
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 October 2016

by Graham Chamberlain BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 7th October 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/W/16/3154491

Durrant's Barn, Church Lane, Claxton, Norfolk NR14 7HY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr and Mrs Kris and Anna Gamble against the decision of South Norfolk District Council.
 - The application Ref 2015/2802, dated 4 December 2015, was refused by notice dated 29 January 2016.
 - The development proposed is the change of use and conversion of a timber frame agricultural barn to a single dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appellant's have submitted a drawing outlining amendments to the proposal, including horizontal weatherboarding to all elevations and a simplified design of the windows. However, this does not appear to be the drawing upon which the Council consulted and based its decision. As such, and in the interest of fairness, I have confined my considerations to the original drawings.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the existing building and surrounding area.

Reasons

4. The appeal building is a single storey timber structure located towards the northern end of Church Lane. There is some sporadic development within the vicinity of the building but it is not physically well related to a discernable settlement and facilities and services are not particularly accessible from the site by means other than a private car. Moreover, the Council have concluded that the site is not suitable for a commercial use given its inaccessible location. As a result, the building can reasonably be described as 'isolated' and consequently there is a presumption against the buildings residential use unless there are special circumstances.¹
5. Nevertheless, Policy DM2.10 of the South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies Document 2015 (DMP) permits a historic and traditionally

¹ See Paragraph 2.56 of the DMP and Paragraph 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework

constructed building to be converted to a dwelling, as a special circumstance, if it is worthy of protection and the proposal would enhance the building, the setting of nearby buildings and the countryside.

6. To this end, the appellants' heritage assessment sets out the history and significance of the building. The heritage assessment concludes that the significance of the building is in its association with local agricultural and military history. I have no reason to question the findings of this assessment. The Council have suggested that the significance is limited because the building has been moved from its original location. To an extent I share this view, especially as the building is architecturally unremarkable due to a very simple timber frame, shallow roof form and a significant number of alterations.
7. Nevertheless, the letters of support submitted during the Council's consideration of the planning application are a strong indication that local residents consider the building to be part of the local heritage of the area. Moreover, although of little architectural significance, the building has elements of a traditional construction and has a history which is, on balance, sufficiently compelling for the building to be considered important locally and worthy of protection as a heritage asset.
8. The proposed residential conversion would involve substantial alterations. The timber cladding and roof would be replaced and the existing lean-to reconstructed and truncated. Additionally, the internal brick floor would be lifted and the timber framed supplemented. The extent of works proposed would dilute the historic fabric and archaeological interest of the building. However, in my experience such works are not uncommon in rural conversions in order to satisfy the building regulations. They are also works that over time could, in part, be undertaken as repairs. As such, they can be tolerated to an extent if the building retains an appropriate character and appearance.
9. However, the original and simple rural appearance of the building would be harmed by other aspects of the appeal scheme. The conversion would include the use of vertical, rather than horizontal, boarding on the gable ends. This would result in the loss of an original feature. The same would occur with the loss of original side hung doors and entrance points. In addition, the proposed windows would have an unsympathetic appearance, with a discordant material finish and a jarring and overtly modern design and arrangement.
10. Additionally, the original form of the eaves would be eroded by the continuation of the roof into the lean-tos and the overall solidity of the building diminished due to large areas of unbroken glazing. Moreover the southern roof plane would be cluttered by domestic paraphernalia including solar panels and roof lights. In my view, the conversion would significantly alter, and harmfully erode, the original and rural appearance and character of the barn through unsympathetic alterations. I share the view of the Conservation Officer that the building once converted would appear as a modern new building. It would thus be discordant in, and harmful to, the rural setting of the countryside.
11. In reaching this view, I acknowledged that hedge planting is proposed to soften the impact of the conversion on the countryside. But this will take time to mature, cannot be relied on long term as it may die or fail and is not intended to span the entire southern boundary. As such, the converted building would have a harmful and discordant presence in views from the south.

12. Some of the unsympathetic alterations proposed could be amended through a suitably worded planning condition, such as the window materials. Planning conditions could also be used to prevent further alterations to the barn and visual impacts from domestic clutter such as outbuildings. However, some aspects of the proposal would require a more complete redesign. As such, I am not satisfied that the proposal could be made completely acceptable through the imposition of planning conditions.
13. I therefore conclude that the proposal would significantly harm the character and appearance of the existing building and the surrounding area. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policy DM2.10 of the DMP, which does not permit conversions if they would seriously and adversely impact on the rural characteristics of the original building and its setting. Furthermore, the conversion would not enhance the buildings immediate setting and therefore the proposal would be contrary to Paragraph 55 of the Framework.

Other Matters

14. The appellant's have suggested that the conversion is necessary to safeguard the building into the future and address the 'untidy condition' of the barn. However, the structural survey commissioned by the appellants has found the barn to be in a reasonable condition. Consequently, there is no pressing need in the short term for its conversion along the lines proposed to safeguarding its historic interest. The medium to long term protection of the building could be achieved through a more sensitive conversion. As such, my conclusion on the main issue is unaltered.
15. The proposal would facilitate the provision of a smaller, more affordable dwelling in a rural area. This could be occupied by a small family with a local connection, such as the appellants. However, this benefit could not be guaranteed and would not be a requirement of any planning permission. Therefore, the weight I attach to this benefit is limited, and is not sufficient to outweigh the harm I have identified. The conversion would be undertaken in a way that would minimise carbon emissions associated with future occupation. Nevertheless, nothing particularly innovative is proposed thereby rendering this a limited benefit that would not outweigh the harm I have identified.
16. The appellants have referred to an approved conversion (2015/0891/F) and have questioned how this was approved and their scheme refused. Especially as the approved scheme was found to be acceptable without reference to a structural survey or design and access statement. Be that as it may, I have considered the appeal scheme on its own merits and found it to be contrary to the provisions of the DMP. As such, the approval of a scheme at a different site is not a sound basis on which to permit the harmful development before me.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Graham Chamberlain
INSPECTOR