

Heritage Statement – Former Laboratory, Smethurst Mill, Tottington Road, Bury



1. Introduction

This Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of proposals for **the conversion of the former laboratory building at the former Smethurst Mill, Tottington Road, Bury, into office accommodation**. The purpose of the statement is to identify the heritage significance of the building, which has been included on Bury Metropolitan Borough Council's draft Non-Designated Heritage Asset List, assess the impact of the proposed change of use, and demonstrate how the proposals conserve and, where possible, enhance the significance of the heritage asset in accordance with national and local planning policy.

2. Site Location and Description

Smethurst Mill was located on Tottington Road, Bury, within a historically industrial area associated with textile manufacturing and ancillary processes that developed from the late 18th and 19th centuries. The former laboratory forms part of the wider mill complex and is a small, functional building historically used to support the mill's industrial operations, likely linked to quality control, testing, or administrative functions connected with textile production.

The building is of modest scale and utilitarian character, constructed using traditional local materials typical of Lancashire mill architecture. Its form and detailing reflect its original industrial purpose rather than any decorative or high-style architectural ambition.

3. Planning Policy Context

3.1 National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's approach to conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraphs 199–208 require applicants to describe the significance of heritage assets affected by development proposals and to assess the impact of the proposals on that significance. The NPPF encourages the sustainable use of heritage assets, recognising that viable new uses can be key to their long-term conservation.

3.2 Local Policy

Local planning policy within the Bury Metropolitan Borough Council development plan places emphasis on the retention, reuse, and sympathetic alteration of historic buildings, particularly those associated with the borough's industrial heritage. Development proposals should respect the character, appearance, and historic interest of such buildings and their settings.

4. Heritage Significance

It is believed that the former laboratory building was constructed between **1910 and 1929**, during a later phase of development at Smethurst Mill. This period reflects continued investment in industrial infrastructure as mill

operations became more specialised and increasingly reliant on ancillary functions such as testing, administration, and quality control.

The former laboratory building has been identified by Bury Metropolitan Borough Council and included on the Council's **draft Non-Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA) List**. Its inclusion reflects the building's local historic and architectural interest and its contribution to the understanding of Smethurst Mill as a coherent and evolving industrial complex.

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4.1 Historic Significance

Smethurst Mill is representative of Bury's strong association with the textile industry, which played a central role in the town's economic and social development during the Industrial Revolution and into the 20th century. The former laboratory contributes to an understanding of how mill complexes operated as integrated industrial sites, with ancillary buildings supporting production processes.

While the laboratory itself may not be individually listed or of exceptional architectural merit, it forms part of the historic fabric of the mill complex and contributes to the overall historic character of the site.

4.2 Architectural Significance

The building displays a robust yet restrained architectural character typical of early 20th-century ancillary industrial structures. The elevations are constructed in **red engineering brick**, reflecting a concern for durability and functional performance. Architectural interest is added through the presence of **decorated parapets** to the Stewart Street and Tottington Road elevations, incorporating **brick dentilled eaves** and **stone copings**, which provide a modest level of ornamentation and visual distinction.

The east and south elevations are further articulated by the use of **stone quoins**, subtly emphasising the building's form and corners and contributing to its overall architectural coherence. These features demonstrate a level of design consideration beyond purely utilitarian requirements and enhance the building's contribution to the character and appearance of the wider Smethurst Mill complex.

4.3 Communal and Evidential Value

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As part of a long-standing industrial site, the former laboratory holds communal value through its association with local employment and the shared industrial history of the area. Evidentially, the building illustrates the technological and organisational aspects of historic mill operations.

5. Description of the Proposed Conversion

The proposed development involves the conversion of the former laboratory building into office accommodation. The change of use represents a continuation of the building's historic association with employment and productive activity, aligning well with its original ancillary role within the mill complex.

The proposals focus on sensitive adaptation rather than extensive alteration and include:

- Internal reconfiguration to provide functional office space, meeting modern standards for accessibility, safety, and energy efficiency.
- Retention of the existing external envelope, roof form, in particular the original roof light to the north elevation, and minimal alteration to the structural layout.
- Repair and reuse of original materials wherever feasible, particularly external masonry.
- Limited alterations to existing openings only where necessary to provide appropriate levels of daylight and access, designed to respect the building's industrial character.
- Minimal external intervention to ensure the historic appearance of the building and its contribution to the wider mill complex are preserved.

6. Impact on Heritage Significance

The proposed conversion of the former laboratory building into office accommodation has been carefully designed to preserve its identified heritage significance as a non-designated heritage asset. The building will be **sensitively restored with minimal interventions**, ensuring that its historic fabric, form, and architectural detailing are retained wherever possible.

These works will include the **reintroduction of previously closed or in-filled openings**, based on historic evidence and the existing architectural rhythm of the elevations. The reopening of these openings will enhance the legibility of the original design, improve natural light to the interior, and reinforce the building's historic industrial character, particularly on the principal elevations.

Overall, the proposals are considered to result in **no harm or less than substantial harm** to the significance of the heritage asset, in accordance with the NPPF. Any limited change is justified by the benefits of securing a viable and appropriate office use, which will ensure the building's long-term conservation and continued contribution to the character of the Smethurst Mill complex.

7. Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

The following measures are proposed to ensure the conservation and enhancement of heritage significance:

- Use of appropriate materials and detailing for all repair and alteration works.
- Reversible interventions where possible, allowing future understanding of the original form.
- Recording of any historic fabric affected during the works.

8. Conclusion

The former laboratory at Smethurst Mill is a non-designated heritage asset of local significance, as evidenced by its inclusion on Bury Council's draft Non-Designated Heritage Asset List. It represents an important surviving element of the borough's industrial heritage and contributes to the historic character of the wider mill complex.

The proposed conversion to office accommodation is a sympathetic and sustainable form of development that preserves the building's significance, results in no harm or less than substantial harm as defined by the NPPF, and secures a viable employment-related use for the future. The proposals accord with national guidance within the NPPF and with local planning policy objectives for the conservation and positive reuse of heritage assets.

The former laboratory at Smethurst Mill is a modest but meaningful component of Bury's industrial heritage. The proposed conversion represents a sustainable and sensitive approach to reuse, aligning with national and local planning policy objectives. By securing a new use while respecting the building's historic character and significance, the development will help ensure the continued appreciation and preservation of this heritage asset for the future.