



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 January 2026

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 31 March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/Y/25/3359833

38 Elton Road, Wansford, Peterborough PE8 6JS

- 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 Peter Frost of Milton (Peterborough) Estates Company against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
- The application Ref is 24/00086/LBC.
- The works proposed are demolition of secondary structures to the rear (south) of Stibbington House to facilitate the construction of a new south wing and its connection to the existing principal block. Associated with these works is the creation of a new terrace, a new circular north garden and a private family garden near the swimming pool. It also includes a new allee of trees, and adjoining gardens, leading south from Stibbington House to a new pavilion within the South Fields. This will necessitate the demolition of a group of modern equestrian buildings.

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(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
3. A planning application (ref 24/00085/HHFUL) was made at the same as the application for listed building consent. Both applications were refused. However, this appeal is against the refusal of listed building consent only and there is no related appeal against the refusal of planning permission. Therefore, while noting the broad description of the development, I have limited my consideration of matters in this appeal accordingly.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building, “Stibbington House” (ref 1222415), and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses, the setting of nearby listed buildings, and the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wansford Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. Stibbington House (the LB) dates from around 1805 and it was built as the mill house for the adjacent Wansford Paper Mill following a fire that destroyed an earlier house. It is set in extensive grounds to the east of the River Nene and it is accessed from Elton Road via a long private drive with Lodge and Grade II listed gate piers to driveway. The paper mill closed in the mid 19th century, after which it

was largely demolished and the former mill house was let. The grounds were landscaped in around 1927.

6. The LB was originally a simple 3-storey building with north entrance façade of 3 symmetrical bays and constructed in coursed limestone with freestone dressing and a shallow pitched hipped slate roof. The Georgian square plan building was extended during the 19th century, including a classically designed single storey drawing room to the west and kitchen extension and linear range to the rear. It was also ornamented, with clock belvedere added to the main house in 1844 and the principal north elevation was altered by the addition of a verandah returning to side elevations with patterned cast iron piers and frieze support tented metal canopy.
7. The 19th century expansion and alteration of Stibbington House illustrates the prosperity of the mill, the owner's social status and wealth and the changing architectural fashions of the time. The dwelling has remained little changed in the intervening time but the 20th century landscaping of the grounds, and the addition of features such as tennis court and boat house, serve to illustrate its evolved status. Given the above, I find that the special interest of the LB, insofar as it relates to the appeal, to be primarily associated with its architectural and historic fabric and its plan form which illustrate the miller's house and its subsequent adaptation and development to a small country house.
8. Little remains of the former mill except for the Grade II listed building "Workshop, former soll to Wansford Paper Mill circa 26 metres west of Stibbington House" (ref 1274688). This is an early 19th century 2-storey building constructed in coursed limestone rubble with freestone dressings and a low pitched hipped stone slate roof. It has been converted to ancillary residential accommodation but its significance, insofar as relevant to the appeal, relates to its historic interest as the rag sorting house of the paper mill. By virtue of the historic functional and visual relationship between the soll and the early mill house, the LB makes a positive contribution to the setting of the soll and vice versa.
9. There is a further grade II listed building in the grounds of Stibbington House, this being "Gate piers to garden entrance, circa 15 metres to north of Stibbington House" (ref 1222526). There are also several unlisted historic ancillary buildings to the south of LB1, including former carriage house, threshing barn and granary. Collectively, the listed and ancillary buildings have an associated group value.
10. Wansford Conservation Area (the CA) covers the early core of the settlement along the historic Ermine Street with its historic bridge, together with the land between Elton Road and the River Nene including Stibbington House and the former paper mill. The CA has a strong sense of place due to the historic thoroughfare with its flanking development of well preserved modest vernacular buildings and cohesive palette of materials. Although it no longer exists, the former Wansford Paper Mill was a sizeable industrial complex with a long history of paper making. The surviving buildings, including the soll and the LB, are set back from Elton Road in landscaped grounds where they contribute positively to the significance of the CA.
11. The proposal requires the demolition of the 19th century kitchen, linear domestic range and garden building to the rear of the LB. The kitchen abuts the north wall of the drawing room extension and the connecting jib doors, currently serving a cupboard, and roof level louvre illustrate the historic functional use of the kitchen. Although the kitchen fittings and WC are modern, historic fabric remains including

windows and door. The linear range is a narrow and low lean-to building, the east wall of which forms the boundary to the rear yard to the LB. Although much altered, the lean-to also retains historic fabric in the form of stone flag floors, roof timbers and chimney remains.

12. Notwithstanding the alterations, the 19th century domestic ranges evidence the development and evolution of the LB as a country house. Therefore, even accepting they could be recorded before demolition, the loss of these domestic service extensions would erode the historic interest of the LB. Irrespective of their architectural merit, the partial demolition of the listed building would result in a loss of historic fabric.
13. The proposed 2-storey extension would be over 9m tall and with a footprint of around 22m by 6m. It would increase the usable floor space of the LB by around 300sqm, which would be more than 50%. As such, the extension would be a substantially large addition, equivalent in scale to a large modern family home. The utilitarian rear yard and service area would be replaced with an extension of grand proportions and classically inspired architecture together with raised stone terrace and dining loggia. It would not be read as ancillary domestic or functional and it would not be understood as the historic rear of the LB.
14. As illustrated by the plans, the large rectangular extension would be out of proportion and out of scale with its square plan host. Viewed from the rear, it would obscure a much larger extent of the south elevation of the LB than the existing extensions, thereby detracting from an appreciation of the LB. In side views, the design and extensive fenestration would be out of keeping and more conspicuous than the relatively plain east and west elevations of the LB. By virtue of its scale, massing and design, it would be considerably more prominent than the original Georgian house. Except in views of the north elevation of the LB, the proposal would dominate and it would not be subservient to its host. Moreover, in contrast to the existing modest extensions, the overly large proposal would not sit comfortably but instead it would overwhelm the drawing room extension.
15. External alterations to driveways and parking areas would remove parking from the north frontage and the historic circular drive would be converted into a garden. As illustrated, the entrance into the extension would be the main entrance to the dwelling. Paths would lead directly to the extension whereas the principal north entrance to the LB, being further away and not readily accessible from the parking areas, would be relegated to a secondary entrance to the garden. Notwithstanding that the removal of parked cars from the historic frontage would be a benefit, the promotion of the modern extension and demotion of the LB would fundamentally and detrimentally alter how the LB was approached and experienced.
16. The external servants' bell would be relocated on the south elevation of the main house. As it is not in its original location, this would be a neutral impact. The uPVC window to the rear first floor would be removed and the window opening would be enlarged to form a new internal doorway from the LB to the upper landing in the extension. This would result in a small loss of historic fabric and the new doorway would significantly detract from the original design and aesthetics of the Georgian staircase. In this context, the removal of the uPVC window would not be a benefit. The blocked jib doors would be reinstated to provide a doorway between the drawing room and the new entrance hall in the extension. On the basis that the jib doors were historically a discrete service door between the kitchen and drawing

room, their conversion into a primary doorway from the entrance hall to the drawing room would be little benefit. The reuse of demolished historic fabric for repair and conservation of other historic buildings does not weigh in favour of the scheme.

17. The removal of the linear range and set back of the new entrance would reveal the lower south east corner of the original Georgian house. Few details have been provided in relation to the physical relationship of the 19th century extensions to the original house or proposed works to historic fabric. However, the exposed corner would be closely juxtaposed with the imposing new entrance with stone dormer and the double height bay feature. Moreover, the extension would obscure a far greater extent of the rear elevation of the LB than the modest 19th century range. In this context, the removal of the existing small and relatively unobtrusive lean-to range from the rear corner of the LB would not better reveal the LB and it would be a limited heritage benefit.
18. I note the concerns of the Council in relation to the adequacy of the plans for the purposes of assessing the full impact of the proposal. While there is a change in ground levels west to east, I agree that the plans are sparse in terms of proposed ground levels and the relationship and potential impact of the proposed terrace and steps on the southern elevation of the existing drawing room. Moreover, even accepting that the contextual elevations plans may be accurate, their textural enhancement and illustration of screening vegetation hinders ready comparison with the proposed plans. There also appears to be little detail in relation to likely impacts, and potential loss of historic fabric, as a result of the attachment of the proposal to the drawing room roof or the treatment of incorporated historic walls.
19. The extension would be a substantial quantum of new development in the setting of the soll listed building. The mill no longer exists and the LB has evolved into a country house. However, the Georgian miller's house remains legible as does the historic relationship between the buildings, this being a contributor to the special interest of the soll. In this regard, as the heritage assessment notes, the rather plain west elevation of the LB reflects that it historically faced the paper mill. In contrast, the long west elevation of the proposal would be grand with numerous windows, large terrace and loggia all facing the site of the former paper mill. The significant enlargement of the LB and the extensive overlooking towards the former rag sorting house would erode the legibility of the historic relationship between the former soll and the LB. By virtue of its prominence, design, scale and orientation, the proposal would detract from the setting of the soll listed building.
20. Drawing all this together, I have found that the proposal would erode and detract from the special interest of Stibbington House listed building. It would make a negative contribution to the setting of the soll listed building. The harm to the LB and to the setting of the soll would diminish the group value. Although not readily visible in public views, the proposal would be prominent in private views from the grounds of the LB. As such, the proposal would be capable of harming the significance of the CA as a whole.
21. Paragraph 212 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (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 advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets or development within its setting and that any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification.

Given the nature and scale of the proposal, it would result in a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the LB and the setting of the soll listed building, and a modest level of less than substantial harm to the CA. The collectively moderate level of less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets in this instance is of considerable importance and weight in the planning balance of the appeal.

22. Where a proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, 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. At ground floor, the proposal would provide a kitchen with family dining area, pantry, dining room, snug, entrance hall, coat storage and toilets. The first floor would house a large master bedroom with 2 ensuite bathrooms and dressing rooms, and storage. This would result in a marked increase in the extent of internal living space and the proposal would provide for modern family living. There would also be enhanced private outdoor space.
24. The LB is already generously proportioned and it provides a reasonable standard of living conditions in part resulting from previous internal alterations including a contemporary kitchen and insertion of bathrooms. Therefore, the substantial enlargement and modern living accommodation would be a significant private benefit to the appellant, but a limited public benefit. Moreover, the continued viable use of the appeal property as a residential dwelling is not dependent on the proposal as the building has an ongoing residential use that would not cease in its absence. The short term economic benefits during construction would be a limited public benefit. As set out above, there would be limited heritage benefits.
25. The appellant intends to landscape the fields to the south of Stibbington House, which is expected to result in biodiversity enhancement and improve air quality. The planning practice guidance is clear that public benefits should flow from the proposed development. In this case, the fields to the south are not in the curtilage of the listed building and there is little evidence that the proposed habitat creation would be reliant upon this appeal against the refusal of listed building consent. The landscaping of the wider land within the ownership of the appellant might be a public benefit, but it carries little weight in favour of the proposed extension to the listed building. Consequently, the public benefits that would flow from the proposed development are not sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified.
26. Given the above, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to preserve the special historic interest of the Grade II listed building Stibbington House, the setting and thereby special interest of the Grade II listed soll building, and the character and appearance of the Wansford Conservation Area would be neither conserved nor enhanced. Accordingly, this would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 212 of the Framework and development plan policies insofar as relevant.

Other Matters

27. I note comments about the imbalance of indoor utility space and outdoor storage space compared to living accommodation. However, even accepting there may be a need for enhanced utility space, that does not provide a compelling justification for a disproportionately large extension. Moreover, while I note the various sketch designs, it has not been robustly demonstrated that there are no alternative

solutions that could provide enhanced domestic utility space with less or no harm to the designated heritage assets.

28. Stibbington House currently serves as the headquarters for an online retail business and it is regularly used for photoshoots and to host meetings and client dinners. The evidence indicates that it functions as a shop window but, as a showcase for the business, it lacks a suitable dining room, kitchen and accessible entrance. However, little substantive evidence has been provided in relation to the business or to demonstrate that it would not be viable in the absence of the proposal. The need to showcase the online retail business carries little weight in favour of the scheme.
29. An earlier application (ref 21/02790/LBC) was withdrawn in 2022 in order to address concerns raised by the Council. That scheme was amended and pre-application advice (ref 22/70023/PREAPP) was sought before the application subject of this appeal was made. While a constructive meeting with the Council did take place in 2023, the appellant refers to a general lack of engagement or any meaningful advice from the Council during the pre-application and the application processes. He also voices frustration that while clarification, further information and amendments could have been provided, the Council did not agree to an extension of time and it does not accept amendments during the processing of applications.
30. The Council accepts there was a breakdown in communication during the processing of the applications, in part due to the change in case officer and more generally resourcing issues. In recognition of the lack of service and the delays, it offered the appellant a partial refund. Moreover, while the appellant's frustration is understandable, nevertheless the Council's website is apparently clear that amendments to applications would not be accepted in the interests of timely decision making. I acknowledge the appellant's frustration and disappointment with the lengthy decision making process and the Council's decision. However, the Council's behaviour and procedures during the processing of the applications does not weigh in favour of the appeal.

Conclusion

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

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR