

Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

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(South/West)

Officer's Name: Hayley Clark
Officer's Title: Planning Officer

Application No: PL/2026/00144

The George Inn, The Square, Mere, Warminster, BA12 6DR
Creation of a dedicated external trade area and refresh of internal trade area

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. Sections 16 (LBC) and 66 (PP) require 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."

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 George Inn (listed as The Talbot Hotel) is a grade II listed building, sited on one side of The Square. The list entry reads as follows:

'Inn. Probably C16 or C17 origins, but substantially modified in C19 and C20. Front block rendered on rubble, and applied timber framing, back limestone rubble; plain tile roofs. A complex layout, the earliest block, facing the clock tower (q.v.) being L-plan, with short wing to right end; to this in later C19 a further extension to left; between two back extensions a third projection, probably service accommodation originally, further extended with wing containing 5 prominent dormer windows: this last unit not of special interest. Front is 2 storeys, ground floor has 4 square C20 casements with some leading, first floor six 2-light early C19 casements. Part-glazed door between bays 1 and 2, and plank door centrally, probably to an original cross passage. Two brick gable stacks and one similar ridge stack off centre left. Upper storey is applied timber framing, as on return gable left, which has a 2-light casement over C20 part-glazed door. Right return has plain gable with niche and two low deep buttresses, then half-hipped wing in 2 storeys and attic with various lights: a small flat-roofed projection added with canopy taken over rear entrance door. Adjoining wing has two C19 2-light casements at first floor and a brick stack. Beyond left gable of front block a late C19 house, now incorporated, rendered, 2 storeys, 2 windows, 4-pane sashes, left over C20 door, and right in canted bay to hipped roof. The interior ground floor completely modified in C20; the main entrance door a good wide plank one. Building, although heavily modified, maintains its overall form, and holds a vital townscape position.'

There are a number of listed buildings in the vicinity, including the Clock Tower which is opposite.

The building is within the Mere conservation area. It makes a significant contribution to the Mere conservation area in view of its function, siting and history.

Proposal:



I am 'interested' in the annotations on the ground floor plan. The areas marked as Lounge (A and B on the above plan) are part of the historic building and as such, the ceiling beams are likely historic too. The inglenook also has a large beam over the opening.

The annotation says that they are proposing to sandblast all 'dado height panelling'. I don't have an issue with this as it appears to be modern, however, they are also proposing to sandblast 'timber beams'. This is potentially concerning as aggressive cleaning can be harmful and remove marks etc. As such, the methodology for cleaning the beams should be a condition of the LBC. However, I would also like a condition expressly stating that the fireplace lintel (which has atropaic burn marks as far as I could discern) should not be cleaned.

Heritage consultant says: *'The most intrusive change would be the cleaning up of timber beams and timber panelling, whereby we are recommending a very fine sandblasting to breathe life back into the painted or blackened timbers'*.

The annotation also says 'overhaul all windows and doors to ensure they function correctly'. Assuming we are just talking about localised repairs and there is no replacement, this is acceptable.

The external works are minor and relate to the outside seating space. The only comment I would make is that they talk about brick planters. Could they not use stone? Would seem a shame to introduce brick where there is so little. Or perhaps they should stick with timber?

Issues: impact on the listed building, impact on the setting of neighbouring listed buildings, impact on the conservation area.

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, Access and Heritage Statement" the document provides limited information about the building and fails to provide any objective assessment of the fabric affected, its date or significance or of the impact of the proposals and, as a result, it fails to meet the requirements of the NPPF.

In this case, the applications are accompanied by a "Design and Heritage Statement" which provides sufficient information to understand the impact of the proposals and is proportionate to their scope. The requirements of the NPPF are therefore met in this respect.

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.

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, and in relation to the application, much of the interior is modern fabric, upgraded on a regular basis given the function of the building (public house). As such, the interior decor and fittings have limited value. However, the ceiling beams are part of the historic fabric of the building and as such, have significant interest, as does the beam over the inglenook fireplace. Their treatment needs careful consideration. In respect of the dado panelling, this is modern fabric and not of interest (although a traditional-looking feature which is appropriate for the setting).

The external space provides the setting for the building and other listed buildings in the area. As such, screening of bins etc, seating, temporary structures (ie smoking shelters) all need careful consideration (section 66 of the Planning LBCA Act 1990 talks about the setting of LBs). These elements too are visible within the conservation area.

Assessment:

The proposals are modest in respect of impacts on the historic fabric, indeed, only the sandblasting of the beams affects historic fabric. This should be subject of a condition.

Repairs to the windows does not require consent providing we are talking about localised repairs ie not window replacement (which would require consent).

In terms of the external works, I have suggested stone planters would be more appropriate than brick as there is little brick in the town and none as far as I am aware, used in respect of The George. Maybe timber would be preferable as it silvers.

External trade area. I note that the existing external seating area is tarmac and the proposed shows a combination of resin bonded gravel and stone flags. This proposed change would be a considerable enhancement, however, I suggest conditions to cover the colour of the resin bond and details of the stone to be used (which should be random sized blocks as shown in the drawing).

Timber entrance arch (external seating area), timber posts and festoon lighting. Given the context – ie rear extensions to The George are not of special interest, I have no objection.

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 impact of the proposals on heritage assets will be neutral On this basis no specific justification is required however it is considered the works will assist in securing the future use of a heritage asset in support of its long-term conservation. The requirements of current conservation legislation, policy or guidance are considered to be met and there is therefore no objection to the approval of the application.

If you are minded to grant consent, I recommend the following conditions:

Timber cleaning

That a detailed specification is provided to the LPA for our approval prior to the commencement of works. This will include a trial area of cleaning also for the LPA's approval (Conservation Officer). Once approved, the work shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved specification.

Details of the colour of the resin bonded gravel shall be approved by the LPA.

The stone for the external seating area will be natural stone and laid in random sized blocks. Details of the stone (type and colour) shall be submitted for approval to the LPA prior to the work commencing.

Planters shall be either timber or stone NOT brick.

Informative

Like-for-like repairs to windows does not require consent. Replacement windows require listed building consent.