

Nesting instinct

You'd be cuckoo to miss out on the chance of converting this dovecote on the stunning Northumberland coast into a beautiful home

WORDS JOANNA BOOTH

Lichen covers the grey stones of Haggerston Dovecote, giving the impression that the squat, cylindrical tower has stood in this remote spot near Berwick upon Tweed forever. But its true origins are impossible to determine.

Some believe it was built as early as the 1540s, as a defensive fortress against the marauding Scots. Others think it began life as a windmill in the late seventeenth century. 'It was certainly used as a windmill, before being converted into a dovecote sometime before 1824,' says Robin Kent, the conservation architect responsible for the design that will turn the tower into a residence.

Despite losing its roof sometime in the Fifties, most of the 500 hand-made brick nesting boxes that line the internal walls still remain, as does the wooden potence, an octagonal pole stretching from floor to roof, off which rotating ladders gave access to the birds and eggs. The dovecote's nearest neighbour is Haggerston Castle, the

ruined remains of which stand a few miles away. The view across the Cheviot Hills is stupendous, and in the other direction the sea is within easy distance.

A scheduled ancient monument and a listed building, it's rare that permission is granted to convert a structure of such historical importance into an individual residence. It's also rare to get the chance to put a new home in this greenbelt area of Northumberland. It's on the market for £145,000, with detailed planning permission to convert it into a three-bedroom house.

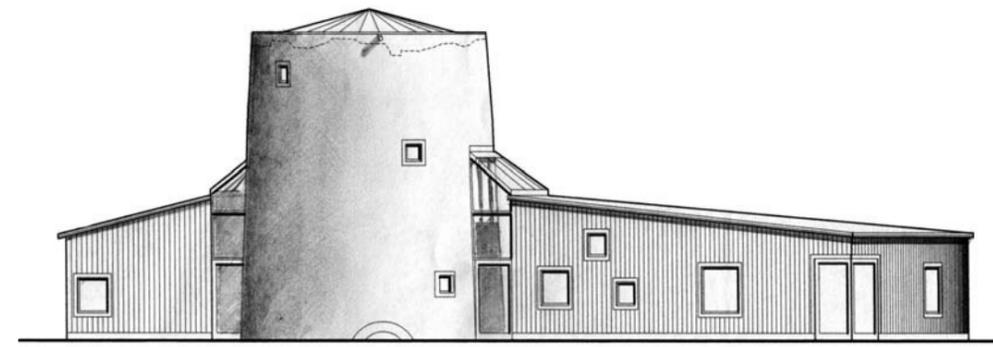
Though convert may not be the correct term to use, Robin Kent's ingenious design forms a new-build home around the monument, leaving it as far as possible unchanged – one of the reasons why the application was accepted by the planning committee.

The cylindrical space will have a glass roof fitted and act as a kind of grand hall and atrium. The rest of the house will splay out in a semi-circle round the dovecote, joined to it by a glazed link. This new-build will be a sustainable one, with a green roof and timber-clad walls filled with plenty of insulation. An underfloor heating system will be fed by a ground-source heat pump.

The detailed planning permission means the basics of the design must remain but internal layouts can be reconfigured to suit the future resident and the footprint slightly altered. The size will be in the region of 226sqm, construction cost will depend on detailed specifications.

So if you fancy saving something old and building something new simultaneously this could be the project for you. The next step is to gain scheduled monument consent and building regulations approval so that the works can proceed, the tower be saved and a new home built around it.

Haggerston Dovecote is being sold by Edwin Thompson for £145,000 [01289 304 432; edwin-thompson.co.uk] Robin Kent Architecture and Conservation [01361 884 402; robinkent.com]



this picture The location is as unique as the building; rural Northumberland, with its hills and coastline, is usually a difficult place in which to get planning permission for a new-build **left** Original hand-made nesting boxes still line the walls of the dovecote **above** The future of the dovecote retains its past, thanks to conservation architect Robin Kent

OTHER TOWERS WITH CONVERSION POTENTIAL



£200,000 (guide price)

Fornsett St Mary Church, Norfolk

This Grade 1-listed church could be converted if plans are approved by church commissioners, planners and listed building consent is gained. [Diocese 01603 882 350](tel:01603882350)



£65,000

Welney Water Tower, Cambridgeshire

This ex-Anglia Water tower sits in a 40sq ft site and overlooks The Wash. The owners are currently applying for outline planning to convert the tower. [Owner 01354 610 670](tel:01354610670)



£425,000

Mythe Water Tower, Gloucestershire

Already converted, this Grade II-listed Victorian tower has three bedrooms and a roof terrace. [Knight Frank 01242 246 959](tel:01242246959)