

BLOCKHOUSE COTTAGES,TRESCO

HERITAGE, SETTING & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Blockhouse Cottages (Google Maps 2021)

I. Introduction

This Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared by Llewellyn Harker Lowe Architects in support of an application to replace the existing Blockhouse Cottages with a single self-catered unit with 5/6 bedrooms, each with a bathroom, and shared spaces, including a large drawing room, a kitchen and dining space, spa facilities, a separate studio space and separate gate house building. The applicant is the Tresco Estate Partnership.

This report has been written to provide an overview of the heritage context of the site and the impact on the island character and setting. This establishes the basis to carry out an assessment of significance and heritage impact assessment of the proposals, which will be assessed in accordance to the relevant local and national policy.

The Blockhouse Cottages site does not contain any assets that have been identified as being of special interest or significance. The existing row of cottages are unlisted but are within the setting of the Old Block House, a grade-II listed structure and scheduled ancient monument, and the broader conservation area, and in the setting of the settlement of Old Grimsby Bay. Only heritage assets regarded as having the potential to be impacted, either through proximity or visibility, by the proposals have been identified and included in this assessment. The visual impact assessment appraises the impact on immediate setting and wider landscape. Identified heritage assets will be analysed further in terms of impact on significance.

2. Site and Context

The application site covers an area of approximately a quarter of a hectare and is located on the east coast of the island, at the southern end of Old Grimsby Bay. The Blockhouse Cottages are located approximately 80m to the south west of the Old Block House.

Blockhouse Cottages are a row of unlisted, mid-19th century cottages, which are characterised by their traditional linear form with two gable ends, projecting service extensions and a single storey lean-to at each end. The slate roofline is punctuated with five regular chimney stacks and the elevations have been covered in modern pebble dash render. The conservation area appraisal describes the common and traditional form of this type of building across the archipelagos as *‘isolated terraces of houses...usually late-19th century and are built straight, along the contour, usually below the skyline.’*

The following section provides an overview of the site’s historic context, including a brief history and description of identified designated heritage assets, and the characteristics of the setting that contribute to important views, which include the Blockhouse Cottages .’

Brief History of Tresco

There is evidence of prehistoric inhabitation across the Isles of Scilly, with evidence of human activity on Tresco dating back to c.8000BC. Iron Age and Roman sites have been excavated but the islands are first recorded in the tenth century, when they were subdued by King Athelstan (925-939). It appears that before or during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066), some of the islands had been given to monks or hermits, who lived on the Island of St Nicholas (now Tresco). King Henry I (1100-1135) granted to the Abbot of Tavistock all of the churches of ‘Suliye’ and the land which had belonged to the monks, or hermits. The islands had been part of the Crown since the Norman Conquest and have been part of the Duchy of Cornwall since it was established in 1337 by Edward III (1327-1377), for his son and heir, Prince Edward.

The islands were of considerable importance during the civil war, when in 1645 they afforded a temporary protection to Prince Charles and his associates. In 1649 Sir John Grenville, who was governor of the Isles of Scilly and instrumental in bringing about the Restoration, built fortifications, with the intention of holding them for Prince Charles, but the islands eventually succumbed to Parliament. Grenville’s standard was one of the last rallying points for the Royalists.

The settlements on Tresco have largely grown around the bays of Old Grimsby and New Grimsby, with development running between the two. Tresco Priory was formed in 969, a monastic settlement at the southern end of the island, which now form part of the Abbey Gardens and Tresco Abbey, which was the home of Augustus Smith in the mid-19th century, the first proprietor of Tresco.

Today, Tresco is a family run island providing high quality self-catering accommodation and facilities for visitors. All of the properties, including the Blockhouse Cottages, are owned and managed by the Tresco Estate. The island has a community of around 150 permanent residents, with a number of the families having lived on the island for generations.

Brief History of the Old Block House and Old Grimsby Bay

The Old Block House was built between 1548 and 1554 as a defensive fort to protect the adjacent harbour of Old Grimsby. The structure is one of a number of forts built on the Isles of Scilly during the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I. However, the fort was not in active use until the English Civil War in the 17th century, when a Royalist garrison was defending the islands against attack by Parliamentarians, led by the famous Admiral Blake. Tresco was the first island to be attacked and taken with relative ease and was successively used as a base to attack the remaining islands.

Ordnance Survey Maps demonstrate that the settlement around Old Grimsby Bay was established by 1888 and has changed very little since [Figure 1]. The buildings in the bay are mainly located to the north of the central quay, which sits at the end of the road to Dolphin Town, forming a cluster of buildings. The remains of the Old Block House are not labelled, and the adjacent land at this time was used as a quarry. The Blockhouse Cottages are labelled and are shown as having a series of outbuildings to the south. By the 1906 Map, the remains of the Old Block House area clearly labelled, as are the Porth Mellin Carn and Middle Carn to the north, demonstrating a rise in interest and recording of antiquity towards the end of the 19th century [Figure 2]. The Blockhouse Cottages are labelled to the west but the series of outbuildings to the south have been removed. The settlement to the north of Old Grimsby Bay and towards Dolphin Town, remain largely unchanged, as is shown in the 1980s Ordnance Survey Map [Figure 3].

Setting of Old Grimsby Bay and the Old Block House

The Isles of Scilly are unusual, as there is one single conservation area that includes all of the islands, under the jurisdiction of the Council of the Isles of Scilly, designated in 1975. Since 1976 the Islands have been designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and defined as a Heritage Coast. The majority of the listed buildings on Tresco are concentrated in the centre of the Island, between Old Grimsby and New Grimsby, and in the Abbey complex to the south [Figure 4].

The Local Plan identifies Archaeological Constraint Areas on Tresco, which includes the area immediately around the Old Block House but this does now include the area around the Blockhouse Cottages (Figure 4).

The two bays of Old Grimsby and New Grimsby, creates a natural harbour on either side of the island, around which harbours have developed. Central services used by both communities developed between the two settlements forming the area known as Dolphin Town, situated on the ridge between Old and New Grimsby. The bays are characterised by their two storey, granite houses, and their close proximity to the shoreline.



Figure 1 - 1888 Ordnance Survey Map (National Library of Scotland)

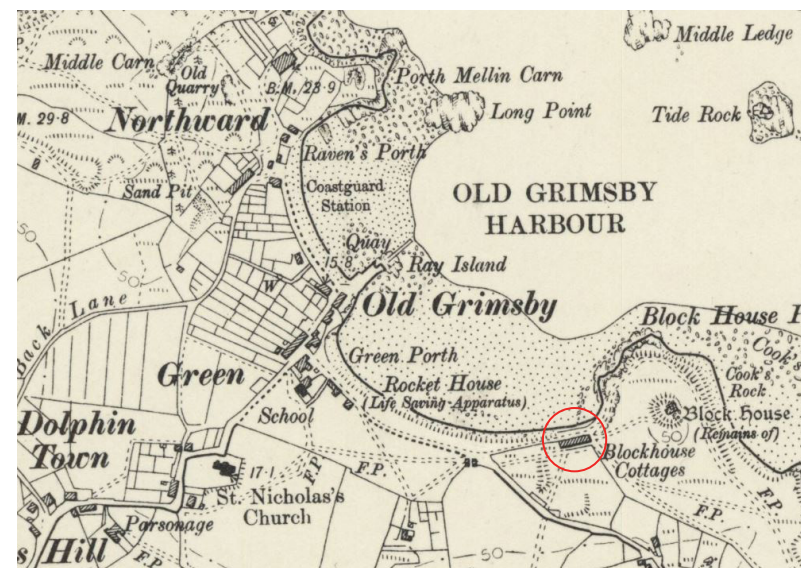


Figure 2 - 1906 Ordnance Survey Map (National Library of Scotland)

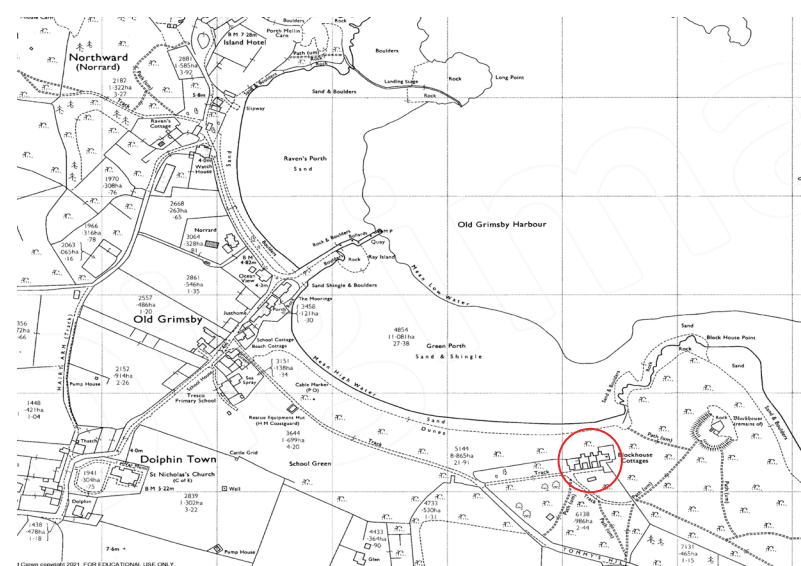
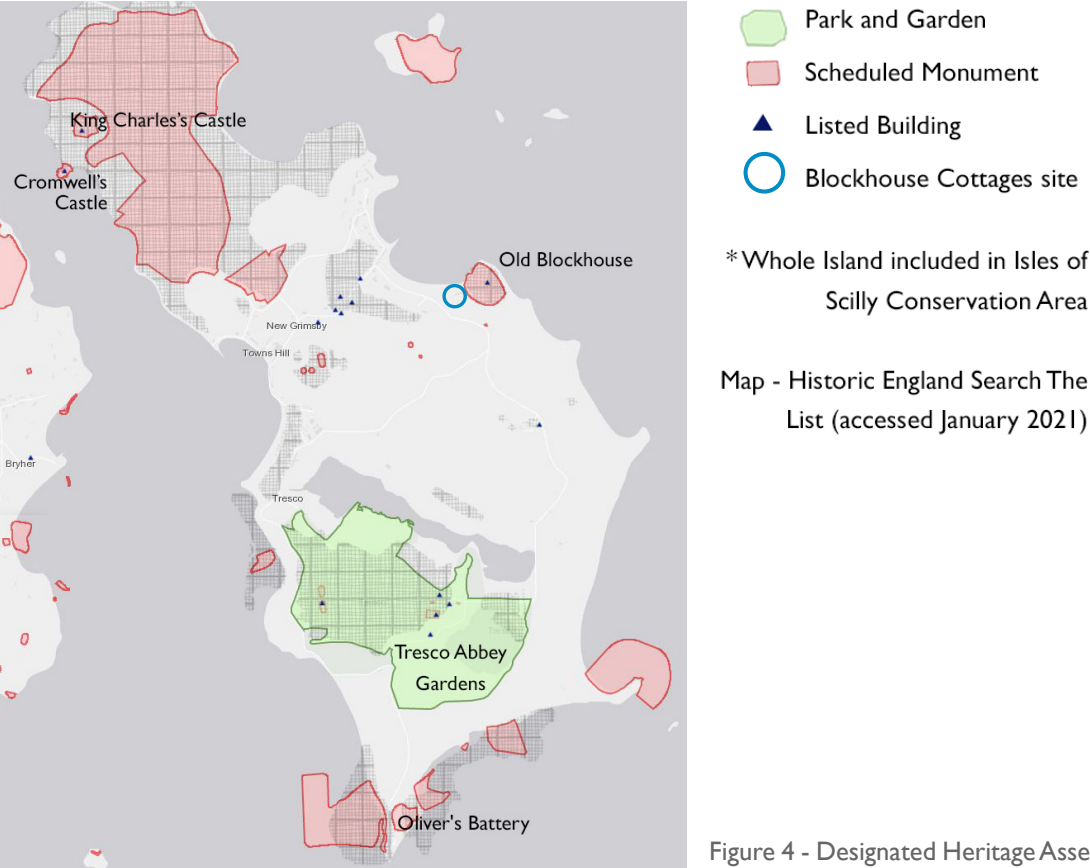


Figure 3 - 1980 Ordnance Survey Map (National Library of Scotland)

The raised outcrop at the southern end of Old Grimsby Bay provided an ideal natural position for a defensive structure to be located. The strategic site commands a field of fire to the north-west, across the harbour of Old Grimsby Bay and across one of several entry points to the Scilly archipelago between Treco and Tean. Today, this strategic positioning translates as a series of key views towards the sea and across Treco in all directions, making the Old Block House a key feature in the landscape.

The Blockhouse Cottages are located at the south east reaches of Old Grimsby Bay, to the south west of the Old Block House. In comparison to the development around the west and north reached of Old Grimsby Bay, the distribution of buildings to the south of the bay is sparse, including the Blockhouse Cottages and two modern agricultural buildings sit back from the shoreline.

The area surrounding the Blockhouse Cottages is described in the Conservation Area Appraisal as being located in a character area of ‘low lying dunes and heath.’ To the north east, the ground level increases to the site of the Old Block House, which is located in a character area of ‘headland and hilltop heathland,’ and is a dominant feature in the landscape. From this site, Old Grimsby Bay curves round to the north east and is characterised as a ‘sand and shingle beach.’ The land to the south of Blockhouse Cottages is ‘open pasture fields.’ These character areas come together at the site of Blockhouse Cottages and the cottages sit within a number of key views to and from the Old Block House and Old Grimsby Bay.



3. Assessment of Significance

The Isles of Scilly Conservation Area has a unique character and distinctive identity, derived from each islands position and shape, and how inhabitants on the islands have adapted and changed to utilise the available resources to create and defend settlements. It is from this continuous development that the significance of the islands manifests, and can be understood, through the landscape and buildings.

The significance of Old Grimsby Bay is found in its form as an off-island quayside settlement, which is unusual for Scilly and suggests that its existence is because of the association of these quays with the political administration throughout the history of Scilly. The significance is found in the form and materials of the traditional two storey largely granite houses, set back from the shoreline, and the projecting quay in the centre of the bay, which demonstrates how the settlement has developed around this natural resource. Significance is present in the setting of Old Grimsby Bay, through the form of the bay, extending from the old Blockhouse to the south east, past the central quay to the rocky outcrop and Porth Mellin Carn to the north. This significance can be perceived from the surrounding landscape, which includes views to and from the Old Block House and Blockhouse Cottages.

The significance of the Old Block House is found in its built form as a raised gun platform, with adjoining living quarters and its strategic positioning at the south east of Old Grimsby Bay. Significance is found in the use of the building, which was initially built between 1548-52, in response to threats from the French. However, the fortification was first used in action during the English Civil War and is recorded to have been in use until 1750. This significance of the Old Block House is intrinsically linked to its setting, as through the relationship of building, the sea and the surrounding landscape, it is possible to understand the original purpose of the building.

Therefore, it is considered that Blockhouse Cottages make a modest contribution to the setting of Grimsby Bay and the Old Block House through their exterior form. Their modern exterior pebble dash elevations arguably detract from the setting of Old Grimsby Bay and the Old Block House.

4. Proposed Scheme and Impact Assessment

Description of the proposals and Impact on the Heritage Assets and Landscape Setting

The proposals have been developed to replace the existing buildings but retain the characteristics that contribute to the conservation area setting and to the key views towards the Old Block House. A full description of the proposals and design development are included in the Design, Access and Planning Statement.

The form of the proposed building is lifted directly from the existing row of cottages that it would replace, in recognition of the modest contribution that the existing cottages make to the setting of the Old Block House, Grimsby Bay and the surrounding landscape.

The visual impact of replacing the existing cottages would be minimal as externally, the characteristics of the existing cottages would be maintained; a long linear building, with a pitched slate roof, five regular chimney stacks and low level single storey service extensions that would project perpendicular to the row. The length of the 2 storey element of the existing cottages would be reduced, which would mitigate the small increase in length of the single storey addition that includes the drawing room and the kitchen and dining room.

The character of this development therefore maintains the characteristics described in the conservation area appraisal; *'isolated terraces of houses...usually late-19th century and are built straight, along the contour, usually below the skyline.'*

The ridge height of the proposed building would be less than 1m higher than the existing cottages. However, any perceived harm on the setting would arguably be mitigated by the benefits that the small increase in height would bring; raising the floor level to mitigate risk of flooding and allow an insulated ground floor, and raising the roof level to allow insulation to be installed, both of which would allow the proposed building to have a considerably higher environmental performance than the existing. Natural indigenous materials and finishes would be reinstated.

The building takes its material palette from the traditional vernacular on the island and the pattern of development that has created a Tresco Style, using a palette of granite, timber boarding and glass to provide continuity of character. The proposed building would continue this pattern of development, with Tresco Estate making significant investment in high quality materials.

The impact of the proposals on the setting of Old Grimsby Bay and the Old Block House are described and assessed in the following section, which focuses on four key views that include the Blockhouse Cottages.



Figure 5 - Key Views

Key View I

Figure 6.1 shows the existing view of the Blockhouse Cottages from the central pier that projects away from the land in Old Grimsby Bay, which includes the Old Blockhouse on the raised headland to the east. The key aspect of this view is the relationship of the existing cottages and the Old Block House. The Old Block House sits above the cottages, which are located where the sandy beach and dunes turns to headland, as the landscape gradually rises to the east, with screening to the south from the trees. In this view the cottages are characterised as low level and linear, with the chimneys creating a regular rhythm in the landscape. Between the Old Block House and the cottages is uninterrupted open space.

Figure 6.2 shows the proposed view of the Blockhouse Cottages from the central pier in Old Grimsby Bay. The relationship between the cottages and the Old Block House described above would be maintained, as would the character of the cottages as low level and linear, with the regular rhythm of chimneys recreated. The proposals would have a minimal impact on the skyline, as the building silhouette is obscured by the headland and established woodland behind the row. The proposed annexe would add a building to the setting of the Old Block House and Old Grimsby Bay. However, the visual impact of this would be minimal, and would arguably be mitigated by the traditional, low slung form and materials, and its position in the landscape. The use of a dark green profiled roof sheeting would further help the new annexe to blend unobtrusively with the landscape setting.



Figure 6.1 - Existing view of Blockhouse Cottages



Figure 6.2 - Proposed view of Blockhouse Cottages

Key View 2

Figure 7.1 shows the existing view from the Old Block House, looking west towards the centre of the island, with the stretch of sandy beach and dunes of Old Grimsby Bay to the east. The foreground of the view is the open, raised plateau that the Old Block House sits on, which drops away as the bay curves to the east and gently rises to the west towards the centre of the island, characterised as open fields. The existing cottages sit at low level above the dunes, forming part of a sparse pattern of development at the southern reaches of Old Grimsby Bay. The cottages are sheltered from this view by existing planting on the western boundary.

Figure 7.2 shows the proposed view from the Old Block House, looking west towards the centre of the island. The relationship of the cottages, the surrounding landscape and sparse buildings would be maintained. The annexe, in the form of a Scilly's gig shed, would be visible from the Old Block House, but the visual impact is minimal and its character and form has been designed to be appropriate to this particular setting. Any impact would arguably be mitigated by the gig shed reading as a perpendicular element to the cottages, like the extant projecting elements on the north elevation, and not as a separate building. The proposed separate studio building to the south of the cottages would not be visible from this aspect. Removal of accrued garden paraphernalia and modern structures associated with the existing row and their gardens would also make a significance improvement to this outlook.



Figure 7.1 - Existing view of Blockhouse Cottages



Figure 7.2 - Proposed view of Blockhouse Cottages

Key View 3

Figure 8.1 shows the existing view from the raised headland above the cottages to the south, looking back towards the northern end of Old Grimsby Bay and the rocky outcrops of Men-a-vaur and Golden Ball beyond. The foreground is open fields, which is bordered with trees to the north east. The cottages appear in a break in the trees, as low and linear in form, with the chimneys creating a regular rhythm against the backdrop of the sea and the rocky outcrops beyond. Because the land rises to the south, the cottage row is viewed against the sea rather than silhouetted against the skyline.

Figure 8.2 shows the proposed view from the raised headland above the cottages to the south, looking back towards the northern end of Old Grimsby Bay and the rocky outcrops of Men-a-vaur and Golden Ball beyond. The relationship of the cottages to the trees and sea and rock outcrops beyond would be maintained, as would the linear character and rhythm of the chimneys. The proposed separate studio building to the south of the cottages would not be visible from this aspect.



Figure 8.1 - Existing view of Blockhouse Cottages



Figure 8.2 - Proposed view of Blockhouse Cottages

5. Justification of the Proposals

Local Policy

The design of the building has taken into account the characteristics and context of the area, in terms of important buildings (The Old Block House), landscape character of the setting and important views, in accordance with Policy OE7 Development Affecting Heritage. The form, scale, massing and character of the building respond directly to the buildings that it would replace, preserving the vernacular character of the building. The contribution of the building to the conservation area setting would be equal to the contribution of the existing building, through the recreation of the vernacular form and character of the existing cottages. In addition, this contribution would be significantly enhanced, as the existing cottages are finished in a modern pebble dash render and the proposed row would be finished in traditional granite, making a positive contribution to the quality and character of the conservation area setting. The proposed building would not detract from the significance of the setting of, or views to and from, the Old Block House

National Policy

In accordance with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the special architectural and historic interest of the Old Block House, and the setting of the listed building and conservation area, would be preserved and arguably modestly enhanced by the proposed scheme. In accordance with the terminology of the National Planning Policy Framework, it is considered that the proposed work would not cause any harm to the significance of the Old Block House and the setting of the listed building and conservation area. In addition, the scheme would provide the following benefits:

- The setting would arguably be significantly enhanced by the existing pebble dash render elevations being replaced with traditional granite elevations.
- The replacement of a barely habitable row of units with an energy efficient and energy generating building.
- Provision of an asset that will contribute to the island economy by improving and diversifying the available tourist offering.
- Reduced flood risks.

The proposals are therefore considered to be the type of sustainable development for which the NPPF establishes a strong presumption and it would align with relevant national and local policy. As such, the proposals are considered to be acceptable in heritage terms.

6. Conclusion

The design of the building has taken into account the characteristics and historic context of the area, including; the relationship of the site to the Old Block House; the landscape character of the setting and the conservation area. The form, scale, massing and character of the proposed building is a facsimile of the buildings that it would replace, preserving the vernacular character of the building in the immediate setting. This has been analysed through an appraisal of the setting and the key views identified. The proposed materials reflect the traditional and vernacular style present across the island, ensuring that the modest changes would be appropriate to the local character and setting.

This document has identified and described the heritage assets that could be affected by the proposals. The assessment has considered their significance and the potential impact of the proposals on their significance, in accordance with local and national policy. The proposals would maintain the modest contribution, and arguably improve upon the contribution that the existing cottages make to the setting of the Old Block House and the broader conservation area, and are therefore considered to be acceptable in heritage terms.

APPENDIX I - LISTING DESCRIPTION

Heritage Category: Listed Building
 Grade: II
 List Entry Number: 1219196
 Date first listed: 14-Dec-1992
 Statutory Address: THE BLOCKHOUSE

TRESCO

SV81NE The Blockhouse 1358-011119

II

Blockhouse. Probably 1548-52. Roughly coursed granite rubble. Rectangular plan. Top of the platform is enclosed by walls, originally surmounted by a parapet with embrasures. Stairs to east. Winder stairs to original lean-to in south-east corner, with plain granite open fireplace; remains of later room constructed in south-east corner of platform. Covers Old Grimsby Harbour, and is probably one of the blockhouses built on TreSCO under Sir Francis Fleming, and later John Kiligrew, captain of Pendennis Castle, between 1548 and 1552. Scheduled as an Ancient Monument. (P Laws: The Buildings of Scilly: Redruth: 1980-: 6; B.H. St.J.O'Neil: Isles of Scilly: London (HMSO): 1950-: 20).

Listing NGR: SV8973015462

Appendix 2 - Sources and Bibliography

National Library of Scotland - Historic Maps
 English Heritage, Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Research Framework (2012)
 Council of the Isles of Scilly, The Heritage and Cultural Strategy for the Isles of Scilly (2004)

Appendix 3 – Planning Policy and Guidance

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
 The National Planning Policy Framework (updated 2019)
 Historic England: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning (March 2015)
 Historic England: Conservation Principles and Assessment (2008)
 The Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings document produced by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2010)
 Isles of Scilly Local Plan (2015-2030) Historic Environment Topic Paper