

MEMO

**North
Lincolnshire
Council**

TO: JENNIFER ASHWORTH, DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT
FROM: ALISON WILLIAMS, HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD
REF: PA/2022/2226
DATE: 18/01/2023

SUBJECT: Planning application to vary condition 2 of PA/2021/1644 namely to change layout, Saxon Close Farm, Saxon Lane, Westgate, Belton

PARISH: BELTON

SUMMARY OF ADVICE

- Saxon Close Farm is within the Area of Special Historic Landscape Interest of the Isle of Axholme (Local Plan Policy LC14); the agricultural buildings are located within the Early Enclosed Land character area and the setting of the Ancient Open Strip Fields
- Policy LC14 requires

A high standard of design and siting in new development will be required reflecting the traditional character of buildings in the area and the character of the historic landscape, and using materials sympathetic to the locality.

- The proposed amendment to the windows in the southern elevation and increase in the extent of modern glazing that would be visible from the historic landscape to the rear of the site do not reflect the traditional character of agricultural buildings and are therefore not in keeping with the requirements of the policy
- The application to vary condition 2 should be refused as the design would adversely affect the character, appearance and setting of the historic landscape contrary to the NPPF, Core Strategy Policies CS5 and CS6 and Local Plan policies LC14 and DS1.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD (HER) FUNCTION: To hold, maintain, interpret and manage heritage information, enhancing the understanding of the area's historical development as a distinctive and attractive place. HER information provides source material for interpretation by heritage professionals and for use by community groups and individuals. The HER database is updated as new information about the historic environment is discovered.

The HER also provides advice on development proposals that affect, or may affect, the sites and settings of all heritage assets i.e. designated and non-designated historic buildings, archaeological sites and monuments, and historic places, areas and landscapes. This advice is provided against saved

local plan policies and national historic environment policies. See <https://www.northlincs.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/historic-environment-and-conservation/>

DETAILED ADVICE: Thank you for consulting the HER on this application affecting the Area of Special Historic Landscape Interest of the Isle of Axholme (ASHLI) afforded protection under saved Local Plan Policy LC14.

HERITAGE POLICY

The application site lies within the Area of Special Historic Landscape Interest of the Isle of Axholme (ASHLI). This area is locally designated for its unique historic landscape retaining the pattern of ancient open strip fields and enclosed fields surrounding the villages on the Isle, and the Turbaries (areas of historic peat cutting). This historic landscape is considered to be of national importance and Local Plan Policy LC14 applies which states:

‘The Isle of Axholme is designated as an area of Special Historic Landscape Interest.

Within this area, development will not be permitted which would destroy, damage or adversely affect the character, appearance or setting of the historic landscape, or any of its features.

Development required to meet the social and economic needs of rural communities and small scale tourist and outdoor sport and recreational development will be permitted provided such development is related to the historic landscape and its features.

A high standard of design and siting in new development will be required reflecting the traditional character of buildings in the area and the character of the historic landscape, and using materials sympathetic to the locality.

Schemes to improve, restore or manage the historic landscape will be sought in connection with, and commensurate with the scale of, any new development affecting the area of Special Historic Landscape Interest.’

Policy LC14 is supported by the evidence of a detailed survey of the historic landscape character of the Isle of Axholme (Miller, K. 1997 *The Isle of Axholme, Historic Landscape Characterisation Project* Countryside Commission, Leeds; see <http://www.northlincs.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/historic-environment-and-conservation/historic-environment-record/historic-landscape-character/>).

This detailed study identified significant areas of medieval open strip fields and turbaries, both of which are of considerable national importance. These attributes together with the enclosed land and the overall settlement pattern of the area make it unique in the country. The Lincolnshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project, 2011, also recognised this landscape as nationally important.

Core Strategy CS6 specifically refers to the importance of the Isle’s historic landscape and that the council will conserve its significance through **‘Safeguarding the nationally significant medieval landscapes of the Isle of Axholme (notably the open strip fields and turbaries)...’**

Local plan policies LC7 and RD2 will also apply as the development is within the open countryside; policy LC7 Landscape Protection states **‘Development which does not respect the character of the local landscape will not be permitted’**. Policy RD2 Development in the Open Countryside requires that such development is strictly controlled stating that only certain essential development that meets very specific criteria will be permitted.

The design objectives of Core Strategy CS5 and Local Plan policy DS1 are also relevant. Core Strategy CS5 Delivering Quality Design requires new development in North Lincolnshire to **‘Ensure it takes account of the existing built heritage from the earliest stages in the design process, in particular terms of scale, density, layout and access.’** With regard to design, local plan policy DS1 General Requirements, Quality of Design criteria sets out that **‘The design and external appearance of the proposal should reflect or enhance the character, appearance and setting of the immediate area’**.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) provides guidance to local authorities for conserving heritage assets and their settings, which includes historic areas and landscapes (Annex 2: Glossary; Heritage asset). Paragraph 8 refers to the role of the planning system to contribute to achieving sustainable development under three overarching objectives; the environmental objective encompasses protecting and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 184 describes heritage assets as **‘an irreplaceable resource’** to be **‘conserved in a manner appropriate to their**

significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations’.

Paragraphs 194 and 195 require an applicant and local planning authorities to identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset). This assessment should be taken into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, and used to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal (paragraphs 199-203).

The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness should be taken into account by local planning authorities when determining planning applications (NPPF, 197). Local planning authorities should also look for opportunities for new development within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance (NPPF, 206).

A heritage asset is defined in the NPPF (Annex 2, Glossary) as **‘A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).**

Significance (for heritage policy) as: **‘The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting...’.**

The definition of the setting of a heritage asset as **‘The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. 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.’**

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE SIGNIFICANCE

The historic landscape of the Isle is a heritage asset of historic interest as defined in the NPPF, and is clearly identified as such in the Local Plan (Landscape and Conservation section), as well as on the relevant area inset and proposals maps (Local Plan, 2003).

The ASHLI and LC14 policy area incorporates various historic landscape character types that were researched, described and mapped in the 1997 Countryside Commission report into the historic landscape of the Isle of Axholme. This detailed survey forms the evidence base of the LC14 policy in the 2003 Local Plan. The historic landscape character type areas established by Miller (fig 5, 1997) are mapped on the North Lincolnshire HER GIS maps and this data is made available to applicants on request.

Within the LC14 policy area the Ancient Open Strip Fields (Miller, AOSF) form the historic character core of the Isle of Axholme historic landscape persisting since medieval times. The Early Enclosed Land (Miller, EEL), created by piece-meal enclosure of blocks of former strips into small irregular fields, buffers the AOSF together with the surrounding Recent Enclosed Land (Miller, REL) on the low-lying former wetlands. These three historic landscape character zones encompass the majority of the LC14 policy area, together with other discrete character areas, such as the important Turbaries and Moorland Allotments (Miller, RM&T), Designed Landscape (Parkland), and the Settlement and Building Types.

The historic landscape character of the Isle of Axholme is the sum of these historic landscape character types. The LC14 policy area includes all the character types within the designated area and seeks to protect the character, appearance and setting of the historic landscape **as a whole**.

The essential character and appearance of the AOSF historic landscape type is of open unenclosed agricultural land lacking physical boundary features such as hedgerows and fences. Other key defining characteristics of this landscape include the roads, common ways and access tracks known locally as meres; a general absence of farms in the open fields, these being located in the built up settlement areas; and the presence of visual reference points and landmarks such as church, mill and water towers that afford legibility to the core historic landscape and form part of its setting.

Also characteristic of the ancient open field landscape are areas of piece-meal enclosure, frequently found around the fringes of the open strip fields and the settlements where they form the immediate setting of the AOSF. This ‘Early Enclosed Land’ (EEL) comprising amalgamated blocks of strips within the former open fields served as ‘home closes’ for stock-keeping and mixed farming, and date from the late-medieval period onwards. Early, in this context, does not necessarily refer to the period at which

the enclosure happened, but to the character of an individual strip, or group of strips, enclosed directly from the open field. These early enclosed fields are typified by their narrow long or irregular shape, with sinuous boundaries that retain the reverse S-shaped ploughing curve of the former cultivated strips. Frequently bounded with hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small copses in field corners, the character of the EEL is in marked contrast to the unenclosed AOSF that they frequently buffer.

Elsewhere enclosures with regular straight boundaries, commonly formed by ditches, were laid out when the marshlands surrounding the Isle were drained to create farmland from the 17th century onwards and at Parliamentary Enclosure of these areas in the early 19th century. The enclosures of this 'Recent Enclosed Land' (REL) are largely devoid of upstanding boundary features, and maintain the characteristic open aspect of this historic landscape, even where such enclosures are combined into blocks of large modern fields.

The enclosed landscape character types are important in their own right and in terms of their spatial associations with each other, and with the remaining areas of the open strip fields at the core of the historic landscape surrounding the villages of the Isle, as well as with the Turbaries. The individual historic landscape character areas share their settings with the other character type areas, and together they form the overall setting of the historic landscape character. The evolution over time of these distinctive historic character types with their differing and contrasting physical features and appearance that add to their legibility are what make the Isle of Axholme a 'Special Landscape'.

Historically, the enclosure of the open strip fields, whether by individuals or parliamentary act, was strongly resisted in the Isle and the communal arrangements for farming the strips continued through to modern times. The persistence of the elements of the former landscape and the resultant openness of the core area remains the dominant characteristic of the contemporary landscape of historical importance. This remnant landscape is acknowledged as the best example of very few surviving landscapes of this type in the country, with the Isle of Axholme being by far the largest of the three best-known survivors.

For these reasons the Isle of Axholme historic landscape is of national importance, however is not capable of formal designation as a heritage asset under current legislation which relates specifically to Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Scheduled Monuments.

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

The agricultural buildings at Saxon Close Farm are located in the open countryside outside the current Development Boundary for Belton (inset 08, HELA DPD, 2016). They are located within the ASHLI as defined by the LC14 policy area (Inset 08, Local Plan, 2003) and stand within the Early Enclosed Land (EEL) that here buffers the Ancient Open Strip Fields (AOSF) on Belton Fields, one of the best preserved areas of the core historic landscape in the Isle.

The EEL fields are well-preserved in this area and have been in agricultural use for centuries, enclosed from within the open strip fields. The agricultural buildings date from the latter half of the 20th century.

The effect of converting the agricultural buildings to residential use in this location would be to extend the domestic built environment further into the surviving area of the historic landscape. A residential use of the buildings is not related to the traditional use of the land for agricultural purpose. The change of use would introduce other domestic features such as boundary fences, garden structures, lighting and other permitted development.

The residential nature of the converted buildings would be clearly visible and intrusive in the historic agricultural landscape. This would be an unacceptable visual intrusion that alters the appearance of and damages the legibility of the historic landscape. The agricultural context of the remaining farm buildings that maintains the historic character of the landscape would be inevitably be diluted and overwritten.

The form, design and modern appearance of the converted building may not comply with the LC14 policy requirements regarding design and building materials; the Planning Statement suggests that the application is accompanied by design plans showing sympathetic introduction of doors and windows to facilitate the conversion of both barns but any such plans were not apparent with the application.

The proposed change of use alters the character, appearance and setting of the historic landscape, and damages the legibility of the character zones. As such it would be an unacceptable encroachment into the Area of Special Historic Landscape.

Any residential incursion into the LC14 zone in this location could make similar applications more difficult to resist and result in further degradation of this nationally significant historic landscape character type.

The proposed amendments to the window openings on the southern elevation and the extensive use of modern glazing is not in keeping with the traditional appearance of an agricultural barn in this locality. The amendments exacerbate the impacts on the historic landscape and conflict with the requirement of policy LC14 that new development should reflect the traditional character of buildings in the area and the character of the historic landscape, using appropriate building materials.

RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Environment Record recommends this application is **REFUSED**. This is because it would adversely affect the historic landscape of the Isle of Axholme, a heritage asset of national significance. The proposed amendments to the design of the converted barn would adversely affect the character, appearance and setting of the historic landscape of the Isle of Axholme and dilute the traditional vernacular.

This is contrary to local plan policies LC14 and DS1 and Core Strategy policies CS5 and CS6. The proposal would not be in accord with paragraphs 197 or 206 of the National Planning Policy Framework as the proposed development would not make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, and would detract from the significance of the historic landscape at this location. The application fails the key objective of the NPPF to conserve the historic environment for this and future generations.

Should the planning authority be minded for any reason to give consent to the current proposals contrary to this advice, it is requested that Condition 3 on the permission for PA/2021/1644 is attached to any new permission that may be issued.

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