



Historic England

Mr Robert Lennis
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Direct Dial: 0117 975 0685

Our ref: P01568379

22 November 2023

Dear Mr Lennis

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**LAND WEST OF CHURCH HILL, AND LAND OFF BUTTS CLOSE AND
SCHOOLHOUSE LANE, MARNHULL
Application No. P/OUT/2023/02644**

Thank you for your letter of 6 November 2023 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Historic England Advice

Significance of the heritage asset

Marnhull is a village of an unusual character and form, its Conservation Area (designated 1971) split into two distinct areas. Historically, the settlement was formed of small clusters of housing at the corners of a square of roads. The village developed separately along New Street and Burton Street, and as historic map regression indicates, the two parts of the village remained unconnected until the 20th century. The southern portion of the village contains the grade I listed church of St Gregory and Seniors Farmhouse and barn, a grade II* listed medieval house of striking proportions.

Whilst no Conservation Area Appraisal for the village has been produced to date, we consider the unusual and dispersed layout of the settlement to be a key aspect of its special character. Whilst the two distinct northern and southern areas of development are now linked by modern housing along the eastern side of Church Hill, the central open area remains largely open and undeveloped. Moving along Church Hill from north to south, the open agricultural land to the west provides expansive views, and the dispersed nature of the historic settlement is clearly legible: the experience is of moving from one settlement to another.

From Burton Street and Sackmore Lane, the prominent tower of the grade I listed church of St Gregory is viewed across this central open land, providing attractive and key views of this landmark building. The church is placed on slightly higher ground so



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as to be highly visible from North and South. There are clear views of the tower from parts of Burton Street, Church Hill and Sackmore Lane and from the south from Schoolhouse Lane and Chippel Lane.

Seniors Farm may have been built as a Grange to Glastonbury Abbey, and as such is a building of particular historic interest. Its imposing scale and form ensure that it vies with the church for prominence in the streetscape and it maintains a commanding presence across its rural hinterland to the north.

Impact of the proposals

This application is of two halves - an outline application for the development of up to 120 houses in land off Butts Close, south of New Street, and a full application for the creation of a mixed-use development in land to the west of Church Hill, including a food store and other businesses as well as carparking and residential accommodation.

Historic England's focus here must necessarily be on the impact of the development on the setting of the grade I listed church and neighbouring II* Seniors Farm. Whilst we have also considered the impact of the proposals on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and its setting, it is for your Authority's specialist conservation advisers to fully assess this.

Land west of Church Hill

With the exception of the modern health centre building and one further house, the land to the west of Church Hill is open farmland. Historic map regression clarifies that this land has been in agricultural use since at least 1887 and that the paths which currently traverse it are also historic routes.

This open space which separates the two halves of the village is a key aspect of the setting of the Conservation Area. Whilst modern, post-war development to the east of Church Hill has created a connection between them, the sense of separation and dispersed nature of the settlement is sustained by the presence of this open land. This development would be a substantial intervention into this green and open area. The large food store building, business units and associated carparking would sit to the west and south of the health centre, infilling the currently open land to the west of Church Hill and thereby undermining the clear separation between the two discrete parts of the Conservation Area.

As was noted above, the grade I listed church lies on higher land and therefore its 15th century tower is widely visible across the countryside surrounding the village. In views from the northern portion of the Conservation Area and the wider landscape, the church is viewed across the open, undeveloped farmland which sits at the core of the village. The proposed development will therefore fundamentally alter the character of this setting, inserting large built form,





carparking and infrastructure into this currently open, agricultural land. The scale and massing of the proposed buildings will only exacerbate this impact.

Immediately adjacent to the church is Grade II* listed Seniors Farmhouse and attached barn. Perhaps built as a Grange to Glastonbury Abbey, the farmhouse is of more than special historic and architectural interest and of an imposing scale and form. We accept that the removal of the large asbestos chicken sheds to the north west could be argued to be an enhancement to the setting of the farmhouse. However, we consider that the proposed development will erode the farmhouse's historic relationship with its immediate agricultural setting, inserting new structures of a competing scale into its rural hinterland.

Land off Butts Close

This application follows the granting of an outline scheme for the development of up to 39 dwellings on land east of Butts Close. Historic England was not consulted on this application. An earlier larger proposal (initially for 74 houses, then reduced to 58) on this land was withdrawn and was not supported by your Authority's conservation specialists. Historic England had responded to this application highlighting that the impact of the development on the special character and grain of the Conservation Area should be key in your Authority's deliberations.

This new application has expanded the development to 120 houses, and now proposes to entirely fill the field which is bounded by Chippel Lane and Schoolhouse Lane. At present, the grade I listed church is viewed from the south across open agricultural land. This development will therefore fundamentally change this relationship between church and landscape, creating a densely developed foreground in views towards the Conservation Area and church. We accept that a gap through the development has been left in order that views from the junction between Chippel Lane and Schoolhouse Lane towards the church are not blocked. However, it remains the case that the visual prominence of the tower and the historically open, rural setting of the church would be eroded by development in this location.

Policy considerations

When considering the current proposals, in line with Para 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2023), the significance of asset's setting requires consideration. Para 199 states that in considering the impact of proposed development on significance, great weight should be given to asset's conservation and that the more important the asset the greater the weight should be. Para 200 goes on to say that clear and convincing justification is needed if there is harm as a result of development within its setting. Whilst some are given equal importance, no other planning concern is given a greater sense of importance in the NPPF. When considering development that has the potential to affect setting Historic England's



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Advice Note 3, the Setting of Heritage Assets should be referred to.

Historic England's position

The proposed development would result in harm to the significance which the Grade I listed church of St Gregory, the grade II* listed Seniors Farmhouse and the Marnhull Conservation Area derive from their setting. The rural character of the landscape which surrounds and immediately abuts the historic core of the village and which provides these heritage assets with their open, agrarian setting would be considerably eroded. As outlined above, we consider that both aspects of this development proposal would result in the encroachment of built form into land which has historically provided the church with its open, rural setting and which underpins its prominent and eye-catching presence within the village and from the wider landscape.

In all cases where development will lead to harm to designated heritage assets, the NPPF places the onus on the determining body to rigorously test the public benefits against the level of harm caused (NPPF 201). The NPPF makes it clear that harm which is less than substantial is not considered to be automatically acceptable. Your authority will therefore need to rigorously test the public benefits against the level of harm caused in making your determination.

Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that you should pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 confirms that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Eve Van der Steen

Assistant Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas



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