

Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

30 December 2025

Jocelyn Sage
Senior Conservation Officer
Wiltshire Council Conservation
(South/West)

Officer's Name: Andrew Thomas
Officer's Title: Planning Officer

Application No: **PL/2025/09557**

The proposal aims to convert the existing dwelling house into 4 apartments and provide 3 family sized homes to the rear grounds. The proposal will also seek to relocate the vehicle entrance east of its current location for better visibility onto the highway and to provide wider access for modern day vehicles. The proposal will require partial demolition of the existing brick boundary wall fronting the highway to make way for the new entrance and full demolition of the single storey attached garage.

The Old Vicarage, Heytesbury, Warminster, BA12 0HA

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)
☐	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 66 (PP) requires that **special regard** be given to the desirability of preserving or enhancing listed buildings, their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

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 214-16 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 210 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.

Historic England Advice Note 2 – Making changes to Heritage Assets illustrates the application of policies set out in the NPPF in determining applications for PP and LBC.

The following points are taken from the Historic England document "The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 3" (HE GPA3) that are considered to be particularly relevant:

HE GPA3 Part 1:

"The NPPF makes it clear that the setting of a heritage asset is the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset."

"The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to visual considerations. ...views of or from an asset will play an important part..."

"While setting can be mapped in the context of an individual application or proposal, it cannot be definitively and permanently described for all time as a spatially bounded area or as lying within a set distance of a heritage asset. This is because the surroundings of a heritage asset will change over time."

"The importance lies in what the setting contributes to the significance of the heritage asset or to the ability to appreciate that significance."

Site and assets considered:

The site is within the designated Heytesbury conservation area (the CA is a designated heritage asset). The Old Vicarage is not a listed building, however it is a building of local significance and interest (historic and social) and of a pleasing appearance, typical of the late 19th century. As such, it could be reasonably considered a non-designated heritage asset. It has not been formally identified as such, Wiltshire Council having no formal list but the planning system allows for the identification of such assets (see paragraph 216 of the NPPF).

The former vicarage sits within a generous plot. An attractive brick wall with a clay tile capping runs along the roadside boundary.

There are mature trees within the grounds of the house which make a pleasing contribution to the character of this part of the CA.

Proposal:

A modern flat-roofed garage is demolished.

The Old Vicarage is converted into four apartments without a substantial extension. A parking area is provided to one side

Three detached houses with parking bays, are erected within the grounds.

A covered bin store is formed near the entrance

An internal road is created.

Issues: impact on the conservation area, impact on the setting of a NDHA

Information considered/provided:

Paragraph 207 requires that applicants describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. This should include sufficient information to provide a clear understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and its setting and the potential impact of any proposals on that significance.

In this case, whilst the applications are accompanied by a "Design and Access Statement". I note at 4.2 it says *'The existing house is considered by Wiltshire Council to be a non designed heritage asset'*. However, no mention is made of the Heytesbury conservation area although there is a review of the historic development of the site.

However, paragraph 208 also provides for the local planning authority to make its own assessment of impact and the following heritage recommendations are offered on this basis.

Pre-application advice (conservation officer)

This was undertaken by Maureen Pearce. Key comments include:

*'There is **no objection in principle to the subdivision of the Vicarage** depending on design. There is no objection to the removal of the existing garage which is an obtrusive element of the site being a flat roofed garage.'*

*'The proposal to move the entrance to the site to improve visibility which would involve removing a large section of the wall. The wall is a feature of the site and conservation area and the loss would have a **harmful impact of the conservation area**'.*

'The plot is large and the proposal would be an urban layout with urban houses and garages which would not preserve this part of the conservation area.'

Significance of assets and contribution of setting:

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 significance of the building (The Old Vicarage) lies largely with its scale, architecture, use of traditional materials, its siting in a generous plot. Its floorplan is of some interest, the one and half storey element likely being an earlier building, added to in the late 19th century. Its former association with the church (ie historic/social significance) also contributes to its interest.

Additional elements such as the trees and the attractive boundary wall also contribute to its interest.

In respect of the conservation area, Little London has a fragmented character with residential buildings from many different decades, however, buildings from the 18th century are evident sited hard back of the road. There is also a wide variety of materials. The site contributes to the area in terms of the scale of The Old Vicarage (a grandeur uncharacteristic of the locality), the pleasing red brick front wall and the trees which create the impression of an arcadian garden setting.

The flat roofed forward projecting garage detracts from the appearance of the building and the site.

Assessment:

I welcome the retention of The Old Vicarage and its conversion into flats.

In respect of the proposed new development, two houses would have been less impactful (less 'suburbanising') and also houses of a more diminutive scale ie 1 ½ storey – thereby ensuring that The Old Vicarage remains pre-eminent.

In view of the proposal, the open and 'green' character of the plot will inevitably be eroded. The particularly 'suburbanising' elements are the proposals in respect of the opening onto the road and the need for an internal road with turning heads and parking for several cars per house etc.

The proposal in respect of the road side wall, a feature that makes a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area, is regrettable. I would question whether this demolition and realignment is an imperative?

Summary:

I welcome the conversion of The Old Vicarage but have reservations about the scale of new development and its impact on the character of the CA and setting of The Old Vicarage. I consider the harm to be '*less than substantial*' and as such, paragraph 215 is engaged.

I consider that the harm could be lessened if the proposed houses were smaller and that the existing wall was maintained and repaired, rather than demolished, relocated and rebuilt.

In respect of the landscaping, a quality road surface within the site to avoid a 'cul-de-sac' appearance (ie extending the brown cobble paving the full length of the road to avoid looking too 'municipal'?) should be considered.

In terms of the wall, if the splay and set back are non-negotiable, then the wall should be carefully dismantled, materials salvaged (particularly the capping) and re-used.

If you are minded to grant consent, then I recommend conditions covering materials should be required, although it would be preferable to agree these upfront (ie a comprehensive materials schedule).

Conclusion

The NPPF confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset (in this case, the Heytesbury conservation area), 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. Whilst paragraph 215 allows that a level of harm may be offset by public benefits, which could include conservation benefits.

Section 72 is statutory legislation and requires works to **preserve or enhance** the conservation area.

There are some benefits to the current proposals, namely the conversion of the existing building into flats such that its existence is assured. The removal of the modern flat-roofed garage is also a positive. However, this must be offset against the adverse impacts which I consider to be: the loss of the verdant character of the site; the demolition of the wall and 'urbanisation' of the existing plot. As it stands, I consider the scheme would fail to preserve the character of this part of the CA. Amendments to the scheme, as suggested above, could largely address these concerns.