Ellie Jones

From: Elgan Jones <elgan.jones@spab.org.uk>
Sent: 14 April 2026 11:48
To: Tyler Fox
Subject: Pickhill Farm, Pickhill, Cross Lanes, Wrexham

Your reference: P/2026/0208

Our reference: 217040

Pickhill Farm, Pickhill, Cross Lanes, Wrexham

Dear Tyler,

Thank you for consulting the SPAB over the proposals to undertake internal and external alterations to the grade II listed farmhouse. Whilst we have not had an opportunity to visit the site, we have reviewed the documentation submitted online and would like to provide the following observations.

The SPAB recognises the need to address the structural defects affecting the building and supports a programme of repair and rehabilitation to bring the farmhouse back into use. However, several elements of the current proposals cannot be supported due to their impact on the character, fabric, and significance of this Grade II listed structure. We believe these concerns can be resolved through relatively minor design changes and additional information that would not compromise the intended use or overall aspirations for the farmhouse.

For clarity, we have included observations on individual aspects of the proposals.

<u>Demolition of the brick lean-to structure on the western side of the house</u>

We have no objections the proposed demolition of the late 20th century brick lean-to structure located on the western side of the house. This is of detrimental significance and its removal provide and opportunity to expose the 18th / 19th century elevation behind. The condition of the exposed elevation will need to be assess following the demolition works and a schedule of repairs may need to be submitted to the local authority depending on the findings and level of repair intervention.

<u>Introduction of a new timber framed porch to the western elevation.</u>

Whilst we are open to the introduction of a porch which will provide cover from the elements before entering the inner hall and help to define a point of entrance to the farmhouse, we believe that there is an opportunity to revise the design and scale of the current design so that it is more sympathetic to its context. The current design, scale and proportions of an exposed traditional truss bare no relationship to this context. The agent should explore alternative designs and submit the options considered along with justification for the proposals. We would suggest that the agent includes an option for a smaller traditional timber framed canopy (with no posts) limited to the door as a baseline option for comparison in the study.

The red brick boundary wall is noted in the HIA as being repaired but is not shown on the proposed floor plans. It is important to understand how this wall relates to the overall design of the porch and can contribute to the sense of arrival and defining of the new entrance. We note, a proposed site plan does not appear to be included within this application.

Structural repairs to the northeast range.

The submitted documentation demonstrates the need to address the structural failure of the north-east wall of the 19th-century range, and the proposed methodology appears broadly appropriate. However, it is unclear what level of recording is to be undertaken before any partial dismantling occurs. Accurate reinstatement relies on thorough pre-works recording, and this should be clearly specified.

The application is also vague regarding the reinstatement itself. We assume the intention is to reuse the existing masonry, but any new stone required should be agreed with the local conservation officer through an approved sample. Clearer detail on these points is essential to ensure the work aligns with good conservation practice.

Building to the north west of the farmhouse

The photographs of the site suggest that there is a single storey pitched slate roof structure abutting the northwest corner of the farmhouse however this does not appear on the existing of proposed floor plans. Clarity should be sought on this.

The proposed boot room

The proposed boot room and cupboard introduce new partitioning across the assumed early-17th-century oven, concealing this important feature. Hiding the oven obscures significant early fabric and undermines the legibility of the building's historic development. The SPAB approach stresses minimal intervention and the need to keep historic features visible so their evidence remains readable. Enclosing the oven conflicts with these principles and results in an unnecessary loss of interpretive value.

We therefore strongly object to this element of the application and recommend revising the proposals so the oven remains visible, conserved, and appreciable within the room.

New dining room extension.

The location of the proposed kitchen is identified in the HIA as forming the earliest portion of the farmhouse dating from the 16th century. Although it notes that there have been some external alterations to the outer wall. the interior retains the deep timber beams and joist ceiling as well as other architectural and historic details which contribute to the character of the space. The remove a large portion of the 16th century wall (which includes a window and door) by introducing a large steel lintel and helifix ties will substantially harm the character of the interior, the earliest fabric of the site and can not be supported. In short, we can not support any proposals which seek to open this wall especially when there is a door providing access in this location.

We have significant concerns over the need and justification for a new extension to form a dining room. The ground floor plan includes four other rooms (lounge, parlour, snug and a games room) and it is unclear why one of these rooms can not support the funding of a dining room.

The information provided regarding the new extension is limited and does not allow us to fully assess the impact of the proposals. No external elevations of the proposals are included within this application. The proposed location also abuts and conceals the earliest two phases of the property (the late 16th century and early 17th century cross wing addition).

At present, we have concerns regarding the proposals, lack of information submitted and justification for this aspect of the application.

Proposed upgrade of the floors

The proposals involve lifting all existing ground-floor surfaces and installing a new concrete sub-floor across the entire footprint. Introducing a non-vapour-permeable, insulated concrete build-up raises significant concerns, particularly the risk of displacing moisture laterally into the base of the masonry walls. Impermeable floors in historic buildings can trap moisture, force it into adjacent fabric, and disrupt the building's natural ability to breathe. Given these well recognised risks, we question why a vapour-permeable alternative, such as a limecrete floor build-up, has not been considered. A breathable floor construction would be more compatible with the building's traditional materials and moisture behaviour and could avoid the potential harm associated with a concrete slab.

First Floor layout

We have concerns over the impact of introducing so many new partitions and subdivisions of existing rooms at first floor level and the impact that this will have on both the character and quality of spaces. It would be beneficial to understand the other options considered at first floor level and any opportunities to lessen the overall impact. The photographs included within the HIA demonstrates that some of the interiors retain a wealth of historic fabric and details which may be affected by the proposals.

Window Details

The proposals note that the new windows are to be as specified on window detail drawing however this does not appear to have been included. It is unclear from the information submitted which windows are to be retained and repaired and which shall be replaced. We would strongly advice that a suitably qualified historic building professional is consulted on the window designs for the different locations and phasing of the house. The windows designs and style are likely to differ across the site.

We trust our comments are helpful to you.

Kind regards,

Elgan

Elgan Jones

Casobework Officer

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