



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 21 September 2021

by S Edwards BA MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1 November 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/A1720/W/21/3268531

The Tithe Barn, Mill Lane, Titchfield, Fareham PO15 5RB

- 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 Kevin Fraser against the decision of Fareham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref P/20/0778/FP, dated 23 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 18 January 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as 'laying of a top surface to the existing tarmac surface consisting of a top layer of a thin coat of bitumen rolled with 6mm grit'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) published on 20 July 2021 sets out the Government's planning policies for England. Policies within the Framework are material considerations which should be taken into account for the purposes of decision-making from the date of its publication. I have taken account of the updated Framework in determining this appeal.
3. The development subject to this appeal would affect listed buildings located within a conservation area, and I have therefore had special regard to Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
4. Within the listing description, the appeal building is described as Monastic Barn of Titchfield Abbey at Fern Hill Farm, but the parties have referred to it throughout their submissions as the Tithe Barn. For the avoidance of doubt, I have referred to the building as the Tithe Barn or the barn in the banner heading and in my decision.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve the significance of the Grade I listed Tithe Barn or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, the Grade II listed Fern Hill Farmhouse and Titchfield Abbey, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, as derived from their settings, and preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Titchfield Abbey Conservation Area.

Reasons

6. Located within an area of rural character, the Tithe Barn is a large monastic timber-framed building dating from the 15th century, which is constructed of oak, limestone, tile and brick. The building includes two prominent wagon entrances to the eastern side set under hipped tiled roofs, with double-plank door entrances. The barn, which was originally constructed for grain storage for Titchfield Abbey, is sited in the area of the outer precinct of the former Premonstratensian monastic estate.
7. As noted within the listing description, the Tithe Barn holds significant architectural interest, as one of the few surviving great medieval abbey barns, having particular regard to the survival of historic fabric and its monumental proportions. Additionally, the barn's unusual timber framing, which was securely dated to 1407-09, is of exceptional interest in terms of its structural construction and craftsmanship.
8. The significance of the Tithe Barn also derives from its historic interest, as a testimony of agricultural monastic life in Britain from the early 15th century onwards and as an important part of the history of Titchfield Abbey. By reason of this strong historic connection and the rural character of its surroundings, the appeal site makes an important contribution to the significance of Titchfield Abbey and its wider setting. Furthermore, the appeal site also contributes to the special interest of Fern Hill Farmhouse, especially due to the value which the Grade I listed barn and the Grade II listed farmhouse hold collectively, as key components of a historic farmstead.
9. Titchfield Abbey existed for just over 300 years and had 1000 acres of arable land, before being converted to a mansion during the 16th century and largely demolished in the 18th century. Insofar as it relates to this appeal, I find that the special interest of this Scheduled Ancient Monument resides primarily in its high historical significance as a medieval monastery set within spacious, rural grounds, though it is accepted that the former monastic precinct has over the years become somewhat fragmented. There is no doubt that, in particular, the garden centre immediately adjacent to Titchfield Abbey has harmfully eroded the setting of this Scheduled Ancient Monument.
10. The Titchfield Abbey Conservation Area extends over a large rural area around the ruins of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, which lie on the Meon valley floor and sit prominently in the landscape, being visible from many viewpoints. As noted within the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy for Titchfield Abbey¹ (the CAA), the landscape, topography and tranquillity of the valley are important to the character and appearance of the conservation area and provide a setting and a historic context for the scheduled monuments and listed buildings within its boundary.
11. The Tithe Barn, together with Fern Hill Farmhouse, the medieval Titchfield Abbey and its associated ruins and fishponds, to which the CAA adds Place House Cottages, form a group in the landscape on the western side of the valley and the valley floor. For these reasons, it is clear these heritage assets make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of Titchfield Abbey Conservation Area. They would have historically been visually and

¹ Adopted September 203.

functionally linked, and the Tithe Barn and the Abbey in particular retain a degree of intervisibility in the open landscape today, despite the level of screening provided by the vegetation, especially at times of the year when trees are in leaf.

12. There is a large hardstanding area to the front of the listed barn, which is presently used to provide access and parking for events taking place at the site. This car park area has recently been re-surfaced with tarmac, and the appellant sought planning permission retrospectively for the development. The application² was refused by the Council and subsequent planning and enforcement appeals³ have been dismissed. The Inspector found that the existing tarmac surface does not preserve the listed building of Titchfield Barn and its setting, but also the special interest of Fern Hill Farmhouse and Titchfield Abbey as derived from their settings, as well as the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
13. Due to its physical proximity and functional relationship, the proposal would be viewed in association with the Tithe Barn, and affect the setting of this Grade I listed building considerably. Whilst the addition of a thin coat of bitumen rolled with grit may be viewed as a more suitable surfacing compared with the existing tarmac, the proposed development would still present an unduly flat, harsh and formal appearance. Even allowing for vegetation to grow over time on the edges of the car park, the proposal would still clearly be identified as a modern, urban intrusive form of development, which would detract from the agricultural and rural character of the site's immediate surroundings and historic monastic precinct.
14. I appreciate that the Tithe Barn is set away from the Mill Lane road frontage and is therefore not visually prominent within the street scene, but the proposal would nevertheless be noticeable by visitors to the appeal building and users of the nearby footpaths, regardless of whether cars were parked on the hardstanding area.
15. The appeal scheme would consequently erode the special interest of the Tithe Barn, as derived from its setting. Furthermore, the appearance of the proposal would detract from the site's surrounding rural context, and thus erode the appreciation of Titchfield Abbey and Fern Hill Farmhouse, by reason of the inherent links which the Tithe Barn holds with these designated heritage assets. This would inevitably be detrimental to their significance. Given the above, it follows that the proposal would also diminish the contribution which the appeal site currently makes to the Titchfield Abbey Conservation Area, and thus fail to preserve or enhance its character and appearance.
16. In reaching this view, I have considered the conditions suggested by the appellant, in particular to ensure that the colour of the surfacing and its long-term maintenance are agreed with the Local Planning Authority. However, these would not, in my view, overcome the harm resulting from the proposal, and having regard to the available evidence, there is no certainty that, in respect of the latter, it would meet the enforceability test.

² Local Planning Authority Reference P/19/0316/FP.

³ APP/A1720/C/19/3235825 & APP/A1720/W/19/3235531.

17. The area surrounding the barn is largely grassed. However, like the existing hardstanding area, the proposal would be a solid, impermeable surface, which would directly abut the timber thresholds and pillars situated either side of the entrances, thus potentially restricting the ability of the permeable materials to breathe. The appellant's submissions include a Timber Condition Survey⁴, which includes an assessment of the existing surfacing and finds that there is little to no risk of moisture migration into the barn from rain water or runoff from the roof. Due to the gradient of the driveway, any water would however flow away from the building, and it is therefore unlikely that the development would affect the listed building's historic fabric. On this basis, the addition of a French drain within proximity to the threshold of the barn would not be considered necessary.
18. Paragraph 199 of the Framework makes it clear that the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be given to its conservation. As noted above, the development would cause harm to the special interest of the Titchfield Abbey Conservation Area and the Grade II listed Fern Hill Farmhouse, but also the Grade I listed Tithe Barn and Titchfield Abbey Scheduled Ancient Monument, which are among the designated heritage assets of highest importance nationally. Consequently, I ascribe each incidence of harm considerable importance and weight.
19. The harm which would be caused to each individual heritage asset would be less than substantial, and therefore has to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, in accordance with paragraph 202 of the Framework. It is argued that the proposed development would assist with providing safe and easy access for all members of the community, support the use of the appeal building for community events, whilst also making it easier and cheaper to maintain for the charity running the premises. However, in the absence of substantive evidence to the contrary, I cannot be certain that such benefits could not be similarly achieved by providing a car park which would respect its sensitive surroundings. Overall, the presented public benefits would not outweigh the identified harm.
20. My attention has been drawn to an application which has been approved by the Council in recent years within the Titchfield Abbey Conservation Area. Whilst it is noted that the development includes the formation of an access road, the circumstances of this particular scheme are not considered to represent a direct parallel to the proposal before me, having notably regard to the nature of the development, its proximity to designated heritage assets, and thereby effect on their respective setting.
21. For the foregoing reasons, the proposed development would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade I listed Tithe Barn, the Grade II listed Fern Hill Farmhouse and Titchfield Abbey Scheduled Ancient Monument, as derived from their settings. Furthermore, the appeal scheme would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the Titchfield Abbey Conservation Area. It would therefore conflict with Policy CS17 of Fareham Core Strategy (Adopted August 2011) and Policy DSP5 of Fareham Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies (Adopted June 2015). These require development to be of a high quality design, notably by responding positively to

⁴ Timber Condition Survey carried out by Alpine Surveys Ltd, dated 2 February 2021.

and be respectful of the key characteristics of the area, including heritage assets, and refusing proposals that would unacceptably harm the building, its setting or any features or special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Conclusion

22. There are no material considerations which indicate that the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons detailed above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

S Edwards

INSPECTOR