

Land at 'Mayfield'

Junction of Twycross Road and Glebe Lane, Sibson, Nuneaton CV13 6LB



Heritage Statement/Heritage Asset Impact Assessment: Erection of 2-Bedroom and 4-Bedroom Detached Dwellings, with New Vehicular Access to Twycross Road

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1.0 The Historical Context and Significance of the Application Site and the Cock Inn

1.1 This Heritage Statement supplements the main Design and Access/Planning Statement for a proposed development of one 2-bedroom, 1.5-storey dwelling with detached garage and one four-bedroom 1.5-storey dwelling with detached garage on open garden land (a former meadow) to the north of 'Mayfield', Twycross Road, Sibson. The site lies on the eastern fringe of the physical settlement of Sibson, with several modern dwellings existing nearby both on Twycross Road to the south and Glebe Lane to the north-east. It falls just outside of the 'settlement boundary' for Sibson for planning purposes and also outside of the Conservation Area, which has a similar though not identical boundary in this location.

1.2 A public footpath crosses the land diagonally, which it is not proposed to divert, and an existing dense and elevated hedgerow/tree belt is to be retained on the western boundary of the application site, except for a short stretch which would need to be removed in order to create a vehicular access for the 4-bedroom dwelling. An existing gateway on Glebe Lane would be used to form the access to the 2-bedroom dwelling at the northern end of the site. New tree planting proposals for biodiversity net gain purposes would help to compensate for the loss of the short length of hedgerow.

Sibson Village

1.3 The small village of Sibson in Leicestershire, which lies close to the large town of Nuneaton, in Warwickshire, has hitherto not benefited from any extensive published research into its history. For example, the classic *Victoria County History* coverage of Leicestershire is limited to the three general volumes, a fourth covering the City of Leicester and a fifth covering Gartree Hundred in the south-eastern part of the county, corresponding roughly to the modern Harborough District. Sibson lay within the historic Sparkenhoe Hundred, but no further topographical volumes have been published in the Leicestershire series since 1964. Likewise, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments published many inventories for various English counties, but in Leicestershire this research was only ever published insofar as it related to Nonconformist places of worship.

1.4 According to the Wikipedia article on Sibson, the manor of Sibson, also called *Sibetesdone* or *Sibbesdon*, was part of John le Poter's inheritance in the time of Henry I. It changed hands several times over the centuries, passing to Roger Corbett around 1301, Thomas Corbett of Legh in 1420, and Keytes of Gloucestershire in the early 17th century. The ancient parish of Sibson included the chapelry of Upton, although Sibson and Upton became separate civil parishes in 1866. In 1935, the civil parish of Sibson merged with the civil parishes of Upton, Sheepy Magna and Sheepy Parva to form the new civil parish of Sheepy.

1.5 The same article goes on to note that during the English Civil War, aggrieved Sibson residents made several claims for losses and "free quarter" from the local parliamentary garrisons. In June 1646, William Mousley and William King claimed for lost horses taken by soldiers from the Tamworth garrison. Colonel Purefoy from the Coventry garrison had extorted money and "provinder". As many as 44 soldiers under the command of Colonel Cheshire from the Warwick garrison were quartered here for nearly two weeks on one occasion. Sibson is also notable as the birthplace of Peter Temple, a regicide, born there in 1599 and apprenticed to a linen draper.

1.6 The national census of 1801 records that the village had a population of 45 families, comprising 220 people, mostly employed in agriculture. In 1803, about 740 acres (3.0 km²) in the parish was enclosed by Pendock Neale, the lord of the manor, leaving a proportion to the rector, Thomas Neale "equal to the value of his uninclosed glebe and right of common". In 1810, the manor of Sibson with

880 acres (3.6 km²) of freehold enclosed land and the advowson of the rectory, a newly erected rectory-house, coach-house, stables, and yards, altogether worth about a thousand pounds was offered for sale. The *Victoria History of the County of Leicester, Volume III* (1955) offers further detailed information about the Sibson population at different dates, compiled from a variety of sources. At the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086 there were 30 villeins, 17 bordars and 1 'Servi' in Sibson, a total of 48 people. In 1563 there were 40 households, and in 1603 there were 145 communicants at the parish church. The 1670 Hearth Tax recorded 14 paying and two exempt households in Sibson; six years later 164 persons were recorded as living in the village. In the ten years between 1801 and 1811, the population had dropped by 29 inhabitants, but then it slowly rose to a peak of 280 people in 1841, declining steadily to 220 by 1871, but then rising again to 278 in 1881. In both 1911 and 1921, 258 people were recorded and in 1931 the population had only risen to 264 people. The Sibson village website (<https://www.townandvillageguide.com/Leicestershire/Sibson.html>) suggests that the village now has a population of around 500 people.

1.7 This small village was noted for its religious nonconformity in the 17th and 18th centuries. Illegal meetings of Presbyterians, Independents and 'Anabaptists' were reported here in 1669, attended by about 40 people. The usual preachers were a Mr Meade, an ejected minister from Stepney, and Matthew Clarke, the former vicar of Narborough. They met on Sundays and weekdays in the house of a Mr Palmer. However, only six dissenters were noted in the village in 1676. Thirteen out of 46 families living in the village in 1706 were nonconformist, comprising twelve families of Presbyterians, who had a meeting house in the parish, and one of Quakers. In 1709, the number of individual nonconformists was given as four Quakers and 20 Presbyterians. The latter met every Sunday afternoon, recently under the leadership of John Valls, a baker's son from Nottingham, although it was said he had recently left. By 1712, this group had two meeting places in the parish, worshipping together almost every Sunday Afternoon. Their 'teacher' was now John Jackson. The situation declined over the next century, as by 1829 there were just fifteen Baptists meeting for worship in a private house. No nonconformist returns were made to the 1851 religious census, and no chapels were noted in 19th- or early 20th-century trade directories.¹

1.8 William White's 1863 *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Leicestershire* states that all the cottages in the village had recently been rebuilt "in a very tasteful manner" by Earl Howe. The previous edition, of 1846, had instead stated that "many of the houses are very old", so clearly Earl Howe's sterling efforts had greatly improved the living conditions for the lowlier inhabitants but had, at the same time, destroyed a large part of the physical evidence of the village's history.

1.9 The 1863 Directory stated that the Rectory had over 265 acres of glebe land in Sibson, which was awarded at the time of the Enclosure in 1803, in lieu of the ongoing payment of tithes. The tithes were also commuted in 1845. The rector in 1863 was the Rev. John Sheffield Cox, who had been the incumbent at Sibson since 1859, but the previous rector who was in office at the time of the Enclosure was Thomas Neale, who had been serving Sibson for very many years. He was already there in 1782 and was still rector in 1846.

The Application Land

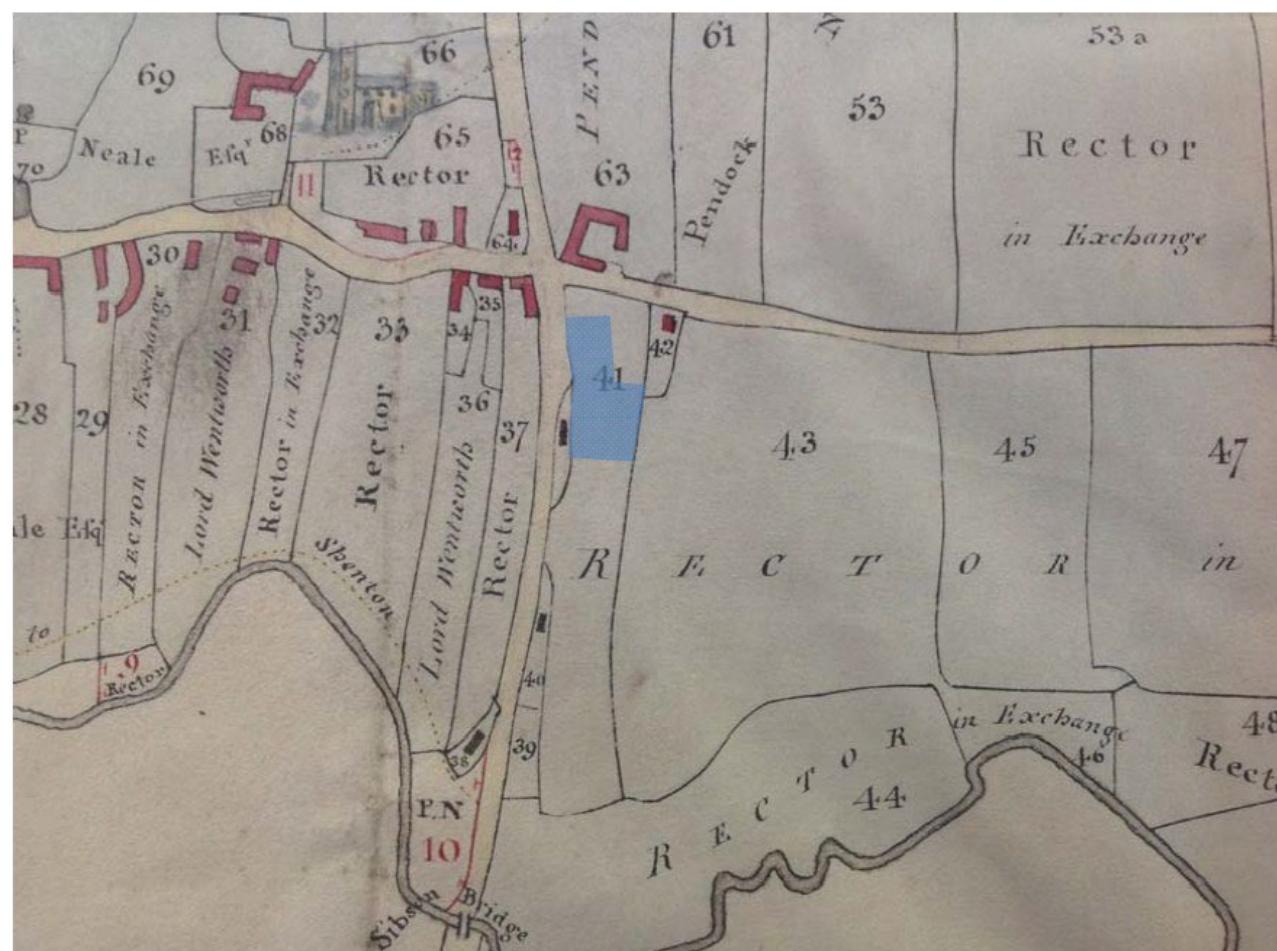
1.10 The Heritage Statement produced for the planning application of 2016 made no attempt to uncover the history of the open land at Mayfield, but the associated Desk-Based Assessment did include an examination and comparison of the available historic maps, beginning with the 1803/4

¹ Source: https://leicestershirehistory.co.uk/?page_id=3314

Enclosure Map and accompanying Schedule. The DBA suggested that the land north of 'Mayfield' was owned by Robert Farmer, but the map extract included in the Assessment clearly showed that this plot of land (numbered '41'), together with the nearby fields to the east and south (numbered 43 to 48) all belonged to the "Rector in Exchange". This terminology often referred to land awarded to the Rector to extinguish tithe obligations or simplify related financial arrangements, and the truth of that in this instance is confirmed in the White's Directories.

1.11 It is therefore likely that Robert Farmer was the tenant farmer, cultivating or grazing the land on behalf of the Rector, rather than its owner, who would have been the Rev. Thomas Neale. In 1804 the field was called 'Nether Yard', a surprising name for what appeared to be a meadow rather than a hard-surfaced area. However, this is not an uncommon field name in the Midland counties. Historically, the term 'yard' (derived from the Old English word *geard*) could simply mean a small enclosure, especially one near to a dwelling or with a specialised use, such as a milking yard, garden, a field devoted to the regular growing of a particular crop, and so on – in that respect similar in meaning to 'garth'.

1.12 The later historical map evidence (Ordnance Survey) suggests that the application site continued to be agricultural grazing land or meadow. On the 1803 Inclosure Map a small cottage and garden, plot 42, was located immediately east of the upper portion of the Mayfield/Nether Yard plot, but this had completely disappeared by the time of the first Ordnance Survey detailed mapping of 1885. The 25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1885 shows a pinfold or animal pound located directly outside the field at its north-western corner, but this had disappeared by the 1901 revision.



Extract from the 1803 Sibson Inclosure Map (the application site is highlighted in blue)

1.13 The field was numbered '72' on the 1885 and 1901 maps, at 2.869 acres; the roadside plot immediately to the south of it, No. 73, was occupied by two cottages, the predecessors of 'Mayfield', which appears to date from the late 20th century. Little had changed by the time of the 1927 revision, except that the meadow had reduced in size slightly to 2.111 acres. This scenario has continued through the succeeding century. The site is relatively flat but does begin to slope downwards towards the southern end: Google Earth mapping suggests that the land is at 85 metres above sea level at the northern end, near Glebe Lane, reducing to 83 metres at the southern end, with most of the land on the north-east side of the public footpath at 85 metres.

1.14 Given the destruction of most of the ancient houses in Sibson by Earl Howe, there are only four statutory listed buildings in Sibson, one of those being the parish church of St. Botolph. Of the remainder, two contain timber framing: Houghton House (later encased in brickwork) and the Cock Inn, which lies opposite the application land at Mayfield, on the western side of Twycross Road and at the junction with Sheepey Road, which includes the main street of the village. Despite persistent local traditions that the **Cock Inn** is some 750 to 800 years old, the less romantic official listing description states that the building, listed at grade II in 1966, dates only from the late 16th or early 17th century. It is timber framed in square panels, 12 x 2 feet, but divided into three principal bays by arched braced posts. The panels are infilled with brick nogging and the structure rests upon a rubble stone plinth. The main building has a thatched roof, but there are modern brick and tile extensions to the rear, stretching along Twycross Road. The thatched roof incorporates two eyebrow dormers and there are gable end and axial chimney stacks.



An old postcard view of the Cock Inn showing the prominent inn sign

1.15 The Cock Inn is one of many hostelries allegedly frequented by the notorious early 18th-century highwayman Dick Turpin. Local legend asserts that he was a regular visitor because he lived at Fenny Drayton for a few years and his parents lived in nearby Hinckley. He allegedly kept his horse, Black Bess, in nearby Lindley Wood. When seeking refuge from the pursuing authorities, Dick was said to have hidden his horse in the cellar and himself up the bar's inglenook chimney! There is also the popular claim that the pub once had a secret tunnel leading into the heart of the village. There appears to be no record of the date of the inn's first licence, but it was once owned by the church and therefore had only a six-day licence until 1954, shortly after the former free house was sold to Frederick Smith Ltd., the Birmingham brewers, in 1953. Modern-day robbers, allegedly two American soldiers, stole the famous iron inn sign in September 1944, which weighed some two hundredweight (*Western Daily Press*, Monday 18th September 1944).

1.16 Returning to the inn's earlier history, the innkeeper in 1841 (the year of the first available full census) was Joseph Upton, aged 23, and his wife Ann, the same age. They had two very young servants, Fanny Dalton (15) and Sarah Handford (11). Joseph Upton also features as landlord of the Cock Inn in a newspaper article of 1840, which is the earliest mention of the 'Cock Inn' in the British Newspaper Archive. It seems probable that the inn may have begun its life as a farmhouse, and it was situated next to the former village smithy, which is usually listed next to it in the census records. Many of the later landlords also practised some farming. In the 19th century, when much of the inn trade would have come from the modest local population, the licensees would need to have a reliable additional source of income to supplement the often-meagre earnings from the inn. The inn was adjacent to the main road (now the A444 Twycross Road) linking Sibson with Twycross to the north and Fenny Drayton, the Watling Street (now the A5) and ultimately Nuneaton to the south, so this would have brought in some passing trade, but still probably not enough to make the inn pay without the extra income. It was not uncommon for the innkeeper's wife and daughter(s) to do much of the daytime serving in the inn while the husband was out at work in his fields.

1.17 The 1851 and 1861 Sibson censuses have William Genders, innkeeper and farmer of 90 acres, at the Cock Inn. In 1851, he was said to be aged 58 and his wife Ann 57, but in 1861 their ages are inconsistently given as 60 (or 68?) and 70. They had one servant, Joseph Lakin (19) in 1851, but in 1861 they had a carter called William Bown (20) and a ploughboy called Joseph Foster (14).

1.18 A newspaper article of 1926, recording the transfer of the Cock Inn's licence to Leonard White, noted that the previous licensee, Mrs Priest, had been at the Cock Inn for 63 years (that is, since 1863). The owner at the time was the Rev. J. Poyntz, Rector of Sibson. However, census records reveal that Henry Mears, innkeeper, was at the Cock Inn in 1871 (aged 58) and was still there in both 1881 and 1891. In 1881 he was described as "publican and farmer of 27 acres" and in 1891 again as publican and farmer. On all three occasions his wife was named as Elizabeth (aged 56 in 1871) and they had a daughter also named Elizabeth, aged 22 in 1871. Douglas Stewart Priest, aged 48, was a farmer at the Cock Inn in 1901, while his wife Elizabeth (aged 50) acted as the innkeeper. It therefore seems likely that the younger Elizabeth Mears would have married Douglas Priest, explaining her long residence at the Cock Inn. The truth of this is borne out in a much later newspaper article which suggests that Mrs Priest was née Dawkins and married twice (see paragraph 1.17 below). The couple had two children living with them, Douglas Henry Priest, 23, a salesman, and Muriel Poppy Priest, aged 18, together with servant Albert Twigg, 20, who was a cowman on the farm.

1.19 In 1911, Douglas, aged 59, was described as farmer and publican. He and Elizabeth had a general domestic servant named Lizzie Roberts and described the inn as having eight principal rooms and being located in "Sibstone", a former alternative spelling of the village's name. The 1921 census

has Douglas again, now aged 68, described as innkeeper and farmer, with his wife Elizabeth, 72, described as assisting in the business and domestic work. There were five principal rooms, possibly suggesting some internal rearrangement since 1911. No-one else was living with them at the inn by this time. Censuses after 1921 are not currently in the public domain. Mr Priest retired in March 1926, and that April Leonard Overton White took over the running of the Cock Inn, as well as working as a farmer. Peter Dawkins succeeded him in April 1934, but he had to give up his own farming at Sibson in October 1938 due to ill health, when he sold 39 dairy cattle. Sadly, he died aged only 29, in January 1939. His brother Joe took over the management of the inn, leaving in June 1953. Interestingly, a newspaper article of that time states that Mrs Priest had been Elizabeth Dawkins before her marriage, as had Mrs Mears before her. Given the evidence cited above, it would appear that Elizabeth Dawkins, Elizabeth Mears and Elizabeth Priest were, in fact, all one and the same person!

1.20 Frederick Smith Ltd. of Aston, Birmingham, took over the inn in July 1953. A newspaper article of the time stated that an unspecified young Birmingham couple were to take over from the Dawkins under the new owners. However, the landlord in June 1954 was John Henry Herbert Hipkiss, known as Jack, who remained in charge until he handed over the pub to Henry (Harry) J. Pike in August 1971. A Mr E. Shepherd was also said to be associated with the Cock Inn in December 1959. It was early during Hipkiss's tenure (1954) that the inn, for so long in the ownership of the church, finally switched from a six-day to a seven-day licence. The Cock Inn was then the last remaining 'free house' in the district.

1.21 Harry Pike left the inn at some point after May 1978 and information about later landlords is patchy, but Mitchells & Butlers owned the pub by 1985. Graham and Stephanie Lindsay ran the inn from 1989 until May 2003 and Lee and Trudi Collins from 2006 until November 2019, after which the pub sadly had to close. At the time of writing it still awaits new licensees.

2.0 Assessment of the Significance of the Cock Inn and Application Site Context, and the Potential Impact of the Proposed Development Upon Them

2.1 The inn is therefore clearly of great importance to the village of Sibson in architectural and historical terms and makes an attractive and prominent corner focal point at one of the entrances or 'gateways' to the village street, as well as to the Sibson Conservation Area. It is also one of the very few timber-framed buildings in the village. However, the writer would dispute the suggestion that any view of the inn obtainable from the public footpath that crosses the Mayfield meadow site is of importance to its status as a 'gateway' to the village or that the low-density development proposed on this mostly well-enclosed site would have any demonstrable impact upon its setting and the public's ability to appreciate the same. The Google Earth street view images included in the Design and Access/Planning Statement for this application (Rev. 2, page 13) demonstrate clearly that the application site is very well screened from the side elevation of the Cock Inn by a dense boundary of trees and shrubbery on the opposite side of Twycross Road to the inn, and that this same screen would prevent walkers from obtaining any clear view of the inn until after they had exited the footpath on to Glebe Lane at the north-western corner of the site.

2.2 As for distances, the approximate distance between the south-east corner of the historic timber-framed Cock Inn and the north-west corner of the proposed two-bedroom house (that is, the minimum separation) is 22 metres (72 feet). The same measurement down to the north-west corner of the proposed 4-bedroom dwelling is 81 metres (265.75 feet) and to the centre of the proposed vehicular entrance for the latter 84 metres (275.5 feet). There would, of course, be no view of the proposed dwellings from the Cock Inn because of the tall, dense hedgerow and tree belt intervening between the two on the east side of Twycross Road. The inn's rear outbuildings, which front on to Twycross Road, are nearer, but they are much

later additions to the original timber-framed building and, being very much functional adjuncts built in a plain style, are of no particular architectural merit or historic interest in themselves, except insofar as they represent part of the ongoing historical changes to the original building over time.

2.3 In terms of the Sibson Conservation Area, the Appraisal and Map indicate that the conservation area ends at the eastern end of Sheepy Road and borders the Twycross Road as far as St Botolph's churchyard to the north and to the end of the Cock inn's rear garden to the south. The map indicates that the area around the Church, Old Rectory and the house called Brookfield constitute a 'key space', presumably meaning a significant open or green space with significant landscaping. Arrows indicate important "views to be protected", including the view down Sheepy Road westwards from the junction with Twycross Road (by the Cock Inn) as far as Lovelace Close, and southwards down Twycross Road from the churchyard and Brookfield back to that same junction and the Cock Inn.

2.4 The Conservation Area Appraisal regrets that recent housing development in Sibson has ignored the established principles of redbrick estate cottages positioned close to the road, or larger Victorian villas set back behind substantial front gardens, often enclosed by brick walls, and has instead opted for large open plots in "sweeping avenues" that are open to view from the street. Most of the older village houses are of red brickwork with plain clay tile roofs with flat ridges, one and a half to two storeys high, often with prominent ridge-top chimneys and only occasionally featuring porches (usually modern additions). Some roofs include dormers or small gables. The proposed dwellings, although they would not be seen in the context of the village street, would use traditional materials (red brick and clay roof tiles), have plain ridge tiles, small dormers and gables, and the 4-bedroom dwelling would have an end chimneystack with the chimney positioned on the roof ridge. It would also feature some areas of rendered wall, but this also applies to existing nearby buildings such as 'Byron's Lodge' and 'The Millers', and even to some buildings in the village street, such as the elevated bungalow nearly opposite Houghton House.

2.5 The proposed development of two houses in large gardens on the Mayfield meadow, well concealed behind the mature, elevated hedgerow and tree belt on Twycross Road and also set well back from Glebe Lane, would not have any effect upon the currently obtainable view down the Sheepy Road from the Twycross Road junction, nor would it affect the view from the churchyard edge on Twycross Road down towards the Cock Inn, as the nearest proposed dwelling, the 2-bedroom 1.5-storey house, would be located some 20 metres (minimum) from the gateway on Glebe Lane and the centre of that gateway is some 22 metres away from the centre of Twycross Road. Therefore, nothing would be seen of the two proposed dwellings from the 'protected view', whether alongside the entrance to St Botolph's churchyard or the nearer entrance to 'Brookfield', as the first two Google Earth street view images reproduced below (on page 6) amply demonstrate. This remains true even in proximity to the Sheepy Road junction, as shown by the third image below.



2.6 The conclusion of the 2016 Heritage Statement, related to the earlier planning application 14/01073/OUT, which was for five dwellings on this same site rather than just two, was that:

“Whilst the site is immediately opposite the Cock Inn and near the boundary of the Conservation Area, the site will be screened from the listed building and its curtilage, and the Conservation area almost completely by a mature hedgerow and some mature trees.

“The impact of the new development on the setting of the Cock Inn is considered to be very low and the public benefit of building houses on this site outweighs any such very low effects. ... The impact of the new development on the setting of the Conservation Area is judged to be neutral.

“In summary, whilst there will be a very low impact related to the change of land use and the new buildings stepped back from the A44 behind a hedge, it is judged that the development will not have an undue adverse impact on the heritage assets and settings of these assets in this particular location.”

2.7 The Officer’s Report on the 14/01073/OUT outline planning application for up to five dwellings, each with its own single garage (so ten buildings) reached the following conclusions (my emphasis in bold type) on the degree of harmful impact that this development might have on the setting of the Cock Inn listed building:

*“[8.46.] A Heritage Statement has been submitted by the applicant of proportionate detail to satisfy the requirements of paragraph 128 of the NPPF. The Statement makes an assessment on the impact of the proposed development on the setting of the Cock Inn and conservation area and any subsequent harm to the significance of these two designated heritage assets. The Statement concludes that **the impact on the setting of the Cock Inn is very low and the impact on the setting of the conservation area is neutral**. The Conservation Officer has reached a similar conclusion, for the reasons explained below.*

*“8.47. Given the location of the proposed development it would have **no impact on the immediate setting of the Cock Inn**. The view of the Cock Inn provided from the north along Twycross Road has been identified as an important view within the Conservation Area Appraisal. This view is focused on the principal elevation of the Cock Inn, rather than development further along Twycross Road. **There will be limited instances when the proposed development may be visible**, in particular within the winter months where the screening provided by the vegetation will not be in full leaf. This also allows views of the existing dwelling at Mayfield, and although this is likely to provide limited conflict with allowing an appreciation of the significance of the Cock Inn, the proposed development would be closer to the Cock Inn than Mayfield so this may increase the impact on its setting, although **still negligible**.”*

2.8 The officer’s conclusions suggested that the harm likely to be caused by the new dwellings to the setting of the listed building would be “less than substantial”, but that nevertheless any degree of harm must be taken very seriously and weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which were deemed to be negligible. The writer would suggest that (a) “very low” or “negligible” harm is not quite the same thing as “less than substantial” and that (b) in reality it would be very difficult to demonstrate that the proposed dwellings would harm the key views of the Cock Inn or conservation area in any way whatsoever, even during the winter months. Any views of the new dwellings from the road or the Cock Inn from the application site and public footpath would be considerably broken up by the hedge and

tree screen even when not in full leaf, as is the case at present, and therefore it would be unreasonable to claim that such fragmentary glimpses were important to the appreciation of the conservation area ‘gateways’ or listed building setting.

2.9 Therefore, any degree of harm attributable to the development in this context would be very small indeed, and the current proposal would do more to preserve the present setting of the Inn and the footpath itself than the refused 2014-16 application, on several counts: (1) the existing diagonal line of the footpath would be preserved; (2) no new opening would be made on to Twycross Road opposite the inn building; (3) the lower density (four rather than ten structures) would be more in keeping with the character of the village and would preserve a larger green area, retaining all the existing boundary trees near the Inn and providing new tree planting; and (4) the extra residents would be potential customers for the Inn, thus contributing to its continued viability, as well as supporting other local services in Sibson and the surrounding villages. Again, this matter is explored further in paragraphs 3.46, section 2 and 3.54 below of the Design & Access/Planning Statement for this application.

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