
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 November 2021

by Jonathan Hockley BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 November 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/G2815/Y/21/3270976

31 Main Street, Upper Benefield PE8 5AN

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against the grant of listed building consent subject to conditions.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Paul Falkner against the decision of East Northants District Council.
 - Listed building consent Ref 20/00898/LBC was granted on 5 February 2021 subject to conditions.
 - The works proposed are the partial demolition and rebuild of existing curtilage listed barn.
 - The condition in dispute is No 2 which states that: "Notwithstanding the submitted plans, the roof covering shall be of natural Collyweston stone slate laid to diminishing courses."
 - The reason for the condition is: "To preserve the special character of the listed building and the Upper Benefield Conservation Area in accordance with policy 2 (b) of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy."
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Listed building consent (LBC) and planning permission for the appeal site was granted in February 2021. The appeal that is before me only relates to the LBC (20/00898/LBC). I have thus only considered matters relating to LBC in my main issue and reasoning below.

Background and Main Issue

3. The relevant LBC was granted for the partial demolition and rebuild of an existing curtilage Grade II listed barn subject to conditions, one of which restricted the roof covering of the rebuilt barn to natural Collyweston stone slate, to preserve the character of the listed building and the Upper Benefield Conservation Area. The appellant wishes to remove this restriction and allow a different roof covering. During the application process blue slate was proposed; in the appeal documents the suggested alternative was altered to Cotswold Bradstone tiles. The Council commented on both materials in their statement of case.
4. The main issue in this case therefore is the effect that altering the condition would have on the special interest of the Grade II listed barn and whether the condition is reasonable and necessary.

Reasons

5. Upper Benefield is an attractive linear settlement largely based on the A427. The main street through the village is characterised by a range of historic houses and farmhouses, frequently set close to the road, with various more modern properties often infilling the gaps between the older buildings. Many of the houses are constructed in limestone and collyweston slate roofs are common, which helps to give the settlement a unified feel.
6. No 31 is a Grade II listed property with a main 'L' shaped plan set on the south side of the road. The northern gable of the building fronts directly on to the pavement and the two-storey house is constructed in squared limestone with a collyweston slate roof. To the west there is a single storey extension subservient to the main building, again constructed in limestone with a collyweston slate roof. There is a reasonably large parking area to the west/front of the house fronted with a dwarf limestone wall, with a former barn on the side of this area. At the time of my visit this barn had its northern gable largely intact, but little else. Pictures within the appellant's evidence show the barn previously with a partial Collyweston slate roof (stated to be around 20%). The barn lies in a prominent position in the village and given its clear association with the parking area/yard, its proximity to the main house, and the coherence of the 'plot' provided by the boundary walls, is clearly associated with and a part of the listed building.
7. The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) requires special interest to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features or architectural interest it possesses. Paragraph 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework (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. It goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration and destruction of such assets.
8. To the rear of the parking area lies a modern property with a striking blue slate roof. Other fairly modern buildings close by to the west have concrete roof tiles. Other roof coverings are in evidence within the village, including red pantiles and thatch, but the predominant roofing material for older properties in the village is Collyweston slate. On my visit to the settlement I did note that several subsidiary buildings to older houses had small pantile roofs and the appellant states that the conversion of the Wheatsheaf Pub used Cotswold Bradstone to replace Collyweston slate, although the Council dispute this.
9. The LBC shows the approved plan for the completed barn as keeping its limestone northern gable with timber cladding to the other three sides set under a slate roof. The appellant proposes to use the reclaimed collyweston slate for repairs as and when required to the main property.
10. The application proposed blue slate tiles for the new roof covering. However, these are stated in the Design and Access Statement to match those of the modern property to the rear, which has a striking roof which would not be suitable for a small subsidiary historic barn; the use of such a slate would draw the eye away from the principal building and cause harm, detracting from the setting of the main property.

11. Cotswold Bradstone tiles may be more sympathetic to the host property than the aforementioned blue slate tiles. However, there are clear differences between the tiles and collyweston slate which would be apparent in such a prominent location right on the roadside. Cotswold Bradstone tiles are man made of concrete, as opposed to the limestone of collyweston. The Council also point out that man-made tiles tend to have little variation in their colouring, differences in how they react to weathering and note the differing gauges for laying to diminishing courses between the two types of tile. Finally, collyweston slate tiles are noticeably laid on a bed of mortar as opposed to being hung over battens. Cumulatively all these differing features result in an end product which are noticeably different to each other and which give Cotswold Bradstone tiles a considerably more modern character and appearance than Collyweston slate. I consider that such differences would cause harm both to the barn itself, and to the setting of the main building, particularly in such a visual location.
12. My attention is drawn to the cost of a collyweston slate roof, stated to be some £35,000 as opposed to £6,500 for a Cotswold Bradstone roof. It is not clear if this cost for the collyweston slates takes into account the tiles which were previously on the roof of the barn. I have sympathy with the appellant over this matter. However, listed buildings are of special interest and the listing of a building aims to protect such buildings for future generations. The proposed change of roofing material to either blue slate or Cotswold Bradstone would cause harm to the special interest and would not protect the listed building. In terms of paragraph 201-202 of the Framework I consider that such harm would be less than substantial. However, aside from the limited financial information referred to above, I have little information on public benefits of the proposal or on securing the optimum viable use of the building and therefore such matters do not outweigh the harm that I have identified.
13. I therefore conclude that altering the condition would have an adverse effect on the special interest of the Grade II listed barn. The proposal would be contrary to the Act, to the Framework, and to policy 2(b) of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031 (July 2016), which states that proposals should complement their surrounding historic environment through materials.
14. Therefore, for the reasons given above, and having regard to any other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Jon Hockley

INSPECTOR