

Conservation Officer comments for: 25/00902/FUL

Proposal: Siting of four static caravans and two touring caravans for residential use and conversion of the existing barn into a day room

Site: Pinehollow Barn, Stoke Lane, Higham on the Hill

Date Submitted: 21/11/2025

Site context and significance

The application site comprises of a single parcel of land, situated to the west of Stoke Lane, Higham on the Hill. The site is enclosed along its eastern boundary by a closed boarded fence, with access positioned to the south of this eastern boundary. An existing brick and tiled barn is situated along this east facing edge. To the north and west of the site the site is bound by agricultural land, immediately to the south Public Right of Way T47/1 bounds the site and provides direct access to Higham on the Hill.

To the south of the site is the northern section of the Higham on the Hill Conservation Area, this being a designated heritage asset and an area of special historic and architectural interest. The northern section of the conservation area is characterised by the large field and extended garden to the north of the Old Rectory. The field is kept as pasture and includes an old village pond. It is defined by trees and hedgerows to its northern and eastern boundaries. The field is an important open and green space which makes a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area, and as such it is identified as an important space (space A) within the Higham on the Hill Conservation Area Appraisal (HHCAA) (2009).

The Old Rectory itself was built as a rectory in 1771 and was the home of the Fisher family. It was the birthplace of Geoffrey Fisher, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, and in recent times has been known as Canterbury House. It is a large dwelling of local historic and architectural interest and as such it is identified as a significant local building within the HHCAA with it making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Despite being set in a predominantly rural context the application site has a largely urbanised and domestic character due to the presence of the close boarded fencing around the site perimeter and presence of existing caravans on the site. Despite a strong intervening field boundary of dense hedgerow and trees providing a screening effect, for the above reasons it is considered that the site is currently a minor negative visual presence within the immediate setting of the conservation area and the wider setting of the Old Rectory.

The HHCAA also recognises that due to its location on a slight plateau, from a distance, Higham on the Hill and particularly its church, is easily seen from the neighbouring countryside on the northern village approach from Stoke Golding. Moving closer, however, these glimpses are concealed by the twisting road pattern and mature tree planting.

The grade II* listed building the Church of St Peter is located c.200m south-west of the application site. It comprises of a largely mid-19th century rebuilt parish church constructed of ashlar with a nave of 1790 and retained 12th century west tower built of freestone. It principally derives its significance from the historic and architectural interest of its built form as a parish church although the church also embodies communal value as a place of worship and as the social and physical focal point of both the past and present community of Higham on the Hill.

The church is located on raised ground within a large church yard which provides some separation from surrounding built form. This immediate and contained setting contributes positively to the church's significance, reinforcing its historic, architectural and communal values. By virtue of its location on the northern edge of the ridge top there are long-ranging views westwards and northwards of the countryside between existing vegetation when positioned in the churchyard (as identified within the HHCAA) from which the rural setting of the church and the village can be appreciated. There is also some visibility looking north-eastwards from the churchyard, within which the site is partially visible. Due to its largely urban and domestic character it is considered to be a minor negative visual presence within the wider setting of the church when viewed from this position.

Due to its elevated position the church tower is also visible in views towards the village. Whilst this visual prominence does reflect the status and role of the church, the visibility of the church is sometimes incidental and obscured by intervening built form and vegetation. This is evident when in the vicinity of the application site, where the site boundary treatments and a dense screen of vegetation along the eastern boundary of the churchyard largely conceal views of the church from Stoke Lane, with any visibility being limited to seasonal glimpses only. Only a minor appreciation of the significance of the church is able to be obtained from such glimpses. It is considered this is due to their limited extent and the intervening distance rather than the glimpses being taken from the suburbanised context of the site. When traversing westwards on the public right of the way to the south of the application site there is no visibility of the church due to the dense surrounding vegetation, with the church only becoming visible from the right of way when well beyond the application site.

National and local policy

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on the local planning authority when determining applications for development which affects a listed building or its setting to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural and historic interest which it possesses.

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. Whilst this proposal is not located within the conservation area, the decision-taker will still need to consider the potential impact on the area's setting, even though the specific duty under Section 72 itself does not extend to it.

Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides the national policy on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraphs 212-215 of the NPPF require great weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets when considering the impact of a proposed development on its significance, for any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset to have clear and convincing justification, and for that harm to be weighed against the public benefits of a proposal.

Policies DM11 and DM12 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies (SADMP) DPD seek to protect and enhance the historic environment. Policy DM12 requires all development proposals to accord with Policy DM10: Development and Design. Policy DM12 also states that development proposals should ensure the significance of a conservation area is preserved and enhanced through the consideration and inclusion of important features (as identified in Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans). All proposals for development affecting the setting of listed buildings will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that the proposals are compatible with the significance of the building and its setting.

The proposal and its impact upon affected heritage assets

The proposal is for the siting of four static caravans and two touring caravans on the site and the conversion of the barn on the site into a day room.

There is already an established use of the site for two caravans. No further works are required in regards of additional boundary treatments or access, with the proposed additional caravans being located within the confines of the existing site. The site has an urbanised and domesticated character due to its established use. In my opinion the introduction of a small number of static and touring (so transient) caravans on to the site will further urbanise its character, but in visual terms, it would only have a negligible and not adverse effect upon the heritage significance of both the Higham on the Hill Conservation Area and the grade II* listed building the Church of St Peter, due to the level of visual containment of the caravans in the site due to its existing boundary treatments, and that the application site is only a minor component within the setting of these designated heritage assets. The proposal would not have any material effect upon key characteristics of the adjacent conservation area or result in any material reduction in the ability to appreciate and understand the significance of the conservation area and the listed church when located within the setting of these designated heritage assets.

As such the proposal would preserve the heritage significance of the Higham on the Hill Conservation Area and be compatible with the heritage significance of the grade II* listed building the Church of St Peter. Therefore, the proposal complies with Policies DM11 and DM12 of the SADMP DPD, section 16 of the NPPF and Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The existing brick wall and clay tile barn on the site appears to date from the early to mid-19th century (its footprint is evident on early edition Ordnance Survey mapping) and was likely an outbuilding forming part of Vale Farm, with the majority of the farm complex being on the opposite eastern side of Stoke Lane. The barn has a typical linear plan form and is constructed from traditional materials. However, the barn and wider complex is not identified on the Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record, and whilst it is considered that the barn is of some minor heritage significance, it is not of enough significance to warrant identification as a non-designated heritage asset and so any proposals affecting its minor heritage significance are not a material consideration. Any impacts upon the character of the barn resulting from its conversion to a day room and an assessment of compliance with Policy DM10 is left to the decision-taker.