

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	25/02069/FPH & 25/02070/LBC
CASE OFFICER:	AHD
APPLICATION SITE:	5 Westbury Farm Close, Offley, Hitchin, Herts SG5 3FL
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Single storey side garden room extension following removal of existing porch canopy. Re-positioning of shed.

RECOMMENDATION:

I raise **NO OBJECTION** on the basis that the proposal satisfies the provisions of Sections 16(2) (LBC), 66(1) (FPH) and 72(1) (both) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

Note: Technically, repositioning of shed does not require LBC.

SHORT SUMMARY:

Impact on listed building's special character and its setting

Physical intervention with existing historic fabric limited to the link. Main impact is the presence of the building within the farmhouse's setting and whether this impacts upon the building's significance.

Impact on character and appearance of the conservation area –

Limited impact upon character and appearance for reasons stated under analysis.

Harm, preserve or enhance.

The proposal would neither harm or enhance but the farmhouse's status within this group would be preserved.

SITE CONTEXT:

5 Westbury Farm Close is grade II listed and is in Great Offley Conservation Area (GOCA). The building and area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 16 the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The building forms part of the entry described as Flats 1, 2, 3, 4. (formerly listed as Westbury Farmhouse under School Lane) and the list entry can be found at the following link:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1175092?section=official-list-entry>

There has only been one recent addition to the farmhouse and that related to no.4 and was under refs: 23/01796/FPH & 23/01797/LBC for a 'Single storey rear extension and internal alterations'.

Under these applications I described Westbury Farmhouse as being defined by its several gabled, clay tiled roof forms which are derived from its C15 or early C16 former open hall house origins through to the C16 (or may be early C17), C19 and C20 rear additions.

The building was converted under the following permission/consent:

- **99/01396/1** - Conversion of farmhouse into three dwellings with detached carport for 6 vehicles (as amended by plan nos. 0829/130C, 131B & 132C received 23/3/2000).
CP 28.04.2000
- **99/01397/1LB** - Internal and external alterations to facilitate conversion of farmhouse into three dwellings. Demolition of garage extension (as amended by plan nos. 0829/130C, 131B & 132C received 23/3/2000).
CON 28.04.2022

DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

I gave pre-app advice on 18 June 2025.

The key heritage issues are to consider the impact of the proposal upon:

- The special character of this listed farmhouse, its setting and that of agrarian buildings within this group, and
- The character and appearance of the Great Offley Conservation Area.

The Great Offley Conservation Area Character Statement (GOCACS) mentions at 2.1.7 that the former site of Westbury Farm, now being '*principally a relatively densely built estate of barn-type buildings where the estate has a modern road surface edged with inlaid bricks creating more of a shared-space feel*'.

There are various references to Westbury Farm in the GOCACS but it may be considered rather misleading if the following references, 'Westbury Farm Court' (2.1.9) and 'Westbury Court Place' (2.2.1) are supposed to refer to 'Westbury Farm Close'.

What Westbury Farm Close is not is a compact singular grouping of historic agrarian buildings. Quite the contrary, this is an extensive group of earlier and later buildings covering a large area. Having said that, the farmhouse is the singular standout building (focal point) in terms of height, external finish, and overall appearance. The density of Westbury Farm Close is a key consideration here. Paragraph 2.1.8 of the GOCACS is noted below together with Fig 2.3:

2.1.8 Buildings in Great Offley are generally in soft red or red-dominated multi brick although there is flint and stone in the Church of St Mary Magdalene. There are timber-framed buildings within the village south of Luton Road although these are not necessarily obvious as such from the outside due to later rendering. North of Luton Road there are a number of timber-framed buildings, including the plastered Westbury House and its barns, whether historic and converted for residential use or modern residential builds. The older buildings in the Conservation Area tend to have tiled roofs, with others, and buildings into the 20th century using slate. To the north of the Conservation Area weatherboarding has been employed to clad upper stories and extensions and for some modern properties adjacent to historic farm buildings.



Fig 2.3 Westbury House, looking west from Westbury Farm Place. This is Grade II listed and is a focal point of the part of the Conservation Area within the former site of Westbury Farm.

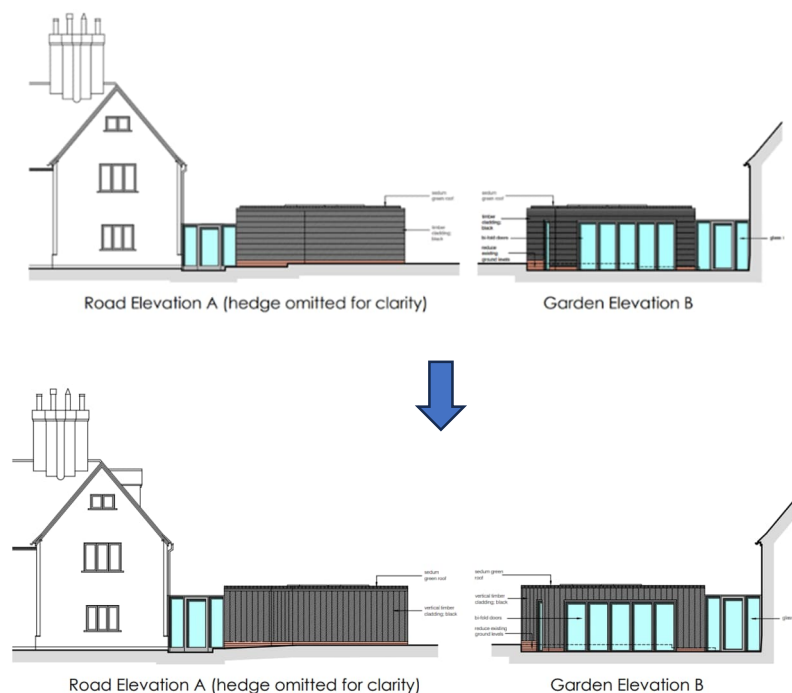
In the words of the supporting Design & Heritage Statement [DHS] *'the architectural intent is to create a contemporary addition to the house, whilst respecting the heritage setting both in terms of the relationship to the farmhouse and to the wider collection of buildings'* (3.3). Whilst the *'contemporary elements of the garden room (green flat roof, irregular floor plan, bifold doors) form a deliberate contrast to the existing farmhouse, clearly expressing and celebrating the modern nature of the addition'* (3.14).

Para 3.15 of the DHS says:

Subsequent to the pre-application advice the proposals have been developed as follows, acknowledging the input from the Conservation Officer:

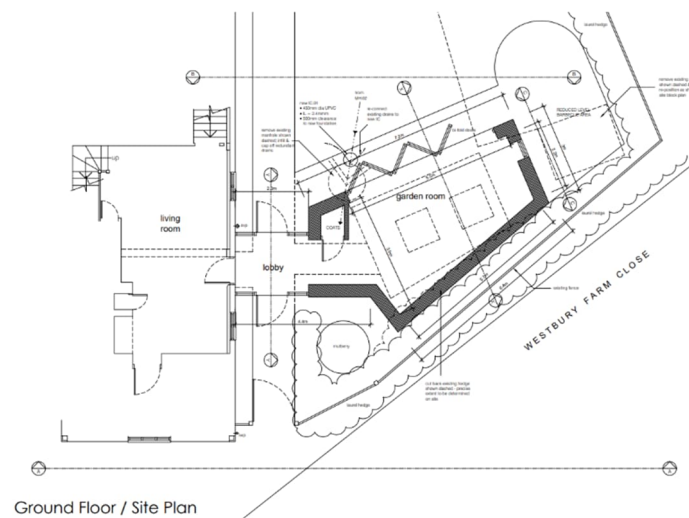
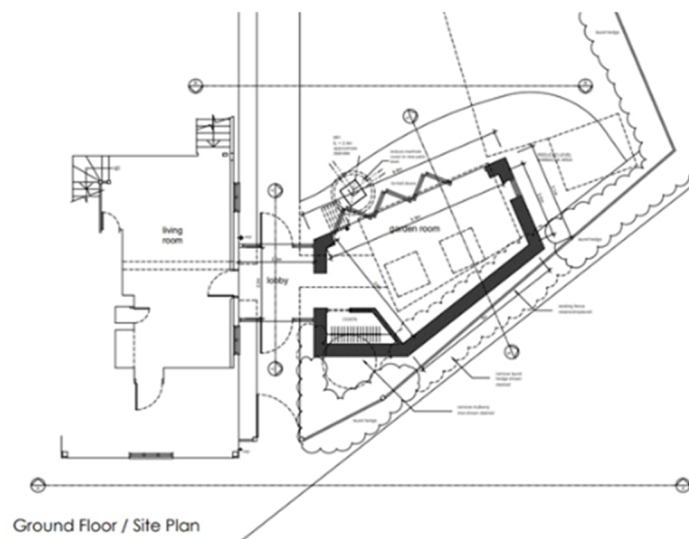
- i. The footprint of the extension has been slightly adapted and moved further west, thereby allowing the retention of the existing boundary hedge and screening the extension from Westbury Farm Close.*
- ii. The coat cupboard has been omitted from the south east corner of the extension, creating a clearly defined corner and longer external front wall.*
- iii. A smaller cupboard has been added to the west side of the extension, adjacent to the glazed link. Storage space (particularly full height storage) is underprovided in the existing house, and a new cupboard is therefore an important element of the design brief.*
- iv. The footprint of the extension has been extended slightly further north to compensate for the space lost due to the removal of the coat cupboard from the south east corner and reintroduction on the west elevation.*
- v. External materials have been amended to vertical boarding, reflecting the contemporary nature of the design. We would be willing to agree to a condition such that details of external materials are to be submitted for the Council's approval.*

The flat, sedum green roof ensures that the extension would be visually relatively unobtrusive but would, nonetheless be a flat roof addition that would set this apart from a significant number of slate, dual-pitch roofs in the vicinity. The way that Elevations A and B are drawn perhaps suggests a building that is longer than would be the case in reality.



At pre-app I acknowledged the cranked floor plan but expressed some reservations regarding the position of the cloakroom and the loss of the Mulberry Tree and part of the laurel hedge. I said that removing part of the hedge, thus, revealing more of the extension,

would have a mildly erosive impact upon the setting of Westbury Farmhouse and a case could be made that there would be less than substantial harm to the setting of heritage assets affecting their significance.



I note the architect's conclusions at 4.0 of the DHS particularly the design rationale put forward at 4.4 (see below):

The design is respectful of the listed farmhouse and historic setting, specifically:

i. The contemporary design forms a deliberate contrast to the farmhouse, so that the garden room is clearly seen as a modern addition.

ii. The external materials replicate those of the listed barns and other barn-like structures predominant throughout Westbury Farm Close. The use of black timber cladding continues the architectural hierarchy whereby the pink rendered farmhouse is marked as important in relation to the surrounding barns.

iii. The height of the roof is limited to match the height of the existing hedge. This maintains the same level of screening of the north/side elevation of the farmhouse as is currently provided by the hedge ie the view of the north/side elevation is unchanged from the current view.

iv. The glass link forms a visual break between the garden room and the farmhouse and maintains the oblique view of the north elevation of the farmhouse from the gate.

v. The glass link creates a 'light-touch' junction to the farmhouse, both in visual terms and in terms of the constructional interaction with the historic building fabric

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:

Sections 16(2) – LBC only, 66(1) – FPH only and 72(1) – LBC and FPH

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

Policy HE1

NPPF (December 2024):

The following paragraphs are relevant:

- **135 c)** (sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment),
- **207** (local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)
- **210** (desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),
- **212** (great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),
- **213** (clear and convincing justification), and
- **215** (harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).

CONCLUSION:

As amended since pre-app the scheme is considered better responding in terms of the cloakroom, link, vertical boarding, boundary treatment and Mulberry tree.

OFFICER: Mark Simmons

DATE: 14/10/2025