



Professional Archaeological Services



The Bell House, 47 High Street, Sutton Benger, Chippenham SN15 4RH

Heritage Impact Assessment

18 March 2026

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Heritage Planning Services Ltd

35 Dallas Road, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN15 1LE

Sam Driscoll (m) 07825 550271 (e) sam@heritageplan.co.uk

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Non-Technical Summary

Heritage Planning Services has been appointed to prepare a Heritage Impact Assessment to support the proposed works at The Bell House, 47 High Street, Sutton Benger, Chippenham SN15 4RH (the Project Site).

The Bell House is a Grade II listed building situated within Sutton Benger Conservation Area, Wiltshire. The building has its origins in the 16th/17th century and retains significant historic fabric, including a timber-lintel inglenook fireplace and curved wind braces in the roof. The property has served various uses over the centuries, including as an inn, a physician's residence and surgery, and more recently as a hotel with the former post office and café areas. The building is currently vacant and closed to the public.

Planning permission is sought for a series of internal and external alterations to The Bell House. Works will include the demolition of the single-storey annex, alongside internal alterations to provide disabled toilet facilities. The proposals also incorporate renovation works to the hotel, ancillary bar, restaurant and café, and the managers' accommodation. The proposals retain the Grade II listed building in its entirety. Works to the historic core are limited to the repair and restoration of existing fabric, including timber-framed windows and external masonry, and the replacement of deteriorated floor joists in the region of the inglenook fireplace. A new café is proposed within the southern portion of the historic L-shaped range, occupying the former post office accommodation.

The central modern extension, which is of no architectural or historic significance, is proposed for demolition to create a new courtyard. The modern rear annex is proposed to be retained and converted to provide hotel rooms and managers' accommodation at first floor, and a further bedroom at ground floor. Windows on the non-historic modern annex are to be replaced with heritage-style double-glazed units. The incongruous modern balcony and external staircase on the northeast gable are also proposed for removal.

The side windows to the alleyway on the southwest elevation form part of the historic core of the listed building. It is recommended that prior to any works being undertaken, each window is subject to an assessment by a suitably qualified specialist to establish whether historic material is preserved and whether repair and retention is achievable. Where replacement is justified following that assessment, timber double-glazed units are recommended in preference to aluminium frames, with any specification agreed with Wiltshire Council's conservation officer prior to implementation. Replacement windows on this elevation should be of a design sympathetic to the architectural character of the historic core, adopting a heritage style in keeping with the vernacular of the building.

The Heritage Impact Assessment concludes that the proposals will result in a positive heritage outcome overall. The works conserve the historic core, remove incongruous modern elements, and secure the long-term viable use of a Grade II listed building. Subject to the recommendation regarding the southwest elevation windows being followed, the overall impact on the significance of The Bell House and the Sutton Benger Conservation Area is considered to be positive.

1. Introduction

1.1. Heritage Planning Services has been appointed to prepare a Heritage Impact Assessment to support the proposed works at The Bell House, 47 High Street, Sutton Benger, Chippenham SN15 4RH (the Project Site).

1.2. The report is required to inform plans for a series of internal and external alterations to The Bell House. Works will include the demolition of the single-storey annex, alongside internal alterations to provide disabled toilet facilities. The proposals also incorporate renovation works to the hotel, ancillary bar, restaurant and café, and the managers' accommodation.

1.3. A Heritage Impact Assessment was prepared by Lund in 2023 and revised in 2024. The report provides a comprehensive review of the historic development of the Project Site and the significance of The Bell House. The relevant findings from Lund's assessment are summarised in Sections 4 and 7 of this report.

1.4. The report has been completed by Sam Driscoll, MCIfA, under Project Code HPS715/26.



Figure 1 Detailed Project Site location outlined in red. Centred on ST 94717 78681

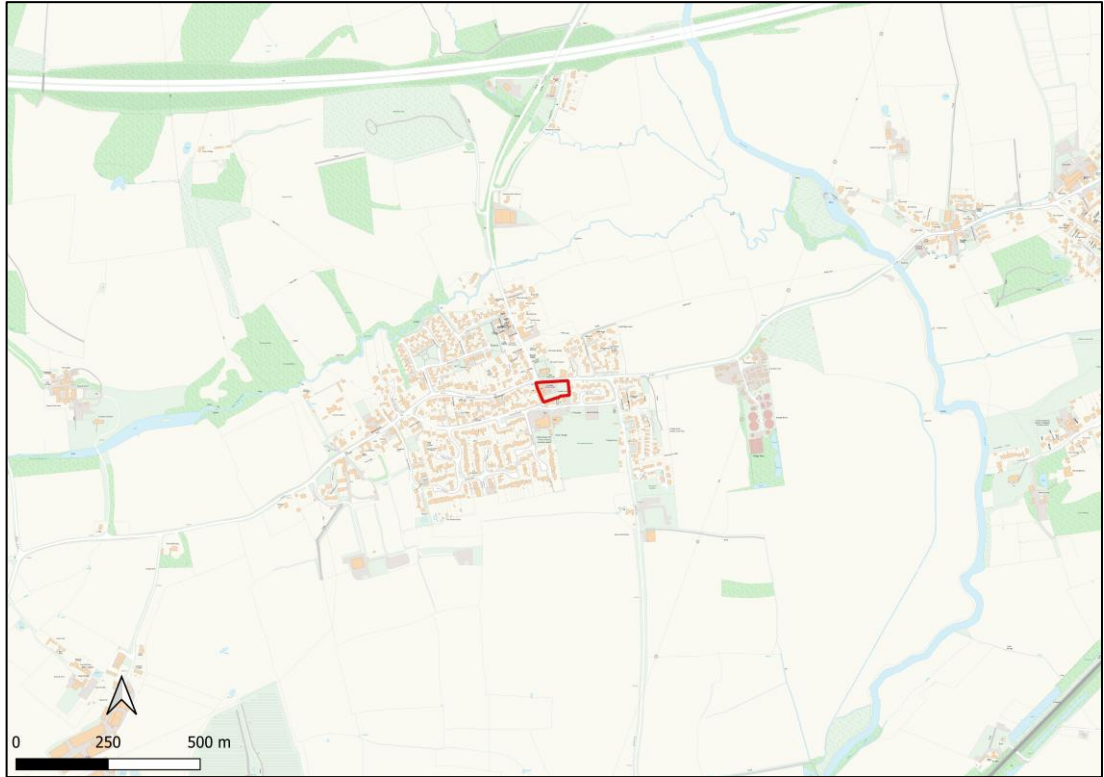


Figure 2 General Project Site location outlined in red. Centred on ST 94717 78681

2. The Project Site

2.1. A site visit was carried out on 13th January 2026. The interior and exterior of the Project Site was viewed and a preliminary photographic record made.

2.2. The Project Site comprises a Grade II listed hotel with former post office and café areas. The building is accessed from the east via the car park and from the northwest via a roadside pedestrian entrance. The rear range was subsequently converted to hotel accommodation, with access provided from the northeast. The business is currently closed to the public.



Photo 1 southwest facing view of The Bell House, from carpark. Historic core painted white.



Photo 2 SSW view of modern extension, former café and post office unit.



Photo 3 NNW facing view of rear (modern) range.

3. Heritage Assets

Sutton Benger Conservation Area

3.1. The Project Site is within Sutton Benger Conservation Area. The character and significance of the area of designation is set out in Sutton Benger Parish Character Appraisal. The key points are summarised below (Bluestone Planning, 2024).

3.2. Sutton Benger Conservation Area covers the historic heart of the village and is notable for its clearly recognisable Medieval structure and its long-standing connection with the Draycot Estate, which governed the settlement for centuries. Its character comes from a combination of traditional buildings, greenery, and its close visual and physical relationship with the surrounding countryside.

3.3. Key Characteristics comprise the following:

- I. Settlement Pattern: The village reflects its early linear arrangement, focused along the High Street. A secondary route, now Chestnut Road, runs parallel to it, and the 13th century All Saints Parish Church occupies a prominent position opposite the Project Site.

- II. Architectural Style: Most buildings are two storeys and built from locally sourced stone, either laid irregularly or in courses. Roofs typically use stone slates or clay tiles, giving the area a consistent historic appearance.
- III. Building Features: Common architectural elements include stone corner detailing, timber sash or casement windows set in stone surrounds, and modest dormer windows positioned either within the roofline or projecting slightly above it.
- IV. Boundary Treatments: Dwellings usually sit behind low stone boundary walls or hedges, creating a sense of enclosure while avoiding harsh or visually intrusive fencing.
- V. Green Spaces: The area's character is strengthened by sizable open gaps and mature vegetation, for example, the open field between the church and La Flambe restaurant, as well as established trees in the churchyard and the grounds of the Bell House.

3.4. This designated area safeguards the unique identity of a village whose layout and appearance changed very little over half a millennium, until the early 20th century.

3.5. Its importance stems from several factors:

- I. Historic Buildings: Numerous listed structures contribute to a rich architectural and cultural setting.
- II. Continuity Over Time: The village's development was shaped by its closeness to Medieval royal hunting land and its long period under the ownership of the Draycot Estate, lasting until 1920.
- III. Landscape Connections: The Conservation Area offers valuable views both into the village and outward into the surrounding clay vales and River Avon landscape, maintaining strong visual links between built form and nature.
- IV. Low-Density Form: The historic centre maintains a spacious, low-density arrangement helping preserve its rural, tree-lined character.

Significance of the Project Site within the Conservation Area

3.6. The Bell House is a key non-residential landmark within Historic Core Area 1 of the village. The village is described as predominantly residential, interspersed with The Wellesley Arms, The Bell House, La Flambé restaurant and All Saints Parish Church.

3.7. Sutton Benger Parish Character Appraisal highlights the grounds of The Bell House as a valuable part of the village's natural environment. It notes that the land surrounding The Bell House contains mature trees and plays an important role in shaping the setting of the listed building.

Designated Heritage Assets

The Bell House

3.8. The Grade II listed Bell House (formally designated on 29th February 1988) is dated to the 16th/17th century with alterations in the early 19th century. The historic core is built of rubble stone with stone slate roofs and brick stacks, with a two storey L-plan.

3.9. [List Entry Number: 1200602](#)

"House now hotel, C16 altered in early C19, painted rubble stone with stone slate roofs and brick stacks. Two storeys, L-plan with early C19 flush mullion windows, hoodmoulds and Gothic cast-iron small-paned glazing. Four 2-light windows above, two 3-lights, half-glazed door in depressed-arched surround with hoodmould and 3- light below. The second bay has gable over and fourth bay is gabled end of cross wing with large brick stack to left. Cross wing roof is swept low on west side. East end wall has similar 2- light and 3-light. South west rear wing is in two sections with stack between, the roof hipped at south end over window in C18 stone architrave. C20 additions in rear angle and behind. Interior: ground floor wholly altered apart from large timber- lintel fireplace in west end room. Some windbracing in roof."

Listing NGR: ST9470978671."

Church of All Saints

3.10. The Grade II* listed Church of All Saints (formally designated on 20th December 1960) is situated c. 28 m to the northeast of The Bell House.

3.11. [List Entry Number: 1022403](#)

" Anglican parish church, C12 origins, C14 and C15, heavily restored 1851 by J.H. Hakewill. Rubble stone with stone slate roofs and coped gables. West tower, nave, south aisle, south porch and chancel. C15 west tower has pointed west door, renewed 3-light west window, canopied niche over, diagonal buttresses, moulded dripcourses, flat-headed 2-light bell openings with pierced stone panels, panelled embattled parapet with corner pinnacles and centre bell-spirelet, openwork with crockets. Nave has ashlar 3-window C15 north wall with buttresses, moulded plinth and large Perpendicular flat-headed 3-light windows, possibly originally a north aisle. Small circular east window. South aisle has remarkable C14 Decorated detail. Sill course and massive ball flower eaves cornice carried around west end as hoodmould over 3- light west window with reticulated tracery."

Three bay south side with stepped buttresses, moulded sill course and dripcourse, mouldings carried around buttresses and projecting ashlar south porch, dripcourse raised as hoodmould over 2-light pointed window each side of porch. Porch has moulded pointed arch with ogee headed niche over, three flat-headed cusped 2-light side windows with buttresses between, moulded sill course and eaves cornice. Ball flower cornice is not continued to right of porch. Right 2- light window has cusped lights and octofoil head. Exceptional pointed east window with reticulated tracery all ball flower ornamented and cusped. Blank bottom panel of middle light is ornamented with a miniature scheme of the window between buttress shafts. Very large pig gargoyle to right, between nave and aisle roofs. 1851 chancel with ball flower eaves cornice, south side lancet, buttress, door and 2-light window, east end 3-light with flamboyant tracery and north side gabled vestry and lancet. Interior: porch has transverse stone arches on wall shafts. Stone slab roof. Moulded pointed doorway with C19 door. Aisle has double-purlin roof with collar trusses, possibly original, nave has broad 1851 four-bay windbraced roof. Moulded tower arch, 1851 five-bay arcade of circular piers and 2-step pointed arches, the west arch springing from green-man carved corbel, of remarkable size and quality, possibly C19 but said to be original. Aisle has circular scalloped Norman font and fine canopied niche with buttress shafts in middle light of east window. Mutilated niche in wall to right. C19 chancel arch, scissor-truss chancel roof and encaustic-tiled sanctuary with c1851 stalls. Stained glass: deep coloured 1851 east window, pictorial style, one chancel south window of 1862. Nave north windows with, from east, patterned quarries of c1860, good C14 style glass of c1862 and good deep coloured window of 1864 signed Charles Gibbs. Nave east roundel has glass of c1860. (N. Pevsner, Wiltshire, 1975, 502-3)

Listing NGR: ST9472078722'.

Churchyard Cross in Churchyard of Church of All Saints

3.12. The Grade II listed Churchyard Cross within the Churchyard of Church of All Saints (formally designated on 29th February 1988) is situated c. 15 m to the northeast of The Bell House car park entrance.

3.13. [List Entry Number: 1200541](#)

"War memorial cross, 1920 by H. Brakspear, on stone steps, probably the base of medieval cross. Cross has square base, octagonal tapering shafts, foliate carving to cap and small gabled and pinnacled top tabernacle with carved Crucifixion to front.

Listing NGR: ST9472478707'.

Three Monuments in Churchyard South of Chancel of Church of All Saints

3.14. The Grade II listed Three Monuments within the Churchyard South of Chancel of Church of All Saints (formally listed on 29th February 1988) are situated c. 25 m to the northeast of The Bell House car park entrance.

3.15. [List Entry Number: 1022404](#)

"Three chest tombs, late C18 and early C19, ashlar. From north: a) Unidentified late C18 monument with raised oval plaque each side flanked by fluted strips to south and by plain strips to north. Baluster angles. Moulded base and cornice. b) Engles monument, early C19, with ornamented baluster angles, moulded base, ridge capstone and two plaques each side. Inscriptions to J. Engles Sr died 1830 and R. Engles died 1840. c) Hibbard monument, later C18 with two shield plaques each side, fielded centre and angle strips, moulded base and cornice with pulvinated frieze. Inscription to Elizabeth Hibbard died 1816.

Listing NGR: ST9473078718".

Three Monuments in Churchyard South of Chancel of Church of All Saints

3.16. The Grade II listed Three Monuments within the Churchyard South of Chancel of Church of All Saints (formally listed on 29th February 1988) are situated to the rear of the church, over 40 m from The Bell House car park entrance.

3.17. [List Entry Number: 1363824](#)

"Three chest tombs, C18 and early C19, ashlar. From south: a) about 8m east of chancel, unidentified early C18 monument with two sunk panels each side, one each end and moulded capstone. b) about 2m north east of chancel, Lanfear monument, c1845, ashlar with black and red colouring. Flattened lyre ends with low relief classical sarcophagus, and heavy scrolls. North side single plaque, two south plaques with urn in niche and descending dove between. c) about 4m north of b), Messiter monument, later C18, with two raised plaques each side, baluster angles and similar flat balusters on inner side of plaques. Centre carved flower in vase. Moulded base and cornice with fluted frieze. Inscription to Thomas Messiter died 1783.

Listing NGR: ST9473678731".

The Old Rectory

The Grade II listed Old Rectory (formally listed 29th February 1988) is situated c. 53m ENE of The Bell House.

[List Entry Number: 1200544](#)

"Rectory, 1841, possibly on earlier core, ashlar with slate roofs and paired ashlar stacks on north and south ridges. Two storeys, square plan, ornate Tudor Gothic style with deep set mullion windows and small-paned sashes, battlemented parapets and coved cornices. West front has advanced gable to right, coped with raked parapet and cornice, angle and apex finials, large ground floor 1:4:1-light canted bay and projected first floor 3-light window above. Bay has Tudor-arched lights, parapet, finials and centre gablet, upper window is corniced and embattled. Apex small hooded lancet. Range to left has roof hipped at north west angle, 2-light first floor window flanked by single lights, all with hoodmoulds and similar ground floor arrangement of door and single lights, Tudor-arched, the door with overlight. Ground floor is set in fine 3-bay Tudor loggia with buttresses, pierced parapet and centre gablet. Loggia links to advanced single storey drawing room with hipped roof, cornice, parapet and projecting centre 3-light mullion and transom window with carved arms in gable above and finials. North side has large canted bay window. North east 2-storey gabled wing with north end mullion windows and finials to gable. North wall of main house has battlements carried round. South side is set high over road, plain rendered wall with parapet and roof hipped to south east but attached is fine ashlar lean-to conservatory, Tudor style, five bays, with parapet, finials and iron intersecting glazing bars. Left bay is doorway with overlight and steps up to similar Tudor arched door at right angles to west front. Glazed roof is missing. Interiors: centre hall, drawing room to left and dining room to right all have fine Gothic plaster cornices. Hall and drawing room have centre Gothic ceiling roses. Drawing room and dining room have stone Gothic fireplaces. Hall has stone Tudor-arched screen to rear stair hall, centre opening and 3-lights each side. Stone cantilevered stair on rear wall with Gothic wrought-iron balustrade. Built for the Rev G. Marsh, died 1862.

Listing NGR: ST9371278240'.

4. Historic Development

4.1. The following section summarises the Heritage Impact Assessment prepared in 2023 and updated in 2024 (Lund, 2024), with additional observations by the author.

4.2. The Bell House has evolved over several centuries, reflecting the changing needs of the village.

4.3. The structure now known as The Bell House may have originated in the 16th or 17th century, likely beginning as a modest dwelling near the junction of Bell Lane and the High Street. Surviving features such as the inglenook fireplace and the distinctive curved wind braces in the roof support this dating.

4.4. The building is first clearly identified as an inn in the late 18th century and records suggest that the property continued to trade as such into the 1840s. A local physician also appears to have occupied rooms within the property. A consulting room was created in the rear wing with access from Bell Lane, and the property functioned as both residence and surgery for many years.¹

4.5. Following post-war increases in car ownership and rural tourism, the building was converted into a hotel and restaurant in 1958. This change brought significant alterations, including a new two storey rear block replacing earlier outbuildings, a corridor extension to improve internal circulation and later use of part of the rear block as the village shop and post office.

4.6. In 1988, the Bell House was designated a Grade II listed building in recognition of its architectural and historic interest. The listing highlights the rubble stone walls, stone slate roof, Gothic style windows, and the historic rear wing. However, by this time the interior had been heavily altered, and several earlier external structures had already been lost.

5. Planning Policy

5.1. With regard to the relevant policy and development framework, the following are considered appropriate to the current proposal:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2024;

¹ Lund's report identified a change of use from the 18th to 19th century, with the building ceasing to be used as a public house and being converted to a private residence and surgery of a local doctor. However, further research for this report has identified historical records indicating that Thomas Ferris senior (1782-?) was associated with the Bell Inn at Sutton Benger, appearing as a victualler in 1816 (ref: birth record of son, Thomas Ferris) and recorded as resident at the house known by the sign "Bell Inn" between 1823 and 1830 (ref: Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette – Thursday 20 February 1823). His son, Thomas Ferris (1816–1872), continued the family's connection with the premises, being registered as a publican living in Sutton Benger in 1846 (ref: Marriage Record), while a contemporary newspaper report records that Robert Simpkins was found intoxicated at the Bell Inn, Sutton Benger in 1846 having stopped for a drink on his way home, implying that the establishment was still operating as a public house during Thomas junior's tenure (ref: Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard – Tuesday 01 December 1846). It is likely that the building was in multiple occupancy in the first half of the 19th century.

"207. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

210. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

214. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

218. Local planning authorities should require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible. However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted.

219. Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably".

Wiltshire Core Strategy adopted 2015

Core Policy 58 Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment.

"Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment.

Designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced in a manner appropriate to their significance, including:

- i. nationally significant archaeological remains;
- ii. World Heritage Sites within and adjacent to Wiltshire;
- iii. buildings and structures of special architectural or historic interest;
- iv. the special character or appearance of conservation areas;
- v. historic parks and gardens;
- vi. important landscapes, including registered battlefields and townscapes.

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. The potential contribution of these heritage assets towards wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits will also be utilised where this can be delivered in a sensitive and appropriate manner in accordance with Core Policy 57 (Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping).

Heritage assets at risk will be monitored and development proposals that improve their condition will be encouraged. The advice of statutory and local consultees will be sought in consideration of such applications".

6. Proposed Development

6.1. Planning permission is sought for the change of use, refurbishment and extension of The Bell House, 47 High Street, Sutton Benger, Chippenham, SN15 4RH. The application is supported by the following drawings prepared by Artel31 (Project Reference 786 – 3), dated October 2025.

6.2. The proposals retain the Grade II listed building and seek to restore it to active use, primarily as a hotel and café. The development involves alterations to the existing building fabric, the demolition of later non-historic additions, and the creation of a new courtyard through the removal of the central modern extension.

Ground Floor

6.3. At ground floor level, the historic core of the building is proposed to be retained without significant alteration to its plan form or fabric. The existing bar area, kitchen, restaurant and dining area within the principal range are to be retained and refurbished. Works within the bar include replacement of the fireplace to the side of the bar, installation of flues to both fireplaces, replacement of rotten timber floorboards and joists in the east section of the bar, and replacement of cracked glazing like for like. A freestanding bar is to be installed in the dining area.

6.4. A new café is proposed within the southern portion of the historic L-shaped range, making use of the former restaurant seating area.

6.5. The former office and entrance area adjacent to the existing toilets is to be converted to form new toilet facilities, with the existing flat-roof toilet block demolished to form part of the new courtyard. A covered passage linking the car park to the courtyard is proposed, forming part of the new circulation route through the Project Site.

6.6. Within the kitchen, a new wall is proposed in the rear store cupboard to create a walkway from the alleyway (west) to the rear garden, with an existing window replaced by a door.

6.7. A new rear staircase is to be installed in the rear corridor.

6.8. A reception area and ancillary office will be relocated in the former post-office area of the building, with repair of water-damaged walls and floors, installation of a small kitchenette, and replacement of the suspended tile ceiling with a plasterboard and skim finish.

6.9. The central modern extension, which currently occupies the space between the historic core and the rear modern annex, is proposed for demolition. The existing flat-roof extension and rear stairway are to be removed to open up the new courtyard at ground floor level, improving the

legibility of the historic plan form and creating an attractive outdoor amenity space for visitors to the hotel and café.

6.10. Fire safety improvements within the ground floor include the installation of escape doors connected to an interlinked fire detection system, and the rehinging of the existing side entrance door to the bar. These works are confined to the non-historic fabric of the building and do not affect the historic core of the listed building.

6.11. At ground floor, one bedroom (Room 5) is proposed within the southern end of the modern rear annex, with associated living accommodation. The bedroom is accessed from the covered passage and includes storage provision.

First Floor

6.12. At first floor level, the historic core of the building is to be retained with no significant alterations to its plan form or internal fabric. The front four hotel bedrooms (Rooms 1–4) are to be refurbished with new bathroom layouts, secondary glazing, extractor fans, replacement fire doors and new lighting and electrical layouts. The communal corridor is to receive new wall panelling and lighting.

6.13. To the rear of the historic core, a landlord's flat is to be created from the three existing rear rooms by removing modern studwork to create an open-plan living, kitchen and dining space. A front door is to be installed within the corridor to provide self-contained access.

6.14. Within the modern rear annex at first floor, the existing rooms are to be reconfigured into family-sized suites with associated living, kitchen and dining areas. A new internal corridor is to be formed by the erection of a stud wall.

6.15. Fire doors (FDS30) are proposed at key locations throughout the first floor of the modern annex to provide compartmentation in accordance with fire safety requirements. These are limited to the non-historic fabric of the annex.

Elevations

6.16. The proposed elevations show a number of changes to the external appearance of the building.

6.17. **Northwest Elevation (Principal):** Works are limited to the repair and restoration of the existing timber-framed windows and selective repointing of weathered external masonry. No new openings or alterations to the fenestration pattern of the historic core are proposed on this elevation. The flower boxes and signage are to be retained.

6.18. **Northeast Elevation:** The incongruous modern balcony will be removed.

6.19. **Southwest Elevation:** Existing side windows to the alleyway are to be replaced with heritage-style aluminium double-glazed windows in RAL 7032 to match the rear elevations.

6.20. A new door is proposed within the rear modern annex on this elevation, replacing an existing window opening.

6.21. The overall massing and roofline of the historic building on this elevation remains unchanged.

6.22. **Southeast Elevation:** The existing white timber single-glazed windows on the rear modern annex are proposed for replacement with heritage-style aluminium double-glazed windows in RAL 7032. A new escape window is incorporated as part of the fire safety strategy. The modern balcony previously shown on this elevation is proposed for removal. The external materials of the historic core, including painted rubble stone walls, stone slate roofs and brick stacks, are to be retained and repaired as necessary.

Site and Landscaping

6.23. The existing car park to the north and east of the building is to be retained and improved, providing 24 parking spaces (2.4m x 4.8m each), including three dedicated accessible spaces positioned closer to the building entrance.

6.24. The proposed site plan also shows the route of a new water main, which is proposed to run through the car park and along the rear of the Project Site in response to the poor condition of the existing water supply pipework. This connection was discussed with Wessex Water, who attended the Project Site, and represents the most cost-effective route to connect a new service.

The existing low stone boundary wall fronting the High Street is to be retained. A raised concrete triangle within the front garden is to be removed and any damage to the stone wall made good. New low beech hedging is proposed behind the wall to provide screening from traffic noise and fumes, alongside a temporary post and wire fence. A new iron pedestrian gate is to be installed while the existing vehicular access from the High Street is retained. A ramped access is proposed to the bar side door. To the rear, a new fence is to be erected adjacent to the gas tanks.

The ground level of the existing rear patio is to be reduced to prevent water ingress to the proposed office, and the patio relaid.

The existing grassed areas beyond are to be retained as amenity space.

6.28. The existing glasshouse to the south of the site is not proposed for alteration.

7. Statement of Significance

7.1. An assessment of the significance of the Project Site was undertaken by Lund (2024) and supplemented by a detailed physical description of the fabric. The principal findings are as follows:

7.2. Historic and Architectural Interest of the Core: The primary heritage value of The Bell House resides in its 16th/17th century historic core. This core is a two-storey L-plan structure of painted rubble stone with a traditional stone slate roof and brick stacks. Its significance is reinforced by the survival of high-quality internal and structural features, most notably a large timber-lintel inglenook fireplace in the west end room and distinctive curved wind braces within the roof structure.

7.3. Evolution and Communal Value: The building's significance reflects a long pattern of adaptation in line with the historic development of Sutton Benger. The building originated as a 16th/17th century dwelling and is first clearly identifiable as an inn from the late 18th century, continuing in that use through to at least the mid-19th century. Historical records confirm the presence of a victualler at the Bell Inn between 1816 and 1830, and a publican in 1846, indicating a sustained period of licensed use spanning both centuries. The Bell also holds particular historical interest for its subsequent early Victorian use as a local physician's residence and surgery.

7.4. External Character and Aesthetic Contribution: The principal (northwest) frontage maintains a moderate level of architectural importance due to its early 19th century alterations, including flush mullion windows with Gothic cast-iron small-paned glazing and protective hoodmoulds. These features, along with the swept-low roof on the west side of the cross wing, contribute significantly to the visual amenity of the Sutton Benger Conservation Area.

7.5. Setting and Openness: The building serves as a key non-residential landmark within the village's historic core. The retention of undeveloped space near the High Street is vital, as it preserves the sense of openness that characterises this part of the Conservation Area and

contributes to the wider historic setting, which includes the Grade II* listed Church of All Saints situated approximately 28 metres to the northeast.

7.6. Modern Additions (Neutral/Negative Significance): In contrast to the historic core, the modern rear range and central extensions hold no architectural or historic importance. Later 20th century additions, including the two-storey rear block and the incongruous balcony and external stairs to the northeast gable, are considered unsympathetic in character and currently detract from the architectural legibility of the original L-plan form. The central modern extension in particular interrupts the reading of the historic building's plan, and its removal to form a courtyard is considered beneficial to the significance of the heritage asset.

8. Impact Assessment

8.1. The proposal to conserve the historic layout and fabric of The Bell House is grounded in the need to protect the architectural legibility and special interest that underpin its Grade II listing. The building's L-shaped plan form represents a key component of its historic significance, reflecting a long pattern of occupation and later commercial adaptation. Retaining this arrangement ensures that the evolution of the building remains clearly traceable, allowing future generations to understand its functional history and architectural development.

8.2. Maintaining the core historic building without major alteration also preserves its traditional internal hierarchy. The distinction between principal front rooms, secondary spaces, and former service areas forms an important part of the building's character.

8.3. Conservation of the original fabric is central to this approach. By committing to avoid significant material change within the core areas, the proposal ensures continued protection of the historic materials and internal features. This minimises the risk of incremental loss, where small, seemingly minor interventions collectively diminish historic character over time.

8.4. The strategy also recognises the need to accommodate modern use while respecting heritage value. To achieve this, new interventions, such as café facilities, accessibility improvements, and other contemporary requirements are intentionally concentrated in secondary or newly formed spaces. This approach mitigates the visual and physical impact on the most sensitive parts of the building, enabling a controlled and compatible evolution. In doing so, the scheme sustains the asset's significance while allowing continued viable use.

8.5. Overall, the proposal offers a sympathetic and proportionate approach to change, balancing the conservation of The Bell House's historic core with the operational needs of a modern fixed use building complex.

Removal of Rotted Modern Flooring and Historic Joists Below

8.6. Owing to deterioration, the floorboards adjacent to the inglenook fireplace are proposed for removal and replacement.

8.7. The removal of the deteriorated floorboards and underlying historic joists is justified on conservation grounds due to the extent of decay caused by the historic use of soil as an insulation method. The soil packing has retained moisture against the timber structure, creating persistently damp conditions that have led to significant biological decay and structural weakening of the joists. As the affected timbers are no longer capable of performing their structural function, and their condition poses a risk to the building's fabric, their replacement constitutes essential remedial work.

8.8. The works will be carried out using sympathetic conservation techniques, ensuring that any surviving sound historic fabric is retained where feasible and that replacement timbers match the original in material, dimensions, and detailing. The intervention will stabilise the affected area, prevent further deterioration, and secure the long-term preservation of the building while adhering to the principles of minimal intervention and like-for-like repair outlined in established conservation best practice.

8.9. One accepted conservation approach for suspended timber floors is breathable natural insulation (such as sheep's wool, hemp fibre, cellulose or woodfibre board), laid between new treated timber joists, with ventilation to the underfloor void retained or improved. This will provide thermal improvement while allowing moisture to dissipate, preventing the recurrence of the conditions that caused the original decay.²

² For further advice on suspended timber floor insulation see the following:

Historic England (2016)

<https://www.spab.org.uk/advice/suspended-timber-floor-insulation>

Café

8.10. The introduction of café facilities within the historic range will involve some installation of services and ventilation, which may result in minor impacts to historic fabric. These works will be carefully limited and managed to avoid harm to areas of highest significance.

8.11. By locating the café in the rear portion of the L-shaped plan, the scheme retains the legibility of the more significant front range. The overall footprint and historic configuration of the L-shaped range will remain unchanged, ensuring continued clarity of the building's early form.

8.12. The proposed new café elements will be designed to be lightweight, minimally fixed, and reversible, ensuring that no significant permanent harm is caused to the historic fabric. Modern plumbing and electrical installations will be integrated discreetly within this area.

Elevations

8.13. **Northwest Elevation (Principal):** The proposed restoration of the existing timber-framed windows, together with careful repair and repointing of weathered external masonry represents essential conservation work that will preserve and prolong the historic fabric of the Grade II listed building, resulting in a positive impact on its condition and significance. These sensitive repairs will also enhance the building's appearance within Sutton Benger Conservation Area, positively contributing to the quality and visual amenity of the street scene.

8.14. The masonry repairs and selective repointing will address weather-related deterioration and help stabilise and protect the historic stonework, reflecting good conservation practice with no adverse impact on the listed building. Collectively, these works reinforce the traditional character of the Conservation Area and deliver a minor but meaningful improvement to its overall visual coherence.

8.15. **Northeast Elevation:** The removal of the incongruous modern balcony is acceptable as this feature has no architectural or historic significance. Its removal will be minor beneficial due to improved views from the public realm and enhanced visual amenity within the Sutton Benger Conservation Area.

8.16. **Southwest Elevation:** The southwest elevation encompasses the historic rear wing of the listed building.

8.17. The side windows to the alleyway on the southwest elevation form part of the historic core of the listed building and as such their treatment requires careful consideration. Lund (2024)

attributes low significance to the rear wing of The Bell House on the basis that its interior has been substantially altered and it lacks clear dating features. However, it should be noted that Lund's assessment was prepared in the context of a fundamentally different scheme. Notwithstanding that assessment, the rear wing remains part of a Grade II listed building and is specifically referenced in the Historic England listing description which notes the southwest rear wing as being *"in two sections with stack between, the roof hipped at south end over window in C18 stone architrave."* Furthermore, the southwest elevation fronting Bell Lane is visible from the public realm and forms part of the setting of the listed building as experienced from that approach. On this basis, whilst the interior alterations and lack of surviving historic fabric within the rear wing may justify a lower significance rating in terms of archaeological or evidential value, the exterior of the southwest elevation retains historic interest that warrants sympathetic treatment. Works to windows on this elevation should therefore be approached with the same care as any other publicly visible element of the listed building.

8.18. Prior to any works being undertaken, it is recommended that each window is subject to an assessment by a suitably qualified specialist to establish whether historic material is preserved and whether repair and retention is achievable. Where windows retain original or early joinery, or where they contribute to the character and significance of the listed building, repair should be the preferred approach in accordance with the principles of minimal intervention and like-for-like repair.

8.19. Where a condition assessment concludes that replacement is justified, it is recommended that timber double-glazed units are specified in preference to aluminium frames. The use of heritage-style aluminium frames, while acceptable on the non-historic modern annex, may not be appropriate on the historic rear wing without clear justification that timber replacement is not achievable.

8.20. Any replacement windows should be of a design sympathetic to the architectural character of the historic core, adopting a heritage style in keeping with the vernacular of the building. The specification should be agreed with Wiltshire Council's conservation officer prior to implementation.

8.21. A new door is proposed within the rear modern annex on this elevation, replacing an existing window opening. As this alteration affects only the non-historic fabric of the modern annex, it will have no adverse impact on the significance or setting of the Grade II listed building.

8.22. **Southeast Elevation (Modern Annex):** The southeast elevation relates solely to the modern rear annex, a structure of no architectural or historic significance. Replacement windows are proposed on this elevation as part of the conversion of the annex to hotel accommodation. A new escape window is incorporated into the proposals in accordance with fire safety requirements.

As all works on this elevation are confined to the non-historic fabric of the modern annex, the proposals will have no adverse impact on the significance or setting of the Grade II listed building. The overall impact is considered neutral.

Demolition of Modern Buildings to Form Courtyard

8.23. The demolition of the central modern extension, which holds no architectural or historic significance, will remove an incongruous addition, better revealing the historic plan form. The removal will help to restore the visual and spatial clarity of the early layout, while opening up a courtyard that enhances the setting of the heritage asset and softens the relationship between modern and historic elements. This proposal will result in a heritage benefit by improving appreciation of the building's historic character.

Internal Alterations within Modern Buildings

8.24. The reconfiguration of the internal plan form within the modern rear annex allows for improved functionality without affecting the heritage value of the listed building. As this annex does not contribute to the building's significance, internal alterations can be carried out without harm to historic fabric, while enabling a more efficient layout that better supports the operational needs of the wider hospitality use.

Conversion of Modern Annex to the Rear

8.25. The modern annex to the southeast of the Project Site is proposed to be retained and converted to form part of the hotel accommodation. The annex is of no architectural or historic significance, but its retention and conversion to beneficial use is considered preferable to demolition and represents an appropriate approach to securing the long-term viability of the wider site.

8.26. The annex is visually and stylistically inconsistent with the historic fabric of the listed building. Its massing, detailing, and overall appearance neither reflect nor enhance the architectural qualities for which the principal building is designated. However, as the conversion works are confined to the interior and the non-historic fabric of the annex, the proposals do not affect the significance or setting of the Grade II listed building.

8.27. The conversion of the annex will not result in the loss of any historic fabric associated with the listed building.

8.28. The conversion of the annex will bring the building back into active use without harming the significance of the Grade II listed building. The overall impact of the annex conversion is considered neutral.

First Floor – Core Building

8.29. The proposal introduces no significant material alterations or changes to the historic layout of the core Grade II listed building, thereby ensuring its architectural integrity, historic fabric, and overall significance are fully preserved with a wholly neutral to positive impact on the heritage asset.

First Floor Modern Annex

8.30. The reconfiguration of the internal plan form relates solely to the modern annex, a structure of no architectural or historic significance, and therefore does not affect the fabric, layout, or significance of the Grade II listed building. As the works are confined to non-historic elements, the proposals avoid harm to the designated heritage asset and ensure that its special interest remains fully preserved.

Landscaping

8.31. The retention of the low boundary wall, introduction of low hedging to provide subtle screening from traffic, installation of a new iron pedestrian gate, and retention of the existing vehicular access represent modest and sympathetic enhancements that maintain the character of the streetscape while delivering a minor positive contribution to the visual amenity of the Sutton Benger Conservation Area.

Sutton Benger Conservation Area and Designated Heritage Assets

8.32. The Grade II* listed Church of All Saints and the Grade II listed Old Rectory form part of the wider historic setting in which the Grade II listed Bell House is experienced. Together, these designated heritage assets contribute to the historic character and architectural coherence of this part of Sutton Benger.

8.33. Within this context, the proposed works to The Bell House represent a clear opportunity to enhance the presentation and legibility of the building's historic significance. The repair and restoration of the principal historic elevation, the removal of the incongruous central modern extension to form a courtyard, and the conversion of the modern rear annex to beneficial hotel

use collectively demonstrate a sensitive and considered approach to change that respects the character and setting of the wider Conservation Area.

8.34. The repair and restoration of the primary elevation will reinforce the architectural integrity of The Bell House. These works will ensure the continued longevity of the historic fabric while reinstating a more authentic appearance to the publicly visible frontage. Complementing these repairs, the removal of intrusive or visually unsympathetic elements from the modern extension will reduce clutter and visual noise in views from the public realm.

8.35. Collectively, the proposed interventions will deliver a positive contribution to Sutton Benger Conservation Area by enhancing the quality and coherence of the street scene and better revealing the inherent architectural interest of the Project Site. In turn, this improvement to the outward presentation supports and strengthens the wider setting of nearby designated assets, including the Church of All Saints and the Old Rectory, by reinforcing the historic character that links these buildings as part of a shared village context.

8.36. Overall, the proposals are sensitively conceived and will result in a positive heritage impact, improving the visual amenity, preserving historic fabric, and enhancing the legibility and contribution of The Bell House within the Conservation Area and its wider historic setting.

9. Conclusion

9.1. The proposals for the restoration and adaptive reuse of The Bell House represent a sensitive, heritage led scheme that secures the long-term conservation of a Grade II listed building while enhancing its contribution to Sutton Benger Conservation Area. The scheme balances a respect for the building's historic fabric with a pragmatic approach to ensuring its continued, sustainable use.

9.2. Central to the project is the preservation of the building's historic core. By focusing on the principal front range and safeguarding surviving early fabric, the proposals retain the clarity of the building's historic plan form, architectural character, and legibility. Interventions within these areas are deliberately minimal, guided by established conservation principles of minimal intervention, reversibility, and like-for-like repair. Modern alterations are confined to secondary or non-historic spaces, thereby ensuring the building's most significant elements remain protected and uncompromised.

9.3. The removal of later, incongruous additions, of negligible architectural and historic significance, will provide a meaningful heritage benefit. Their demolition improves the building's

legibility, reinstates a more coherent historic setting, and enhances the appreciation of its early form. Complementary conservation works, including the repair of weathered masonry, restoration of traditional windows, and stabilisation of historic structural elements, will reinforce the building's visual presence and ensure the continued preservation of its historic fabric.

9.4. Importantly, the proposed diversification of use, including the introduction of a small café within the rear range, strengthens the building's long-term sustainability. This approach ensures that The Bell House remains in active, economically viable use that is essential for securing the specialist maintenance required by a Grade II listed building. The provision of a café will also diversify public footfall to the heritage asset, offering wider community engagement and allowing more people to experience and appreciate the historic interior.

9.5. Furthermore, the hotel and café are expected to create local employment opportunities, supporting the village's economic vitality and providing a modest but meaningful community benefit that aligns with the broader objectives of sustainable development.

9.6. Overall, the proposals represent a proportionate and positive heritage outcome. They conserve what is most significant, remove what is harmful, and introduce new uses and opportunities that support ongoing stewardship. In doing so, the scheme delivers clear heritage benefits and ensures that The Bell House continues to serve as a valued and vibrant component of the village's historic character.

Recommendation

9.7. The proposals include the replacement of side windows to the alleyway on the southwest elevation, which forms part of the historic core of the listed building. It is recommended that prior to any works being undertaken, each window is subject to an assessment by a suitably qualified specialist to establish whether historic material is preserved and whether repair and retention is achievable. Where replacement is justified, timber double-glazed units are recommended in preference to aluminium frames, with any specification agreed with Wiltshire Council's conservation officer prior to implementation. Windows on this elevation should be of a design sympathetic to the architectural character of the historic core, adopting a heritage style in keeping with the vernacular of the building.

9.8. Subject to these recommendations being followed, the overall impact on the significance of the listed building is considered to be neutral to minor beneficial, representing an opportunity to improve the appearance of an elevation where the existing windows do not reflect the character of the historic core.

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1 Impact Assessment

The Bell House				
	Proposed Work	Loss of Historic Fabric	Potential Impact	Commentary and Justification
Ground Floor				
1.1	No significant material changes or changes to historic layout proposed throughout the core historic building.	None	Neutral	The proposal retains the historic L-shaped plan form, preserving architectural legibility and the traditional hierarchy of rooms while avoiding the loss associated with open-plan layouts. Original fabric—including rubble limestone, historic timber, and internal features—is protected, preventing incremental “creeping” change within the core. Modern interventions such as café facilities and accessibility improvements are concentrated in secondary areas, reducing visual and physical impact on the most sensitive historic elements.
1.2	Removal of rotted floorboards and historic joist beneath in the region of the inglenook fireplace.	Yes	Less than substantial harm.	Removal of the rotted floorboards and joists is justified as moisture held in soil-based insulation has caused severe decay, and replacing them is essential to stabilise the structure; breathable natural insulation such as sheep’s wool or woodfibre is recommended as a suitable, conservation-appropriate alternative.

1.3	Installation of café service area to the rear (south) of the historic L-shaped range.	Potential Minor Loss	Less than substantial harm	The café proposal introduces only minor service-related impacts while securing the building's long-term viability by placing lightweight, reversible interventions in historically secondary areas, enhancing public access and preserving the significant fabric and plan form of the Grade II listed asset.
1.4	Demolition of central modern extension of no architectural or historic significance to form a more coherent plan form and to open up a courtyard.	None	Minor Beneficial	Removal of the modern, non-significant central extension enhances the clarity of the historic plan form and creates a more coherent courtyard setting, resulting in a net improvement to the building's heritage character.
1.5	General reconfiguration of internal plan form throughout rear modern buildings of negligible significance.	None	Neutral	Reconfiguration of the modern rear annex alters only non-significant fabric, improving functional layout without affecting the historic or architectural value of the listed building.
1.6	Retention and conversion of the modern annex to the southeast of the Project Site to form hotel. The modern building is of no architectural or historic significance.	None	Neutral	The retention and conversion of the modern, non-historic southern annex to hotel accommodation will result in no loss of historic fabric. As the works are confined to non-historic fabric and the interior of the annex, the proposals do not affect the significance or setting of the Grade II listed building. The overall impact is considered neutral.
First Floor				
2.1	No Significant material changes or changes to historic layout proposed throughout the core historic building.	None	Neutral	The proposals introduce no significant material changes or alterations to the historic layout of the core Grade II listed building, ensuring that its architectural character, historic fabric, and overall significance are fully preserved. The approach maintains the building's integrity and results in a wholly neutral to positive impact on the heritage asset.

2.2	Reconfiguration of internal plan form modern annex no architectural or historic significance.	None	Neutral	Reconfiguring the internal plan form of the modern annex is justified as the works affect only non-historic fabric and have no impact on the significance of the Grade II listed building.
Northwest Elevation (Principal)				
3.1	Existing timber-framed windows are to be restored and repaired as necessary	Yes	Less than substantial harm.	The repair of timber-framed windows and targeted masonry and repointing works are appropriate conservation measures that protect and prolong the historic fabric of the listed building.
3.2	Proposed repairs to the external masonry and repointing of the stonework where weather damage has occurred.	Yes	Less than substantial harm	The masonry repairs and localised repointing address weather-related deterioration and help preserve the historic stonework without affecting the building's significance.
Southeast Elevation – Modern Annex				
4.1	Replacement of existing white timber single-glazed windows on rear modern annex with heritage-style aluminium double-glazed windows (RAL 7032).	None	Neutral	The replacement of the existing white timber single-glazed windows on the rear modern annex with heritage-style aluminium double-glazed units is acceptable as it affects only non-historic fabric. The specification of a heritage-style frame in a sympathetic colour (RAL 7032) represents an improvement on the existing windows and has no adverse impact on the significance or setting of the Grade II listed building.
4.3	Removal of balcony of no architectural or historic significance. New escape window incorporated in accordance with fire safety requirements.	None	Neutral	The removal of the balcony is acceptable as it is a modern feature of no architectural or historic significance and its loss will not affect the significance or setting of the Grade II listed building.
Southwest Elevation (Historic Core)				

5.1	New Door within rear modern annex to replace window.	None	Neutral	The replacement of window with a door within the rear modern annex is acceptable as it affects only non-historic fabric and has no impact on the significance or setting of the Grade II listed building.
5.2	Side windows to alleyway on southwest elevation (historic core). Condition assessment by conservation specialist recommended prior to works. Repair and retention preferred. Where replacement is justified, timber double-glazed units recommended. Specification to be agreed with Wiltshire Council conservation officer.	Potential	Less than substantial harm, subject to recommendations.	The side windows to the alleyway on the southwest elevation form part of the historic core of the listed building. Prior to any works, each window should be assessed by a suitably qualified conservation specialist to establish whether historic material is preserved and whether repair and retention is achievable. Where replacement is justified, timber double-glazed units are recommended in preference to aluminium frames. Any replacement windows should be of a design sympathetic to the architectural character of the historic core, adopting a heritage style in keeping with the vernacular of the building, and agreed with Wiltshire Council's conservation officer prior to implementation. Subject to these recommendations being followed, the impact is considered less than substantial harm and is outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme.
Northeast Elevation				
6.1	Removal of incongruous balcony and external stair from north facing gable of modern range.	None	Minor Beneficial	The removal of the incongruous balcony and external stair provides a minor visual benefit by improving views from the public realm and enhancing amenity within the Sutton Benger Conservation Area.
Landscaping				

7.1	Beech hedging and iron gate. Removal of raised concrete triangle in front garden. Reduction of rear patio level and relay. New fence adjacent to gas tanks. Ramped access to bar side door. Car park improved with 24 spaces including 3 accessible bays.	None	Neutral	The low boundary wall to the northeast will be retained with new low beech hedging planted behind to provide screening from noise and traffic fumes, enhancing the garden experience for visitors. A new iron pedestrian gate will be installed and the existing vehicular access retained. The removal of the raised concrete triangle in the front garden and reinstatement of the stone wall are modest improvements to the streetscene. The reduction of the rear patio level to prevent water ingress, relay of the patio, and erection of a fence adjacent to the gas tanks are functional works confined to the curtilage. The addition of a ramped access to the bar side door improves accessibility. The car park is to be improved to provide 24 spaces including three dedicated accessible bays closer to the building entrance. None of these works affect the significance or setting of the Grade II listed building and the overall impact is considered neutral to minor beneficial.
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