

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

FOR

ALTERATIONS & REFURBISHMENT

OF

WHITSON COURT, WHITSON, NEWPORT NP18 2AY.

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SITE LOCATION

The property is located at Whitson, Newport, NP18 2AY set back on the east side of the road and occupies a site with an area of 16.4 acres and is surrounded by agricultural land.



AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF SITE (site outlined red)

ACCESSIBILITY

The site is located adjacent to a public highway and is within walking distance of Whitson village and Goldcliff

EXISTING BUILDING

The property was built as a country house for William Phillips (1752-1836) and traditionally been ascribed to the architect John Nash. The porch was added circa 1860's and the front windows re-glazed shortly afterwards. During the early 20th century the house became a convent and Christian college, before reverting to private ownership during which time the grounds were used for a zoo with a number of the outbuildings being adapted to accommodate various animals. Over recent years the building has been unoccupied and had fallen into disrepair.

The property, pavilions and walled garden were designated Grade II* listed status in 1963 (CADW 2944), as an exemplar of a smaller country house.

Since purchasing the property in 2008 the current owner has carried out repairs/refurbishment works as listed planning approvals 08/0070 and 08/0609.



FRONT ELEVATION

CHARACTER

The main house is three storeys, over vaulted basement. Brick with bathstone dressings, dentil cornice and parapet; slate roofs, brick chimneys. Five window W front, horned sash windows with marginal glazing bars; square windows to second floor, stone band course between first and ground floors; ground floor windows set in shallow arched recesses with bandcourse at springing of arches. Central Italianate porch in matching materials; paired Doric pilasters to ends, entablature with enriched decoration to parapet; round arched doorway with keystone. South (R) elevation of 3 windows, outer windows blind, to centre, 9-pane sash to second floor, 12-pane sash to first floor, steps up to doorway (modern door). Rear has 3 windows to second floor; and (symmetrical) windows to first floor. On ground floor, steps up to central doorway with wrought-iron porch, with tripartite sash window to each side.

The Main block of house links via brick court walls to North and South service pavilions, aligned East-West. The South pavilion (Stables), brick on grey stone foundations, hipped slate roof, brick chimneys, each end has shallow arched recess with blind window, long sides have central archway through to courtyard, round window above; S side has blind arcade to ground floor (later glazing). North pavilion similar to the south but partially ruinous to rear. Low rear walls to E of house in brick with stone gate piers, and iron railings



REAR ELEVATION

The pavilion to the north is constructed similar but is partially ruinous to the rear.



NORTH PAVILLION

Work has commenced on the refurbishment/repair works approved under listed building consent applications numbered All repair works are being carried out in traditional materials. The site has been cleared of debris and overgrowth with all bricks being salvaged and cleaned for reuse in future repair/alteration works.

PROPOSALS

Since commencing the works on the main house the front entrance porch has been found to be subsiding and has been carefully taken down fully recording the location of each stone moulding. A lime stone base has been provided and the porch rebuilt. On removal of the porch roof the original arched entrance door frame was found, In order to retain the arched entrance door frame is proposed to replace the flat roof of the entrance porch with a flat glazed roof and to raise the first floor locally as detailed on drawing numbered 630/PA/15

On removal of the overgrowth from the rear steps it's been found that the steps are insitu concrete in a poor condition it is therefore proposed to replace them with steps as detailed on drawing numbered 630/PA/14

The owners have also decided not to build the pool extension to the south of the main house as approved on application 08/0609, it is therefore proposed to provide new steps to serve the side access door as detailed on drawing numbered 630/PA/13

Listed building consent for application 08/0609 gives approval for the conversion of part of the basement floor into a gymnasium and changing rooms, a plant room for the house heating system and a wine store. In order to enable the space to be used it is proposed to lower the floor level of the basement by 450 mm, the new floor will be constructed in limecrete and be finished with the existing stone slabs. It is also proposed to tank the basement walls with a specialist applied membrane.

In addition to the replacement/refurbishment of the doors and windows as approved under application number 08/0609 it is necessary to provide new doors and frames to all the external openings to the basement (see detail drawing 630/PA/17)and also to the external doors serving the library and the utility room (see detail drawing 630/PA/16).

NORTH PAVILION

Following removal of vegetation from the remaining section of the North pavilion a structural survey has been carried out and report prepared (see appendix A). As can be seen the report recommends the demolition of the remaining structure. The pavilion will then be rebuilt using materials salvaged from the existing. The pavilion will provide garaging for 4 vehicles with changing facilities and plant room on the ground floor and a home office and children's play room over as drawing numbered 630/PA/08, 10, 11 and 12. Pedestrian access will be provided to the courtyard via an arched access way.

EXTERNAL WORKS / LANDSCAPING

SITE CONTEXT

Whitson Court is located 11km south east of Newport city centre on the Caldicot Levels and is accessed from Whitson Common Road which delineates the western boundary of the property. (National Grid Reference ST371 847).

Whitson village, the nearest conurbation lies 350m to the south, and consists of a ribbon the

houses and farmsteads set back from the road in long strips of pasture reflecting a medieval 'cope' land allocation pattern.

The property, pavilions and walled garden were designated Grade II* listed status in 1963 (CADW 2944), as an exemplar of a smaller country house, and most recently bought by Mr and Mrs J Collingbourne, the current owner in 2008. The house was in a serious state of disrepair when purchased and in the 'Register of Buildings At Risk'. The owner since purchasing the property has been painstakingly restoring the house in close consultation with Newport City Council and CADW and wishes to adopt create a landscape befitting of such an exemplary property.

SITE FEATURES

OVERVIEW

Whitson Court is a classic Georgian Country House and was designed and built for the Phillips family in 1791 by John Nash on the site of an older property. The impressive house lies in the centre of a large mature garden predominantly laid to grass and well populated with middle-aged and mature trees, a good number of which are Horse Chestnuts, lime, evergreen oak, purple beech, ash sycamore and cherry trees. Some of these were planted approximately 150 years ago and are at maturity showing signs of decay and rot.

The house is accessed via two gated entrances leading to gravel drives with the principle access lying to the north. The southern drive flanks the south boundary hedge and its egresses very close to the neighbour's driveway and is enclosed by the boundary hedge and small copse.

The northwest boundary is defined by steel horse railings and mature chestnuts.

The north boundary is marked by a rean, occasional hawthorn hedgerow interspersed by mature ash and sycamore.

The south boundary doglegs and comprises a single mature ash near the site entrance leading to a treeless hedge before merging with a dense ash tree belt bordering the walled garden.

The 0.6 acre walled garden, which lies 65m to the southeast of the property is a conspicuous feature within the grounds, but like much of the estate, has fallen into disrepair and neglect and its former kitchen gardens have reverted to scrub.

The northeast and east boundaries of the wider estate are marked by mature oak and ash trees with native hedgerows between paddocks.

The house lies on a north south axis with its frontage elevation facing west over a large semi-circular lawn, rean ("Monks ditch") and mature trees towards Newport. A mature purple beech dominates the lawn area to the front and lies on the central axis of the house. The gardens to the rear are screened from the approach to the house entrance by two walls that flank either side of the front façade and join the former stables/workshops to the south and dilapidated buildings to the north.

There are no recognizable formal gardens remaining around the house but a stone wall running 12m parallel with the rear of the property appears to mark the transition into the less formal part of the estate leading to grazed paddocks.

The water table in the Gwent Levels lies very close to the ground surface and there are a number of reans, small ponds and ditches contained within the grounds.

The house was used a zoological garden from the 1950's to the 1990's and there is little evidence of any underlying historic garden that sets a precedent or template for restoration.

The site is covered by a blanket Tree Preservation Order.

The house and gardens are located within the Caldicot levels, a largely flat area (approx 6m AOD), that runs from the Llanwern Steel works 2km north , to the coast, 2.7km to the south. The ground floor of the house (7.4m AOD) is raised above the grounds which lie around 5.4 - 5.7m AOD. The levels have been raised around the front of the house to approximately 6.4m - 6.7m AOD.

Filtered views of the frontage gardens and elevation can be seen from Whitson Common Road but the rear gardens are screened.

LANDSCAPE STRENGTHS

Existing mature and semi mature trees providing scale and historic context.

Attractive hard landscape features such as brick walls and stone paving provide a strong connection to the house.

LANDSCAPE WEAKNESSES

Overgrown and derelict areas of both buildings and landscape features

LACK OF COHERENCE

Underlying narrative of the garden and its history has in the main been lost.

Many trees are at maturity and have recently died or are in serious decline.

Opportunities

To nurture a new landscape setting for the house, respecting its history.

To create a series of outdoor spaces that positively add to the character of the house but are adaptable to modern living needs.

To perpetuate the strong tree cover in perpetuity through new planting.

To create interest and seasonal change.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY (SEE DLA GA01 & 02)

INTRODUCTION

The client's brief was to initially prepare a site masterplan for the whole estate from which landscape projects could be undertaken according to priority and budget constraints. This application covers the high priority works and comprises:

SITE ACCESS. These works are for the realignment of the southern driveway and gated access to create a symmetrical driveway set around the east x west axis of the house. This will necessitate the realignment of the southern driveway from its current location. The aim is to mirror the details of the north drive entrance in terms of its gateway features and low walls over monks ditch. The surface will be porous gravel edged with granite kerbs. The egress onto Whitson Common Road will be marked with a slightly domed resin bound gravel strip edged with granite cobbles to contain and prevent gravel from spilling onto the public highway.

The existing driveway will be removed, grassed over and its edge planted with occasional trees to reinforce the southern boundary.

Separate gravel tracks will spur from the main drive to the north and south to provide access to the stables and proposed new offices. The north and south drives will converge at a new circular island feature planted with low box hedges on the central axis of the entrance steps.

HARD LANDSCAPE WORKS. New paths, terraces and paving will be laid predominantly to the

rear of the house to connect and integrate otherwise discordant courtyard spaces. Hard landscape will be sympathetic to the dwelling comprising natural stone materials either recovered from site or matching reclaimed paving and kerbs. The client has prudently stored a large quantity of hard landscape materials recovered from the site and has also purchased a significant amount of matching granite kerbs, large and small stone slabs and cobbles. Less formal paths and the entrance drives will be laid to bound gravel, edged with granite kerbs or timber depending on prominence of their location. Tractor and equine access is required from the stables to the paddocks to the far east of the estate and an existing track which was buried under years of vegetative detritus will be reinstated and built in a porous bound gravel material to avoid adverse impacts on surrounding trees.

OUTDOOR POOL AND TERRACE. This will be created to the northwest of the house and comprise a 12m x 8m outdoor pool, poolside terrace all enclosed by hedgerows and a loggia.

WALLED GARDEN. The scrub within the walled garden is to be cleared and the area reinstated to provide a vegetable garden, tennis court, borders and lawn. A timber lean-to glasshouse will be provided in later phases.

A BS5837 Pre-Planning Tree Survey and tree constraints plan was undertaken by a qualified arborist to determine the condition and vigour of the existing tree stock. This shows that the highest 'A' category trees lie adjacent to the west boundary between Whitson Common Rd and Monks ditch (G79 - Horse chestnut and Lime) and outside the north corner of the walled garden (G6- Hornbeam). Individual 'A' category specimens lie to the north and south of the main residence (T60 & T25). The remaining trees are mostly Category C with some B category on the north and south boundaries.

The walled garden is currently overgrown with several young-middle-aged self-seeded C category trees. Some of the walls are in poor repair and in some sections missing. Trees growing near the walls may further undermine the foundations and will be removed.

The large purple Beech which dominates the setting of the house and lawn and has serious decay. Whilst the tree has been identified within the BS5837 Tree survey as category R the owner wishes to retain it for as long as possible while new tree planting matures. Other mature trees are showing similar signs of decay, and it is believed the life expectancy of some trees will be shortened because of the high water table. New planting should include species such as Pin Oak which are more tolerant of variable and high water tables.

The proposed driveway and access track to the rear have been designed to reduce impacts on high quality trees and only Category C1 and R trees are affected. The paddock access track will be a no dig construction and finished in a porous material. It will also endeavor to

follow the route of a more historic track that serviced the derelict farm buildings located to the northwest of the walled garden.

Some poor form trees will be removed and replaced to the front of the grounds in order to create a better long term tree structure and setting to the building. Proposed species will be agreed with the tree and landscape officers at Newport City Council.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Materials used in the refurbishment /reconstruction works will wherever possible be recycled / salvaged. Wherever possible materials from sustainable sources and local labour will be used to carry out the works.

MOVEMENT TO, FROM & WITHIN THE SITE (ACCESS)

Access to the house is via a hard surfaced driveway. The ground floor of the house is approximately 550 mm above the drive level and is accessed via three easy going steps which are suitable for disabled access.

Door openings on the ground floor are all suitable for wheelchair access and an accessible wc is available.

Electrical switches and sockets will be located at heights complying with Section 8 of Approved Document M of the Building Regulations i.e. between 450 and 1200 mm above finished floor level.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

The new access will improve highway safety due to its location having good visibility in both directions

SUMMARY

It is believed that the refurbishment and alterations to this fine building are necessary in order to restore it to its former glory and preserve it for future generations, as well as providing a comfortable home for 21st century living.

The lowering of the basement floor to provide adequate headroom to the lower ground floor

basement gym and wine cellar area will ensure the space is usable and that the area is maintained.

The rebuilding of the Northern pavilion will restore the symmetry to the elevations and provide parking for the owner's classic car collection. The provision of a home office will allow the owners to occasionally work from home and use of rear first floor area as a play room provides safe space the owner's children and their friends to play.

The relocation of the southern entrance drive and provision of the new entrance gates and piers will provide symmetry to the front garden layout together with a safe and secure access off the adopted highway.