



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 January 2021

by M Chalk BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/J1915/W/20/3258182

29 Station Road, Sawbridgeworth CM21 9JY

- 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 Colin Hardy against the decision of East Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 3/20/1081/FUL, dated 10 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 13 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is conversion, and extension, of existing barn outbuilding into a self-contained residential unit and associated development.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The planning application the subject of this appeal was accompanied by an application for listed building consent, which the Council granted. This appeal therefore only seeks planning permission for the development proposed and has been determined on that basis.

Background and Main Issue

3. Although not forming part of the Council's reason for refusal, the site lies within the curtilage of a Grade II listed building known as 27, 29 and 31 Station Road, and within the Sawbridgeworth Conservation Area (the CA). The statutory duties set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) require that I pay special attention to the desirability of preserving the setting of the listed building and preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. I have therefore included the effects of the development on these as the main issues. As these have been addressed in the appellant's planning and appeal statements, and the Council's delegated report, and the main parties have also been given the chance to make further comments, this is not prejudicial to their interests.
4. The main issues are therefore whether the development proposed:
 - Would preserve the setting of the Grade II listed building; and,
 - Would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Sawbridgeworth Conservation Area.

Reasons

Setting of the listed building

5. Numbers 27, 29 and 31 Station Road were formerly one 17th century long timberframed house. The building has a steep, half-hipped tile roof, plastered and weatherboarded elevations and multi-paned sash windows. It occupies an imposing position at the brow of a hill.
6. The listed building is prominently sited close to the highway along Station Road and positioned so that it faces along Knight Street. It is an important part of the Station Road street scene, and visible in the surrounding area in part due to its elevated position. Its age, scale and visibility at a crossroads suggest that it was of some prominence in the evolution of the village. The significance of the listed building derives from its retained historic fabric and its position within the Station Road street scene and relative to the road layout, which the historic maps contained within the Council's Conservation Area Appraisal show has been consistent in this area since at least the mid 19th Century. These maps also show an outbuilding to the rear of the listed building from the late 19th Century. Later maps also show a smaller rear outbuilding within the grounds of the listed building. A modern extension to No 29 has reduced the space between that property and the outbuilding, but the ancillary relationship of the outbuilding to the house remains clear due to the outbuilding's backland siting, small size and lower height.
7. Within this context the barn outbuilding is a subordinate structure located to the rear of the listed building, generally consistent with the size and siting shown on the historic maps. The outbuilding has a dual-pitched roof that makes it quite prominent from certain angles. However, as it is quite shallow it does not appear unduly prominent in the setting of the listed building. The proposed extension to the outbuilding would substantially increase its depth. Even with the slightly lower ridgeline over the extension the enlarged footprint would result in the outbuilding appearing significantly more prominent within the setting of the listed building, to the detriment of the interpretation of its historic relationship to the listed building. The conversion of the outbuilding to a separate dwelling would also introduce an independent use for which no historic evidence exists. When taken with the greater size and prominence of the outbuilding, this would fail to preserve the relationship with the listed building as an ancillary and subordinate structure.
8. The Council has granted listed building consent for the works. However, there is limited information before me with regard to the significance of the outbuilding, and that consent does not excuse me from carrying out my statutory duties as required by Section 66 of the Act.
9. The development proposed would therefore fail to preserve the setting of the listed building. It would conflict with the requirements of the Act and Policy HA1 of the East Herts District Plan 2018 (the DP) which states that development proposals should preserve and where appropriate enhance the historic environment of East Herts.

Conservation Area

10. The Council's Conservation Area Appraisal notes that the terrace is a landmark building within the CA. Together with the bakery opposite it frames the landscape dominated prospect along Station Road, contributing to the semi-

rural character along that stretch of Station Road as it transitions between the built-up area of the settlement and the countryside beyond. The outbuilding is a peripheral feature in such views due to its siting to the rear of the terrace, set back from the road, although it is visible from Bullfields between the trees that line the junction with Station Road.

11. The outbuilding is at the edge of the CA, with properties on Leat Close and Bullfields beyond lying outside of the CA. The outbuilding is unique in the immediate vicinity as a timber weatherboarded structure of substantial size and backland siting, although there are smaller garages and other outbuildings visible within the grounds of properties in Leat Close and Station Road. The CA derives its significance in part from the historic relationships between buildings and their surroundings, as well as from the usage of the buildings within it.
12. The extension and conversion of the building would result in it becoming more prominent in its setting due to its greater size, and it would not appear as a subservient outbuilding to the terrace. The character of the site would change due to the independent use of the building. However, as a one-bedroom dwelling the intensity of use would be little different to that of a domestic store.
13. Consequently, it is the enlargement of the outbuilding that would have the greatest effect on the CA. The building is substantially larger than any other outbuilding visible in the surrounding area, and further enlargement would result in it appearing even more prominent in its setting. This would be out of keeping with the prevailing pattern of development in the area, which does not typically include significant backland development that is visible in the street scene.
14. The appeal proposal would therefore also fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA, contrary to the requirements of the Act and of Policy HA1 of the DP, which are set out above.

Other Matters

15. There has been support for the appeal proposals from local residents. However, this does not overcome the identified harm to the designated heritage assets that would result from the development proposed.

Planning balance

16. The harm arising from failure to preserve the setting of the listed building and to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA would be experienced principally in the immediate setting of the appeal site. It would amount to less than substantial harm, when weighed against the significance of the listed building and the CA as a whole. The National Planning Policy Framework states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the assets' conservation irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to less than substantial harm.
17. The appeal proposal would result in public benefit from the creation of a new dwelling, supporting the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes. While there is no indication that the Council has a shortfall in its housing land supply, this does not diminish the value of new housing.

18. Nevertheless, there would be limited public benefits arising given the scale of development. These limited benefits would not, in this instance, outweigh the great weight to be given to the harm to the designated heritage assets.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons set out above, the appeal fails.

M Chalk

INSPECTOR