

Conservation Officer comments for: 25/00402/FUL

Proposal: New timber pergola, new metal pergola, retaining wall with fencing and bin store and associated works

Site: The Blue Bell Inn, 39 High Street, Desford

Date Submitted: 08/07/2025

Site context and significance

The Blue Bell Inn is located within the Desford Conservation Area. The Desford Conservation Area Appraisal (DCAA) (2010) identifies that “this timber framed structure has retained its original window openings on the street frontage although a new third gable has been added replacing the earlier eyebrow dormer. The rubble stone building has also been recently rendered and a bay window added to the south-east elevation. The car park was the site of a row of thatched cottages which were demolished in the early 20th century.”

The land to the west of the building currently comprises of an outdoor seating area and porch canopy serving the public house, with a surface level carpark beyond. Planning permission reference 23/00711/FUL has been granted for the building known as 37 High Street/2A Main Street to be converted and extended to form a convenience store with associated car parking and landscaping. The site access to the car park is to be retained as part of the permitted scheme, alongside some car parking spaces for the public house and the outdoor seating area.

A detailed Heritage Statement was submitted for the scheme 23/00711/FUL and this included late-19th and early-20th century photographs of the High Street on Desford which incorporated the Blue Bell public house. The photographs, in addition to historic mapping and records demonstrate that the Blue Bell has been operating as a public house in the village since at least the late-19th century. In terms of its physical form, the photo indicates some discrepancies with the information contained in the DCAA, in that the building was a brick built construction rather than a rubble stone building. Given the location of the building within the historic core of the village, it is possible that it dates from the medieval period and may have originally been a number of cottages of a timber framed construction, which were then ‘re-faced’ during the 19th century in brick with its scale increased and typical late-Victorian period architectural detailing added including the steeply pitched end gable and half dormers with timber spandrel detail, clay roof tile covering, tall chimney stacks and larger window openings. During the 20th century the building has then been covered in a roughcast render and a bay window added to the western elevation facing the current outdoor seating area and a flat roofed extension added to the rear.

Despite such alterations the building is of local historic and architectural interest and due to its strong presence in the street scene it is considered to make a positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area, with its identification as an unlisted building of local importance within the DCAA being warranted. The outdoor seating area is currently bound by a low-level brick wall to the site frontage with a low-level painted fence behind and along the boundary to the car park. The seating area has a rather functional appearance but serves a purpose for the operation of the public house and is considered to be a neutral element within the conservation area.

The DCAA identifies a view to be protected from the High Street over the application site. The importance of the view is not explained in any detail but judging from its direction and the guidance provided within the DCAA, it is assumed the view is deemed to be towards the grade II* listed building the Church of St Martin, which is c. 100m to the north. The church

dates from the late 13th century and has a tall spire making it a visible landmark within the village and its setting. There is a large cluster of vegetation along the northern boundary of the shared car park and within the gardens of residential properties in between the public house car park and the church. As a result, the view of the church spire from High Street is not particularly clear when the vegetation is in full leaf, although visibility does increase when the vegetation is not in leaf. When positioned within its wider setting it is considered that the view over the car park does allow for a minor appreciation and understanding of the significance of the church.

The Old Manor House is a grade II* listed building located on the opposite southern side of High Street. It is an early 17th century farmhouse built in red brick in English bond. The property has sandstone ashlar quoins and dressings and Swithland slate roof. The windows are stone mullioned with square leaded casements that have rectangular ashlar surrounds. To the left is a brick barn that has been converted into a dwelling and to the right, forward of the house, is an early 18th century service block built in Flemish bond. It was a working farm until the 1990's.

The Old Manor House is a particularly important building of more than special interest. It is an imposing, traditional vernacular building that has considerable historic interest in its age and fabric, and as a high status house in the village. It likewise has a degree of architectural interest in its form and fabric, including its plan form and internal features. Whilst the significance of the building is not directly impacted by the proposed development there is the potential for an impact upon its significance resulting from change to its setting. Due to its local heritage interest and contribution towards defining the traditional streetscape of the historic settlement the Blue Bell Inn is considered to be a positive presence within the setting of The Old Manor House. As per its neutral contribution to the significance of the conservation area, the open car park and seating area is also considered to be neutral presence within the setting of The Old Manor House.

National and local policy and guidance

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.

Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides the national policy on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 202 recognises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.

Paragraph 210 states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Paragraph 212 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 213 states that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 215 states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably (paragraph 200).

Policies DM11 and DM12 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD seek to protect and enhance the historic environment and heritage assets. Policy DM11 states that the Borough Council will protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment throughout the borough. This will be done through the careful management of development that might adversely impact both designated and non-designated heritage assets. All development proposals which have the potential to affect a heritage asset or its setting will be required to demonstrate:

- a) An understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and its setting, and
- b) The impact of the proposal on the significance of the asset and its setting, including measures to minimise or avoid these impacts; and
- c) How the benefits of the proposal will outweigh any harm caused
- d) Any impact on archaeology in line with Policy DM13

Policy DM12 requires all development proposals to accord with Policy DM10: Development and Design. 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. 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).

General guidance to maintain the distinctive character and appearance of the conservation area is provided in the DCAA, to achieve this it will be necessary to:

- Retain listed buildings and buildings of local interest
- Ensure new development contributes positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area through its siting, scale, design and materials used.
- Ensure important views of the church and out into the open countryside are protected

Impact of the proposal

The proposal consists of the erection of a single storey 'pergola' structure attached to the western elevation of the building. It would have a rectangular plan form extending out c.5m to the side of the front elevation and extending along the full depth of the side elevation. It would have a shallow mono-pitched 'lean to' section of roof attached to the main building with the remainder of the roof being a flat polycarbonate roof other than for a small dual pitched gable over the entrance door. For the pitched roof elements 'matching' roof tiles are proposed. The elevations of the structure would consist of timber posts infilled with horizontal timber sleeper planting units in the bottom section and glazing units in the top section. As part of the proposal the existing bay window would be fully removed and the

opening infilled in double solid panelled doors with vision panels to match existing single door. This area would be internal and within the proposed pergola structure.

A further single storey pergola is proposed further to the north beyond the access to the pubic house service yard. This pergola would replace an existing cement panel single garage and would be of a similar rectangular footprint. It would consist of aluminium powder coated posts and frame with louvred roof and car park elevation, with the other elevations being open. It would be powder coated finish in anthracite grey.

The straight section of the brick wall currently bounding the seating area would be retained as part of the front elevation of the pergola. A curved brick wall with hedgerow planting would continue along the remaining section of land in between the proposed pergola extension and shared public car park, as per the approved details of 23/00711/FUL.

In my opinion the single garage is an incongruous feature within the conservation area so its replacement with the metal pergola, whilst this being a rather functional structure, would result in no harmful impacts upon its character and appearance.

Due to no changes to the position of the access to the shared car parking and the proposed timber pergola not reducing the extent of the car parking area the seasonal view of the church from the High Street (the view to be protected identified within the DCAA) will remain, ensuring that the minor appreciation and understanding of the significance of the grade II* listed Church of St Martin will be maintained from this position within its wider setting.

However, in my opinion the timber pergola extension has a wholly uncharacteristic appearance that does not reflect the traditional characteristics of the Blue Bell Inn or the wider conservation area. The part flat and part shallow mono-pitched roof profile is not a traditional roof form and given the extremely shallow pitch of the roof it will not be possible to source a natural clay tile to match the appearance of the existing building, with rather synthetic modern tiles most likely having to be used. The timber framed construction with glazing panel infills would provide the extension with a functional and low quality appearance. Given the clear visibility of the western elevation of the Blue Bell Inn the discordant nature of the proposal would be highly visible in the street scene and it would be a clearly uncharacteristic development that would not sit comfortably against the traditional and historic appearance of the Blue Bell Inn. This harmful effect is further exacerbated by the considerable scale and footprint of the extension. Whilst the proposal is not considered to have any material impact upon the significance of the grade II* listed The Old Manor House within the setting of the application site, for the reasons specified above the proposal would have an adverse impact upon the character and appearance and thus heritage significance of the Desford Conservation Area.

Recommendation

This proposal would have an adverse impact upon the significance of the Desford Conservation Area causing a level of harm to its significance. The level of harm would be 'less than substantial' in terms of the NPPF, and in my opinion towards the middle of the spectrum of this category of harm given the highly visible nature of the proposal within the conservation area street scene.

Paragraph 020 of the Planning Practice Guide (Historic Environment section reference ID: 18a-020-20190723) states that "public benefits may follow from many developments and could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental progress as described in the NPPF (paragraph 8)". Public benefits may include heritage benefits, such as:

- Sustaining or enhancing the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting

- Reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset
- Securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long term conservation

In my opinion the proposal can demonstrate no heritage benefits. Non-heritage benefits such as a minor economic benefit from some short-term employment offered from the construction of the development are likely and further non-heritage public benefits may also be identified by the decision-taker. The level of such public benefits shall need to be weighed against the harm caused by the proposal as per paragraph 215 of the NPPF and Policy DM11 of the SADMP. In completing this balancing exercise great weight must be given to the conservation of the Desford Conservation Area as required by paragraph 212 of the NPPF and the statutory duty of Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The balancing exercise is however of course a matter for the decision taker, however if the exercise does not come out in favour of the proposal then it should be refused due to its conflict with Policies DM11 and DM12 of the SADMP DPD, section 16 of the NPPF and failing to meet the statutory requirement of Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.