



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 October 2025

By Terrence Kemmann-Lane JP DipTP FRTPI MCMI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/W/25/3366316

The Old School House, 4 Market Hill, Royston, SG8 9JL

- 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 Mr Paul Brown of The Trustees, Trinity Life Church, against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/02696/FP.
 - The development proposed is raise existing roof ridge height and replace existing slate roof coverings with fibre cement slates and flush mounted photovoltaic panels following removal of existing roof vent.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this case is the effect of the proposed alterations to the building on its character and appearance, and the character and appearance of the Royston Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The building occupies a prominent position south of The Old Court House, and between the parallel streets known as Market Hill and Fish Hill, in Royston Conservation Area. It is single storey, but the main part, the Meeting Hall, is under a high, steeply sloping pitched roof, with very distinctive gables fronting both Market Hill and Fish Hill. As a result of this steep roof and its height, longer views of the building and its roof slope can be seen from Market Hill to the west, north and south and from Fish Hill to the east and south, although the elevation fronting Fish Hill is predominantly under a lower, less steep roof.
4. The building was formerly an old schoolhouse and is designated as a Building of Local Interest (BLI) on the Register for Royston dated 27 March 2007. The BLI entry states: *'Former Royston National School, Fish Hill. The National School was built in 1886 for the children of Church of England families of Royston. It is a flint building with gault brick dressings and chimneys. Its location between Fish Hill and Market Hill results in it fronting and contributing to both streets. The school provides a strong building line to both streets and has an enclosed courtyard facing onto Market Hill. The angled chimneys in gault brickwork at regular positions along the eaves make a particular architectural contribution. The use of flint is a characteristic within the town and is emphasised on the building's Market Hill elevation.'* The reason for inclusion on the BLI Register is stated as: *'Building of local interest to the*

social and educational history of the town constructed in local materials strongly characteristic of the town.'

5. The description of the building given above is not entirely accurate, since the flint is only on limited areas on the lower elements of the building. For the most part the elevations are of gault brick with red brick quoins and a stepped red brick feature along the verges of the tall roof, as well as outlining the triangular arches on the Market Hill elevation. In addition, there are redbrick lozenge shaped features just below the top of the gables. These features are of great importance to the visual quality and attractiveness of the building.
6. Within a conservation area, I have a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area, in accordance with Section 72 of the Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act (1990). Furthermore, Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out guidance relating to sustaining and enhancing heritage assets. Policies HE1 and HE3 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (the Local Plan) are consistent with the NPPF. I need not set out the detail here, as they are well known to the parties.
7. I am told that the appellants, The Trustees of Trinity Life Church, have carried out significant internal improvements in recent years to facilitate the use of the building as a community asset with various local groups, charities and businesses making use of it. For the appellants it is explained that Approved Document Part L2 of the current Building Regulations states that any existing thermal elements being renovated (or renewed) should meet minimum 'limiting' standards with regard to thermal performance. With the roof over the Meeting Hall, subject of the appeal proposal, it is possible to introduce insulation either between and below the existing rafters or over and between them to meet the Regulations.
8. Internally this part of the building benefits from exposed collar tied timber roof trusses and diagonal timber boarding fixed to the underside of the existing rafters, all of which contribute to the historic character of the building. Installing insulation below and between these rafters would result in the removal of the timber boarding and the partial obscuring of the trusses whilst insulating over and between the same rafters would preserve these elements but would result in an increase in the height of the existing roof. It is the latter option which has been chosen, driven by the desire to preserve the visibility of the existing historic fabric inside the building. Thus, the proposed raising of the existing roof ridge height.
9. However, raising of the ridge height, brings a substantial concern about the effect of this on the decorative details on the gable elevations, described in paragraph 5 above. Drawing No.19/010/A/006 shows that raising the ridge involves raising both roof slopes, from eaves up to the new ridge level. I appreciate the appellants' point that the Heritage and Conservation Officer did not comment beyond the fact that there would be a minimal impact from the extra height, but it is difficult to see how this would be achieved without damaging the stepped features in red brick and the lozenge feature. I consider that any harm to these features would be unacceptable, certainly amounting to less than substantial harm, of medium degree. I also have to consider the fact that The Old School House is within the Royston Conservation Area: such harm would not preserve or enhance its character or appearance.

10. I can fully appreciate why the appellants would prefer not to install insulation below and between the rafters, as explained in paragraph 8 above, as this would result in the removal of the timber boarding and the partial obscuring of the trusses, whilst the proposed scheme, insulating over and between the same rafters would, preserve these elements. Ideally the existing boarding and unobstructed trusses would be left as they are, but these are not visible from the public realm, and these features have no effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area.
11. Turning to other matters, with regard to the roof covering of natural slate or cement fibre, had I been allowing the appeal, I would have favoured the appellants' suggestion of imposing a condition requiring approval of the proposed materials prior to construction commencing, in accordance with NPPF paragraph 56.
12. The other controversial feature of the proposal, the photovoltaic panels, would be beneficial in making a positive contribution towards energy savings and, with the proposed insulation, would be likely to improve the overall energy efficiency of the building. They would be installed flush and integrated into the roof, and their dark colour would make them reasonably unobtrusive against the slates. The roof plane on which they would be installed is visible coming down Market Hill, although intermediate buildings would reduce the visual impact. On balance, taking account of the environmental benefits, I do not consider that their appearance would materially affect the conservation area sufficiently to warrant refusal.
13. However, for the reasons that I have given in respect of raising the roof, the appeal will be dismissed.

Terrence Kemmann-Lane

INSPECTOR