

FAO:

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12<sup>th</sup> April 2016

**Potential Rural Exception Site**  
**West Cottage, Piddle Valley Neighbourhood Plan**

We have been commissioned by Mr Mark Richards of Zelda Investments Ltd owner of West Cottage, Piddletrenthide to undertake an independent review of the identified potential Rural Exception Site on land at West Cottage, as identified in the Neighbourhood Plan (based on the submission draft considered at the March 2016 Parish Council meeting), in preparation for submission of the Neighbourhood Plan to the Local Authority for examination.

I visited the site on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016 and have reviewed the relevant policies of the emerging neighbourhood plan, West Dorset District Council's adopted Local Plan and the comments made on the pre-submission draft Neighbourhood Plan in relation to this site by the local authority dated 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015 (Comments by David Hodges and Shelley Saltman).

The site lies within the Piddletrenthide Conservation Area designated in November 1990. There is a conservation area appraisal for the conservation area which was adopted in January 2007. To the east of the grounds of West Cottage to the other side of the river lies the Grade II\* listed Manor House. To the south of the site set back from the road and behind high rendered cob boundary walls is the Grade II listed West House. Brook House, also Grade II listed lies to the east on the junction of Cerne Hill and the B3143. Brook House lies some distance from West Cottage but its boundary walls form part of the wider public setting of West Cottage and its grounds. West Cottage is identified in the conservation area appraisal as a key unlisted building within the conservation area. The building appears to be an amalgamation of buildings originating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century but with a significant early 19<sup>th</sup> century remodeling along the architectural spirit of a villa. This is reasonably successful to the south elevation but to the north the irregular extensions and fenestration belie a building with more vernacular origins but nonetheless of some historic and architectural significance. There are no scheduled monuments in or in the setting of the site.

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The gardens of West Cottage extend to the east and north-east of the house down and along the river. They also extend west from West Cottage up to a former tennis court set up from the house on a levelled section of ground. The site extends north from the tennis court as a tapering triangular piece of land which is presently laid out as paddock/field but not used. To the west, the boundary to the site is the public bridleway which extends its full length on this side. The boundary of the site to the west comprises trees and hedge set on a raised earth mound. This continues around the site from the bridleway to the roadside. On travelling downhill towards West Cottage, the tree-lined boundary turns to a brick and unknapped field flint wall with stone capping which sweeps in to brick gate piers forming the vehicular access to West Cottage. The wall continues down the roadside edge of the boundary and is linked to the brick parapet of the bridge over the river.

The east boundary of the site is defined by the river along its length. The boundary is visually open to the southern end of the site towards the brick bridge but is partially closed by mature tree and hedge cover to the north-east corner.

The following analysis of the site is based on the guidance provided by Historic England in their publication *The Setting of Heritage Assets, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning note 3*. There is a summary of what is considered to be the significance of the site in relation to designated and undesignated heritage assets and an assessment of whether, in principle, in the absence of a scheme for development the site is capable of being developed whilst preserving the setting of designated and undesignated heritage assets.

The gardens to West Cottage are bounded on three sides by statutory listed buildings (Grade II and Grade II\*). The walls to both West House and Brook House in particular are both important to the enclosure of the private gardens to these houses and define their historic curtilage but are also important to the character and appearance of this part of the Piddletrenthide Conservation Area. The enclosure provided to the road in views from the east looking down into the settlement and views west up past West Cottage out of the settlement are highly significant and a defining and attractive part of the character of this part of the conservation area. This is complemented by the intrinsic value of the walls themselves which display an array of vernacular materials and building methods; unknapped flint, brick, rendered cob. Along with the walls, the presence of dense groups of mature trees to the roadside and within garden spaces are also important contributors to the attractive and positive sense of enclosure and create a very dynamic transition from the open character of the downland to the comfortable and well-defined enclosure of the roadside on approaching the valley floor. This enclosure is broken only by the gable, outbuildings and sweeping entrance to West Cottage which allows local views of the south elevation, the 'polite' elevation which looks east down to the river across an open lawn. The sense of enclosure from the bridleway down into the village core and the glimpsed views to West Cottage to the north and West House to the south are important aspects of this part of the conservation area and the open planned garden setting of both these houses are important to their significance as designated (West House – Grade II) and undesignated (West Cottage – unlisted within a conservation area) heritage assets and to the conservation area as a whole.

It is important to note however that West Cottage has a formal setting to the east and was clearly planned in its early 19<sup>th</sup> century remodeling to take advantage of the view to the east, in-part and historically formed by the extended gardens to Manor House. The present house has tall, Regency style French doors set within bays to the east elevation from the principal rooms to take advantage of the view east. In this respect the garden area to the east of West Cottage has, in our view, high significance in terms of both its clear historic relationship with West Cottage and its wider setting implications in terms of views from the south elevation of Manor House, although the latter would be greatly screened presently by mature trees to both the grounds of the Manor and the grounds of West Cottage.

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The garden curtilage to the west of West Cottage is very different in character and is visually and physically separated from Manor House by West Cottage itself and planting and mature trees to the north of West Cottage. This area comprises the hard surface of a tennis court with fenced enclosure and an open field to the north. Both are bounded to the west by a raised earth boundary lined with trees and hedges. This extends to the southern boundary of the tennis court (running along Cerne Hill). There is a marked change in level from the bridleway (Kiddles Lane) to the tennis court and from the tennis court to the rear elevation of West Cottage. This change in level is important as it sets the area occupied by the tennis court and the field beyond below the line of the Bridleway.

This part of the garden curtilage to West Cottage is some distance from Manor House but shares a boundary to its south which can be seen in relation to boundaries associated with the Grade II listed West House to its south and Brook House beyond.

The former tennis court and associated field are set down from the bridleway and screened from Cerne Hill. Development on this site (the garden curtilage to the west of West Cottage) would not physically or visually isolate any heritage assets from elements of their setting we consider significant. The conservation area appraisal identifies '*Glimpses of Manor House*' on Map 1 (page 8). The exact nature and extent of these views is not clear and they appear to be showing that the views originate from the fields to the west of the bridleway. In any event, these views and views from the bridleway are almost completely obscured by vegetation and tree cover even in winter months. There are no clear or well-defined or planned views to the Manor House from the bridleway. Development within the tennis court and part of the field to the north would not in any event (subject to height and scale) impede these glimpsed views.

Development of an appropriate form within the tennis court and part of the field given their topographical location and screening would not be unduly prominent, dominant or conspicuous or compete or distract from any views presently enjoyed of heritage assets. The following would need very careful consideration as whilst not a prominent site, it is an sensitive one:

- Dimensions, scale and massing
- Proportions
- Materials (texture, colour, reflectiveness, method of construction, finishes)
- Architectural style and design

What will be of particular concern will be the means of access to the site as any changes which affect the physical enclosure to Cerne Hill would be considered to be harmful to the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area. There may be scope to provide access from the bridleway into the development but this will mean the loss of part of the enclosure to the bridleway. This loss may be considered to be harmful but in our view would be less than substantial and needs to be carefully weighed against the public benefit of potentially providing more housing for local people in rural settlements.

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It will be for others to assess the planning balance of measuring harm against the public benefit of development within this rural location. However, we are satisfied that with the right design particularly in term of scale which will be important and architectural quality and material detailing, some form of development should be possible to the west of West Cottage which will preserve the setting of statutory listed buildings and preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Piddletrenthide Conservation Area.

We would be happy to expand on this statement, provide further information or provide advice on the form and layout of development if appropriate.

Yours sincerely



**James Webb** BSc(hons) MSc Hist Con. PG Dip UD IHBC  
Director  
Forum Heritage Services

cc. Ms J Witherden, Dorset Planning Consultancy  
Mr J Cox, Chair of Parish Council

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