



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 July 2019

by Tim Crouch DipUD MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5 August 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/R0335/W/19/3225530

Premier Inn, 221 Yorktown Road, College Town, Sandhurst GU47 0RT

- 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 Whitbread Group Plc against the decision of Bracknell Forest Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/00877/FUL, dated 30 August 2018, was refused by notice dated 23rd October 2018.
 - The development proposed is erection of a two-storey extension to the southern elevation of the existing hotel and single storey extension to existing entrance (Use Class C1), alterations to car parking layout, landscaping and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the setting of Rackshaw Farmhouse, a Grade II Listed Building.

Reasons

Listed Building

3. The site is currently occupied by a hotel, an adjoining public house and a restaurant, with outdoor seating and car parking. The public house is a former farmhouse, known as Rackshaw Farmhouse and is Grade II listed. This is a late 16th century timber framed farmhouse, mostly encased in red brick, with some later (18th and 20th century) alterations. It has original internal features as described by the appellant's Heritage Assessment.
4. The Farmhouse has its principle elevation to the south west and is set forward of the neighbouring buildings. Whilst there is a scale of modern development in its environs these buildings are set back from the principle elevation, mostly with lower ridge heights and roof slopes away from the listed building. These have a subservient character due to this positioning, scale and form. The positioning also retains an openness around the heritage asset, despite the loss of the original rural surroundings, and the building does retain a prominence.
5. I recognise that the appellant's supporting Heritage Assessment considers that the historic and evidential values represent the greatest contributing factors to its significance, particularly given the relative rarity of timber framed buildings in the area. However, the setting of the Farmhouse also has a strong

- contribution towards its significance as the principle building of scale and quality with a cluster of secondary buildings, reflecting its historic use as a Farmhouse with surrounding ancillary structures.
6. An important element of the significance of the heritage asset lies in its traditional building materials and its vernacular architecture within a setting which reflects its roots as a farmhouse distinct from ancillary buildings.
 7. The proposal would extend the existing hotel significantly closer to the Farmhouse at two storey level and incorporate strong gable features. This proximity would erode the important gap to the Farmhouse and harm the setting of the building, with the scale dominating the listed building. This would be further exacerbated by the gable design which would highlight the bulk of the proposal, limiting any subservient character. This would introduce a prominent roof form conflicting with that of the listed building, despite the use of the same material palette as the existing hotel.
 8. The proposal would therefore be harmful to the significance of the designated heritage asset, rather than lead to a 'minor alteration in perception' as suggested by the appellant. Given the scale of the proposal and lack of harm to the physical building, I consider this to be less than substantial harm. Paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (the Framework) requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal in such a scenario.
 9. I have had regard to the appellant's identification of the benefits of an increase in hotel rooms in the area, and the subsequent benefits to tourism, local employment and increased patronage of the public house and other local facilities from additional visitors and expenditure. I have also had regard to the proposed sustainability merits of the proposal, including better energy consumption. Whilst these are benefits of the proposal, these are modest effects given the scale of the development. However, the harm to the significance would be apparent and I am conscious of the Framework's requirement that 'great weight' should be given to the asset's conservation where harm to its significance of any level has been identified.
 10. I note that the appellant considers that the proposal would continue to secure the optimal viable use as per paragraph 196 of the Framework. However, the proposal is for an extension to a separate building and no clear evidence has been provided as to the link between the development and the heritage asset to substantiate this.
 11. Therefore, the proposal would harm the setting of Rackshaw Farmhouse and lead to less than substantial harm. This harm would not be outweighed by the public benefits in this case. Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to saved Policy EN20 of the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan (2002), policies CS1 and CS7 of the Bracknell Forest Core Strategy (2008), the Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance. Taken together, and amongst other objectives, these require development to be in sympathy with the appearance and character of the local environment and appropriate in scale, mass, design, layout and siting, both in itself and in relation to adjoining buildings, spaces and views. Development must also protect and enhance the historic features of acknowledged importance and respect the historic environment.

Other Matters

12. I recognise that the Council's Officer's Delegated Report concluded that the proposal would be a sympathetic addition to the host building and would not adversely affect the character and appearance of surrounding area, as highlighted by the appellant. However, this does not outweigh the harm to the significant of the heritage asset that I have identified.
13. The appellant points out that the Council did not object to the proposal in terms of highways, parking and residential amenity, subject to proposed conditions. Although I note that there were third party objections on highways and parking issues. Given my findings on the main issue, I have not had reason to consider these other matters further. However, even if I was to concur with the appellant and Council, the lack of harm on these issues would be a neutral factor in the determination of the appeal rather than a benefit to the proposal.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Tim Crouch

INSPECTOR