
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 January 2022

by Elaine Gray MA(Hons) MSc IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/21/3275635

High Baulk Farm, C224 Military Road Junction To District Boundary, Great Whittington, Northumberland NE19 2HB

- 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 W E Robson against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 21/00667/FUL, dated 22 February 2021, was refused by notice dated 28 April 2021.
 - The development proposed is conversion of agricultural buildings into 4no. residential units.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background and main issues

2. High Baulk Farm is a grade II listed farm house with associated agricultural outbuildings. The site is located in the open countryside for planning purposes. Planning permission ref: 19/03726/FUL was granted in January 2021 for the conversion and alteration of the stone outbuildings to create four new dwellings. As part of this scheme, it was proposed to remove some later buildings from around the stone outbuildings. The scheme that is the subject of this appeal is broadly similar to the development permitted in 2021, except for the proposal relating to the hay barn that sits to the north of the stone outbuildings.
3. The main issues of the appeal are:
 - whether the development of the hay barn for residential use would comply with the relevant local and national policies; and
 - the effect of the development on the historic or architectural character or appearance of the listed building.
4. Because these issues are closely related, I have dealt with them as one in the reasoning below in order to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Reasons

Statutory and policy context

5. S66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides that 'in considering whether to grant planning permission for

development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority... shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'. Policy BE1 of the Tynedale Local Development Framework Core Strategy (CS, adopted 2007) reflects this statutory duty, giving particular protection to listed buildings.

6. CS Policy H6 sets out criteria for proposed changes of use of existing buildings to residential use in the open countryside. The first relevant requirement is that such buildings should be of a permanent construction and have visual or historic merit which contributes to the distinctive character of the area and justifies retention. The second relevant requirement is that the change of use should not involve any extension, significant rebuilding or harm to the character of the building.
7. With reference to the development of rural housing, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), at paragraph 80, states that the development of isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless, amongst other things, the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset, or would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting. The other criteria in paragraph 80 are not relevant in this instance. Although the CS predates the NPPF by some years, Policy H6 is broadly consistent with national policy on the provision of rural housing.
8. Also relevant is Policy HOU 8 of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan - Publication Draft Plan (NLP). Given the advanced progress of the draft plan, this policy is to be given moderate weight. Policy HOU 8 supports the conversion and change of use of non-residential buildings and the re-use of redundant or disused buildings to residential use, subject to the stated criteria. These include that 'the existing building or structure is of permanent and substantial construction, is in keeping with and makes a positive contribution to the character and setting of the area and/or is of architectural or historic merit, and is capable of conversion and appropriate enhancement without complete or substantial rebuilding, disproportionate extension or unsympathetic alterations'.

Assessment

9. High Baulk Farm is a two storey dwelling constructed of dressed stone with a Welsh slate roof, overhanging eaves and brick chimney stacks. Dated 1734 with later alterations, it is arranged in a T-shaped plan with an early 19th century kitchen wing to the rear. Features include the simple door and window surrounds, and the datestone and mounting for a former sundial over the door. It is a good example of a modest farm house of its period, which appears to be relatively unaltered since it was built. As a result, its original form and dimensions remain apparent. These factors contribute to the significance of the principle listed building.
10. Associated with the house are a range of stone outbuildings. These take a linear form, with two shorter ranges projecting towards the drive to the house. These are unassuming, functional buildings of a plain vernacular style. They make a clear contribution to the significance of the farm house in terms of their physical, historical and functional association with it, as well as their positive aesthetic qualities.

11. The hay barn is located adjacent to the lower stone outbuilding that is nearest the main road. The appellant produces an extract from a 1912 valuation of High Baulk Farm. This document includes a hay shed with timber pillars and corrugated iron roof which had been recently erected at the time of writing. The mapping evidence corroborates this date, and so there can be little doubt that the hay barn has been in place for approximately 110 years.
12. On my visit, I was able to examine its construction at close quarters. Clearly of some age, the timber poles are roughly finished but sturdy, and slightly tapered toward the top. They are regularly spaced and support simple timber roof trusses and the metal roof covering. The barn is largely open sided to its north elevation and elsewhere it has a mixture of metal and timber cladding. Nonetheless, it is a robustly built structure that has stood for over a century. There is nothing to suggest that it was intended to be anything other than a permanent addition to the farm stead.
13. Although it is a modest structure, there is an aesthetic value in the simple visual rhythm of the poles and trusses. In wider views, I saw that the hay barn sits comfortably amongst the older farm buildings, reflecting the gabled form of the lower stone building beside it. It is a physical record of the evolution of farming practices into the 20th century and is thus of historic and evidential value. As a pre-1948 building, I am satisfied that the hay barn may be treated as a curtilage listed building that makes a positive contribution to the significance of High Baulk Farm.
14. It is proposed to convert the range of stone outbuildings into four new dwellings. Proposed Unit 4 would have the kitchen, dining and living room within the stone range. It would have a glass link to a two storey section to the north that would form the entrance to the dwelling and provide other accommodation including the bedrooms.
15. The proposed plans show that this new north section would have solid walls with timber cladding and a standing seam metal roof. Crucially, there is little evidence from my reading of the proposed plans that any part of the existing structure of the hay barn would be retained. There is no indication that the timber poles would be incorporated. As no details are given of the proposed roof structure, it is not possible to ascertain if any of the existing roof structure would be reused.
16. A fundamental aspect of CS Policy H6 is that it applies to the conversion of existing buildings. The development to the north of Unit 4 would be broadly comparative to the footprint and dimensions of the hay barn. However, if no part of the hay barn is to be retained, then the proposal cannot reasonably be said to involve its conversion. The linked two storey development would thus amount to a new extension to the converted stone range, which is resisted by CS Policy H6.
17. The appellant argues that there is no stipulation in NPPF paragraph 80 that the conversion of buildings should exclude proportionate extensions. In the case of proposed Unit 4, the new extension would form approximately two thirds of the total volume of the new dwelling, with the accommodation in the existing building as the more ancillary part. Therefore, even if I accept the appellant's interpretation of paragraph 80, the extension would be disproportionate to the size of the existing building, which is contrary to NLP Policy HOU 8.

18. Although I have found that the hay barn is a sturdy and permanent building, it has a distinctly more ephemeral appearance than the stone range due to its lack of solid walls. By contrast, the new build would be of a fundamentally different character, introducing solid walls and openings of a domestic character where none currently exist. In terms of height, the eaves of the hay barn sit well below the ridge of the stone building. However, the eaves of the new two storey addition would be closer to the ridge height of the stone building. As a result, the extension would become the more dominant element of the new dwelling, with the stone outbuilding becoming subsidiary to it.
19. As a result of these factors, the new extension would draw the eye unduly. This would particularly be the case at night, when the structure and the glass link would be lit internally. In departing from the prevailing character of the stone building range and the complementary character of the hay barn, the proposed extension would appear as an incongruous addition. I find that the development would fail to harmonise with the existing buildings, would appear out of context, and would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the listed buildings.
20. As a result of this harm, and the loss of the contribution of the hay barn, the special interest and significance of High Baulk Farm would not be preserved. Accordingly, therefore, the proposed development would conflict with the overarching statutory duty as set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which must be given considerable importance and weight, and with the NPPF.
21. Although serious, the harm to the heritage asset in this case would be less than substantial, within the meaning of the term in paragraph 195 of the NPPF. Paragraph 196 requires that, where there is less than substantial harm, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the works.
22. The new two storey extension to the stone outbuilding would provide additional residential accommodation at the proposed Unit 4. However, this would be a private benefit and so would not count in favour of the proposal. The appellant argues that the proposed development would ensure that the site does not fall into disrepair. However, there is no evidence that this benefit would be dependent on the appeal scheme, particularly as there is already a planning permission in place for the conversion of the outbuildings. There would be some economic and social benefits arising from the provision of housing, but again, these are not dependant on the proposed extension to Unit 4.
23. I therefore find that insufficient public benefits have been identified that would justify or outweigh the harm I have identified to the heritage asset. The scheme therefore unacceptably conflicts with the NPPF, which directs, at paragraph 193, that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.
24. It would also fail to comply with CS Policies BE1 & H6, emerging NLP Policy HOU 8, and Policy WNP 3 of the Whittington Parish Neighbourhood Plan, insofar as it seeks to conserve the significance of heritage assets.
25. I have taken into account the representation in support of the proposal, but this has not led me to a different conclusion on the main issues of the appeal.

Conclusion

26. For the reasons above, I conclude that the proposed development would conflict with the NPPF and with the development plan as a whole, and so the appeal is dismissed.

Elaine Gray

INSPECTOR