

Listed Building Information

DNP Ref: 4/132

Name: MIDDLE VENTON FARMHOUSE

Grad II* Date: 04/03/1988 Grid Ref: SX694939106

Parish: DREWSTEIGNTON [WEST DEVON]

Address: Middle Venton Farm, Drewsteignton, Exeter, , EX6 6PG

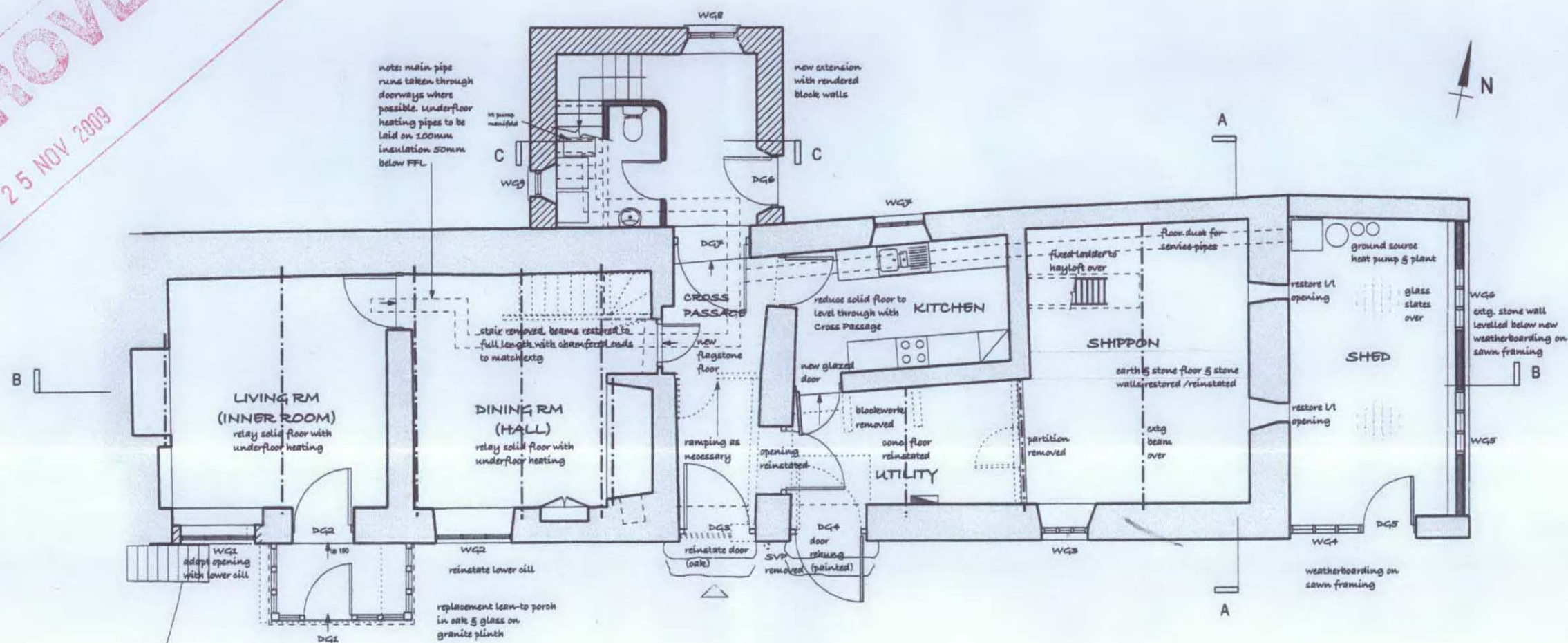
Description SX 69 SE DREWSTEIGNTON VENTON
 4/132 Middle Venton Farmhouse
 GV II* Farmhouse, former Dartmoor
 longhouse. Early or mid C16 with major later C16 and C17
 improvements. Smallish blocks of roughly-shaped granite laid to
 rough courses and large quoins, cob wall tops, front of house
 section is plastered; granite stacks topped with C19 and C20 brick;
 thatch roof, replaced with corrugated iron over the shippon. Plan
 and development: 3-room-and-through-passge plan Dartmoor
 longhouse facing south-east and built diagonally across a gentle
 slope The rear and uphill end are terraced into the hillslope. At the
 uphill left end is the inner room parlour with a projecting gable-end
 stack. The hall has a large axial stack backing onto the passage.
 The shippon is now used for storage. Since the roof structure was
 completely replaced (probably at a higher level) in the C17 most of
 the evidence for the earlier development of the house has been
 removed. Nevertheless it is likely that it began as an open hall
 house probably heated by an open hearth fire. The hall fireplace
 was inserted in the mid or late C16. The inner room was
 refurbished, and probably enlarged, as a parlour in the mid C17.
 The hall was floored about the same time and was thereafter used
 as a kitchen. In the C20 the passage front doorway was blocked
 and the present doorway inserted into the parlour (which is now
 used as the kitchen). 2 storeys. Exterior: the house section has an
 irregular 3-window front of C20 casements with glazing bars.
 Present doorway towards left end contains a C20 door behind a
 contemporary gabled and slate-roofed porch. The ground floor right
 window of this section is blocking the passage front doorway, The
 shippon section to right is exposed granite. There is a cowdoor
 immediately to right of the blocked passage front doorway.
 Towards the right end there is a window, probably a dung hatch
 over a drain hole. The right end wall of the shippon has 2 slit
 windows and there is a hayloft loading hatch in the rear wall. The
 rest of the rear wall is blind except for the passage rear doorway.
 The roof is gable-ended. Interior: the oldest feature in the house is
 the early or mid C16 oak doorframe from passage to hall; it is round-
 headed with a chamfered surround. Hall has a large granite
 fireplace with an oak lintel which is soffit-chamfered and has one

Listed Building Information

pyramid stop. The oven was relined with C19 brick. The hall crossbeam is soffit- chamfered with step stops. The inner room fireplace has a granite fireplace with a soffit-chamfered oak lintel and the crossbeam here is roughly soffit-chamfered. The ground floor partitions are stone rubble, those on the first floor are timber framed. The first floor partition between hall and inner room chambers may incorporate an original truss. Otherwise the roof from end to end is carried on C17 A-frames with pegged lap-jointed collars. The shippon has roughly-finished crossbeams. Middle Venton is one of the minority of Dartmoor longhouses where the shippon is unmodernised. It is still essentially how it was when used as a cow byre although the drain has been buried. Listing NGR: SX6949391065

0101/09

APPROVED
DATE: 25 NOV 2009



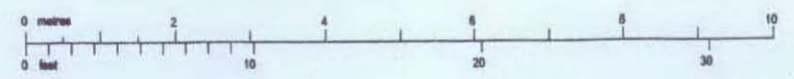
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PARK AUTHORITY

MIDDLE VENTON FARM, DREWSTEIGNTON
FARMHOUSE as Proposed

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

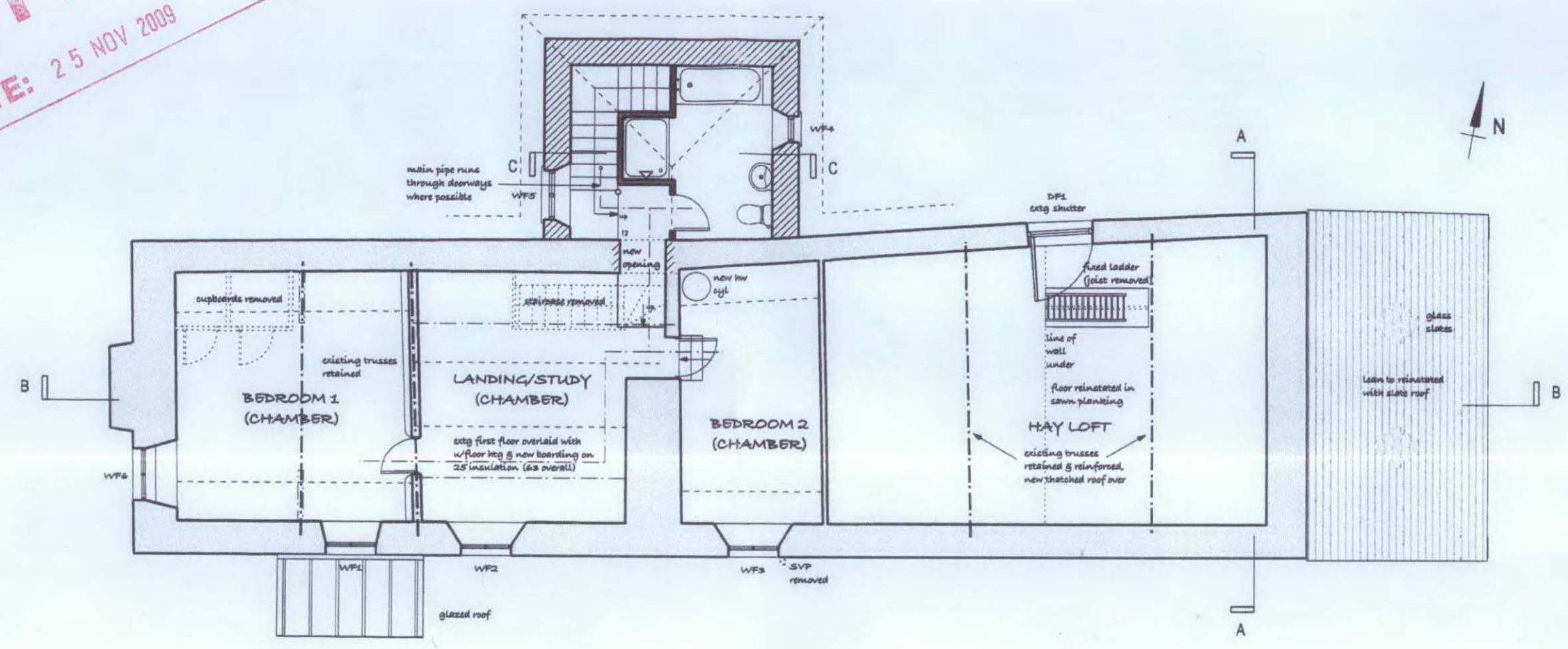
Scale 1:100 Dwg No 0611/FH/41c May 09
Do not scale: all dims to be checked on site

Rev c - 10.06.09 - Mullion added to WG8
Rev b - 04.06.09 - Service pipe ducting extended & note re: under-floor heating added. Shed windows amended.



STEPHEN EMANUEL A.
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**MIDDLE VENTON FARM, DREWSTEIGNTON
 FARMHOUSE as Proposed**

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Scale 1:100 Dwg No 0611/FH/42c May 09
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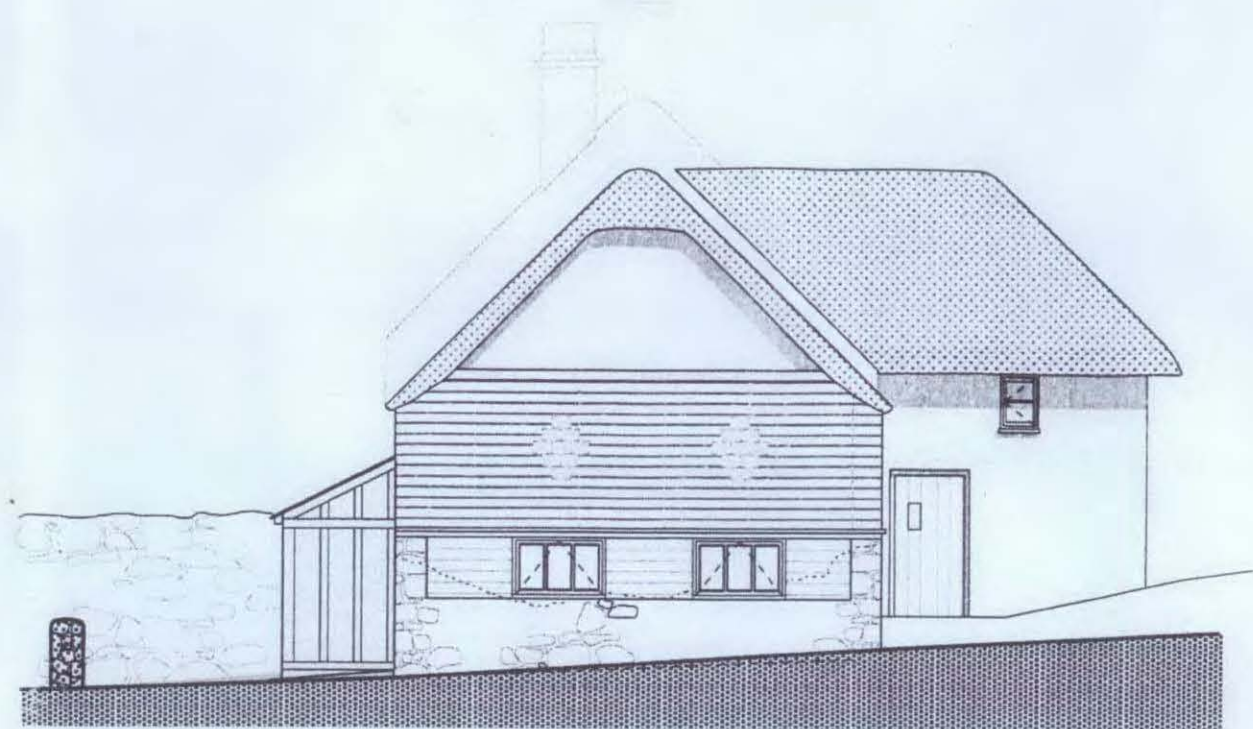
Rev c - 10.06.09 - Mullion added to WF5
 Rev b - 04.06.09 - Under-floor heating detail added.



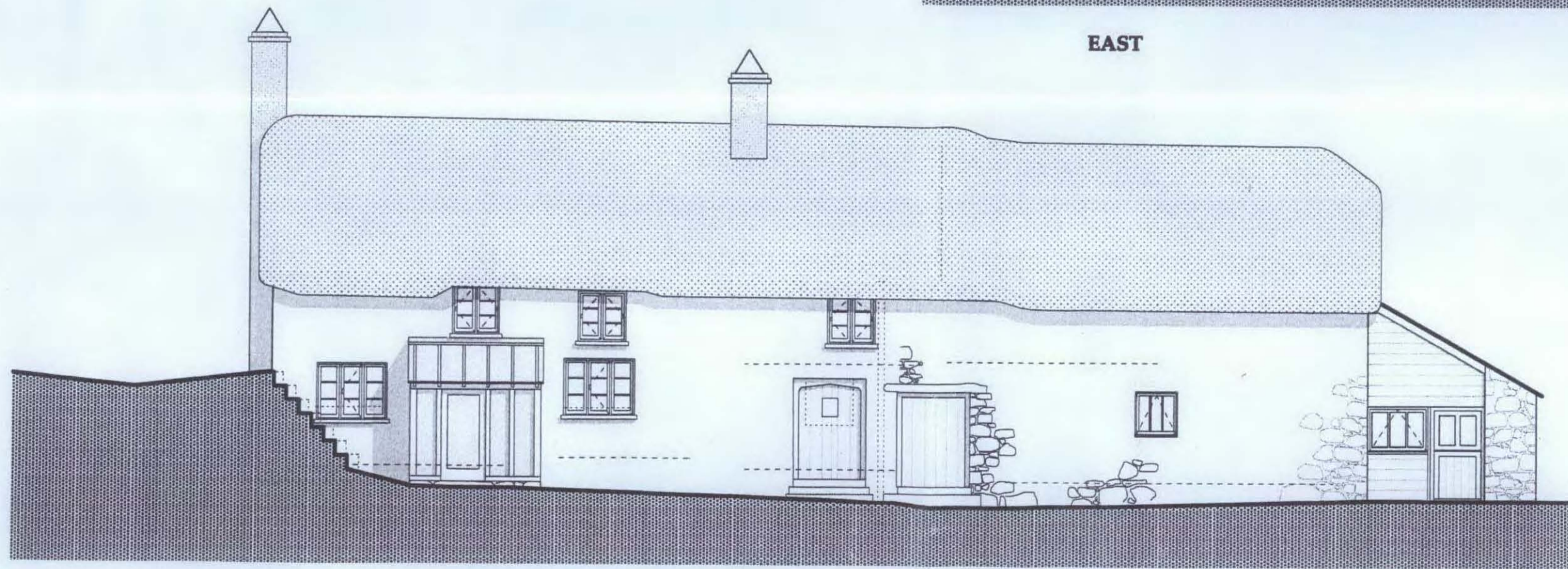
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EAST



SOUTH

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DLE VENTON FARM, DREWSTEIGNTON
HOUSE as Proposed

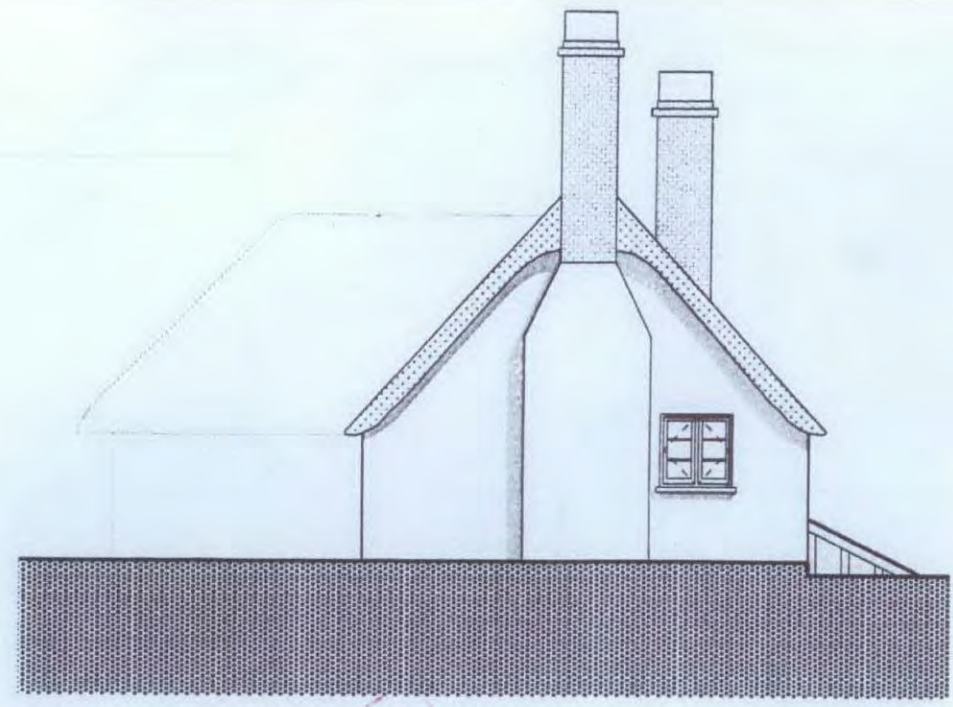
TH & EAST ELEVATIONS

1:100 Dwg No 0611/FH/44b May 09

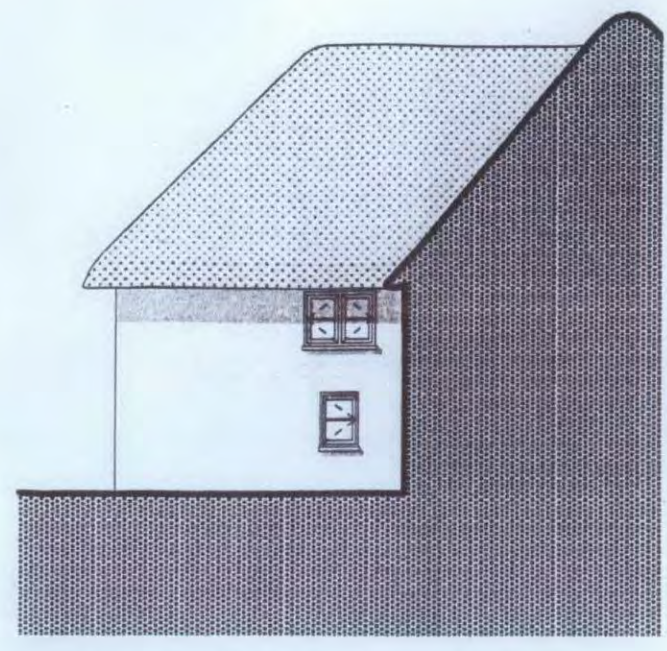
Rev b - 10.06.09 - Extension ridge height amended on East elev. Window opening annotation added.
Rev a - Extension re-drawn with rectangular plan & minor amendments.



MATERIALS:
Generally to match existing.
Thatched main roofs.
Natural slates to shed, glazing to porch.
Stone, cob and rendered walls.
Painted timber doors & windows.
Natural timber frame / cladding to porch, shed & rear extension.

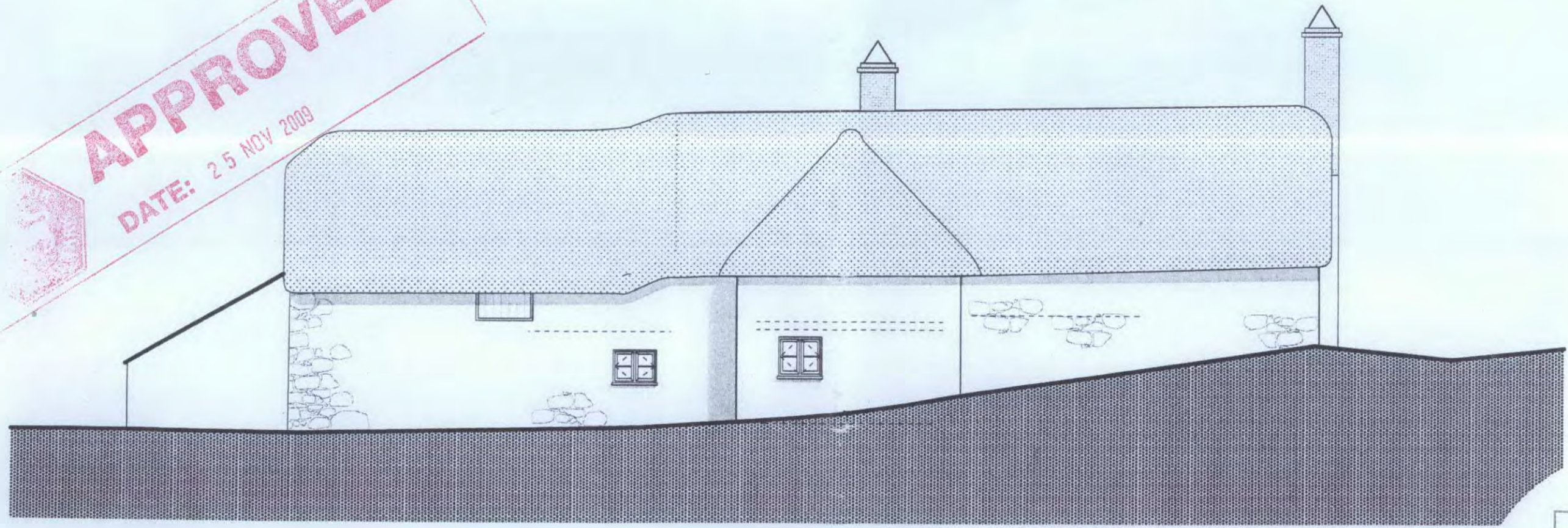


WEST



WEST SECTIONAL ELEVATION

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NORTH

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MIDDLE VENTON FARM, DREWSTEIGNTON
FARMHOUSE as Proposed

NORTH & WEST ELEVATIONS

Scale 1:100 Dwg No 0611/FH/43c May 09
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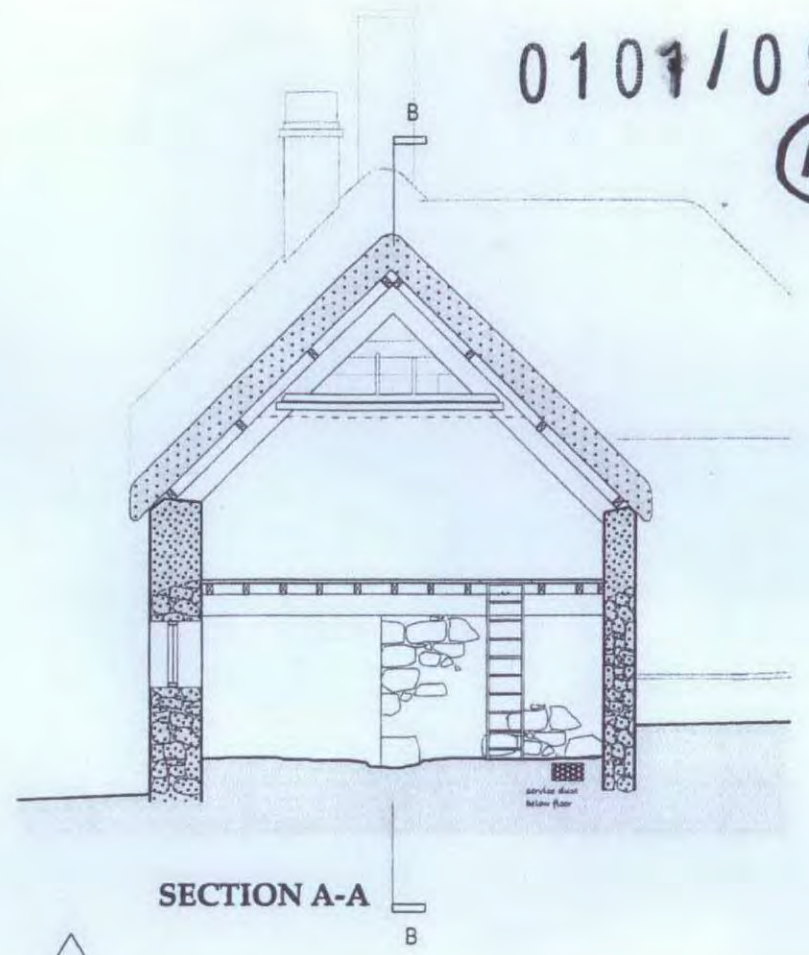
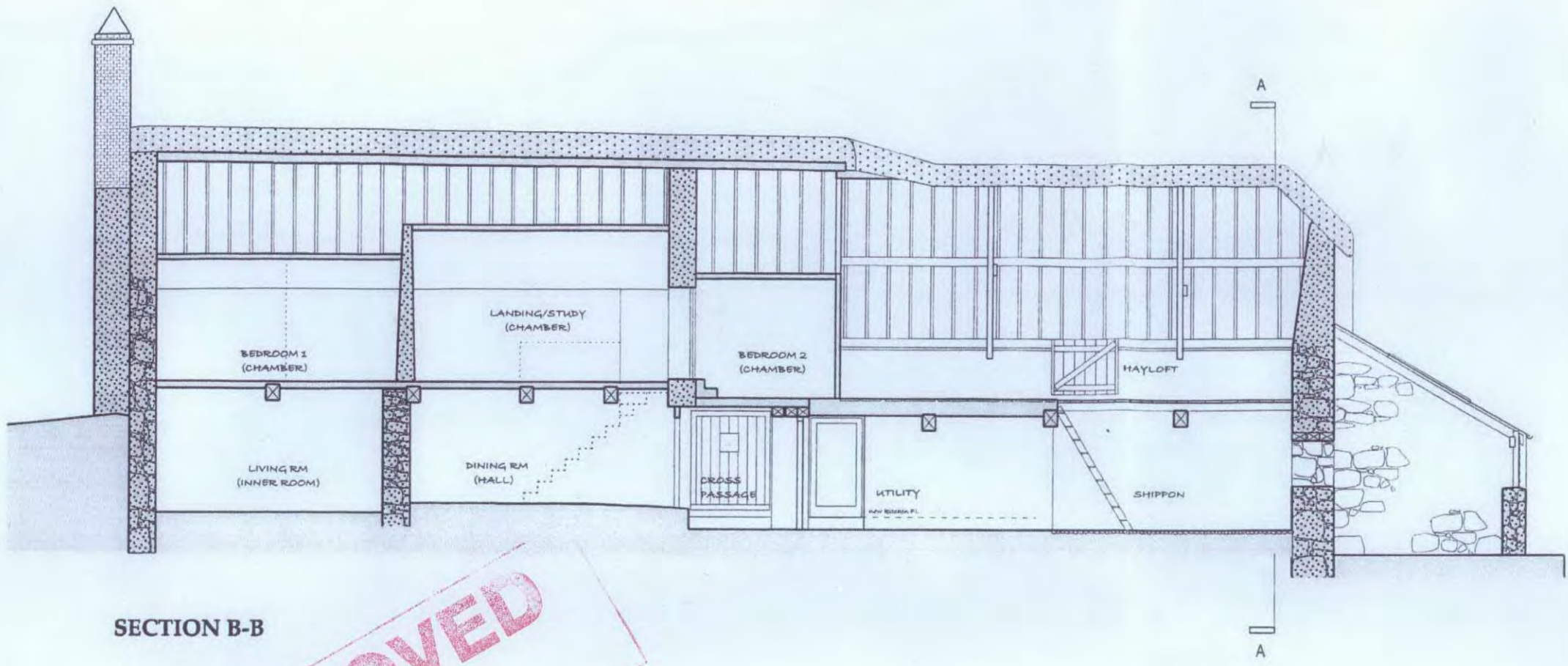
Rev c - 10.06.09 - Extension ridge height amended on West elev. Window opening annotation added
Rev b - 04.06.09 - Chimney heights amended on W elevation & porch added.



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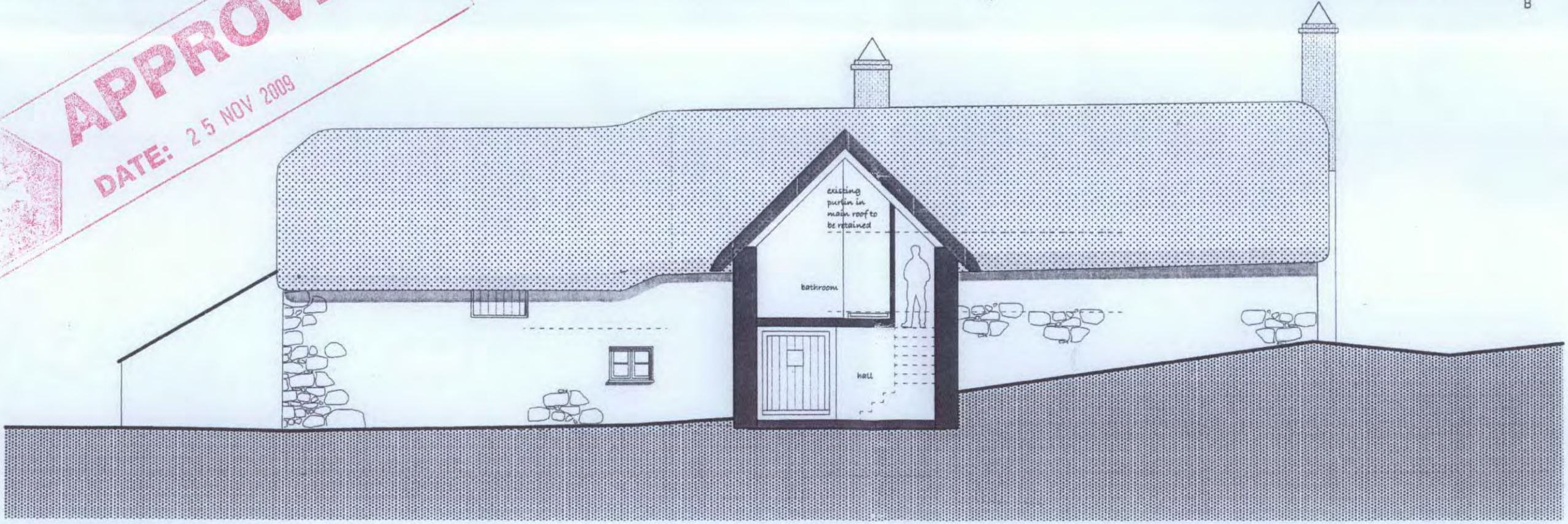
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SECTION B-B

SECTION A-A

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SECTION C-C

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OLE VENTON FARM, DREWSTEIGNTON
 HOUSE as Proposed

IONS

l:100 Dwg No 0611/FH/45a May 09

Rev a - Extension re-drawn with rectangular plan & minor amendments.



0544/13



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Mr Stephen Belli
Dartmoor National Park Authority
Parke
Bovey Tracey
Newton Abbot
Devon
TQ13 9JQ

Direct Dial: 0117 975 0725

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Our ref: L00298430

14 February 2014

Dear Mr Belli

**Notifications under Circular 01/2001, Circular 08/2009 &
T&CP (Development Management Procedure) Order 2010**

**MIDDLE VENTON FARM, DREWSTEIGNTON, DEVON
Application No 0573/13**

Thank you for your letter of 31 October 2013 notifying English Heritage of the above application. This letter deals also with Application Nos 0544/13, 0570/13, 0571/13, 0572/13, 0573/13

Our refs: L.290450, L.298350, L.298390, L.298410, L.298430

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to visit Middle Venton Farmhouse to see for myself the impact of the works for which retrospective consent has been applied.

Summary

In our previous letter we set out the significance of Middle Venton and the reasons for our objecting to these works. The visit has confirmed our advice. English Heritage objects to these applications. The works have cumulatively caused substantial harm to the farmhouse which is graded II* as a former longhouse with a largely intact shippon end.

English Heritage Advice

This letter, like the last, provides our advice in a single place. This is a serious case and the individual elements which have been separated out are actually part of a single programme of improvement, extension and conversion of the house and the majority of the items before you for retrospective consent relate to the upgrade programme. Cumulatively they have caused substantial harm to a grade II* heritage asset.

That is not to say they have been badly executed; in general they have been executed to high 'spec' - but not to one that was approved by the NPA in line with Condition 11 of the



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consented works, nor one that was provided by or supervised by a conservation professional, let alone an accredited one. The works have adapted a run-down, damaged and spartan farmhouse into a comfortable home. That said, the house would have been no less comfortable and the significance would have been better enhanced had the works been undertaken in accordance with the condition.

Historic background and context

Longhouses are rare a vernacular building type of international significance. Although they can be found elsewhere, particularly in south-west of England, they are characteristically a Dartmoor building type. The defining feature is the housing of humans and stock under one roof, originally with a common entrance. Middle Venton is a developed version of the type with what appears to be a separate primary entrance for stock. Recent upgrading works and tree-ring research have established that the primary C16 longhouse was floored, the roof raised and a cross-wall for the Hall chimney introduced in the C17 between the domestic end and the Passage which was left in the shippons end. This cross-wall was built with an offset to carry the joists of the intended Passage Chamber.

The distinctive character of longhouse shippons is vulnerable to change, not just externally but internally as well, particularly if domestic uses are extended into them. As farming has changed and longhouses been adapted to modern uses, few retain their shippons, even partially. Their large space has generally been colonised to enlarge the residential area of the house. Although definitive figures do not exist, it is thought that there are about 140 longhouses in Dartmoor, mostly on the eastern side, probably less than 20 of which retain partially converted shippons and only about 5 or 6 of which have unconverted shippons as at Sanders, Lettaford and Higher Uppacott. This emphasises the rarity of the type and the significance of Middle Venton. It is a remarkable survival, its list grading reflects that and in our view can be upgraded without annexing the shippons to domestic use and thus undermining its significance

The Shippon at Middle Venton

The part of Middle Venton that includes the Shippon is separately roofed in 4 bays and is of irregular plan. Although the Shippon has not been used for stock since before the last war, it has retained its historic agricultural purpose and had not been annexed to residential purposes, apart from four elements, two of them standard historic and non-damaging, extending into the first bay of the shippon.

1. The Through Passage - commonly, and hereafter called the Cross Passage - occupies almost a whole bay of the ground floor. Cross-passages are usually on the shippon side. It has its own entrance, separate from that of the Shippon which implies that the present lower partition wall is primary. Inside were doors to the Hall, the Kitchen (see below), and the Shippon. It had had a bathroom installed in part of it around 1942. The

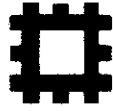


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entrance to the house was changed to the upper end. The partial conversion of the Passage had obscured its purpose.

2. Equally standard to vernacular building was forming a chamber over the Cross-Passage. Here it entailed an opening in the C17 cross-wall between the Domestic end and the Shippon end at the upper (hayloft) level. This chamber was allowed for when the Hall chimney went in (see the offset extending over masonry and timber) and was probably added then or shortly afterwards. This chamber is jettied over the Passage wall. This wall is probably primary as the Shippon has a separate primary entrance and there is a primary doorway in it that opens into the Shippon. The Passage Chamber occupies the first of the 4 bays at the upper (hayloft) level.
3. In the C18 or early C19, a room, probably for a Dairy was built into the Shippon. It was entered from the Cross-passage and occupies half the space between the Passage and the centre of the Shippon - getting on for a quarter of the of the floor-space on the ground floor of the Shippon. This has since the war become the Kitchen and to that degree domestic annexation of the Shippon is not questioned.
4. A light-weight screen was put up in line with this to close off the second bay of the Shippon for utility purposes and the floor levelled with a concrete screed in that part.

For all that, the Shippon of Middle Venton remained clearly legible as such internally and externally; essentially it remained a large barn-like extension to the house on two storeys. At the time of the 2006 report by Exeter Archaeology the two end bays were open to the roof while the second bay of the hayloft was floored over the kitchen and utility space. Apart from the conversion of the Dairy to Kitchen its functionality was not impaired.

Recent approvals to 'enable' the retention of the Shippon in non-domestic use

Recent consents for the changes to Middle Venton and the cowshed in the farmyard were in part justified and agreed on the basis of 1. improvements, such as to reinstate the Cross-Passage by removing the bathroom from it, to remove the recent stairs from the Hall, and 2. 'enablement', to maintain the historic agricultural character of the of the Shippon and retain it as a distinct and separate ancillary non-domestic workshop/storage space. This last aspect was recognised by all parties and was drawn attention to in writing by the applicant's agent.

Following withdrawal of the 2005 applications, he stated in a letter in March 2005 that the revised "proposal is configured to remove pressure for further domestication (of the shippon)". This is clear enough. The (current) 2009 application which included the new extension to house stairs, bath and WCs, was supported by a Design, Heritage and Access statement dated 21 January 2009 in which it is stated that,

"It is considered that these proposals will be beneficial to the form and fabric of the building,



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as well as contributing to its functionality and vitality. This in turn will help to secure a sustainable future for its notable asset, the shippon”.

There may be quibbles over the intended meaning of the word ‘sustainable’ there but it is clear from this statement as well as from the English Heritage files and, I understand, from the NPA files, that the retention of the character of the Shippon and reinstatement of the Cross-Passage together with the issue of the stairs were the key drivers, following on from the 2006 report from Exeter Archaeology.

To that extent the consents for the conversion of one of the outbuildings to ancillary accommodation and the for the extension to house stairs and mod cons were intended to ‘enable’/facilitate the retention of the Shippon as such - the non-domestic element of a longhouse.

Lawful use and human rights

Our advice is that there is no interference with human rights where planning and listed buildings policy and law is being properly followed. It is not unlawful to refuse consent for works that would otherwise facilitate a lawful use of a property if the refusal of consent is properly justified in accordance with policy and all material considerations.

The lawful use of the property is a material consideration, but it does not dislodge the requirement to justify works that may be harmful to a listed building in accordance with the statutory consideration in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the policies in the NPPF.

Of course there are occasions when harm to or loss of an historic asset can be justified - particularly if it is the only way to secure its future. But the more significant the asset, the greater the public benefit justification that is needed (to paraphrase NPPF, paras 128 and 132). There is nothing in the documentation in support of the applications to suggest that the Shippon has to be converted to conserve Middle Venton Farmhouse or its significance, or to conserve the farmstead and its significance. There is no suggestion that the Shippon has to be converted to domestic use to secure the future of the site.

In this context the considerable material benefits that are the result of the previously consented conversions in the stables, and particularly the extension to the house, in our view more than offset any such suggestion. The extension in particular was in the nature of ‘enabling development’, to take pressure off using the Shippon to increase the domestic potential of the historic asset. It is hard to know what argument could be deployed now to justify alterations to ease domestic use of the Shippon or additional domestic accommodation there. ‘Passive storage’ appears to us in the circumstances to be a perfectly sustainable use.

There are obvious fragilities here beyond the specific works for which application is made.



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There is no need for the shippon as the historically agricultural, non-domestic element of the longhouse to be heated and draught-proof. Yet obviously introducing level floors, sealing outer openings and leaving internal connections with the domestic end open: all these blur the distinction between domestic and non-domestic which is key to maintaining the significance of the longhouse.

Unauthorised works and the individual applications for retrospective listed building consent

Substantial or less than substantial harm:

The draft National Planning Practice Guidance on Decision-taking: historic environment (Aug 2013 update) points out that:

A key factor in determining whether the works constitute substantial (ie serious) harm is if the adverse impact goes to the heart of why the place is worthy of designation ... " - as here.

Turning to the works that have been identified for retrospective consent: Where they impact on the Shippon, they each individually introduce a domestic element which is harmful to its character. It might be argued that the harm of some of these, such as glazing the hayloft hatch, is in itself small-scale therefore less than substantial, but as The draft National Planning Practice Guidance on Decision-taking: historic environment(Aug 2013 update)points out that:

" .. even minor works have the potential to cause substantial harm ie the scale of works is not necessarily determinative of whether any harm caused is substantial or less than substantial.

Furthermore, there is no justification for it; to argue public benefit on the grounds of domestic improvement is misplaced. Increasing market value at the expense of significance is not a public benefit, but better revealing the significance of the asset could be. The NPPF makes it clear that heritage assets should be conserved in an appropriate manner for this and future generations (para 17, bullet 10) and in a manner that best reveals their significance (para 126, bullet 1). Individually, each one of the works retrospectively applied for is harmful to the significance of Middle Venton. This significance lies in its plan-form as a longhouse retaining its Shippon largely intact as to legibility and non-domestic functionality. Taken cumulatively including those for which consent is sought, the harm is in our view substantial and cannot be justified on the grounds of necessity or of optimum viable use. This harm is compounded by other unauthorised works,

Unauthorised works and the individual applications for retrospective listed building consent

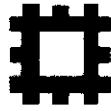
Glazing the hayloft hatch (0572/13): The significance of the hatch lies in its evidential value. The hay was pitched through it and it provided access to the hayloft. The impact of glazing the opening is to make the Shippon more habitable and so erode its non-domestic character. It would also be apparent as a glazed opening from outside when the hatch door was not in place as a shutter. This is harmful to the significance of Middle Venton; it has undermined its



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historic integrity. For the avoidance of doubt, that significance is as a still-legible longhouse with a largely unaltered Shippon (non-domestic part of a longhouse).

English Heritage would not have supported this as a proposal as part of an integrated scheme for the improvement and better revealing of the significance of the longhouse at Middle Venton and we are opposed to it now.

External Door to Shippon (0570/13): A glazed door of unbalanced design has been introduced on the inside face of the wall and an attempt made to fit an outside door as a shutter. The intention is to provide a barn-conversion solution, where a domestic door is masked by an agricultural-looking outer door. The significance of the historic doorway lies in its evidential value. It was a wide, plain, but serviceable door set mid-wall, as the chases in the granite frame show and as is traditional. The impact of the present solution is that the outer shutter frame (and door had this not had to be removed on account of the weather) look unconvincing. Further, that the door set on the inside face of the shippon detracts from the simple but effective traditional character of the shippon entrance. And that the door itself is wholly domestic in character and therefore harmful to the non-domestic character of the shippon. And finally that the attempt at a barn-conversion solution is wholly misplaced when domestic conversion of the Shippon is what the NPA have, with the advice of English Heritage, resisted from the outset - as the applicant and their agents were aware.

English Heritage would not have supported this as a proposal and we are opposed to it now. The door that has been removed should be repaired and reinstated in its correct mid-wall position as the evidence indicates.

Level solid floor and painting of walls in Shippon (0573/13):

The floor in the Shippon was in two parts. In the 'utility;' area a concrete screed had been laid. The rest of the open Shippon had a dirt floor, the evidence of its one-time use for stock apparently removed. Its significance lay in its evidential value of simple, non-domestic character, unimproved in the lower two bays, and simply made serviceable as a surface to support its use as a utility space under the hayloft.

The application was for 'earth and stone floor and stone walls restored/reinstated'. This appears from the sections on Drawing No.0611/FH/45a to have been envisaged as an irregular-surface floor with a level central stone-lined depression. In the event, a solid floor of uncertain make-up has been laid throughout the Shippon, apart from in the Kitchen and the Passage. Although the removal of the makeshift screen has improved the character of the shippon by restoring some of its volume, the impact of this very visible change has harmed the non-domestic character of the Shippon. Aside from potential technical issues, its impact visually is to create a level, and in this case non-agricultural, floor for domestic use. This alters the surviving essentially non-domestic character of the former Shippon in a manner that



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seriously harms its significance.

English Heritage would not have supported a solid floor in this instance and we oppose what has been undertaken on account of its association with further domestic annexation of the Shippon whose non-domestic character is a key factor of the significance of Middle Venton Farmhouse.

The painting of the walls has been executed over the masonry and the cob. Its crude effect may be the result of how it was applied to the rough surface below. Its coarse, globular effect is no doubt intended to be appropriate for a former cowshed. It has to be said that it has lightened the Shippon and thus made the fine new exposed thatched roof more obvious. The impact of painting the walls has been to give misplaced emphasis on the hayloft and its roof.

Had we been consulted we would have recommended limewash (specification to be approved) and that preferably on the ground floor only as it would usually only have been applied where the animals were. English Heritage does not however object to what has been undertaken by way of painting the Shippon walls in this instance. We would suggest that it should not be touched up or renewed in the hayloft level and that thought be given to reducing the crudity of the effect at the lower level if and when it needs touching up or renewing.

En-suite bathroom in Passage Chamber (0544/13)

The Passage Chamber has been upgraded to a point that it is different from, indeed appears larger than, the dingy spare room as in 2005. It has been well done. However, the introduction of a small en-suite shower and WC at one end has changed the plan-form of this modest secondary bedroom. As it is adjacent to the new consented bathroom, it would seem an unnecessary addition. The significance of this Passage Chamber lies in its plan-form (a jettied room over the Passage) and modest character as a secondary bedroom. However, the impact of introducing a small en-suite shower and WC at one end has changed the plan-form and modest nature. It has also added to the ugly complex of pipework in the angle with the new extension. This aspect should anyway be addressed and its impact reduced.

English Heritage would not have supported the 'en suite'. Having visited, we do consider that it is an unnecessary intrusion into the simple volumes of the room with harmful impact on the significance of the plan-form of the house. This is compounded by the scale and crude appearance of the plumbing externally. We remain opposed to it.

Stair and rails (057/13)

The Shippon had a hayloft. At the time of the Exeter Archaeology report in 2006, the hayloft floor survived as a platform over the first bay of the Shippon including the Kitchen (former Dairy); the remaining beams and some joists were not then boarded or otherwise covered,



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though evidence of this has, I understand, been found. The central beam and some of the joists were highly irregular in form; the beams have survived but not the joists. Consent was obtained to floor right across with a fixed ladder up to the existing hayloft floor.

The significance of the hayloft floor is evidential and practical; it was a serviceable and non-domestic floor for storage. The existing floor appears to have been upgraded. It has not been extended across the void of the rest of the Shippon. Instead a guard-rail of rustic-looking poles has been installed. A fixed ladder has been installed, also with rustic-looking rails. These precautions would appear to be unnecessary for access and use of a simple storage loft. The impact has to make a caricature of the space. The harm is less than substantial as it is so clearly impermanent. Nevertheless, it is unnecessary harm and against the spirit of heritage guidance both at the time (PPG15) and subsequently (PPS5 and its practice guide and now the NPPF). The NPPF is succinct (para 17 bullet 10): one of its core planning principles is to "conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance". These relatively minor and reversible works do nothing to enhance significance (as enjoined in NPPF, para 126, bullet 1).

English Heritage would not have supported these proposals and we are opposed to them now.

Door to annexe (converted cowshed): English Heritage appreciates why it was conditionally agreed to but we would not have supported it as a permanent solution. In the event, we do not wish to comment on this aspect of 'enablement' as the real harm is what has taken place in the Shippon.

Open plan

The effect of these works is not seen in isolation. It was clear from the visit which you kindly arranged on 30 January, that the distinction between the domestic end of the longhouse and its Shippon has been further diluted by the absence of doors in the openings, particularly the opening from the Passage into the Shippon, and by forming openings between the Kitchen and the rest of the Shippon. This too erodes the distinctive character of this, the diagnostic element of the longhouse and hence the significance of the grade II* listed Middle Venton Farmhouse. We urge that this issue and other related ones, such as the loss (unauthorised) of the back door, are addressed at the same time as the unauthorised works.

Recommendation

To summarise:

The question of lawful use is a material planning consideration for Dartmoor National Park as the planning authority but not necessarily for English Heritage as the Government's adviser on the historic environment. As such, our advice is that lawful use should not impact further on the character of the Shippon - that is, beyond the Passage and the Kitchen (former Dairy).



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The justification for this advice is that

1. The cumulative impact of the unauthorised works applied for retrospectively, particularly where they affect the Shippon, represent substantial harm to the key element of the significance of Middle Venton Farmhouse which is a longhouse with a relatively unaltered Shippon. Longhouses are a specialist plan-type; and longhouses with unaltered or little altered Shippons - as here - are a great rarity; hence the grade II* listing;
2. Further domestic annexation of the Shippon would lead to loss of significance because the integral Shippon is the characteristic and distinctive feature of a longhouse and its largely unconverted state is the principal reason for the high grading of Middle Venton at II*;
3. These substantially damaging works have introduced an alien, domestic character into the Shippon, the defining nature of which should be its non-domestic, utilitarian character in line with its historic agricultural muse and relevance. They are not justified as being necessary for the survival or sustainable future of Middle Venton (NPPF para 132), and they do nothing to enhance its significance (NPPF para 126); indeed they undermine its significance (NPPF paras 17, bullet 10 and 126).

English Heritage recommends firm refusal of these retrospective applications where they affect the Shippon (0544/13; 0570/13; 0571/13; 0572/13; 0573/13). We would be happy to agree a brief for remedy, reinstatement and improvements. If, notwithstanding our advice, your Authority is minded to grant consent, in light of our objection you should treat this letter as a request to notify the Secretary of State (National Planning Casework Unit) of this application, in accordance with Circular 08/2009.

Yours sincerely

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