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15th June 2018
W01719/mgl/as

Dear Sirs

Reading, 38 Southampton Street, RG1 2QL – Report on further investigation structural survey

Introduction

Michael Lakey CEng MIStructE of Scott White and Hookins, undertook a structural inspection of the exposed structural elements at the above property on 6th December 2017. A further instruction was received 31 May 2018 to undertake a reinspection to determine any deterioration has occurred. A further inspection was undertaken 8 June 2018 to review the ongoing condition of the building.

This letter report should be read in conjunction with Scott White Hookins survey report for the adjoining Red Lion Public House surveyed on 29th August 2017. This report provides survey details for the subsequently acquired adjoining property at 38 Southampton Street. Both properties were re-inspected on 8th June 2018.

This report must not be assumed to be a full structural survey, such as that defined by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

General Description

The property comprises a "two up two down" semi-detached house adjoining the Red Lion public house (photo 1). The property is of loadbearing masonry and timber frame with external elevations of rendered brickwork. The roof is pitched front to back under a plain clay tiled roof (photos 2 and 3). There is a small single storey projection to the rear (photo 4).

The age of the property is unknown but is likely to be late Victorian.

External Observations

There are several hairline to 1mm wide horizontal / stepped cracks to the external render (photo 5). There is also some cracking and disturbance to the roof verge to the end gable wall.

The flank wall of the single storey projection was of face brickwork. Frost damage

was noted to the surface of bricks (photo 6). There is an external, semi-basement boiler room to the rear of the property partly extending under the stairs of the property (photo 7).

The floor of the rear single storey projection is also partly below external ground level with steps up to the back door (photo 8). Externally a section of foundation was exposed to the rear projection above the line of the side path to the boiler room, which is approximately at internal floor level. The path then steps down further into the boiler room.

There is a very large Buddleia within 200mm of the end gable wall of number 38, which appears to be on the neighbour's property. There is a small service building on the neighbour's property in close proximity to the end gable wall of number 38 (photo 9). This building was at a slight angle to the end wall with the front edge touching the gable; with a flashing installed to the gable wall the rear edge was approximately 300mm clear of the building. There is a Buddleia plant growing out of the rain waster pipe hopper, to the front elevation, at the junction with The Red Lion; the shrub has grown significantly since the previous inspection (photo 20).

To the rear of number 38 there is a long very narrow garden extending beyond the public house and beyond the building at the rear. The garden then opens out into a larger outside open space. Several of the fence panels were missing allowing access through the rear (photo 10). The central narrow section of garden is inaccessible due to dumped garden cuttings and other rubbish (photo 11).

A short section of the rear garden close to the house has been laid with large shingle / stone rejects. A section projecting foundation and external wall is partly exposed through the shingle. The single storey lean-too appears to be partly built off the old external wall. The section of foundation is built on rubble and loose debris and the slab has become partially undermined (photo 12).

Internal Observations

The exposed timber elements have been painted with a thick layer of purple gloss paint. The thickness of the paint partially obscures the condition of the timbers and defects could only be fully determined with very close inspection (Photo 13).

An entrance lobby has been formed inside the front door, this appears to be of fairly recent construction. The remainder of the ground floor of the building was open with a kitchenette along the end gable wall. There is a very large chimney breast, which has been clad in unpainted timber boarding.

There is a timber frame with two timber posts within the living space towards the rear, adjacent to the stairs. There is also a timber beam spanning across the room onto the chimney breast towards the front. The front beam has a large shake running through the centre along the line of mortice joints. The floor joists are of random timbers and split logs. The joists have a mortice connection into the floor beam. The tenon is formed horizontally at the bottom edge of the joists. Less than a third of the joists depth has been retained.

The underside of the floor boarding to the first floor was exposed at one location, where the plaster was locally removed. The floor above has been over boarded and the new boarding could be seen where the original boarding has decayed. There is no edge joist to support the floor boards; boards are notched directly into the wall (photo 14).

The section of first floor to the rear of the timber frame appears to have been replaced with new joists.

No major structural defects were observed to the rear single storey extension, internally.

At first floor the ceiling is very low. The doors have been cut down to fit in the space. At one location the top of the door has been cut out in the shape of the timber joists so the door can open (photo 15).

The structure over the first floor follows a similar profile to the structure above ground floor with a timber beam spanning onto the chimney breast and a timber frame towards the rear on the line of the head of stair and internal partition. The joists have been connected with the same horizontal tenon. In some locations the timber tenon has failed and cracked the timber (photo 16).

The first floor is very uneven. There is a disconcerting slope to the landing at the top of the stairs, rising more than 100mm over the landing width. To accommodate the slope there is a triangular step at the door threshold of the main bedroom; approximately 75mm high at one end diminishing to no step at the other (photo 17). There is also a step up into the second bedroom.

Some damp has been noted to the external gable wall and a diagonal crack was noted above the entrance door. Otherwise no major defects have been observed within the rear bedroom.

Opening of the loft hatch reveals a loft access ladder. The loft has been converted into a room above the central section of the space (Photo 18). There is no window opening to the space. The floor is also very uneven with a similar disconcerting slope.

The timber lintel over the external window of the main bedroom slopes approximately 75mm from one side to the other. The timber lintel is decayed with extensive woodworm.

The condition of the building remains similar to the previous survey. Increased damp staining was noted to the first floor rear bedroom wall (photo 19)

Conclusions

The floor and ceiling joists are of poor quality timber and poor condition. The thick paint obscures their true condition and the random size, some of split logs triangular in section, so it will be very difficult to determine their section properties to assess their strength. Considering the size, span and condition observed it is unlikely that the floor joists could be proven adequate by calculation for domestic floor loading. The joists are connected to the main beams with mortice and tenon joints. The horizontal mortice connecting the joists to the main beams is less than half the timber cross section; this remaining cross section is inadequate for support and in some locations the mortice connections have failed. The floor boarding notched into the wall is not satisfactory and clearly decayed where exposed. In view of the above it is considered likely that the original floor joists will need to be replaced.

The ceiling heights at first floor are very low. It will not be possible to strengthen the floor without increasing the floor depth therefore lowering the ceiling height further. Therefore, in order to provide sufficient headroom is it likely that the roof will need to be removed to place the structure at a higher level.

The raised foundation to the rear appears to be possibly surplus so can be broken out and the wall infilled where concrete is removed.

We consider that major refurbishment of the property, in a manner sufficient to enable warranties to be provided to new residential owners, will require rebuilding of large sections of the building. Elements that will require rebuilding include;

- The first-floor timber structure requires replacement.
- The roof construction will require removal and replacement at a higher level or with raised collar construction.
- Changing of floor levels will require rebuilding of stairs.
- Raising the roof / ceiling level will require increasing the height of external walls.
- Lowering external ground level amending entrance for flush threshold and underpinning of walls to remove / rectify the rear of the lean-too where built off external wall / obstructions.

Previous adaptions and alterations of the property have been poorly executed without Building Control approval. The loft conversion is a prime example. The conversion has no windows or ventilation and it is likely that roof supports were removed to form the space. Further investigation would be required to determine the means of support provided to the roof structure to form the conversion and the extent of remedial works required to strengthen the roof.

It should be emphasised that the property is of a very low grade of construction, both in terms of structural condition and living accommodation provided, for example, the rear access to the property is through the only bathroom. It is unlikely that general refurbishment will improve the accommodation provided.

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We trust this provides the information you require. If you have any question or we can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully

Michael Lakey
Scott White and Hookins LLP

Photographs

Photograph 1

Photograph 2

Photograph 3

Photograph 4

Photograph 5

Photograph 6

Photograph 7

Photograph 8

Photograph 9

Photograph 10

Photograph 11

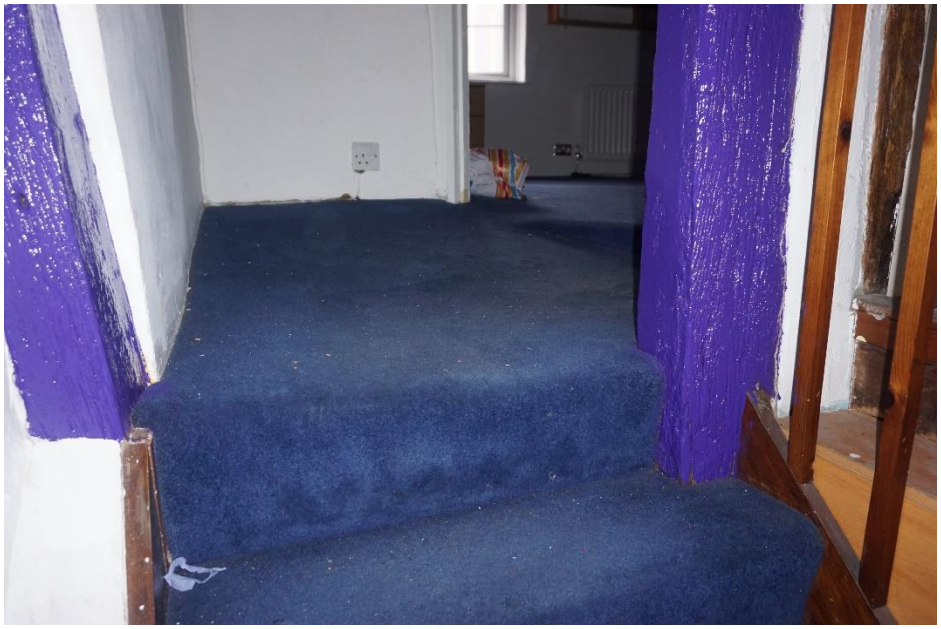
Photograph 12

Photograph 13

Photograph 14

Photograph 15

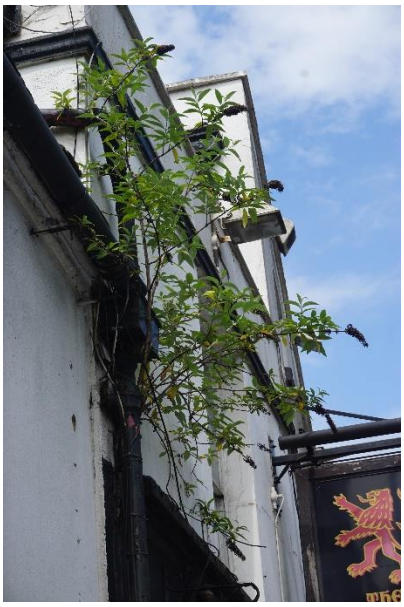
Photograph 16



Photograph 17

Photograph 18

Photograph 19



Photograph 20

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