
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 December 2021

by Mr S Rennie BSc (Hons), BA (Hons), MA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/A1910/W/21/3274202

Honeysuckle Barn, Birch Lane, Flaunden HP3 0PT

- 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 Flaunden Construction Ltd against the decision of Dacorum Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/00358/FUL, dated 29 January 2021, was refused by notice dated 26 March 2021.
 - The development proposed is for the raising of the roof, conversion of barn to residential use, and change to fenestration.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The site is within the Green Belt and Flaunden Conservation Area.
3. As set out by the submitted evidence, there has been planning permission for the conversion of the barn. Subsequently, further works which involved raising the roof has been undertaken, which is what is now being proposed retrospectively, with further works (not included with the original planning permission) including the insertion of additional windows and an internal first floor for part of the building.
4. The appellant has submitted revised plans which they have confirmed to be Drawings 48278 03D and 48278 05B. These amend the proposal through removal of some of the initially proposed windows in the north and south elevations, though the first floor inclusion and the increased height roof remains with these drawings. I have taken into consideration the Council's comments on the matter of these amended drawings and acknowledge that there would not have been a consultation on these particular amended plans. However, it is my conclusion that the amendments from that initially proposed are not extensive, with the removal of some of the windows previously included not prejudicing anybody who may have been interested in this appeal.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - Whether the proposed extensions, together with any previous extensions added to the property, would constitute 'inappropriate development' in the Green Belt;

- The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, as well as the significance and character of the Flaunden Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

Whether the development is inappropriate in the Green Belt

6. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The Framework goes on to state that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In addition, the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt subject to a number of exceptions as set out in paragraph 149. In this paragraph it sets out that one of the exceptions is for extensions or alterations to buildings which does not result in a disproportionate increase in size over the original building.
7. Policy CS5 reflects the Framework regarding Green Belt development, stating that small-scale development may be permitted where it is a form of limited extensions to existing buildings.
8. In this case, the additional volume over that approved or the original barn would be limited. The differences over that approved would include the increase in height and additions related to the roof alterations, which has already taken place. Whilst this has added to the volume and height of the former barn, it was always a relatively large building on this site. As such, the extensions with the additional roof height and associated volume and floor space increases are not to a degree that I would consider results in a disproportionately extended building. The extensions are 'limited' over and above the original building.
9. Therefore, this is not an form of inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is not contrary to policy CS5 in this regard.

Conservation Area/Character and Appearance

10. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas in the exercise of planning functions. The Framework also advises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Paragraph 199 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.
11. The site is within the Flaunden Conservation Area (CA), which partially derives its significance from the rural character of the village and its buildings.
12. The barn conversion as originally approved retained a distinct rural/agricultural character for the new dwelling, which was a positive aspect of the development considering the Conservation Area and the rural setting of the site on the edge of the village.

13. The increase in height of the roof does result in a more prominent building from that originally approved, but it is still set back from the highway and is not an excessively tall building. The additional height of the roof does not diminish the rural character of the barn conversion. There is the shallow pitched roof, but this was similar to that approved and is not incongruous as a result of the additional height. This aspect of the development, in my view, preserves the character and significance of the Conservation Area.
14. With regards to the first floor addition, this is an internal alteration which in itself does not have any harmful visual impact to the Conservation Area or rural character of vicinity of the site.
15. However, the proposal includes the insertion of additional windows at first floor level. Although some of the initially proposed first floor windows have been removed with the amendments, the remaining proposed windows would result in a building with a more domestic appearance through these new fenestration openings where none originally existed, even with the vertical emphasis included. These additional windows erode the rural character of this barn conversion and therefore fails to preserve the significance of the Conservation Area to which the rural character is an important aspect.
16. There are other houses nearby of two storey height, but this is a barn conversion in which the retention of its rural character is positive within the Conservation Area. The domestication of the appearance of the barn conversion would result in a negative effect and therefore the proposed first floor windows would not preserve the Conservation Area. I also note that other barn conversions locally have had first floor windows and raised roofs approved, but this appeal site occupies a relatively prominent position within the Conservation Area, which is close to and visible from the road through the village. In any case, I have considered the proposal on its own merits and the impact it would have to the Conservation Area and its significance.
17. The proposed additional first floor fenestration would be harmful to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Nevertheless, the harm would be less than substantial and in accordance with paragraph 202 of the Framework that harm should be weighed against any public benefits of the proposal. The public benefits include the provision of a larger family sized dwelling within the village by creating a first floor through an upwards extension, in what is stated by the appellant to be a sustainable location. The proposal could be considered an efficient use of land whilst also having some economic benefits, such as through the construction phase and later through occupiers spending locally. Such public benefits arising from the proposal are all considered, but there is already planning approval for a dwelling on-site (albeit smaller than now proposed). Overall, the public benefits for this single dwelling would be limited and do not offset the identified harm, to which I must attach considerable importance and weight.
18. As such, the proposal is contrary to both the Framework and Core Strategy policy CS27. This policy requires development to favour the conservation of heritage assets and to positively conserve and enhance the appearance and character of conservation areas, amongst other things. However, I am not satisfied from the evidence submitted that the proposal is contrary to policy CS12 on this matter.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Mr S Rennie

INSPECTOR