



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 28 January 2026

by **H Smith BSc (Hons) MSc MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 February 2026

Appeal A Ref: APP/C3105/W/25/3373904

Fir Cottage, Fir Lane, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire OX25 4SF

- 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 Mark Utting against the decision of Cherwell District Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/01693/F.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing single-storey extensions and part demolition of an existing first-floor extension. Erection of a part single-storey/part two-storey rear extension and associated internal alterations.
-

Appeal B Ref: APP/C3105/Y/25/3374046

Fir Cottage, Fir Lane, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire OX25 4SF

- 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 Mark Utting against the decision of Cherwell District Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/01694/LB.
 - The works proposed are demolition of existing single-storey extensions and part demolition of an existing first-floor extension. Erection of a part single-storey/part two-storey rear extension and associated internal alterations.
-

Decisions

1. **Appeal A** is dismissed.
2. **Appeal B** is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

3. As the proposal relates to a listed building within a conservation area, I have had special regard to sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act).
4. The two appeals concern the same scheme under different, complementary legislation. I have dealt with both appeals together in my reasoning.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the proposal would i) preserve the Grade II listed building, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and ii) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Steeple Aston Conservation Area.

Reasons

Special interest and significance

6. The appeal property, Fir Cottage, is a Grade II listed¹ building fronting onto Fir Lane within the village of Steeple Aston. It forms a continuous range with Fir Lane Cottage, which is also Grade II listed². The listing description states that the two cottages have group value.
7. Fir Cottage dates from around the early 19th century. The building comprises two-stories with a two-unit plan. It is constructed from coursed limestone rubble with squared dressings set under a steeply pitched ridged tile roof finished with brick end stacks. The front elevation has traditional casement windows with large, squared quoins and flat arches. To the left is a small lean-to extension constructed from similar materials.
8. At the rear of the appeal property, various extensions have taken place including a modern flat-roofed two-storey extension and a single-storey extension. The appellant's evidence identifies these as 20th century additions. Despite these extensions, the listed building still maintains its integrity and authenticity as a traditionally constructed small-scale cottage. Its historic plan form and shape are still distinguishable.
9. Given the above, I find that the special interest and significance of the listed building is largely derived from its historic and architectural interests. These are drawn from its illustration of an early 19th century cottage, as well as the historic fabric and features that survive from the physical origins of the historic building.
10. The appellant states that the significance of the appeal building is in the group value with the adjoining Fir Lane Cottage. Nevertheless, the external and internal features of special architectural or historic interest of the individual properties undoubtedly contribute to their heritage value as listed buildings.
11. The listed building is located within the Steeple Aston Conservation Area (CA). This part of the CA is characterised by traditional buildings of varying scale and style within a rural setting. The imposing Church of St Peter and St Paul provides a focal point on Fir Lane. The special interest and significance of the CA mainly stem from the varying ages and architectural styles of its buildings that reflect the evolution of the village.
12. The appeal listed building retains much of its external historic character and form, making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the CA as a whole and thereby to its significance as a designated heritage asset.

Proposal and effects

13. The proposal would replace the existing rear extensions with a combination of single-storey and two-storey elements. This would create a larger kitchen and dining area at ground floor level and an additional bedroom at first floor level.
14. While the proposed extension would occupy a similar width to the current extensions, its rearward projection would be substantially deeper. This would significantly increase the building's overall footprint. The ridge of the proposed two-

¹ Fir Cottage List Entry Number: 1066595.

² Fir Lane Cottage List Entry Number: 1066596.

storey pitched roof extension would sit below that of the existing cottage. However, its height would be taller than that of the existing two-storey flat-roofed extension.

15. Taken together, the increased depth, height and overall volume would result in an extension of considerable scale and massing. Rather than reading as a modest and subordinate addition, it would appear as a prominent and visually intrusive addition to the historic fabric of the listed building. The pronounced rearward projection would produce an elongated flank elevation, and the added roof height would further intensify its visual dominance. This cumulative elongation and vertical emphasis would give the northern elevation a disproportionate length and scale that is inconsistent with the building's established character.
16. Although positioned to the rear, the proposal's enlarged bulk and height would dominate the modest proportions and simple plan form of the traditional cottage. It would produce a conspicuous form of development that would compete visually with the listed building and undermine its architectural integrity.
17. I accept that the existing rear extensions to the listed building are poor quality and detract from its special interest. However, the presence of these structures does not provide a precedent for proposals which in themselves are harmful. I find that the proposal would not provide an enhancement to the rear of the building, and overall, the rear extension would represent an overbearing and incongruous addition which would harm the character and appearance and special interest of the listed building.
18. During my site visit I observed that public views of the proposal's north elevation would be possible from Fir Lane, despite the neighbouring pre-school building and trees. This is because the private track to the side of the appeal property provides a spatial gap between the existing buildings, making the flank elevation of the cottage visible from Fir Lane. In any case, the significance of a listed building could be harmed whether or not proposed works or development are visible in the public domain.
19. The proposed two-storey extension would adjoin the cottage's existing roof at a higher point than the existing flat-roof extension. Insufficient information has been submitted as to exactly how the proposed roof structure would adjoin the existing fabric. Therefore, I cannot be certain that the proposal would not result in the loss of or damage to the listed building's historic fabric.
20. Whilst the materials chosen for the proposed extension would complement those on the historic parts of the building, this would not justify development and works that would result in harm to a heritage asset.
21. Taking into account the building's positioning on Fir Lane, with public views to the side of the cottage, it follows that the identified negative effects to the listed building would also harm the positive qualities of the CA as a whole. In these regards, the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA and thus harm its significance as a designated heritage asset.
22. Drawing the above together, I find that the proposal would not i) preserve the Grade II listed building, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and ii) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of

the CA. In doing so, it would harm the significance of these designated heritage assets.

Public benefits and balance

23. With reference to paragraphs 214 and 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework), in finding harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the magnitude of that harm should be assessed. Given the extent and fairly localised nature of the proposal, I find that the harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets assessed above would, individually and cumulatively, be 'less than substantial' but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. To my mind, this is towards the middle of the range of the less than substantial harm. Paragraph 215 of the Framework requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing the asset's optimum viable use.
24. In this case, economic benefits would be delivered through the construction phase and the general investment into the property. However, the scale of those benefits is short-term and would be limited by the extent and nature of the scheme.
25. Additionally, there would be social and environmental benefits, which the appellant asserts would be through improving insulation and airtightness to the property, which would help to reduce carbon emissions. The use of swift boxes and bat tiles would improve biodiversity in the area. The appellant also suggests that the proposal would enable the removal of the existing poor-quality rear extensions which detract from the appearance of the listed building. Such benefits would carry weight in favour of the appeals. Nevertheless, the proposal to enable additional accommodation for family use, would primarily be a private benefit to occupants of the property.
26. The appellant claims that the proposed first-floor extension would reduce overlooking to the neighbouring pre-school. However, there are no side facing windows to the existing property. While there is an existing rear facing first-floor window, this would also be the case with the proposed extension.
27. However, I am not persuaded that the only way of securing the benefits identified would be via the appeals proposal. Additionally, it has not been demonstrated that the property would not be usable or viable as a dwelling or that its future would be at risk if the appeals were to fail and the development and works as proposed were not implemented. In these respects, the identified harm to the significance of the listed building and the CA has not been clearly and convincingly justified as required by Paragraph 213 of the Framework.
28. On balance, in giving considerable importance and weight to the harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets, I find that this would not be outweighed by the small public benefits arising from the proposal.
29. I therefore conclude that the proposal would not i) preserve the Grade II listed building, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses; and ii) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Steeple Aston Conservation Area. It would therefore fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the provisions within the Framework which seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment.

30. It would also conflict with Policy ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 Part 1 (adopted 2015), and saved Policies C18 and C28 of the Cherwell Local Plan (adopted 1996). Collectively, these policies, amongst other things, seek to ensure high quality design and the preservation of heritage assets.

Other Matters

31. The appellant states that their fall-back position is to do nothing, in which case the existing rear extensions would remain. Nevertheless, they are not as harmful as what is before me.
32. My attention has been drawn to previous permissions³ in Steeple Aston. However, I do not have the full details of these other schemes. Therefore, I do not know if they are directly comparable to the appeal proposal, which is for a listed building with its own specific characteristics. In any event, I have determined these appeals on their own merits based on the information before me and my own observations of the area.
33. The proposal would not have a detrimental impact upon the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. I also note no objection was raised by the Parish Council. Nonetheless, these are neutral considerations and therefore do not alter my conclusions.
34. The appellant has raised concerns over the handling of the application by the Council. However, this is a matter between the main parties and is not relevant to my determination of these appeals, which is based upon the evidence before me.

Conclusions

35. **Appeal A:** The proposed development would conflict with the development plan when taken as a whole. There are no material considerations which indicate that the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that Appeal A should be dismissed.
36. **Appeal B:** For the reasons given, I conclude that Appeal B should be dismissed.

H Smith

INSPECTOR

³ 22/00911/LB and 23/01405/LB.