



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 25 January 2021

by Mr Andrew Smith BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9th February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/A1910/D/20/3260928

1 Brownlow Farm Barns, Pouchen End Lane, Hemel Hempstead HP1 2SN

- 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 & Mrs Halloran against the decision of Dacorum Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/01546/FHA, dated 17 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 12 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is loft conversion to habitable space addition of 2 conservation style roof lights and small gable window.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. It is apparent from the evidence before me that planning permission¹ was granted at the site in June 2020 for a loft conversion involving the provision of a small gable window, and that the Council's objections are focussed upon the intended installation of two conservation style roof lights (the roof lights). I have formulated the main issue in this appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

3. The effect of the roof lights upon the character and appearance of the rural area, having particular regard to the effect upon the significance of a non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

4. The appeal site forms part of a wider complex of compactly positioned and formally laid out brick-built buildings known as Brownlow Farm Barns (the complex), which have previously been converted for residential purposes. It is my understanding that the complex dates to the mid-nineteenth century. It is of sufficient historic interest to rightfully be considered a non-designated heritage asset. The complex's significance is drawn, in part, from its simplistic and traditional agricultural style and form, its relevance to the historic evolution and rural history of the area and the inherent ruralness of its surroundings.
5. Both roof slopes that cover the particular linear building that contains the appeal property (the building) are constructed from clay tiles and do not currently contain roof light openings. The building's roof slopes are of

¹ 20/00826/FHA

- generous expanse and, being of consistent and simple composition, contribute to the complex being read and experienced as having an agricultural origin.
6. The intended front-facing roof light would have visibility upon approach from the site's Pouchen End Lane entrance point and would be discernible at points along the Lane notwithstanding the existence of hedgerow planting. Given the distances involved, the rear-facing roof light would likely be difficult to clearly distinguish from Berkhamsted Road. Nevertheless, a public footpath runs an approximate north-south axis in proximity to the rear of the complex and offers unimpeded viewing opportunities of the building at relatively close quarters.
 7. I note that various existing roof lights already serve the complex. However, these tend to be discreetly located to inward facing slopes and are often positioned at low height. Indeed, their discreet positioning is particularly apparent when the complex is viewed from the public footpath where continuous and uninterrupted roof slopes are readily appreciable.
 8. A previous appeal decision² appears in the evidence before me, where planning permission was granted for a single conservation roof light to a different residential unit contained within the complex. Reference is made within that Inspector's reasoning to a taller two storey gable-fronted unit of more domestic character and appearance, which I understand to constitute the building under consideration here. Nevertheless, no alterations to the building were before that Inspector for consideration. Furthermore, notwithstanding its two-storey height, the building (unlike the detached farmhouse that sits to the south east) forms an integral part of the complex. Indeed, the simple composition of the building's clay tile roof slopes contribute to the complex's heritage significance.
 9. I note that planning permission is required for the roof lights by virtue of permitted development rights having been removed when permission³ was originally granted to convert the buildings in June 2004. Such circumstances offer decision-makers the opportunity to make informed judgements based upon the individual merits of any given proposal. The roof lights would constitute small-scale alterations and would be sensitively designed in so far as being of flush-fitting conservation style. Even so, by virtue of their visible domesticating influence, the roof lights would cause harm to the heritage significance of the complex as a non-designated heritage asset.
 10. As set out at paragraph 197 of the National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (the Framework), the effect of a scheme upon the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determination and a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm and the significance of the asset. Whilst the level of harm in this instance would be fairly modest, any benefit brought about by improving the usefulness of the property's loft area would attract minimal weight insufficient to outweigh the harm I have identified. This is particularly so when noting the primarily private nature of the benefit and the limited extent of loft space under consideration.
 11. For the above reasons the roof lights would cause harm to the character and appearance of the rural area, having particular regard to the effect upon the significance of a non-designated heritage asset. The proposal conflicts with

² APP/A1910/D/12/2181552

³ 4/00972/03/FUL

Policy CS27 of the Dacorum Core Strategy (September 2013) (the Core Strategy) and with the Framework in so far as these policies set out that the integrity, setting and distinctiveness of designated and undesignated heritage assets will be protected, conserved and if appropriate enhanced.

Other Matters

12. Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy sets out that national Green Belt policy to protect the openness and character of the Green Belt shall be applied. As the intended alterations would not result in disproportionate additions to a building, the proposal would not be inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
13. Nevertheless, the proposal conflicts with the development plan when read as a whole, and material considerations do not lead me to a decision otherwise.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Andrew Smith

INSPECTOR