



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 10 November 2020

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13th November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C3620/W/20/3245321

The Punchbowl Inn (PH), Okewood Hill, Dorking, Surrey RH5 5PU

- 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 Nathan Williams against the decision of Mole Valley District Council.
- The application Ref MO/2019/1667/PLA, dated 18 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 29 November 2019.
- The development proposed is conversion of existing storage outbuilding and construction of a new pitched roof to create 8 holiday letting rooms.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for conversion of existing storage outbuilding and construction of a new pitched roof to create 8 holiday letting rooms at The Punchbowl Inn (PH), Okewood Hill, Dorking, Surrey RH5 5PU in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref MO/2019/1667/PLA, dated 18 September 2019 subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on:
 - i) the character and appearance of the area;
 - ii) the setting of the Punchbowl Inn, a Grade II listed building; and
 - iii) the living conditions of the occupiers of Punchmead with particular regard to whether or not it would be overbearing.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The appeal site is within the countryside and an identified Area of Great Landscape Value, and is part of a small loose cluster of buildings. Around these buildings and lining the roads near to the site are established hedgerows and many large trees, but there remain some views towards the surrounding open landscape, farmland and woodland. Together with the scattered, informal layout of the buildings, this gives the area a significantly open and rural character.
4. The appeal proposes the extension and conversion of a relatively deep outbuilding to the side of the Punchbowl Inn. Buildings and vegetation on and around the site block views of the appeal outbuilding from much of the surrounding area. However, where it is visible, its modern flat-roof design and materials, and lack of architectural detailing is somewhat at odds with the predominantly traditional form and materials of other nearby buildings.

5. The proposal would add a first floor level to the building, increasing its height and overall bulk and mass. However, the building is not in a location which currently provides for unimpeded open views across or through the site which would be blocked or obscured by the development. The extension would be fairly deep given the existing footprint of the building, but would not be of significant width, and the accommodation would be provided within the roof level. Although higher than the current flat roof, the building would remain much lower than the Punchbowl Inn which is two-storey so that its overall height and scale would appear fairly modest in comparison. The half-hip design of the roof would further help to lessen its overall bulk, and while there would be dormers, these would be of limited width and would also be set back and set down within the host roofslope so that they would not be disproportionate. Taking these factors in combination, I do not consider that the scale of the building would be excessive on the site or that the open character of the area would be harmed.
6. In addition, although the appeal building is of greater depth than is typical, I noted outbuildings of varying scales and designs, often with pitched roof forms, to both neighbouring dwellings and other nearby sites. Against this variety, I do not consider that the scale or design of the building would be striking. In my view, the roof design, and tiles and timber cladding materials would also be more in keeping with the rural character of the area than the unsympathetic flat roof, and the addition of fenestration would provide interest and relief, helping to break up the depth and visual impact of the building.
7. The upper part of the roof would project higher than the adjacent outbuilding which currently obscures some views of the appeal building from the street, increasing its visibility. Even so, it would continue to restrict views of much of the development on approaches from the west of the site, and the vegetation around the site and the Punchbowl Inn would also provide screening from many other viewpoints. This, along with the considerable set back from the street, would significantly lessen the visual impact and prominence of the development.
8. Irrespective of permission previously granted for conversion of the building for a smaller number of units, I have no reason to doubt that the proposal for additional accommodation would further help to support the viability of the existing business on the site and the rural economy,. The size of the building would be increased and there would be some views of it from the surrounding area, but it would be seen as part of the existing developed site. In this context, and for all of the above reasons, I find that the building would continue to appear as a subordinate and ancillary structure on the site and its scale and appearance would be compatible with the rural character of this part of the countryside.
9. I therefore conclude on this main issue that the character and appearance of the area would not be unacceptably harmed. Accordingly, I find no conflict with Saved Policy RUD19 of the Mole Valley Local Plan 2000 (LP) which requires, amongst other things, that extensions to buildings in the countryside do not adversely affect the building or surroundings and that development is in keeping. For similar reasons, I find no conflict with requirements within the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) that development responds to local character and respects the character of the countryside.

Listed Building

10. The listing description identifies that the Grade II listed Punchbowl Inn was formerly a house dating from the C17. There are later extensions to the side

and rear of the building, but it has an attractive traditional appearance which contributes to the rural character of the area, and it includes distinctive fishscale tile hanging and gable end cross wings which are prominent in views from the street. In my view, the significance of the building derives principally from the resulting aesthetic interest, together with the building's historic interest.

11. The modern design of the appeal building with a flat roof and rudimentary detailing offer an incongruous contrast in fairly close proximity to the listed building, and the single-storey scale and limited openings give notable horizontal emphasis to its depth. As a consequence, I agree with the Council's Historic Environment Officer that it detracts from the setting of the listed building.
12. The part of the site occupied by the appeal building plays little role in affording views towards the Punchbowl Inn given the relationship with adjacent buildings and vegetation which essentially precludes public views across it and partly screens private views from Punchmead. The impact of the proposal on direct views to the listed building and its appreciation would therefore be very limited.
13. The development would be seen together with the Punchbowl Inn from some of the surrounding area. Nevertheless, I have already found that the development would not diminish the rural character of this locality. The building's eaves and roof ridge would be set well below the respective eaves and ridge of the Punchbowl Inn, and the dormers and rooflights would be of small scale in comparison to the host roofslopes. Notwithstanding its existing depth, the overall footprint of the outbuilding would also be much more modest than the Punchbowl Inn. Irrespective of the increased height and scale, I therefore consider that the building would remain a clearly subordinate feature. Its greater set back would also lessen the prominence of the building and reinforce its subservience to the Punchbowl Inn. For these reasons, I am satisfied that it would not compete with or detract from the eminence of the listed building. The appeal building is also already of much greater footprint than other outbuildings on the site, and from my visit and the information before me, I see no reason that its additional height or scale against these would be harmful.
14. Moreover, I consider that the proposed external finishes and half-hipped roof form would be more sympathetic to the existing development on the site, and details of doors which appropriately respect the listed building and rural character of the area can be secured by a planning condition. Against the brick, render and tile hanging to the Punchbowl Inn, the timber boarding to the upper part of the building would additionally emphasise its subordinate appearance.
15. For all of these reasons, I conclude on this main issue that the proposal would preserve the setting and special interest of the Punchbowl Inn as required by Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (LBCA), and its significance and character would not be harmed. Accordingly, I find no conflict with Saved Policy ENV43 of the LP or Policy CS14 of the Mole Valley Core Strategy 2009 which together broadly require, amongst other things, protection for the historic environment and the character or setting of listed buildings. I similarly find no conflict with requirements within the Framework seeking the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets.

Living Conditions

16. The development would be fairly close to the boundary of the site with the adjacent dwelling of Punchmead. There is some screening by vegetation, but

this would not obscure views of the upper part of the building which would run for some way to the side of the neighbouring garden.

17. However, Punchmead occupies a large plot and the dwelling itself is set in from the boundary. While I acknowledge the depth of the building and that it would be visible from some of the windows to the property, with regard to the intervening distance and the overall height and scale of the building I am satisfied that it would not be unduly prominent or cause loss of light to them. In addition, I saw an outbuilding and mature vegetation within the neighbouring site closest to the boundary. These would provide somewhat of a buffer to the development, limiting its visual impact when seen from the neighbouring site. Notwithstanding its depth, the proportion of the large garden as a whole that the building would adjoin would not be excessive. I do not therefore consider that the development would be overly dominant or overbearing so as to detract meaningfully from the use or enjoyment of the space or from the quality of life of occupiers.
18. Rooflights to the rear of the building would serve stairwells and bathrooms rather than habitable rooms, and a planning condition could require further details of their specification to avoid overlooking to the neighbouring windows or garden. Given the size of the rooflights and that 4 would serve bathrooms which are unlikely to be occupied for prolonged periods, I also see no reason that they would give rise to unacceptable light pollution, nor that occupation of the accommodation would result in excessive or disruptive noise.
19. I therefore conclude on this main issue that the proposal would not cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of Punchmead. As a consequence, it would comply with Policy ENV22 of the LP which requires, amongst other things, that development does not significantly harm the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.

Other Matters

20. The appeal site is within the Okewood Hill Conservation Area (CA). The Council has not identified specific concerns in relation to the effect of the development on the CA, but as required by section 72(1) of the LBCA I have paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA. Nevertheless, I have already found that the proposal would maintain the rural character of the area and preserve the setting of the listed building. I am also satisfied that the proposal would not detract from important views within the CA in accordance with Policy ENV43 of the LP, and that the character, appearance and the significance of the CA would be preserved.

Conditions

21. I have considered suggested conditions having regard to the tests set out at paragraph 55 of the Framework, and have amended some of the wording accordingly or for the sake of clarity. In addition to the standard time limit condition (1), I have imposed a condition specifying the approved plans (2) for the avoidance of doubt and in the interest of certainty. Conditions requiring details of materials (3) and of joinery (4) are necessary to ensure a satisfactory appearance. The appellant has agreed the wording of the former which is a pre-commencement condition in order to ensure that it has the intended effect given that the proposal involves the conversion and extension of an existing

building. In the interests of the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers, a condition referred to within the Council's report on the application is necessary to ensure that rooflights do not result in unacceptable overlooking (5). A further condition to restrict the use of the building to holiday accommodation (6) is necessary in the interests of the rural economy and given the location of the site within the countryside.

Conclusion

22. The proposal would comply with the development plan when it is read as a whole and material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached. For the reasons given above, I therefore conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 18/36/SP, 18/36/1 and 18/36/3 Rev A.
- 3) No development shall commence until details and samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 4) Notwithstanding the details shown on the submitted plans, details of all external joinery, windows, rooflights and doors shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the installation of the relevant feature. Details shall include their materials, method of opening, large-scale drawings showing sections through mullions, transoms and glazing bars and a reveal to window and door openings. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 5) Before the development hereby permitted is first occupied, the rooflights to the west elevation shall be obscure glazed and designed to open only in accordance with details which have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The rooflights shall thereafter be retained in accordance with the approved details.
- 6) The accommodation hereby permitted shall not be occupied at any time other than for holiday let purposes ancillary to the Punchbowl Inn use of the application site, and specifically shall not be used by any person as a separate unit or units of residential accommodation as a person's sole, or main place of residence.