

Houghton Regis Heritage Society

Submission on planning application No CB/24/03182/LB to demolish Vane Cottage a Grade II listed building.

In England a listed building can be demolished only in exceptional circumstances and after all other options have been considered. The following factors are taken into account when deciding whether to grant consent for demolition:

1. Importance of the building – how important the building is to the area’s history and culture. Information from the public consultation as to whether the local community supports the demolition.
2. Condition of the building - whether the building is structurally sound or poses a risk to public safety. If the building has suffered severe and irreparable structural damage, and restoration or repair is deemed unfeasible, the local planning authority may consider granting consent for demolition.
3. In certain cases, economic factors may be taken into account. If you can show that the cost of restoring or maintaining the building far exceeds the economic benefits it would bring, the local planning authority may assess the economic viability as a factor in granting consent.
4. Alternatives – whether there are other uses for the building or if it can be restored.

Houghton Regis Heritage Society’s **Strongly** objects to the proposed demolition of Vane Cottage on the following grounds:

Importance of the building

Vane Cottage is a Grade II listed 17th century building (albeit modified over time), which lies within the Houghton Regis Conservation Area. The cottage is shown on the Duke of Bedford’s 1762 Survey map and so has been part of the history and heritage of the town for a long time..

It is listed in the Houghton Regis Neighbourhood Plan (March 2024) on Page 83 Annex 1. The relevant policy relating to the Conservation Area is on Page 84 namely: To preserve and enhance Houghton Regis’s Green, Conservation Area and heritage assets (whether listed or not).

The Houghton Regis Town Council recognises the historic, cultural and heritage value of Vane Cottage.

Vane Cottage is situated on the main access road – Park Road North – from Luton and is therefore in a prominent position as people enter the Town. To lose the building will be a great loss to the heritage and history of the town for residents and visitors.

The cottage is part of the cultural heritage of the area. The community see it as a property that reminds them of times past and how the town looked in earlier centuries. It has important educational value to students and future generations.

A survey of the residents of Houghton Regis carried out by the Houghton Regis Heritage Society showed that 174 respondents supported the campaign to object to the demolition of Vane Cottage.

At the end of this submission is a list of comments from the responders and clearly shows the strength of feeling about preserving Vane Cottage and the deleterious affect demolition would have on the culture and heritage of the town, which has suffered greatly from the loss of heritage buildings in the past.

Recent archaeological investigations in the North of Houghton Regis have shown a rich archaeological record in the area dating back to Mesolithic times. Demolishing Vane Cottage and building new properties, without archaeological surveys of the ground could endanger significant, nationally important historical evidence of past use of the land.

Condition of the Building

Vane Cottage had been occupied by the previous owner since 1959 until Mrs Morton moved into a care home two years ago. It has been unoccupied since that time. It is clear that significant work would be needed to bring the interior of the building to a modern living standard – subject to listed building consent.

The new owner commenced work on the interior soon after the sale was completed. Work was undertaken, for example, in the kitchen area removing the floor and inserting building materials, without listed building planning consent. Evidence of this is the stack of building material standing in the garden. All work was suspended several weeks ago, pending investigations by planning officers.

Since it would be expected that the new owner, in carrying out due diligence, would have commissioned a full Structural Survey of the building before completing the purchase of a 17th century cottage which had been vacant for a considerable time, it must be surmised that he deemed it both feasible and economic to renovate the existing Cottage. Evidence of this is that the owner commenced such repairs to and renovation of the building immediately after purchase.

The Planning Application contained a Structural Site Inspection Report dated 28th October 2024, some weeks after work was suspended by the Planning Officers. Several claims are made in the report about the unsafe structure of the building with little or no supportive evidence from appropriately qualified experts.

Vane Cottage is essentially a timber framed building, typical of the period in which it was built. Therefore, the Heritage Society would not deem cracks in the brickwork as necessarily detrimental to the integrity of the building, unless there is strong evidence from a structural survey completed by an appropriate expert in the field supporting such a claim.

The report claims that the excessively steep internal stairs compounds concern about unhealthy living. The Society rejects this claim since the stairs have been in the house since the 17th century and the last owner Mrs Morton coped with them for 60 years, well into her nineties.

Fungal growth was also inevitable in an uninhabited building, but not terminal and should not be considered as an exceptional reason for demolition or proof of an unhygienic building.

Neither photographs, nor a structural engineer's report are included to support the claim that the ripples in the roof are evidence that it is unsafe and that a leaning end wall is the result. The Society has verbal evidence from a neighbour, living next door to Vane Cottage, who states that both the roof and wall have been in this condition since 1979 when they moved in, with no evidence of deterioration over years.

The Heritage Society therefore objects to this planning application on the grounds that no unambiguous evidence has been provided to support the claim that the unsafe nature of the building is an exceptional circumstance to support demolition.

Economic Factors

The owner gives no evidence as to the cost of renovation vs the cost of demolition and replacing Vane Cottage with a new build on the same footprint. The owner has not submitted an application to build a new property, only a statement that he intends to build on the same footprint. All that is presented in the Application is a statement that renovation would be "cost prohibitive compared to a new build".

The applicant has presented no evidence to show that he has undertaken or even considered in detail remedial steps to secure the building and ensure its future integrity.

In conclusion, the Houghton Regis Heritage Society strongly objects to the application on the grounds that the applicant has failed to present evidence, backed by experts, of exceptional circumstances that would warrant the demolition of the Grade II Listed Building - Vane Cottage - and that such demolition would cause substantial and irreparable harm to the culture, history and heritage of the Town.

It should be noted that the listing of Vane Cottage covers the cottage and any attached structures, plus any external structure built before 1947. There is a shed and vinery in the garden behind the cottage which is also listed.

Comments from Residents of Houghton Regis demonstrate clearly the strength of feeling about opposed to the demolition of Vane Cottage:

- A lot of the original Houghton Regis has disappeared, let's not lose it all.
- This house is an important part of the history of Houghton Regis. This house should be restored not demolished. It's tragic that the beautiful garden has already been destroyed. Houghton Regis is turning into a concrete jungle.
- This beautiful building is part of Houghton Regis history! Most of the historic buildings have already been destroyed and replaced by awful new buildings which are not complimentary to the surroundings. I'm not against new builds as I've visited places where new builds are so in keeping with existing old buildings you wouldn't even know! Please please have some consideration for our historic (once village) town.
- Absolutely disgusting to pull this done mustn't happen

- It is a historic house and we have very few left.
- Seeing what's been done to the garden already is such a shame."
- "Why is this building under threat!
- Houghton Regis needs every bit of our history protected. We have been around since William the conqueror, And the town needs every little bit charm to counteract the overload of new builds we now have"
- This is a historic building and should be preserved and cherished
- Beautiful cottage, please leave it alone, it is an important part of old Houghton Regis
- Grade II listed building in a conservation area, this property is a designated heritage asset. The new owner has cleared garden without consent and likely done harm to building by ripping out interior fixtures and fittings. This is one of the few listed buildings left in our town and needs to be saved
- Save the history of this town
- Keep the history
- It would be a great shame to tear down a grade 2 listed cottage with original features that are difficult to replicate, I knew Beryl and her hubby from when I first moved to Houghton Regis, I used to buy my tomato plants from them out of their greenhouse in their lovely garden that has now been torn apart, please save our listed buildings.
- Such a precious and historical building should not be allowed to be demolished- Shame on anyone who passes this application
- I think it's disgusting what they have done to the garden.
- Please do not let anything else disappear from the original village
- I object to the demolition of this beautiful property. It is a disgrace what they've done to the gardens. This property is part of Houghton Regis History and should be kept how it was. It is also a grade 2 listed building in a conservation area. Please leave it alone.
- Part of Houghton Regis heritage, would be tragic to see. It demolished.
- Such a beautiful building that's already had the garden ripped out and destroyed. The building should be protected
- I concur with the sentiments expressed that we should do everything in our power to ensure that the developer follows the law in this case, and going forward that the resulting development preserves this jewel of and for Houghton Regis.
- I lived in Houghton Regis from aged 17 to aged 55 and remember this beautiful cottage and its pretty gardens too. So lovingly tended by the owners. It is a heritage building and should be protected. It could be used for some civic use, but to sell it for development and destroy this lovely cottage a part of Houghton Regis heritage is criminal!!! They can't be allowed to do this as Houghton Regis has a rich history going back centuries and historic beautiful buildings like this need to be preserved and can be used for civic purposes while still preserving the building.
- This was a wonderful looking garden and house. Please do not allow anything to happen to it. The garden area looks horrible now. Such hard work had to go into it all.
- Demolition would be pure vandalism and remove one of the few buildings still remaining that I remember from my 1940's childhood in Houghton Regis and that I was always pleased to see on my return visits over the years.

- "This property is a beautiful looking cottage of our old Houghton Regis village.
- Buildings like these should be preserved so people can still see what this area once was like.
- Any person owning such a cottage should be proud to own something so beautiful and a passed history of Houghton Regis.
- The people who brought this Listed property obviously had no intention of keeping the cottage or to refurb it to it's passed glorious beauty.
- Their sole purpose was to destroy the cottage and build on it's land.
- This should be forbidden to happen.
- They have already cleared all the surrounding land in preparation and probably inflicting all types of damage to the cottage.
- In my mind they should be prosecuted for what they have already done and the land and cottage taken away from them."
- Such a beautiful home
- "Please save this beautiful cottage from demolition.
- It's so sad to see that the garden has already been flattened"
- Once again, the heritage of our once great village is preyed upon by greedy developers. Having been here for 22 years, the village has become soulless and derelict. Watching the destruction of the gardens at Vane Cottage was tantamount to sheer vandalism.
- I think it is deplorable that anyone can consider this demolition.
- Just because something is old and needs repairing it should not be destroyed.
- Please do not let this happen by greedy developers.
- To precious piece of local history to be demolished
- This is a historic grade II listed building, vital part of Houghton Regis heritage. It must be preserved.
- Such a beautiful cottage it has to be saved from demolition.
- I object to the application to demolish the listed cottage, Vane Cottage, in the conservation area of Houghton Regis
- It looks a wonderful house and should not be demolished but looked after and kept in good condition for the foreseeable future.
- Keep the heritage of the village /Town
- I was born in Easthill Road in 1941 when there were only 8 houses there. I have known this beautiful cottage all my life. Please try and save it. Houghton Regis has already been ruined by demolishing many other historic buildings. I have many memories of when it was a really lovely village.
- This is such a beautiful cottage that I have lived close to for years. It was shocking to see what the new owners have done to the beautiful garden and now want to demolish. I fear it would never be rebuilt to its original glory.
- "This is a historic listed part of our community dating back to the 17th century. The buyer should have done all checks beforehand so this looks like the plan from day one, not what they said they wanted to do.
- This cannot be approved, it's destroying history."
- I grew up a few doors away from vane cottage. We as children always have fond memories of going to see Mr & Mrs Morton. I was once allowed in the house and it was amazing I'm there. We need to keep buildings that have been round longer than most of us.

- It will be a travesty if a developer is allowed to knock down this listed building. There is no point in it being listed if developers are allowed to ride roughshod over the rules.
- Heritage is of up most importance to today's generation and the future generations to come to remember where the past stood and how much has changed in the years around keeping such assets standing and kept is the only way to remember what was
- Leave things alone love character houses they're way better than modern houses
- I sign this Petition to object to the demolition of Vane Cottage in Park Road North Houghton Regis.
- This Cottage has to be preserved. Someone would love to renovate it. Or could be bought as a community asset.
- As this is a Grade 2 listed building, this application should have been made before any work was started. A listed building should not be demolished, it can be restored. The developer appears to have ignored rules regarding this and should be punished accordingly. This is an iconic and well-loved property in Houghton Regis and we would like to ask CBC how this has been allowed to progress as far as it has. I strongly object to this planning application.
- This house is a landmark for Houghton Regis along park road north, how can this be knocked down!
- I fully support the objection to the demolition of Vane Cottage
- Vane cottage should not be demolished as it is part of Houghton Regis original heritage. Ripping out the garden was an act of pure vandalism.
- As a listed building it should be saved like the Red House in Houghton Regis
- Appalled at damage done already to the site chopping down protected trees! Please try and save this building and ask new owners to ""make good"" as best as able to surroundings.
- If building really is too damaged to restore then a similar rebuild must be in same style and layout.
- Vane Cottage, like The Red House, stands testament to the long history of our village. It must be saved.
- We must protect these beautiful old buildings from these so-called developers who only want to make money by destroying these old buildings
- It's part of the towns history we don't have much left. It should be restored just as red house has. We need to keep pieces of history for future generations and not destroy these wonderful properties.
- It's a listed building. How is this even possible? Very little left of old Houghton now. Progress??
- It would be a shame to destroy such an iconic building
- I believe this building should remain and not be demolished as it forms part of Houghton Regis history and it would be a shame for it and its memory to be lost
- As a neighbour of Vane Cottage, I absolutely support this petition to save Vane Cottage.
- Vane Cottage" must not become "Vanished Cottage"
- So many of our historic buildings have been demolished for financial gain and the Houghton Regis Heritage Society is working hard to prevent the loss of more buildings and to retain as much of our heritage as is possible."

- It is my understanding that in case of a grade II listed property all options for conservation and repair should be examined. Demolition of such building should only be allowed if all other possibilities have been exhaustively investigated and were categorically deemed unfeasible.
- We cannot keep allowing the destruction of the historical buildings in and around Houghton Regis
- We should save the cottage, as it is a listed building also it is part of Houghton Regis history.
- Vane Cottage must be saved and not demolished - it can be renovated - if these properties can be moved brick-by-brick then it can be saved
- It is a historic building and the garden clearance has probably caused the damage to the external walls when the jcb was moving around.
- Demolition of this property would be a crime and I am surprised the application is even being considered.
- Too much change in Houghton Regis we are losing our town
- I feel this is an unjust demolition of a listed building, without suitable foresight, and consideration of the local area, and the historical value.
- Words fail me! Why would anyone want to demolish this building!?
- I have lived in Houghton Regis all my life, and this lovely historic grade II listed property is a property that Houghton Regis is well known for! If a property is listed, it's supposed to remain the same, with any upgrades to be carried out to the same style as it stands today! Not to be demolished! What's the point in having listed properties if it doesn't stand for anything? It's listed for a reason! Same as all the trees in the lovely garden that got took down, did anything get looked into with that as well? The owner says it will cost too much to get renovated, well I'm sure the owner would have known this when they viewed it right !? It would be devastating to see this lovely historic property no longer there!
- Presumably the owner commissioned a survey of the property?
- I strongly object to the proposed demolition of Vane Cottage, a listed building with immense value to the heritage of Houghton Regis and the local street scene. The loss of the trees and garden has already damaged the conservation area and should not have happened.
- Disgraceful. We need to save this heritage property before we lose more of historic Houghton Regis to the scourge that is diocese of St Albans
- The utter disgrace the way this clearance has been started before any planning application had been had been officially discussed. The structural report is very biased towards rip down and a copy-cat rebuild which loses all original building. Renovate not destroy!
- I fully support the Houghton Regis Heritage Society to help preserve Houghton Regis history.
- Such a beautiful cottage and listed should be preserved not pulled down historical place
- It is part of Houghton Regis history. Why get rid of the cottage turn into a part of a museum
- Too much planning and building being done in and around Houghton Regis. Any places with architectural importance and age should be saved at all costs. We are fast losing our identity with loss of land and buildings and Vane

Cottage is one of our few remaining links to the past and should be preserved. It has many outstanding features and needs a preservation order.

- There is so little of our history left. Don't let it die completely.
 - How can they even consider destroying a wonderful part of the history of this town?!!
 - This is a beautiful cottage that needs to be preserved
 - A beautiful historic cottage. It's part of original Houghton's Heritage and History! The beautiful grounds of this beautiful cottage have already been desecrated!
 - It's nice to see it from the road in all its period charm leave it that way. Don't demolish it who cares if the stairs are wonky inside and the wall bows that's what structural braces are for of buildings of that age and less leave it alone
 - This is an outrage Vane Cottage is one of the oldest buildings in the town and must be preserved.
 - This should be objected on the grounds of our Neighbourhood plan and it is in the Conservation area and is a listed building. The owners have already taken down all the trees without permission. Surely the Planning Committee should realise how much the residents of Houghton Regis feel with the issues the Red House was.
 - So please think hard when you are considering this and have some consideration for the residents of Houghton Regis"
 - Why didn't the company who bought Vane cottage have a survey done before they signed contracts? They were very quick to demolish the beautiful garden and destroying the trees. Seems to me they had no intention of renovating this 17th century cottage.
 - I strongly object to the demolition of Vane Cottage. It is a building of cultural and historical value which adds character to Houghton Regis. The ground works which have already been undertaken have resulted in the land looking bare and an eyesore.
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- Having visited and been inside the house a few years ago I am very disappointed to learn that the property seems to be in an unsalvageable state. Please do whatever can be done to save this characterful house, an important landmark in the heritage of Houghton Regis.
 - They have already obliterated the garden removing all the trees, shrubs and plants and should be stopped from destroying the house.
 - This is a Grade listed building and has protection on the Houghton Regis Neighbourhood Plan and there seems to be a breakdown in Central Bedfordshire Councils Planning Dept., the building also stands in the Houghton Regis Conservation Area. Seems that many rules have been broken and many roads need to be crossed before we get to Planning Application level.
 - This property which is Grade 2 listed is one of only a handful of historic properties in Houghton Regis and falls within the conservation area boundary. It should be preserved not demolished and renovated for future generations to enjoy.
 - This is an absolute travesty! A developer with no respect for Houghton Regis, its heritage, its Neighbourhood Plan, its Conservation Area, nor for Heritage

England and Listed Buildings status! The destruction of the well maintained and established gardens with heritage fruit trees is environmental vandalism. This developer needs the book thrown at him!

- A stunning cottage garden, local history and heritage levelled, I was shocked to see this happen, disgraceful.....
- Outrageous! Every part of Houghton History is being demolished for the sake of pound notes in people's pockets.
- This must be stopped it is Houghton Heritage and the Community are in uproar. This cannot happen to a Town which has seen so much of its history and green space eroded in the recent past.
- We do not want to lose any more of the heritage houses of the town.
- Please save Vane Cottage from demolition.
- As the Chairman of Houghton Regis Heritage Society, I strongly object to the listed proposal to demolish Vane Cottage.
- This is one of the very few 17th Century buildings left in Houghton Regis which has stood the test of time. A short distance away stands three other buildings, The Red House, Houghton Hall and Dene Hollow. As a Society we keep a keen eye on properties of historic value.
- The property owners pulled down several trees in the garden attached to the house without prior permission. It is believed that some of the said trees were rare.
- Too many buildings of interest have been lost in Houghton Regis, and ones like this of special historic interest need to be saved from demolition."