
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 September 2021

by Benjamin Webb BA(Hons) MA MA MSc PGDip(UD) MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 September 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/U1105/Y/21/3274441

Annexe, Higher House Farm, Branscombe, Devon EX12 3BH

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mrs Nicola Langley against the decision of East Devon District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/1213/LBC, dated 10 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 9 December 2020.
 - The works proposed are addition of solar panels to the roof.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. I have used the Council's description of proposed works in the banner heading above as it is more concise and precise than that used on the application form.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the works would preserve a Grade II listed building, its setting, or any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

4. The Annexe stands within the grounds of Higher House Farm, which is a Grade II listed building. In this regard the Act sets out the desirability of preserving the special interest of listed buildings, and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) makes clear that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets.
5. Insofar as it is relevant to the appeal, the special interest and significance of the listed building resides in its probable C16th origin with C17th improvements, its historic fabric and features, including late C18th and early C19th work, vernacular materials, and apparent historic function as a farmhouse. This appears to be illustrated by a number of historic functional structures within the immediate setting, including the Annexe.
6. A listed building includes any structure that is within its curtilage which has existed since before 1st July 1948. The Annexe was present by the late C19th, and stands alongside the main access, immediately adjacent to Higher House Farm. Its original function has not been described within the submissions, however it features a vehicular entrance, and roadside and gable hatches,

which could indicate possible past use in either a domestic or agricultural context. It was later used as a workshop, and more recently as a domestic garage/holiday accommodation. Given its layout relative to Higher House Farm, and its past and present ownership and ancillary uses, I consider that the Annexe is covered by the listing.

7. The Annexe is largely constructed from stone and carries a hipped roof. Its position alongside and set forward of the front elevation of Higher House Farm means that it is a physically and visually prominent feature within the setting of the latter. This is particularly true in views from the west. The Annexe as such demonstrates a strong spatial, visual and historic relationship with Higher House Farm, as too with other historic structures within the immediate setting, which is further enhanced by its similar vernacular character and construction. In these regards the Annexe holds significance in itself, whilst also making a positive contribution to the special interest and significance of Higher House Farm.
8. The appeal scheme seeks the attachment of solar panels to the two principal roof slopes of the Annexe. These appreciably modern devices would stand proud of the roof, and, unlike the roof tiles, would be large rectilinear slabs finished in black. They would as such be physically and visually distinct additions, which, given the height and location of the Annexe relative to the lane, would be clearly exposed to view from both within and outside the site.
9. Given the above, whether or not the current roof covering is of recent origin, the panels would not complement the historic architectural character or appearance of the Annexe in any obvious way. They would as such appear incongruous, and more so given the relatively large area they would cover. The panels on the westward facing roofslope would furthermore be conspicuous in views of the front elevation of Higher House Farm, providing a source of intrusive visual distraction. The panels would therefore diminish appreciation of the significance of the Annexe, the contribution that this makes to the significance of Higher House Farm, and appreciation of the significance of Higher House Farm itself.
10. Other modern additions have been made to the roof of the Annexe including rooflights and a stove flue. Neither complements its historic character, and each gives rise to visual clutter. The Council however suggests that the flue lacks consent. Either way, I see no reason why such modifications should be held to justify the additional and separate harm that the attachment of the proposed solar panels would cause.
11. Solar panels have been fitted to other buildings within the surrounding area, and an example is cited of consent being granted for mounting solar panels on the roof of a Grade II* listed building. I have however been provided with few details of the latter. In any case, the attachment of solar panels to other buildings elsewhere, be they listed or otherwise, cannot be held to indicate that the adverse site-specific effects of the scheme in question would be acceptable.
12. Indeed, in view of my findings above, the solar panels would fail to preserve the special interest and setting of the listed building, thus conflicting with the expectations of the Act. The harm caused to the significance of the listed building would as a whole be less than substantial. Such harm attracts great weight. In accordance with paragraph 202 of the Framework it is necessary to weigh this harm against the public benefits of the scheme.

13. The appellant states that the solar panels would contribute towards addressing climate change. They would indeed generate 'clean' energy, and reduce the need for use of electricity derived from other sources. The positioning of the panels on the eastward and westward facing roof slopes of the building would however by no means represent the most efficient use of the panels. In this regard the Council has indicated that it would accept panels mounted on the ground as an alternative. Ample open space appears to be available for this to be discretely achieved, and as the panels could be orientated south they would potentially function far more effectively than in the locations proposed.
14. I appreciate that the appellant considers that mounting on the ground is undesirable, however the reasons given do not indicate that this would be impractical. As stated by paragraph 200 of the Framework, any harm to or loss of the significance of a designated heritage requires clear and convincing justification. As alternative ways exist in which the panels could provide greater environmental benefits than would be delivered by the appeal scheme, whilst at the same time avoiding the harm that would be caused by mounting them on the roof, such harm would not be justified. The broader environmental benefits of the scheme would in any case be extremely small in scale. The above being so, I attach no more than negligible weight to the environmental benefits. As such, the harm that would be caused by the proposed works would not be outweighed by public benefits. This indicates that the appeal should be dismissed.
15. For the reasons outlined above I conclude that the scheme would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest and setting of the listed building. It would therefore fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, heritage policy set out within the Framework, and, insofar as it is relevant, conflict with Policy EN9 of the East Devon Local Plan 2013-2031, which generally reiterates national policy.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons set out above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Benjamin Webb

INSPECTOR