



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 8 September 2021

by Paul Thompson DipTRP MAUD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 06 October 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/W/21/3271689

Bennetts Farm, Ashfield Road, Elmswell IP30 9HJ

- 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 Robert Dyball against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/20/05740, dated 11 December 2020, was refused by notice dated 25 February 2021.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing structures and erection of one, part single storey and part two storey, dwelling house and cart lodge.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The National Planning Policy Framework was revised on 20 July 2021 (the Framework). The main parties have had the opportunity to comment upon the relevance of any revised content of the Framework and I have had regard to any responses received in my decision.

Main Issue

3. The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, including the setting of the Grade II listed building known as Dagwood Farmhouse.

Reasons

Significance, setting and site surroundings

4. The appeal concerns a roughly rectangular parcel of land at the end of an access track extending west from Ashfield Road. It is occupied by a row of stables, a water tower and a caravan. To the south, beyond barns converted to residential use, is Dagwood Farmhouse. This is a Grade II listed detached house arranged on L-plan, with attic rooms beneath a thatched roof. It is a timber framed and plastered building and originates from the 17th Century or earlier. Despite later alterations, the significance of the listed building today is as a good example of a well-preserved 17th Century, or earlier, high-status rural farmhouse.
5. Although the converted barns between the site and the listed building share a closer historical association with the farmhouse, the buildings within the site and largely undeveloped nature of the fields and paddock land surrounding Dagwood Farmhouse provide a rural context which forms an integral part of the

historic setting of the farmhouse and contribute to its understanding and significance as a heritage asset, and to the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings.

Effect of the Proposal

6. The proposal would be an alternative to the approved for a single storey dwelling¹ on the site of the existing buildings, which would all be removed. These are generally of low architectural quality and utilitarian appearance, and do not contribute positively to the setting of the listed building, so their removal would be beneficial. The designs of the approved and proposed dwellings both incorporate elements of traditional farm building character and materials but, given the overall extent and arrangement of openings, they would both present overtly domestic exteriors.
7. The form and scale of the two-storey section of the proposal and the overall extent of glazing therein would be more assertive than the approved scheme, which would be considerably lower than the converted barns. These are either single storey or incorporate rooms in their roof spaces. While the roof form of the two-storey element would have a similar appearance to the corresponding part of the approved scheme, there would be greater extent of façade in comparison to the roof. The proposal would therefore be less recessive and stand out as a more prominent and obtrusive form of development that would compete with Dagwood Farmhouse as the only purposely designed and built dwelling within the immediate context of the former farmyard. This would therefore be harmful to the historic rural context and setting of the listed building and the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
8. I accept that the conversion of the barns formerly associated with the farmhouse to separate residential use and the replacement of the buildings within the appeal site with a further dwelling have/will change the historic setting of the listed building. The presence of the converted barns between the site and listed building also reduces the visibility between them. I also note that the Inspector for a previous appeal² at Dagwood Farmhouse referred to the visual relationship of that site to the listed building. However, based on the characteristics of the listed building and its surroundings, I do not find the absence of a visual connection to be a determinative factor, as it is the physical presence of the proposed dwelling beyond the historic farmyard of Dagwood Farmhouse that would be harmful to its significance. For similar reasons, despite other dwellings in the locality being of a varied appearance and scale, including those to the north and south of the site, it is the design and scale of the proposed dwelling in its particular context that would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and their presence would not obviate the harm to the site and its surroundings that would otherwise result from the proposal.

Public benefits

9. The statutory duty in Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) is a matter of considerable importance and weight. Paragraph 197 of the Framework states that the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them

¹ Planning Reference: DC/20/01999, granted permission in July 2020.

² Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/W/19/3239171, for dwellings at the frontage of Dagwood Farmhouse with Ashfield Road.

to viable uses consistent with their conservation should be taken into account in determining applications. Furthermore, paragraph 199 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. Paragraph 206 also suggests that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance.

10. The proposal would be harmful to the setting of the listed buildings, which would have a harmful effect on its significance as a designated heritage asset. In my view the harm that I have identified would equate to less than substantial harm to its significance. In such circumstances, paragraph 202 of the Framework identifies that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of proposal.
11. Like the approved development at the site, the appeal scheme could deliver one dwelling, the only difference being that it would offer four bedrooms and a dedicated study, as opposed to three bedrooms and a room able to be used as a study or bedroom. Despite the fact that the proposal could be built out relatively quickly, the contribution to the local and national supply of housing would be the same as for the approved scheme. Moreover, it would be minor in its extent, so it would only be afforded limited weight.
12. The proposal would result in the removal of unsightly utilitarian buildings which do not contribute positively to the setting of the listed building but, given that the buildings are small and unassuming, this would only equate to a heritage benefit of modest weight.
13. The proposed dwelling would utilise ground source or air-source heat pump technology alongside rainwater harvesting and high standards of insulation. While these would primarily result in private benefits restricted to the appellant, there would be a public benefit in terms of the minimisation of energy consumption. The proposal could achieve a net gain in biodiversity through the proposed ecological enhancement measures set out in the appellant's Ecology Report. There would also be short-term benefits to the local and wider economy from the direct and indirect employment associated with construction works; and future occupiers would be likely to support local shops and services through expenditure. Nonetheless, due to the scale and extent of the proposed development, the weight I could afford these environmental, social and economic benefits would be limited.
14. I afford moderate weight to the benefit of improved visibility to the site access, as it would provide safer conditions for users of the site and highway.
15. I also recognise that the proposal could be said to make more efficient use of a brownfield site and it would be sited in an accessible location, close to the services and facilities in Elmswell, which is designated as a Key Service Centre. However, the Framework is clear that making efficient use of land should include taking into account the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting and the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.
16. The New Homes Bonus recognises the efforts of Councils to bring residential development forward. It would therefore be inappropriate for me give weight to the potential of the proposal to raise money for the Council. Increased Council

tax and Community Infrastructure Levy receipts would also be offset by a corresponding increase in demand on local services, so would not attract positive weight.

17. Other aspects cited in support of the proposal relate to an absence of harm through policy compliance, rather than considerations that provide positive advantages.
18. I am mindful that many of the public benefits that I have outlined above would also be associated with the approved scheme. Nonetheless, taking these together, they would not justify allowing development that would be harmful to the setting of Dagwood Farmhouse. In accordance with paragraphs 199 and 202 of the Framework, considered together, I therefore conclude that the public benefits do not outweigh the great weight to be given to the less than substantial harm that I have identified.

Conclusions on the main issue

19. In light of the above, I conclude that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings, including the setting of Dagwood Farmhouse, which is a Grade II listed building. Hence, the appeal proposal would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraphs 197, 199 and 206 of the Framework and conflicts with the heritage aims of Policy HB1 of the Council's Core Strategy.

Other Matters

20. Oak Farmhouse, Mulberry Farmhouse and Willow Farmhouse are grand farmhouses set back from the western side of Ashfield Road and designated as Grade II listed buildings. I have therefore had regard to the statutory duty referred to in the Act. However, given the proximity and physical relationship of the appeal site with these designated assets, their settings will be preserved and the proposal will not detract from them.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

21. I have already identified the benefits of the appeal scheme as part of the assessment of public benefits in undertaking the necessary balancing exercise in relation to the heritage asset. In terms of harm, the proposed development would not comply with development plan policy in respect of the harm to the setting of the Grade II listed building.
22. This leads me to an overall conclusion that the appeal scheme would not accord with the development plan, when considered as a whole, and I find that the adverse impacts of the proposal are matters of significant weight against the grant of planning permission that comfortably outweigh the claimed benefits.
23. The proposed development would be contrary to the development plan and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which outweigh this finding. Accordingly, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Paul Thompson

INSPECTOR