



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 December 2025

by Stuart Willis BA Hons MSc PGCE MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 January 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/C1570/Y/25/3373455

4 Common Hill, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1JG

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr John Lodge against the decision of Uttlesford District Council.
 - The application reference is UTT/25/0001/LB.
 - The works proposed are to install 14 solar panels on the west facing roof of the listed building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. As the site is in a conservation area and relates to a listed building, I have had special regard to sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act).

Main Issues

3. The main issues are whether the proposal would:
 - Preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Saffron Walden Conservation Area; and
 - Preserve the Grade II listed building known as “4 and 5 Common Hill” (Ref: 1297784) and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

Saffron Walden Conservation Area (CA)

4. Saffron Walden is a historic town that saw considerable growth following its commercial success and importance from the late medieval period. There are a considerable number of surviving historic buildings, many of which are timber framed in the CA. While the roofscape is varied in terms of slopes and materials from different periods, there is a high quality roofscape that in many instances have peg tiled roofs, distinctive chimneys and have largely retained their simple traditional form and appearance. The topography of the area and sometimes winding or narrow streets mean views of roofs are particularly characteristic, even where glimpsed.
5. Given the above, I find that the significance of the CA is derived, insofar as relevant to this appeal, from the quality of the historic roofscape where their

traditional form and materials remain clearly legible. Although largely screened from public views, 4-5 Common Hill reflects the materials, appearance and roofscape of the CA. As such, it contributes positively to its significance.

6. There is little information to demonstrate how the panels would project from the roof and the effect on the existing chimney. However, the proposed panels would be a clearly modern and incongruous addition within the context of the existing traditional materials and construction. This would draw the eye and distract from the traditional roofscape.
7. The rear of the property is largely enclosed from public views by the adjacent buildings and boundary walls. Therefore, while views would be limited, from the evidence before me there would be glimpsed views of the panels from the pavement and car park nearby. Although the car park may be private and is not a Public Right of Way, it was open and there was nothing preventing people passing through it or along the street. Thereby, views of the proposal would still be experienced by users of this area. Furthermore, the chimneys are more readily visible from private and public vantage points and there is uncertainty over if and how the scheme would affect the one nearest the panels. Any such works would be more readily apparent.
8. Thus, the proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the CA. Given the scale and limited prominence of the proposal in relation to the CA as a whole, the harm would be at the very lower end of less than substantial harm but nevertheless is of considerable importance and weight.

4-5 Common Hill

9. The listed building is an early 17th century timber frame building plastered with panelled pargetting. It has a tiled roof and prominent red brick stacks. The building has been altered and refurbished in subsequent centuries. However, it has largely retained its relatively restrained appearance, consistent materials and form. Although the tiles are said to have been replaced in recent years, the peg tiled roof has retained its modest appearance and traditional materials, with the roofscape, other than a rooflight, being undisturbed to the rear.
10. Given the above, I find that the special interest of the listed building, insofar as it relates to this appeal, is primarily associated with the undisturbed architectural integrity of its rear roof slope and use of traditional materials.
11. As a result of the surrounding built form, there would be little space within the rear garden for solar panels and for them to be effective. The front garden and front roof plane would be more prominent locations, as would the roof of the side extension. As such, these alternative locations other than the rear roof plane at the appeal property have been explored and discounted. Nonetheless, the panels are proposed towards the Emson Close end of the main roof, and it has not been shown that being set further north on the same roof slope is unfeasible.
12. HEAN18¹ refers to panels on roof slopes of less prominence being generally acceptable, even if they would be visible. Notwithstanding this, the panels would be obviously modern in their materials, appearance and reflectivity. The existing roof tiles are traditional style and materials and currently blend in with the rest of

¹ Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency, Historic England Advice Note 18

the historic materials of the building. The panels however would obscure these, jar with and disrupt the existing plain roofscape, drawing attention away from the traditional architecture of the building. Their contrasting materials and appearance would be evident and distracting.

13. There are no scale drawings and limited other site-specific evidence showing how they would be fixed to the roof, sit within/project from it or how ancillary equipment would be accommodated or affect the historic fabric of the building. Moreover, the chimney is a distinct and prominent historic feature. From the information before me, it is not clear if the panels would require works to the chimney in this part of the roof or how they would relate to it, as the chimney is not clearly shown on the Proposed 3D View of Solar Panels. While the panels are said to be a temporary structure and could be replaced/removed, no specific period is sought, and the panels could remain indefinitely.
14. There are limited public and private views of the rear roof. However, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether or not public views of the building can be gained. Moreover, the chimney is currently prominent and any works to this would be more noticeable. The lack of detailed plans mean I cannot be certain how the projection from the roof would appear or how the chimney may be affected.
15. Given the above, I find that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building. Due to the extent of the works, it would lead to harm at the lower end of less than substantial harm. Nevertheless, this would be of considerable importance and weight.

Heritage Balance

16. There would be public benefits from renewable energy generation and energy efficiency for the building and helping to alleviate climate change. The National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) gives significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings. However, the Framework also requires great weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. Given the scale of the scheme, the benefits would be small.
17. The continued viable use of the appeal property as a residential dwelling is also not dependent on the proposal as the building has an ongoing residential use that would not cease in its absence.
18. Consequently, I find that the public benefits do not outweigh the harm to the designated heritage assets, which carries great weight. As such, the scheme fails to preserve the special historic interest of the listed building and significance of the CA. As such, it would not satisfy the requirements of the Act and paragraph 210 of the Framework.
19. Policies ENV1 and ENV2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan 2005 are of some age. However, along with Policy SW3 of the Saffron Walden Neighbourhood Plan, their aims of protecting heritage assets are consistent with the Framework and the Act. Insofar as relevant the scheme would be contrary to these policies.

Other Matters

20. While I saw solar panels at some properties nearby, they were not within the same part of town and were often on more modern properties. Therefore, the panels, as modern features, would not stand out as much or appear as discordant on more recent properties. I also do not have full details of those schemes highlighted nearby or others elsewhere. Therefore, it has not been shown that they are directly comparable to this scheme.
21. The conduct of the Council during the application and appeal process does not affect my findings on the main issues. A lack of objection from members of the public is not a reason in itself to grant consent.
22. There is a listed wall² near the appeal site. It is a c1600 red brick random bond wall with triangular coping and ovolo moulding that was partly rebuilt and repaired in subsequent centuries. It is part of the historic townscape of Saffron Walden formerly being part of the garden walls of The Priory. Its special interest insofar as it relates to this appeal, is derived from its historic association with The Priory, and the legibility of the historic streetscape and enclosures that shaped the towns layout along with its traditional local materials.
23. The setting of the wall is primarily associated with the historic layout of the surrounding buildings and streets. The roofscape of the appeal site makes little contribution to the special interest of the wall. The appeal proposal would not alter the historic layout of the area. As such, given the scale and nature of the proposal, it would not detract from the setting of the wall or the ability to appreciate and understand it. It would not harm the setting, as it relates to the special interest of the wall and would satisfy the requirements of the Act and paragraph 210 of the Framework.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons given above the appeals should be dismissed.

Stuart Willis

INSPECTOR

² Wall at north east end of Emson Close, ref 1205673, Grade II