



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 November 2025

by E Catcheside BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/D/24/3354754

23 Church Road, Swainsthorpe, Norfolk NR14 8PH

- 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 & Mrs Carron-Brown against the decision of South Norfolk Council.
 - The application Ref is 2024/1892.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing garage and outbuildings and replacement with 2-storey outbuilding.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The decision notice refers to the Church of St Peter¹ (the church) as a Grade II listed building. However, the list entry shows the church is a Grade II* listed building and I have considered the appeal accordingly.
3. As the proposal relates to a listed building, I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act). However, notwithstanding the details on the decision notice, Sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Act are not relevant to the appeal because the site does not lie within a Conservation Area and the proposal does not involve works to a listed building.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including the setting of the nearby listed buildings.

Reasons

5. The Church of St Peter is a parish church, which encompasses a 12th Century tower along with later additions, some of which have been restored. Its walls are constructed predominantly of flint with ashlar dressings; and its form and facades are well-preserved. The church is therefore a valuable example of a religious building from this area that has developed in phases over a long period of time. The church lies within a burial ground, in which the Grade II listed Memorial to Joseph Dunton 9 Metres South East Chancel of Church of St Peter² (the memorial) can be found.

¹ List entry number 1169726

² List entry number 1050441

6. The special interest of the church partly originates from its ecclesiastical architecture, its age and surviving fabric, and its communal value as a place of worship and for burials. Its significance is also informed by the rural surroundings, including Swainsthorpe village, where worshippers would have resided over the centuries. The distinctive round tower, which remains visible from parts of the village and the surrounding area, provides information about the importance of the building as a focal point for communal and spiritual gathering and as a geographical landmark that has endured over time.
7. The evolution of the village has brought relatively modern development close to the church. However, the church nonetheless has the character of being set within spacious surroundings owing to its deep setback from Church Road behind grassed areas and the adjacent fields. No 23 contributes to this sense of space through its orientation and setback; whilst its catslide roof and the low profile of the existing outbuildings add to the degree of separation between the built form and the church at first-floor level.
8. The long and wide driveway, which lies adjacent to the church footpath, allows for an open aspect towards the church from Church Road, particularly when approaching from the east. This key processional route is framed by areas of grass and trees, which combine to provide an attractive pathway that highlights the building's role as a welcoming place for gathering, remembrance, and worship. The low height of the existing outbuildings on the appeal site enables views towards the trees and other greenery to the rear of No 23, thus providing a visual cue to the wider, historic, rural setting of the church. These characteristics of the church's immediate setting help to reveal its special interest.
9. The significance of the memorial lies partly in its commemorative value and its association with a local person of note. Its special interest is further informed by its immediate setting within the church grounds, due to its purpose as a burial ground and a place for remembrance. Due to its siting beyond the church grounds, the appeal site is of neutral value to the significance of the memorial insofar as it is relevant to this appeal.
10. There is a diverse mix of building types and styles in modern-day Swainsthorpe, including at least two gambrel style roofs that I observed at 3 Church Road and Edgefield, Church View. However, even if it were constructed with matching materials, the roof design of the proposed outbuilding would be at odds with the roof forms of No 23 and its semi-detached pair, which are the defining roof features in the immediate context of the site. It would therefore be an incongruent structure that would fail to respond positively to the character of the nearest buildings beside which it would be observed.
11. I recognise that the design of the proposed development has been adjusted in response to pre-application advice from the Council; and its siting and setback would be similar to that of the existing garage and outbuilding. However, the proposed building would nonetheless have a larger footprint than the existing structures combined, and, due to its height, the proposal would add bulk and mass to the space at first-floor level that is currently devoid of built form. I observed that the new outbuilding would rise above the hedged boundary between the site and the adjacent church and, as such, it would be significantly more prominent in views from the church grounds than the existing buildings. Moreover, it would also lead

to the encroachment of buildings into the undeveloped space around the church, causing an adverse effect on its setting.

12. Nearby trees, which would be retained, and intervening buildings would provide a degree of screening in longer views along Church Road and from the rear of the site. However, due to its height, siting, and the incongruent nature of its design, the proposed outbuilding would be conspicuous in close views from Church Road and from the processional footpath route to the church from the street. The harmful effect would be amplified by the orientation of the outbuilding, which would expose the angles of the roof slopes to public view thus highlighting its disharmonious form. The outbuilding would, therefore, cause a visual distraction that would detract from the experience of the church and its architectural and historic interest.
13. Overall, for the reasons I have set out, I find the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area, and it would also cause harm to the setting and significance of the listed church. However, the proposed development would preserve the special interest of the memorial due to the more tightly defined nature of its setting insofar as it is relevant to this appeal.
14. The harm caused to the listed church would be less than substantial and at the lower end of that category due to the small scale of the proposal and the proximity of existing built form to the church. Nonetheless, I ascribe great weight to the conservation of the listed church, as I am required to do by the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The Framework states that any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification; and that the less than substantial harm I have identified should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
15. The existing outbuildings do not carry any notable architectural merit; and there would be some beneficial effects to the character and appearance of the area if they were to be replaced with a sympathetically designed structure. Moreover, the improvements to the property would be likely to endure in the longer term thus improving the housing stock for wider public benefit, including through the proposed provisions for individuals with mobility difficulties. Economic benefits would arise via the building trade during the construction process; and it is feasible that the new outbuilding could generate additional public revenue through construction income and other local taxes. Collectively, these public benefits carry support from the social and economic development provisions of the Framework, and they weigh in favour of the proposal.
16. However, I am not persuaded that the existing accommodation is unfit for purpose; and the evidence does not convince me that the appellant's ambitions for the property could not be delivered by other, potentially less harmful, means that also make effective use of this site, without encroaching onto land outside of the property boundaries. Consequently, and due to its small scale, the cumulative public benefits in this case carry limited weight. It follows that the public benefits are not sufficient to outweigh the considerable weight and importance that I attach to the heritage harm I have identified.
17. Overall, and with regard to the duty placed on me by the Act, the harm that would be caused to the character and appearance of the area and to the significance of the Grade II* listed church brings the proposal into conflict with Policies DM3.8 and DM4.10 of the South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies

Document (Adopted Version, October 2015) and Policies 2 and 3 of the Greater Norwich Local Plan Document 1 – The Strategy (Adopted Version of Councils, March 2024) which, taken together and amongst other things, seek to ensure development proposals are of a high quality design that respect local character and avoid harm to designated heritage assets including their setting. The proposal would also conflict with the historic environment policies of the Framework.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

E Catchside

INSPECTOR