

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 February 2017

by K E Down MA(Oxon) MSc MRTPI MRSB

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

Decision date: 27 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/D3125/D/16/3164692

Old Dairy Barn, Main Road, Cote, Bampton, OX18 2EG

- 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 M Sharff against the decision of West Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/03227/HHD, dated 27 September 2016, was refused by notice dated 17 November 2016.
 - The development proposed is a single storey rear extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. There is one main issue which is the effect of the proposed extension on the character and appearance of the host building and the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises one end of a former stone barn that was converted into two residential units around 2004. The barn has a characteristically simple rectangular plan form and is very long but relatively shallow. The conversion to two dwellings has resulted in a more domestic appearance, including through the introduction of a large number of new openings and alterations to a series of arched openings on the rear elevation. A simple, open porch has been erected on the front elevation of the appeal dwelling. Nevertheless, the conversion is generally sympathetic to the building's origins such that it still reads as a traditional former barn. In particular it retains its characteristic rectangular plan form.
 4. The barn conversions are set on generous plots with large, mainly lawned, gardens to front and rear which help to preserve their open, agricultural setting. The surrounding countryside is generally flat and low lying meaning that there are long views, particularly towards the rear of the dwellings.
 5. The proposed extension comprises a single storey rear addition set at 90° to the rear elevation. It would be set in from the end wall of the existing building and the ridge would end just below the existing eaves. It would be some 6.6m wide, roughly a third of the width of the appeal dwelling, and 8.8m deep.
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6. The appeal building is not listed and neither does it lie in a Conservation Area. Nonetheless, it is a historic building of merit. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advises at paragraph 135 that the effect of an application on the significance of a non designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application and that a balanced judgement will be required in weighing applications that affect non designated heritage assets, having regard to the scale of any harm and the significance of the heritage asset.
7. Policy BE10 of the adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (LP) relates to the conversion of unlisted vernacular buildings. The appeal building has already been converted but the policy is relevant insofar as it resists extensions which would obscure the form of the original building. LP Policy BE2 expects extensions to respect or enhance adjoining buildings, with local building traditions reflected as appropriate. LP Policy H2 advises on general residential development standards and resists extensions that would erode the character and appearance of the surrounding area or adversely affect features of historical or architectural importance and their setting. Explanatory text to H2 states that extensions which unacceptably dominate the original dwelling to the detriment of the character of the local building and the local scene will be resisted.
8. The Council appears to take the view that, owing to the dwelling being recognisable as part of a characteristic traditional barn range, an extension of any form could not be supported. However, this stance is not endorsed by local or national policy which makes clear that extensions to historic buildings may be acceptable subject to appropriate siting, scale and design. The West Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 (SPD) suggests, in the context of the conversion of agricultural buildings, that extensions to barns are unlikely to be supported but, whilst a material consideration, this applies with less force in the case of the appeal dwelling where its conversion to a dwelling, including significant alterations to its appearance, has already been allowed. In these circumstances, further sensitive evolution of the building is not in my view precluded.
9. The proposed extension has, in general, been sensitively designed. It respects the height and width of the existing dwelling. Materials would match those used in the original building and doors and windows would repeat the scale and pattern of openings in the rear of the existing barn. It would be set in from the side elevation and when seen from the south-west would thus read as an extension. This would ensure that, although the rectangular plan form of the building would alter, it would still be possible to distinguish the original long barn from the extension.
10. Nevertheless, the extension would be significantly deeper than the characteristically shallow barn. When seen in the context of the end elevation of the original building, one of the few unaltered elements, it would appear as an unacceptably dominant and unbalanced addition that would detract from the importance of the barn, compete with and obscure the original form and diminish its substantial, agricultural character. In this view, the set in from the north-west elevation would not avoid a materially harmful effect. Overall the extension would appear as an excessive and unsympathetic addition that would erode the building's original character. It would therefore conflict with LP Policies BE10 and H2. Whilst the harm would be less than substantial in terms of its effect on the undesignated heritage asset it would, nevertheless, have a

materially detrimental effect on its significance that would be permanent and direct. For this reason the appeal should fail.

11. The appellants argue that given the existing changes that have been permitted, including the addition of a porch, it is unreasonable to resist further change and that the Council appears to be placing a higher level of protection on the appeal building than that applied to statutorily listed buildings. In particular they point out that the extension incorporates features which recall the architectural origins of the building, such as the arched openings and the matching materials. As reasoned above, I agree that some level of extension could be accommodated whilst respecting the original character of the barn and that the design of the proposed extension is in general sympathetic. However, owing in particular to its depth, the proposed extension would not be clearly subservient to and would erode the primacy of the original building. In consequence it cannot be supported.
12. The appellants are critical of the Council for its use of permitted development limitations as a guide to the acceptability of the proposed extension. I agree that it would be more appropriate to judge the application on its own merits in the context of the host building and any supplementary planning guidance. However, in this case the outcome would be no different.
13. Finally, the appellants suggest that the lack of any public views would add weight in favour of the proposed development. However, the effect of development on its surroundings is a material planning consideration whether or not it can be seen from the public realm.
14. It is concluded on the main issue that, owing in particular to its excessive depth, the proposed extension would have a materially detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the host building and the surrounding area. In consequence, as set out above, it would be contrary to LP Policies BE2, BE10 and H2, the NPPF and the Council's SPD. It would also conflict with emerging policies in the un-adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, including Policies OS4 and H6 which generally reflect the adopted policy framework.
15. The neighbouring Cote House is a Grade II* listed building. However, owing to the distance of separation, the high intervening boundary wall and tree screening and the single storey character of the proposed extension I am satisfied that there would be no material effect on Cote House or its setting.
16. The appellants state that the extension is required to provide additional living space for their growing family. However, such personal circumstances would apply to many families and would not outweigh the material harm to the character and appearance of the host dwelling identified above.
17. For the reasons set out above and having regard to all other matters raised, including the lack of any objection from the Aston, Cote, Shifford and Chimney Parish Council and the support of the adjoining neighbour, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

KE Down
INSPECTOR

