KEEPERS COTTAGE, SONNING, RG4 6GJ

PLANNING & LISTED BUILDING APPLICATION

DESIGN, ACCESS & HERITAGE STATEMENT

OCTOBER 2026



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Keeper's Cottage, Sonning is a Grade II listed detached residential property owned by the adjacent Sonning Golf Club.

The cottage has been unoccupied for at least a decade, which as a result has now left it in poor condition generally and requiring repair and refurbishment works.

This Design, Access & Heritage Statement has therefore been prepared to support the planning and listed building consent application for works to stabilise it, make it safe, address damp issues and repair any prominent and visible damage and deterioration.

KEY

- 1 Keepers Cottage
- 2 Sonning Golf Club
- A4 Bath Road
- Train Line between Reading and Twyford
- Application Site
- Other land in the Applicant's ownership



Figure 1. Aerial View of Site

2.0 CONTEXT & LOCATION

Keeper's Cottage is situated on the outskirts of Sonning village in Berkshire.

Its name relates to its mid C19 established use as a gamekeeper's cottage, rather than a green keepers cottage for the adjacent golf course.

The cottage is located approximately 100m from a road bridge over the Great Western Railway.

Vehicular access is via Duffield Road which runs along its southern boundary, and a separate private pedestrian access is provided to the north-west corner, from a car park in the adjacent Sonning Golf Club.

It is surrounded by an area of rough grass to the west and a golf course to the north and east, both belonging to Sonning Golf Club. It is visible from all sides.

Site boundaries are close boarded fencing around the vehicular access (installed by Network Rail during their use of the site) and the eastern boundary, post and chain link to the remainder of the road boundary and evergreen hedge to the north and west.

Other than a concrete path and remnants of a modern lean-to extension, the landscape within the site comprises overgrown bushes and grass.





3.0 HERITAGE STATUS

Keeper's Cottage was given a statutory listing of Grade II in September 2009. The listed description is included below alongside references throughout the document.

List Entry Number:1393434

Grade II Listing Description:

72/0/10007 DUFFIELD ROAD 11-SEP-09
Keeper's Cottage

(Keepers) Cottage, probably built as a single dwelling in the late C16 or early C17, conceivably on an earlier core. Southern bay added or part rebuilt in the later C17, northern bay added in the later C18 or early C19. Current footprint extant in 1870. It appears to have been subdivided into single cell units during the later C19 or early C20.

MATERIALS: (See page 4)

PLAN: (See page 5)

EXTERIOR: (See page 4)

INTERIOR: (See page 6)

HISTORY: It is possible that the house originated as a small hall house; examples survive in Wokingham and Sonning. It lies on the outskirts of modern Sonning to the south of the A4, which now separates it from the core of the village, and north of the railway which separated it from the nearest village, Woodley. Sonning lies on the River Thames and has a rich diversity of historic timber framed and brick buildings. The name Keeper's Cottage implies that it was an estate cottage. C19 OS maps show it on the edge of woodland. It has been suggested that it may relate to hunting grounds in Sonning held by the Bishop of Salisbury in the late C16 but there is no proof of the association. The cottage is marked on Rocque's map of c1761 and with its current footprint on the 1822 Enclosure map and 1870 OS map.

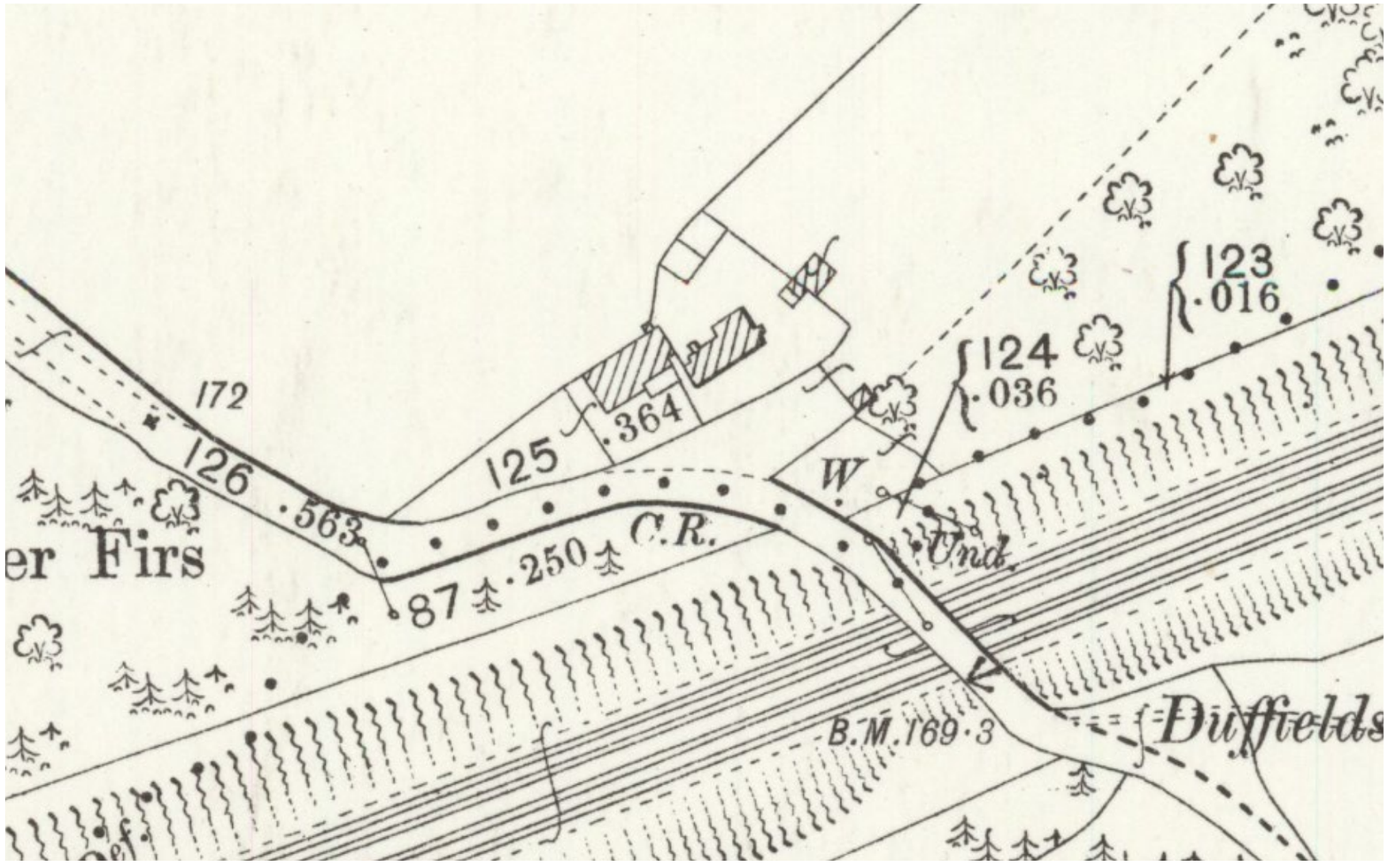


Figure 2. Oxfordshire LVII.13 - Ordance Survey 25-Inch - Second Edition 1899 (Originally Surveyed 1872) / Source: National Library of Scotland

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION: Keeper's Cottage, a late C16 to early C17 cottage, extended during the C18 or early C19, is listed for the following principal reasons:

** The cottage retains most of its timber frame and roof and sufficient evidence of its historic plan;*

** Later C19 or early C20 work is typical of the vernacular revival;*

** The cottage contributes to the rich heritage of timber-framed buildings in the area.*

3.1 EXISTING BUILDING - EXTERIOR

The North and South elevations of the cottage are timber frame with some bracing on the southern elevation. The panels are infilled with brick of varying ages with a painted finish to the front and unpainted to the rear, with bottom rails built of brick and flint. The west gable wall has been faced or replaced in painted C19 brick and the east gable abutting the golf course is largely weather boarded.

The main entrance door is located on the south elevation with a side door to the west.

Two brick lean-to outshoots abut the north elevation, one of which has been extended.

The roofs are clay tile, with a hipped gable to the western elevation A large brick chimney is central to the east elevation with a smaller chimney and flue to the smaller of the rear outshoots.

Grade II Listing Description:

MATERIALS: Small framed timber-framing with some bracing on the southern elevation below the mid rail; brick-nogging. Flint and brick plinths. Brickwork varies from C17 or C18 non-standard brick to modern standard brick, the south-east and south-west walls are painted. The southern gable wall is faced or replaced in C19 brick. The northern gable is largely weatherboarded. Steeply pitched tile roofs, half-hipped at the southern gable. Brick stacks.

EXTERIOR: The main entrance on the south-east elevation has a door with moulded muntins and ornate strap hinges, beneath a tile canopy. Windows on all elevations are generally later C20 timber casements, some with small panes, one has a shallow canopy. At the rear is a three-light, metal-framed casement with rectangular leaded lights. Openings in the south-west gable wall have cambered brick arches. There is a rebuilt semi-circular structure, possibly an oven, in the north-west angle.



Figure 3. South-East Elevation



Figure 4. North-East Elevation



Figure 5. North-West Elevation



Figure 6. South-West Elevation

3.2 EXISTING BUILDING - INTERIOR

Both the ground and first floor of the main volume of the cottage are divided into four sections.

A large internal chimney stack is evident adjacent to the main entrance door section, which has been capped below the roof line.

The internal ledged doors appear to be C18 and C19 throughout.

Woodchip wallpaper has been applied to walls and ceilings throughout, over assumed lath and plaster in at least some places.

Grade II Listing Description:

PLAN: Four cells, of which the central two appear to have formed a two-cell building under a single wind-braced side purlin roof. At the southern end of the southern cell is a large stack which has been capped below the roofline. The cross wall between the cells has a substantial cill which was possibly formerly an external wall. A high mid-rail with indents for floor joists on both elevations of the frame may indicate an earlier floor level prior to introduction of the stairs. The main entrance on the southern elevation is in lobby entry position opposite the main stack. There is a blocked entrance opposite the base of the stairs. To the south is a slightly later two-storey, timber-framed bay, also with a side purlin roof but possibly built as a cross wing and since altered. To the north is a later timber-framed bay with a brick, external gable-end stack. At the rear (north-west facing) are two outshuts, the southernmost built of brick of two builds and with a tile roof, the northernmost of timber-framed and brick-nogged, with a slate roof. The southern outshut has two brick stacks, one in each section.

GROUND FLOOR PHOTOS



Figure 7. The ceiling to Kitchen / Family Room GF.01 contains a large chamfered timber beam supported off chamfered timber posts.



Figure 8. Unless original, the change in level down to the Utility GF.06 extension is likely to have been achieved by underpinning the main rear wall of the property.



Figure 9. Modern fireplace in Living Room GF.05



Figure 10. Modern fireplace in Hall GF.02

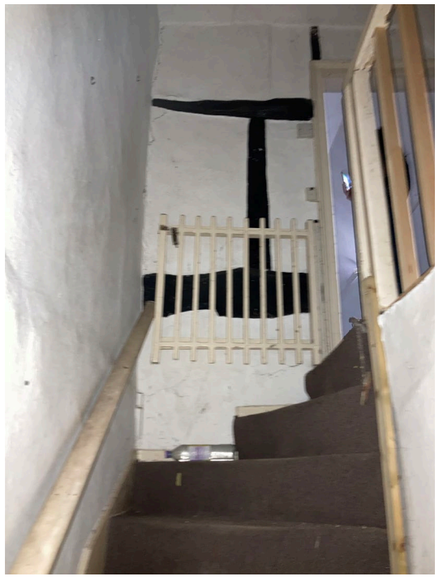


Figure 11. Stairs appear to be early to mid C20

FIRST FLOOR PHOTOS



Figure 12. The capped off chimney breast is evident in a first floor Bedroom 2, FF.02.



Figure 13. Modern sanitaryware in Bathroom FF.04

Grade II Listing Description:

INTERIOR: Early to mid-C20 stairs are set in the third bay, which at upper floor level is sub divided to create a landing. The upper floor is below mid-rail height. The wind-braced side-purlin roof extending over both central bays is partly visible beneath an inserted ceiling. The ridge piece appears to be added. The southernmost bay has a deep ground floor axial ceiling beam supported internally on a reset chamfered timber pier, and has deep joists. The purlins do not align with those on the main roof. Internal doors are of ledge and brace construction, some in the northernmost bay have slender strap hinges; principal architraves leading from the lobby are moulded.



Figure 14. Sloped ceilings in Bedroom 01, FF.01



Figure 15. Sloped ceilings in Bedroom 01, FF.01.

In 2017 the client obtained planning permission with listed building consent to erect a two part single storey extension to the west elevation providing a dining room and kitchen, and to rebuild the east gable wall of the large outshoot with a new external door (references 171785 [FUL] and 171786 [LBC]). Although work briefly commenced it was not completed. A Structural Report on the existing building was subsequently commissioned (December 2017) and included the following summary:

'The property is generally in poor condition and requires significant restoration to be habitable. Being unused for many years with no heating and leaks has allowed water to penetrate the building and rot some of the timber members.'

A brick panel in the centre of the eastern bay of the south elevation and associated window collapsed and has been repaired with temporary materials. Otherwise no significant work has been carried out in the interim. Windows and doors have been boarded up.

Subsequent structural inspections and reports from the same engineer were carried out in 2024 and 2026, the latter of which is submitted within this application as a supporting document. A survey to identify damp and wood boring insects was also undertaken by a specialist in October 2024.

The building remains unoccupied and has continued to deteriorate. Vegetation growth on the northern elevation is now extensive. Furthermore, it was encouraged by the Heritage Officer at Wokingham Borough Council during recent correspondence, to make a listed building consent application as soon as possible, to seek approval for works to prevent further deterioration and resolve the issues that materially compromise the structural integrity of the building.

Consideration has been given to the planning conditions on the approved scheme that are relevant to the works now proposed e.g. retention of historic internal doors, minimizing loss of fabric and archaeological requirements.



Figure 16. Missing brick panel referred to in text

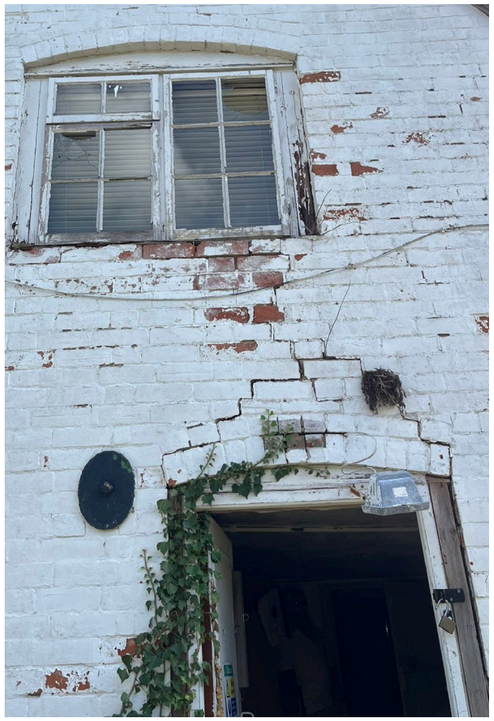


Figure 17. Masonry cracking



Figure 18. Deflected roof structure clearly needs attention in places (this example not accessible from the interior). Numerous tiles slipped/ missing throughout.



Figure 19. Vegetation damaging fabric.



Figure 20. (Inappropriate) rainwater goods dislocated due to building movement



Figure 21. Inappropriate and failed cement 'weathering' of projecting brickwork trapping water against timber frame behind. (Projection in this location tapers from zero at post in photo to over 100mm by the next bay; projection believed to be due to movement in wall above rather than original.)



Figure 22. Windows appear later C20, generally timber casements. This window (first floor gable) is partially rotten and appears damaged beyond repair but elsewhere windows appear repairable.



Figure 23. Cracking evident internally



Figure 24. Cracking evident internally



Figure 25. Vegetation entering building via windows



Figure 26. Numerous broken window panes



Figure 27. Evidence of damp ingress

The proposed works primarily focus on repairing existing defects and correcting modern interventions to both restore and conserve the building. (These include; structural repairs to the timber frame and plinth, replacing broken rainwater goods with cast iron gutters and downpipes, replacing a modern uPVC window with timber frame, and repairing the roof using salvaged tiles.)

In addition, the works will include the repair of existing defects contributing to the issues noted in the recent damp survey. This survey identified rising damp to all external walls and most internal structural walls. The surveyor's recommendation would be to install a chemical Damp Proof Course throughout the building however, it is appreciated that this would be extremely invasive and is therefore not currently proposed.

Instead the initial proposal seeks to address the various defects and issues which are believed to be the main contributors to the damp problems. These include:

- Rebuilding the timber/ brick panels to the right of the main door to avoid the current exposure of the top of bricks below the bottom timber rail. (See Figure 30 and Figure 21)
- Removing the cement 'smearing' to timbers and localized external cement render to brickwork.
- Lowering ground levels around the larger rear outshoot to ensure they are below rather than above internal floor level
- Removing the modern brick wall to the eastern end of the larger rear outshoot. Failure of the cement capping is trapping moisture against the extant original brick wall behind, which contains timber framing. The original structure will be propped before any demolition and a proper assessment made of what measures if any might be required following it. (See Figure 29)



Figure 28. Modern brickwork wall against rear offshoot to be removed. Photo taken in 2017.



Figure 29. Modern brickwork wall against rear offshoot to be removed. Photo taken September 2026 showing deterioration



Figure 30. Distorted timber/ brick panels to be rebuilt

- Replacing existing failed rainwater goods with new cast iron gutters and downpipes
- Carefully remove the extensive overgrown vegetation, being mindful of any identified invasive species and subject to any ecology mitigation measures required.

It is noted that some proposals within this application are indicatively shown on the drawings, and the full extent repairs will be finalized once all areas are uncovered and inspected.

MAIN ROOF

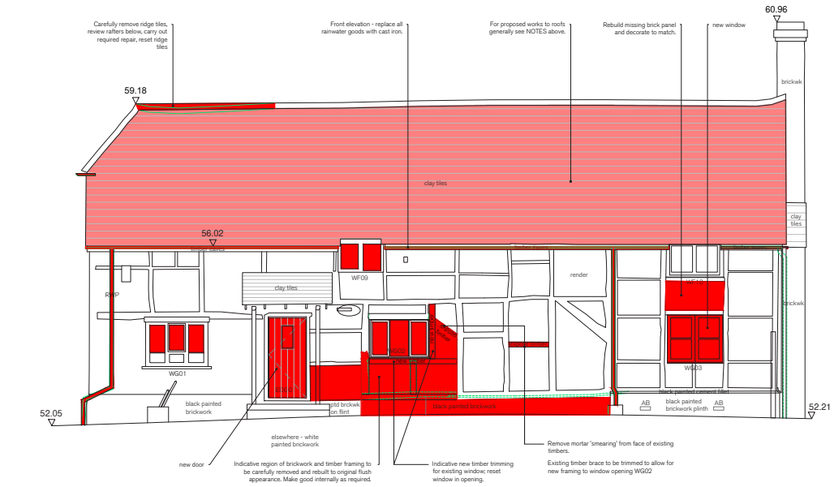
The structural engineer has identified that the evident deterioration of the main roof structure (and possibly first floor ceiling structure) means that the roof space is not currently safe to access. The following observations were made from visual inspections via the roof hatch:

- Many rafters are notched, reducing their structural capacity (structural engineer).
- Roofing felt is evident to all pitches visible.
- Evidence of beetle infestation was present on timbers (damp specialist).

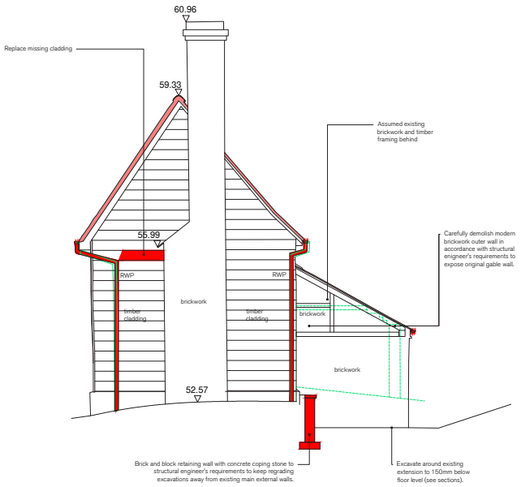
As the existing ceilings are mostly lath and plaster, these are not currently proposed for removal and therefore access from above is required to determine the full extent of repair work to the roof structure.

Therefore the proposed procedure is as follows:

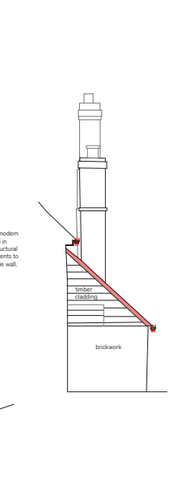
- Strip roof tiles
- If battens and roofing felt appear in good condition carefully install temporary internal supports to underside of first floor ceilings to enable safe access to roof space for inspection. If they do not appear in good condition strip off to allow inspection of timber structure below, and replace.



1 PROPOSED SOUTH ELEVATION 1:50

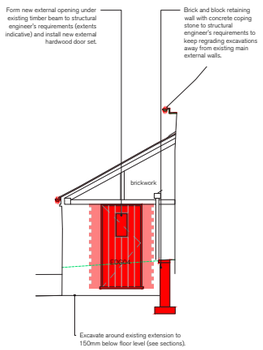


2 PROPOSED EAST ELEVATION 1:50

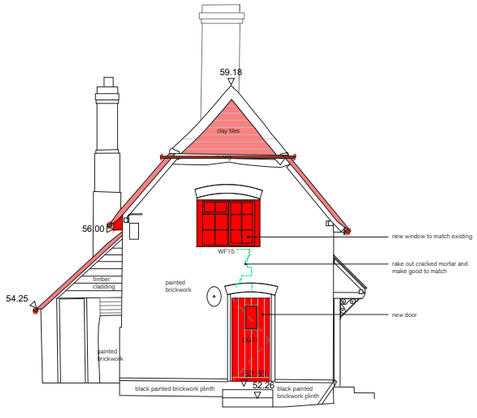


2a PROP'D E ELEV'N 1:50

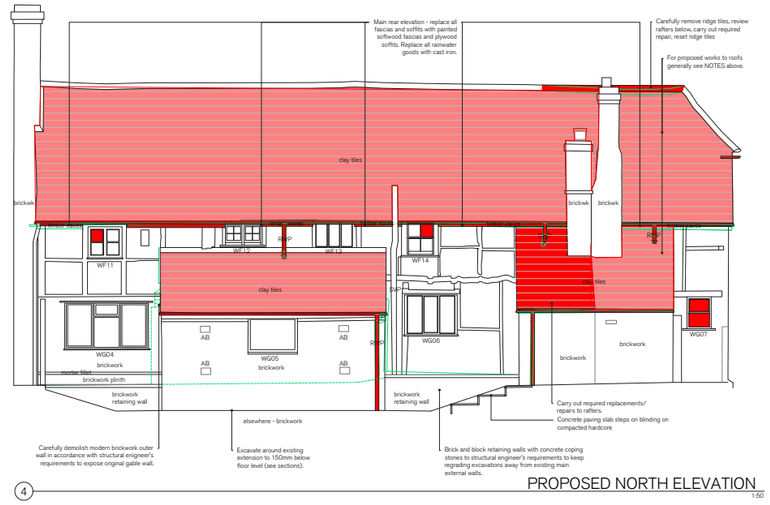
AB Air Brick
RWP rainwater pipe
reg. rainwater goods
SVP soil vent pipe



3a PROP'D W ELEV'N 1:50



3 PROPOSED WEST ELEVATION 1:50



4 PROPOSED NORTH ELEVATION 1:50

EASTERN HALF OF SMALLER REAR OUTSHOOT

- Strip roof tiles, battens and (if present) roofing felt to assess condition of roof structure.
- Repair/ replace as required.

DEFLECTED FIRST FLOOR LANDING

Carefully lift up floorboards and set aside for re-use on completion. Inspect the existing staircase structural trimming elements and carry out any repairs or replacements required. Replace existing floorboards where appropriate.

PROPOSED NEW EXTERNAL DOOR

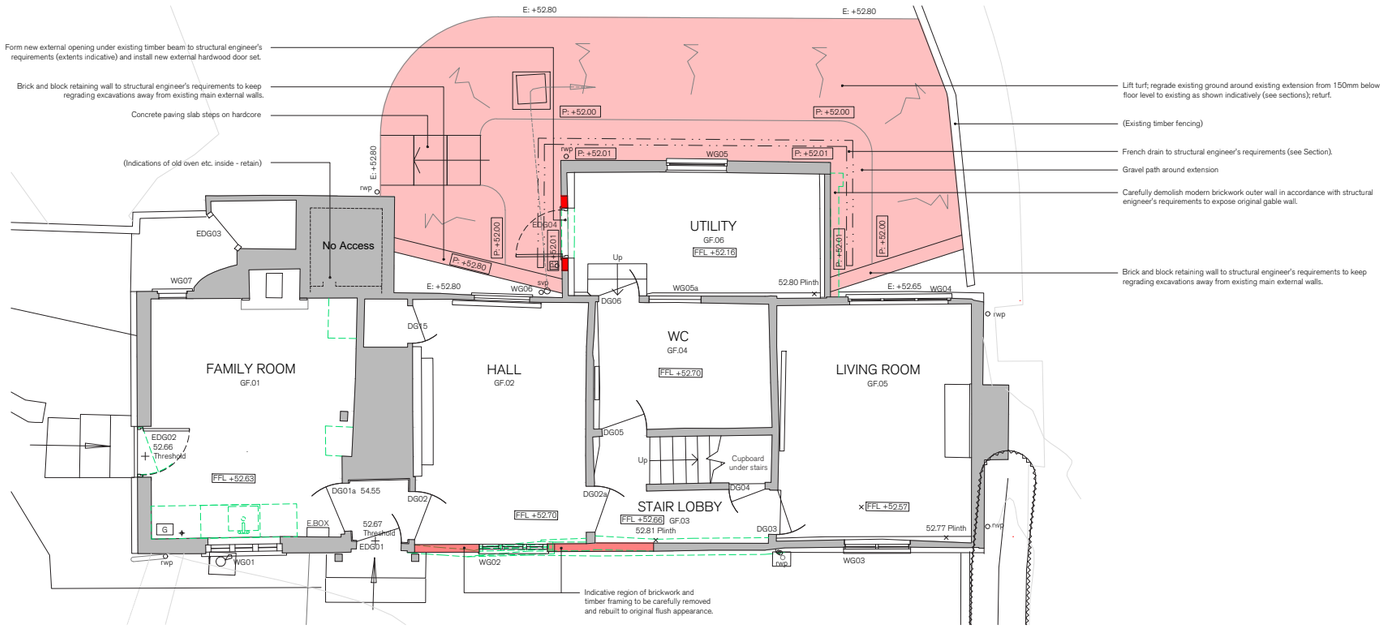
This is proposed under the existing timber beam within the brickwork to minimize impact. Simple external steps are proposed to allow access down the proposed sloping ground to the proposed door.

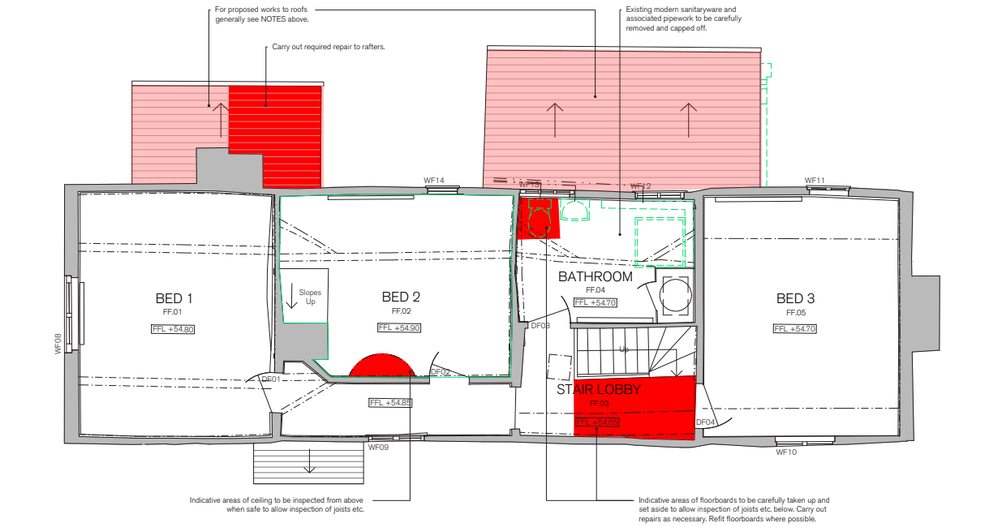
WORKS TO EXISTING WINDOWS AND EXTERNAL DOORS

The proposed elevation sheet includes a table scheduling out the condition and expected works for each window and external door. With the exception of the uPVC window all but one are expected to be refurbished rather than replaced.

ACCESS

Access to the property is unchanged by the proposals.





CONDITION SURVEY - DAMP AND TIMBER REPORT

In October 2024, Peter Cox Ltd. was instructed to undertake a conditions survey at Keepers Cottage to produce a specialist damp and timber report.

The survey investigated the whole cottage including all accessible internal ground and first floor areas, the roof space and external walls, roof and rainwater goods.

In summary the report highlighted three principal issues that are rising damp to ground floor walls, penetrating damp caused by external defects and vegetation, and an active woodworm infestation in the roof timbers. No active fungal decay was identified.

The recommended works focus on installing a new damp proof course, re-plastering affected walls, repairing external building defects, and treating the roof timbers for woodworm.

As previously highlighted, the recommended installation of a chemical damp proof course would be highly invasive this is currently not being proposed.

STRUCTURAL INSPECTION REPORT

In June 2026, Simpson Associates were instructed to carry out a structural inspection of Keepers Cottage and comment on the building's structural stability. Previous inspections were also carried out by Simpsons in 2017 and 2024 for the same purpose.

Overall, it was noted that the building remains structurally standing but is in poor condition and requires substantial restoration before it could be considered suitable for residential occupation. Long-term vacancy, lack of heating, water ingress, dampness, roof defects and deteriorating timber and masonry are continuing to affect the building.

Simpsons noted the most serious ongoing issue to be on the right hand side of the front door where a failed masonry plinth, rotted timber framing and separation between the timber frame and masonry infill panels have continued to worsen. In this area, they recommended urgent works including the removal of the previous cement mortar repairs, rebuilding of the masonry plinth, installing new hardwood timber bearers and reconnecting the timber frame structure.

In addition, they also recommended roof repairs, further investigations of the floor joists and timber elements, as well as rectifying damp related defects.

In conclusion, it was noted that despite the poor condition, the property is considered salvageable but in need of signification structural and conservation sensitive repairs, to prevent further deterioration and restore it to a habitable condition.

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT

In August 2026, Arbtech were instructed to prepare a Preliminary Roost Assessment for the repair works at Keepers Cottage.

The report considered the potential presence of bats, nesting birds and invasive species. With inspected areas including the external features and internal roof space within the house as well as any surrounding ecological habitats.

No direct evidence of bats were found during the survey however the cottage was assessed as having a high suitability for roosting bats due to various gaps in timber cladding, missing roof tiles, gaps in soffits and areas of missing mortar and dense vegetation. It was also noted that some areas within the loft were not accessible during the visit.

No active birds nests were found during the visit either, although it was noted that the building is suitable for nesting birds.

It was also noted that a Virginia creeper was recorded on site, which is a species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and care must be taken to prevent its spread during the works.

Although no bats were observed the report recommends that further bat surveys will be required before any works affecting the building fabric are undertaken. Due to breeding cycle time frames which postpone the surveys until next spring, it is expected these will be conditioned within the approval.

7.0 HERITAGE IMPACT & CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the proposed works focus on repairing existing defects, correcting various modern interventions and providing sensitive improvements to both restore and conserve this Grade II listed asset.

Where visible alterations are proposed such as the proposed external door to the north-eastern outshoot, it is considered to cause minimal harm to the character and significance of the heritage asset being positioned on a rear elevation and not be visible from the public realm.

The excavations around the above outshoot and associated works would also not be visible from the public realm. They are considered to cause minimal harm and are outweighed by the enhancement achieved by reducing the damp and risk of collapse of the fabric.

In conclusion, all other elements of the proposal seek to preserve the heritage asset and provide much needed urgent repair works to remedy the structural deterioration and damp ingress which is creating a growing risk of collapse.



SPRATLEY
& PARTNERS