

The Special Circumstances that support this Application for the Remodelling of Keepers Cottage

16th November 2008

The proposed scheme that is the subject of this application has been devised:

- a) In the light of the Inspector's appeal report on the previous proposal for a replacement dwelling.
- b) With the benefit of extensive consultation with the Planning Officers, the Conservation Officer and English Heritage.
- c) In the understanding that a substantial volume of buildings exist within the present curtilage.
- d) With the knowledge that the recent relaxation of the permitted development regulations allow significant further expansion without planning permission.

The special circumstances that support this application fall into the following categories:

- The changes are an enhancement to the setting of the grade 2* listed building "Middlefield". (See Appendix 1 – Comments from Mr Grech Conservation Officer and Appendix 2 - Comments from English Heritage)
- Removal of the existing extensions and other clutter from around the original cottage will, "return it to something approaching its former glory." (Comment from Mr Grech Conservation Officer – See Appendix 1 attached)
- The net volume of buildings on site above ground will be less than at present and located in such a way as to improve the openness of the countryside.
- The spread of the buildings is reduced by 7m east to west (excluding garage - which is hidden) and a massive 28m north to south. The new extensions are also lower than the south wing that is being replaced. i.e. 3.2m compared to 4.6m.
- The scheme enables the authority to more easily control future development on the site, especially in light of the recent extensive changes to permitted development rights. The proposed volume and style of buildings is much less intrusive than would be allowed by the present permitted development regulations.
- It upgrades the overall quality of construction on the site with a muted, modest external appearance.
- It increases the separation between the buildings at Keepers Cottage and the neighbouring property.

An enhancement to the setting of the grade 2* listed building "Middlefield"

That this proposal is an enhancement to the historic setting of grade 2* listed building Middlefield has been confirmed in writing by Mr Grech the Conservation Officer on

the case and Mr Eve of English Heritage - Their comments are on file and reproduced here in Appendix 1 and 2. Not all of Mr Eve's comments are included but the record will show that any remaining items he is happy to defer to the Council.

Both the Conservation Officer and English Heritage had objected to the previous application for a replacement dwelling.

The return of the original cottage to something approaching its former glory

Again this is confirmed by the Conservation Officer Mr Grech in his comments and supported by Mr Eve of English Heritage. The key improvements to the original cottage include:

- Removal of the extensions described by Mr Grech as clutter to the south, east and west of the original cottage.
- Removal of the existing and approved windows in the roof of the original cottage.
- Reinstatement of a contiguous gutter line and tiled soffit around the perimeter of the original cottage.

Reduced Volume and Improved Openness of the Countryside

A key feature of this application is that it represents a reduction in the volume of the buildings above ground compared to what currently exists.

The replacement of the 4.6m high south wing with a lower 3.2m high east wing set to the north of the original cottage is far less visible both from the public viewpoints and the private shared access driveway. This also strongly contributes to the reduced spread of buildings further reducing the presence of the buildings

By placing ALL of the new build to the north of the original, removing the "clutter" from around and in front of the original and keeping the height of the new build low, the openness of the countryside is improved as described below which is reproduced from a series of emails sent to the planning officer Ms Casey in June 2008 to illustrate how the proposed new build would relate to what exists.



This image is a view of the outbuildings from the north-west. The room visible is currently in use as a playroom and office.

The head of the patio doors is currently around 2.4m above ground level compared to the 1.6m proposed in the new build. The building height is comparable to the proposed new build but the new build will appear lower since it is located further into the site. i.e. 5m from the hedge compared to the current 1m. It is also 10m shorter.



View of part of the south wing with a height sight board of 3.2m = to the height of the proposed east wing, visible behind the open stable door.

As can be seen in the telephoto image below, the east wing would appear to be at the same level as the gutter of the south wing i.e. 1.6m lower than the south wing ridge.

Note: The roof light will also be removed



Telephoto version of the above image. The board is = to the height of the proposed extension and located at what will be the extension's southern edge.



A wider angle view - All buildings to the right of the main pitched roof (with roof light) are to be removed and the height board shown in the image above is only around 1m from the eastern extreme of the proposed east wing. I.e. It is virtually completely hidden even from within the site when viewed from the south and there are no offsite views from the south the nearest is a south-south westerly view from Haverhill Road around 600m away!



The lighter tip of the 3.2m height gauge board can just be seen in the valley between the pitched roof of the cottage and the pump house roof.

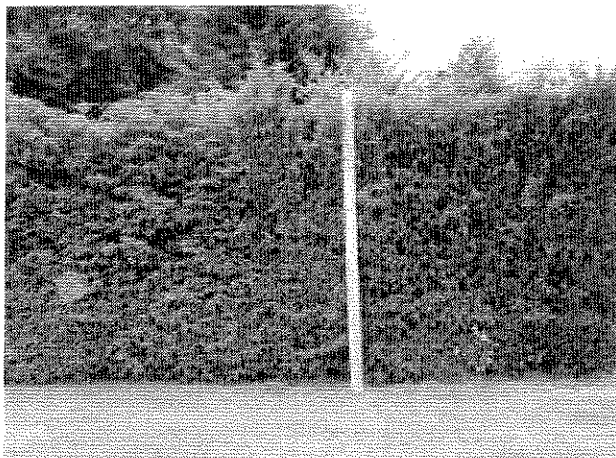
The height gauge indicates the height of the west wing which when viewed from Haverhill road will appear lower than the current outbuildings.

The links between the original and the west /east wings will in real terms be lower still and at 2.5m sit below the gutter line of the original.



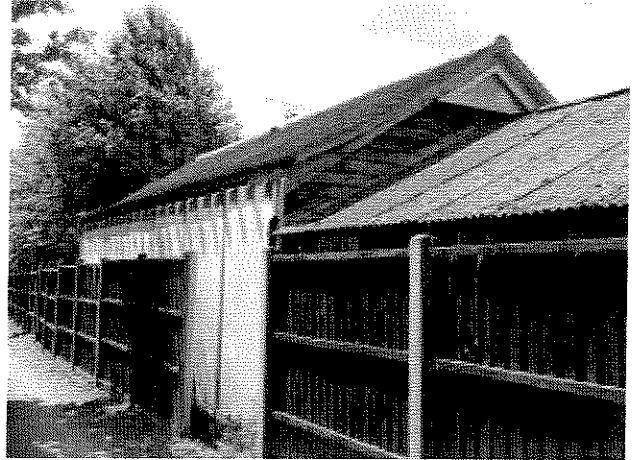
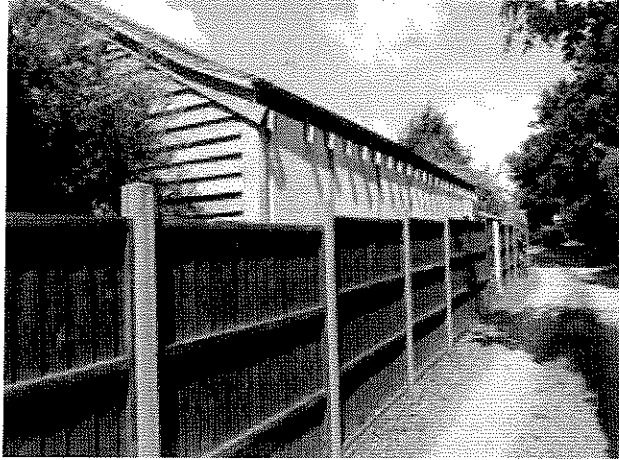
The same view with a wider viewing angle. This is with the height gauge board at 3.2m – i.e. Equal to the current proposal and the version of the proposal approved by the Parish Council.

Both wings will appear much lower than the pump house and other buildings they are replacing.



The yew hedge is not the only screening of the new build from the east but by itself it completely hides the new build when viewed from the east.

Again the height gauge board is 3.2m

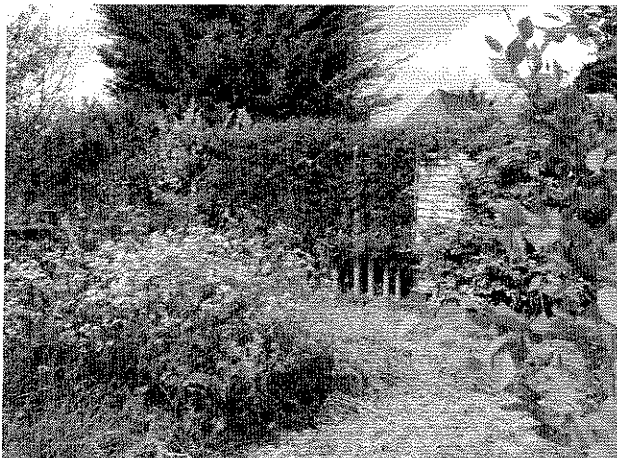


The two images above are of Keepers Cottage viewed from the driveway. An indication of the bias of the objectors is that they either ignore or pay only passing attention to these buildings.

These buildings are 4.6m high and only 0.3m from the boundary of the adjacent driveway. Under the proposed remodelling all of the buildings shown would be removed and replaced by:

- a) A 2.4m wide verge
- b) Behind which would be a 6ft high fence which would be a continuation of the existing fence currently hidden from view.
- c) Inside the extended fence would be further screening as necessary.

The reason why the east wall of the current buildings has been left as exposed polystyrene is because our neighbours at the House on the Hill have threatened us with prosecution should we attempt to maintain these buildings from the driveway.



A near view of Keepers Cottage taken from the edge of the field to the west, on the other side of the "orchard" ,owned by the owners of The House on the Hill.

As can be seen everything below around 4.5m is hidden from view. This also represents the one clear vantage point.



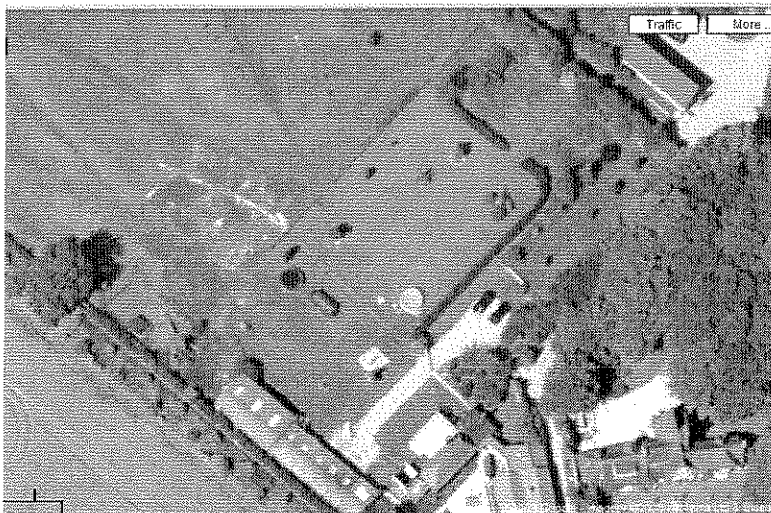
This view taken from Gog Magog Way near Hill Farm clearly demonstrates how the extension to the north (left) of the original roof will be hidden by the rising hill to the west and the improvement to the openness of the countryside produced by the removal of the pitched roof extension to the south (right) of the original cottage



The new build will not be visible from the drift to the south. Only the top 1m of the original roof is visible from this direction.

This view also highlights the hill to the west that masks the site from Stapleford village. The new extensions will in effect be

behind both this hill to the west and the original cottage to the south. To the east and north there is extensive woodland screening, some of which is visible in the above image.



The final view point is the aerial view. The current Google Maps view which actually dates from around 2002 reveals a number of points:

- a) There is a large amount of roof area which in the proposed remodelling will be replaced by green roof construction.

- b) The patio area to the north of the dwelling is in effect outside the current curtilage and has been in use as an amenity associated with the dwelling for around 10 years.
- c) The lawn area clearly shows intensive use of the lawn area to the north as garden. The existence of a tent, trampoline and above ground pool, attest to the frequent (daily) use of this area as garden.
- d) The paved surround of the London Plane tree in the north-west corner of the lawn is still in situ and during their site visit the Councillors may wish to verify this and compare the extent of the current tree with that indicated in the Google Map image. This will clearly confirm that the image is a number of years old.
- e) The clump of vegetation south south-east of the London Plane contains mature versions of garden plants such as Lavateria and Purple Sage, among others. It is also worth noting that the Yew hedge which is poisonous to grazing animals is a well established feature of the garden.
- f) The embryonic nature of the wood is also clearly evident and is very different from its current appearance.

Much of this is not relevant to the current application but we have been using this area as garden for almost 14 years and I think it is worth mentioning prior to the visit from the Councillors.

Note: Aerial images dated summer 1984, summer 1998 and summer 2002 have been sent to the planning officers and should be available on file.

Available Permitted Development

The changes to permitted development rights implemented on the 1st October 2008 remove many of the volume constraints relied upon to control development within the countryside.

As stated in the guidance notes relating to the new regulations the main thrust is to prevent intrusion upon neighbouring properties rather than limit what can be achieved if it does not impact upon the neighbouring properties. It therefore appears to allow really very extensive enlargement. Specifically:

A map reproduced from a 1937 conveyance defines the "original" as best we can ascertain.

Based upon this the permitted development the property could enjoy includes:

- a) A 7.5m single storey extension to the east that could be in the region of 9m deep (north south) – i.e. up to 4m behind the line of the rear wall of the original. (Class A)
- b) A similar extension to the west that would envelope the existing pump house and its raised section. (Class A)
- c) The pitched roof of the original cottage, can I believe be extended over the existing flat roof to the east to add a further 50m³ to the roof volume. (Class B).
- d) Clear glazed Velux windows can be inserted in the front elevation of this extension and obscured windows in the side elevation. (Class B)
- e) Then a 3m deep 2 storey extension can be constructed behind the entire resultant roof (i.e. Rear extension). This extension would have an eaves height = the existing, not exceed the height of the original and have a roof pitch = the original. (Class A)

(note: Interpretation used:- 2008 No.2362 – schedule Part 1 A.3 (c) appears to state that the roof extension that is caused by an extension under Class A is not subject to the volume limitation of Class B unless Class B extension is proposed after a Class A extension in which case it would be included. – The key would be to do the Class B extension first)

If this interpretation is correct and apart from d) above it certainly complies with both the letter and spirit of what is written, d) only complies with what is written, then the volume can be

increased by something in excess of 580m³. In contrast the current proposal is an above ground volume **reduction** of around 200m³ compared to what currently exists.

Perversely this permitted development would result in the "original" cottage being more enveloped and not benefit the occupants, neighbours or the historic setting of Middlefield in the way that the current proposal does. It is certainly our route of last resort.

Approval of the proposed scheme will inevitably also involve a section 106 to limit future development and thereby give the authority greater control over any proposed further development.

Better Quality of Construction and Muted External Appearance

It is our intention that the new build should complement the original and be of a similar or better quality. We fully accept the need for more detailing of the design before construction commences and are happy for this to be dealt with as one or more conditions on approval.

Both Mr Grech (Conservation Officer) and Mr Eve (English Heritage) have stated that the success of the scheme will depend upon the detail of the design and this we completely agree with.

One feature of the design is that to the outside world the buildings will appear modest, muted and have the appearance of a walled garden attached to the original cottage.

The detailing of the exterior wall surround needs to be defined but all of the exterior wall will be in the same brick with any detailing only visible to the naked eye from within the site. E.g. We will adopt Mr Grech's suggestion for the coping of a plinth stretcher topped with a half round brick, which will be in the same colour as the wall. We may also propose a plinth, which will step out slightly but again be in the same brick as the rest of the wall and not visible off site even if there was line of sight to it which there will not be.

The brick will be chosen to blend with the original cottage brick and we are proposing using a lime/sharp sand mortar to compliment the existing cottage walls. Whether we add some cement to the mix is as yet undecided.

The small pane windows of the original cottage will be retained and painted a light colour as at present. For the pivotal glass features between the original cottage and the two wings we were considering using oak and allowing it to weather naturally. All other window frames would be in a colour that blends with the brickwork so that where visible the windows appear as simple muted piercings and not as prominent features.

i.e. The walls are of a relatively dark red/brown colour and the glazed areas appear black when viewed from the distance. It is therefore the colour of the frame that will largely dictate how prominent they appear. Consequently there will also not be any contrasting window lintels or sills, except those over the existing windows in the original cottage.

Drainage will be provided inside the outer wall – i.e. Where appropriate there will be a gutter inside the surrounding parapet wall and drainage will be directed either through the building or into the courtyard.

Not unreasonably most of the comments relate the building itself but it is important to remember that it is only 3.2m high and with a flat top green roof. The buildings will therefore lend themselves very well to being dressed in attractive shrubs and other planting. It will take very little to enable these buildings to blend into the countryside and we are very happy to take this approach.

Appendix 1 - Comments From Mr Grech Conservation Officer

Please find Mr Grech's more recent comments below. The design has since been modified to incorporate the changes sought by him, the Planning Officer Ms Casey and Mr Eve of English Heritage. The changes made as a result of this round of comments included:

- a) Significant reduction in the size of the east wing and the move of the kitchen to the west wing as requested by Ms Casey.
- b) Alteration to the windows in the south east elevation to reflect Mr Grech's requirement.
- c) Modification to the windows in the southwest elevation to again meet Mr Grech's Requirements. i.e. There are now far fewer windows and the window head height is 1.6m
- d) The basement garden has been terraced on 5 levels
- e) A method statement for the excavation of the basement has been submitted
- f) The landscape plan for the disposal of the spoil has been submitted following further consultation with the Landscape and Ecology Officers.
- g) We have agreed to provide further detailed drawings of key features prior to the start of construction. This is seen as essential by all concerned to ensure a quality build but it will have little if any effect upon off site public views, which are at their nearest 600m distance.

30th May 2008

Please find enclosed comments from David Grech re the application.

Kind regards
Lorraine Casey

-----Original Message-----

From: Weiser Stacey
Sent: 03 June 2008 17:04
To: Casey Lorraine
Subject: Stapleford

Observations:

Keepers Cottage was originally constructed as a small outbuilding as part of the Middlefield estate, built by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1908. The main house is now a listed building, but Keepers Cottage has been separated off from the main estate and is now an independent dwelling. The building has been heavily altered over the years, with a very significant number of extensions and outbuildings that combine to obscure the original structure and erode its character. However, it remains my opinion that the original structure is of some architectural and historic interest and should be retained, forming the focus to a revised dwelling on the site.

Whilst the applicant may not agree with my view on the merits of the original structure, he has accepted the need for its retention and has prepared a scheme that removes all the latter additions, replacing them with new structures that seek to enhance the original building.

During our various meetings to discuss the evolving design I have expressed my concern that the new-build elements should not 'swamp' the original building. The applicant has adopted an approach whereby the new elements may be considered from the outside as a 'walled garden' with the original building now forming a structure attached to the enclosing wall. This I believe is a valid approach, and one that has the potential to ensure that the new elements do not dominate the original structure. The success of the approach will be down to the detailing of the scheme.

Turning to the design as submitted, the north-east elevation has the greatest resemblance to a walled garden, with the new accommodation contained behind a plain brick wall, with only a single break to define the new front door. The suggesting of a walled garden is reinforced by

the roof being set behind a brick parapet, and this should be detailed to reflect the coping on a traditional brick garden wall (ie possibly with a splayed plinth stretcher brick topped by a half round brick coping).

By contrast the south-west elevation is pierced by 8 openings, which weaken the overall concept of the walled garden, but I note that in long views these openings will be masked by the hedge. However, I wonder if the scheme might be developed further to help reduce the impact of these openings. For instance, it might be possible to develop this wall into a traditional 'crinkle-crankle' wall, with the openings set into returns in the curving brick wall.

The south-east elevation is also rather compromised by the number of new openings in the 'enclosing' wall and the scheme would be architecturally much stronger if the openings were restricted to the two glazed elements that provide articulation between the original building and the new elements, though I accept that this may not be functionally acceptable. However, consideration might be given to say a glass 'lantern' over the kitchen that might then allow the removal of the openings in the south-east wall and, in any event, I would suggest that the new openings should have 'crisper' form than the multi-paned windows suggested on the drawings. I would prefer to see glazing bars confined to the windows on the restored original structure only.

Within the 'walled garden' the design steps down to a lowered basement garden, thereby providing light to a series of basement rooms. The drawings are unclear as to the northern extent of this basement and I would suggest that it would be more successful if it stepped up in a series of terraces, rather than a single retaining wall.

Recommendation:

As stated above, I support the basic concept behind this design proposal, though I also believe it would benefit from further development. The scheme has the potential to significantly enhance the setting of the original Keepers Cottage building and to return it to something approaching its former glory, while at the same time providing significant new accommodation. I therefore have no objection to the design approach, but would wish to see further design development to address the issues outlined above. At the very least I would suggest that if the scheme is to be approved, a number of large scale details would need to be agreed before works commence (minimum scale 1:20) including:

The coping to the parapets;

The jamb, cill and head details of any openings in the outer brick wall;

The method of removing rainwater from the sedum roof areas;

The glass 'lantern' on the western wing;

The zinc and glass roofs;

The bond pattern for the enclosing external wall (here I suggest English Garden Wall bond).

In addition, I have some concerns over the proximity of the excavations in relation to the retained original structure and before works commence I would suggest a method statement and structural engineers report is required to set out how this work is to be undertaken and how the structural integrity of the retained structure is to be ensured during the course of the works. Finally, the scheme will require the removal of a very significant quantity of sub-soil/chalk from the site. Given the narrow access road this is likely to be a matter of extreme concern to the neighbours and again further information should be sought as to the quantity of material to be removed from site, the method of removal and the final destination for the excavated material.

David Grech
30th May 2008

Comments Received on 14th January 2008

From: Grech David
Sent: 14 January 2008 16:22
To: Casey Lorraine
Subject: RE: Comments re Keepers Cottage

Lorraine

See Below

David.

Proposed Extension to Keepers Cottage, Stapleford

Observations:

The sketch proposals are for very substantial extensions, but are along the lines discussed at our meeting and, assuming the volume/area calculations confirm that extensions of this size are in order then I would not object to the concept (the success of the design will be in the detailing and I look forward with interest to seeing how the 'glass box' on the roof and other elements are to be handled). One distinct benefit accruing from this proposal is the presentation of the original structure as a distinct architectural element and the removal of a number of structures which currently detract from it.

In respect of the revised proposal for the roof over the dining and sitting room element; I have some concerns over the proposal as described in Mr Culbert's e-mail, though believe there might be a solution that could be acceptable to both him and me. In the sketches sent with his letter of 9th December the dining room and sitting room are effectively enclosed behind a solid wall that from outside the site could be detailed to give the appearance of a 'walled garden' attached to Keepers Cottage - thereby suggesting that the extensions to the original structure are apparently not as extensive as they would actually be. The dining and sitting room would only be visible from the courtyard or the private garden area to the west. I am keen that this illusion is retained and therefore would like to retain the solid brick wall as a parapet wall around the north, east and part of the west side of the dining/sitting room block. The roof over these rooms could then be either a lead/zinc flat roof behind the parapet, or a shallow pitched lead/zinc roof either as a 'lean-to' against the brick parapet wall or as a hipped roof structure but again behind the parapet wall (this would require a gutter to be located between the roof and the parapet wall). In order to make this all work it might be necessary for the height of the wall to be raised somewhat, though it should be possible to keep the extra height to a modest amount and, indeed, if the hipped roof behind a parapet is adopted, then the apex of the roof might be higher than the enclosing parapet since from eyelevel on the track outside the site the parapet would still hide the roof from view.

I look forward to seeing this scheme developed in more detail, since I believe it has the potential to provide Mr Culbert with the accommodation he desires while at the same time enhancing the original structure.

David Grech
12th January 2008

Appendix 2 - Comments from English Heritage

The initial response from Mr Eve at English Heritage (see pdf document below) included two main concerns that he felt needed to be dealt with prior to approval:

- Method statement related to the excavation of the basement near to the original dwelling - This was provided on 7th August
- Method of disposal of spoil and a landscaping plan – This was provided on 15th August

Apart from these two key issues Mr Eve did state that the success of the scheme depended upon the detail of the design although he has also confirmed that he is happy for this to be dealt with as a condition of the approval and has deferred all other decisions to the Council.

Having dealt with the initial main concerns Mr Eve is happy that the proposed scheme constitutes an improvement to the setting of grade 2* listed Middlefield.



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