



VALE COTTAGE, STERT, DEVIZES

Proposed landscape alterations to the pond and surrounding land

PLANNING AND HERITAGE STATEMENT

May 2026

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of Mrs C Begg-Smith and is submitted in support of a householder planning application for proposed landscaping alterations on land at Vale Cottage, Stert, Devizes. Specifically, the works relate to regrading of land around a pond, and associated landscape works within the garden of the property.
- 1.2 This Statement aims to explain the design rationale for the proposed development. The Statement demonstrates how the proposals comply with the relevant national and local planning policies and have been undertaken to avoid any damage to heritage, tree and ecology features on the site.

2. Site Context

- 2.1 Vale Cottage is located at the western end of the village of Stert, circa 1.5km southeast of Devizes. Stert is a linear settlement with its main point of access being at the eastern end of the village and from the A342.



Aerial view of the application site (www.google.co.uk)

- 2.2 Vale Cottage itself sits at the north end of the site and is a grade II listed building. Adjacent to the cottage is a two-storey building providing garaging and ancillary space. The property then has large gardens to the south and east of the cottage. There is a fall on the site from north to south and at the southern end of the site is a pond.

3. Relevant Planning History

- 3.1 The recent planning history for the property comprises:

- PL/2024/00195- Planning permission granted for a replacement perimeter fence and gates;
- PL/2024/00934- Planning permission granted for alterations to the outbuilding
- PL/2024/04755- Permission granted for a new swimming pool and pool house, boat store, garden store, greenhouse and alterations to garden wall
- PL/2025/03948- Permission granted for a new treatment plan to replace existing foul drainage system

4. The Proposed Development

- 4.1 Prior to the Applicant's purchase of the site the property the garden become overgrown and partially inaccessible. Specifically, there had been little maintenance to the pond and gardens in recent years to the extent that the landscaping was overgrown and the pond was not draining properly and had accumulated silt and detritus from surrounding trees. Eventually this resulted in localised flooding around the pond and to an adjacent property. The Applicant sought to rectify the situation by appointing a team of groundworkers to scrape out the sides of the pond,

generally tidy the space and to remove dead/overgrown landscaping. The spoil that was excavated during the process of those works was intended to be spread elsewhere on the site.

- 4.2 The extent of the works prompted a visit from the LPA's Enforcement Officer who in turn requested that a retrospective planning application be submitted on the basis that the works constitute an 'engineering operation' and thus required consent. This application is duly submitted on that basis.

5. Relevant Planning Policies

National Planning Policy

- 5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development is defined as encompassing economic, social and environmental factors. The economic involves building a strong, responsive and competitive economy. The social role entails supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations and by creating a high-quality built environment. The environmental role requires protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- 5.2 The NPPF confirms that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking. For decision-taking this means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
- 5.3 Paragraph 131 of the NPPF confirms that the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and helps make development acceptable to communities. Paragraph 135 sets out that decisions should ensure developments:

- Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area;

- Are visually attractive;
- Are sympathetic to local character and history, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change;
- Establish or maintain a strong sense of place;
- Optimise the potential of the site; and
- Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible.

5.4 Paragraph 192 of the NPPF seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, and paragraph 193 sets out the principles for determining planning application, including refusal applications if significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated for. Opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.

5.5 Paragraph 207 of the NPPF require applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate and sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Paragraph 212 of the NPPF advises 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. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.

5.6 **Local Planning Policy**

5.7 The Development Plan for this part of Wiltshire comprises the Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted 2015). Each relevant policy is considered in turn below:

5.8 Core Policy 1: 'Settlement Strategy' identifies the settlements where development will take place, Allington is identified as a small village. *"Development at large and small villages will be limited to that needed to help meet the housing needs of settlements and to improve employment opportunities, services and facilities"*.

5.9 Core Policy 50: 'Biodiversity and geodiversity' states that all development proposals should seek to enhance biodiversity.

5.10 Core Policy 57: 'Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping' A high standard of design is required in all new developments. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complementary to the locality. Development should make an efficient use of land whilst taking account of the characteristics of the site and

local context.

- 5.11 Core Policy 58: 'Historic Environment' Development should protect and where possible enhance the historic environment.

6. Design Considerations

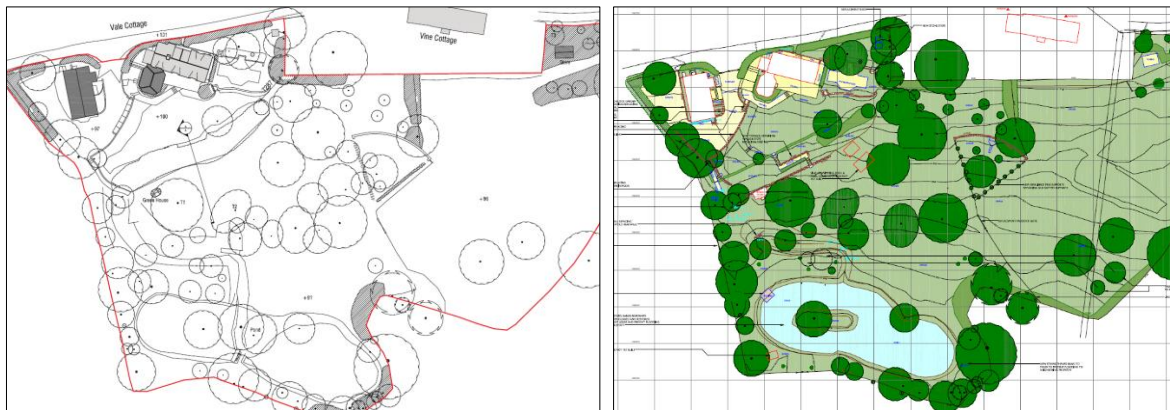
- 6.1 On the basis that the proposed works are landscaping works only it is considered that the main considerations in this case are;

- Impact of the works on the character and appearance of the area
- Impact of the works on the Stert Conservation Area and the setting of the listed building (Vale Cottage)
- Impact of the works on the ecology interests of the site
- Impact of the works upon trees and landscaping.

Each of these matters is considered in turn in the following paragraphs

Design and Appearance considerations

- 6.2 The site plan below (left), taken from application no. PL/2024/04755, shows the pre-existing site arrangement, shape and location of the pond. The plan on the right shows the post works arrangement. In terms of the works to the pond it can be seen that although a degree of reshaping of the pond has occurred as it has been scraped and regraded, the pond remains in the same location and of an equivalent size to the pre-existing situation. Trees have also been retained on the site (discussed further below), and the overall site arrangement is therefore little changed. It should be noted that the pond is a natural feature (albeit previously reshaped some years ago) and fills naturally from springs. Therefore, it was always the Applicant's intention to retain and indeed improve the pond.
- 6.3 It should also be noted that, in ecology terms, the works to the pond were undertaken in accordance with a licence issued prior by Natural England, including for the drain down and re-shaping of the pond, licence ref. 2024-00630-EPS-DLL.



Pre-existing site plan (left) and proposed site plan (right)

- 6.4 In terms of the regrading of the land, a site survey of the pre-existing situation is not available, but nevertheless, the silt/spoil removed from the pond has been spread across the site and not merely left in heaps. Given the size of the site the actual end result has been little change to the sites topography, and not to any extent that is considered to be perceptible from outside of the site to the extent as could affect the character of the area. It should be noted that, as is always the case with such works, they looked their most significant immediately after the initial scraping and depositing was done, but that new planting and grass (the paddock area has already been re-seeded) will quickly re-establish, and it is not considered that there will be any impact on the character of the area once the new grass and planting has established itself.
- 6.5 The public vantage points from which the works can potentially be glimpsed are from the lane at the north end of the site (which is also a public footpath) and from a footpath passing by approximately 100m away and to the south of the site. From both vantage points the works are considered to be sufficiently minor in scope as to have no material impact upon the perception of the site once the replacement planting is fully established. It should further be noted that at the time of the Enforcement Officer's visit the pond was empty but that it has subsequently been re-filling.

Heritage considerations

- 6.6 As noted above, Vale Cottage is a grade II listed building. Additionally, the site falls within the Stert conservation area.
- 6.7 The official listing for Vale Cottage describes it as follows;

"Cottage. C16-early C17 possibly incorporating earlier work. Timber framed with wattle and daub and colourwashed brick noggings, thatched roof. Single storey and attic, 2½ bays extended in C20 to 3 bays. Framing 3 panels high with ogee corner braces, the centre bay of north side raised by further panel and gabled. Oversailing chamfered wall plate. Entrance within centre bay, recessed, and C19 timber casement windows. South front of brick with paned windows in segmental headed openings, and 3 raised dormers. East gable believed to contain cruck not now visible. Extension Tyrolean rendered blockwork with whitewashed gable. Orchard Cottage, Vale Cottage, Vine Cottage (q.v.) and Old Mill Cottage form a widely spaced group of interest, constructed or reconstructed c1640-60 by New College, Oxford, with similarities in construction, and again remodelled in mid C19." The listing does not describe any features within the garden of the cottage as being of note to the listing (although the garden will of course contribute to the setting of the cottage).

6.7 The LPAs Character Appraisal and Management Plan for the Stert Conservation Area (2007) describes the village as a small village but with a history that *'goes back to the pre-conquest period'*. It has *'always been a small settlement no greater in status than a village...The core of the village grew up around the church and the adjacent Manor Farmhouse. A substantial number of yeoman farmhouses and agricultural buildings survive whilst some later cottages filled in some of the gaps'*. Of particular note in this case the document states that *'As noted above the built form of Stert is softened by woodland and individual trees. The proposed Conservation Area includes the setting of the hamlet including the steep banks to the south west. The slopes are well wooded, but there are also important trees and tree groups located throughout the proposed conservation area. Whilst the village core has little in the way of public open spaces; the paddocks, large gardens and banks make a strong contribution to the character of the area'*. Map 5 in the document identifies a number of significant trees and hedges in the conservation area, though none of those are in the grounds of Vale Cottage other than for on its front boundary with the lane.

6.8 The garden to Vale Cottage is therefore a contributor to the wider character of the conservation area and to the setting of the listed building. However, as already noted in the preceding paragraphs, the topography of the site has not been materially altered as a result of the works, trees are retained, new planting provided and the pond also retained in the same size and

position. It is therefore concluded that the sum result of the works preserves the significance of the identified heritage assets.

Tree and landscape considerations

- 6.9 Trees on the site are protected by virtue of the inclusion of the site within the conservation area. There are many trees on the site now and as part of the Applicant's programme of refurbishment of the gardens an application was previously submitted, and approved, for various tree works (LPA ref.PL/2024/01962). Some of those works have taken place with others outstanding.
- 6.10 No mature trees have been felled without consent as a result of the proposed works. Some smaller, dead trees at the pond edges were removed to be replaced but it is not considered that those will have been protected (as they were too small). A schedule of tree works done and to be done accompanies the application. Overall, it is considered that the important trees on the site have been retained and that the works undertaken have not/will not affect their health or longevity.

Ecology

- 6.11 As previously noted, the works to the pond were undertaken in accordance with a licence that had been issued prior by Natural England. Therefore, notwithstanding that the works took place without planning permission the Applicant undertook the necessary due diligence in terms of safeguarding protected species.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 In accordance with the NPPF consideration needs to be given as to whether the proposals constitute sustainable development. In this case the proposals are sustainable for the following reasons:
- The proposals are of an appropriate design and scale to preserve the landscape character of the conservation area.
 - The proposals will preserve the significance of nearby designated heritage assets and will preserve protected boundary trees and habitats.
 - The proposals preserve the character and appearance of the area and have no impact on the amenities of surrounding properties.

7.2 It is therefore considered that the design rationale set out in this Planning and Heritage Statement demonstrate that the proposed development is acceptable.