



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 August 2019

by David Spencer BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 August 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/W/19/3228672

Green Farm Buildings, Onehouse Road, Harleston, Suffolk IP14 3HW

- 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 T Scarff against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/18/03864, dated 23 August 2018, was refused by notice dated 16 November 2018.
 - The development proposed is use of land for storage of touring caravans.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Context and Main Issues

2. The appeal site comprises a rectangular piece of open land situated between various buildings at the Green Farm site on the edge of the small village of Harleston and generally arable farmland. Nearby buildings include the Grade II listed Green Farm House and a separately Grade II listed barn approximately 20 metres north-west of this listed farm house. The appeal site is open along its eastern boundary to a well-marked public footpath which crosses over countryside between Onehouse Road and the parish church. Accordingly, the two main issues in this appeal are the effect of the proposal on: firstly, the setting of the Grade II listed buildings at Green Farm; and secondly, the character and appearance of the rural locality.

Reasons

Heritage

3. Green Farmhouse is a sizeable late Sixteenth Century timber framed dwelling with subsequent alterations, mainly from the Nineteenth Century. Its scale, materials and appearance are redolent of a farmhouse status dwelling. Accordingly, the heritage significance of the building is its antiquity as an agrarian dwelling, inherently bound to the countryside in this part of Harleston.
4. A short distance to the north-west of the farmhouse is a separately listed timber framed barn of appreciably steep pitch and tall ridge which is contemporaneous in origin to the farmhouse, with timber weatherboard walls and clad in corrugated steel sheeting on the roof. The heritage significance of the building is in main part due its internal timber framing but also its intrinsic traditional barn appearance as part of an historic farmstead in this rural location.

5. The 'setting of a heritage asset' is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as the surroundings in which it is experienced. Surroundings are not necessarily fixed within defined boundaries. In the case of these heritage assets they can be readily experienced from the public highway in Onehouse Road, at various points along the public footpath to the east and to those visiting the farm complex which includes other small businesses within the farm buildings. Notwithstanding the domestic garden to the farm house (which includes garden trees, a sizeable polytunnel and tall timber fencing) and a modestly sized, low, modern agricultural building adjacent to the barn, the setting of both the farmhouse and the barn principally comprises a relatively uninterrupted relationship to surrounding farmland. The low modern barn and the garden features described above have a neutral effect on the setting of the historic buildings and generally consolidate rather than detract from the character and appearance of the core of the historic farmstead.
6. I accept the appellant's submission that the appeal proposal would not affect the setting of the listed buildings from various perspectives within Onehouse Road. The Farmhouse and the barn are, however, prominent in the wider setting of the farmland to the north and east, particularly from the public footpath. From this perspective, the appeal site tangibly forms part of the undeveloped, intrinsic agrarian setting for these heritage assets. Consequently, the appearance of an assemblage of modern caravans, inharmoniously glinting and glimmering, in the near-immediate foreground to these historic buildings would significantly detract from the heritage significance of these building described above by failing to conserve or enhance their historic agricultural setting. This harm not only includes what would be a stark, incongruous visual interruption in how the buildings are experienced but also through the loss of open, undeveloped land that is part of the narrative for the location and form of these agrarian heritage assets.
7. The appellant submits that the caravans could be contained within a fenced and landscaped boundary. There are few details before me to determine whether or not this would be effective and therefore could be appropriately secured by condition. Objectors to the proposal refer to the scale and height of modern caravans such that I accept that any effective screening would need to be significant. In my view I find there is credence that if the fencing was not tall enough, the array of caravan roofs with any rooflights and roof paraphernalia (such as aerials, flues etc) would remain harmfully visible and discordant. A particularly tall close-board fence along the perimeter of the appeal site this would further harmfully dislocate the heritage assets from their wider agricultural context. Landscaping may be capable of providing a softer, verdant edge but it would take an appreciable period of time and would need to be particularly dense to effectively screen any tall boundary fencing or other means of screening. Experiencing the setting of heritage assets is not limited to just the purely visual, the historic relationship of these listed buildings is to farming and farmland and that would be tangibly eroded by the intervening storage of inharmonious modern domestic caravans.
8. The appellant also submits that agricultural machinery and/or former shipping containers could be accommodated at the appeal site under permitted rights related to the farm enterprise. The open storage of farm machinery would not be unusual at an edge of farm location. Former shipping containers tend to have a duller, more utilitarian appearance, which are often assimilated into

farm complexes. Overall, the appellant's asserted fall-back would be appreciably less harmful than the appeal proposal. Accordingly, it would not provide an analogous basis to justify the detrimental impact on the setting of the listed buildings that would arise from the appeal proposal.

9. I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would have a negative effect on the setting of the Grade II listed buildings at Green Farm and consequently would harm the heritage significance of these assets, which the NPPF states are an irreplaceable resource which should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. I am required to give special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings. This is a high bar such that whilst the harm I have identified would be less than substantial, in the terms set out at paragraph 196 of the NPPF, there would need to be clear and demonstrable public benefits that outweigh this harm.
10. The appellant submits that there is demand for the appeal proposal due to restrictions on storing caravans on many housing developments and its proximate location to the A14 road. However, the evidence on need is limited and generalised including a limited list of names of people (but no further details) who say they want to store a caravan. This is insufficient to justify the harm identified to these heritage assets and does not meet the clear and convincing threshold required at paragraph 194 of the NPPF. The proposal states that 1 part-time job would be created. Again, there are few details about this such that the economic benefits of the appeal proposal are likely to be no more than modest.
11. Overall, there are no demonstrable public benefits that outweigh the harm identified to the setting of the listed buildings. The proposal would be contrary to Policy HB1 of the Mid Suffolk Local Plan 1998 (the MSLP) which, amongst other things, places a high priority on the setting of listed buildings. It would also be contrary to paragraphs 184, 194 and 196 of the NPPF for the reasons set out above and as such fail to accord with one of the principal objectives of national planning policy which is to conserve and enhance the historic environment.

Character and Appearance

12. For similar reasons as set out above, the appeal proposal would appreciably alter the rural character at this edge of Harleston through the direct loss of an open area of land that readily blends into and adjoins open arable fields to the north. It would introduce the uncharacteristic presence of a consolidation of stored caravans into a rural landscape. By virtue of both their appearance and number, the caravans would be particularly noticeable and completely at odds with the surrounding gently rolling farmland character.
13. This discordant effect would be strongly appreciated from the public footpath directly to the east of the appeal site, not only within the immediate environs of the site but in longer perspectives from this path, particularly to the north, where the footpath emerges from a woodland ride. I appreciate housing at Harleston and the existing buildings at Green Farm are visible from this footpath but this generally over distance. In contrast the appeal proposal would introduce a visually jarring change in land use at very close quarters to users of the footpath.

14. For similar reasons to those set out at paragraphs 7 and 8 above I am not persuaded that boundary treatments or landscaping would effectively ameliorate the harm to the rural character at this location. For users of the footpath any tall fencing along the eastern boundary of the appeal site would abruptly enclose what is currently a pleasant, open rural trail.
15. I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the rural locality. It would be contrary to Policy CS5 of the Mid Suffolk Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008 which requires all development to maintain and enhance the local environment and retain the local distinctiveness of the area including protecting and conserving landscape qualities. It would also be contrary to MSLP Policy GP1 which seeks development to maintain or enhance the character of their surroundings. It therefore follows that the proposal would also fail to accord with NPPF paragraph 127 which seeks to ensure that developments add to the overall quality of the area, are sympathetic to local character including the surrounding environment and landscape setting and maintain a strong sense of place. There would also be conflict with NPPF paragraph 170 on the need for development to contribute to and enhance the local environment including, amongst other things, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Conclusions

16. The proposal would result in harm to both the setting of listed buildings and the rural character of the locality. This identified harm is contrary to the relevant up-to-date provisions of the development plan as well as national planning policy. I have taken into account all other material considerations, including the adequate highway access to the proposal and the agricultural land quality of the site, but this does not lead me to a conclusion other than the appeal should be dismissed for the reasons given.

David Spencer

Inspector.