
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 July 2020

by Jonathon Parsons MSc BSc(Hons) DipTP Cert(Urb) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/20/3250547

Manor Farm, Brookstones, Sydenham, Chinnor OX39 4LZ

- 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 J Quesnel against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref P20/S0011/FUL, dated 20 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 26 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is the conversion and alteration of an existing barn to form a dwelling with parking and amenity space.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application originally proposed a 'ceramic rain screen' exterior which was designed to take the form and appearance of stacked hay bales. This was to be used on the four bay side and rear back (part) of the new dwelling. In the appeal, an alternative material is proposed; black corrugated sheeting, to match the other proposed elevations of the converted dwelling and the material of the existing barn.
3. Irrespective of the merits of this alternative, this would materially alter the nature of the proposal because it would cover a significant part of the building. Such a scheme was not before the Council when it determined the application and third parties may not be aware or be expecting such a material change during the appeal process. There is no evidence that the appellant has consulted with third parties before submitting the alternative scheme. For all these reasons, consideration of the alternative scheme would prejudice their interests and the original material, 'ceramic rain screen', has been considered in this appeal and not the alternative materials.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, having regard to the setting of a listed building at Manor Farmhouse.

Reasons

5. The appeal site comprises a detached 'Dutch Barn' on the southern edge of a group of buildings at Manor Farm which is accessed off a road known as Brookstones. The barn is four bays wide and steel framed, with a semi barrel

- shaped roof. It is open on one elevation, with remaining elevations (including the roof), finished with black corrugated metal sheeting. The remaining buildings at Manor Farm consist of a farmhouse, Grade II listed, and a range of traditional and modern agricultural buildings, in residential, storage and equine uses. There is an extant permission and listed building consent for many of these buildings, to the south and north of the farmhouse, to be converted and altered to form four dwellings.
6. Outside of the Manor Farm building complex, there is a group of dwellings at Manor Farm Cottages to the south and a further group of farm buildings to the north. However, the farm and its buildings including the 'Dutch Barn' building, are located outside of the settlement of Sydenham, and they have a distinctly rural context because they are predominantly surrounded by fields and paddocks.
 7. For the re-use or adaptation of rural buildings outside built-up areas, South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP) policy E8 states, amongst other matters, that the form, bulk and general design of the building should be in keeping with its surroundings and that the fabric and essential character should be maintained.
 8. The proposed dwelling would be contained wholly within the form and fabric of the existing building, and parking areas would utilise existing hard surfaced areas. Access to the dwelling would be via that existing off Brookstones which serves the farm. Existing sheet cladding on the end elevation directly facing the road and the yard behind would be retained, with minimal alteration. The main entrance into the dwelling would be sited unobtrusively within the end sheet clad elevation facing Brookstones. Amenity space provision would be provided within existing fenced areas to the south and west of the converted building. The appellant would accept a condition removing permitted development rights for extension and alteration of the converted barn.
 9. However, there would also be significant glazed recesses within the remaining side and rear elevations which would be noticeable features due to their width, height and contemporary design. On the four bay side elevation, the glazing would extend vertically up above a plinth to the roof eaves whilst on the rear elevation, the glazing would extend up from just above ground level to the roof eaves. Such glazing extent would give rise to a significantly domesticated appearance and striking design which would be markedly at odds with the rural character and appearance of the building and its context. Furthermore, the 'ceramic rain screen' cladding system would be arranged in flat panels between columns and along with the recessed glazing, this would result in a rather modular and contrived appearance.
 10. The converted building would also have its main glazed areas facing the countryside. This exposure would contrast with the existing buildings around Manor Farm which have openings mainly facing onto yard areas. They are also mainly smaller in storey scale and height. Furthermore, even if the permitted conversion and alterations of the farm buildings were implemented, dwellings would be low-key in appearance due to their mainly single storey scale and arrangement facing onto original yard areas.
 11. There is a path to the south and south west of the 'Dutch Barn' but this is not a public right of way. The barn is already a prominent feature when seen from Brookstones. Nevertheless, the infilled four bay side elevation would be

particularly obtrusive by reason of its design and materials. This would create a domesticated building markedly out of step with the distinctly rural character and appearance of the area.

12. Turning to the listed building, Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.
13. The seventeenth century Manor Farmhouse sits within a complex of mainly traditional rural buildings. It has a rough cast exterior, probably on brick, old plain tile roof and sash windows. There is a modern canopy structure covering a courtyard formed by the farmhouse and buildings to the north. Projecting from the north-west of the farmhouse, there is a substantial single storey section, that links the farmhouse with a former barn. Some of the surrounding buildings are of more recent and modern construction. Nevertheless, these surrounding buildings and additions are subordinate in scale and use to the farmhouse and the listed building retains agrarian historical and architectural qualities that are of significance and importance. The distinctly rural context contributes to this significance.
14. The permitted conversion and alterations of surrounding buildings to form four dwellings would still be in keeping with this farmstead setting due to their scale and orientation facing onto yard areas. The 'Dutch Barn' has a modern utilitarian construction, being erected in the 1970s and has open four bay elevation facing the countryside. It has never related to the yard area behind which other more traditional buildings face onto. Nevertheless, it has a rural appearance due to its use and overall, the agricultural barn has a positive effect on the setting of the listed building.
15. However, the contemporary design of the conversion would contrast markedly with traditional character and appearance of the complex of buildings at Manor Farm. The converted building would have its main fenestrated elevations outwardly facing the countryside and the development would be in a prominent location along Brookstones at the entrance into Manor Farm. As a result, there would be an adverse impact on the wider rural setting of Manor Farmhouse and its significance as a listed building.
16. A residential conversion of a 'Dutch Barn' in a neighbouring village of Kingsley has won a design award. However, this scheme had the benefit of being inward looking towards existing buildings and had little alteration on elevations facing the open countryside. For this reason, there are significant material differences in comparison with the appeal proposal. In any case, every proposal has to be considered on its particular planning merits.
17. For all these reasons, there would be harm to the character and appearance of the area, including the setting of Manor Farmhouse. Accordingly, the proposal would be contrary to policies CSQ3 and CSEN3 of the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (CS) (2012) and policies D1, G2, G4, C4, E8 and CON5 of the SOLP.

Other matters

18. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) makes clear, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a

designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.

19. In accordance with the Framework, the type of harm identified above would be less than substantial in respect of Manor Farmhouse. It is necessary that this identified harm is weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The proposal would boost housing supply. Framework policy recognises the value and contribution that small and medium sized sites can make to meeting housing requirements and supports the development of windfall sites. Future occupiers would enhance and maintain the vitality of a rural community. Nevertheless, the benefits also have to be weighed against the adverse impact on the significance of the listed building which considerable importance and weight is required to be attached. Furthermore, the value of the benefits would be diminished by reason of the proposal being for a single dwelling. Thus, the harm to significance would outweigh the scheme's benefits.
20. By reason of the harm to character and appearance, there would be a conflict with emerging policies SYD3 (design) and SYD4 (local heritage assets) of the emerging Sydenham Neighbourhood Plan.

Conclusion

21. The proposal would not accord with the development plan and there are no considerations to outweigh that finding. Therefore, for the reasons set out above, this appeal is dismissed.

Jonathon Parsons

INSPECTOR