

Comment on Southwick Court Fields application, PL/2025/09486, 23 June 2026

We write as owners of Grade II* listed Southwick Court to object to this application on grounds of its impact on the heritage asset of the house and its associated fields.

HERITAGE IMPACT

SUMMARY

1. More detailed specifications have finally been provided for the bridge and raised roadway spanning the Lambrook stream. At a total height of almost 5m and clearly visible from Frome Road, we believe that this structure, together with the access road and frequent traffic, will cause substantial harm to the Grade II* heritage asset of Southwick Court and its associated fields system.

2. This intended harm to a designated heritage asset is no longer outweighed by the public benefits as defined by the NPPF since the withdrawal of the Wiltshire Local Plan removes the restrictions on housing developments elsewhere in the county.

In this case, the relevant heritage asset is the medieval manor house of Southwick Court together with its associated fields. The 2018 Heritage Impact Assessment on the Wiltshire Housing Site Allocation Plan noted that this asset had particular value due to the continuing link between the field system and the manor house from which they were historically farmed.

The assessment said: "Where moated and other manorial sites often lose this relationship to their working landscape through the development of larger houses and parkland in later centuries, Southwick provides a relatively rare and valuable illustration of a 16th and 17th century estate centre in its agricultural context."¹

1

<https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/documents/s143827/Heritage%20Impact%20Assessment%20LUC%20March%202018%2015052018%20Cabinet.pdf>

In other words, this application is not for a development that would be situated close to a historic asset but physically on top of that asset, given that the asset comprises the fields as well as the house.

The heritage asset will be severely and permanently harmed by the building of an access road across the Park Field to the west of the housing development and in particular by the creation of a bridge over the Lambrok Stream that will irrevocably change this historic landscape.

In its original response to this development application at Outline stage, Historic England commented as follows:

“The setting of Southwick Court allows its significance to be understood and appreciated ... The listed buildings retain a character of rural isolation surrounded in an agrarian landscape. This experience is enhanced by the principal approach to Southwick Court, across former water meadows which are now used for pasture. These rural environs, clear of neighbours, speak of the importance of the property and its former occupants....”

Historic England continued that the proposed access road “is likely to impact on appreciation of the rural, isolated setting of the asset” and that “the creation of a road across the pasture will still have an adverse impact on appreciation of the Grade II* listed buildings, despite its proposed sympathetic design. The engineered nature of the carriageway and the frequency of vehicular traffic will serve to erode the sense of rural isolation of the Grade II* listed building.”

The impact of the proposed development on the historic setting of Southwick Court was a major factor in the decision of Wiltshire Council’s Strategic Planning Committee to refuse permission in February 2023.

In the subsequent appeal, the Inspector gave “considerable importance and weight” to the harm that the planned development would cause to the special interest and significance of Southwick Court and its gatehouse and moat bridge.

The Council’s Conservation Officer objected to the Outline application (20/00379/OUT), saying that “on the basis of the submitted indicative development details”, the harm which would result to the Southwick Court

assets should be considered as “less than substantial harm” but within the higher levels of this category.

But she added that the submitted plans lacked detail, in particular regarding the road that would bisect the Park Field between the A361 and the Lambrok Stream and the bridge over the stream. She said: “...the harm that will result from the road crossing over Lambrok is unclear as I have not spotted that any information has been provided in respect of this element.”²

When the Outline application was approved by Inspector JP Longmuir at appeal in March 2024, he wrote: “I find that the proposal would fail to preserve the setting of both the Grade II* listed Southwick Court Farmhouse and Grade II* listed Gatehouse and Bridge Over Moat at Southwick Court, causing harm to their special interest and significance as designated heritage assets.

“I find that the harm from the proposal would be 'less than substantial'. However, section 66 of the 1990 Act, requires special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. Additionally, Paragraph 205 of the Framework advocates great weight to the asset’s conservation. I therefore give considerable importance and weight to the harm I have identified in my balancing judgment below.”³

Details of the bridge have now been provided and these show a significant construction, apparently between four and five metres high when the fence is included, more than twice the height of the average person, and roughly equivalent to the height of a bungalow.

One of the plans in the ‘Culvert details x6 Drawings’ document seems to suggest the height of the structure is 3.6m (3647mm) with a fence above that of 600mm. That creates a structure with a total height of 4.2m.^{4 5}

² <https://development.wiltshire.gov.uk/pr/s/web-comment/a073z00001lq0vmAAB/conservation-comments>

³ <https://southwickcountrypark.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/appeal-decision.pdf>

⁴ <https://development.wiltshire.gov.uk/pr/s/planning-application/a0iQ300000IEhSXIA1/pl202509486?tabset-8903c=2>

⁵ <https://development.wiltshire.gov.uk/pr/s/planning-application/a0iQ300000IEhSXIA1/pl202509486?tabset-8903c=2>

While the road and the bridge constitute fixed structures that will harm the historic asset on which they are situated, the harm will be exacerbated by frequent traffic movements on the road and bridge.

At the time of the appeal, Wiltshire Council estimated that the development might generate some around 100 vehicle arrivals and departures during each morning and evening peak hour.⁶ More up to date figures from the National Travel survey of 2024 estimate that on a verge 364 car trips are made per person per year.⁷ Assuming 2.3 people per household, that equates to around 150,000 trips per year for a 180-home estate or 413 per day. Parcel deliveries, estimated at 200 parcels per year per household nationally, would add around 36,000 trips per year to a 180-home estate, or a further 100 trips per day.⁸ There is therefore the prospect of more than 500 vehicle trips being made every day along the access road and bridge.

This represents a major intervention into a historic landscape that would irrevocably alter and harm the historic asset.

Mindful that government guidance states that: “It is the degree of harm to the asset’s significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed”⁹ we would ask the Wiltshire Conservation team to consider whether, taken together, the bridge, road and traffic, should now be judged to cause substantial harm to the heritage asset of Southwick Court and its associated field.

PUBLIC BENEFITS ARGUMENT

Relevant sections of the National Planning Policy Framework are as follows:

212. 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

⁶ <https://development.wiltshire.gov.uk/pr/s/planning-application/a0i3z000014evqKAAQ/2000379out?tabset-8903c=2>

⁷

⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/cardboard-recycling-uk-amazon-b2171252.html>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment>

should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

214. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply: a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

215. 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.

We contend that section 212 applies here and that “great weight” should be given to the conservation of the heritage asset of manor house and fields.

We believe that section 214 also applies and that consent should be refused as none of the exceptions cited apply.

However, should the Council take the view that the harm remains as a “less than substantial” level, then the harm should be weighed against the public benefits as per section 215.

At the 2023 appeal, the Inspector acknowledged the potential harm caused to the heritage asset of Southwick Court and weighed it against the public benefits of new housing. After consideration he ruled for the latter on the grounds that Wiltshire’s housing land supply was then limited.

However, in the intervening period, the Wiltshire Local Plan has been withdrawn with the result that, while technically Wiltshire has a land supply shortage, there

is little limitation on the availability of development land. The 2015 Local Plan period ends this year. The authority has clearly not met the requirement to review its policies every five years. It cannot demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing land and the so-called 'tilted balance' applies, meaning that planning permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

When the Outline application was approved, it was one of a limited number of sites in the then Local Plan – a plan that did not include the delayed Ashton Park development of 2,500 houses which now has Outline permission. With developers now able to secure approvals on sites not in the Local Plan provided they do not breach the NPPF, any perceived urgency to build 180 homes on a highly sensitive site has receded.

As a result there is no valid justification for harm to a heritage asset on the basis defined by the NPPF.

Simon & Carey Tesler
Southwick Court