

**S/1561/02/LB and S/1498/02/F - COTTENHAM
Enforcement Report, Dunstall House, 193 High Street**

From: Timothy WOTHERSPOON
Sent: Friday, November 28, 2008 12:57 PM
To: 'barbara.clarke@scambs.gov.uk'
Cc: 'david.bevan@scambs.gov.uk'; 'philip.readman@scambs.gov.uk'; 'Simon Edwards'; 'nigel.bolitho'; 'philippa.corney'; 'nick.wright'; Cottenham Parish Council Clerk; 'cvdg-committee'
Subject: Re: your Enforcement Memo 193 High Street, Cottenham, 19 November

Dear Ms Clarke

You say:

1. The wall has not been constructed in accordance with Listed Building Consent S/1561/02/LB & Planning Permission S/1498/02/F. The conditions of consent requested a sample of the proposed brick and details of the mortar mix, coping and plinth in addition to the railings and gate.

It is indeed regrettable that the owners omitted to check with you before going ahead. This was remiss of them.

2. The wall has been constructed using reclaimed bricks from an internal wall in the dwelling, that was approved under the same reference, and bricks from a site in the village. The use of reclaimed bricks is not supported, firstly as the wall should read as a 21st century addition and therefore the use of new bricks is more honest, secondly as the use of reclaimed bricks that have lost their sharp edges results in wide mortar joints and thirdly because of the difference in colour, in particular the use of red, sooted and painted bricks.

There is no reason whatever why this wall should read as a 21st century addition. This is out-dated dogma of the kind that has done much to wreck many a fine listed building. As I am sure you know, I am a passionate advocate of contemporary architecture. I also strongly believe that striking modern extensions in a contrasting style can be made to existing buildings, and that new construction abutting cherished buildings can succeed in being equally bold, but this must not serve as a credo to be imposed in every case.

Your reference to honesty is confused, because you cannot at one and the same time insist on "read as a 21st century addition" and demand no cement in the mix, etc.

The width of the mortar joints is exaggerated by the softness and finish of the mortar, to which we return below.

I have closely studied all the walling between 135 and 193 High Street. As I never tire of having to point out, the use of red bricks is widespread in Cottenham, and even predominantly "white" walls contain many hints of red. This applies to the boundary walls of Mitchell House, as well as to the footings of 193 High Street itself (which are visible at the corner, beneath the gate). As with many buildings, the side walls of Dunstal House are full of less well fired reddish bricks, and the right side of this building is no exception (and particularly exposed) in this regard. As for sooted and painted examples, we need do no more than wait five, ten, twenty years, for algae and lichen to do their work, and as with every other wall of any age on the High Street it will acquire a perfectly matching camouflage.

3. Mortar varies to that on the house in colour and texture, due to the colour and sharpness of the sand. There is very little sharp sand in the mix and the joint has been “bagged” to give a smooth finish. The colour and hardness of the mortar implies that some cement has been added, which is not a traditional mix.

Yes, this is true, except that I dispute that “cement” does not form part of a traditional mix. May I remind you that Joseph Aspdin was granted a patent for Portland cement in 1824, which I dare say predates 193 High Street? I do not know what mix was used, and as an award-winning bricklayer myself I much prefer to avoid cement too, but something like 1:2:9 or 1:3:12 would have struck me as perfectly acceptable.

Your point about the absence of sharp sand is one with which I sympathise, but this could be simply remedied, if you insist, by requesting the visible joints to be repointed appropriately, with a flush finish so as not to detract from the wall of the dwelling behind it. This would have the added benefit of disguising the width of the joints.

(In fact, “sharp” is a bit of a misnomer for the fine aggregate generally found in walling of this period here, consisting of a more rounded, granular, whitish material than the kind you would find in a bag from Travis Perkins. If you really were to require the nightmarish chore of repointing (which does of course carry its own risks of making the situation worse) it is only something more along these lines that would make the effort worthwhile.)

4. Detailing of the new pier is not correct, as the pier is flush with the new flank wall. The traditional detail is one and a half bricks wide i.e. to match the original pier to the left hand of the front elevation.

I have examined the wall very closely again just now. While I agree that the traditional detailing would be a one brick wall between one and a half brick piers, and possibly off a one and a half brick plinth, of which the wall in front of 157 High Street is a prime example, I can find no evidence that there had previously been such an offset from the left hand pier. To the best of my knowledge, and in my judgment, the new wall has been built on the same footprint as its predecessor (if by this you mean the one course above ground level to which you are seeking demolition).

This being the case – that the wall itself had previously been flush with the front of the left pier – in my opinion the bricklayer has chosen well in not attempting a one and a half square pier on the right. This would have introduced an unappealing asymmetry into the front elevation. Whoever designed this wall seems to have possessed sensitivity to such matters, and has clearly given some thought to the right hand pier in opting for a one by one and a half plan. The right side is clearly subservient to the left, which has had to keep up with the dominant theme of the walls surrounding Mitchell House, and it was a wise move, I think, to avoid attempting some kind of competing “statement” on the right. I am also persuaded by its being three courses lower than the one on the left.

5. The colour of the stone coping is very pale and does not match the existing capping to the left-hand pier. In addition the stone coping to the low wall is shallow and flat, which are not traditional details. Normally a coping is thicker and cambered to allow rainwater run-off.

I wholeheartedly agree with you about the copings on the low wall, and I expressed my disappointment about them to the owner as soon as they were laid. They are the only element that really lets the wall down. They are too thin, too pale, too polished, and lack something like a double pitch which I would have expected. It should be relatively straightforward to replace them.

6. The stone capping to the new pier does not match the existing capping in size and colour.

Actually the capping on top of the right pier does work for me and I see no reason to change it.

7. The form of the new flank wall does not exactly match the curve on the original flank wall.

Yes, I recognize that the left and right curtains have different splays. Nevertheless, the one on the right is just one brick length further out at the front than the one on the left – and in any case why should they be symmetrical in this respect? As I mentioned above, the two sides of the property are very different, one a dark wooded garden behind massive walls and the other a gate opening to a gravel drive. (Apart from anything else, the lightening of colour in the brick helps the flow of tones across the surfaces.) I also like the echo with the flank wall the other side of the street.

Had the trowel been in my hand I think I would have tried much harder to match the courses of the flank to those of the dwelling, and I might have attempted a finer resolution to the stopping of the flank against the corner of Dunstal House, but in these details the right curtain is no different from the left one.

For the reasons I set out above, therefore, I remain firmly of the view that the enforcement notice that you are seeking is neither expedient nor in the public interest, and I cannot support your issuing it.

While I am a member of both Cottenham Parish Council and Cottenham Village Design Group, the above are my personal views. I would be prepared to expand on them in any appeal process.

Yours sincerely

Tim Wotherspoon.