

Design, Heritage and Impact Statement

Erection of a Detached Garden Gazebo

4 Westbury Farm Close, Offley, Hertfordshire SG5 3FL

Applicant site	4 Westbury Farm Close, Offley, SG5 3FL
Proposal	Detached, lightweight steel-and-glass gazebo within the rear garden
Heritage asset	Westbury House Flats 1, 2, 3 and 4 - Grade II, NHLE 1175092
Supporting drawing	1052-PL02 Proposed Site Plan, scale 1:100



Illustrative image of the proposed contemporary gazebo form and materials.

1. Purpose and Scope

This statement accompanies the application for a detached gazebo within the rear garden of 4 Westbury Farm Close. It describes the proposal, identifies the significance of the nearby designated heritage asset and assesses the effect of the development on that significance, including its setting. The assessment has been reviewed against the submitted proposed site plan and the current national and local heritage policy framework.

2. Site and Heritage Context

2.1 Site arrangement

The application property forms part of the residential conversion of the historic Westbury House complex. The rear garden is enclosed and domestic in character, comprising lawn, planted borders, paving, a timber shed and established boundary treatment. The proposed gazebo occupies the north-western corner of the garden, adjacent to existing brick boundary walls and away from the principal listed building.

The proposed site plan shows the gazebo as a discrete rectangular structure placed against the outer garden boundaries. It is separated from No. 4 by the main lawn and shrub bed and is screened in part by the existing 1.9 metre brick wall, planting and the enclosed nature of the garden. No alteration to the listed building is proposed.

2.2 Designated heritage asset

Westbury House Flats 1, 2, 3 and 4 is included on the National Heritage List for England at Grade II (List Entry 1175092). The list description identifies a C15 or early C16 former open-hall house, later altered and converted to flats. Its special interest derives principally from the survival and legibility of the early timber-framed hall-house form, crosswings, later historic phases, steep old red-tile roofs, prominent chimney and surviving internal structure.

The listing also describes later C19 and C20 rear additions. The application garden is therefore understood as part of the evolved domestic setting of the listed building rather than an area containing identified historic fabric of equivalent significance.

2.3 Contribution of setting

The setting contributes to significance through the building's historic relationship with the former farmyard and associated buildings, the ability to appreciate its H-shaped form, roofscape and early fabric, and the generally low-density, landscaped character around it. The private rear garden of No. 4 makes a limited but positive contribution by maintaining domestic open space around the converted building. Its enclosed character, modern residential subdivision and existing garden structures reduce its sensitivity to a small, reversible garden addition.

3. Description of the Proposal

The proposal is for a freestanding gazebo with a lightweight contemporary frame and glazed or openable side panels. The structure is approximately 2.5 metres high. It is positioned beside the existing brick boundary wall, which is approximately 1.9 metres high, so that only about 0.6 metres of the upper structure would be visible above the wall from adjoining land at that boundary.

The gazebo would provide a sheltered outdoor seating space for the occupants. It would stand on the existing garden level with paving beneath. The works do not require excavation affecting the listed building, changes to historic ground levels, demolition, attachment to the listed structure or removal of identified historic fabric.

4. Site Plan Assessment



Figure 1: Proposed Site Plan 1052-PL02 at 1:100, showing the gazebo in the north-west corner of the garden.

The plan supports the following conclusions:

- The gazebo is located at the furthest practical part of the private garden from the principal mass of Westbury House.
- Its footprint is contained within the established domestic curtilage and does not interrupt the principal relationship between the listed building and the former farmyard.
- The structure is read against existing boundary walls and garden enclosure rather than as an isolated building in open land.
- The central lawn and planted areas remain substantially open, preserving the sense of garden space around No. 4.
- Existing planting and boundary treatments provide immediate visual containment and soften views of the new structure.

5. Planning and Heritage Policy

5.1 Statutory duty and national policy

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special regard to be paid to the desirability of preserving a listed building, its setting and features of special architectural or historic interest. The National Planning Policy Framework requires great weight to be given to the

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conservation of designated heritage assets and requires any harm to significance, including harm arising from development within the setting, to be clearly and convincingly justified.

5.2 Local policy

The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted in November 2022. Policies SP13 and HE1 seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment and require development affecting designated heritage assets to preserve or enhance their significance, including the contribution made by setting. The proposal has therefore been assessed not simply as a domestic outbuilding, but by reference to its siting, scale, form, materials, visibility and reversibility.

5.3 Planning status

Because the property lies within the curtilage of a listed building, the usual householder permitted development allowance for outbuildings should not be relied upon. The proposal is appropriately presented for express planning consideration. This statement addresses the heritage effects of the new freestanding structure; any requirement for listed building consent should be confirmed by the local planning authority by reference to the precise works and the extent of curtilage protection.

6. Assessment of Heritage Impact

6.1 Siting and spatial character

The gazebo is subordinate to the listed building in both scale and function. Its corner position avoids the more sensitive areas immediately adjoining the principal elevations and preserves the main open lawn. The plan demonstrates that it would not compete with the listed building, block an important view of it or erode an identified historic approach or farmyard space.

6.2 Scale, height and visibility

At approximately 2.5 metres high, the gazebo is a low, single-storey garden structure. The adjoining 1.9 metre wall conceals most of its height in views from beyond the boundary. Within the garden it would remain clearly secondary to the two-storey and attic scale, steep roofscape and substantial built form of Westbury House.

6.3 Design and materials

A restrained contemporary design is preferable to a pastiche historic structure. The slim frame, extensive glazing and limited visual mass allow the gazebo to be read as a modern and reversible garden element. Dark, non-reflective framing would recede against the wall, hedge and planting. Glazing should be kept clear and visually lightweight, with external lighting limited and warm in colour temperature to avoid visual prominence after dark.

6.4 Physical effect and reversibility

The proposal is detached and does not rely on the listed building or historic wall for structural support. There is no direct intervention in listed fabric. Subject to shallow and carefully located foundations, the work is readily reversible and would not prevent future understanding or maintenance of the heritage asset.

6.5 Cumulative and neighbouring effects

The garden already contains paving, planting and a small timber shed. The gazebo would not result in excessive site coverage or urbanisation of the garden, provided the existing lawn and planting shown on the plan are retained. Its enclosed corner position limits intervisibility with neighbouring properties and the wider Westbury House group.

7. Recommended Heritage Safeguards

- Use a dark charcoal or similarly recessive powder-coated frame with a matt finish.
- Avoid fixing the gazebo to the historic brick boundary wall or to any listed fabric.
- Retain the existing wall, hedge, shrub beds and principal lawn shown on the site plan.
- Keep external lighting minimal, low-level and warm-white, with no upward illumination.

8. Conclusion

The proposed gazebo is a modest, ancillary and reversible garden structure. The submitted site plan confirms that it is located in the enclosed north-west corner of the garden, separated from the principal listed building and read against existing boundary walls and planting. Its low height, lightweight contemporary construction and limited visibility ensure that it remains subordinate to Westbury House.

The development would not alter historic fabric, interrupt an important view, compromise the legibility of the listed building or materially diminish the contribution made by its setting. With the safeguards identified above, the proposal would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building and its setting. No heritage harm is identified, and the proposal is therefore consistent with the statutory duty, the National Planning Policy Framework and Policies SP13 and HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

Sources

- Historic England, National Heritage List for England: Westbury House Flats 1, 2, 3, 4, List Entry 1175092.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework, Chapter 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.
- North Hertfordshire District Council, North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031, adopted 8 November 2022.
- M Scott Architectural Design Ltd, Drawing 1052-PL02 Proposed Site Plan, scale 1:100.