

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 January 2017

by John L Gray DipArch MSc Registered Architect

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

Decision date: 25 January 2017

Appeal Ref. APP/X1925/D/16/3157079

The Stables, Howells Farm, Halls Green, Weston, Hitchin, SG4 7DZ

- 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 & Mrs Henderson against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application, ref. 16/00750/1HH, dated 22 March 2016, was refused in part by notice dated 10 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is a 2-storey side extension, conversion of the existing garage and the insertion of a single-storey linking structure between the garage and house, with re-ordering of the existing structure.
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Clarification

1. The application was the subject of a split decision. Planning permission was granted for the 2-storey side extension and the single-storey linking structure between the house and the garage. The conversion of two bays of the 4-bay garage block to habitable accommodation was refused. Whatever the Council's decision, the Secretary of State may deal with an appeal as if the application had been made to him in the first instance, which means that the whole of the application proposal is to be considered in this appeal.

Decision

2. The appeal is allowed. Planning permission is granted for a 2-storey side extension, conversion of the existing garage and the insertion of a single-storey linking structure between the garage and house, with re-ordering of the existing structure, at The Stables, Howells Farm, Halls Green, Weston, Hitchin, SG4 7DZ, in accordance with the terms of the application, ref. 16/00750/1HH, dated 22 March 2016, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) the development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision;
 - 2) the development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: the unnumbered site location plan and drawings nos. 5148/01, 02, 04K and 09G;
 - 3) the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted, including the garage doors, shall be constructed in the materials shown on drawings. nos. 5148/04K and 09G;
 - 4) the three new rooflights in the east-facing roof pitch of the garage block shall not be inserted unless until details of them have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.
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Main Issue

3. The main issue in the appeal is the effect on the character of the existing group of buildings of extending The Stables and converting the two-bay garage into habitable accommodation.

Reasons

4. The group of buildings at Howells Farm comprises a listed farmhouse, a listed barn now converted into two dwellings and various other farm buildings also now converted into dwellings. The only obvious evidence of a continuing farming operation (which may or may not be managed from the farmhouse or one of the converted buildings) is the substantial agricultural building to the immediate east of the group, on the opposite side of the access road and screened by a very tall evergreen hedge (so tall that "hedge" may be the wrong word). The Stables is part of a long, low, originally single-storey range forming the north side of the group and now comprising two dwellings.
5. As the Council concluded when it granted planning permission as part of the split decision, there is no objection to the 2-storey extension to the existing building, nor to the single-storey extension linking it to the garage block. Overall, the group of buildings is now wholly residential in nature, though the manner of the conversions retains the important aspects of the original agricultural character. The two extensions, while obviously increasing the amount of residential development, would not significantly or adversely affect that character. Also, both elements have been designed in a manner entirely in keeping with the character of the group. Essentially, therefore, what falls to be considered is the impact of the change to residential use of one half of what seems originally to have been a 4-bay cart shed.
6. The garage block, or cart shed, is perhaps the only building in the group that retains its historical agricultural and ancillary character. Others may have kept a similar character but are obviously now ancillary to dwellings. Conversion of part of the garage block would mean the loss of a distinct (and distinctive) remaining element of the original agricultural use – but it would also mean a change away from what actually appears as something of an anachronism in the context of the now established residential use of the whole of the group. In principle, there can be no objection to the proposed change to habitable accommodation. Instead, it is a question of how it would be done.
7. The outward appearance of the two bays of the garage block would, in effect, remain. The more southerly of the two bays would have a pair of garage doors fixed in position as part of the external wall of the proposed accommodation; visually, the change of use behind would thus remain unseen. The more northerly bay would also have a pair of garage doors, able to be opened, with glazed folding doors behind. How often they would be open is questionable. They would serve the master bedroom, so privacy might suggest they would be more often shut than open; and the rooflights proposed for the east-facing roof slope would avoid any need for them to be open. On the other hand, it is natural to want to look out from a room, suggesting that they might be at least partially open for a significant part of the time. Even if that were so, however, it cannot be said that any serious harm to the character of the group would arise. The character of the garage block would certainly change but that is not crucial either in itself or to the now established residential character of the overall group. The conversion of the group to residential use has been very tastefully designed and executed and what is proposed now, the 2-storey and

- single-storey extensions as well as the conversion of part of the garage block, would very much be a continuation of what has already happened.
8. There could remain the question of what, if anything, would happen to the two remaining bays of the garage block, which are in different ownership. At the time of my visit, one bay had its doors in place, the other did not. However, whether or not that remained the position, the impact described above would remain the same.
 9. Nor do the proposed rooflights weigh harmfully against the proposal. They are annotated as "conservation style" rooflights, which would be appropriate for a former agricultural building – indeed, probably more appropriate than the range of Velux style rooflights to be seen on the outward-facing roof slope of the listed barn. They would be virtually invisible, other than from the access road alongside, because of the adjacent agricultural building and evergreen hedge; and even if those were to be removed in the future, public viewpoints are from sufficiently far away that the impact on what, from a distance, still has very much the appearance of a group of agricultural buildings would be all but unnoticeable.
 10. Accordingly, no part of the proposed extensions and conversion can be said to conflict with Policy 28 saved from the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2. Nor would there be any material impact on the significance of the two listed buildings in the group because of this proposed development within their settings. The proposal can be said to deliver good design and conserve the historic environment in accordance with sections 7 and 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
 11. In concluding that the proposal would cause no material harm and that the appeal should be allowed, planning permission may be granted subject to conditions. Ordinarily, those conditions would deal only with the statutory time limit, identification of the approved plans and a requirement that external materials should match those of the existing building. In this particular case, to ensure the appropriate quality of design, that third condition should be elaborated upon to include the garage doors and a further condition added to require approval of the details of the conservation rooflights.

John L Gray

Inspector