
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 January 2026

by **J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 January 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/W/24/3350659

The Studio, Manor Farm, Church Lane, Graveley, Hertfordshire SG4 7BN

- 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 David Sandford against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/01101/FP.
 - The development proposed was described as 'retention of the change of use and extension of the garage to use as a self-contained flat',
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development in the banner heading above is taken from the planning application form. However, I note that the description stated on the Council's decision notice and entered by the appellant on the appeal form refers to 'retention of two dormer windows on south roofslope, box dormer on north roofslope and continued use of first floor as one 1-bed studio accommodation'. I consider this to more fully and accurately describe the proposal shown on the submitted plans, albeit with the exception of the term 'retention' which is not an act of development.
3. At my visit, I observed two dormer windows to the appeal building's south roofslope and a box dormer to the north roofslope. Nevertheless and for the avoidance of doubt, I have considered the appeal on the basis of the development as it is depicted on the submitted plans.
4. The Council has provided a copy of a decision issued on an enforcement appeal against a notice alleging a breach of planning control on the appeal site comprising 'the erection of box dormer to North roof slope and the material change of use of the first floor of the building to self-contained studio flat'¹. That appeal was dismissed and the enforcement notice upheld. However, the decision only considered grounds of appeal under sections 174(2)(d) and (f) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Given that these grounds do not relate to the planning merits of the matters stated in the enforcement notice and that it does not include an assessment of matters of planning merit, it has not been necessary to seek comments from the parties on any relevance of that decision to the current appeal.

¹ Appeal ref APP/X1925/C/24/3347940

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:

- i) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and the significance of nearby heritage assets; and
- ii) the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of the occupiers of 1 Barn Cottages with particular regard to whether or not it would be overbearing.

Reasons

Character and Appearance and Heritage Assets

6. The appeal site includes a former garage which is part of a cluster of buildings at the Chesfield Manor Farm estate. These include the Grade II listed buildings 'Manor Farmhouse' and the boundary wall and gate piers to its walled gardens, and the nearby Church of St Ethelreda which is a Grade II* listed building as well as a Scheduled Monument ('SM').
7. Given the nearby listed buildings, I am mindful of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the LBCA Act') which requires special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building, its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
8. The listed buildings and SM would also comprise heritage assets. Where proposals affect heritage assets, the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') includes a requirement for an applicant to describe the significance of the assets, including any contribution made by their setting. Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 also includes a requirement for proposals affecting heritage assets to be accompanied by a heritage assessment/justification statement. However, the appellant provided no such assessment of their own with the application.
9. Nevertheless, the list entry for the Church of St Ethelreda indicates that the listed building dates to the 13th or early 14th century, but that it was dismantled in 1750 and the ruins were later consolidated in the 1980s. The structure lacks a roof, but there are some standing flint rubble walls with sections of plastering, and despite its current ruined condition, it remains generally legible as a former medieval church.
10. Manor Farmhouse is a 17th century manor house which was part demolished and converted to a farmhouse in the 1770s and further extended and renovated in the 19th century. The building's traditional materials and architectural detailing in keeping with a rural vernacular including a timber frame, steeply sloping tiled roofs with prominent stacks and chimneys means that it retains much of its historic character as a former manor and farmhouse. The walled garden and quality of the brickwork boundary wall and piers further reflect and reinforce the character and former status of the listed building.
11. Insofar as it relates to this appeal, I consider Manor Farmhouse and the boundary wall and gate piers to its walled gardens to derive significance from the legibility of the site as a former manor then farmhouse and its historic position and status in the local area. The Church derives significance from its architectural, historic, evidential and communal interest as a church which formerly served a rural village. The close proximity and relationship of the assets additionally provides group value as part of a rural manorial complex which further contributes to their respective significance.

12. The appeal building is not part of the heritage assets' immediate setting, but is within the cluster of buildings to the north of the group which also includes two parallel ranges of single-storey brick buildings which are now in residential use, beyond which are a collection of large, modern barns. Although separated by a track, the close proximity, layout and agricultural appearance of these buildings which sit within surrounding open fields gives the clear impression of a farmstead complex associated with the Farmhouse.
13. The appeal building itself has a weatherboard exterior with a tiled roof including end hips. While it may be of modern construction and of no inherent historic interest, its traditional materials, simple form and architecture and its modest height and overall scale give it a generally functional appearance and the impression of an ancillary former working building. As a result, it sits comfortably and unobtrusively within the farmstead complex which contributes to the rural and agrarian quality of the wider surroundings to the listed buildings and SM and the legibility of the group, and thus the significance of the heritage assets.
14. The proposal includes dormers to the north and south roofslopes of the appeal building. Those to the south elevation which is closest to the listed buildings and SM are of modest scale against the roofslope, and while they are a somewhat domestic feature, they are comparatively discreet additions which do not significantly alter the scale or appearance of the building nor disrupt its overall form.
15. However, the box dormer to the north has only a slight set down from the main ridge and small set ins from the sides of the roof. The submitted plans also show the face of the dormer sitting broadly level with the ground floor elevation below. As a result, it would occupy a substantial proportion of the host roofslope resulting in an awkward and unduly bulky feature which would dominate the building. Moreover, the form and design of the box dormer give it a strongly domestic appearance and are far more typical of an urban or suburban area.
16. In combination, these factors result in a highly incongruous and unsympathetic feature which stands out against the rural, agrarian surroundings and the modest ancillary character of the building.
17. The position of the box dormer to the north roofslope of the appeal building limits direct intervisibility with the listed buildings and SM. However, its unsympathetic and conspicuous nature detract notably from the quality and rural character and appearance of the area which currently contributes to the significance of these features. As a consequence, there would be detriment to the experience and understanding of the heritage assets within their rural setting.
18. For these reasons, I find that the proposal harms the significance of the nearby listed buildings and the SM, as well as the character and appearance of the area.

Heritage Balance

19. When considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, the Framework requires that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation and that the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. It goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting and that any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification.

20. The proposal does not affect the fabric of the listed buildings or SM and having regard to the scale of the proposal and its effects, I find the harm to the significance of each of the designated heritage assets to be limited and less than substantial in the terms of the Framework.
21. Where a proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
22. Although the harm to the listed buildings and SM would in each case be less than substantial and at a low level, it nevertheless attracts considerable importance and weight, with the harm to the Church attracting greater weight given its SM status and Grade II* listing which denotes that it is a particularly important building of more than special interest.
23. Against this harm, the proposal provides for an additional dwelling on the site. Noting that the Framework seeks to significantly boost the supply of homes, I afford significant weight to this as a public benefit of the proposal. That said, and while not diminishing the weight that I afford, the benefit of a single dwelling is very limited in scale.
24. There would be some economic benefit associated with the construction process and spending by future occupiers of the dwelling, but the scale of the proposal means that the effect is likely to be limited. The loss of the first-floor study/office space which the dwelling replaces and which could also be expected to offer some economic benefit would further reduce the overall scale of any net effect.
25. The appellant asserts that the proposal is commensurate with the domestic scale of neighbouring properties and the wider village and that it would not affect the openness of the Green Belt or countryside, create an extension of ribbon development, result in loss of significant open space or block important views. However, these are neutral factors rather than public benefits that weigh positively in favour of the proposal.
26. In my judgement, the cumulative public benefits of the proposal are not sufficient to outweigh the harm to listed buildings nor the harm to the SM which attracts considerable importance and weight. Accordingly, I am not persuaded that there is a clear and convincing justification for the harm that the proposal causes to the significance of designated heritage assets.

Conclusion on Main Issue

27. For the reasons above, I conclude that the proposal causes harm to the character and appearance of the area contrary to Policy D1 of the Local Plan which broadly seeks development that responds positively to the site's local context.
28. There is also harm to the significance of designated heritage assets contrary to the LBCA Act and the development would conflict with the aims of the Framework as it fails to sustain the significance of designated heritage assets and public benefits would not outweigh the harm. It would also be contrary to Policy HE1 of the Local Plan insofar as it indicates that planning permission for development causing less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset will only be

granted where the harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the development including securing the asset's optimum viable use.

Living Conditions

29. I saw that the neighbouring dwelling at 1 Barn Cottages is positioned very close to the appeal building and that it has ground-floor windows facing directly onto it, including one which is aligned broadly level with the northern part of the structure.
30. As I have noted above, the box dormer to the north of the appeal building occupies a substantial proportion of the host roofslope and in my assessment, the considerable bulk and mass that it adds to the upper part of the appeal building would appear as a near full second storey. In my view, its proximity to the facing window of 1 Barn Cottages and height above the window present a highly imposing feature which would dominate and significantly restrict outward views and open aspect for the room within.
31. Notwithstanding that there may not be harmful overlooking, I therefore consider that the box dormer would be overbearing to occupiers of the facing room within 1 Barn Cottages.
32. The dormer would occupy much less of the available angle of views from other windows and the garden to this neighbour which would significantly moderate its visual impact and prominence such that I find its overbearing impact would be largely restricted to the directly facing window. As a result, I consider that the overall level of harm to living conditions for occupiers of 1 Barn Cottages would be modest.
33. Nevertheless, I conclude on balance that there would be some harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of 1 Barn Cottages and the development would conflict with Policy D2 of the Local Plan insofar as it requires that extensions do not dominate adjoining properties.

Other Matters

34. I note the appellant's comments referring to the Council's lack of communication and failure to engage proactively or pragmatically, but this is not a factor which alters my consideration of the planning merits of the proposal.

Planning Balance

35. Given my findings above that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the significance of listed buildings and an SM, policies in the Framework that protect designated heritage assets would provide a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. On that basis, the presumption in favour of sustainable development at paragraph 11 d) of the Framework does not indicate that permission should be granted in this case.
36. I have additionally found that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area as well as harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of 1 Barn Cottages.
37. The cumulative harm and resulting conflict with the development plan attracts significant weight and I find that the limited benefits of the proposal would be

insufficient to outweigh the harm and the resulting conflict with the development plan when it is read as a whole.

Conclusion

38. For the reasons given above, I find that the proposal would conflict with the development plan when it is read as a whole, and material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR