



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 January 2026

by **E Catcheside BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 February 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/D3125/Y/25/3372721

Feathers Hotel, 16-20 Market Street, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1SX

- 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 Mrs K Kann (Builders Ede Ltd) against the decision of West Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application reference is 25/01319/LBC.
 - The works proposed are 2X flag poles and flags added as signage for the hotel above the main entrance to facilitate locating the entrance and the hotel. To be attached by Chem fixed M20 x 250mm through bolts into the building face/substructure, 4 fixings per flag.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. On my site visit, I observed that two flag poles with flags had been erected at the site in broad accordance with the details shown on the submitted plans. I have therefore considered the appeal on the basis that permission is sought to regularise works that have already been undertaken, as is indicated to be the case on the application form.
3. As the proposal is in a conservation area and relates to a listed building, I have had regard to sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). Section 66(1) of the Act is not pertinent to this appeal, as it relates only to the consideration of the grant of planning permission, rather than listed building consent.
4. There is no requirement under section 16(2) of the Act to have regard to the development plan when determining appeals for listed building consent. Nonetheless, I have had regard to policies EH9, EH10, and EH11 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan (LP) insofar as they seek to safeguard heritage assets, including listed buildings and Conservation Areas.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve the Grade II listed building known as The Feathers Hotel¹ or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses and whether the character or appearance of the Woodstock Conservation Area (WCA) would be preserved or enhanced.

¹ List entry number 1052856

Reasons

Heritage assets, special interest and significance

6. The Grade II listed Feathers Hotel is a large building, formed through the amalgamation of several historic buildings, which individually date from the 17th-19th Centuries. The hotel has a distinctive form, composition, and appearance, owing to the fact that the individual old buildings that make up the hotel do not share consistency in their heights, proportions, and architectural details.
7. The hotel occupies a prominent position within the historic core of Woodstock. It has multiple frontages that 'turn the corner' from Market Street to Market Place, the latter of which is indicated in the evidence to be the site of a former market. It is here, on Market Place, that the main entrance to the hotel can be found, forming part of a simply designed three-storey red brick former house with modest features, including storey bands and arched stone dressings above sash windows. The roof is a notable feature of this part of the hotel, which is stated to be hipped but presents as almost pyramidal when observed from street level.
8. The main doorway to the hotel is accessed via a porch, which provides some prominence to the commercial entrance and beside which I saw there is a small wall-mounted sign. The longest elevation of the hotel is its side elevation, which faces Market Street and incorporates a secondary entrance to the property. Here, the colour-washed frontage has an understated presence, although there is a prominent statue of the Virgin Mary above the doorway which, according to the list entry, dates from the early 14th Century. The side elevation comprises two elevated hanging signs and a small wall-mounted sign by the doorway, which promote the commercial use of the building to passers-by and guests.
9. Insofar as it is relevant to this appeal, the significance and special interest of the hotel lies in its composition of old buildings from past eras, its elegant architecture, its surviving historic fabric, and its historic and current uses which, taken together, reveal information about the time in which the building was constructed and its evolution to the modern day. The hotel also gains significance from its setting, which includes the rich mix of old buildings and spaces within the historic market town of Woodstock. The setting of the hotel enables the building to be experienced within its wider historic context, which enriches our understanding of the origins and development of the building over time.
10. The WCA comprises the historic core of the town, including the streets on which the hotel is sited. I have not been provided with an adopted Character Appraisal or other formal document that sets out the rationale for the WCA designation. However, the appellant has not disputed the evidence put forward by the Council in relation to the historical importance of Woodstock, which is thought to originate from the 13th Century. The evidence says that the settlement subsequently grew and became prosperous from the 16-17th Centuries owing, in part, to commercial activities including glove-making and fine steelwork, as well as its proximity and association with Blenheim Palace, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and tourist destination.
11. The WCA comprises a high concentration of historic buildings, which include the appeal property and the many other listed buildings that are tightly packed in predominantly terraced rows along Oxford Street, High Street, and Market Street. The buildings closest to the appeal site display a broad mix of styles and materials;

and they include a range of uses, many of which are associated with the local visitor economy. Notwithstanding their differences, I observed that these historic buildings generally share simple sophistication in their elevational treatments, particularly at the upper floor levels, where the windows stand out as the key architectural features. Overall, the buildings contribute to the sense of elegance that characterises the area, and which is a defining feature of the WCA.

12. From my observations, the commercial signage within the WCA is generally discrete, particularly above ground floor level where it comprises a small number of hanging signs and some wall murals bearing the name of the premises within. At street level, the commercial frontages were more animated with a mix of attractive window displays, planting, and small-scale fascia, wall, and pavement signs, amongst other things. Due to the simple form and small size of the advertisements, they do not detract from the character or appearance of the CA.
13. The concentration and variety of the well-preserved historic buildings, streets, and spaces within Woodstock reveal information about the growth and development of this market town that has endured over a long period of time. These characteristics of the town contribute to the special interest and significance of the WCA as a heritage asset insofar as it is relevant to this appeal. As a well-preserved, amalgamation of historic buildings in a prominent location and with a use that supports the visitor economy, the appeal property makes a positive contribution to the significance of the WCA.

Effects of the scheme

14. The muted colour of the flags and the subtle design of the feather image are sympathetic to the simplicity of other advertisements in the area. However, the flags are nonetheless prominent due, in part, to their height and the length of the poles, which project significantly further into the airspace around the building than the other elevated adverts I observed in the local area. Furthermore, the shiny, gold finials are uncharacteristically ornamental, and they are discordant when set against the simpler, understated features that are distinctive to the hotel. Even though care has been taken to ensure the flags are roughly symmetrical and level with the windows, the flags, poles, and finials together are incongruent embellishments that detract from the architectural integrity of this hotel frontage.
15. Due to the narrow width of the poles, views of the building and its architectural features are safeguarded, as are the longer views along Market Street and within the WCA. However, the flags are inevitably designed to attract the attention of potential guests and visitors to the hotel; and they stand out due to the height and length of the poles, and the large size and mobility of the flags. The flags are therefore a visual distraction that divert attention away from the simple, elegant façade of the hotel building. In doing so, they diminish the ability of passers-by to experience and appreciate the history of the listed building, including its former use as a house, from within its setting.
16. The flags are directly attached to the brickwork on this front façade via square plates and bolts, and they have therefore undoubtedly caused some, albeit minor, damage to the historic brickwork on the listed building. If the appeal were to be allowed, I see no reason why the details of the fixings could not be secured through a condition to ensure that any necessary alterations and repairs could be made to safeguard the longer-term integrity of the historic brickwork. However,

given the concerns I have already expressed about the appropriateness of the flags with their poles and finials on this historically sensitive site, there is no clear and convincing evidence before me to justify the damage to the fabric that has been caused; and this exacerbates the harmful effects of the appeal scheme on the special interest of the building.

17. I note that the appellant refers to the fixings as 'reversible'. However, there is nothing in the evidence to indicate that consent is sought on a temporary basis and, in all reasonable likelihood, the flags would endure in the longer term if consent was granted. It follows that the harm I have identified to the listed building and the WCA would be long-lasting, which adds further to my concerns about the acceptability of the appeal scheme on this site.
18. The appellant invites me to consider that flags of this nature can be found on other traditional established hotels. However, I have not been directed to any similar features on buildings in Woodstock and I did not observe any on my site visit. Within the local context, the flags are incongruent features that fail to reflect the generally more discrete form and design of other advertisements in the WCA.
19. Overall, and having regard to my duties under the Act, the appeal scheme fails to preserve the Grade II listed building known as The Feathers Hotel, its setting and its features of special architectural or historic interest. The scheme also fails to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the WCA.

Heritage balance

20. The harm that has been caused to the listed building and the WCA as a result of this scheme is less than substantial in the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The degree of harm is low. However, I ascribe great weight to the conservation of the listed building, as I am required to do by 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 should be weighed against the public benefits.
21. The flags enhance the visibility of the hotel to passers-by, and they provide waymarking to the main entrance on Market Place. In this regard, the proposal could contribute to the economic success of this long-established enterprise and, by association, the local visitor economy. These public benefits weigh in favour of the scheme. However, there is no evidence before me to suggest that the hotel was not a viable enterprise prior to the erection of the flags, or that the continued use of the building as a hotel would be at risk should the appeal fail. Furthermore, I am not convinced that the public benefits could not be achieved through other, potentially less harmful, means. Consequently, the public benefits in this case are not sufficient to outweigh the considerable weight and importance that I ascribe to the heritage harm I have identified.
22. Overall, the harm that has been caused to the significance of this Grade II listed building and the WCA conflicts with the historic environment provisions of the Framework. Insofar as they are relevant considerations to this appeal, the works also fail to accord with Policies EH9, EH10, and EH11 of the LP, which seek to safeguard heritage assets, including listed buildings and Conservation Areas.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above, the appeal should be dismissed.

E Catchside
INSPECTOR