



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 February 2026

by N Praine BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/C1435/Y/25/3372085

Walnut Tree House, High Street, Mayfield, East Sussex TN20 6AB

- 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 J Buddle against the decision of Wealden District Council.
 - The application Ref is WD/2025/0298/LB.
 - The works proposed are described as the decommission of an external doorway, created in 1949, and to restore the external wall to its condition before the entrance was made.
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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").
3. During the appeal, a draft version of the National Planning Policy Framework ("the Framework") was published for consultation. Having regard to the matters in dispute between the parties and the draft status of the document with the possibility of change following consultation, I attach limited weight to it. I am therefore satisfied that the interests of the parties would not be prejudiced by proceeding to determine the appeal without inviting further comments.

Main Issue

4. Whether the proposal would preserve the Grade II* listed building known as Walnut Tree House (Ref:1193529) ("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 Mayfield and Coggins Mill Conservation Area ("the CA").

Reasons

Designated heritage assets

5. The listed building is a charming and impressive fifteenth century exposed timber frame building with plaster infilling. The eastern flank of the listed building features a brick chimney stack with further brick sections along the ground floor. Buildings of this age have a rich history spanning many centuries often containing extensive historical, architectural, and cultural significance.

6. The story of this building is particularly fascinating as it demonstrates the engineering advancements of the fifteenth century; it also gives us a valuable appreciation of changing domestic life at the time, a refinement in how we lived and a symbol in rising wealth. The high quality of this listed building attests to the wealth of the owner at a time where prosperous individuals could build high status and long-lasting buildings. As a result, this listed building provides a valuable and tangible link to the past.
7. The flank side door facing Holders Lane appears to be a later addition, but this does not mean that it is without merit. Indeed, later additions can be valuable as they tell us about the evolution of heritage assets while giving an appreciation of changing artisanship and needs over time. These layers of the historic fabric contribute to a building's story and our understanding of the past.
8. The evidence before me indicates a lively blend of historical uses at this listed building, and these include: a bakery, shop, tea rooms, offices, as well as private accommodation. The evidence suggests the east flank door was introduced to serve these evolving uses.
9. The significance of the listed building, as far as it relates to the appeal before me, is largely derived from its age, form, siting, historic fabric, and architectural detailing. Its earlier usage is also of interest as this can recite how the building was used as time went on and how it responded to changing society. All these factors mark Walnut Tree House as a particularly important historic building.
10. This part of the CA features a mix of relatively low formed buildings which have evolved over time from an original medieval core. It is steeped in history, a historic village which has organically grown over time. Medieval buildings mingle with buildings from the sixteenth and eighteenth century as well as more recent buildings. The significance of the CA, as far as it relates to this appeal, is primarily associated with the historic character of broadly high-quality buildings that front onto the High Street. These represent an exciting mix of buildings from different periods and overall, one has the sense of being in a charming historic village.

Effect of the proposal

11. It is proposed to remove the side door facing Holders Lane and replace it with bricks. There would be no other changes, and the door is already blocked internally. Based on the evidence before me, the loss of the door would remove evidence of an important part of the evolution of the building and the ground floor layout. Additionally, and while I appreciate the moderate nature of the infill, the impact of the existing door sill, future straight joints, and proposed stretcher bond brickwork have not been robustly justified as far as their impact on the significance of the listed building.
12. Even if the removal of the door and restoration of the wall was found to be acceptable, the retention of the transom light is confusing as traditionally these windows sit on a horizontal bar called a transom, which separated them from an opening below. The proposed works would in effect leave an isolated transom style window with no opening below harming its significance. No substantive evidence has been provided to justify this design approach or to demonstrate that it preserves the building's special interest.

13. I note that the door may not have been in active use for some time and it faces onto a narrow lane with limited longer-range public views. However, heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and part of the special interest and historical significance of this listed building is its evolution over time and its response to the changing needs of its custodians and society. Listed buildings are also safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of the quality of viewpoints.
14. The proposed works would lead to the loss of an integral feature of the building which provides evidence of the evolution and use of the listed building over a period of time. Furthermore, it would lead to an awkward relationship of architectural detailing which would also harm the significance of the building. Given that the works would be evidently visible in the street scene, the diminishing of the significance of the building would also harm the character and appearance of the CA, to which the building contributes positively in its current form.

Heritage balance

15. The proposed works would harm the special interest of the listed building and the significance of the CA. Paragraph 212 of 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.
16. Given the scope of the works, I find the harm I have identified in this instance would be less than substantial and at the mid-point of this category. 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.
17. The Appellant explains that the door opens onto a one-way lane with a partial restriction in visibility and no pavement. I also accept that vehicular movements along the lane and the power of vehicles are likely to have increased since the door was installed. While a snapshot in time, I found the lane to be well frequented with pedestrians making their way up or down the lane with occasional vehicles also sharing the lane.
18. Therefore, and given the shared nature of this lane and the narrow width of the lane bounded by walls either side, it is most likely that drivers would be proceeding with caution at considerably reduced speeds. Furthermore, there is limited information before me to suggest that the lane is unsafe or an accident blackspot. I therefore give this benefit minor weight.
19. I note that the door and the surrounding frame have started to deteriorate and water is entering the building. While bricking up the opening may be one solution to tackle water ingress, it has not been robustly demonstrated that repairs to the door and its frame would be inappropriate or physically cannot be achieved. While I note that the appellant states previous repairs have not been successful, there is no professional input showing exactly what is causing the ingress of water, what the repairs were,

how they were undertaken and why they did not work. I therefore also give such alleged benefits minor weight.

20. I have also been given no evidence to show that the continued viable use of the appeal property would be dependent on this proposal or that it would cease in its absence. Therefore, without the robust justification to the design approach, 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 features of special interest or the significance of heritage assets.

21. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, the Framework, and the relevant provisions of Policy SPO2 of the Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan 2013. These, amongst other things, seek to preserve the intrinsic quality of the historic environment.

Other Matters

22. The appeal site lies within the High Weald National Landscape (“the NL”). Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 includes a requirement to seek to further the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of National Landscapes. The proposed works would have effects on heritage assets which I have considered above, however, this harm would not affect the natural or scenic qualities of the wider landscape given its localised impacts. Therefore, the proposal would have an acceptable effect on the NL and would conserve its natural beauty. The absence of harm in this regard is, however, a neutral factor in my assessment and does not alter my overall findings.

Conclusion

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

N Praine

INSPECTOR