Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

15 February 2024

Fiona Webb
Senior Conservation Officer (Consultant)
Wiltshire Council Conservation (Central)

Officer's Name: Jane Sanger
Officer's Title: Planning Officer

Application No: **PL/2024/00437**
New off-street parking and reconfigured steps up to existing cottage
2 Ivy Cottage, Low Road, Little Cheverell, Devizes, SN10 4JX

Please find following comments in respect of the above application(s).

Recommendations:

	No comment
	Support in principle subject to amendments to the scheme (as set out below)
	Support subject to conditions (as set out below)
X	Object (for reasons set out below)
	No objections

Scope of comments: the following comments relate to the built historic environment.

Policy: From the point of view of the historic environment the main statutory tests are set out within the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 also requires the Council to pay **special attention** to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of designated Conservation Areas.

The NPPF outlines government policy, including its policy in respect of the historic environment. Section 16 of the NPPF 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' sets out the Government's high-level policies concerning heritage and sustainable development. Paragraphs 207-9 of the NPPF require a balanced approach with any harm which would be caused being weighed against the potential public benefits which might be achieved. Paragraph 203 requires local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

National Planning Practice Guidance provides guidance on interpreting the NPPF.

The Council's Core Strategy Policy CP58 'Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment' requires that "designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where

appropriate enhanced, in a manner appropriate to their significance." It is also required that distinctive elements of Wiltshire's historic environment, including non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity will be conserved, and where possible enhanced.

Wiltshire Council's Core Strategy Policy CP57 'Ensuring high quality design and place shaping': A high standard of design is required in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complementary to the locality.

Site and assets considered: The property is an unlisted building located within Little Cheverell Conservation Area. Nos 1 and 2 Ivy Cottages are identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal as locally important 'unlisted' buildings, i.e. Non Designated Heritage Assets (NDHA).

Proposal: The proposal seeks a new off-street parking area and reconfigured steps up to the existing cottage.

Relevant planning history: PL/2022/06877 – New detached garage, turning zone and reconfigured steps up to existing cottage (refused and appeal dismissed)

Issues: impact on the NDHA, impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Information considered/provided: This is my second consultation response and follows on from the submission of amended plans.

Paragraph 200 requires that applicants describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The current statement incorporates some analysis of character but ideally a detailed Heritage Statement should have been submitted assessing the character of this part of the contribution, the contribution that it makes to the significance to the designated heritage assets and the impact of the proposal. As such the document provides limited information about the site and its setting, the character of the conservation area building and the impact of the proposal; as a result, it fails to meet the requirements of the NPPF.

However, paragraph 201 also provides for the local planning authority to make its own assessment of impact and the following heritage recommendations are offered on this basis.

Significance of assets and contribution of setting (as appropriate): The NPPF defines significance as the "value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be **archaeological**, **architectural**, **artistic** or **historic**. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting." Historic England assesses significance in a similar manner, referring to evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal values of a place.

In this case the special interest of the conservation area is derived from its largely unspoilt 18th and 19th century buildings creating an attractive rural village character that is heavily dependent upon trees and its landscape setting.

Assessment: The proposal now is for a cutting in the existing grassed bank in order to provide a single car parking space. This retains all existing trees and includes the implementation of green retaining wall structure around the cutting to encourage greenery growth.

In my view, the proposal would still result in the loss of a large and significant portion of the bank in favour of a uncharacteristically engineered cutting that would be visually dominant and discordant when viewed in the approach from both directions along Low Road.

This would have an urbanising effect in the streetscene and the verdant qualities of the area.

Whilst not shown in the drawings, I am also concerned that due to the height and scale of drop from both the steps and front garden that for safety reason the cutting would require a safety barrier and handrail.

Overall, I find that the proposal would appear significantly damaging to the rural character of Low Road.

The applicant has stated that the proposal would address parking issues along the narrow Low Road. However the road at this is able to accommodate some parked vehicles and there is no evidence that this is a hazard to public or highway safety. Whilst the provision of off-street parking at the site would have the benefit of removing a car owned by the occupants of 2 Ivy Cottage from otherwise being parked on-street in the locality. It would not however remove the capability for other cars to continue to park along Low Road where they are able and can lawfully be accommodated. As such, any benefit that may accrue would be largely personal to the applicant in terms of parking convenience rather than having any public benefit.

Summary & conclusion: The NPPF confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). It makes clear that any harm to a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification.

The proposals will result in harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area via the cutting in of the bank and the loss of verdant landscape character. The proposals involve only part of the conservation area and could therefore be considered as causing 'less than substantial harm' for the purposes of interpreting the NPPF.

Whilst paragraph 208 allows that a level of harm may be offset by public benefits, which could include conservation benefits, in this case no objective justification has been provided for the works and the proposals are articulated as being primarily for the convenience of the occupants i.e. a private benefit. As a result, the proposals fail to meet with the requirements of current conservation legislation, policy or guidance and I therefore recommend refusal.