
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 September 2016

by S M Holden BSc MSc CEng MICE TPP FCIHT MRTPI

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

Decision date: 21ST October 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/U1430/W/16/3152580

Oast Cottage, Main Street, Peasmarch, East Sussex TN31 6SS

- 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 Ms Nicola Humphrey of Denton Homes Ltd against the decision of Rother District Council.
 - The application Ref RR/2015/2445/P, dated 30 September 2015, was refused by notice dated 24 December 2015.
 - The development proposed is for the demolition of one detached dwelling and the erection of two, three bed semi-detached houses with integral garages.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is a modest-sized plot that occupies a prominent corner position at the junction of Main Street and The Maltings in the village of Peasmarch. The siting of Oast Cottage, towards the rear of its plot, gives this corner an open and spacious appearance. This sense of openness is continued along The Maltings, as there are no buildings close the western side of this street. Oast Cottage previously stood in a larger site, but the plot has been sub-divided and permission granted for a pair of semi-detached houses Ref: RR/2010/934/P and a detached house (with retention of Oast Cottage) Ref: RR/2010/925/P. These three houses have now been constructed and were occupied at the time of my site visit.
 4. Oast Cottage is a small vernacular building, which is thought to date from the early-mid 19th century. In considering its merits for the purposes of listing, Historic England thought it likely that the original building pre-dated 1840. However, it has been substantially altered during the 20th century and is thought to have been partially reconstructed as a consequence of damage by fire in the 1950s. The addition of larger dormer windows has resulted in the loss of much of its original catslide roof, the internal layout has been changed and the doors and windows are modern. In March 2016, after this application had been determined by the Council, Historic England concluded that Oast Cottage was not sufficiently intact to be worthy of designation as a listed building.
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5. Nevertheless, the cottage retains a number of historic features. It has a prominent chimney on its western elevation serving a large fireplace in the living room which has a low beamed ceiling. It has a clay tile roof, hipped to the east and is of brick with a timber-framed, clay tile hung first floor. It is therefore typical of vernacular buildings of the period and the local area. Many of these features are visible from the public realm, whereas most of the alterations at the rear of the building are not. I therefore consider that the external appearance of Oast Cottage makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
6. Whilst this part of Peasmarsh is not a conservation area, Main Street is interspersed with a number of vernacular buildings and together they contribute to the appearance of the village as a rural settlement within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The cottage is consequently a significant and tangible link with the history of the village as a rural community and contributes to the mixed character of the street scene.
7. The value of the cottage to the historic context of the village has also been upheld in three previous appeal decisions¹. Included in their assessments of those previous schemes, the Inspectors described Oast Cottage as an attractive, albeit simple and unassuming, traditional Sussex cottage whose setting should be respected. In the most recent of these decisions the Inspector commented that, irrespective of its state of disrepair and disputed vintage, Oast Cottage has considerable architectural merit. I agree with the previous Inspectors' observations and assessments.
8. I understand that the Council does not retain a 'local list' of non-designated heritage assets. However, as most of the features described above are visible from Main Street, I consider that there can be no doubt that Oast Cottage is a heritage asset. The Government's approach to heritage assets is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. In determining applications that affect a non-designated heritage asset the Framework advises that a balanced judgment will be required having regard to the scale of any loss and its significance. The Framework also advises that where there is evidence of deliberate neglect to a heritage asset its deteriorated state should not be taken into account in any decision.
9. Oast Cottage is suffering from serious neglect, the consequences of which are described in the structural report submitted with the appeal. In particular water penetration as a result of broken windows, doors and a partially collapsed roof have contributed to the first floor now being inaccessible because of concerns about the safety of the staircase and floor. This deterioration appears to have occurred under the stewardship of the current owner. The report suggested various works that might be required to bring the cottage into a habitable condition. However, it lacked specific details and contained no estimate of the likely cost of restoration. Whilst it suggested that it might be difficult to provide room heights that would be normally required in a modern house, there was no substantiated evidence to persuade me that the house could not be made fit to live in, or that the building had reached the end of its useful life.

¹ APP/U1430/A/06/2021919, APP/U1430/A/07/2033859 and APP/U1430/C/14/2214318

10. In my view the report was little more than a description of the physical state of the building, most of which could be ascertained from a visual inspection. It did not amount to a thorough condition survey and did not include a repair specification supported by a conservation specialist. Furthermore, there were no suggestions about the possible value of the property either in its current or restored state. There was therefore no means of assessing whether or not the cost of the necessary repairs could render the restoration work unviable. Consequently, I can give the conclusions of the report little weight in my determination of the appeal. Overall, I consider that the Council has presented a convincing case that demolition of Oast Cottage would result in the loss of a heritage asset for which there is not a clear or convincing justification.
11. The proposal would replace Oast Cottage with a pair of semis that would be set much further forward on the appeal site. There would be only limited gaps between the newly constructed dwelling to the west and the footway along The Maltings to the east. The openness that currently characterises the corner of the junction between Main Street and The Maltings would be significantly reduced and a sense of enclosure would be introduced along the western side of The Maltings. This would be at odds with the more generous space on the opposite corner where the house is set further back from the street. Furthermore, the staggered building line and the orientation of the proposed dwellings would appear awkward alongside the new development to the west. These factors demonstrate that the scheme would not respect the established and more spacious pattern of development in Main Street.
12. The shared access arrangement would result in a significant part of the area in front of the dwellings being required for hardstanding and manoeuvring of vehicles. Although this could be screened by hedges and landscaping, the development as a whole would increase the extent of harsh, suburbanising features in this part of the village, particularly when considered in combination with the loss of the open space that is currently in front of Oast Cottage. In addition, the inclusion of large box fascias and bargeboards and the use of PVCu weatherboarding would fail to reflect the materials used in either the new houses immediately to the west, or the surrounding traditional buildings. The proposal would therefore not integrate satisfactorily into the existing street scene.
13. I accept that the current proposal is not directly comparable with the schemes previously rejected on appeal which included the retention of Oast Cottage. In reaching their conclusions, the previous Inspectors therefore took account of the proposal's effect on the setting of Oast Cottage, which is not relevant to the case before me.
14. Taking all these factors into consideration, I conclude that the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, arising from the loss of Oast Cottage and its replacement with a development that would be of inadequate quality in terms of its siting, layout and use of materials. It would be contrary to Policy EN2 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy which seeks to protect the historic built environment, including non-statutorily protected heritage assets and preserve locally distinctive vernacular buildings. In addition the proposal would conflict with the Framework's advice to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance. The scheme would also fail to comply with Policies OSS4, RA1 and EN3 of the Core Strategy which require development to be of high quality and to make a

positive contribution to the special character of the district's villages. However, in view of the site's location in the heart of the village, I am not persuaded that there would be any conflict with Policy EN1, which seeks to protect the natural beauty of the AONB.

Conclusions

15. The Government is seeking to significantly boost the supply of housing and requires applications for housing development to be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. However, the Government is also seeking to protect heritage assets and requires them to be conserved in a manner that is appropriate to their significance.
16. I have concluded that although Oast Cottage has not been designated as a Listed Building, it is a non-designated heritage asset that makes a significant contribution to the character and cultural history of Peasmarsh. Its loss would therefore be harmful and there was no convincing justification for concluding that it could not be restored as a dwelling. In the context of the surrounding area I have also found that the proposed replacement pair of semi-detached dwellings would be unacceptable. The benefits that would accrue from the provision of one additional house would not outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the area arising from the proposal, including the loss of Oast Cottage.
17. For this reason, and having regard to all other relevant matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR