceptible to retaining moisture within the bricks, rather than being wicked away from the joints - refer to Image 09.

4.0 THE PROPOSED WORK AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE HERITAGE ASSETS (cntd)



Image 09: View of brickwork to First Floor West gable

- 4.5.3 In selecting a possible replacement infill material, the choice could include a restoration of the (assumed) wattle and daubed and lime render. This, however, would not reflect the modern living standards of the need to thermally improve buildings for an improved retention of internal heating. This opportunity provides a chance to improve the overall thermal performance of the wall.
- 4.5.4 With regards relevant information available to guide the selection of an alternative material to wattle, daub and lime render, Historic England's most recent and relevant research from 2025, "Hygrothermal Monitoring of Timber-Frame Replacement Infill Panels: Material testing and extended monitoring", offers the best information currently available. The research examined a range of infill materials for their ability to diffuse moisture once it had been exposed to wind-driven rain: NHL 3.5 plastered; hempcrete; wattle and daub; wood fibre; wood wool; cork. Interstitial condensation was found in wood fibre/wood wool and the wattle and daub panels (2025).
- 4.5.5 The importance of high quality workmanship was highlighted in the detailing of the perimeter seals to the panels (ibid). The report suggested that a "...more continuous finish such as lime washes carried over both panel and frame..." could be a robust detail for the perimeter of the panels - depending on the heritage significance of the building as to whether this approach is appropriate. With regards thermal performance and energy efficiency the expanded cork boards achieved the best U-values of between 0.51-0.75 W/m²K (ibid).
- 4.5.6 The report concludes that further work on risks associated with the energy retrofit of historic timber-framed buildings are still required, however at The Old Cottage, the timber frame against which the new panels are proposed are now largely new and the risk to the original timber frame is minimal.

4.0 THE PROPOSED WORK AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE HERITAGE ASSETS (cntd)

4.6 Impact of proposal

- 4.6.1 Visually the cork insulation would be finished with a lime render, and painted with limewash and would provide the white colour achieved with the brick currently, and thus would not impact the aesthetic of the conservation area.
- 4.6.2 Technically, the infill material is a better choice compared to the brick infill owing to the ability of the cork and lime plaster finishes to wick moisture away from the building, minimising the moisture held within the wall and potentially being driven into the timber frame, as had occurred in the past. The lighter weight of the cork would be more appropriate for use within the timber frame.
- 4.6.3 Cork as a proposed infill material has been subject to extensive testing by Historic England which has established a series of positive results for moisture wicking and thermal properties with regards 'retrofit' of wall elements within historic timber-framed buildings. Additionally, the Ground Floor of the West gable is in a relatively sheltered location and potential thermal movement of the frame is likely to be less compared to more exposed elevations, which offers relatively stable conditions for these panels.
- The proposed material is hygroscopically 'open' which would be an improved choice over brick to enhance the performance of the timber for its longevity.
- 4.6.4 This application seeks approval for agreement that cork infill panels finished in lime plaster is an acceptable repair option should replacement of the brick infill panels prove necessary during the timber frame repair works: the existing brickwork will be retained or reinstated wherever that is considered the most appropriate approach vis-a-vis the condition of the frame.
- 4.6.5 It is considered that where brick is replaced with cork infill panels with lime plaster finishes - both internally and externally - this would cause **no harm to the heritage significance** of the property and the conservation area, and will positively contribute to the longevity of the Phase 1 construction - of high heritage significance.

5.0 ACCESS STATEMENT

- 5.1 The proposal will not impact the existing access into and within the property.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The review of the proposed works has demonstrated to cause 'no harm' upon the heritage significance of the Grade II listed property, the conservation area or the setting of nearby listed buildings and those nearby 'Buildings of Traditional Local Character'.
- 6.2 The modern brick infill material has caused detrimental moisture damage to the West gable timber frame which has high heritage significance, and where appropriate the alternative of cork infill material shall be considered for the overall improvement of the performance of the wall.
- 6.3 The proposal capitalises on the opportunity presented with the repair of the timber frame to the West gable to select a material with greater compatibility with the timber frame, with regards moisture movement, and enables the thermal performance of this part of the wall to be improved to allow the property to evolve with modern standards of living and the national drive towards reducing carbon emissions via reduced internal space heating.

7.0 METHODOLOGY

The following methods were used in gathering the information that informed this Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment:

1) Site visit

The Old Cottage was visited on the 02.03.2026 and 12.05.2026 with the Built Heritage Officer, and recorded with photographs.

Historic England. (2025). *Hygrothermal Monitoring of Timber-Frame Replacement Infill Panels: Material testing and extended monitoring*. [Online]. Available from: <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/9251/HygrothermalMonitoringofTimber-FrameReplacementInfillPanelsMaterialTestingandExtended-Monitoring>. [Accessed: 04.07.2026].

Historic England. (2019). *2019 Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management Second edition, Historic England Advice Note 1*. [Online]. Available from: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1/heag-268-conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management>. [Accessed: 31.03.2026].

Historic England. (2008). *Conservation Principles Policy and Guidance: For the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*. [Online]. Available from: www.historicengland.org.uk. [Accessed: 31.03.2026].

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. (2024). *National Planning Policy Framework*. [Online]. Available from: www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/675abd214cbda57cacd3476e/NPPF-December-2024.pdf. [Accessed: 31.03.2026].

Wokingham Borough Council. (2017). *Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal 2017*. [Online]. Available from: www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Sonning%20Conservation%20Area%20%20Appraisal%202017%20%28Adopted%2019%20April%202017%29.pdf. [Accessed: 31.03.2026].

Websites

Historic England

www.historicengland.org.uk

9.1 Redacted Heritage Statement

COMBINED DESIGN, ACCESS & HERITAGE STATEMENT

**THE OLD COTTAGE, PEARSON ROAD,
SONNING ON THAMES, BERKSHIRE, RG4 6UH.**



Proposed External Alterations; Conservation works including sensitive historic timber and masonry cleaning, cement and modern facing timber removal, structural repairs, installation of vapour permeable wall insulation, lime rendering and breathable decoration to all elevations.

Prepared by
Rob Workman BSc (Hons) PG Dip (Historic Conservation)
on 18th September 2023.

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About the Author

Rob Workman has worked in the built heritage construction sector since 2004 and founded Lime&Listed in 2008. Initially undertaking specialist conservation building work, extensive repair and alteration projects with traditional materials for domestic clients and most recently also providing historic building and heritage planning consultancy for homeowners and organisations.

Rob has extensive practical on site experience relating to the challenges involved with listed buildings, particularly with historic timber framed buildings. With an honours degree in engineering from Brunel University (2002) and a further Post Graduate Diploma from Oxford Brookes University in Historic Building Conservation (2008-10). Rob has also been employed as a Conservation and Design Officer at South Oxfordshire and Vale White Horse District (2017-2021), also consulted for Wokingham Borough Council (2019) as an external built heritage consultant and has gained valuable experience of heritage planning matters, legislation, local and national planning policies during this period to compliment his practical knowledge and experience.

Rob is now perfectly placed to advise on repairs and alterations to listed buildings from a heritage planning perspective but with practical understanding of what is actually feasible to undertake such projects. Rob is a keen supporter of [The SPAB Approach](#) to building conservation and has also helped set up the Heritage Skills Centre for National Trust at The Coleshill Estate in West Oxfordshire and is currently a volunteer member of the Steering Group and is regularly involved in running practical conservation skills course and training days there.

1.0 BACKGROUND

This heritage statement has been compiled by Rob Workman BSc (Hons), PGDip (Hist Cons) of Lime&Listed Historic Building and Heritage Planning Consultants on behalf of Naomi Dwight, the applicant to support this application for;

Proposed External Alterations; Conservation works including sensitive historic timber and masonry cleaning, cement and modern facing timber removal, structural repairs, installation of vapour permeable wall insulation, lime rendering and breathable decoration to all elevations.

The purpose of the heritage statement is twofold. Firstly, to assess the architectural and historic significance of The Old Cottage, and then to consider the heritage impacts of the proposed alterations on the significance identified. This document is intended to assist the owners and the local planning authority in making informed decisions about the proposed alterations.

The heritage statement is written to comply with paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF) which require applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by proposed alterations, including any contribution made by their setting, stating that *“The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance”*.

Such an approach is also identified as best practice in Historic England’s *‘Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2 – Managing Significance in Decision – Taking in the Historic Environment’* (March 2015).

The Old Cottage is a significant Grade II Listed building located on Pearson Road situated within the heart of the Sonning Conservation Area and the setting of numerous nearby listed buildings.

Mr and Mrs Dwight have lived in the property for the last year and have taken their time to fully understand the building throughout the seasons, it’s significance as a designated heritage asset and most importantly the current condition of the historic fabric. They have sought specialist advice from two structural engineers including conservation specialist David Evans (SPAB Scholar), a specialist conservation surveyor (Joe Hotson) and an eminent dendrochronologist (Dr Andy Moir) who have all visited the property within the last 12 months to inspect the fabric, provide advice and recommendations.

Alongside this statement please review the supporting surveyor and engineer inspection reports, their recommendations, the existing and proposed elevations which also outline the sensitive conservation works proposed to the external elevations.

The supporting survey reports highlight the structural, damp and timber decay issues throughout the building inevitably caused by the liberal application of impervious modern cement renders, gypsum plaster and plastic paint coatings that have been applied over the last 50-75 years. These impervious materials have trapped excessive dampness, both internally and externally, which now needs to be carefully removed to enable the fabric to dry out, to allow inspection and repairs to progress.

It cannot be understated how harmful this past approach to building maintenance and repair at The Old Cottage has been, not only to the building’s historic fabric, but its heritage significance as further sections of historic timber and masonry will inevitably be lost to enable conservation repairs to the significant timber framing and surrounding fabric.

Dr Andy Moir has suggested the primary phase in the west wing, originally an open hall, may have a slightly earlier construction date than early 15th century stated in the official listing, this ties in with the Pevsner account. The smoke blackened roof rafters, braces and scissor truss are a rare survival and as such hold very high significance in built heritage terms.

Initial sampling for dendro-dating has unfortunately been unable to get an accurate date but further timber samples have now been submitted for isotope analysis which will hopefully provide an accurate date for the structural timbers in the next few weeks. We await his report and will update the Conservation Officer at the earliest opportunity and whilst listed building consent applications are ongoing.

The historic timber framing in the west gable wall is in a terrible state of degradation as highlighted in David Evans report, the true extent will not be known until further opening up, outlined in this initial application, has been approved by the Conservation Officer and so further inspections can take place.

It is highly likely specialist timber scarf and face repairs will be required to the structural timber framing with well-seasoned oak sections, alongside appropriate lime mortar repairs to masonry. Vapour permeable building materials and craft skills will be utilised in line with conservation best practice and Historic England guidance are to be adopted to resolve the current issues the building faces. There is no doubt this will be an extensive conservation project that will be implemented over a number of years as the owner's budget and planning consents allow.

The inserted ceiling in bedroom 1 of west wing (a later addition to the hall house) had failed before the applicant took possession of the property. David Evans inspected in January 2023 following temporary propping having been installed to enable further investigations. Wokingham Borough Council were informed of this structural issue earlier this year as it was considered urgent work may be required. However, with temporary support in place enabling further investigations, this has enabled the applicant to consider how best to approach the project and develop a holistic approach to resolving all the building's problems.

The defective beam and ceiling in bedroom 1 will be dealt with in due course, via a later application for listed building consent covering internal repairs in the west wing. However, it is considered structural repairs to the adjacent west gable wall are required in advance as it is this wall the bedroom ceiling beam is connected to and is of higher significance being earlier primary fabric than the inserted ceiling. Bat surveys are also being undertaken for any work to the roof and roof voids.

Alongside works outlined in this initial application for the external elevations the applicant would like to focus their attention on making the inside of the east wing more habitable in the shorter term as less intrusive work is required here than in the west wing and also so the more extensive structural works to the west wing can be fully investigated and progressed. In tandem to the above the applicant would also like to tackle an extensive overhaul to the roof coverings early next year, listed building consent/householder planning applications to cover these proposals will be forthcoming over the coming months once all bat surveys have been completed by the consulting ecologist.

The intention is to safeguard the remaining historic fabric and significance alongside the buildings special interest for future generations to enjoy.

This statement is based on cartographic, documentary and photographic evidence but primarily on a detailed inspection of the property and its setting onsite and we would encourage the Conservation Officer to review the proposals onsite. It also draws on the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal, 2017.

It should be read in conjunction with the application drawings and any other supporting documentation.

2.0 DESIGN AND PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

The proposals predominantly look to conserve and repair, thermally upgrade and safeguard the existing historic fabric in a sensitive manner in line with conservation best practice and Historic England guidance.

We consider the works outlined in this application only require listed building consent as no 'development' is proposed and so a householder planning application has not been submitted.

Please do let the agent know at the earliest opportunity if this is incorrect and so an application for householder planning can also be made.

ACCESS

Access and parking arrangements are unaltered by the proposals and therefore there are no Highways impacts.

TREES

There are no mature trees within 25m of property. No trees will be impacted by the works outlined in these proposals.

ECOLOGY

No protected species will be impacted by the works outlined in this application.

NB. No roof work is proposed on this initial application for listed building consent. Subsequent applications will likely involve upgrades to the roof/roof voids which may require bat mitigation works. We await completion of all bat surveys for confirmation and to support future applications for works to the roof and roof spaces.

3.0 DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

The conservation works proposed directly impact the following designated heritage asset including its setting:

THE OLD COTTAGE, PEARSON ROAD

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1117432?section=official-list-entry>

Grade II Listed, designated 26th January 1967.

Description:

14/29 The Old Cottage 26.1.67 GV II House. Early C15 hall house altered, 2 storeys, timber framed, painted brick infilling, old tile roof, central chimney inserted C17, and later chimney to east end. North front has gable to left, one bay of 4-light leaded windows, one irregular bay of 3-light leaded casements to right of gable, a small C20 single light and to right hand coupled 3-light leaded upper casements over a 3-light window on ground floor and C20 door in right corner. Large C20 extension to rear. Smaller gabled extension to east in painted brick. Interior: - most of timber frame visible including large roof purlins and wind braces heavily sooted. Large scissor brace truss in roof. Ground floor room right contains old carved heads and a carved panel, reputedly from the former Bishops Palace.

The setting of the following designated heritage assets may also be impacted;

THE DOWER HOUSE, PEARSON ROAD

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1117431?section=official-list-entry>

GLENDALE, PEARSON ROAD

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1319456?section=official-list-entry>

FORGE COTTAGE, PEARSON ROAD

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1135905?section=official-list-entry>

The proposals may also be considered to impact the character and appearance of the SONNING CONSERVATION AREA, designated in 1971.

4.0 HISTORICAL SOURCES

The Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal gives an extensive description on the Historical Development and Spatial Analysis of Sonning as a settlement. However, in the context of The Old Cottage the following information is known in addition to that provided in the list description.

Sir Nikolaus Pevsner describes as follows;

"THE OLD COTTAGE, a C14 or C15 hall house, with scissor-bracing and a gabled cross wing."

Source: *The Building of England, Berkshire* – 1966.



The Old Cottage, late 19th century, Source: *The Book of Sonning* by Angela Perkins, 1977

The above photo shows the majority of the front elevation. From this we can clearly see past alterations to the front boundary giving way to the driveway and garage addition to the east. All of the window frames appear to be a light colour (externally) or a broken white as brilliant white was not commonly used until post 1920 following the advent of titanium oxide. The ground floor windows also appear to have shutters now lost and the east wing is shown without the applied facing timbers to the first floor.

The book of Sonning by Angela Perkins also documents a fine C18th shoe that was discovered at The Old Cottage which is now at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

5.0 HISTORIC MAPPING



Source: National Library of Scotland, Extract from historic OS Map (1875) – The Old Cottage highlighted in red

The extract above from the 1875 OS map shows The Old Cottage which appears to be split into two distinct units/sites at that time and without the current rear additions to the south elevation. There is very little change in the 1911 and 1932 edition OS maps except the loss of some smaller attached and detached out buildings. The 1932 mapping shown below appears to show the two units as one with the centre boundary treatment removed and still no additions to the rear. Interestingly the 1932 historic map on page 11 of the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal (unsourced) shows the kitchen and utility room additions to the rear which may indicate their addition at this point?

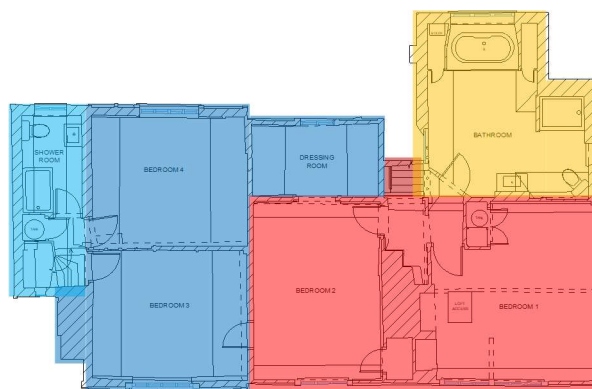
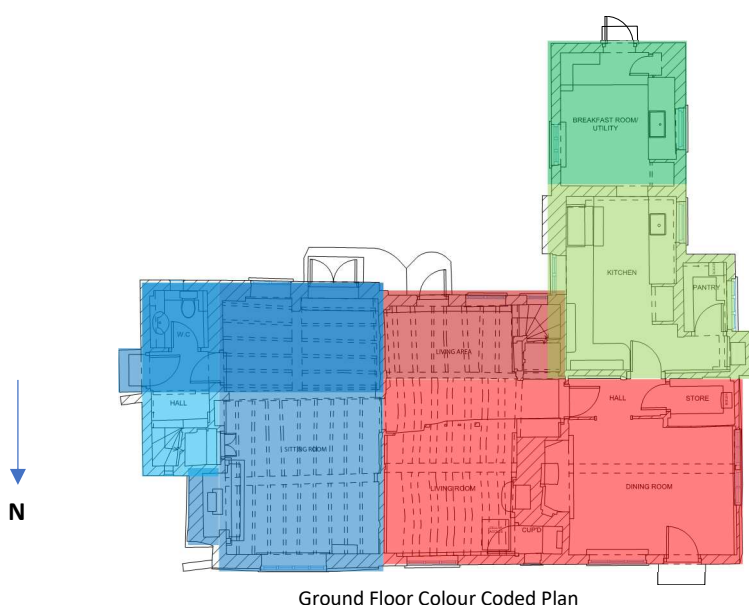


Source: National Library of Scotland, Extract from historic OS Map (1932) – The Old Cottage highlighted in red

6.0 CONSTRUCTION PHASING

At present we have limited information on the construction phasing at The Old Cottage. However, based on the historic mapping, inspection of the measured survey and architectural features onsite the current layout would accord with the property having been two separate cottages as indicated by the historic OS mapping and given the awkwardly low access door between bedrooms 2 and 3. Albeit the property may have been one unit without interconnection at first floor when the eastern wing (Phase 2) was initially built.

It is hoped further inspection following the removal of inappropriate modern finishes on the building as outlined in this application for LBC will help inform a better understanding of the building construction, its phasing and in turn help us gather an enhanced understanding of its heritage significance.



(red shades)

Phase 1: likely C15th (possible C14th). Predominantly timber framed with smoke blackened and scissor truss roof. The rear 'living area' ground floor element originally with a cat-slide roof may be a slightly later addition or contemporary to this original phase. The dressing room element on first floor is a later phase of historic alteration which likely removed the earlier cat slide roof some of which remains above the staircase. The central chimney stack, floors and ceilings would appear to be later insertion to the primary phase. The primary timber framing to the ground floor in front elevation has been lost and under built in brick, some of which appears to be C20th rebuild. It is possible wattle and daub infill panels may still exist within the primary phase but the majority do appear to have been rebuilt in brick.

(blue shades)

Phase 2: likely C18-19th. Predominantly brick built with timber roof truss exposed to front. The stair/bathroom addition is likely to be later still especially at first floor maybe even C20th, further investigation is required. There appears to be a change in direction of ceiling joists to ground floor at the rear of sitting room which likely indicates this rear section being a later phase or distinctly separate rooms if contemporary to east wing now opened up. There also appears to have been interconnection between bedrooms 3 and 4 historically which is likely to indicate the east stair/bathroom element is indeed later still.

(green shades)

Phase 3: likely early-mid C20th. Predominantly brick built with timber roof trusses. As previously outlined these additions do not appear to be on historic mapping until 1932. It is hard to date the fabric at present due to modern paint/coatings on brickwork, but generally they appear to be older brick but of course may have been built using reclaimed brick.

(yellow)

Phase 4: C20th. Predominantly brick built with timber roof trusses. Addition of west bathroom to first floor removing original roof line above kitchen that still exists above utility room, constructed using modern engineering bricks typical of 1950-70s used in the construction this may have been added prior to listing in 1967 or just after.

There are likely more than four main phases of construction at The Old Cottage, including numerous sub phases within each main phase, but we cannot put precise dates on some elements within each phase at present due to the inappropriate modern finishes that have been applied masking the underlying fabric and architectural detail.

As outlined earlier we are currently waiting on dendro-dating/isotope investigations on historic timbers to confirm the felling date of structural timbers in the primary and secondary phases. We hope more accurate dating for later phases can be confirmed by the removal of inappropriate modern render, modern facing timbers and/or modern paint coatings outlined in this initial application for listed building consent, all of which give a false narrative and understanding at present.

The existing windows in primary phase all appear to be later insertion. However, earlier windows or evidence of original windows constructed within the primary historic timber framing may exist under later alterations and finishes.

It is considered elements of phasing and dates will evolve as the project progresses and this heritage statement and the colour phased plans within are considered to be a dynamic document that will be updated as we undertake opening up work, further inspections and sensitive conservation repair works progress which will also help inform subsequent applications for listed building consent.

7.0 SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Assessing 'significance' is the means by which the cultural value of a place and its component parts is identified. The purpose in so doing is as the basis for effective conservation and management, because identifying aspects of higher and lower significance, based on thorough understanding of a heritage asset, enables proposals to be developed which protect, respect and enhance its character and cultural values. Such assessment can identify those areas where minimal changes should be made as well as areas where change might be positive and enhance understanding or appreciation of significance. Changes can then be designed to ensure that significant features are not compromised and that alterations conform to legislative and policy requirements.

The significance of The Old Cottage is currently masked by later modern coatings it can be summarised as follows based in the information known to date:

- The building is a good example of a 14th/15th century dwelling (exact date TBC following dendro/isotope dating), with multiple later additions to the east and south of the primary phase. It is likely heritage significance reduces to a degree as the phases progress.
- Historically the building was possibly two separate units/plots, now combined into one.
- The plan form of the more significant primary and secondary phases is still largely legible, some of the rooms have lost their historic proportions having been 'opened up' or have had the interconnection altered and/or infill panels removed in the past.
- Most rooms retain at least some of their architectural features although modern inappropriate finishes may be disguising earlier more significant features. (Plan form is significant in understanding how buildings were originally occupied so some significance has been lost by the opening up of room plans and alterations to interconnection which does lower significance).
- The building's architectural form expresses its history and the narrative of its development. However, there is more to understand following the removal of inappropriate materials.
- Changes over time, including the connection between the two buildings, opening up between rooms and the alterations to the windows are all responses to changes in the occupant's living standards and lifestyle. As such, they add to the narrative of how the building is now experienced.
- Other alterations during the 20th century, such as the garage, bathroom extension and some of the modern Crittal windows, are less successful and may be considered to contribute negatively to the significance of the listed building.
- It is highly likely the building incorporates locally distinct vernacular building materials under modern finishes and coatings. The primary timber framing including a scissor truss provides evidence of local materials and local craftsmanship, so it is of high significance. It also contributes to local distinctiveness and character.
- Examples of other skilled trades such as internal carpentry, joinery and ironmongery all add to the significance of the listed building although provenance of some mouldings and carvings in dining room is questionable and requires further assessment. Historic timber framing and finishes such as wattle and daub and lime plaster should be preserved where they survive.
- The house makes a positive contribution to the character of Sonning Conservation Area. Conversely, the immediate surroundings of the house contribute positively to the value and significance of The Old Cottage.

The building's architectural and historic significance is formally recognised in its statutory designation as a Grade II listed building.

