



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 March 2021

by Mike Hayden BSc DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 17 May 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/G2815/Y/20/3262985

Spring Barn, 1 Manor Farm, Main Street, Yarwell PE8 6PR

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr and Mrs Voyle against the decision of East Northamptonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00736/LBC, dated 18 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 17 August 2020.
 - The works proposed are the modification to two rear dormer windows.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this case is the effect of the proposed works on the special architectural and historic interest of Spring Barn, as a listed building within the curtilage of Manor Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building.

Reasons

3. Spring Barn is one of a number of former farm buildings, which are grouped within the curtilage of Manor Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building. Although not mentioned in the list description for Manor Farmhouse, as a curtilage building, Spring Barn forms part of the statutory listing of Manor Farmhouse, is of historic and architectural value in its own right and contributes to the heritage significance of the farmhouse and its group.
4. Manor Farmhouse itself dates from the early C17. Spring Barn was originally a threshing barn, constructed in the C19. Part of the special historic interest of the appeal building and its group, is that they show the progression of the farm over several centuries. As noted in the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), it is possible to see how informal farmyards were defined by the development of barns, granaries and open sheds, as is the case here. Very few such groupings have survived intact and therefore it is important that the historical integrity of the buildings that form the listing in this case is maintained.
5. Spring Barn was converted to residential use in the late 1990s, in a sympathetic manner that has preserved its architectural and historic value. While the building has been altered for domestic use, externally it retains its traditional agricultural form and character. This is seen in the retention and reuse of the historic pattern of external openings in the barn, including those which contained its full height threshing doors, and through the preservation of much

of the fabric of its original limestone walls, by limiting the number, size and position of additional doors and windows to those necessary for its residential use. Although the three dormer windows inserted into the barn roof are not characteristic of the vernacular architecture of agricultural buildings, their size and proportions reflect those of other openings in the building, and they are contained entirely within the roof slope, preserving the strong eaves line, which is an important aesthetic feature of the former barn, separating its slate roof and stone walls. As such, the appeal building continues to make an important contribution to the heritage significance and special interest of this group of former farm buildings.

6. The proposed works would extend the overall height of the two outer dormers, by lowering the window sills beneath the eaves and gutter of the building, introducing two further openings into the stone wall. Whilst dormer windows are a common feature on dwellings within the village, they are predominantly designed to sit at or above the eaves line. There some examples of dormers dropping below eaves, but these do not appear to be on former agricultural buildings and, therefore, are not obviously characteristic of the vernacular architecture of farm buildings in the area.
7. I acknowledge that high level apertures below the eaves line are a common feature on traditional farm buildings, originally to allow access to mezzanine floors, and that there was one such opening on the rear elevation of Spring Barn, which was blocked up when the building was converted. However, in this case the proposed works would result in two high level openings, which would extend from the roof through the eaves line and into the stone wall. Their depth and overall size would be out of proportion with those of the other window openings in the building, and their effect in breaching the eaves line would interfere with and fail to preserve an important feature of the building's traditional agricultural character and appearance, as described above.
8. Whilst the proposed alterations are modest and would be on the rear elevation of the building, nonetheless they would visible from adjoining properties and in glimpsed views from the footpath to the north east of the appeal property. Moreover, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest, irrespective of whether or not public views can be gained. Therefore, for all of these reasons, I find that the proposed works would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of Spring Barn and its heritage significance as a former farm building within the curtilage of Manor Farmhouse. In terms of the scales of harm identified in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), I consider that the harm caused to the significance of the heritage asset in this case would be less than substantial.
9. Paragraph 196 of the Framework requires that less than substantial harm to a heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In terms of the weight to be attached to the harm, paragraph 193 of the Framework states that 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, irrespective of whether the harm amounts to substantial or less than substantial harm. In light of this and the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, I attach considerable weight to the harm the proposal would cause to its heritage significance.

10. In terms of public benefits, the Planning Practice Guidance¹ (PPG) advises that they should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just a private benefit, but that works to a listed private dwelling which secure its future as a designated heritage asset would be a public benefit. In this case, the justifications given for extending the depth of dormers are to provide safe means of escape from upper floors and ensure sufficient natural light into the first floor bedrooms in line with current the Building Regulations (BR), and to improve views across the fields to the north.
11. Compliance with the BR may be considered a public benefit that can be weighed against the harm. However, as pointed out in the advice of Historic England², the BR only apply to new work and there is no general requirement to upgrade all existing buildings to meet these standards. It is my understanding that the BR make provision for the retention of listed buildings in the form in which they were constructed. There is nothing before me in the evidence which leads me to conclude otherwise in this case. The submitted design and access statement advises that alternative means of escape were investigated, but that all proved to be far more intrusive. However, no details have been provided to enable me to assess this.
12. I understand the desire of the appellants to have more natural light to upper floor rooms and a better view of the countryside, but these are purely private benefits. When choosing to occupy a historic building, acceptance of the limitations of the existing building structure is often a compromise when compared with modern types of accommodation. Therefore, I find that the benefits arising from the works would be largely private, relating to its occupants, and not of demonstrable benefit to the public at large.
13. Accordingly, I conclude that there would be insufficient public benefit to outweigh the identified harm to heritage significance or the special regard to be had to the preservation of the listed building under the Act. As such, the proposal would conflict with Policy 2 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (2016), which seeks to ensure proposals conserve and, where possible, enhance the heritage significance and setting of an historic asset, and compliment their surrounding historic environment through their form, scale, design and materials.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should fail.

M Hayden

INSPECTOR

¹ PPG Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20190723

² Building Regulations Compliance: Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets, Historic England Advice on-line