



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 January 2026

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

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24th February 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/Y/25/3374317

Varnells, Hambleden, Buckinghamshire RG9 6RT

- 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 V Stuart against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council.
 - The application reference is 25/05875/LBC.
 - The works proposed are works to roof comprising replacing delaminated, missing or broken tiles, securing loose and slipping tiles where necessary. Using handmade clay tiles to make up any shortfall. Replacing defective laths with treated battens, install insulation and membrane, repair and repaint ornamental fascia and replace guttering with same materials.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Whilst I have had regard to the description of the works on the application form, the description in the banner heading is taken from the decision notice and the appeal form because it is more concise.
3. Listed building consent (LBC) reference 08/06410/LBC was granted in 2008 for works described in the appeal documents as: *“Construction of two storey side extension, insertion of window into front elevation, insertion of 2 x ground floor windows to former scullery and associated internal works including new staircase to replace existing. Replacement of Georgian style windows to sash windows”*. Planning permission reference 08/06409/FUL was granted around the same time, for a development described in the evidence as: *“Construction of two storey side extension, insertion of window into front elevation, insertion of 2 x ground floor windows to former scullery and alterations”*.
4. There is a difference of opinion between the parties as to whether or not some of the works that are the subject of this appeal were permitted as part of the 2008 scheme or are otherwise localised repairs that do not require LBC. Whilst I have had regard to the comments made in these respects, I have determined the appeal on the basis upon which it was submitted, which is to seek LBC for the works described in the application.
5. The application form says that the works were started on 3 February 2025, and the evidence says that the works have since been completed. I have therefore considered the appeal on the basis that permission is sought to regularise works that have already been undertaken. Because the works have already been carried out, and some of the works are concealed above ceilings, I am reliant on the

evidence to describe the condition of the building prior to the works being undertaken and to explain the details of the changes that have occurred. My assessment is made on this basis.

6. 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).
7. There is no requirement under section 16(2) of the Act to have regard to the development plan when determining appeals for LBC. However, I have had regard to policies CP9, CP11, DM31, and DM35 of the Wycombe District Local Plan (Adopted August 2019) insofar as they seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment and heritage assets, and to improve the character of the area.
8. The appeal site is subject to a National Trust covenant, which seeks to protect the vernacular form of buildings in the village. I have not been provided with full details of the covenant and, should any consent for the works be required in association with the covenant, it would be a separate matter to this appeal. Therefore, whilst I have had regard to the covenant, it is not determinative to my decision.

Main Issue

9. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve the Grade II listed building known as Varnell's¹ or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses, and whether the character or appearance of the Hambleden Conservation Area (HCA) would be preserved or enhanced.

Reasons

Heritage assets, significance, and special interest

10. The appeal site lies within the HCA, which encompasses the historic core of Hambleden. The village has a picturesque character due to its concentration of well-preserved traditional buildings, framed by the rolling hills of the Chilterns National Landscape (NL). The Grade II* listed Church of St Mary the Virgin, which originates from the 12th Century, stands at the heart of the village near to a cluster of small, medieval cottages. Larger properties, including the Grade II* listed Manor House and other grand houses and villas such as the Varnells, lie on the outer limits of the village. The Hambleden Conservation Area Character Survey notes that the village has retained many of its traditional vernacular features, all of which add to its charm, and this description aligns with my own observations of the area.
11. The significance of the HCA, insofar as it is relevant to this appeal, is derived from its rich concentration of historic buildings, many of which are listed or are non-designated heritage assets, and which display architectural features from the Medieval through to the Edwardian eras. The nucleated form of the settlement core, and its' verdant landscape character and surroundings, also contribute to its special interest. Together, these characteristics of the CA reveal information about the growth and development of this rural settlement over a long period.
12. The Grade II listed Varnells is a large, detached brick and flint house, with hipped tile roof, thought to date from the mid-18th Century. The list entry refers to late 19th Century alterations to the property, which the evidence indicates were

¹ List entry number 1125690

substantial, comprising amongst other things a two-storey side extension, a porch, and the creation of close-boarded loft rooms and dormer windows. The property was extended further in the 20th Century and, more recently, in around 2008-9, when a two-storey extension was added to the rear of the building.

13. The roof of the appeal property has been subject to previous alterations and repairs. The Council has not disputed the photographic evidence provided which shows that, prior to the works commencing, the roof comprised a mix of 20th Century handmade and machine cut tiles. Consequently, whilst there could be some original tiles remaining, a large proportion of the roof covering does not comprise historic fabric. Nonetheless, the traditional appearance of the building and the roof has been maintained through the consistent use of brick, flint, and tiles; and the historic character of the building has not been eroded.
14. Insofar as it is relevant to this appeal, the significance of Varnells is derived from its age, traditional appearance, and the surviving historic fabric. Some significance is also gained from its large, villa-like proportions, its spacious grounds, and its setting within the Hambleton CA. Taken together, these features provide information about development and the construction methods used in this area at the time in which the building originated and has evolved, as well as the lifestyle of its early occupants.

Effects of the proposal

15. The appellant states that the roof of the building was significantly damaged and in need of repair prior to the works being undertaken. Indeed, I have been provided with photographic evidence, which shows that significant decay had occurred to the laths and their fixings; and that there was previously extensive moss growth across the roof, with many tiles broken, missing, or slipped from position. The appellant explains that the poor condition of the roof contributed to water ingress into the internal space, causing issues with damp which, over time, would risk the long-term integrity of the roof timbers and the internal historic fabric.
16. Given the need for the repairs, the replacement of the laths with similar, albeit not identical, timbers was an appropriate and sensitive intervention that is likely to help preserve the listed building and its historic fabric in the longer term, whilst also maintaining its architectural integrity.
17. A large proportion of the roof tiles were re-used in the repair works, with the new tiles representing a minority of those installed across the roof. On my site visit, I observed differences in the texture, tone, colour, and profile of the individual tiles used, which reflects the age range and mix of tiles that were present prior to the appeal works commencing. However, I have not been directed to any specific parts of the roof where the new tiles have not been integrated sympathetically with the retained tiles. Rather, I saw that the natural variation in the appearance of the tiles was generally consistent across the roof, which had a visual quality and character that was similar to other tiled roofs I saw nearby in the CA. Moreover, the newer tiles will achieve closer visual integration with the older tiles as they weather over time.
18. Whilst I recognise the Council's concerns regarding the use of machine cut tiles, the product description provided shows that the tiles were selected from a range of only handmade clay tiles, which reflects the description of the works for which LBC is sought. Overall, having regard to the evidence and my own observations of the

works, I see no reason to conclude that the tiles that have been installed are inappropriate or that they have failed to preserve the authenticity of this historic roof as it has evolved over time.

19. There is no evidence before me to dispute the appellant's claim that the sand and cement mortar used in the repairs was a like-for-like replacement of the mortar that was previously present. There could of course have been some heritage benefit had traditional materials been reinstated. However, the appeal works did not lead to a loss of lime mortar and, therefore, no degradation to the special interest and architectural integrity of the building has occurred through the direct replacement of the mortar type that was removed.
20. Given the age of Varnells, it was, in all reasonable likelihood, built as a vapour-open structure, with an absence of roof insulation that would have helped the property to breathe. Indeed, the evidence provided by the appellant says that the property had limited roof insulation prior to the works, comprising straw packed between the laths and some plasterboard, and that it likely had no insulation at all during its early origins. The permeability of the fabric of older buildings is important to their longevity, as these materials can absorb and release moisture in a way that keeps dampness below a level at which decay can start to develop.
21. The Historic England guidance on the insulation of roofs at rafter level² acknowledges the role of roof insulation in improving the thermal performance of old buildings. However, the guidance is clear that any alterations to the thermal performance of these older properties carries risk, with the most significant risk arising through the creation of condensation which, over time, can damage the building's fabric through decay. Therefore, in order to form a view on the appropriateness of the insulation and the membrane that have been installed, I must necessarily have regard to the effects of the works on the movement of moisture through this historic property.
22. The manufacturer's specification for the membrane indicates that it is 'air-open' and effective at minimising the risk of condensation without the need for additional ventilation. This indicates that it would be suitable for use on an older building where ventilation and moisture management are key considerations. However, whilst the appellant has described the insulation as suitable for pitched roofs and timber-framed houses, there is an absence of detailed information about the insulation used and its suitability for this historic property, which leads to ambiguity as to its permeability and the likely effects on the ventilation of the building.
23. For example, there are no cross-sections or other detailed drawings to show the extent of the insulation and its siting within the property relative to the close-boarding, roof timbers, and membrane; and there is no information to show the ventilation pathways that are available in this traditionally constructed building with the insulation in place. Without this information, my ability to make a full and proper assessment of the likely effects of the works on moisture control in this building is seriously hindered.
24. Of particular concern is that the insulation is stated in the evidence to be non-hygroscopic, which goes against Historic England's guidance that insulation with hygroscopic properties is used in older buildings, due to its capabilities at managing fluctuations in temperature and vapour pressure which reduce the risk

² Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating Pitched Roofs at Rafter Level (Historic England, January 2016).

of condensation. The guidance states that insulation made from natural materials such as sheep's wool and wood-fibre, which are highly compatible with traditional buildings, are now readily available. Therefore, there is no clear and convincing justification for the use of a synthetic substance that is likely to impede ventilation and vapour-control in this building.

25. Furthermore, the appellant acknowledges that the ventilation gap to the underside of the roof does not meet the size recommended in Historic England guidance³. Therefore, the insulation is likely to impede the upwards flow of vapour, and it could fail to prevent the transfer of water from above into the historic fabric. The guidance notes that there may be occasions where a smaller ventilation gap would be necessary and, in those circumstances, conditions in the roof space should be monitored. However, in the absence of cross sections or other detailed information to show that a narrow ventilation gap is necessary, there is a lack of justification for the heightened risk of harm through condensation and wetting. Furthermore, I have not been provided with details of the additional ventilation measures that could be reasonably and practicably delivered and enforced on this building should the monitoring show condensation or humidity levels to be a cause for concern. Consequently, I am not satisfied that a monitoring condition would be effective at ensuring the longevity of the building fabric in this instance.
26. The evidence suggests that water ingress and damp levels in the loft rooms have improved following the works. Nonetheless, the effects of condensation on the historic timbers and other fabric in this building would occur over a long period of time and may not be apparent in the short term. Overall, and based on the evidence before me, I am unable to conclude that the insulation would not lead to the harmful decay of historic fabric over time, failing to preserve the listed building.
27. The Council has not identified any harm has arisen through the repair and repainting of the fascia and the replacement guttering, which are stated to have been undertaken with matching materials. I see no reason to form a different view on these components of the works. When considered together with my findings in respect of the repair and replacement of the roof tiles, I do not find any harm has arisen through the external alterations to the property. It follows that the character and the appearance of the HCA have been preserved.
28. However, my concerns about the effects of the insulation on the health and longevity of the internal historic fabric leads me to conclude that the scheme overall fails to preserve the special interest and significance of this Grade II listed building and its features of special architectural and historic interest. Consequently, and with regard to my duties under the Act, there would be harm caused to the significance of this designated heritage asset.

Heritage benefits

29. The harm that has been caused to the listed building is less than substantial in the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Whilst the degree of that harm is low, 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 the less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme.

³ Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating Pitched Roofs at Ceiling Level (Historic England, April 2016).

30. The repair works that have been undertaken have addressed issues relating to the damage and decay of roof tiles and battens, and they have resolved prior causes of water ingress. This, in turn, has managed one potential cause of damp and the associated threat to the integrity of the internal roof timbers. Indeed, the investment in the repair of the roof demonstrates the appellant's commitment to the upkeep and maintenance of this historically important building and to its preservation for future generations. The removal of materials and debris that had accumulated in the roof space has also helped to safeguard this building from potential damage and destruction through fire. The benefits I have listed here are heritage and public benefits that weigh in favour of the scheme.
31. Further positive weight is ascribed to the public benefits that would arise through the improved thermal performance of the building, which would help to reduce energy use and to mitigate climate change for the public good. Collectively, the heritage and public benefits in this case carry moderate, positive weight.
32. However, I am unable to conclude that the roof insulation works have been carried out in a manner that would safeguard the historic fabric of this listed building in the longer term thus risking the harmful deterioration of the property. Moreover, I am not convinced that the insulation that has been installed is the only way to improve the thermal performance and energy efficiency of the building, and that these benefits could not be achieved through other, potentially less harmful, means. Consequently, the harm that has been caused lacks clear and convincing justification; and the public benefits in this case are not sufficient to outweigh the considerable weight and importance that I ascribe to the heritage harm.
33. Overall, the appeal scheme has failed to preserve the Grade II listed Varnells and the features of architectural and historic interest that it possesses, and the harm is not outweighed by the public benefits in this case. Consequently, the scheme fails to accord with the historic environment provisions of the Framework.

Conclusion

34. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

E Catchside
INSPECTOR