

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Replacement of two sets of external French doors

The Old Vicarage, Willian Road, Willian, Letchworth, Hertfordshire SG6 2AE

Application for	Listed building consent
Listed building	The Old Vicarage, Willian Road — Grade II*, NHLE list entry 1295503
Local planning authority	North Herts Council
Applicant	Mr A. Clarson, The Old Vicarage, Willian, Letchworth SG6 2AE
Date	July 2026

1. Introduction

We are the owners of The Old Vicarage and we are applying for listed building consent to replace two sets of external French doors. This statement explains what we want to do and why, and how we have thought about the effect on our house.

We are not heritage professionals, but we do take the responsibility of owning a Grade II* building seriously. The Old Vicarage is a house of about the early sixteenth century, timber-framed and thatched, and we are conscious that we look after it for the people who come after us as much as for ourselves. We have therefore read the official list description carefully, looked at Historic England's published guidance on windows and on energy efficiency in older buildings, and taken advice from a specialist joinery manufacturer, before deciding what to propose. We have also deliberately kept the scope of this application as narrow as we can.

We would be very glad to discuss any of this with the conservation officer, and we are happy to adjust the details if that would produce a better result for the building.

2. Our house, and what matters about it

The list description records a house probably of the earlier sixteenth century, originally a three-bay lobby-entrance house, later altered. What gives it its Grade II* status is the surviving early fabric: the timber frame with panel infill, the retained first-floor jetty to the side and rear of the former sixteenth-century entrance bay, the internal remains of the earlier mullioned gable windows with their ovolo mouldings and stay bars, the brick fireplaces, the eighteenth-century architraved doorway with its panelled door, and the thatched roof. None of that is touched by this application.

Two points from the list description are directly relevant to what we propose. First, it records that the western bay was rebuilt in about 1925 and that the house was refenestrated at the same time, and it describes the windows as two-, three- and four-light casements of about 1925 with leaded lights. Those c.1925 casements are the established window pattern of the house. Second, the description makes no mention of French doors anywhere.

The two door sets in this application are not early fabric and are not part of the 1925 work either. On the evidence of their construction, materials and detailing they are late twentieth-century softwood joinery. The doors face into our private garden and, so far as we can tell, are not visible from Willian Road or any other public place.

3. Why the doors need replacing

Despite maintenance and repair, the doors have reached the end of their life. The photographs at the end of this statement show the condition. The bottom rails and the feet of the frame jambs are decayed where the paint film has broken down; the glazing putty has cracked and shrunk at a number of panes, letting water into the rebates; and the original cill has been repaired numerous times, it is of a design which sheds water badly and is itself now deteriorating. There are no weatherseals, the glazing is single, and both sets are noticeably draughty.

The glazing bars are part of the problem: each bar joint and putty line is another place for water to get in, so the pattern itself has shortened the life of the doors. Patching them again would buy us a few years at best, and would leave us doing the same work over again before long — which, on a listed building, means repeatedly disturbing the fabric around the openings.

4. Replacement Specification

We propose to replace both sets with purpose-made door sets, made to the exact size of the existing openings so that nothing has to be cut or altered to receive them.

	Door set D1	Door set D2
Size	1,150 × 2,050 mm	1,120 × 2,200 mm
Frame	Sapele hardwood	Sapele hardwood
Door leaves	Accoya Grade 1	Accoya Grade 1
Glazing	14 mm toughened slimline double-glazed units, krypton filled	14 mm toughened slimline double-glazed units, krypton filled
Thermal performance	U-value 1.4 W/m ² K	U-value 1.4 W/m ² K
Finish	Factory-applied three-coat Teknos spray system	Factory-applied three-coat Teknos spray system
Hinges and locks	100 mm ball-bearing butt hinges; nightlatch and deadlock with internal thumbturn, keyed alike	100 mm ball-bearing butt hinges; nightlatch and deadlock with internal thumbturn, keyed alike
Ironmongery finish	Antique matt black	Antique matt black

Both doors are on the rear elevation and both are in the rendered sections of the building

5. Our proposed design

a) Use of slimline double glazing, to reduce heat loss and energy use

The two door sets together make up about 4.8 square metres of single glazing with no seals. Painted timber single glazing of this kind loses heat at roughly 4.8 W/m²K; the new door sets are specified at 1.4 W/m²K, which is about a seventy per cent improvement. On a simple calculation that is in the order of 800 kWh of heat a year, or roughly 175 kg of carbon dioxide, before counting the draughts — which in a house like ours are probably the bigger loss of the two. These are our own rough figures rather than a modelled assessment.

What matters to us is that this is one of very few sensible opportunities we have. A thatched, timber-framed house does not lend itself to insulating walls or roof slopes, and we would not want to interfere with the fabric or the way the building handles moisture to do so. Replacing two failing modern doors, on the other hand, gives us a real improvement and touches nothing of any historic value. We understand from Historic England's advice note on adapting historic buildings for energy and carbon efficiency (2024) that double glazing of an appropriate material and pattern, used to replace units that do not contribute to a building's interest, will generally be acceptable.

We have specified the thinnest unit we could find that still performs — a 14 mm krypton-filled slimline unit — rather than an ordinary sealed unit of 24 mm or more, because that keeps the door sections slender and the rebates shallow in line with the historic windows. A standard unit would have looked unmistakably modern. We should add that, as we understand it, we are not obliged to do any of this: listed buildings are relaxed from the usual Building Regulations energy requirements where compliance would harm their character. We are doing it because we would like the house to be warmer and cheaper to run without harming it.

b) Better materials, so the work lasts

The doors we are removing are in situ-painted softwood, and they have lasted perhaps twenty years. What we are proposing is a considerable step up:

- **Sapele hardwood frames and cills** — a stable, naturally durable hardwood at the most exposed part of the door set, where rain runs down and splashes back.
- **Accoya Grade 1 leaves** — an acetylated timber of Class 1 durability which barely moves with changes in moisture. That matters on a glazed door, because movement is what cracks paint and fails putty lines in the first place. It carries a fifty-year durability warranty above ground.
- **Three-coat Teknos finish** — sprayed in the factory onto every face, including the edges and rebates that a brush can never properly reach and which are always the first to fail.
- **Security and safety** — toughened glass and a proper nightlatch and deadlock, keyed alike across both sets, on garden doors that at present have nothing. The internal thumbturn means we can get out without a key, which matters a great deal in a thatched house. We have enquired about multi-point locking systems to meet a higher security standard, however it is not possible whilst maintaining the historic character and shallow depth of frame

- **Ironmongery** - specified in antique matt black rather than a bright modern finish, to match with the wrought ironwork character of the house.

We think there is a conservation argument here as well as a practical one. Every time a door is replaced, fixings come out of old masonry and framing, mortar and render get made good, and paint is stripped and rebuilt. Doors that should last fifty years rather than twenty mean far fewer of those disturbances to the fabric over the life of the building. Improving the specification of the joinery now is, we hope, the better outcome for the house.

c) Removing the glazing bars, to match the other windows

Each existing leaf is divided into 4 lights by glazing bars which each in turn have a 2 x 3 grid of leaded glazing. That pattern belongs to neither phase of the house and matches no other windows or historical detail. The windows of The Old Vicarage, as the list description sets out, are two-, three- and four-light casements of about 1925 with leaded lights, and the surviving casements follow that pattern. The doors match nothing; they simply look like the late twentieth-century joinery they are, and they sit awkwardly on the elevation as a result.

What we would like to do is take that unrelated grid away and let the new doors follow the light-and-pane proportions of the surrounding casements on elevation. Historic England's guidance on modifying historic windows makes the point that where windows have been replaced with ones whose design does not follow historic patterns they are unlikely to contribute to a listed building's significance, and that replacing them with new work of a sympathetic pattern may cause no additional harm and can be a chance to improve the building. That is what we are trying to do here.

We want to be straightforward about this one, because we can see it is the part of our application most open to question. Taking subdivision out of glazing is not usually something to be encouraged on an old house, and we would not want large blank sheets of glass any more than the conservation officer would. Our case is simply that the bars we are removing are not historic and do not match anything else on the building. The intention is to have leaded glazing divided in the same way as the casements next to it, not undivided glass. The proposed pattern is to match the two light casements directly above both doors, with a 3 x 8 pane leaded grid to match the 3 x 4 pane leaded grids on the casements immediately above.

We would be content for the glazing pattern to be dealt with by condition, or to submit amended drawings, if the officer would prefer.

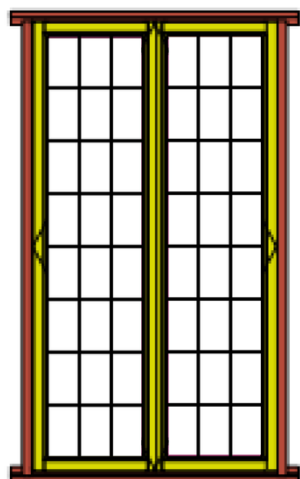


Figure A – Proposed leaded light Pattern

6. Other options we looked at

- **Repairing them** — This has been done in the past, and both the frames and doors have replacement sections, they have now advanced to beyond repair. The decay is in the bottom rails and the feet of the frames, which are the parts that hold a glazed door together, and the putty has failed generally rather than in one or two places. We would end up remaking most of each door for close to the price of a new one, with no improvement in warmth, security or appearance — and there is no old fabric here worth saving for its own sake.
- **Like-for-like in single glazing** — would give us durable doors but no improvement in warmth at all, and would reproduce a glazing pattern with no basis in the history of the house.
- **uPVC or aluminium** — never considered. Wholly wrong for this building.

7. Effect on the listed building

Our conclusion is that the effect on the special interest of The Old Vicarage is neutral at worst, and on balance positive. Nothing of significance is lost: the doors being removed are late twentieth-century joinery that the listing description does not mention and that corresponds to no phase of the building's history. The openings are unaltered, so the historic structure around them is undisturbed. Nothing identified in the list description as part of the special interest is affected. Set against that, an incongruous glazing pattern goes, active decay and a badly detailed threshold are dealt with, the security of the house is improved, and the new work should last two to three times as long as what it replaces.

We understand that the council must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building and its features of special interest under section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and that great weight is given to conservation under the National Planning Policy Framework and to Policies SP13, HE1 and D1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031. We believe the proposal is consistent with all of them, and that it preserves and in one respect improves the building. If the council does take the view that some small degree of harm arises we would ask that it be weighed against the benefits set out above, and that a condition be considered in preference to refusing the application.

8. Access

The house is our private home and nothing about its use changes. Neither opening moves or changes size, so the way we get in and out is unchanged and no alternative access needed to be considered.

There are two small improvements. The rough raised board currently laid over the threshold is an uneven trip hazard, and the new door sets give us the chance to form a properly weathered threshold at the lowest level that will still keep the water out — we have not pursued a fully level threshold precisely because that would mean interfering with the historic fabric. The nightlatch, deadlock and internal thumbturn are keyed alike across both sets, which means that we can open the doors from inside in an emergency.

9. Conclusion

This is a small piece of work: two sets of failing modern softwood doors, replaced with well-made hardwood and Accoya door sets with heritage slimline glazing, following the window pattern of the rest of the house. Nothing old is lost, no opening is altered, and the house will be warmer, more secure, better detailed and better looking for it — and will need less intervention over the coming decades than it would if we simply patched what is there.

We hope the council will agree that the proposal preserves the special interest of The Old Vicarage, and we would be grateful for consent. We are very happy to talk through any of the details.

Photographs



Photo 1: One of the two existing French door sets. The glazing bars match nothing else on the house; the glazing is single; the putty has failed; the paint and timber have broken down at the foot of the frame; and a rough, replacement cill has been installed at an unknown point in the past



Photo 2: Close up of decaying frame and door, showing a state that is beyond repair



Photo 3: The Old Vicarage from the garden. What matters about the house — the C16 timber frame with panel infill, the jetty and the thatched roof — is untouched by this application. The c.1925 leaded casements visible here are the window pattern the new doors will follow.

Sources we consulted

- Historic England, National Heritage List for England, list entry 1295503, The Old Vicarage, Willian Road (Grade II*).
- Historic England Advice Note 18, Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency (2024).
- Historic England, Traditional Windows: Their Care, Repair and Upgrading, and the guidance on modifying historic windows as part of retrofitting energy saving measures.
- National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024, as amended), Chapters 14 and 16.
- North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031, Policies SP13, HE1 and D1.