

## 1. INFORMATION

- 1.1 **Name and Address of Client** - M....
- 1.2 **Address of Property** - ....
- 1.3 **Local Taxes** - To be confirmed
- 1.4 **Date of Inspection** – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2003
- 1.5 **Weather** - It was raining heavily at time of inspection after a period of mixed weather.
- 1.6 **Limits of Inspection** - The property was fully carpeted and furnished which therefore limited my inspection to those parts normally visible unless otherwise specified
- 1.7 **Tenure** - I understand that the property is being offered for sale with a clear title but this must be confirmed by your solicitors when the relevant documentation is to hand
- 1.8 **Tenancies** - The property was furnished but vacant at the time of my inspection and again your Solicitor must confirm that full vacant position on completion as I gather the vendors live there occasionally and also let it.

## 2. DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 **Description of Property** - The property comprises a deceptive detached cottage which is located in a quiet rural location very much on the fringes of town, approximately 1km from the town centre on a pleasant, relatively secluded corner plot although the house and accommodation itself is quite exposed.

The accommodation has been modernised with the ground floor accommodation being substantially original apart from the removal of an internal wall and at first floor level the modified accommodation is partially built into the roof void. To the rear, there is a barn wing, which has been converted for residential purposes overlooking a courtyard garden, and a small drainage ditch passes along the easterly flank in the form of a stream.

- 2.2 **Accommodation** - The front door gives access to a pleasant living room with log burning stove and open staircase rising to first floor level. To the rear of the living room, there is an L shaped kitchen/dining room, which is comprehensively fitted and incorporates an old chimneybreast. Steps go down to a partially below ground floor level cellar and there is a short staircase rising to a mezzanine level off which there is a bedroom the top part of this staircase which originally went to first floor level is sealed off.

To the rear of the kitchen, there is a pleasant conservatory, which opens to a further bedroom/sitting room with kitchenette, this area being substantially self-contained and having a mezzanine floor accessed via a folding ladder, this area contains its own shower room. At first floor level to the main property, there is a small landing with two double bedrooms together with a bathroom and WC. The property is predominantly single glazed.

- 2.3 **Outbuildings/Parking** - Vehicular access for the purposes of limited off street parking is available within the gardens although the outbuildings would be beyond the scope of this report.
- 2.4 **Age of Property** - Clearly, the property dates back a number of years and the precise date will no doubt be confirmed by your solicitors when the relevant documentation is to hand.
- 2.5 **Orientation** - The property appears to face east and backs west although again this must be confirmed if this significant to your purchase
- 2.6 **Location/Amenities** - Approximately 1 km from the local village, open location surrounded by countryside, albeit on a busy corner relative to the quietness of the general area.

- 2.7 Summary of Construction** - The external walls are of 9" solid brick construction in a Flemish bond. The main structure rising to a double pitch roof sloping front and rear covered with Flemish tiles and set with wood finished doors beneath tiled roofing.

To the rear there is a further structure again with 9" solid Flemish bond beneath a double-pitched tiled roof and within the 'L' there is a 4½" brick plinth rising to an attractive hexagonal conservatory.

Connecting the two wings of the property, there is a somewhat ramshackle structure with a brick outer face although the roof is in poly sheeting and is causing damp problems, particularly to the barn structure. The rainwater goods are in PVC and the windows are in soft wood and hard wood according to the age and elevations.

### **3. EXTERNAL CONDITION**

- 3.1 Chimneys/Flues** - A principle chimneystack rises above the main ridge and this appears to be of more recent brick construction, well formed and pointed to the roofline with a sand and cement flashing. Some localised attention would be beneficial to the pointing and over time, I anticipate you will need to upgrade the flashing.

To the rear, above the extension there is a stainless steel flue, which serves the log burning stove in this area. This is also flashed to the roofline with a mixture of sand and cement and some form of plasticised material. You must ensure that these flues exhaust freely which may well require some form of fixed external ventilation set in the walls of the relevant rooms.

The original flue to the rear of the kitchen has clearly been removed and tiled over.

- 3.2 Roof** - The main structure has a double pitch roof sloping front and rear, which is covered with interlocking clay Flemish tiles rising to a half round ridge and the front slope, is set with wooden dormers that are similarly tiled to match the roofline itself.

The valleys are metal lined and in regard to the roof, it has to be said that there is considerable undulation across the roof line with a build up of moss and lichen to the ridge of the main roof and various dormers with a good deal of degradation to the tile bedding and a number of the tiles are showing decay.

An overhaul of this area would be essential and at the same time I would suggest that the Calendrite flashings to the roof slope from the dormers will have to be better dressed and in part upgraded. In addition to this, attention would be beneficial to the pointing of the bedding to the ridge and to the verges.

In regard to the rear self contained area of the property, the roof here is similarly formed although not set with dormers and there is less undulation although still some damage to the roof tiles which will require attention on a periodic basis this being vulnerable to wind damage. A general comment in regard to the tiling of the roof slopes would be that a minimal number of tiles have been used relative to the area of coverage and in places this coverage leaves a good deal to be desired.

Again some attention would be beneficial in this area and again on the lower mono-pitch above the store where decay has led to extensive moisture penetration, particularly to the plastic rear slope, which is allowing water penetration into the associated walls.

- 3.3 Rainwater Goods** - The rainwater goods are in PVC with guttering draining to matching downpipes which simply spill out at the bottom level rather than discharging to any form of underground soak-away. This is unsatisfactory and I would recommend that a more appropriate system be applied to obviate moisture washing down into the lower parts of the external elevations, possibly washing out foundations.

At either side of the northerly elevations the main structure these appear to discharge underground and I suspect probably run away to the ditch / stream that flanks the boundary in this area.

To the rear they simply tip out at ground level and I would recommend excavation and modification to carry away this surface water at presently leaves the foundations vulnerable similarly the rainwater good to the conservatory where an upgrade is urgently required.

**3.4 Walls/DPC** - Dealing initially with the main structure this is in 9" solid construction in a full Flemish bond in alternate coursing in headers and stretchers and the original pointing to this structure was clearly a lime mortar which has been modified and upgraded from time to time during the properties lifetime.

Some decorative corbelling was noted to the upper side of the front beneath the roof slopes both front and rear although you should note that tie bars have been applied through the property in both directions although I am off the opinion that these probably date back to the original structure, to tie in the upper elevations and obviate structural distortion due to the inevitable roof spread in this type of structure.

There is no obvious evidence of serious distortion or bellying within the structure which would seem to give credence to these comments, despite some movement in the right hand gable which has probably led to the more substantial tie bar having been installed in this area.

Some distortion was noted, particularly above window openings, which are notoriously weak, points in any structure and I think this can be ascribed to the soldier course brickwork which provides linteling in these areas. These do not have a particularly substantial splay and this would seem to have led to some slippage. Other areas of distortion were noted but nothing I felt to be recent, making good has been carried out and I found no evidence that this is causing ongoing problems.

There is some bellying to the northerly elevations where the most substantial of the tie bars has been installed, as referred to above, and there is obviously an old fracture which runs through at this point but, again, I am off the opinion that this dates back many years and in regards to this you will have to take a view.

Attention to the brickwork by way of upgrading the pointing has taken place during the properties lifetime and this would seem to me to be an ongoing situation with further work certainly required to stabilise the walls.

You will appreciate that the floor is of solid construction and there is clearly evidence of fairly substantial dampness in most of these elevations and this will be evident internally by the smell. I notice in places that damp treatment has been carried out by way of silicone injection and this will be tested in greater detail under the appropriate heading in the report.

Moving to the rear area of the property, which has the self contained apartment, this is similarly constructed although I would suggest this is more recent and there is far less evidence of structural movement having taken place during the properties lifetime although there is some movement differential between this part and the original structure.

I note that the gable wall on this part of the building has been rendered up, and there is evidence of a damp proof course, although this is very low relative to the surrounding ground level.

As to the conservatory, this is formed above a 4½" plinth which incorporates a damp proof course although this again is very low relative to surrounding ground levels and it is pleasing to note that there is no serious visible distortion.

This leaves only the small area between the two main structures which is used as a store between the main structure and the newer part of the building beneath the mono pitch roof, here, as noted, the standard of workmanship leaves a good deal to be desired although this should be readily rectifiable and you may feel that tying the two areas together with provide more beneficial accommodation.

Again my inspection shows that this is formed in 9" solid brickwork which has been butted to the main structure and the tiling in this area discharges onto a wall plate and down the wall with some minor flashing and this must be appropriately upgraded to obviate the potential for degradation in the wall structure which is currently ongoing.

Dealing with the matter of the damp proof course, I would reiterate my earlier comments that there is no evidence of a formal DPC within the original structure although some silicone injecting has taken place within the cellar area and this can be confirmed in

more detail under the appropriate heading. In its present form however I consider it largely useless.

- 3.5 External Joinery** - This principally relates to the dormers together with the shutters and some localised woodwork supporting the rainwater goods and I set out my advice in regard to these as follows.

The dormers appeared in reasonable order comparative with their age although, as previously noted, it would be sensible for you to look to upgrading the Calendrite flashings which dress to the roofline and I suspect that during future programmes of redecoration you will find areas of decay within the external joinery, similar comments apply to the shutters, doors and frames.

The conservatory was obviously well formed when originally built, but it is suffering to a degree from the original materials and lack of continuous decorative maintenance which has led to localised degradation and, although this is not serious in nature, should be upgraded by way of new wood being let in prior to the next programme of decoration.

Decay was also noted in the glazing bars and a comprehensive overhaul is clearly required to obviate progressive damage and decay. The eaves where there are wooden fascias and soffits are somewhat scantily formed with a light plywood and clearly this area has never had the benefit of formal decoration, again attention will be required to preserve the fabric in this area, which would also apply to the self contained wing to the rear.

Whilst discussing the conservatory, this has a polycarbonate roof which, as is normally the case with this type of roof, has built up an accumulation of fungus on the slopes which should be cleaned off at which time you will need to address the flashing, upgrading appropriately and ensuring these are properly dressed to the wall.

- 3.6 Windows** - These were generally found to be in very mixed condition and clearly a comprehensive overhaul is required with attention to the puttying and some localised attention to the glazing before any redecoration.
- 3.7 Decorations** - It is my opinion that, after preparation, during the course of 2003 it would be sensible to carry out a comprehensive overhaul of external decorations.
- 3.8 Garage/Outbuildings** - Whilst there is off street parking space via the gates adjacent to the self contained area, there is no formal garage space and within the gardens the various buildings would frankly be beyond the scope of my report, being timber under a felt flat roofing which is considerably showing its age.
- 3.9 Site** - The property has a triangular plot tapering to the rear and bounded by the road to the southerly side and the stream to the north. It is important to look at the various walls and retaining areas in the garden particularly the fencing, which is showing a deal of dilapidation and the walling having obviously misplaced.

A substantial culvert has been run to the ditch on the northerly flank this partially, in my opinion, to stabilise the northerly wall of the building and I can only advise that although some hair fracturing was noted, in the main the movement in this wall appears old in nature

- 3.10 Drains** - Waste would appear to drain to the septic tank, which is located in the rear patio area, and I cannot advise as to where this runs out although I assume it is very probably into the stream, which flanks the property, but this cannot be confirmed.

#### **4. INTERNAL CONDITION**

- 4.1 Roof Space** - This was substantially not accessible with the exception of the mezzanine level to the self-contained annex where a bedroom has been formed. This area is accessed via a rather unstable folding staircase, in respect of which great care must be exercised.
- 4.2 Ceilings** - the ceilings throughout the property are formed in some type of boarding which has been tacked up under the rafters and skimmed or decorated to a finish and frankly this is an area where you will have to take a view.

In regards to the ground floor accommodation, the ceilings principally constitute the upper floor boarding, which has been set over the joists above the living room and kitchen / dining room and the only thing I can say in this regard is that the supporting joists are at very wide centres which accounts for the flexibility noted in the first floor flooring.

I gather bracketing has been formed beneath the northerly end of the property to the kitchen / breakfast room and trimmers have been installed which clearly indicates some form of modification at this point. I suspect a partition wall may well have been removed. The gallows joist which has been formed requires reinforcing to the joisting by way of additional support, possibly set into the chimney breast wall as the present levels of support are inadequate.

You will note that the tie bar, referred to on the northerly flank, and is strapped to the joists that run through at this level, which is another reason for ensuring the overall stability of the first floor structure.

You should note the localised decay beneath the bathroom floor, where I suspect there has been water leaking at that point. You will also have notice the soil pipe which runs across the ceiling of the dining area, and is not the most appealing facet of the property in respect of which I would suggest some form of boxing in.

- 4.3 Walls/Partitions** - The walls are substantially formed in brick or block work, which has been both rendered, plastered and over-lined. You should be aware that there are extensive areas of hollow plaster, which will manifest from time to time during redecoration, although there is no evidence of any serious recent movement, within the fabric of the building, at this time.

Dampness in the external elevations has led to the potential for degradation in the plasterboard lining to the internal surfaces and you will not my recommendations in this regard under the appropriate subsequent heading.

- 4.4 Fireplaces/Chimney Breasts** – The original fireplace within the kitchen, which presumably had some form of cast iron stove, has been sealed off and is now used to store the cooker and the cupboard with the chimneystack having been removed at roof level and over-tiled.

There is the original fireplace within the living room has been sealed, although the flue has been used to accommodate the cast iron log burning stove, which is situated at this point, and it is essential that you ensure there is adequate ventilation to allow this to exhaust freely.

Moving to the self contained rear area in the barn, this also has a log burning stove which is free standing with a cast iron flue which discharges to the stainless steel flue running through the roofline and I would have to say that this must be considered a somewhat vulnerable area which should be better secured.

- 4.5.1 Floors** - The flooring throughout the property at ground floor level is solid and overlaid with a quarry tile and this I can confirm appeared reasonably stable at the time of my visit, as did the slab flooring to the conservatory.

To the upper levels, inspection of the flooring generally was precluded by carpets but a good deal of instability was noted which relate, as previously commented, to the under joisting which has taken place when the property was originally structured and is an area where I am afraid you will have little alternative but to reinforce in line with my recommendations.

- 4.6 Dampness** - Measurements were taken at relevant points in accessible areas using a moisture-detecting meter. Very high levels of moisture were recorded in the majority of the walls and clearly it is essential that a specialist firm be invited to provide a comprehensive programme of damp proofing. I would suggest that it would be appropriate to strike off the lower wall coverings up to approximately a metre and a half and tank from floor level upwards. This should also be carried out in the cellar area, as the double pumping, which has been carried out, down there fails to serve any particularly useful service.

In regard to the extension, this has rising dampness but to a lesser degree than the main structure and where the collecting store room abuts the flank wall as you enter this part of the building, water is clearly penetrating from above as there are high readings of moisture right up to the ceiling line and staining was noted on the brickwork within the store shed.

As discussed, dampness is clearly a major consideration in this property but I do not consider that it precludes rectification and once you have established a means of dealing with it, I certainly feel this should not discourage you from your proposed purchase.

We talked about the possibility of bringing an English team over to carry out this work and I would be happy to discuss this with you further as I have had dealing with a firm here in the UK who carried out works to one of my Clients' properties which proved to be a very satisfactory job. They would also be able to discuss other aspects of the repair and improvement works with you should you so desire.

**4.7 Timber Defects** - Clearly there will be potential for decay in some of the concealed timbers and attack by wood boring insects was noted in some of the rafters at first floor level although I found no evidence that this was recent and presumably an appropriate certification will be provided in accordance with French property transfer requirements.

**4.8 Internal Joinery** - This is substantially commensurate with what one would expect to find of a property of this age and specification although I would point out the potential hazards of main staircase, which is extremely steep and must be approached with care. The subsidiary staircase to the main bedroom and the folding ladder to the mezzanine above the rear conversion each present their own problems.

**4.9 Windows** - A general check of windows was made, and these were found to function normally where it was possible to open them. As did the shutters once they had been released. I would suggest that you must consider a general overhaul in this area.

**4.10 Kitchen** - There would seem to be little comment, which I can make in this regard.

**4.11 Sanitary** - In both the main bathroom and the shower room to the ancillary building, supplies and waste functioned normally although I do not, for obvious reasons, check showers. Certainly you must upgrade seals and tiling as this is a contributory factor to dampness and obviously there has been a problem within the first floor bathroom.

**4.12 Decorations** - This is an area you will have no doubt satisfied your self and a comment by me would be no doubt subjective.

**4.13 Cellars** - The cellar runs out beneath the semi mezzanine bedroom off the kitchen and this makes useful storage space although it is clearly both wet and has suffered from lying water. Note the sump and pump which have been installed and, in view of surrounding ground levels and watercourses, it is my opinion that the whole area is vulnerable to flooding.

A proper form of tanking must therefore be considered in addition to which some stitching must be carried out where the left hand wall meets the far end wall and has opened out. I would repeat that I am unable to see what purpose the double line of silicone pumping serves.

**4.14 Thermal Insulation** - I found no evidence that this has been a consideration at the property.

## **5. SERVICES**

**5.1 Electricity** – There is a meter point in the cupboard just inside the door and a further one to the outbuildings. I have to recommend in view of my findings in regard to the general condition of the electrics that there be a formal test be implemented with the appropriate upgrade put in hand.

**5.2 Gas** – Whilst I do not believe that this has significance, any checks with regard to such gas as may be located, must be carried out by an appropriately qualified plumber.

**5.3 Plumbing** – The plumbing generally was found to be in copper and this is assorted with random runs to the various parts of the property. Water heating is by a modern electric storage tank in the bathroom, which must form part of any test.

**5.4 Central Heating** - No central heating, random convector heaters which must also be checked as part of the electrical test.

## **6. MATTERS FOR SOLICITORS**

**6.1 Roads and Footpaths** – I assume the roads in the immediate vicinity of the property are the responsibility of the local authority but this must be confirmed.

**6.2 Rights of Way/Easements** - I noted nothing of relevance at the time of my visit.

**6.3 Road Agreements** - This would not be applicable subject to findings under 6.1 above.

**6.4 Management Companies** - Not seemingly applicable

**6.5 Drains and Sewers** – The property would appear to have a private sewer with a septic tank located under the rear terrace and confirmation might be sought in regard to the outfalls for same.

**6.6 Planning/Building Regulations** - I noted nothing at the time of my inspection, which should make this a significant factor, but again your Solicitor will confirm. It might be considered important to establish what consents, if any were obtained in regard to the conservatory and using the outbuildings as residential accommodation.

**6.7 Planning/Highway Proposals** - I am unaware of anything relevant in the immediate area, although, hopefully, details of any such would show up in local authority searches.

## **7. GENERAL ADVICE**

**7.1 Schedule of Hazards** - I would stress that the following Schedules are for your convenience and must not be treated as definitive lists of works or other matters requiring attention/consideration. It is important that the report be considered as a whole and all points raised under 7.1 and 7.2 must be read in conjunction with the overall report.

1. Ensure that the two rooms with log burning stoves have adequate fixed ventilation to enable free exhaust of the fumes via the chimney flues, which in turn must be free and clear.
2. Ensure boundaries secured and protection is provided in regard to the surrounding culverts and streams with particular regard to children.
3. Comprehensively upgrade the joisting and support to the underside of the flooring at first floor level in accordance with my advice.
4. Be aware of the potential hazards associated with all the stairs.
5. Implement my advice in regard to tanking the cellar and protecting the area against flooding.
6. Arrange a formal test of all the various electrical systems and carry out a programme of upgrading.

**7.2 Schedule of Repairs** - I would draw your attention to the advice given at the commencement of paragraph 7.1 which is equally applicable to the following Schedule.

1. Give localised attention to the pointing and flashings associated with the main chimneystack.
2. Carry out a general overhaul to the roof slopes ensuring adequate and weatherproof tiling with the ridges and verges properly bedded and pointed.
3. Upgrade and properly dress flashings to the dormers.
4. Upgrade and modify the monopitch roofing/PVC covering to the store area.
5. Comprehensively clean and overhaul the rainwater goods generally and ensure proper discharge of surface water away from the property.
5. Carry out repointing as required to external elevations, stitch and pressure localised cracking to external elevations using resin bonding.

6. Consider slate packing brick on edge lintelling over window openings to stabilise.
7. Upgrade translucent roofing and associate flashing to obviate ongoing water damage to the annex walling.
8. Overhaul external joinery and windows etc prior to any programme of redecoration.
9. Comprehensively prepare and redecorate the whole of the exterior.
10. Attend to localised decay beneath the bathroom flooring over the kitchen and breakfast room.
11. Box in waste pipes above the dining room.
12. Seek professional advice and carry out a proper programme of damp proofing in accordance with the advice set out in this report.
13. Obtain certification in regard to termites, lead and asbestos, which should be provided by the vendors.
14. Overhaul the windows generally.

I trust that you find the foregoing report provides you with the information you were seeking, but hope that you will feel free to contact me with any queries or should there be other areas in respect of which you feel I may be able to assist. In the meantime, I remain

Yours sincerely,

**Ian Graham FRICS**  
**Chartered Building Surveyor**