Method Statement and Specification

Localised Repair of Existing Lath and Plaster Ceiling

Property: The Old Cottage, Pearson Road, Sonning, RG4 6UH

Application reference: 261787

Date: 27 October 2026

1. Purpose and extent

The proposed works comprise careful removal of modern plaster overcoats and localised repair of the existing lath and plaster ceiling in the west bedroom affected by the fractured ceiling beam.

The approach is minimum intervention and maximum retention of existing fabric. Historic plaster and serviceable timber laths will be retained in situ wherever possible.

The intention is to retain the substantial majority of the existing laths. Replacement will be confined to individual laths or sections that cannot reasonably be retained or reused because of their condition.

The ceiling repair area indicated on the submitted reflected ceiling plan identifies the area within which repairs may be required. It does not indicate wholesale removal or replacement of the ceiling.

This specification does not authorise replacement of the complete ceiling, alterations to ceiling joists or additional structural works beyond the approved repair details.

2. Responsibility and sequence

The contractor will undertake the works using operatives experienced in traditional lath and lime plaster repairs.

Before disturbing the ceiling, the contractor will check the accessible plaster, laths and fixings to distinguish:

- Modern applied plaster layers.
- Surviving historic plaster.
- Areas of local failure or detachment.
- Serviceable laths and isolated defective sections.

Ceiling works will be coordinated with the approved beam repair. Existing structural supports will not be altered under this specification.

Protection to the smoke-blackened roof timbers will remain effective in accordance with the separate timber-protection method statement.

3. Selective removal of modern plaster

Modern plaster overcoats will be removed carefully in small, controlled areas using hand tools, beginning at an existing exposed edge or a limited trial area.

The contractor will work progressively at the interface between the modern layer and the underlying historic plaster, avoiding levering against the laths or pulling down large sheets.

Percussive power tools and indiscriminate hacking-off will not be used.

Modern plaster will be removed where it can be separated without damaging the underlying historic plaster or laths. Where it is firmly bonded and removal would damage retained historic fabric, the affected modern material will be retained locally. Loose edges will be carefully trimmed and the surrounding area repaired using the specified compatible lime plaster system.

4. Retention of historic plaster

Sound historic plaster, including surviving backing and finishing coats, will be retained.

Cracking, surface irregularity or age alone will not justify removal. Existing plaster will not be stripped merely to provide a uniform background.

Localised loose or defective plaster will be carefully assessed by the contractor. Material capable of remaining securely in place will be retained; material that cannot be securely retained will be removed only to the minimum extent necessary and the resulting opening repaired using the specified lath and lime plaster materials.

Edges of local repair areas will be formed carefully back to sound material without unnecessarily enlarging the opening or disturbing adjacent plaster keys.

5. Retention and repair of timber laths

Existing laths will be retained in their original positions wherever serviceable.

A lath will not be replaced solely because it is old, irregular, discoloured or has redundant fixing holes. Loose fixings will not, by themselves, justify replacement of an otherwise serviceable lath.

Where practicable, sound loose laths will be carefully resecured, avoiding vibration and damage to retained plaster and its keys.

Replacement will be limited to laths or sections that are:

- Decayed to the extent that they cannot support the plaster.
- Fractured or split so that they cannot be securely retained.
- Too deteriorated to accept an effective fixing.
- Missing.

Only the minimum defective length will be removed. Sound adjoining laths will remain undisturbed.

6. Replacement laths and fixings

Where replacement is necessary, new riven oak or riven chestnut laths will be used, matching the existing laths as closely as practicable in section and arrangement.

Replacement laths will:

- Be free from decay and defects that would impair their function.
- Be supported and fixed at their ends.
- Have staggered end joints where more than one adjacent lath is replaced.
- Maintain suitable open gaps for the formation of plaster keys, including counter-laths at beam locations where necessary to provide clearance behind the plaster-carrying laths.
- Be fixed using corrosion-resistant stainless-steel fixings of suitable size, avoiding splitting and unnecessary disturbance.

Fixings will be limited to those necessary for the local ceiling repairs, minimising disturbance to retained historic fabric.

Plasterboard, expanded metal lath and sheet-board substitutes will not replace the traditional timber lath background.

7. Lime plaster repairs

Local plaster repairs will use a compatible traditional lime-putty-based plaster system, comprising:

- A coarse, haired lime plaster scratch coat where the lath background is exposed.
- A second coat of lime plaster (float coat).

- A fine lime plaster finishing coat.

Materials will be compatible with the retained plaster in strength, permeability, texture and finish. Cement-based backing plasters, modern gypsum backing or finishing plasters and PVA bonding agents will not be used.

Before application, loose debris will be removed locally without damaging retained plaster keys. Suction will be controlled by careful dampening, without saturating the existing ceiling.

The first coat will be worked through the lath gaps to form effective mechanical keys or nibs. Subsequent coats will be applied only where required and allowed to firm up and cure in accordance with the selected lime plaster system.

The repair build-up will follow the submitted specification: a haired scratch coat, float coat and fine lime finish. Coat thicknesses will be matched to the retained ceiling at local repairs, rather than applying a complete new build-up over sound historic plaster.

Local repairs will be finished flush with adjoining retained plaster, with a compatible texture and finish.

8. Curing and decoration

Fresh lime plaster will be protected from rapid drying, excessive heat and strong draughts. Controlled ventilation and light misting will be used where necessary in accordance with the plaster manufacturer's instructions.

Decoration will take place only when the plaster is sufficiently cured and dry. Any new decorative finish will be vapour-permeable and suitable for lime plaster.

9. Limits of the proposed repair

The works comprise selective removal of modern plaster and localised repair, retaining historic plaster and serviceable laths wherever possible. Wholesale ceiling replacement and additional structural alterations are outside this specification.