
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 February 2020

by Mr D.R McCreery MA BA (Hons) MRTPI

An Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 01 May 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/G2245/D/19/3240094

The Old Bakehouse, Six Bells Lane, Sevenoaks TN13 1JE

- 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 Saleem Ali against the decision of Sevenoaks District Council.
 - The application Ref 18/00577/HOUSE, dated 14 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 5 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of disused outbuildings (washroom and outdoor WC), and an enclosed courtyard into a one-bedroom annex for the Old Bakehouse.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The appeal site is located within the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area and close to a number of listed buildings. In deciding this appeal I have therefore paid special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings and preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area¹.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area and the effect on nearby listed buildings.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within a core of historic buildings that are accessed via a footpath from Six Bells Lane and Sevenoaks High Street. The character of the immediate area is predominantly residential with traditional cottages that are mostly 2 storeys and subservient outbuildings closely packed in irregular configurations that reinforces the historic nature of the locality.

¹ S66(1) and S72(1) Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

5. The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan identifies the area as including the historic focus of the town. Six Bells Lane is characterised as a picturesque backwater off the High Street, with a footpath leading steeply downhill past a series of cottages, small scale with a distinctively different character from the High Street. As the appeal site is located on a footpath just off Six Bells Lane it shares many of these characteristics.
6. The statutorily listed building at 8 Six Bells Lane is also located adjacent to the site and there are a number of locally listed buildings nearby, including the adjacent 5 and 6 Six Bells Lane and the Old Bakehouse.
7. The site comprises an open courtyard, that is accessible directly from the adjacent footpath, and two outbuildings. The larger of the outbuildings has a pitched roof with a gable facing into the courtyard. The smaller outbuilding is orientated differently and has a steeper mono pitched roof. The courtyard and buildings are associated with the Old Bakehouse, which is a residential property located opposite on the other side of the footpath.
8. The appeal proposal would enclose the open courtyard and incorporate the 2 outbuildings to provide an annex to the Old Bakehouse. The main external changes includes the provision of a single pitched roof form that would span the courtyard and both outbuildings and create a new gable facing towards the footpath. The plans indicate that changes to the height of the walls at the boundary of the site would be required in order to accommodate the new roof form.
9. Due to the width of the appeal site, the span of the proposed roof form would be considerable when compared to those evident on outbuildings in the general locality. The effect would be to create a very shallow pitched roof that would appear as a single large roof form, in particular when viewed from neighbouring buildings. I do not consider the principle of a gable fronted outbuilding to be a concern in itself. However, the scale and appearance of the roof of the proposed development would bring a uniformity and prominence to the appearance of the outbuildings. This would look out of character in an area where outbuildings are generally of a small scale, reinforcing their subservience to their historic parent buildings, and exhibit a higher degree of variety in roof form and orientation that contributes to the character and appearance of the area.
10. In light of the above, I conclude that the proposed development would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area and, given their proximity to the appeal site, harm the setting of nearby listed buildings and fail to preserve their particular significance.
11. I note concerns raised by the Council about how the proposed development would be constructed and its relationship with the outbuilding and other potentially historic fabric of the adjoining listed building at 8 Six Bells Lane. I also note that the extent of listed structures and other historic fabric is disputed by the parties.

12. Notwithstanding this, I see limited evidence before me that properly identifies nearby potentially historic fabric and assesses its significance. Nor do I have firm evidence about the extent of demolition and rebuilding that would be necessary in connection with the proposed development. I am mindful of the need to ensure that the assessments necessary to support proposals are proportionate. However, on the evidence presented I am unable to conclude that the nature and extent of the development would not lead to substantial harm to nearby heritage assets as set out in paragraph 195 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).
13. Given the considerable weight to be given to the presumption that preservation of heritage assets is desirable and the need to properly assess the nature, extent and importance of their significance, it would not be appropriate to require this work to be undertaken as a condition of planning permission.
14. I have considered the appellant's points on public benefits to weigh against the harm identified to nearby heritage assets and the tests set out in paragraphs 195 and 196 of the Framework. Given the available evidence and level of harm identified above, including issues relating to the assessment of historic fabric, I give limited weight to the stated public benefits, including the view that the proposed development would lead to the optimum viable use of the site or remove the risk of the asset falling into disrepair.
15. In light of the above, I conclude that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and the setting of nearby listed buildings. The proposal would also fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area. Consequently, I find conflict with policies in the Sevenoaks Local Plan, in particular Policy SP1 of the Sevenoaks Core Strategy and Policies EN1 and EN4 of the Sevenoaks Allocation and Development Management Plan which, taken together, seeks to ensure that new development achieves a high standard of design and preserves and enhances the historic character of the area and its assets.

Conclusion

16. For the above reasons the appeal is dismissed.

D. R. McCreery

INSPECTOR