



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 October 2025

by **D Cleary MTCP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/V4250/W/25/3370787

Fit 4 Life Health Centre, King Street, Leigh WN7 4LJ

- 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 John Littler against the decision of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
 - The application Ref is A/22/93443/MAJOR.
 - The development proposed is described as the Demolition of existing Methodist School and erection of new apartment block (29 units) along with associated car parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In the banner above, I have taken the address from the Decision Notice of the Council and the Appeal Form. This is because it accurately identifies the location of the appeal site. The address contained on the application form submitted with the appeal appears to relate to a different site.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Leigh Bridge Conservation Area, and the effect of the development on the setting of No. 5 Wilds Passage, a Grade II Listed Building.

Reasons

Leigh Bridge Conservation Area (the LBCA)

4. The appeal site lies within the LBCA which I understand is on the at Risk Register of Historic England. The Leigh Bridge Conservation Area Appraisal (LBCAA) acknowledges that since its designation, the LBCA has lost some of its original interest. The LBCAA makes recommendations for the area, which include options to amend the boundary or remove its designation entirely. However, I have no evidence to suggest that either of these recommendations have been actioned. Therefore, I have no reason to consider that the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the statutory requirement¹. This requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

¹ Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

5. The LBCAA provides a good understanding of the LBCA, detailing its history and identifying characteristics and features which are of importance and interest. The LBCA is a small conservation area which centres around the point where the Bridgewater Canal and the Leigh Branch of the Leeds and Liverpool canal meet. Insofar as relevant to the appeal, the significance of the LBCA derives from its canals and associated industrial buildings, the growth and evolution of the area through the industrial revolution, along with the architectural quality and interest of the remaining historic buildings.
6. The appeal site relates to the former Kings Street Methodist School, which is a large building located close to Leigh Bridge. The building has an asymmetrical front façade, comprising a square tower positioned adjacent to an imposing gable, with subservient elements positioned to either side. The front façade includes large openings with ornate detailing and decorative features, while several buttresses add further character to the building. While sited at a lower level to Leigh Bridge, the building is a prominent and striking feature within the street scene.
7. The LBCAA identifies the building as one of the few remaining key buildings of interest within the area. I consider that the building is a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) in its own right. Its historic context, architectural detailing, and prominence, along with the scarcity of remaining historic buildings in the conservation area, means that the building makes a highly positive contribution to the overall character and appearance of the LBCA, and forms part of its overall significance.
8. The appeal proposes the demolition of the building. The total loss of this NDHA would cause irreparable damage to the character and appearance of the LBCA. I consider the building to be of high importance as one of the few remaining historic buildings which contribute towards the significance of the LBCA. This harm is irrespective of any proposed replacement building, which I now turn to.
9. The proposal seeks the construction of a large three storey apartment building. The development would be positioned forward of the existing building, while it would also occupy much of the plot depth. This would be across three storeys in its entirety. Its front elevation, while appearing to draw some reference from the existing building in its window design, would be largely symmetrical. This would represent a significant deviation from the existing striking asymmetrical front façade with fine detailing. Furthermore, the side elevations include tall projecting gables and a large expanse of unbroken ridge line to its roof. In this respect, the proportions and characteristics of the proposed building appears to take more visual and design reference to the adjacent canal side buildings. As the appeal site is not canal-side itself, this design approach may appear somewhat out of place. Therefore, I consider that the proposed design of the building would be in stark contrast to the appearance of the existing building and would represent a visual dilution of character in the area.
10. For the above reasons, I find that the proposal would neither preserve nor enhance the character or appearance of the LBCA. The harm to the significance of the LBCA would be less than substantial. Given the development would result in the total loss of a NDHA within the LBCA I agree with the Council that the harm to significance would be towards the higher end of less than substantial. In this regard, I conclude that the magnitude of harm would be significant.

No.5 Wilds Passage (No.5)

11. No.5 is a three storey, Grade II Listed Building located on Wilds Passage, a row of 19th century terraced cottages. The buildings on Wilds Passage are located immediately adjacent, and have front elevations which address the appeal site. The close spacing between Wilds Passage and the appeal site results in a visually intimate relationship. The LBCAA confirms that No.5 is a weavers cottage, with a top shop, dating from approximately 1800. The building is constructed from Flemish bond brick, with stone slate roof. Large openings are positioned within the front and rear elevations across all three storeys. It is understood to be the only remaining domestic weaver's premises in the area. The significance of the building lies within its historic use, and uniqueness in the area, along with its architectural features and detailing.
12. The close proximity between the appeal site and No.5 means that there is a clear historic and visual relationship. There is a juxtaposition in style and scale, which reflects the historic and cultural evolution of development in the area. Visually, the more modest elements of the appeal building sited to the rear ensure that the building does not visually compete with No.5, when viewed from Ellesmere Street. This also allows for architectural features of the heritage asset to be appreciated from the public realm. I find that the appeal building is a positive influence in the setting of No.5 and this relationship contributes towards its significance. While I note that it was constructed some years later, I do not consider this to be a factor which diminishes the appeal buildings contribution in the setting of No.5.
13. As with my findings on the LBCA, I consider that the total loss of the appeal building, in the first instance, would have a negative effect on the setting of No.5. This is due to the erosion of the established historic and visual relationship.
14. The proposed replacement building would move development further away from No.5. This would, to a limited extent, help to better reveal some architectural features of significance within its front elevation. Albeit this greater appreciation would be limited to vantage points along Wilds Passage and at very close proximity.
15. On the other hand, the proposed building would be over three storeys and would occupy the majority of the plot depth. The development would add a considerable mass of built form to the rear of the appeal site. This would be in a location where existing built form is more modest in scale. The scale of the development would visually erode the backdrop to No.5 in views along Ellesmere Street. Where Ellesmere Street passes to the side of the appeal site (from the front of Cavan House and Waterhouse Court), the proposed three storey development would appear even more prominent. In some views to the side, the existing views of No.5 over the appeal site would be completely eroded. Therefore, I consider that the proposed development would visually diminish appreciation of No.5 from Ellesmere Street.
16. For the above reasons, both the removal of the existing building and its proposed replacement would fail to preserve the setting of a statutorily listed building. The harm to its setting would be less than substantial. Given that the development would result in the total loss of a NDHA, which is a positive influence in the setting

of the listed building, the harm would, again, be towards the higher end of less than substantial, and I consider that the magnitude of that harm would be significant.

Heritage Conclusions

17. I have found that there would be less than substantial harm to the significance of the LBCA and the setting of a nearby statutorily listed building. Although the harm is less than substantial, it should not be treated as a less than substantial objection to the proposal. I have attached considerable importance and weight to the desirability of avoiding such harm, in accordance with Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. In addition, the total loss of a NDHA is further heritage harm arising from the development.
18. Paragraph 215 of the Framework states that where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of heritage assets, such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Public Benefits

19. Notwithstanding the Councils housing land supply position, the delivery of housing in a sustainable location would be a clear benefit of the scheme. This would attract significant weight in favour of the development. I also consider that there would be economic benefits, both during construction and once occupied, which would be public benefits which attract moderate weight in favour of the development.
20. The appellants statement of case suggests that the scheme would deliver seven affordable units². However, I understand that the scheme which was considered by the Council did not propose any affordable housing. Following an assessment of a Viability Appraisal, the Council accepted that the delivery of affordable housing would not be viable for this scheme³. In any event, even if affordable housing is now proposed, there is nothing before me which would secure such provision. Therefore, as there is no mechanism for affordable housing to be secured, I can only attach very limited weight to this suggested benefit.
21. It is suggested that the scheme represents the optimum viable use of the heritage asset. I have not been presented with any evidence to demonstrate what other uses have been discounted. Although, I acknowledge ongoing issues with the condition of the building and the suggestion that continuity of alternative uses have been relatively short lived. I accept that residential is *likely* to be the most viable use for the site going forward.
22. The Council consider that other options for residential development at the site should be explored. This includes conversion of the building, and consideration of whether the prominent front façade could be retained. I agree that, in heritage terms, these options would be a more preferable solution for the residential re-use of the site.
23. The appellant has provided an appraisal for the conversion of the existing building to 16 units⁴. This suggests that the provision of 16 units would not be viable.

² Paragraph 5.8

³ Planning Contributions section of delegated report of Wigan MBC

⁴ Prepared by Hengam Ltd, dated 15/01/25

However, I have no information to show how this scheme would be provided within the existing fabric of the building. I am unclear whether the delivery of 16 units, as indicated, presents the best scenario financially for a conversion scheme, or whether an alternative mix of units would result in a different outcome. I am also unclear as to whether the 16 units would merely utilise existing floorspace, or whether it seeks to maximise the existing volume. In this regard, I note the building is of considerable height and there could be potential for additional space to be provided over additional floors internally. Furthermore, the evidence before is a very brief appraisal and that the appraisal itself acknowledges that the figures are “high level”. I do not have before me a full Viability Appraisal for any conversion scheme. Given the importance of the building, and the heritage harm that would arise through its loss, I consider that more robust evidence ought to be provided.

24. The appellant consider that the retention of the front façade would be “impossible... due to cost”⁵. However, there is nothing before me to definitively support this position. Furthermore, there may also be other options for the site such as part conversion and part demolition/rebuild. Again, such options ought to be fully explored before accepting the complete demolition of the building.
25. Even if I were to agree that demolition is the only viable option for the site, for the reasons set out earlier, I am not convinced that the design proposed is the most appropriate solution for its redevelopment.
26. Given the importance of the building in a conservation area which is at risk, I am not persuaded that all options which seek to preserve the building, or parts thereof, have been fully explored. Therefore, I cannot agree that the scheme is the most viable option for the site.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

27. While I give significant weight to the totality of the public benefits associated with the proposal, based on the evidence before me, I am not satisfied that these benefits can only be delivered by the development which is proposed.
28. I attribute considerable importance and weight to the harm to the significance of the LBCA and the setting of a nearby listed building. This is in line with the statutory duties highlighted above. The harm through the complete loss of a NDHA only carries further additional weight against the scheme. On that basis, and based on the evidence before me, the harm to heritage assets is not clearly outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal.
29. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposed development would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Leigh Bridge Conservation Area, and would have a harmful effect on the setting of No. 5 Wilds Passage, a Grade II Listed Building. Furthermore, I conclude that, based on the evidence before me, the public benefits associated with the proposal would not outweigh the harm to the significance of these heritage assets. This is contrary to relevant paragraphs of the Framework.
30. Therefore, the development conflicts with Policies CP10 and CP11 of the Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy (2013), saved Policy EV4A of the Wigan Unitary

⁵ Paragraph 5.11 of appellants Appeal Statement of Case

Development Plan (2006), and Policies JP-P1 and JP-P2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (2024). Together, amongst other things, these seek to deliver high quality design in development which also preserves or enhances heritage assets.

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

D Cleary

INSPECTOR