

**Castle Morpeth Local Area Council Planning Committee
8 January 2018**

Addendum report

Application no. 16/02756/FUL – Land South of the Old Smithy, Widdrington Village, Northumberland.

Background:

The application site is located west of the site of Widdrington Castle scheduled monument and north of Widdrington Church of the Holy Trinity (includes 12th century fabric; Grade 1 listed).

There has been a settlement at Widdington since at least the medieval period. The earliest documentary reference dates from 1160.

A licence to crenelate [a castle of defended house] was granted in 1341. The original castle was repeatedly remodeled and ultimately confiscated by the crown in 1715 following the Jacobite rebellion and demolished in 1772. A replacement building was damaged by fire before completion and itself demolished in 1862. The demolished remains of the Castle are not visible at ground level.

Assessment:

The application was supported by a phased assessment comprising:

- 1) Archaeological desk-based assessment
- 2) archaeological evaluation trenches targeted on the proposed house footprints

Prior to the application and assessment, no archaeological features were recorded within the site itself.

The desk-based assessment included a copy of the 'Survey of the Town of Widdrington in 1768' with the application boundary as an overlay (Figure 5 of the DBA). This demonstrated that the proposed development site lies north of the Castle (as recorded in 1768). The plan identifies a group of buildings standing within the application boundary (in 1768), including cottages, a 'pigeon house', stables and smithies. The proposed dwellings as part of the present application coincide approximately with buildings identified as 'I' and 'H' on the 1768 plan. These buildings are identified in the text as 'common slaughterhouse' and 'cottage and smithy belonging to Jesse Gordon' respectively. The map shows that these buildings and others to the south but against the edge of a wall enclosing a rectangular kitchen garden. The original Castle is likely to have been in a ruinous state at the time the map was drawn (hence the construction of a cottage 'D' abutting its wall).

A single evaluation trench (15m x 2m) was located along the axis of the proposed dwellings. A second smaller trench (1x1m) was subsequently excavated at the southern extent of the proposed dwellings. Both trenches exposed sections a large masonry wall. The wall had been demolished to below ground level but foundations and lower courses survived below the ground present ground level. Clay pipe fragments found in association with the wall indicate a 16th construction. The form and location of the identified wall is consistent with the 'kitchen garden' boundary illustrated on the 1768 map (being demolished only four years later).

A single prehistoric (Neolithic) stone axe (Group VI Langdale / Lake District) was identified as a stray / unstratified find within the evaluation trench. This is indicative of prehistoric activity in the area but should not be taken to imply that a significant prehistoric site exist within or close to the site.

Significance:

The archaeological features recorded via evaluation should be regarded as 'undesigned heritage assets' in the context of the NPPF.

Para 139 of the NPPF states that:

"Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest that are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets."

The archaeological evaluation has demonstrated that whilst archaeological features (notably the remains of the wall recorded on the 1768 map) are present on site, these remains are **not** demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments. Paragraph 139 of the NPPF is therefore **not** engaged.

The identified archaeological features (essentially the remains of the stone wall) are interpreted as the remains of the former kitchen garden wall illustrated on the 1768 map. The wall is not demonstrably associated with the Castle. As such, the remains are considered to be of local importance only.

The stone axe recovered is similarly of local interest.

The archaeological features identified via the evaluation are therefore **not** of sufficient importance to prejudice the development, subject to an appropriate condition.

Mitigation:

Paragraph 141 of the NPPF states that:

"Local planning authorities should make information about the significance of the historic environment gathered as part of plan-making or development management publicly accessible. They should also require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner **proportionate to their importance and the impact**, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible.³⁰ However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted."

Having reviewed the submitted application and associated assessments, the Archaeologist has concluded that impacts to the archaeological resource, potentially including the loss of some historic fabric (remains of the buried wall) can be mitigated via a programme of archaeological monitoring with provision to record archaeological remains. This advice is **proportionate to the significance of the archaeology** and therefore consistent with para 141 of the NPPF.

In this particular instance the approach set out as part of the recommended condition relates to a programme of 'strip, map and record' mitigation.

Under this approach the initial site stripping would be undertaken under the control of an archaeologist appointed by the applicant, working to a method statement approved by NCC Archaeology.

This would ensure that no archaeological features would be damaged without first being recorded by the archaeologists. Following the completion of the archaeological work the condition requires that a report is produced. This will be available in the public domain.

The archaeological features are **not** of sufficient importance to require that they are preserved in situ. Taking into account the results of the archaeological evaluation, it would be unreasonable and disproportionate for the LPA to require this. However, it may be possible to for some of the remains to be preserved below the new dwellings, subject to the final detail of the applicant's foundation solution. (To do so would almost certainly be beneficial to the applicant since it would reduce the cost of archaeological work).

Overall

The archaeological remains identified via the assessment are of local importance only. They should be regarded as 'undesigned heritage assets' in the context of the NPPF.

A programme of archaeological monitoring with provision to record the archaeological remains is an appropriate, reasonable and proportionate response consistent with para 141 of the NPPF

To require that the archaeological remains were preserved would be disproportionate to their significance and therefore unreasonable in this instance.

Case Officer Conclusion

Given the comprehensive advice of the Council's Archaeologist and the evident thorough investigation into the site and the concerns of Members since they were raised on 13th November, it is considered that the report, suggested conditions and recommendation remain unchanged.

Members are therefore requested to grant planning permission for the proposal subject to condition no. 21 and all others detailed within the report.