

**PROPOSED THREE NEW DWELLINGS AND RESIDENTIAL
CONVERSION OF EXISTING BARN
MANOR FARMYARD, BLACKWELL CLOSE, EARLS BARTON**

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC)

***Alex Stevenson Building Conservation & Design* is recognized by the IHBC as a professional historic environment service provider. The IHBC is the professional body for Historic England, local authority conservation officers and heritage consultants.**



1. Introduction – Pre-App Iteration

1.1 The application site comprises a traditional 19th century stone barn with lesser lower-quality utilitarian fabric attached on its west and south sides, a dilapidated group of smaller outbuildings in the southeast corner, and an open yard in the remainder.

1.2 An initial enquiry in respect of the site's development was made in June of this year under reference NWP/23/00053/PREF.

1.3 The council responded with the following observations and advice¹:

- Whilst the barn itself is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA), the attached rear shelter and side lean-to are not of any special interest and so can be removed. But as parts of the boundary wall, including the integral feeding troughs, are of historic and archaeological interest, it would be appropriate to retain them in the design if practicable.
- The form and massing of the proposed rear extension to the NDHA ought to be architecturally subservient thereto and respect the barn's existing traditional materials' palette.
- Allow for an area in which the barn's double-height open space can be appreciated internally, by retaining at least a third of the internal volume open to the roof.
- The siting, height, scale, massing, and design of the proposed new dwellings were accepted as adequately responding to local character and distinctiveness, the works thereby having a congruent relationship with the NDHA (its setting).
- The shelters in the south-east corner of the site have been extensively altered over time, and few elements of the original/historic fabric have survived. But they would benefit from further investigation as to their suitability for retention within the scheme design. It may be appropriate to include a consent Condition for a programme of historic building recording in respect of the shelters.
- NCC Archaeologist noted as requesting that the forthcoming application should include some information on the current state of preservation of the stone barn and of the brick buildings, including a small number of external and internal photographs.

1.4 following receipt of the above written Pre-App response, the applicant carried out further work on the practical feasibility of the layout only to find that it failed to meet highway standards including provision for emergency service vehicles to access and manoeuvre within the site.

1.5 An alternative design which duly met all the highway access standards was then, therefore, forwarded to the council for comment under the same Pre-App reference. Unfortunately, however, in so doing the configuration and character of the resulting unit

¹ Paraphrased.

design failed to meet with the approval of the council in the way that the original design had.

2. Proposed Works

2.1 In the light of the above and after further consideration, the present application now offers a third design which is intended to meet both the county highway and the historic building conservation standards.

2.2 It is proposed to carry out the following works:

- Erection of two detached 4-bed units (Plots 1 and 2), and one detached 3-bed unit (Plot 3).
- A barn conversion with glazed link serving a south extension to form a 4-bed unit (Plot 4).

2.3 Materials will feature natural slate and pantile roof-covering, and natural stone and brick facings.

3. Statement of Significance

3.1 This Assessment considers the effect of the proposed development on two heritage assets viz:

- Earls Barton Conservation Area (CA), a designated heritage asset.
- The barn, an NDHA.

The CA

3.2 The special architectural and historic interest of the CA is identified in the council's *Earls Barton Conservation Area Appraisal* of 4.11.03.

3.3 This is summarized as deriving from the following factors:

- Historic fabric includes ashlar gable parapets/kneelers, squared coursed or regular coursed lias (in ironstone, with or without a limestone element), red brick, wooden casement or sash windows and lintels, brick chimneystacks some with stone bases, roofing mainly Welsh slate, also plain tile, white/off-white painted render, pebble-dash, limestone dressing on polygonal red brick bays, free-

standing limestone walling with cock-and-hen capping or red brick with blue engineering coping, and painted timber plank doors.

- Dating ranging from the 16th to 19th century.
- Form: mainly 2-storey height with or without an attic.
- Plan form/street pattern opens out at The Square with characteristic topographical visibility and spatial containment. Significant panoramic views are also obtainable from higher parts looking over the Nene valley to the south.

3.4 The asset, therefore, has a high level of heritage significance deriving from the distinctive sense-of-place created by the configuration and inter-relationship of the various historic buildings and structures, the consistently clear historic and architectural legibility of the built fabric, and the settlement's topographical and visual relationship to the surrounding countryside.

The Barn

3.5 NPPF paragraph 203 concerning the "balanced judgement" to be exercised by councils in dealing with development proposals affecting NDHAs, is taken to imply that the bar, so to speak, for such assets is set lower than that for statutorily listed examples. NDHAs are clearly, therefore, on the lowest rung of the hierarchy of heritage assets, and this reality must underpin assessments as to their heritage significance.

3.6 Accordingly, particularly as the building is of a generic design typical of Victorian barns elsewhere in the area and therefore not of special interest, it is considered to have a low-to-moderate level of local heritage significance.

3.7 It's architectural and historic interest lies in its status as an example of a Victorian barn once serving the adjacent Manor Farmhouse (to the east), and the survival of several of its component architectural features, including natural local stone construction with ventilation slits under timber lintels, natural slate roof-covering, queen-post roof trusses, oversailing verges with exposed chamfered purlin ends, original cart/carriage entrance, personnel doors and an upper hayloft loading door. Some of these features are illustrated in the photographs below (Figs 1 to 3).

3.8 It's (low-to-moderate level of) heritage significance, therefore, lies in its age, architectural interest, historic interest, archaeological interest, and group value.



Fig 1. Barn Interior.



Fig 2. Barn exterior, south gable with modern lean-to (to be removed).



Fig 3. Animal feeding troughs in adjacent shelter.

4. Justification for the Proposed Development and Impact upon the Significance of the Heritage Assets

The CA: Its Setting

4.1 As the proposed development site lies outside the CA, positioned at its nearest point some 23m southeast of the eastern extremity of the designation area, this Assessment is solely concerned with the indirect effect that the scheme has on the asset's setting and not the more direct effect occasioned were the site to have been located within the designation area.

4.2 Historic England advice² defines setting as “the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced”, and the following issues are posited in the GPA3 detailed assessment checklist:

- the question as to whether a heritage asset's setting contributes to its significance.
- experience of the asset: views towards it, location/siting, and position in relation to key views.

4.3 Also, NPPF guidance indicates that: “elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.”³

4.4 Approaching Earls Barton from the east along Doddington Road and Broad Street the viewer's first experience of the CA is of the downhill sloping road running down to The Square starting from the property on the corner of Broad Street (No. 62), and Blackwell Close. However, by this point the viewer would have passed the development site lying in a backland location directly to the south, so it cannot be said that any coincident inter-vision or line-of-sight relationships exist here. Equally, because of the existing built form and boundary treatment along Dowthorpe End there is no possible line-of-sight whereby it could be said that intervening development would impact on views towards the CA from this street.

4.5 Considering views in the opposite direction - from the CA outwards to the east - the area of land between Blackwell Close and Dowthorpe End, at its north end where the streets meet Broad Street, contains several traditional buildings (including the NDHA: the barn), the complementary form and character of which serve to reinforce the adjacent asset's significance. The barn itself, comprising Plot 4, is itself partially visible from Blackwell Close from a position beside the garden of No. 62 Broad Street, as shown in Fig 4, below.

² GPA3 The Setting of Heritage Assets, 22.12.17.

³ Annex 2: Glossary, National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG, 2012.



Fig 4.



Fig 5.

4.6 Further along Blackwell Close as it begins to turn at right-angles westward, the position of the development site access comes into view as shown on Fig 5, above.

4.7 It is opined in this Assessment that to the extent that the proposed development site constitutes an interface with the nearby CA, the sensitively designed and laid out built form comprising the proposed development, including the converted and extended barn, is an entirely inoffensive and complementary response to the immediately prevailing local character, as well as that of the adjacent CA.

4.8 The HE and NPPF tests outlined above can, therefore, be responded to in tabular form, viz:

TEST/QUESTION	RESPONSE
<p>Does the setting contribute to the CA significance?</p> <p>Do elements of the setting (i.e., the development site) make a positive contribution to asset significance?</p>	<p>The CA's immediate eastern setting comprises suburban townscape which, although unharmed in its character and appearance, makes no direct positive contribution to the asset's significance.</p> <p>Because of the absence of any real visual interconnection, the development site itself is not felt to make any direct positive contribution to the asset's significance.</p>
<p>How is the CA experienced – views towards it; position (of site) in relation to key views?</p>	<p>As argued above, views towards the asset from (the public street network) from the east are unaffected by the proposed development site which is not in the line-of-sight.</p> <p>The CA character appraisal makes no</p>

	mention of any key views outwards from the east end of the designation area.
Do elements of the setting affect the ability to appreciate significance?	No.
Do elements of the setting have a neutral effect?	Yes.

4.9 The conclusion of the analysis, therefore, is that that the proposed works remain entirely unharmed to the CA setting because of the neutral effect that the development would have on the asset’s heritage significance, whether viewed both inwards towards the CA or outwards from the CA.

The Barn: The NDHA

4.10 In identifying the barn as an NDHA the council indicated in the original Pre-App response that it needed to be satisfied that neither the works to the building itself, involving its conversion and extension, nor the added newbuild within its setting in the adjacent yard, were harmful to its heritage significance.

4.11 The present proposed works for the barn’s residential conversion positively respond to the Pre-App advice by:

- including removal of the later west and south shelters whilst retaining the flank wall and feeding troughs,
- ensuring its extension is architecturally subordinate whilst using appropriate matching/traditional materials,
- retaining a proportion of the building’s central volume to the roof as a feature in the layout.

4.12 Concerning the three newbuild units in the NDHA’s setting, it is felt that the proposed restrained development density, the organic layout (including the relationship with the barn extension), and the unit height, scale, massing, and traditional design and materials’ palette, successfully reinforce the character and appearance of the NDHA.

The Shelters in the Southeast Corner of the Site

4.13 The council’s heritage consultant draws attention to the shelters, noting that they have been extensively altered over time with few elements of the original/historic fabric having survived, suggesting they would benefit from further investigation and indicating

that should it be determined that demolition is acceptable,⁴ it may be appropriate to include a condition for a programme of historic building record commensurate with Historic England guidance.

4.14 It is opined in this Assessment, however, that as the shelters are not considered NDHAs, apart from prior-approval formalities it appears that there is no basis for controlling their demolition should the applicant so desire. But the scheme design nevertheless shows the partial retention and refurbishment of the smithy structure.

Impact of Proposed Development on Asset Significance

4.15 It is suggested above in section 3 that the CA's essential significance relates to the distinctive sense-of-place created by the configuration and inter-relationship of its constituent historic buildings and their clear historic and architectural legibility, and the asset's topographical and visual relationship to the surrounding countryside; and that of the NDHA, its age, architectural interest, historic interest, archaeological interest, and group value.

4.16 Particularly bearing in mind the barn's identified relatively low level of heritage significance, none of these values or characteristics is felt to be detrimentally affected by the proposed development.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The scheme is compliant with the provisions of section 16 of the NPPF: *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*, where the issue of the potential impact of development proposals on heritage assets is addressed.

5.2 The works are felt to have a neutral, and therefore unharmed, impact upon the heritage assets' significance as detailed above in section 3.

5.3 The statutory requirement concerning the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas contained in section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is also considered to be properly met.

⁴ My emphasis.

