

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer
Service	Green Infrastructure
App No:	252335
Address:	Bird Place, Henley Bridge, Henley-On-Thames, RG9 2LN
Proposal:	Application for Listed Building Consent for the proposed erection of single storey rear extension with basement following demolition of existing rear lean-to extension, rear roof terrace, lowering of basement floor and changes to fenestration.
Heritage Assets:	Bird Place – Grade II Remenham Bridge Conservation Area <i>Setting of:</i> Bird Place Cottage – Grade II Henley Bridge – Grade I Church of St. Mary – Grade II* The Little Angel – Grade II Henley Royal Regatta Headquarters – Grade II The Angel – Grade II 18 Thameside – Grade II Rectory and Coach house on Thameside – Grade II 11-12 Thameside – Grade II The Old Granary – Grade II Baltic House – Grade II River Terrace and Obelisk – Grade II Henley-on Thames Conservation Area Park Place and Temple Combe – Grade II* RPG
Site Visit Made:	Yes

Summary Of Recommendations

Objection – refusal recommended

Comments On Proposal

The application proposes the extension and alteration to Bird Place (including the service wing, known as Rose Cottage), a Grade II listed building. The proposals include a single storey extension in a contemporary architectural form, along with

associated landscaping, the excavation of the lower ground floor, the creation of a viewing/sun deck, alteration to the plan form, replacement of a Yorkshire sash window, as well as general refurbishment and repair.

The application site is located wholly within the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area and within the direct setting of the Henley-on-Thames Conservation Area. Furthermore, the application site lies within the wider setting of the Grade II listed Bird Place Cottage, The Little Angel, Henley Royal Regatta Headquarters, The Angel, 18 Thameside, Rectory and Coach house on Thameside, 11-12 Thameside, The Old Granary, Friday Cottage, Baltic House, River Terrace and Obelisk, the Grade II* Church of St. Mary and the Grade I listed Henley Bridge. The site also lies within the wider setting of the Grade II* Registered Park & Garden of Park Place and Temple Combe. All of which, to a greater or lesser degree, draw significance from their setting and context.

In addition, the application site is within the setting of a number of non-designated heritage assets, which include, but not limited to, the Royal Mansions, numerous 19th and 20th century boat houses along Boat House Reach on the Henley side of the river.

Bird Place is a highly significant and complex building. The site holds a great deal of historic interest, being a prominent and a well-known building in the town. Whilst on the Berkshire bank, and within the parish of Remenham, Bird Place has always been seen as a 'Henley house'. *A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3*, ed. P H Ditchfield, William Page (London, 1923) notes Bird Place as the residence of Mr. W. A. Simmons, J.P – as in Simmons & Sons, still going in the town and elsewhere.

Architecturally, the building is highly complex. Whilst many historic buildings will have phases of development, these tend to be relatively obvious and clear to read. Bird Place has not only multiple phases of development, but these are convoluted intertwined throughout the building. As discussed later, the building is not simply "C18... (with a) service wing of no special interest" – as per the listing description, but actually a much more interesting and significant building.

Understanding Significance

To make changes to any historic building – particularly one of such interest – a full and informed understanding of its significance must be had as to not only avoid adverse impacts to the architectural and historic interest, but to appropriately conserve and manage change. Such a concept is enshrined in the British Conservation Movement, from Morris and Ruskin to English Heritage's *Conservation Principles* (2008) – still the authority on the subject:

"Sustainable management of a place begins with understanding and defining how, why, and to what extent it has cultural and natural heritage values: in sum, its significance. Communicating that significance to everyone concerned with a place, particularly those whose actions may affect it, is then essential if all are to act in awareness of its heritage values. Only through understanding the significance of a

place is it possible to assess how the qualities that people value are vulnerable to harm or loss. That understanding should then provide the basis for developing and implementing management strategies (including maintenance, cyclical renewal and repair) that will best sustain the heritage values of the place in its setting. Every conservation decision should be based on an understanding of its likely impact on the significance of the fabric and other aspects of the place concerned.”

The concept is further embedded in planning system, as para. 207 of the NPPF (Dec 2024) states:

“In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. 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. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.”

Assessment of significance:

It is not typically custom for the LPA to provide a detailed analysis of the significance of a heritage asset during the planning process – as per para. 204, the onus is for the applicant to provide such an assessment. However, in this case as understanding the significance, particularly the historical development of the building, is central to the determination of the application, a brief assessment will be supplied:

Primary elevation:

The primary – north – and east façades are contemporaneous, exhibiting identical traits. The façades are of a brown brick mainly with fine tuck pointing, in a mixture English, Flemish and Header bonds – as can be typical for tuck pointing. Despite the lack of recent maintenance, the tuck pointing is in excellent condition, and does appear to be original. Brown brick became fashionable in the 1730s, through a blend of clays, brick manufactures marketed this hue as of ‘higher status’ – and indeed more expensive – than the regular provincial red brick. This is partly why the brown is used on the primary element, with the secondary service wing of ‘regular’ local red brick. The fenestration has beautiful gauged brick arched segmental heads – such style went out of fashion by the 1750s. The extant windows have flat heads with Cavetto and Bead glazing bars – a style popular in the 1790s-1800s. It can therefore be assumed the windows are not the originals, but inserted some 50-60 years after the construction of the façade. The gap between the segmental head and the flat sash head has been infilled with brick, not inexpertly, but certainly not of original construction. Given the known dating of

architectural elements and materials, the north and east façades can be comfortably dated to the 1740s. There is comparison to Church House in Beckley, known to have been built in 1744 (as illustrated in Nathaniel Lloyd's *A Historic of English Brickwork*). This main element has a raised ground floor – the piano nobile – as might be expected for a high-status 18th century neo-classical house. This, however, is resultant of part design, part circumstance. The north and west façades appear to have been applied to, and raised upon, an early building. Other than obviously tell-tales such as uneven dimensions, the roof structure is clearly altered and not what would be expected for a newly built piece of polite architecture. The inclusion of blind windows is not related to the Window Tax introduced in 1692 (a common misconception) but a deliberate design notion as the maintain classical rhythm and balance. This is further confirmed by the presence of contemporary interior panelling in the rooms with the blind windows.

South Elevation

By contrast, the southern elevation (to the primary element) bears little in relation to the polite front of the building. The two phases are clearly evident – brown brick, as per the front, with a smaller red brick element. These two components are gabled, but at different heights and scales. Both have been altered. The brown brick 'half' is likely to be concurrent with the north and east façades. The lower bow window is likely to have been added in later in the 18th century, perhaps the 1750s-60s. The upper portion of the bow is later again, likely more towards the turn of the 18th century. The arches of the original window (of which is replaced) can be seen just to the top of the flat roofed bow. The oversized arched window is likely to be original, the surrounding brickworks is undisturbed, with Queen closers evident. It is peculiar for such a 'polite' house to have such a rudimentary and 'vernacular' elevation. Such ad-hoc alteration demonstrates the rise and fall in the owner's means, and changing architectural interests.

West Elevation

The west elevation is very interesting. Of the same brown brick as the north, east and part south, and thus likely concurrent, it clearly demonstrates alteration. In the first, it has a gable, which forms the unusual roof form. The detailing of the gable (as to have a parapet type edge, as opposed to a more vernacular wet edge tile finish) is identical to the southern element, as discussed above. These two parts are undoubtedly contemporaneous in construction. The top two casement windows are exactly what would be expected for an 18th century servant's level to appear. The middle sash is as per the front, a segmented arch which has then had a flat top sash inserted. A further segmented arch can be seen above the service wing dormer which abuts the elevation – clearly an early window was here, then removed when the service wing was altered. The lower sash is the most interesting. It has no brick header (i.e. no support to spread the load), this would never have originally been built like this. Below the window is clearly infill brickwork, with lower further differentiation to the rendered banding. To the right is completely different brickwork again. Red brick with vitrified headers in a Common bond. The brickwork extends down to the ground level. The brickwork is of the late 18th century and fine work, second only in quality on building to the tuck pointing on the primary front. Evidently substantial change has occurred here.

Basement

The lower ground floor of the main element is most peculiar. It is not typical, nor what would be expected for a cellar of a neo-classical house. Firstly, the ceiling height in part of the level is far too low. Obviously low by modern standards, but even taking into account the lower average heights of people in the 18th century, it is not correct. For a 'new' house, built afresh, it would never have had a been constructed with such a lower level. Vernacular Georgian houses would typically have a ceiling height approaching 6ft (depending on context) with 'smart' houses (such as this) having ceiling heights of 7ft-9ft – again depending on context. Further to this, there are evidently two phases within the basement – one part is floored with stone flags primarily the under the north and west, with a secondary element to the south and east. This level is evidently different, being part of the red brick gabled element (noted above) – as if it this was a completely different house. The phasing is clearly different and altered to suit.

Most importantly, part of the walling is built of flint, in a mixture of smaller and large stone – this is highly unusual and would never be expected for 'new' construction of the time. Flint is an uncommon building material in the immediate vicinity. Being an alluvial geology, flint would have to be brought down from the fields above river plain – perfectly normal, however the due to the increased labour and cost, flint at the time (and indeed still today) was typically only used on high-status buildings, or by those commissioned by patrons of means. St. Mary's Church in Henley – 'Ivy Cottage' an eyecatcher for Temple Combe further down the river are good examples – or, more pointedly, Friday Cottage, a 15th century warehousing range almost plumb opposite Bird Place on the Oxford bank.

Putting together these points, and whilst it remains conjecture, this may be the remnant of a much earlier building. Given this, there is a high degree of interest in the lower level. To excavate this area would immediately remove any archaeological interest and perhaps eradicate any evidence of the past building.

Service Wing

On the surface Bird Place's service wing appears to be of two or three phases. There is clear evidence the element closest to the primary element was the coach house – with the 'hayloft' door very obviously blocked on the north elevation, with the original coach door now containing a large mullion and transom leaded light. The brickwork here is Georgian, primary in a Flemish bond. There are numerous vitrified headers, and the bricks were likely brought down from Nettlebed. There is, however, evidence externally that the eaves line has been raised. From the brickwork, the 'first' phase is likely around 1790-1810 – probably concurrent with other alterations (such the upper bow window on the south elevation), then subsequently altered. Internally, the roof structure appears as might be expected, that of machine or pit cut softwood. However, part of a truss is different. The axe cut timber appears to be oak or perhaps ash. This is unusual and deserves further investigation. This could be evidence of an earlier structure or perhaps brought in (reused).

Architectural Salvage

As is not entirely uncommon for historic buildings, there are a number of architectural features which did not start life at Bird Place. The extremely rare and interesting oversized Yorkshire sash (discussed below), the large projecting oriel Edwardian window is unlikely to have constructed specifically for the building. The Gibbs-esq (very vaguely) door surround to the rear is peculiarly placed (it would be expected to be for primary entrance and to be centred). Internally, some of the panelling is undoubtably Georgian and made for the space, other aspects shown evidence of being cut down – having been not made for the building and have come from elsewhere. Some of the panelling appears to be early 20th century, but perhaps installed in the 20s – given other tell-tales such as plumbing and other fixtures. Some of the fire surrounds are Edwardian, some a bit later. All this adds to the architectural and historic interest of the listed building.

Orientation

The principal elevation is orientated towards White Hill (as in the road) this is an ancient route – with the crossing recorded in the 13th century, however, may date back two millennia. It is curious why a newly constructed mansion should face a rudimentary road when the landholding included the valuable river frontage. Earlier, contemporary, and later mansions in the area (albeit of slightly grander status) such as Fawley Court, Greenlands, Culham Court, Phyllis Court etc., all have strong river facing elevations. Not so for Bird Place. This may well have been a quirk of the builder, but given the physical evidence, it is possible the main element was built where it was built and orientated the way it is oriented, due to the pre-existing constraints and the (relative) ease and reduction in cost of adding to, and altering, an already existing building.

Proposals

Extension

The application's proposal of a single storey extension to the south – as to replace the unauthorised lean-to – in a contemporary language drastically contrasting with the host's architectural appearance, that of a traditional 18th and 19th century polite and domestic vernacular. The highly modernistic aesthetic introduces a bellicose form to the established architectural language with conflicts with traditional appearance the host setting. Whilst a contemporary approach could be considered to represent an 'honest' tact to building philosophy, it is clear in this instance the jarring nature of the architectural form is at odds with the contextual historic significance. The resulting incongruity would be highly notable in the historic context and relationship to nearby heritage assets.

Although of a single storey, the overall projection and arrangement of the proposal would begin to compete with the visual dominance of the main part of the building,

impairing its historic legibility. That the proposed extension of a contemporary, 'lightweight' and simplified design approach does not overcome this. The large areas of glazing proposed would compete with and distract from the more modest fenestration across the building, and its overall solidity. Furthermore, the perpendicular arrangement competes with, and thus erodes, the primarily linear plan form of the building causing harm to the interest derived from this element.

Basement

As discussed above, the lower level of the primary element holds great interest as extant. It may, potentially, be of even greater significance. The proposed excavation and alteration to the plan form would seek to remove and undermine all the historic interest within this level. The flooring is a mixture of stone flags and clay tiles, evidently 18th and 19th in date. Such features would be lost through the proposals. The removal of some of the storage shelving, which have stood there for century, would seek to erode the historic interest here. The shelving is sawn-cut stone, at least 19th century in date using for the cold storage of wine and foodstuffs. The proposed drawings indicate the retention of some of these, but given the floor level is proposed to be lowered, it would be impossible to retain the shelving as is – the legs would require extending down, otherwise they would 'float' in the air, and in any regard the shelves themselves would be closer to eye height than the extant level. Similarly, it is proposed to retain, but reposition the historic water pump. The pump is likely Victorian, perhaps early 20th century and provides interest as to the building's water supply. The removal or reposition the pump would seek to undermine the historic interest and render it as a decorative artifact rather than an integral element of the building's significance.

The structural assessment by Cooper & Withycombe confirms the excavation of the basement is possible from a technical perspective. However, any such excavation would require substantial alteration to the structure. As noted in the structural report, the building would require underpinning. This is no small feat given the construction and ground type. The application has not provided sufficient detail as to establish the impacts not only the structure but the way in which works would interact with the building's pre-existing faults and deficiencies.

Creation of new subterranean basement part below new extension, part below service wing

Related to both the above, it is proposed to create a further subterranean space wholly under the single-storey extension and partly under the service wing. The application has not provided sufficient information as to regards the structural status of the service wing and how any excavation would impact the structure and pre-existing conditions. Further to this, as the below-ground water level is extremely high here, consideration needs to be given to the subsequential impacts of how any proposed large basement would interact with the existing structure(s).

Viewing platform

The application proposes the creation of a 'viewing platform' or 'sun deck' between the two internal pitches of the gables to the south elevation. The details are not

entirely clear, but it would appear from the drawings, and as discussed on site, that the structure of the platform would bridge the existing lead valley and attach to the roof structure. How such an attachment would be achieving is uncertain. No opening up (which in itself may require consent) has been undertaken to inform the proposal. It is likely the structural alteration would require significant cutting and removal of historic fabric. The extant dormer, which is at least of the 19th century, would be completely removed, leading to the loss of the historical arrangement. Further to this, the addition of glazed balustrading would seek to add a conflicting element of contemporary appearance to the traditional roofscape. Whilst viewing platforms either designed or by happenstance, are not unusual in the vicinity, particularly given the views afforded of not only for the attractive riverscape, but the ability to view river craft (although of course Regatta is the other side of the bridge) – however the contrived creation of modern platform in this position would seek to undermine the historic and architectural interest.

Internal alterations

Lowering of the staircase

Flights under principal staircases within houses of this period are not uncommon and thus the general principle of extending the staircase is not inappropriate within itself. However, as discussed above, the proposals concerning the lowering of the basement floor are harmful and thus it would render this element of the proposal moot.

Creation of shower room on the top floor

There is no objection in principle to the creation of an en-suite shower room on the top floor within a space which would have formed storage off the servant's bedroom. However, the given the very restricted head height the practicality of such proposals are questioned. It is proposed to remove the door here. This door appears to be the original, if not a historic feature and as such positively contributes to the interest of the building. Given this, the door should be retained and repaired as appropriate.

Planform alteration on the second floor

In regards to the proposed alteration as to create an en-suite for 'Bedroom 2' – this is a historic layout and the doors here are historic architectural features. It is however slightly peculiar in arrangement, and whilst the proposed would result in erosion to the historic plan, the alteration is relatively modest and the rooms would still be able to read as separate elements, give this, no objection is raised, subject to detail. With respect to the proposed creation of an en-suite to 'Bedroom 5' – a free-standing centred 'panel' as affixed to the floor, but not the ceiling, would be acceptable here (a section drawing would be required). This would allow for the room to still be read as a single element, and not subdivided in an inappropriate manner. Bathroom fixtures and fitting would be acceptable here subject to detail. In regards to 'Bedroom 4', clarification is required as to why the impact upon the proposed creation of the 'jack and jill' door – i.e. how would an additional door fit

within the frame. If it can be demonstrated no harm would occur to the fabric, this would be acceptable.

Knocking down of walls/new staircase for 'master bedroom' in service wing

It is proposed to remove 3no. internal walls as to amalgamate extant 'Bedrooms 5 and 6', bathroom and passage into a single master bedroom suite, consisting of a bedroom, en-suite shower room and 2no. 'walk in' wardrobes. To achieve this all of the extant walling in this area would be removed, with the retention of the tie beams, then further walling and ceiling removed above tie beam level to collar level, as to create a large open 'vaulted' room. The tie beams appear to be of the late 18th, early 19th century. The walling also appears to be concurrent age, as is the lath and plaster ceiling. Some alteration may have gone on here (there is evidence of a blocked door, insertion the Yorkshire sash), as noted below in reference to the stack in 'Bedroom 6' the exact sequence of alteration is uncertain. However, it can be certain that a substantial amount of historic fabric would be lost. It also proposed to remove the extant staircase leading from the primary element to the service wing. This is a historic staircase (as can be ascertain from underneath assessment through an access cupboard), in its historic position, and is highly likely this is the original staircase (notwithstanding balustrading alteration) from the late 18th century. This fabric and plan form strongly contribute to the historic and architectural interest, and the loss would seek to harm the significance of the listed building.

Partial demolition of chimney stack

It is proposed to remove part of the chimney stack in the service wing within extant 'Bedroom 6' (proposed 'Bedroom 1'), however leave the above and below parts of the stack – effectively severing it in half. The chimney stack is constructed of brick and dates from the 19th century. On the ground floor a typical 19th century 'range' fireplace remains - this room was evidently the kitchen. On the first floor the extant arrangement is undoubtedly a little peculiar, with the ability to 'go round the back' of the stack. It is clear alteration has occurred here, but the exact sequence of events is uncertain. What can be certain, is the brick chimney is historic fabric and positively contributes to the significance of the listed building. The fireplace is currently concealed, and it possible a historic insert exists behind the boarding, as the surround appearing historic. Further to the loss of a substantial piece of historic fabric, there is question of technical feasibility. No particular details have been provided as to demonstrate how the severing would occur – particularly the support and retention of the upper part (through the loft space and out to the roof. It would be assumed significant steel intervention would be required, a 'stretcher' type shape as to support the underside of the upper stack and transfer the load to the walls. This is a span of some distance, and thus the steels would need to be of considerable size. The walling on either side is predominantly 19th century, but altered (thus weaker), of a single brick depth. The capacity to take the additional load is uncertain with the structure as extant. No structural calculations have been provided as to demonstrate this would be technically possible, and in any event further alteration to the fabric would be required. Notwithstanding the technical aspect, the loss of the historic fabric, and thus the ability to appreciate the historic form and interest would seek to harm the significance of the listed building.

Alterations to the plan form of the ground floor of the service wing

It is proposed to make a number of alterations to the ground floor of the service wing in relation to the create of separated staff accommodation. The closing up of the walling at the bottom of the stairs and '2nd kitchen' is considered acceptable – this area was evidently previous walled, with no record of LBC for the creation of the opening, thus to return a historic plan is acceptable. Related to this is the subdivision of the historic kitchen, and the knocking-through to the side of the Georgian range, as to create access to a newly formed 'snug'. Whilst both aspects have an impact upon the planform and thus significance, these are considered acceptable. The sub-division would be of a 'lightweight' construction and thus reversible. The access between 'bays' for lack of a better term, would be modest and thus it would still be able to read as an identifiable element. There is, however, concern over the further erosion of the walling as to create access from '2nd kitchen' to the 'boot room', as there are already a doorway here, the plan should be altered as to utilise the existing opening, as to avoid further impacts to the plan form and historic fabric. In regards to the proposed 'doors to windows' on the north elevation of the service wing, neither of these doors are particularly old, and thus no loss of historic fabric would occur. The aperture of the door to the extant 'living room' has Queen closers down to similar level as the neighbouring window, and thus it likely this opening was historically a window – given this no concerns are raised, subject to detailing. The doorway to the extant kitchen is altered, it may have been the case there was a window or door, or perhaps a door was where the unauthorised existing connects – it is uncertain, but similarly, subject to detailing, no objection in principle is raised to this element of the application. Furthermore, no concerns in principle to inserting an entrance door to the modern single storey extension here – this element is, however, unauthorised and thus the applications' should seek to retain this – if required, and thus appropriate consideration can be given.

Windows

Repair/replacement of windows

As noted above, the submitted Heritage Statement asserts that all the windows to the building would have new slim-line double glazing applied. This notion conflicted with other submitted documentation which stated the windows would be repaired as appropriate. The accuracy and consistency of information forming part of a planning application is key as to avoid erroneous elements forming part of the proposals. It was, however, subsequently confirmed by the agent on site that the windows would not have the historic glazing removed with the subsequent replacement with double glazing and in fact the windows would simply be repaired by a specialist contractor. (EDIT – an amended Heritage Statement has been submitted omitting the slim-line double glazing proposal)

In respect to the submitted details for the repair and refurbishment of the windows, this of course would be welcomed as a good number of the windows require attention. The submitted schedule of works is appropriate; however the 18th

century windows should have new cylinder glass panes specified for replacement and also the colour, finish and specification of the paint supplied – such details would typically be subject to condition.

Oversized Yorkshire sash window

The room known as 'Bedroom 6' (proposed 'Bedroom 1') contains a large Yorkshire sash window – that is, a horizontal (as opposed to the 'regular' vertical) sliding sash. Such windows are uncommon. To have one of this scale – oversized – is extremely rare. As noted above, the building contains a significant amount of architectural salvage – that is, pre-existing architectural features brought from other buildings. Whilst it remains conjecture, but there is sound evidence for this Yorkshire sash to be thus. The window excerpts all the characteristics of an authentic Georgian window. The glazing bars are of quality, finely detailed - Cavetto and Bead in profile – likely constructed of Pitch Pine. Yorkshire sashes tend to be more 'provincial' in fashion, the simple horizontal design originated in the 16th century – in and around Yorkshire (hence the name), with refinement over the centuries. The Cavetto and Bead glazing bar profile was popular in the 1780s-1800s, and thus it is highly likely this window dates from this period. It is however, oversized for the room and elevation, peculiar even. The lack of Queen Closers on the exterior brickwork further leads credence to the suggestion the window did not start life in this position and has been inserted post-construction. It cannot be certain when the window came to be in this position, however it is evident it has been in this position for some time. Whilst not an original construction feature per se, the architectural feature itself is historic and very rare. Its presence in this position demonstrates the development of the building and thus strongly contributes to its significance. The removal of this feature would seek to harm the significance of the listed building and erode the special architectural and historic interest.

Impact upon the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area

The Remenham Bridge Conservation Area is, in part, characterised by a low density, with a gentle built character and verdant context, which provides a contrasting setting to the directly related neighbour of Henley town on the other side of the river. Unlike the town, greater space and thus openness, (arising from both topography and land ownership) allows for a number of historic buildings to be set within their own grounds, Bird Place being one of them. This is a sensitive location, betwixt the bottom of White Hill and the river with the open expanse of Bird Place's garden to the south strongly contributes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and thus its significance as a designated heritage asset.

Whilst there are limited views of Bird Place from within the Conservation Area, the site is within a wide vista as appreciated from the Oxfordshire bank. This vista – as viewed from numerous angles and positions strongly contributes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. As a historic riverside mansion, the interplay between built form and the riverscape is crucially important. The traditional

appearance of Bird Place – one of the oldest surviving riverside mansions - and open and verdant character contribute to the riverside setting. Whilst it is acknowledged the immediate area contains a number of modern contemporary built elements, these detract from the traditional character and appearance of the Conservation Area and have sought to cause harm to their significance. These modern elements, whilst in close proximity, all have differing aspects of interest and there is not an identical impact upon the heritage assets' significance.

Impact upon the Henley Conservation Area

As noted above, the impact upon the Remenham Conservation Area's character and appearance is primarily effected through the vista as appreciated from the Oxfordshire bank. This area of the Henley Conservation Area (Riverside Character Area) partly draws its interest and significance from the traditional riverscape, a component of this – as noted above – is the interplay between the built form and riverside. Bird Place – whilst in part obscured by trees is a riverside landmark. The wide vista as appreciated from Thameside includes so many unchanged and historic elements – from the tower of St. Marys, to the Grade I Henley Bridge – and importantly – Bird Place. Through the proposed contemporary elements, this traditional vista would be eroded and cause harm to its significance. Whilst visibility is a good indicator of the impact to setting, as Historic England's *The Setting of Heritage Assets, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition)* advises: "Setting is the surroundings in which an asset is experienced, and may therefore be more extensive than its curtilage. All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not." And that: "The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to visual considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places."

Setting, therefore, is not just the visual link between buildings and environments, but in part the way in which they are experienced. Detachment through vegetation and trees, either extant or proposed, can provide a visual distinction between environments, however a landscaped boundary, or buffer, cannot always shield against non-visual atmospheric characteristics, such as noise and presence. Landscaping can also easily be subject to future change. Trees can easily be felled, hedging lost and thus there may not always be such detachment between buildings. As such, whilst the visual aspect plays a part of the character of the setting, it is the encompassing environment which truly defines how the assets are experienced. As the Henley CAA notes: "The River Thames is one of the most important features of the conservation area and intrinsic to the establishment and evolution of the town. At Henley the Thames is broad and has a green setting beyond the limits of the relatively compact urban area." It is the contrast between the "compact urban area" and the low-density and lower built form of the Berkshire bank which strongly contributes to not only the setting of the Henley Conservation Area but to the character and appearance of the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area, which in itself derives significance from the contrasting urban grain from the town. Through

the contemporary architectural nature, the proposals would undoubtedly seek to introduce a greater urban character to the Bird Place vicinity.

As such, the proposals would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area through the introduction of a conflicting form which would seek to erode the established character and appearance of the designated heritage asset. The proposals would also result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Henley-on-Thames Conservation Area, of which part of its significance is drawn from the setting. Through the contemporary architectural form and appearance, the proposals would seek to alter the traditional outlook from Oxfordshire bank and further erode the established context. This harm would be considered to be at the lower level of the 'less than substantial' scale.

Impact upon other designated and non-designated heritage assets

All heritage assets draw a degree of significance from their setting. Typically, in a developed setting (as opposed to a rural one), the historic built context forms part of the setting and thus interest. The Grade I Henley Bridge is one such asset which draws significance from the setting. Similarly to the conservation areas, the bridge is viewed within its riverscape context, and as assessed above, this traditional context would be eroded through the proposed alteration of Bird Place.

Unauthorised Works:

Single storey 'lean-to' extension on the south elevation of the service wing

Photographic records suggest this lean-to extension was constructed between 2015 and 2016. As an extension to a listed building, the works would have required both planning permission and listed building consent. No such records of these exist. This element is therefore unauthorised and may be subject to a Listed Building Enforcement Notice (LBEN) for its removal at any time. As this structure does not lawfully exist, it cannot form a precedence for further development in this area. Any such proposals – as discussed above – must be considered on their own merits.

Single storey 'cloakroom' to the north of the service wing

Similarly to the lean-to extension to the south, this single storey element does not appear to benefit from either planning permission or listed building consent. The date of construction is uncertain, however from the materials it appears to be less than 20 years old. If it can be confirmed this element is also unlawful, the proposed works – description of development – would need to be altered and the retention of this element considered in its own right.

CCTV cameras

The affixing of CCTV cameras to a listed building requires listed building consent. No such consent exists for the numerous CCTV cameras attached to Bird Place. Whilst the purpose of crime prevention and thus the assist in preserving the empty

property is acknowledged, authorised works to a listed building is an Offence under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Given their unlawful state, the cameras should be removed henceforth with appropriate repairs made to the fabric. If not forthcoming the LPA has the power to require removal under a Listed Building Enforcement Notice (LBEN).

Structural Assessment

Not included with the initial submission, but later supplied to the LPA, is a structural assessment by the practice of Cooper & Withycombe. This assessment – for its brief – is considered of a high standard and evidently authored by a professional with excellent knowledge of historic buildings, it is as such commended. However, this document is only an initial, non-evasive assessment. Considerable opening up works (which in themselves would require LBC) would be required to fully understand the structure and specifically the ability to adapt it. The document also confirms the technical ability to excavate the basement level, but advises significant involvement to do so. Such interventions, such as the underpinning of the primary element, and the inclusion of floor defences do not form part of the application's proposals. The assessment (as it is presumed was not within the commissioned scope) does not discuss the implications to the creation of the new basement part under the service wing and part under the new extension nor elements such as the partial stack removal. Given this, the applications' assessment is incomplete for the purposes.

Pre-application advice

Under Section 4 of the NPPF (Dec 24), applicants are encouraged to engage with the Local Planning Authority prior to the submission of formal application(s), particularly when the application site is sensitive and the proposals complex in nature. In this case, the applicant submitted for pre-application advice for the some of this application's proposals (with additional elements not including in this application) – such early engagement is, of course, welcomed by the LPA. However, it is important to note that pre-application advice is simply that – advice – it is not binding to any particular outcome of subsequent application(s), and the any advice given as part of the proposals relies, in part, on the information provided by the applicant. As para. 44 of the NPPF notes: *"The right information is crucial to good decision-making, particularly where formal assessments are required..."* – as noted above, the assessment of significance of Bird Place provided as part of this application, and indeed lesser-so, at the pre-application submission, has not fully assessed the significance of the site and thus the information was incomplete at the time of enquiry. As the Inspector noted under a recent appeal decision (APP/H1705/W/25/3371827): *"The appellant's engagement in a pre-application enquiry is noted. However, it is important to emphasise that pre-application advice is informal and non-binding and does not predetermine the outcome of a formal planning application. Any perceived positive feedback received during those discussions does not override the need for a full and proper assessment of the proposal against the development plan and all other material considerations. Notably the pre-application response from the Council states that this is a preliminarily view and would be reviewed at the application stage through the site visit. As such, the existence of pre-application advice does not justify*

approval, nor does it diminish the weight of the identified conflict with the development plan.”

Conclusions

There is strong physical and circumstantial evidence to suggest Bird Place is formed on an earlier structure. Given the long linear form (combined with Bird Place Cottage), perpendicular orientation to the river, building materials (flint, old timbers), there is a remarkable similarity to the 15th century ‘Friday Cottage’ (listing reference 1218624) a warehouse range almost directly opposite Bird Place on the other side of the river. Whilst this remains absolute conjecture, the similarities are striking. Given this, the building may hold even greater significance than currently understood and deserves a full academic archaeological assessment.

Given the above assessment, less than substantial harm would arise to the identified designated heritage assets. The spectrum of ‘less than substantial’ harm ranges depending on the designated heritage assets impacted. The ‘less than substantial harm’ is identified from a lower level to the CAs and other listed buildings (including the Grade I bridge) rising to a moderate level to Bird Place itself, with the potential to reach a high level given the unknown impact upon the potential earlier structure within the building. Where harm is identified para 215 of the NPPF requires that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits (including heritage benefits) of the proposal, which includes securing the asset’s optimum viable use.

It is acknowledged the building requires repair and general refurbishment. Some elements of repair are included within this application (such as the refurbishment to the windows). However, the application does not propose, or contain details of, numerous other elements (such as repair to damaged plasterwork). Any such repairs and refurbishment – as appropriate – would be in general terms welcomed as to maintain the building. However, such ‘positive conservation works’ are not exclusive to the overall proposed scheme and do not seek to outweigh the harmful elements. Furthermore, as para. 209 of the NPPF (Dec 24) states: *“Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of, or damage to, a heritage asset, the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision.”* Lack of appropriate maintenance in this regard is considered deliberate neglect. Some economic benefits would be brought about through the construction phase and the general investment into the property. However, the scale of those benefits is short-term and limited by the extent and nature of the proposal. The primary outcomes of the proposed works, namely the increase to and re-order the living accommodation and the obtaining of views of the surroundings, would be private benefits to the applicant that do not provide clear and convincing justification as required under para. 213 of the NPPF (Dec 24). It is not considered the scheme as proposed in its entirety is fundamentally necessary to secure the optimum viable use of the building, which already provides generous levels of accommodation. Moreover, no substantive evidence has been presented which verifies that the property would not be useable or viable as a dwelling now or in the future, or that its conservation as a designated heritage asset would be at risk, if the application’s proposals were permitted, as submitted, were not implemented.

Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the LPA has a statutory duty to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Through the loss of historic fabric, erosion to the plan form, unsympathetic architectural form and detailing, the proposed alterations would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building (S16 and S66, P(LB&CA)A 90).

Section 72 of the aforementioned Act, requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. Through the unsympathetic form and appearance of the extension and viewing platform, the proposals would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas (S72, P(LBCA)A 90).

Given the identified harm, the proposed development would conflict with Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy and Policy TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery local plan.

As such, an objection is raised to the application from a heritage perspective.

Conditions			
N/A			
Date:	12/12/2025	Signed:	Roderick McDonald Built Heritage Officer