

**CUMBERLAND COUNCIL  
CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

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**Proposal:** Application to determine if prior approval is required for the demolition of the non-original 1931 two storey extension to the south and the single storey non-original extension to the north of abbots court

**Address:** Abbot's Court, Abbey Road, St Bees

**Reference:** 4/25/2311/0N1

**Date:** 29/09/25

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**Description:** Abbot's Court is one of the most prominent houses in St Bees. It was constructed in the 1860s as a large house with stables and stable yard to the side, and is situated on a raised position in expansive grounds. It is not listed and is outside St Bees Conservation Area.

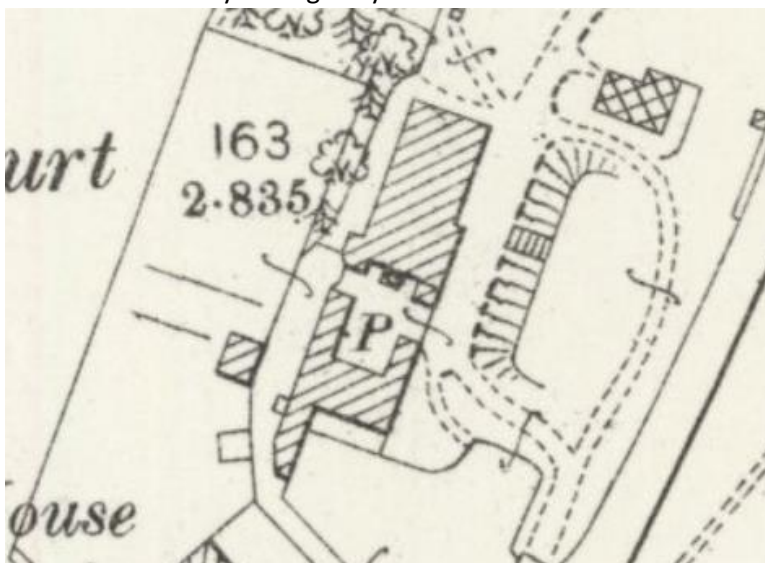
**Assessment:**

This building is a non-designated heritage asset. It has been approved for addition to Cumbria's Local List of non-designated heritage assets, which is in a draft form.

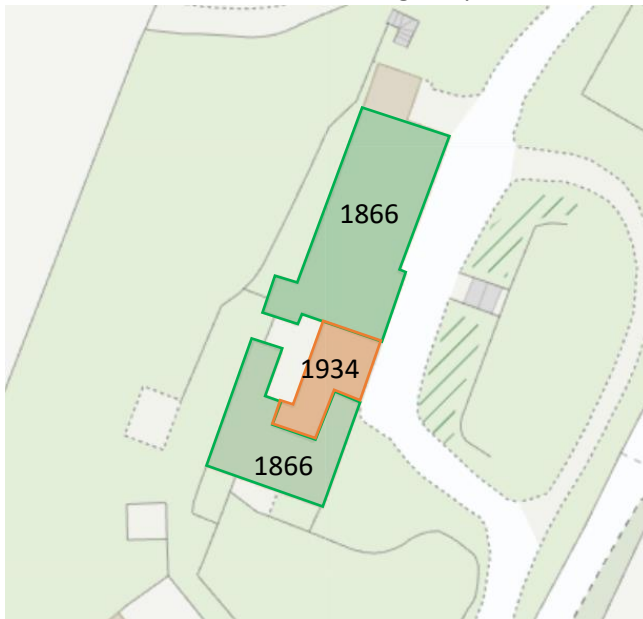
I provide the following background information on its significance.

**History and significance**

- The main house and the stable block are contemporary with each other, being commissioned by Alfred Hodgetts in 1866.
- There is some suggestion that it was built on the foundations of, and named after, an earlier building of 1688, however I have never found any evidence of such a building, nor observed any earlier fabric at cellar level.
- The following map was surveyed in 1898, some thirty years after the building was built, and shows it essentially as originally constructed:



- The C-shaped building to the south-west would have contained stables and loose boxes, dog kennels, tack rooms, and presumably a coach house. One can see from this plan the intimate way in which the two buildings connect in layout and function.
- In 1882, Alfred Hodgetts provided an endowment to construct the Liberal Club on Finkle Street, which is informally known as Hodgetts' Club and now serves as the village hall and Masonic Lodge. Both Hodgetts and Abbot's Court are important parts of the heritage of St Bees, and are locally highly valued, despite the neglect Abbot's Court has experienced over recent years.
- Abbot's Court was purchased at auction in 1930 by Harry Ashley Brownrigg, a well-known local name whose family ran a coaching business at Egremont. He converted the building to a hotel and used the stable block as part of the coaching business.
- In the auction particulars of 1930, the stable to the south-west is described as consisting of "a large coach house which would provide accommodation for two motor cars, stable for five horses, and two loose boxes with loft and harness room above the stables. There were also, "a separate building which can be used as a garage with fruit house above [, a] wash-house with drying room above, potting shed and dog kennels completes the outbuildings, which are conveniently placed around a central yard."
- This is when the 1930s date comes from – it refers to an infill section constructed between the stables and the house, leaving the plan as follows:



- The front of this infill section, which is of fine Gothic red sandstone to match the rest of the building, and was clearly an expensive job, features a crest with the inscription "HAB 1934". The purpose of this was to add additional bedrooms to expand the hotel. These were at first floor, with the ground floor containing a gothic carriage arch for access to the rear of the property.
- In the early 1950s, the property was sold by being split into shares and the shares purchased by Old St Beghians, former students of the school. It was thus collectively owned.
- In the 1970s, this group of owners transferred their ownership to St Bees School, and it became a boarding house. This is within living memory, and contributes to the ways in which the building has heritage attachment to its local community.
- A period of decline set in towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the building has been vacant since 2015 with only minimal maintenance.

- The building had been added to Cumbria’s draft Local List of non-designated heritage assets for its locally significant architectural, historic and communal heritage values.

## Conclusion

- The reduction in stature of the building will entail harm to its significance, both from the loss of the stable block, which attests to the building’s original plan and usage, and the later infill section, which provides context to its use as a hotel.
- It is apparent from the photos and from a site visit I previously undertook that the section of the building under consideration had fallen into a poor state of repair.
- Would it be viable to retain the façade of the stable block and infill section, which are of good quality red sandstone, and make use of the footprint to the rear for a new structure?
- In the event of the demolition taking place and prior approval being required, I suggest requiring a recording to be made prior to demolition equivalent to Level 2 in Historic England’s four-level recording structure.
- I also suggest retaining and re-using whatever good quality materials can be salvaged from the structure, including red sandstone, slate and potentially timber and metal features.

Thanks to Donald Brownrigg for sharing a copy of the auction particulars from 1930, which helped me in documenting the building’s history.

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## Relevant Policies and Guidance:

NPPF para. 210 states that “In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation...”

Paragraph 216 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states the effect on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account when making decisions.

The Copeland area’s Local Plan contains a number of relevant policies:

- BE1 provides for the preservation and enhancement of built heritage assets by:
  - Requiring a heritage impact assessment or heritage statement where the proposal would affect a heritage asset;
  - Giving great weight to the conservation of Copeland’s designated heritage assets when decision making;
  - Ensuring that new development is sympathetic to local character and history;
  - Supporting proposals for the appropriate reuse of vacant historic buildings, recognising that putting buildings into viable uses consistent with their conservation can help sustain and enhance their significance;
  - Supporting proposals that increase the enhancement, promotion and interpretation of Copeland’s architectural and archaeological resources;
  - Strengthening the distinctive character of Copeland’s settlements, through the application of high-quality design and architecture that respects this character and enhances the setting of heritage assets.

- BE2 states that development should preserve or enhance designated heritage assets (or important archaeological sites) and their settings. The more important the asset, the greater weight that will be given to its conservation. Proposals that better reveal the significance of heritage assets will be supported in principle. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset will require clear and convincing justification.
- BE4 refers to non-designated heritage assets, saying that development should preserve or enhance such heritage assets and their settings. Proposals that better reveal the significance of heritage assets will be supported in principle. Proposals affecting non-designated heritage assets or their settings should demonstrate that consideration has been given to their significance.
- DS4 outlines the Council's expectation that all new development will meet high-quality design standards that contribute positively to the health and well-being of residents.
- DS5 refers to the importance of achieving good standards of design in both hard and soft landscaping.

Sammy Woodford

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