

Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

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Application No: PL/2026/01675
**Proposed change of use from former Canal Forge to office and training centre
Canal Forge, Lower Wharf, Devizes, SN10 1JN**

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 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 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 214-216 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.

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.

Site and assets considered: The property is a NDHA associated with the canal and wharf area. The Canal Forge is a late C19th early C20th single storey commercial building, with red brick elevations and a rear wall composed of an older, stone-built wall that abuts the former Wadworth Brewery site. The site is located within Devizes Conservation Area.

Proposal: The proposal seeks change of use from former Canal Forge to office and training centre.

Relevant planning history: ENQ/2026/00317 - Change of use of forge into office and learning space and associated works.

Issues: impact on the NDHA, 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, the application is accompanied by a "Planning 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 the significance of the building lies largely with its vernacular historic fabric and architecture - its form, layout and architectural expression/detailing and use of vernacular materials which have significant aesthetic and architectural interest and which contribute to the character of the conservation area.

Assessment: Canal Forge is a late C19th early C20th single storey commercial building, with red brick elevations and a rear wall composed of an older, stone-built wall that abuts the former Wadworth Brewery site. The building sits within the Devizes Conservation Area, in an enclave described in the Conservation Area appraisal as 'having an air of neglect'. The building is considered a NDHA making a positive contribution to the character of Devizes Conservation Area.

The proposal is to convert the Canal Forge to an office and learning space with the interior reconfigured to create a central office, exhibition and learning space, a library/archive/study space and a meeting room/additional quiet office space, as well as fully disabled accessible lavatory and kitchenette.

The building would be repaired and refurbished without changing the character or facing materials of the existing building. Replacement windows would be sympathetic to the existing and would generally be painted casements. The door and glazed screen arrangement would provide a welcoming and appropriate entrance to the building and would encourage visitors.

This application proposal is a carefully-conceived and sensitive scheme which would respect the building (NDHA) and its setting within the conservation area.

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.

In this case the proposals will also result in considerable heritage benefits by virtue of the proposed investment in repair and upgrading/structural repair which will help to secure the future/stability of the building /via facilitating the optimum viable use.

Conditions:

- **WL6 EXTERNAL JOINERY DETAILS**
- **WB15 DETAILS OF FINISH TO EXTERNAL TIMBER**
- Hard and soft landscaping scheme (as I note the Planning Statement mentions 'area immediately around the building would be enhanced through planting and tidying as part of the intended overall future landscape improvements along the Canal path'.)