



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 29 October 2019

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

Decision date: 27 November 2019

Appeal No.1: Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/W/19/3232778

3, The Manor, Main Road, Drayton Parslow, Milton Keynes MK17 0J]

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mrs Emma Wilson against Aylesbury Vale District Council.
 - The application Ref: 10/00081/APP, is dated 9 January 2019.
 - The development proposed is conversion of curtilage listed barn 1 into habitable accommodation.
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Appeal No. 2: Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/Y/19/3232777

3, The Manor, Main Road, Drayton Parslow, Milton Keynes MK17 0JR

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mrs Emma Wilson against Aylesbury Vale District Council.
 - The application Ref: 19/00082/ALB is dated 9 January 2019.
 - The works proposed are conversion of curtilage listed barn 1 into habitable accommodation.
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Decisions

Appeal No. 1 Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/W/19/3232778

1. The Appeal is dismissed.

Appeal No. 2: Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/Y/19/3232777

2. The Appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

3. These are a) would the proposed works and development preserve the curtilage listed building (identified as Barn 1) or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses, b) whether they would preserve the setting of the Grade II listed building known as the Manor House and c) whether they would preserve the character or appearance of the Drayton Parslow Conservation Area (DPCA).

Reasons

Context

4. The site comprises part of the former yard of the Manor house, a substantial high-status dwelling dating from the C17, with later C18 and C19 additions. The former farmstead is located within the dispersed settlement of Drayton Parslow which comprises a number of buildings listed for their special interest and is designated as a conservation area.
5. These proposals are for what are described as the conversion of an existing historic former farm building into 'habitable accommodation'. 'Conversion' is a creative interpretation, as although the appellant indicates the form, footprint and a quantity of the historic framing will be replicated or retained, it is ostensibly a proposal for a new structure on the site.

Significance

6. The Appellant has submitted a detailed Historic Building Appraisal that covers the development of the village, the Manor House site as a whole and the building the subject of the appeals. This offers a helpful insight in the context of the proposals and explores the structure and make-up of the subject building in some detail, concluding with an assessment of its significance.
7. There is much from this analysis that can readily be agreed. The broad history of the site, particularly its transition to that of a working farm, correlates readily with the known or conjectured evolution of the buildings of the farmstead. What can readily be agreed is that the present structure (with the exception of the eastern fifth bay) as it currently stands, probably dates from the mid C19. What can also readily be agreed that this former open-fronted multi-bay timber-framed building was constructed in part from newly fashioned elements but also in significant part, from components salvaged from older structures on the site. These were most likely removed to facilitate improvements to the farmstead in response to changing agricultural practice at the time. In the context of the vernacular timber-framing tradition, such a methodology makes ready sense; why would one discard serviceable building lumber when the alternative was to source and fashion new at greater time and expense?
8. What can also readily be agreed is that this recovered framing has been supplemented by more recent mill-sawn material. This is evident in the almost entirely rebuilt fifth bay but also within the remaining structure, especially the roof. The same goes for the external cladding of the barn, with the roof being clad in modern sheeting, whilst the walls have modern timber weatherboarding applied.
9. The Appellant states that 'most of the timber fabric that can be seen in the barn(s) dates from the C19, as suggested by the prevalence of machine-cut timber and cement mortar in the brick plinths'. They go on to say however that there is also 'considerable evidence of the reuse and repair in both buildings...' with 'redundant mortices in many of the beams indicating that they were previously used elsewhere'. This in their view justifies a conclusion that 'the barn(s) date from the C19', and that 'if the barn(s) contained more historic fabric their significance would certainly be greater'. A concomitant of this

argument is that whilst some of the carpentry may pre-date the standing barns 'their historic value is depleted by their removal from their original context'.

10. This is a conclusion, having carefully considered the evidence and assessed the structure on site, with which I disagree. As drawing 3-300 illustrates, the survival of hand-sawn timber in bays 1-4 is extensive and, significantly, still works to a large extent as a legible historic timber-framed structure. Moreover, in this case, there is significant ambiguity about what might constitute 'more historic fabric' as the appellant puts it – more C19 framing for the rebuilding, or more discernibly older recovered fabric in the structure? Either way, it is not clear how this might add or subtract from significance. More importantly, whilst it may be right that the special interest of the reused carpentry may be 'depleted' by their removal from their 'original' (again, what might this mean?) context, that is not to say that they, in their current aggregated state, lack special interest or significance.
11. Indeed, I consider that the legibility and integrity of the framing within the four primary bays embodies a significant degree of special interest alone. It is a structure expressing the continuation of this vernacular building tradition at the cusp of the industrial age. Moreover, the embodiment and reuse of pre-worked carpentry speaks to a vernacular narrative of recycling, reuse, adaptation and economy that are an identifiable theme in vernacular agrarian architecture that still has much to tell us of our past. Although a curtilage listed building, it is one of identifiable special interest; a palimpsest in fact, where the elements of the earlier *manuscript* has been effaced to make room for a *second writing*, or reworked structure.
12. It can be seen therefore that Barn 1 embodies an identifiable degree of special interest and significance, clearly expressed in its timber-framed structure incorporating a significant quantity of reused older timber.
13. Historic farm buildings, in conjunction with the farmhouse, form the integral entity of the farmstead, together they are a ubiquitous feature of the British countryside. They are in fact a highly functional entity with different buildings of the group serving particular purposes directly related to the management and exploitation of the land associated with the holding. Barn 1 therefore (in conjunction with barn 2 and the stable range to the north of the appeal site) serves to reinforce and remind us of the former function of The Manor as an historic farmstead. It follows that Barn 1 contributes very clearly to the setting and significance of The Manor as a designated heritage asset as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).
14. Insofar as the historic farmstead was an integral and significant component of the historic rural social and economic community, The Manor farmstead also makes a significant contribution to the character and appearance and so significance of the DPCA.

Proposals

15. As the General Strategy of the Design and Access Statement (D&AS) makes explicit, the proposals are to 'rebuild the main barn'. This reflects the extensive degree of intervention required to achieve a viable residential unit. This is underscored by the proposal drawings which illustrate the extent of new fabric necessary to do this.

16. It is the case that the rebuilt structure would follow the form, height and modular form of the existing building. It would also utilize a pallet of materials reflective of those evident in the existing building. Moreover, and critical to the Appellant's case, the D&AS also states that the 'existing structural bays will be retained as will the main beams from the trusses'. However, this intention is not explained beyond the small sections set out in plan 3-100 which illustrate the retained timber framing in bay 1 & 2. When this is compared, especially to the analysis of hand sawn and hand worked timber in drawing 3-300, the extent of loss of historic framing inherent in the scheme is made clear. On this comparison alone it is apparent that much of the vertical studwork, cross-bracing and surviving rafters would be lost. Beyond the physical loss of fabric implied here is the final loss of integrity to the existing timber-framed structure.
17. I readily accept that the crisp, well mannered elevations of the rebuilt barn, with their discreet modern detail and careful choice of traditional materials, have their own aesthetic appeal. However, this would come at the cost of the softer organic form of the existing timber framed structure with its quirks and patinated surfaces. Something of its vernacular charm and unique character would also be irrevocably lost.

Effect on special interest and significance

18. This is indeed a curtilage building, not one listed in its own right. It is also one constructed of a mix of elements, including reused framing and modern components. However, for the reasons I set out above, it is one that nevertheless expresses considerable special interest and thus significance. The extensive loss of historic fabric, the integrity and authenticity of the structure, and its agrarian vernacular character would all result in material harm to the special architectural interest of the building. As such, the proposals would fail to preserve that special interest. Such an outcome is contrary to the expectations of sections 16 & 66 of the Act and the desirability of which the Courts have determined is a matter of considerable importance and weight. It would also fail to accord with paragraph 193 of the Framework, which anticipates that great weight be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. It would also conflict with the relevant policies of the local development plan that seek to underpin and reinforce these national statutory and policy objectives.

Effect on setting of the Manor House and DPCA

19. It is the case that Barn 2 on the site would remain as a vestigial reminder of the former character of the yard, defining the Manor as a former historic farmstead. However, Barn 1, a more imposing structure adjacent to the house, more powerfully defines this former agrarian context. For the reasons set out above, the significant erosion of the special interest and character of the appeal building would similarly erode the setting of the listed house. As a structure integral to the former function of the farmstead, it forms an important component of its setting and thus significance. Once again this would be contrary to the expectations of the Act and paragraph 193 of the Framework, which extends the expectation of great weight being given to the conservation of the settings of designated heritage assets.

20. For all the reasons set out above (and recognising the barn is a little set back from the public highway) the proposals would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the DPCA, in conflict with section 72 of the Act. Once again, they would also conflict with paragraph 193 of the Framework for reasons set out above.

Planning balance and conclusions

21. Paragraphs 195 and 196 of the Framework require the decision maker, having identified harm to an heritage asset, to quantify its magnitude. Looking at the instance of harm here I would characterise this in all cases to be less than substantial. However, this should not be taken to mean less than substantial planning objection, especially where the national statutory and policy tests have not been met.
22. Having quantified harm, the Framework also anticipated this being balanced against any public benefits proposals might bring. The Appellant does not set these out in such terms but does refer to the expectation of sustainable uses being found for buildings with obsolete functions. Reference is also made to the building being beyond economic repair. Whilst the building remains in low-key ancillary use, its architectural and structural constraints do not in my view necessarily preclude adaptive reuse. Specifically, in this case, they preclude a proposal (and use) that implies material harm to special interest. Moreover, I accept the building may require investment to safeguard its longer-term structural integrity. However, suggestions that it is beyond economic repair are not supported by the Appellant's own structural survey that concludes (in paragraph 116) 'The main barn to the side of the house is not in the greatest condition but can be repaired fairly easily if it is just to be used as a shed and/or garage'.
23. So, arguments over optimal use or economic viability carry limited weight in terms of supporting the current approach as a public benefit. I am prepared to accept that an additional unit of residential accommodation (however that may be defined) may incrementally contribute to housing supply or to the local economy. However, either way, these benefits would be modest and, in any event, are outweighed by the harm to the heritage assets identified above.
24. For the reasons given above and having considered all matters raised in evidence I conclude that both the appeals should fail.

David Morgan

Inspector