



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 December 2025

by N Praine BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/E2205/Y/25/3372699

The Old Corner House, 6 Poplar Road, Wittersham, Kent TN30 7PG

- 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 Shepherd against the decision of Ashford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is PA/2025/0347.
 - The works proposed are described as internal alterations to turn a dressing room into a further bedroom, to create an en-suite shower room and to form a double door between dining room and kitchen.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the proposal is in a conservation area and relates to a listed building, I have had special regard to sections 16, 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (“the Act”).

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve the Grade II listed building identified as The Corner Stores (Ref:1070844) (“the listed building”), and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses and the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wittersham Conservation Area. (“the CA”).

Reasons

Designated heritage assets

4. The list description mentions that the building has an 18th century façade to an earlier core and is of two storeys with a ground floor of painted brick and weatherboarding above. It has a tiled roof, 17th century chimney and describes some external architectural features as well as a modern shopfront inset into the eastern end.
5. Although the list description does not mention the interior of the property, which in my experience is not unusual for some earlier listed building descriptions, I saw during my visit exposed timber framing within the front rooms of the historic core and fireplaces within the seventeenth-century chimney stack. While timber framing has an aesthetic charm, its unobstructed visibility allows us to appreciate how this historic building was constructed and occupied. It also gives us evidence about the historic proportions of the rooms. Additionally, the fireplaces provide information

about the status of the building and the function of the space. I also saw during my visit that the rear part of the building appears to be of later date but nevertheless this part reflects the evolution of the historic building and contributes to the building's significance.

6. The significance of the building, in so much as it relates to the appeal before me, is largely derived from its age, historic fabric, internal layout, and its architectural detailing. The timber framing and fireplaces within the historic core make a marked contribution to that significance, together with other internal historic fabric and features reflective of its age and character. The listed building is therefore an important survival of a historic dwellinghouse.
7. This part of the CA comprises a mix of vernacular building types developed over several centuries. There are also pleasing vistas across open land with green landscaping framing views into the junction ahead of the appeal site. Given the above, the significance of the CA, as far as it relates to this appeal, is primarily associated with the interconnection of open land, soft landscaping, and vernacular buildings. These elements combine to create an attractive, semi-rural historic setting.

The proposal and its effect.

8. Listed building consent is sought for internal alterations at first floor to turn the existing dressing room into a bedroom and to allow direct access to the proposed bedroom and bathroom from the staircase. Consent is also sought for the creation of an en-suite shower room in bedroom two and formation of a wider opening between the existing dining room and kitchen. At the time of my site visit the building was empty and unoccupied, although there was some repair work being undertaken by the current owners.
9. In relation to the proposed enlarged opening on the ground floor, the Appellant suggests that this wall may be 19th century and draws my attention to the tapering of the wall. However, I have not been provided with adequate evidence to substantiate this view such as careful opening up and the assessment of features. The evidence before me suggests that the enlarged opening would be positioned within the back wall of the earliest part of the building. It may therefore contain historic fabric which needs to be investigated and understood to inform such a change.
10. Therefore, in the absence of robust evidence, I cannot be satisfied that the widening of this opening would not cause loss of important historic fabric. In addition, the widening of such an opening would also inevitably harm the historic character of the small rooms to the front range and their sense of enclosure.
11. I have considered whether a condition could be imposed to investigate the historic fabric of this wall. However, this would not be appropriate, in this case, as this very detail is fundamental to the acceptability of the proposal. Heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and important historic fabric may be at risk, I therefore cannot rely on planning conditions to overcome the potential harm.
12. Furthermore, while I appreciate that the loss of fabric would be modest, any loss regardless of size carries harm and needs to be justified. I will return to this in my heritage balance later in this decision.

13. In order to convert the existing dressing room into a fourth bedroom and to create access to the main bathroom without crossing a bedroom, it is proposed to erect a partition wall across bedroom one to form a corridor. An opening between the new bedroom and the proposed corridor would also be created and the existing opening from bedroom one into the dressing room would be filled.
14. The evidence indicates that bedroom one sits within the historic core of the listed building and features a centrally located fireplace along one wall. In addition, the exposed timber framing is readily apparent in this room, and all these features contribute to the special interest and significance of this part of the listed building as set out in the preceding paragraphs.
15. By altering the original proportions of the room, and therefore its historic layout, the ability to appreciate the heritage value of this room would be harmed. Additionally, the partition walling would obscure and interrupt opportunities to experience and appreciate the timber framing within the room. The central location of the fireplace as the focal point of this historic room would also be harmfully offset.
16. The Appellant suggests a glazed section to the top of the partition to provide borrowed light and to retain views of the original room proportions. However, I am not satisfied that this would overcome the harm I have identified as the partition would still disrupt the central fireplace and full appreciation of the historic timber frame and proportions of this historic room.
17. Furthermore, it has not been robustly shown, in the evidence before me, that the creation of this new opening from the existing dressing room into the proposed corridor would acceptably avoid the permanent loss of historic fabric. I appreciate the removal would be modest and other traditional panelling would be retained; however, historic material would still be lost.
18. Some information has been provided by the Appellant regarding a listed building within another council area. However, I do not have details about the historical significance of this other building or how the alterations were found to be acceptable. Each listed building has its own unique special interest and planning decisions turn on the specific circumstances of each heritage asset and the impact of any works proposed. This other example has not been shown to be identical and therefore does not provide adequate justification for the proposed works as part of this appeal.
19. The provision of an en-suite to the later rear part of the building would alter the proportions and layout of bedroom two. However, from what I saw on site and the evidence before me, the room is much larger with fewer historic features which would be disrupted. Subject to a condition to secure the retention of the existing floorboards, and to agree drainage and ventilation, were I to allow the appeal, the works to this room would not have a negative impact on the special architectural or historic interest of the building, or how the wider significance of the building is understood and appreciated. This element of the proposal would therefore be acceptable.
20. Turning to the modern lean-to at the rear of the building, having considered the evidence before me and what I saw on site, I would agree with the Council that the proposed works to this part of the listed building would also not result in any harm to the buildings special interest or significance. Additionally given the works would be internal any impact on the CA would be acceptable.

Heritage balance

21. While I have found some parts of the proposal would be acceptable, the works would overall fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building. Paragraph 212 of the National Planning Policy Framework (“the Framework”) advises that, when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. Paragraph 213 goes on to say that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets and that any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification.
22. Given the scope of the works, I find the harm I have identified in this instance would be a moderate level of less than substantial harm. Nevertheless, this is of considerable importance and weight. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, paragraph 215 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimal viable use.
23. The Appellant explains that the proposed works are essential to meet Building Regulations in respect to fire risk. However, the rooms concerned are currently a dressing room and bathroom rather than bedrooms. It has not been clearly shown that such rooms need to meet the same fire-safety standards as a bedroom, or that Building Regulation standards must be retrofitted to existing heritage layouts.
24. I understand the desirability to introduce a fourth bedroom, and I accept this may make the property more attractive to future purchasers / tenants. However, the existing use of the room is a dressing room, and the evidence suggests the proposed layout would introduce fire safety concerns rather than the existing layout causing them. Even if it was demonstrated that additional works were necessary to comply with Building Regulations, the proposal would probably only be one possible way of complying with the Regulations. I have not been provided with detailed evidence to convince me that all other potential methods of securing fire safety have been comprehensively exhausted and ruled out. This stated benefit therefore carries limited weight as a public benefit.
25. The Appellant states that the widened opening between the dining room and kitchen would reduce condensation issues in the dining room. However, limited information to evidence the causes of this condensation have been provided, or that the widening of an existing opening would satisfactorily resolve the issue. Even if these were adequately shown in evidence, it has not been clearly demonstrated that other less harmful interventions would fail to resolve the condensation issue. This therefore carries limited positive weight as a public benefit.
26. It is suggested that these works are required to make the building more attractive to future occupiers for modern living and to justify the cost of refurbishment and repairs not covered under this application. However, given the statutory duty to preserve a listed building, modern standards and expectations must be carefully balanced with preservation of the historic significance of the building.
27. Furthermore, refurbishment and repairs are part and parcel of maintaining buildings, and it has not been clearly demonstrated that the unacceptable elements of the proposal are the only way to justify the cost of carrying out repairs

to the listed building. This therefore tempers the positive weight I can ascribe to these considerations. Moreover, I have been given no adequate evidence that the continued viable use of the appeal property would be dependent on this proposal or that it would cease in its absence.

28. In conclusion, the public benefits either alone or in combination would be insufficient to outweigh the great weight attached to the harm I have identified. Given the above I conclude that the proposal would not preserve the listed building or the features of special interest that it possesses.
29. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the Framework. It would also conflict with the relevant provisions of Policy ENV13 of the Ashford Local Plan (2019) insofar as this is relevant, which seeks to preserve and enhance heritage assets.

Conclusion

30. Given the above and considering all other matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed.

N Praine

INSPECTOR