

PROPOSED CONVERSION OF AGRICULTURAL SHEDS AT 21 THE STREET, WILSFORD, WILTSHIRE

Heritage Statement



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21 THE STREET, WILSFORD,
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Heritage Statement

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PROPOSED CONVERSION OF AGRICULTURAL SHEDS AT 21 THE STREET, WILSFORD, WILTSHIRE

Heritage Statement

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The proposed development site consists of two modern agricultural sheds located adjacent to No. 21 The Street, Wilsford, a Grade II listed building. The plot lies to the south of The Street within the western part of the village, and the site is located within the Wilsford Conservation Area and the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

1.2 The owner of the barns sought planning permission to convert two of the buildings to residential use, demolish one modern blockwork shed and an attached element to one of the barns in 2024, this scheme meeting objections including objections based on harm to designated heritage assets (PL/2024/10740). The application was withdrawn and the scheme has been revised.

1.3 Forum Heritage Services was commissioned to make an assessment of the extent and importance of the setting of No. 21 The Street and any other nearby listed buildings and the contribution to their significance, and to consider the potential impact of the proposals upon the significance of the listed buildings and to prepare a Heritage Statement in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The contribution of the site and building to the significance of the character and appearance of the Wilsford Conservation Area was also to be assessed. Bob Edwards BSc (Hons) PG Dip IHBC MCIfA, Director of Forum Heritage Services visited the site in June 2025 and subsequently prepared this report which has been revised to reflect the updated proposals.

1.2 This report will present:

- A brief background to the proposed development site using historic mapping
- A description of the setting of 21 The Street
- Policy and guidance background

- An assessment of the importance of the setting of 21 The Street and the potential impact of the proposed development on the significance of the heritage asset following Historic England guidance on assessing the importance of setting in *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2nd edition, December 2017)
- An assessment of the contribution of the site to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Conclusions

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The earliest map available that shows Wilsford in detail is the Tithe map of c.1840 (Figure 1). This map shows what appears to be a large farmstead group to the south side of the village street at the western end of the village. The group included two semi-detached cottages (plot 64, coloured red) on the site of 21 The Street, and a 'messuage and malthouse' in plot 62, the large L-plan range extending from the west end of the cottages and turning to the south. There was a further range of agricultural buildings east of the cottages set perpendicular to the road.
- 2.2 The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 shows No. 21 The Street as two cottages (Figure 2). The attached range to the west had been demolished but the perpendicular range to the east was still present and it was still standing in 1941.
- 2.3 No. 21 The Street was added to the *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic interest* at Grade II in 1986. The building is described as:

House. C18. Brick with timber framed upper floor and thatched roof. Two storeys. Boarded doors, one with added porch. Early C20 timber casement windows. Single storey lean-to on rear. Sun Insurance mark No 70739.

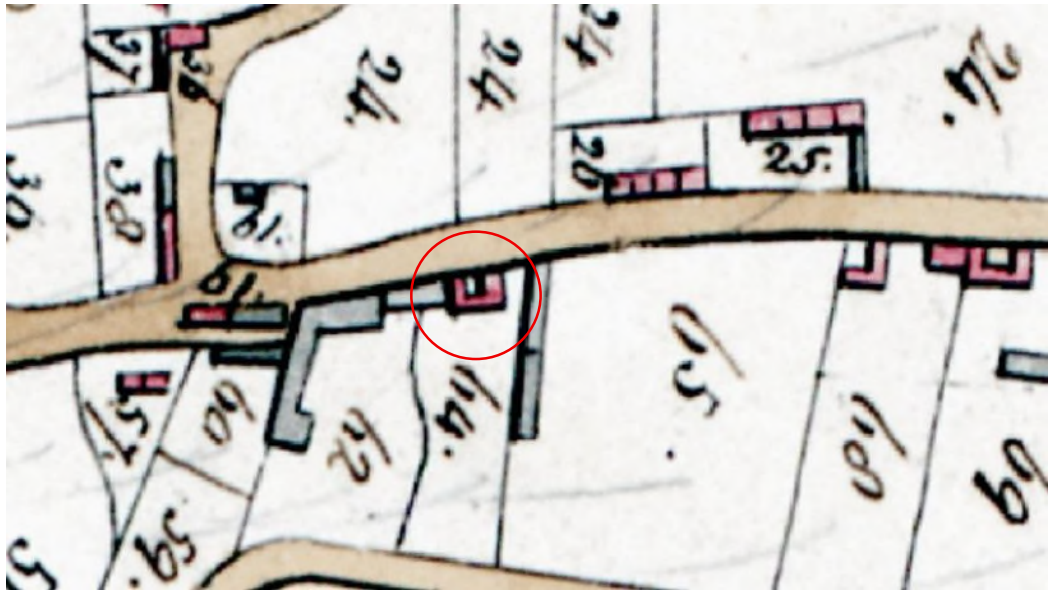


Figure 1 Wilsford Tithe map, c.1840. © WSHC.

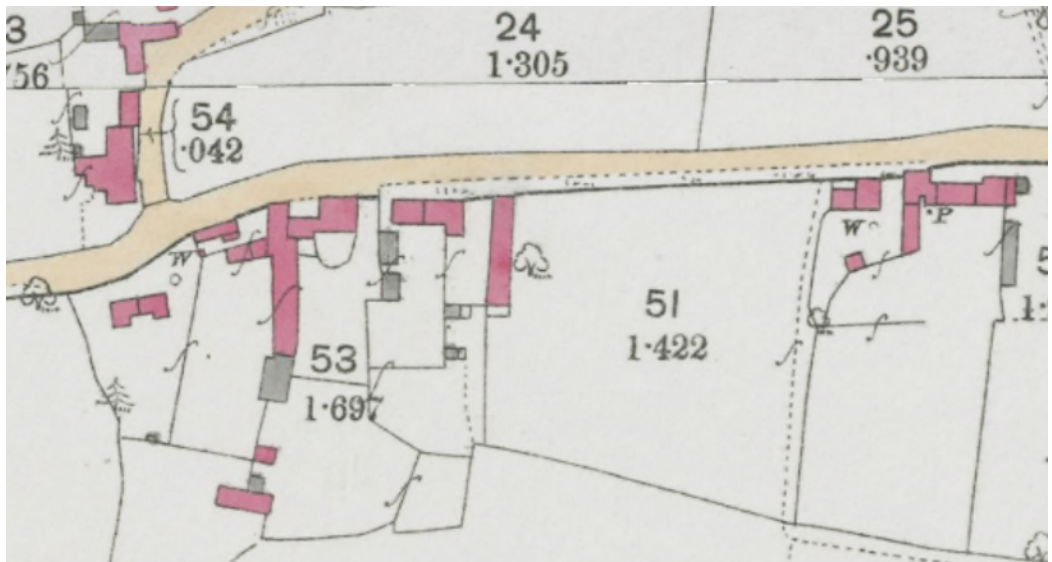


Figure 2 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map, 1886. © WSHC.

3.0 DESCRIPTION

- 3.1 The proposed development site lies on the south side of The Street, the barns being within the plot immediately east of 21 The Street, the two larger sheds being set back from the street frontage and with a smaller blockwork building in front of the larger sheds (Figure 3). The description of the site in relation to the setting of the listed building and the character and appearance of the conservation area will be presented as a series of captioned photographs.

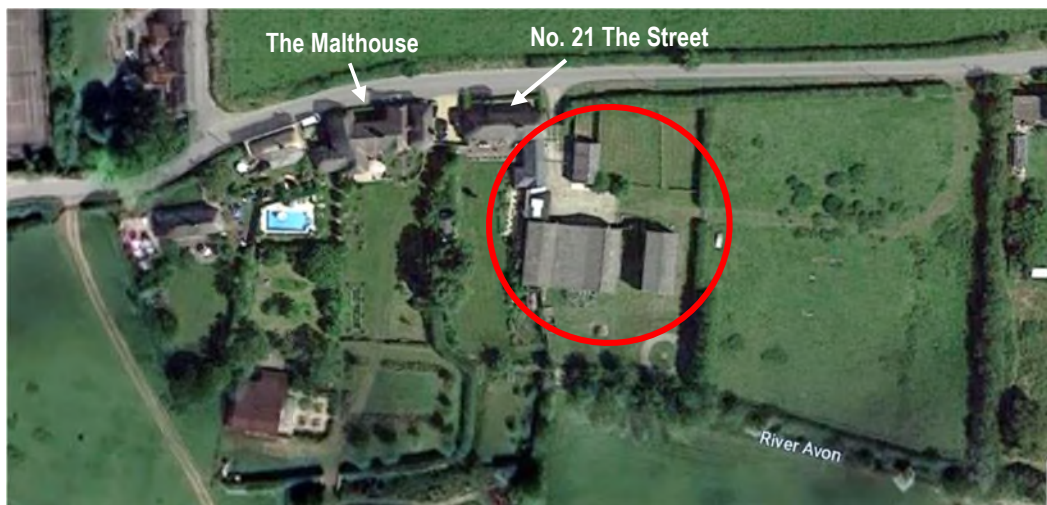


Figure 3 Aerial photograph showing the context of the proposed development site. © Google Maps



Figure 4 No. 21 The Street as seen from the north-east. That the house was formerly two cottages is evident by the presence of the two doors and porches. The character is largely as described in the list description, the early origins of the house as a cruck-framed building of possible 15th century date is not evident from the front elevation.



Figure 5 The view past the east gable end of No. 21 looking towards the agricultural sheds. The low gabled shed to the right is to be demolished.



Figure 6 An angled view through the gateway to the agricultural sheds adjacent to the east end of No. 21. The part rendered block building to the front of the plot is to be demolished.



Figure 7 The agricultural sheds as seen from the north-east corner of the plot east of No. 21. From the street itself, this view is totally screened by the tall hedgerow.



Figure 8 The south and east elevations of the agricultural sheds proposed for conversion from within the south-east corner of the plot.



Figure 9 When viewed from The Street just west of No. 21, the lower element of the western shed, which is to be demolished, can be partly seen. Following removal of this element, the remaining part of the western shed will be largely screened by No. 21 in this view.



Figure 10 Further west along the village street passing The Malthouse, the position of the projecting wings of The Malthouse and the slight curve in the road means that No. 21 is concealed from view, and there is no sightline to the agricultural sheds.



Figure 11 At the west end of the village the road turns to the south. From this road there are views towards the village in which glimpses of some of the thatched roofed cottages can be seen. In the foreground of these views is a timber-clad shed which was granted consent for conversion to ancillary residential use in 2017 (17/01942/FUL). Beyond, the roofs and a gable of the agricultural sheds can be glimpsed.



Figure 12 A footpath leads to the north from The Street west of No. 21. The path is slightly set down from the field level but from the field boundary No. 21 can be seen with the rendered blockwork shed to the left (to be demolished). The eastern shed proposed for conversion can just be glimpsed beyond, set well back from the street frontage.



Figure 13 The view along The Street to the west looking towards the gable end of No. 21 which is partly screened by the hedgerow to the south of the road. Hedges also largely screen the agricultural sheds to the left which are not particularly prominent buildings in the street scene. Compare this view with the view as recorded by Google Street View in 2011 (Figure 14).



Figure 14 The Google Street View image of the view west along The Street towards No. 21. At this date the hedge alongside the road had only recently been planted and allowed open views across the field east of No. 21. The listed house and the sheds are clearly visible, the light grey cladding of the eastern agricultural building giving the shed greater prominence. This is the view that the conservation area appraisal described; the present situation is markedly different meaning that the appraisal is effectively out of date in relation to this particular property and the impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.



Figure 15 A footpath cuts across the fields to the north of The Street from opposite Yew Tree Farmhouse. From this path there are views to most of the houses along The Street. Only the thatched roof of No. 21 (arrowed) rises above the hedge. To the left the agricultural sheds can be seen, their muted, dark colours and relatively low profiles when seen against the backdrop of trees mean that they recede into the scene and do not look incongruous in this rural context.

4.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the statutory approach to the management of historic buildings and areas and requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses, and its setting, under Section 66 – a matter the Courts have held should be afforded considerable importance and weight. Section 72, relating to Conservation Areas requires that ‘special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area’.
- 4.2 The statutory approach is reflected in Policy CP58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 (CS) and Policy 99 of the Draft Local Plan Review: Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment which has ‘weight’ following submission to the Secretary of State in late October 2024.
- 4.3 The government’s National Planning Policy Framework 2026 (NPPF) Paragraph HE4: Securing the conservation of heritage assets states:
1. *Heritage assets, as an irreplaceable resource, should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. To achieve this, development proposals which would affect the significance of heritage assets, including any contribution made by their setting should: a. Maintain or secure a use consistent with their conservation, taking into account the importance of maintaining the assets, the positive contribution they can make to sustainable communities including local economies, and the positive contribution they can make to local character and distinctiveness; and b. Avoid (or if that is not possible, minimise) harm to the significance of heritage assets, and instead conserve this significance.*
 2. *Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (including from development within its setting) should have a clear and convincing justification in accordance with the policies in this chapter.*

4.4 Paragraph HE5 Assessing effects on heritage assets states that:

1. *Development proposals affecting heritage assets should be accompanied by an assessment of the significance of the assets affected (including any contribution made by their setting) and of the potential effect of the proposal on their significance. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is necessary to understand the potential effect of the proposal on their significance.*
2. *Assessments of the potential effects of development proposals on the significance of heritage assets (including through effects on their setting) should identify whether proposals would be likely to:*
 - a. *Have a positive effect, which is where the significance of a heritage asset would be enhanced, or better revealed; or*
 - b. *Have no effect on the significance of a heritage asset; or*
 - c. *Result in harm to the significance of a heritage asset, either from work affecting the asset itself or from development within its setting. The degree of harm should be identified: substantial harm would occur where the development proposal would seriously affect a key element of the asset's significance; or*
 - d. *Cause the total loss of the significance of a heritage asset.*

4.5 Paragraph HE6 Proposals affecting designated heritage assets advises:

1. *When considering the potential effect of a development proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset, substantial weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential effect amounts to a positive effect, harm, substantial harm, or total loss of its significance.*
2. *Development proposals which would have a positive effect on a designated heritage asset should be supported.*
3. *Any harm to a designated heritage asset will be a matter of considerable importance and weight, which should be dealt with in accordance with paragraphs 4 to 6 of this policy.*

4. *Where a development proposal would harm the significance of a designated heritage asset the effect on the asset and its significance should be weighed against any public benefits resulting from the proposal. Important public benefits can include securing the long-term reuse of a vacant or underused listed building, and enabling energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures to be employed.*
5. *Where a development proposal would cause substantial harm to, or the total loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset, consent should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss, or if all of the following apply:*
 - a. *The nature of the heritage asset would otherwise prevent all reasonable uses of the site;*
 - b. *No suitable use for the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;*
 - c. *Conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is not possible; and*
 - d. *The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the asset back into use.*

4.6 Paragraph HE9: Conservation areas states:

1. *Development proposals within or affecting the significance of conservation areas should:*
 - a. *Retain and conserve buildings and other features which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area where possible; and*
 - b. *Consider the area's special architectural or historic interest (as identified as part of the designation of the conservation area) in the design of development.*
2. *Not all elements of a conservation area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Where a development proposal would result in the loss of a building or other element which contributes to the character or appearance of a conservation area that is desirable to conserve, the assessment of impact should take into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the conservation area as a whole, and the effects of this considered in accordance with policies HE5 and HE6.*

3. *Proposals which conserve those elements of a conservation area that make a positive contribution to the area (or which better reveal its significance) should be supported.*

4.7 The National Planning Policy Framework (Annexe 2 Glossary) defines the setting of a heritage asset as:

'The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.'

4.8 The Historic England Guidance *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2nd edition, December 2017) states that:

'Setting is not itself a heritage asset, nor a heritage designation, although land comprising a setting may itself be designated. Its importance lies in what it contributes to the significance of the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate that significance' (p.4)

4.9 The HE guidance sets out a staged approach to the assessment of understanding the significance of setting:

- 1 Identification of heritage assets and the extent of their settings
- 2 Assess whether, how and what degree the settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage assets
- 3 Assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful on the significance
- 4 Explore ways to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm
- 5 Record the process

4.10 The guidance also states that views which particularly contribute to the significance of heritage assets include those where the relationship between the asset and other historic assets or places or designed views.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SETTING TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LISTED BUILDINGS

5.1 This assessment will follow the approach as set out in the Historic England guidance *The Setting of Heritage Assets* to identify the importance of the setting of the listed buildings and to assess the potential impact of the proposed development on their significance.

Step 1: Identification of heritage assets

5.2 The heritage assets to be considered in relation to the proposed development within their settings are:

- No. 21 The Street

5.3 No. 21 The Street is a Grade II listed building and so has been identified as a building of significance in a national context, presumably as an example of the local vernacular. To understand impact on change within the setting of the listed building on its significance, it is essential to consider what contributes to the significance of the listed building. The external appearance of the house does not fully convey the significance of the building with the 'timber framing' refer to the list description being late 18th or 19th century stud and lacing rather than traditional timber framing. However, previous assessments have shown that the house contains two cruck trusses which possibly indicate that the house dates from as early as the 15th century. It is from this early fabric, the plan form, together with the vernacular character of the house, that the majority of the archaeological and architectural significance of the listed building is derived.

5.4 Whilst externally No. 21 would appear to be a pair of estate cottages, the evidence for change internally indicates that it was built as a single house and was presumably the farmhouse which, by the mid-19th century, was associated with a substantial group of agricultural buildings. The farmhouse's origins and historic farmstead context contributes to the historic interest of the listed building, as does its sub-division into cottages.

Step 2: Assessment of contribution of setting to the significance of the heritage assets

- 5.5 No. 21 The Street is one of a number of modest, thatched cottages and houses set close to the street frontage alongside The Street in Wilsford. This village context provides the wider setting for the listed building, and it is the relationship with the village street that is the most important aspect of the setting of the listed building. The Street is from where the house is principally experienced, and its vernacular character can be appreciated and understood.
- 5.6 The majority of historic buildings in a rural settlement such as Wilford will have originated as farmhouses, particularly houses that can trace their origins back to the 15th or 16th century, as is the case with No. 21. Over the centuries the majority of these small farmsteads were taken out of agricultural use, the farm buildings eventually being demolished and, with the consolidation of landholdings into larger farms, many of the former farmhouses became homes to farm labourers. Often, as is the case that No. 21, the houses were subdivided to form smaller cottages, although No. 21 was enlarged in the 19th century with additions at both ends. The mid-19th century Tithe map shows that No. 21 and No. 22 formed part of a clearly defined group of agricultural buildings, including a Malthouse to the west, together with other farm buildings in the range to the rear and the range set perpendicular to the road to the east of No. 21. Whilst the Malthouse was converted to residential use and the farm building range behind demolished, the range to the east of No. 21 will have continued to convey a sense of the agricultural history of this site into the mid-20th century at least. In the late 20th century, the modern agricultural buildings were erected within the plot adjacent to No. 21 and although they are modern metal-framed buildings, they continue to reflect the agricultural use of this site. If these buildings were removed, No. 21 would be seen, externally at least, as a former pair of cottages, losing any indication that historically this house formed part of a farmstead group resulting in a negative impact on the illustrative historic interest of the listed building. Therefore, the presence of agricultural buildings, albeit modern structures which are not of high aesthetic quality, but which represent the latest iteration in a long history of agricultural use on the site, are considered as contributing to the significance of the listed building.

Step 3: Assess impact of the proposed development on significance

- 5.7 It is proposed to convert the existing modern agricultural sheds to residential use (Figures 16 - 19). The larger western shed will be reduced in size with the demolition of the western part of the building, retaining the main gabled element and the 'aisle' to the west to form the residence. The eastern barn will serve as a garage and store with a home studio at first floor level. The approach to the conversion is to maintain the clearly agricultural character of the buildings as seen from The Street with the use of vertical timber cladding and render, materials often used on such buildings. The concrete block shed to the front part of the site will also be demolished. The entrance to the site will utilise the existing gate adjacent to No. 21 rather than using the track across the field to the east as initially proposed in the 2024 application.



Figure 16 Proposed site plan.



Figure 17 Proposed ground floor plan.



Figure 18 Proposed north elevation.



Figure 19 Proposed south elevation.

5.8 Taking the NPPF definition of setting as set out in 4.7, above, it follows that the test for whether a development within the setting of a heritage asset will affect significance must be based on the impact on the ability to:

- Experience the heritage asset or
- To appreciate or understand its significance.

Further aspects of potential impact on setting include:

- Whether the proposed development would be harmful aesthetically when seen in combination with or adjacent to a heritage asset
- Impact on tranquillity, appearance through light pollution or the experience of a heritage asset through the introduction of smells.

5.9 In terms of the impact on the experience of the listed No. 21 The Street – the principal test of impact on setting – the proposed conversion of the existing buildings will not affect the ability to experience the house or to understand or appreciate its significance as there are no new buildings to restrict views to the house, and the form and character of the buildings will clearly remain that of agricultural sheds.

5.10 The change in the use of the agricultural sheds to residential use will result in a minimal change to the buildings as the mass, form and character of the sheds will mean that they will continue to be read as agricultural sheds in the minor glimpsed views from The Street rather than as a residential property. Therefore, the association between the house and the evident agricultural use of the adjacent plot will be maintained, meaning that there will be no impact on the setting of the listed building.

5.11 The proposed conversion of the agricultural shed to the east of No. 21 The Street will result in minimal change to the present street scene and views in which the sheds and No. 21 The Street can be experienced together. The upgrading of the quality of the cladding materials to the walls to vertical timber cladding, and roof from asbestos fibre to corrugated metal sheet, a material that can now be seen as ‘traditional’ on farm buildings actually represents an improvement to the appearance of the buildings and an enhancement of the aesthetic qualities of the views in which the shed can be seen.

5.12 The north elevation is the principal elevation which can be seen from the public realm. The revised scheme has retained part of this elevation open by recessing the wall to the west part of the western building, and the reduced number of window openings proposed within the eastern part to minimise the evidence of conversion, these first floor windows being largely screened by vertical timber slats. As a result, the infilled section of the north elevation will appear largely blank and so, in the minor glimpsed views through the gateway (see

Figures 5 and 6), the change will be minimal and will not represent a change to the setting of the listed building that will harm the significance of the listed building in terms of experiencing the listed building or understanding or appreciating its significance.

5.13 There are no significant views to No. 21 The Street that will be materially affected by the proposed change of use.

5.14 The removal of the blockwork shed to the front part of the plot, which is presently the most visible structure, and which is a more domestic scale shed rather than the clearly agricultural buildings, represents a minor positive change to the setting of the listed building as the gable of the listed building will be more visible from within the front part of the plot. The removal of the western element of the west shed, which partly lies behind the listed building, will increase the area in which the rear elevation of the house can be seen (although these are private views), and remove an encroachment into the rear plot, changes which represent an improvement to the setting of the heritage asset – the Historic England guidance is clear that the experience of a heritage from within its setting is not restricted to public views.

5.15 The 2024 application received an objection from the Council's Conservation Officer which relates to both the setting of the listed building and the character and appearance of the conservation area:

'The buildings proposed for conversion to residential are both modern steel-framed structures, typical of functional agricultural buildings dating from the mid and later C20. The presence of buildings of this nature is broadly tolerated and understood due to their role in retaining a traditional agricultural function and character in small villages in the post-war period. There is no support in the CA appraisal for the arguments put forward in the planning statement that the 'long-term preservation and upkeep of the buildings' would be a desirable outcome, and I see no cause to reach a different conclusion, especially where they would no longer contribute their agricultural benefits. The majority of the buildings appear to have been constructed under agricultural permitted development rights and the site should not be considered previously developed land. The buildings are, in any event, clearly of such construction that any habitable accommodation would effectively be a new structure.

Historically there was a farmyard close to the east side of the listed building but this has gradually been replaced with modern and untraditional buildings. I am in no doubt that the existing barns detract from the character and setting of 21 Wilsford and the significant open space between the village's (and CA's) two focuses of development.'

5.16 The conservation response appears to be based on the premise that once these modern agricultural buildings no longer have an agricultural function, they should be removed from the landscape. The desire to lose these buildings from the landscape is not supported by planning legislation or policy (and also see 5.29, below). The reality of the situation is that these buildings exist, and they may be regarded by their owner as assets. Therefore, it is unlikely that the buildings will be demolished and the site returned to a paddock or part of the garden of No. 21, which appears to be the desired outcome of the Conservation Officer. The reality of the situation is that the buildings will either be utilised and maintained, or they will not be used and allowed to fall into disrepair, but this will not represent a rapid descent to total dereliction and demolition. When these buildings were in a derelict condition it was noted that they were an eyesore. It would be surprising if the local authority or other bodies interested in the character of the landscape were to actively promote the future dereliction of these buildings to the harm of the conservation area and setting of the listed building. Therefore, it is considered that the active use of these buildings, involving an upgrade to the cladding materials and a sensitive design for the conversion represents at least a neutral change and the argument that preventing dereliction in the future is a positive outcome as set out in the Planning Statement, is accepted.

5.17 The Conservation Officer claimed that, due to the form of construction, the conversion of the sheds will effectively create new structures. A planning officer also raised similar concerns:

'Through introduction of a whole wall on the northern elevation, filling in the elevation that is currently open it is considered that it constitutes major rebuilding going beyond necessary modification and does not preserve the character of the original building.'

It is acknowledged that the site lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and is also within a conservation area and so Class Q of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 does not apply. However, the approach to the conversion of these buildings is

commensurate with Class Q. The restriction on Class Q conversion of agricultural buildings within these protected areas does not mean that such conversions cannot or should not be permitted. The requirement for planning permission is to ensure that the proposals respect the character of the protected areas. So, unless the approach to the conversion in terms of the external appearance of the buildings impacts upon the ability to experience the listed building and understand or appreciate its significance, or the impact upon the character and appearance of the conservation area resulting in harm to that character, internal or structural aspects such as how the building is subdivided or insulated, or the loss of openings that are of no architectural significance are of no relevance as the proposals will not harm the agricultural character of the building. The officer response to this application is inconsistent to the approach the Council took in relation to the 2017 application to convert an un-used agricultural shed to the rear of The Malthouse (see 6.8, below).

- 5.18 With regard to the claim that the infilling of the north wall will result in a change in character, this implies that there is a significance to the open front of the shed. In some cases, for example, a traditional cart shed or cattle shelter shed, the open front is an essential element of the character of the building, allowing its original use to be identified. In such cases, the infilling of the open bays is typically regarded as harmful to character unless the presence of the bays remains readable. In the case of a utilitarian, modern agricultural shed, the open side is not significant in terms of understanding the building. Open or infilled, the character of the shed will remain that of an agricultural shed. However, the revised scheme has amended the extent of change, leaving the western side of the north elevation of the western building with a deeply recessed section to preserve the feeling of openness, whilst the eastern part is infilled. The lower part of the eastern building is also deeply recessed. It is considered that this is a satisfactory compromise, particularly given the reduction in window openings proposed in this elevation which further minimises the introduction of any domestic character to this structure. The south elevations, which have minimal visibility, are also largely deep set which reduces the apparent mass of the buildings, further reduced by the removal of the element against the west of the western building.
- 5.19 The conservation comments seem to argue that the fact that the house historically formed part of a farmstead makes no contribution to the historic interest of the listed building, the Conservation Officer clearly stating that the present buildings are harmful to the setting. It might be considered that this is a failure to adequately assess the heritage values of the

listed building – no such assessment of significance in line with the Historic England guidance on assessing significance was presented in response to the previous application. This Heritage Statement has carefully considered the importance of the setting of the Grade II listed No. 21 The Street and includes an assessment of the significance of the listed building. It finds that the agricultural sheds convey an understanding that No. 21 was associated with a farmstead group of buildings and that the removal of these buildings, (if that were to happen for some reason, although the local authority have no powers to force their removal) would result in No. 21 appearing to be a simple pair of workers cottages within the village. The loss of the sheds, removing the visible and tangible link to the historic uses of the site, can only be regarded as a harmful change and so the argument that the sheds detract from the setting of the listed building as presented by the Conservation Officer is strongly refuted.

- 5.20 During the period of the determination of the previous application, the decision on an appeal for a comparable scheme at Tilshead, Wiltshire, was published (APP/Y3940/W/24/3357434) (Appendix I). That application was for the conversion of a modern agricultural shed of similar character to the sheds at Wilsford, which stands within the setting of a Grade II listed building and within a conservation area, for which Forum Heritage Services provided a Heritage Statement. The Inspector allowed the appeal and awarded costs against Wiltshire Council, making it clear that modern agricultural buildings can be regarded as contributing to the setting of a listed building and the character of a conservation area – in direct contradiction to the argument presented by the Conservation Officer who commented on both the Tilshead and Wilsford 2024 applications:

‘Despite the appeal building being of modern construction, it nonetheless conveys an understanding of the historical agricultural function of the site, and this historic link contributes to a minor degree, to the significance of Elm Cottage. From my observations on site, I have no reason to reach a different conclusion with the HS in that regard.

In the views towards Elm Cottage in which the agricultural building would be seen, the building would largely retain its existing functional form and appearance. Consequently, the proposal would preserve the setting of the listed building and would not harm its significance as a designated heritage asset.’

- 5.21 In a further appeal decision, (APP/H1705/W/24/3344669) (Appendix II) also relating to modern agricultural sheds in a conservation area and within the setting of a listed farmhouse in Hampshire, the Inspector stated that:

'It is not disputed that the barns are non-traditional, and their removal is unlikely to harm the appearance of the CA. (para. 13)

However, the visually obvious form of the existing barns emphasises the agricultural use of the appeal site and thereby reinforces the character of the CA and the rural setting of the Church and Farmhouse.' (para. 14)

- 5.22 These appeal decisions clearly indicate that modern farm buildings can contribute to the character of a conservation area and the importance of setting of a listed building, and together with the consent granted for the conversion of a shed associated with The Malthouse (see 6.7, below) set an established approach to such development. Therefore, objections to the current application must be supported by detailed reasons why, in this particular instance, conversion would cause harm to designated heritage assets. No such arguments were presented in relation to the 2024 application.

Step 4: How to maximise enhancement or avoid or minimise harm

- 5.23 The assessment of the importance of the settings of the listed buildings and potential impact of the revised proposals for the conversion of the existing agricultural sheds and the removal of the concrete block shed finds that the proposal will not result in harm to the significance of No. 21 The Street, but will be at least a neutral change, and may, as with the workshop to the rear of The Malthouse, result in a positive change. Therefore, there is no requirement for mitigation measures to avoid or minimise harm.

Step 5: Record the process

- 5.24 This report presents a record of the process of the assessment of the importance of the setting of the listed buildings and its contribution to their significance, together with the assessment of the potential impact of the proposals.

6.0 CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

6.1 The proposed development site lies within the Wilsford Conservation Area.

6.2 No. 21 The Street clearly makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, the house being seen in the context of the village street and the neighbouring timber-framed The Malthouse to the west.

6.3 The agricultural sheds to the east of No. 21 are an established part of the conservation area although they now have relatively limited visibility from The Street, particularly during summer, as they are set back from the street frontage and are largely screened by substantial hedges along the roadside and to the east of the site. In winter the roadside hedge may allow more visibility, but these will be filtered views only rather than allowing open views to the buildings, and with the proposed orchard to be planted within the northern part of the plot there will be considerable screening in views from the village street. There is also a substantial treed boundary to the south of the site. The glimpsed views to the buildings that are possible convey the understanding that these are agricultural buildings within a rural, once agricultural settlement. Whilst not of heritage or high aesthetic quality, the sheds, which are no longer derelict and so are not the 'eyesores' they were when they were in poor condition at the time the conservation area appraisal was undertaken, and they considered to be at least neutral elements in the conservation area and it has been shown in the appeals referred to above that such buildings can be assessed as making a positive contribution to the character of a conservation area.

6.4 The Conservation Officer referred to the published Wilsford Conservation Area Appraisal document in relation to the 2024 application, pointing to the fact that in that document the agricultural sheds were described as being 'derelict' and indeed, No. 21 was also in poor condition at that date. The appraisal document identifies the derelict sheds as being an 'eyesore'. The key word in the appraisal reference to these buildings is 'derelict'. Most derelict buildings of any date would generally be regarded as an eyesore within an attractive, rural village such as Wilsford. It is relevant that the appearance of the sheds has changed since the appraisal of the conservation area was undertaken (Figure 19). It is considered that the appearance of the eastern shed has been significantly improved to the extent that, with the changes to the boundaries and planting, the opinion on their contribution to the

character and appearance of the conservation area at the date of the conservation area appraisal cannot be reasonably cited to justify a view that these sheds remain an 'eyesore'.



Figure 19 The Google Street View image of the agricultural sheds in 2011. The recladding of the eastern shed, together with substantial planting of hedgerows both along the roadside and along the boundary to the east of the buildings, plus tree growth behind the sheds has markedly changed this scene such that the appraisal document is no longer a reliable document in relation to these buildings.

- 6.5 Agricultural sheds within a rural settlement that have appropriate cladding etc., and where they are located in a position where they are not dominant or causing harm due to featuring prominently in any important views whereby they impact upon the aesthetic qualities of, for example, a significant street scene, means that agricultural sheds *per se* should not be regarded as eyesores. Given the largely screened position, the muted colour of the cladding, and their current, maintained, condition it is not considered that these sheds can reasonably be regarded as an 'eyesore' in the setting of the listed building or within the conservation area. The agricultural sheds are an established part of the setting of the listed building and the character and appearance of the conservation area – and it is the duty of the local authority to preserve the settings of listed buildings and preserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas. That a modern agricultural shed can be a positive feature in a conservation area is reflected in the Tilshead appeal decision (APP/Y3940/W/24/3357434) where in similar circumstances the Inspector found that:

'Moreover, notwithstanding its age, and despite its overall scale and utilitarian appearance, the appeal building, in terms of its design and materials, nonetheless reflects the evolution of the area, in particular the agricultural activity historically associated with the adjoining

countryside. As such, the appeal site, including the existing building, makes a positive contribution to the significance of the CA.’ (para 15)

and

‘The Council contend that, when a building such as the appeal building no longer serves its original purpose, it becomes a vacant eyesore and that its retention would not benefit the CA. However, the building is nevertheless part of the present character and appearance of the area. The contribution it makes to the CA does not diminish upon the cessation of its original use, but rather its retention and sensitive conversion would contribute to an understanding of the evolution of the area.’ (para. 16)

The Conservation Officer’s objections to the Tilshead application and the 2024 scheme in Wilsford were emphatically rejected by this decision.

6.6 The question to be addressed is: does the revised proposal cause harm to the existing character and appearance of the conservation area including through impacting the understanding of the evolution of the area? It is strongly argued that the upgrade in cladding materials, together with the retention of the agricultural character, means that the proposal will not result in harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The buildings will still be seen in the distant and glimpsed views that are possible as being of agricultural character as is currently the case. The character and appearance of the conservation area will be maintained.

6.7 This application has similarities with the building shown in Figure 11, above; a black timber-clad building associated with The Malthouse that has been converted to ancillary residential use (17/01942/FUL) and which is a prominent building when approaching the village from the south-west (it is far more prominent than the sheds at No. 21). The relatively derelict condition of the building before conversion is shown in Figure 20. Whilst it lies just outside of the conservation area (unusually, the conservation area boundary cuts through The Malthouse plot to exclude it rather than follow the boundary as is usual practice), it is certainly within its immediate setting, and it is clearly associated with the village. The conservation comments on this application refer to similar points made by the conservation

officer involved with the current application, but take a diametrically opposite stance to the re-use of the building:

'The workshop is not a building of any architectural merit. It is a large utilitarian building made of corrugated iron.'

'The building is visible in the approach to the village and is not a particularly attractive building and if it was to be removed this would be a positive. The proposal states that the works are to refurbish the building however I expect that the works will involve substantial rebuilding as the external walls, ie the corrugated iron, will be removed and replaced with a brick plinth and feather edge boarding with new hardwood windows and doors. The roof will be a new corrugated roof. It is unclear any [sic] of the structure of the building will be retained but it appears that this will be largely a replacement building. I am of view that the change to the aesthetic appearance of the workshop will not harm the setting of the Conservation area.'

'In terms of the historic environment the proposals will not harm the setting of the listed buildings or the setting of the Wilsford Conservation Area.'



Figure 20 The workshop associated with The Malthouse prior to its conversion to ancillary residential use in 2017. (Source: D&A Statement for 17/01942/FUL).

6.8 This 2017 application related to a building of similar character to the sheds at No. 21 but the response from the Council was significantly different compared to the approach being taken with the current application. It is acknowledged that this shed was at a distance from The

Malthouse, and so the proposal was not regarded as being harmful to the setting of the listed building, and it also lay outside of, but on the boundary of the conservation area which enclosed it on two sides. However, the building was, effectively, so close to the boundary (and actually lay within a plot that was otherwise included within the boundary) that it is only on a map that it is evident that it is outside of the designated area. As seen from the south-east the former workshop is clearly part of the village, and is a prominent building. It is clear, when the before and after photos are compared, that the conversion and the change to the cladding has improved the appearance of the building, and it would not now be regarded as harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area even if it were within the boundary. It is essential that the planning authority demonstrate a degree of consistency in decision-making rather than be led by individual preferences of officers- especially when those personal opinions have been contradicted by the Planning Inspectorate and by the decisions of fellow Officers within the same authority.

6.9 It is notable that the Planning Inspector awarded partial costs against the Council in relation to the Tilshead appeal, the Inspector stating:

'While it is a matter of planning judgement as to the effect of the proposal on the heritage assets, the Council's case appears to focus primarily on the assertion that the existing building should be removed, rather than the effects of the proposed change of use of the building, which is the subject of the appeal. Moreover, the Council's case in that regard is vague and generalised, unsupported by any objective analysis of the specific effects of the proposed development upon the Conservation Area or the setting of the nearby listed buildings to justify its decision. The Council's unsubstantiated arguments regarding the alleged harm in relation to the heritage implications of the proposal thus caused the applicant to incur unnecessary expense in the appeal process.'

The Conservation response to the 2024 application relied on broadly the same arguments as presented in response to the Tilshead application other than referencing the out-of-date description of the site from the conservation area appraisal, and provided little additional assessment of the current circumstances of the site or argument to substantiate the objection.

- 6.10 It is intended to plant an orchard within the northern part of the plot which, even in winter, will add screening to public views from the village street, making these buildings less visible than they are at present.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 Standing on the site of a historic farmstead where there are no longer any traditional farm buildings remaining, the modern agricultural sheds subject to this application effectively allow the understanding that No. 21 (Grade II listed) was formerly a farmhouse, which is an important aspect of its historical interest. Therefore, the sheds contribute positively to the importance of the setting of the listed building and its significance – without the sheds, No. 21 would read as a pair of agricultural labourers' cottages.

7.2 The fact that a modern agricultural shed can contribute positively to the setting of a listed building has been confirmed by the Planning Inspectorate's decision in allowing an appeal against refusal for the conversion of a modern agricultural shed in the setting of a listed building and within a conservation area in Tilshead, Wiltshire, where partial costs were awarded against the Council due to their 'unsubstantiated' nature (APP/Y3940/W/24/3357434) as well as in the Inspector's comments for a scheme in Hampshire (APP/H1705/W/24/3344669). The Council presented similar objections to the 2024 application as those made in the Tilshead application, with no substantive assessment or argument supporting the objection.

7.3 It is considered that the revised proposals for the conversion of the existing agricultural sheds to residential use will not cause harm to the significance or 'special architectural or historic interest' of No. 21 The Street through development within the setting of the listed building as there will be no impact on the current ability to experience the listed building or appreciate or understand its significance – the main aspect of the test of potential change within the setting of a heritage asset.

7.4 The conservation claim that the 2024 proposals would have:

'significant visual and experiential impacts on its [No. 21] eastern elevation'

cannot be reasonably justified. The sheds to be converted are present and the closest building to No. 21, a low-quality blockwork structure, is to be demolished. There will be no physical change to the way the gable end of No. 21 will be viewed, experienced or the significance of the listed building understood from the situation today. The character of the

agricultural sheds will remain agricultural, and so the proposal will not result in harm to the experience of the listed building.

- 7.5 The removal the western part of the larger shed, which lies partly behind the listed building will improve the setting of No. 21 and will improve the area from where the rear of the house can be seen, as well as providing an improved rear plot to the listed building. This is a public benefit.
- 7.6 As the buildings are present, and will remain so, the proposed conversion will not cause harm to the character and appearance of the Wilsford Conservation Area as there will be no harmful change to the general form, scale or character of the existing buildings. The change in cladding materials represents a minor positive change. The part-closing of the open sides of the sheds will not result in a harmful change to their character such that the change will harm the character and appearance of the conservation area. The reduced extent of new glazing to the visible elevations is non-domestic in its form and will be largely screened by vertical timber slats, allowing the building to convey the understanding that this was an agricultural shed that has been converted – this will not cause harm to the designated conservation area. Therefore, the proposal at least preserves the character and appearance of the conservation area, and through the use of improved materials, may be regarded as a minor enhancement of the conservation area.
- 7.7 It is important that the Council takes a consistent approach to the re-use of such buildings. The permitted conversion of a workshop at The Malthouse, which is a considerably more prominent building than the sheds at No. 21, was allowed on the basis that there would be no harm to the conservation area or the setting of the listed building. The appeal decision at Tilshead, which is a strong parallel in relation to the main heritage issues discussed here, is also a material consideration that the Council should reflect in their decision-making. If harm is still found, the Council must present clear arguments that explain how there are factors that are specific to this site that were not present in either The Malthouse or Tilshead cases.
- 7.8 The works to the sheds do not represent substantial rebuilding. In the case of the workshop associated with The Malthouse, the scheme was approved even though it was accepted that substantial rebuilding would likely be required. There is no justification for the Council

to take a different approach to these buildings. The insertion of walls to the currently open side of the barn does not represent a meaningful change in character.

- 7.9 Accordingly, I can find no conflict in the proposed development with the statutory duty in Sections 66 or 72 of the Act, National Policy in the NPPF or Core Policy 58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 and Policy 99 of the Draft Local Plan Review and conclude that the application should be allowed.

APPENDIX I

Appeal Decision: Tilshead, Wiltshire

APP/Y3940/W/24/3357434



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 July 2025

by E Worley BA (Hons) Dip EP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/24/3357434

**Barn and Farmyard adjacent to Elm Cottage, High Street, Tilshead, Salisbury
SP3 4RY**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by the Gordon Family against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/2024/02391.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of agricultural barn to C3 dwelling, hard and soft landscaping.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for an award of costs was made by the Gordon Family against Wiltshire Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposed development on European sites;
 - whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Tilshead Conservation Area; and
 - whether the proposed development would preserve the setting of nearby listed buildings.

Reasons

European sites

4. The appeal site falls within the catchment area of the River Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC), also a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and within the zone of influence (Zoi) of the Salisbury Plain Special Protection Area (SPA).

SAC

5. The SAC is designated for its river habitat characterised by water crowfoot and starwort, and species of Atlantic salmon, Bullhead, Brook lamprey, Sea lamprey and Desmoulin's whorl snail. There is potential that the appeal proposal, in combination with other development, could contribute to the unfavourable

condition of the SAC through an increase in foul water produced in the catchment area, leading to increased concentrations of nutrients, including phosphorus.

6. To mitigate the nutrient load and any adverse effects on the integrity of the SAC the appellant proposes to install a GRAF One2Clean 7PE package treatment plant (PTP) at the appeal site. The appellant confirms that nutrient neutrality (zero), could only be achieved through an alternative PTP requiring chemical dosing, which the appeal submissions indicate is not supported by Natural England. The appellant's revised phosphorus nutrient calculation indicates an annual output, with a +20% buffer, of 0.16 kg TP/year. Thus, even if the River Till flow is seasonal, this would represent an uplift in phosphates as a consequence of the proposed development. While I appreciate the amount is modest, the proposal would nevertheless fail to achieve nutrient neutrality.
7. I note the appellant's willingness to enter into the Council's scheme of phosphorus credits to offset the effects of the development. However, even if the development did qualify for the scheme, there is no evidence of a certificate of allocation of credits or a mechanism to secure the necessary financial contribution. In the absence of such, following appropriate assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, the proposed development, in combination with other development, would therefore have an adverse likely significant effect on the integrity of the SAC by virtue of the additional nutrient load it would generate.

SPA

8. The SPA is designated for its qualifying feature of breeding and wintering birds, including the Eurasian hobby, common quail, stone-curlew and hen harrier. The Council's submissions set out that Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) carried out in relation to the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the Wiltshire Housing Site Allocations Plan found that development within the ZoI would have the potential to have likely significant effects on the SPA through increased recreational pressure, in particular disturbance of the breeding stone curlews.
9. There is, therefore, potential that additional residents at the appeal site, in combination with other development, could result in adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA. The appropriate assessment (AA) concluded that the effects arising from new planned housing growth could be mitigated through monitoring of the stone curlew and visitors, in accordance with the Salisbury Plain SPA - HRA and Mitigation Strategy and agreed with Natural England.
10. While the proposal itself does not form part of an allocated housing site, given the modest scale of the development, it is unlikely to have a tangible effect on the overall anticipated visitor numbers on which the Council's AA was based. On this basis, I conclude that likely significant effects on the integrity of the SPA would be avoided.

Conclusion in relation to European sites

11. Therefore, following AA, while the proposal, in combination with other development, would not lead to adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA, in the absence of suitable mitigation, it would lead to adverse effects on the integrity of the SAC. In that regard it would conflict with the aims of Core Policies 50 and 69 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 (WCS) which seek to protect

features of nature conservation and require development to incorporate measures to avoid and prevent pollution, and to avoid and reduce potential environmental effects on the SAC.

Conservation area

12. The appeal site comprises a modern portal steel framed agricultural building, constructed primarily of corrugated cement panels to the walls and a corrugated metal sheeting to the roof, and an area of adjoining land, which at the time of my site visit was used for the storage of various agricultural machinery. The appeal proposal would see the conversion of the building to a 5 bedroom dwelling. Vehicular access to serve the dwelling is proposed via the existing driveway from High Street between Elm Cottage and The Elms.
13. The appeal site is located within Tilshead Conservation Area (CA). The significance of the CA is derived from the age and architectural interest of the many historic buildings within the village, set within the surrounding rural landscape. The historic buildings are interspersed with modern residential properties which form later additions. Built form in the village is generally arranged along the main roads that run through the settlement, with spurs off them, where small groups of residential properties form cul-de-sacs.
14. By virtue of its position, set back from the highway to the rear of Elm Cottage and its mature garden, and external materials which are recessive in nature, the existing building does not appear as an unduly visually dominant or anomalous feature in views along High Street. Moreover, notwithstanding its age, and despite its overall scale and utilitarian appearance, the appeal building, in terms of its design and materials, nonetheless reflects the evolution of the area, in particular the agricultural activity historically associated with the adjoining countryside. As such, the appeal site, including the existing building, makes a positive contribution to the significance of the CA.
15. The appeal proposal would give rise to a degree of domestication of the site, including residential paraphernalia and parked vehicles, however any effects in that regard would be limited given the scale of the development for a single dwelling. While the site is visible from localised vantage points, including from the neighbouring properties, in the glimpsed views of the building available from High Street, the proposed alterations to the building, would not be readily perceptible, nor would the associated use of land. Moreover, the conversion would largely retain the existing form of the building, and the use of external materials, including corrugated metal cladding to the walls, would reflect the agricultural origin of the building. In that regard it would not detract from the character and appearance of the building, or undermine the contribution it makes to the significance of the CA.
16. The Council contend that, when a building such as the appeal building no longer serves its original purpose, it becomes a vacant eyesore and that its retention would not benefit the CA. However, the building is nevertheless part of the present character and appearance of the area. The contribution it makes to the CA does not diminish upon the cessation of its original use, but rather its retention and sensitive conversion would contribute to an understanding of the evolution of the area.
17. For these reasons the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the CA. Accordingly, it would not conflict with the aims of Core Policies 57 and 58

of the WCS which seek development of a high standard of design, which enhances local distinctiveness and protects, conserves and where possible enhances the historic environment.

Setting of listed buildings

18. The site lies close to Elm Cottage and The Elms, both grade II listed buildings. The significance of Elm Cottage is informed by its architectural and historic interest as a building dating back to the early 17th century. It is constructed of red brick and timber-frame with a thatched roof and occupies a prominent position on High Street. The Heritage Statement¹ (HS) submitted as part of the planning application sets out that, even if Elm Cottage was not originally associated with the original farmstead at the appeal site, the presence of agricultural buildings to the rear is an established part of the setting of the listed building. Thus, despite the appeal building being of modern construction, it nonetheless conveys an understanding of the historical agricultural function of the site, and this historic link contributes to a minor degree, to the significance of Elm Cottage. From my observations on site, I have no reason to reach a different conclusion with the HS in that regard.
19. In the views towards Elm Cottage in which the agricultural building would be seen, the building would largely retain its existing functional form and appearance. Consequently, the proposal would preserve the setting of the listed building and would not harm its significance as a designated heritage asset.
20. The primary special interest of The Elms is derived from its early origins in the 17th century, later refaced in the 19th century, and architectural execution. The HS indicates that, while it was probably a farmhouse, it was not thought to have been associated with the appeal site, I have not been presented with any compelling evidence to indicate otherwise. Given the lack of a historical or functional link between the listed building and the appeal site, together with the limited intervisibility, the site does not therefore contribute to the significance of The Elms. Accordingly, the proposed development would not affect the setting of this listed building.
21. In light of the foregoing considerations, I therefore conclude that the proposed development would preserve the setting of nearby listed buildings. In that regard it would accord with the high quality design aims of Core Policy 57 of the WCS and Policy 58 of the WCS, which requires development to be a high quality design which protects, conserves and where possible enhances the historic environment.

Other Matters

22. The proposal would offer benefits in terms of housing supply, which is a key objective of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which seeks to significantly boost the supply of housing. There would also be benefits in terms of increased biodiversity. However, any benefit in that regard would be limited given the scale of the proposal for a single dwelling and the overall extent of the site.
23. High standards of design and materials, including energy efficiency measures, highway safety, and flooding, are normal expectations of new development. As

¹ Heritage Statement by Forum Heritage Services, revised February 2024

such, they are therefore of neutral weight in my assessment rather than benefits to which I attach positive weight.

24. The Council indicate that it is unable to demonstrate an adequate supply of housing land and that being the case, para 11 d) of the Framework falls to be considered. However, the harm to the SAC I have identified means that there are policies in the Framework that provide a clear reason for refusing the development. Therefore, under paragraph 11 d) i) of the Framework, the proposal does not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
25. The absence of objection from interested parties, would itself not render the scheme acceptable. I note the appellant's frustration with the way in which the Council dealt with the planning application, however, that is not a matter for the determination of this appeal, which I have determined on the merits of the case.

Conclusion

26. The proposal would conflict with the development plan, read as a whole. Material considerations have not been shown to carry sufficient weight to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

E Worley

INSPECTOR

APPENDIX II

Appeal Decision: Monk Sherborne, Hampshire

APP/H1705/W/24/3344669



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 October 2024

by R J Redford MTCP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 06 November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/24/3344669

**Rookery Farm, Rookery Farm Lane, Monk Sherborne, Hampshire
RG26 5HW**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by The Manydown Company Ltd against the decision of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/02466/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as the demolition of the existing buildings and replacement with 3 new residential dwellings, together with parking, landscaping and any other associated works and infrastructure.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the appeal site is a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to relevant local policies relating to development in the countryside;
 - whether the proposed development would preserve the setting as it relates to the special interest of a Grade I listed building and a Grade II listed building, and the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a conservation area; and
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location

3. The appeal site is part of Rookery Farm and constitutes a series of agricultural barns, next to Rookery Farmhouse, and surrounded by open fields. The main parties consider Rookery Farm to be part of Monk Sherborne, a loose settlement, mainly residential, located within the countryside and without a defined settlement boundary. The proposal seeks to replace the existing buildings with 3 new dwellings.
4. The location of new residential development is guided by Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (LP) Policy SS1, which provides exceptions for new housing beyond settlement boundaries, and LP Policy SS6 sets specific criteria for such development in the countryside.

5. The appeal site is not allocated within a made neighbourhood plan; and the proposal would not be connected to existing and viable agricultural, forestry, horse breeding and training, livery, or an equivalent rural business; would not constitute a replacement dwelling; re-use redundant or disused buildings or provide affordable housing. The main parties agree that due to its agricultural use, the appeal site would not constitute previously developed land, and there is nothing before me to conclude otherwise. Therefore, it is only possible to consider the proposal against criteria e) of LP Policy SS6.
6. Criteria e) allows for small scale residential proposals of a scale and type that meet a locally agreed need. LP supporting text paragraph 4.77 confirms that small scale is 4 or less dwellings and that local need should be agreed in consultation with the parish or town council. It is noted that the Monk Sherborne Parish Council did not object to the planning process, but their comments do not specifically relate to need, and there is nothing further to suggest the proposed 3 dwellings would meet a locally agreed need. Therefore, the proposal would fail to meet the requirements of criteria e).
7. That the appeal site may not constitute an isolated location for residential dwellings in relation to case law¹ does not overcome the lack of identified local need.
8. Consequently, the proposal would fail to comply with LP Policies SS1 and SS6. Therefore, the appeal site is not a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to relevant local policies relating to development in the countryside.

Heritage assets

9. As the proposal is located within the Monk Sherborne Conservation Area (the CA) and the setting of a Grade I listed building, Church of All Saints (reference 1339517) (the Church) and a Grade II listed building, Rookery Farmhouse (reference 1179308) (the Farmhouse), I have had special regard to sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act).
10. The Church originates from the 12th century and was altered and extended until the 19th century. It is positioned on slightly higher land near to Manor Farm, at the edge of the road with views over Rookery Farm which nestles into a natural dip in the open farmland. This means the Church can be glimpsed from the wider Monk Sherborne area beyond Rookery Farm. Consequently, its significance is therefore within its age and it being a good example of a traditional countryside church built to serve the surrounding farming community. As such its setting is an important part of its significance.
11. The Farmhouse, as part of one of the formative farms² within the area its significance is largely informed by its relationship with the surrounding rural setting of Monk Sherborne, and that it represents a good example of a 19th century farmhouse.

¹ Braintree District Council v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government [2018] Ref. EWCA Civ. 610; and City and Country Bramshill Limited v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government [2021] EWCA Civ 320

² historically known as Lower Farm

12. The Farmhouse and the alterations to the Church coincide with the development of Monk Sherborne. The CA incorporates this and therefore its significance is related to it being a good example of a 19th century informal expansion of a historic farming settlement, and its rural setting.
13. For a considerable period of time the appeal site has been used as part of Rookery Farm, and the existing agricultural barns represent the most modern interpretation of that use. It is not disputed that the barns are non-traditional, and their removal is unlikely to harm the appearance of the CA.
14. However, the visually obvious form of the existing barns emphasises the agricultural use of the appeal site and thereby reinforces the character of the CA and the rural setting of the Church and Farmhouse. Therefore, to preserve this element of the heritage assets' significance, it is necessary any replacement of the existing barns retains this character.
15. The proposed dwellings which would be finished in materials common to the local area. The proposed layout of the buildings around a shared courtyard has been designed to echo a traditional farmyard.
16. The proposed 2 smaller dwellings would be located closely to each other and have similar features to traditional 'farmworker's cottages'. The proposed 'L' shaped dwelling has been designed to reference a converted barn. However, the abundance of domestic features across all 3 dwellings dominates the proposal. These include large areas of glazing, particularly in the link between main dwelling and garage in the proposed 'L' shaped building; their mainly 2 storey height; overall size; and detached form. Therefore, the proposals overall appearance would be of 3 residential dwellings designed with reference to generic countryside styles rather than a representation of a genuine conversion of historic farmyard buildings.
17. The proposal would constitute a domestication of the appeal site, so would fail to retain its agricultural character which, as an important indicator to why the Church and Farmhouse are located as they are, would harm their special interest. For the same reason it would also fail to preserve the character of this part of a CA, but to a lesser degree due to the overall size of the CA.
18. Given the above, the proposal would therefore cause less than substantial harm to 3 heritage assets and paragraph 208 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimal viable use.
19. The appellant confirms the existing buildings are not currently in use and that their removal would enhance the ability to appreciate the structure of the Farmhouse, enhance the contribution the site makes to the CA, and improve the rural character and quality of views from the Church³. Therefore, they conclude the benefits of the scheme are the enhancement of the setting and significance of the heritage assets in question. They reinforce this position with reference to an appeal where the Inspector found a replacement scheme satisfactory, due in part to the removal of existing buildings⁴. Nevertheless, because something may be less harmful than existing does not mean it would not have a harmful impact.

³ Paragraph 6.44 of the appellant's statement of case.

⁴ APP/H1705/W/21/3287932

20. It is acknowledged that the proposal could be considered less visually obvious than the existing barns. Nevertheless, this does not overcome the harm identified in relation to the character of the CA, and the setting of the listed buildings. That the optimal use of the site could be residential if the original agricultural use is no longer viable, is accepted. However, there is nothing before me to show that other options have been considered both in terms of optimal use and that the proposed scheme is the only viable form of residential use. Consequently, the public benefits are not sufficient to outweigh the harm identified.
21. Given the above, the proposal would fail to preserve the setting, as it relates to the special interest, of a Grade I Church and a Grade II Farmhouse. It would also fail to preserve or enhance the character of the CA. The proposal would not fulfil the duties of the Act, nor comply with the Framework, and LP Policy EM11 and the Heritage Supplementary Planning Document, insofar as they seek new development to conserve or enhance the quality of the borough's heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Character and appearance

22. The appeal site has a transitional position between the surrounding fields and the settlement itself. Residential uses can be successfully integrated into transitional locations, at edges of settlements. However, they normally constitute a reduction in density of development to reflect the change from settlement to countryside. From the main body of Monk Sherborne, the density of development drops away to singular dwellings in reasonable large plots bounded by fields or agricultural uses, such as Rookery Farmhouse.
23. As the proposal would be beyond the Farmhouse and constitute 3 detached dwellings positioned closely together, it would have the effect of increasing the residential density within this transitional location. Thus, it would visually encroach into the countryside and have an urbanising effect on the otherwise rural character of the area.
24. It is appreciated the proposal could be less visually apparent than the existing buildings. However, the current agricultural buildings, although large and functional, would not be uncommon features in an edge of village location.
25. Therefore, in conjunction with the harm identified in relation to the heritage assets, integral elements of the appeal sites surroundings, it is found the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would fail to comply with LP Policy EM1 and EM10 and the guidance within the Design and Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document. Which, amongst other things, require new development to be sympathetic to the character and visual quality of the area and contribute positively to local distinctiveness.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

26. The Council cannot demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply so Paragraph 11(d) of the Framework indicates that permission should be granted, unless the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusing the development proposed. The application of heritage policy provides that to be the case here. As such, the proposal would not be the sustainable development for which Paragraph 11 of the Framework indicates a presumption in favour.

27. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the Framework seeks to boost the supply of homes. The proposal would provide a net increase of 3 dwellings towards the Council's 5-year housing supply and could provide some biodiversity enhancements and energy efficient homes, and remove asbestos from the site, as well as create potential construction jobs so would have some limited benefits. However, these would not overcome the great weight that Paragraph 205 of the Framework advises should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets when considering the impact of development on the significance of those assets.
28. No harm has been identified in relation to the loss of the potential commercial use of the site, housing mix, living conditions, highway safety, refuse management, trees, the public right of way through the site, drainage, flooding, and minerals and waste. However, a lack of harm, is by definition neutral, so cannot weigh for or against the proposal.
29. Therefore, For the reasons given above the appeal scheme would conflict with the development plan when read as a whole and there are no sufficiently weighted material considerations, including the Framework, which would indicate a decision otherwise. The appeal is dismissed.

RJ Redford

INSPECTOR