
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 April 2022

by Graham Chamberlain BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23rd May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/21/3286317

Woodmansgreen Farm, Linch Road, Woodmansgreen, Linch, Liphook, West Sussex GU30 7NF

- 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 Andrew Marchant against the decision of the South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/21/01499/FUL, dated 15 March 2021, was refused by notice dated 11 May 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as 'the erection of a replacement storage barn'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - The effect of the proposed development on the landscape; and
 - Whether the proposal would preserve the setting of Woodmansgreen Farmhouse and the Barn at Woodmansgreen Farm, which are Grade II listed buildings.

Reasons

The effect on the landscape

3. The appellant's Landscape Report explains that the appeal site is located within Landscape Character Type O: Low Weald and Landscape Character Area O1: Millard Basin¹. This area encompasses a high density of dispersed isolated farmsteads surrounded by woodland and irregular fields. It is deeply rural with a tranquil landscape of a medieval pattern. The development considerations for this area are to conserve the isolated farmsteads and their setting and ensure built development reflects the local vernacular.
4. The appeal site encompasses a small agricultural building adjacent to a larger farmstead comprised of several barns finished in locally distinctive stone and brick detailing with plane tiled roofs. The farmstead, which is a fine example of the local vernacular, is set amongst undulating and well wooded countryside with thick hedges and small meadows and fields. This makes for a very attractive and bucolic composition. The appeal site is therefore an important feature in the landscape character of the area as described in the LCA.

¹ As described in the South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

5. The proposed building would have a jarring wider plan form than the historic barns and would lack an adequate sense of subservience due to its overall massing. The shallow roof pitch, taken with the wide gable span, would result in an awkward, unattractive, and bulky form that would jar with the nearby historic barns. The shallow roof pitch would also jar with the traditional shape of agricultural buildings in the area. The failure to use plane tiles, which is otherwise a strong harmonising feature of the local roof scape, would result in the building appearing discordant.
6. The unfortunate presence of the building would be discernible from a public footpath to the northwest of the appeal site as well as Linch Road. The building would also largely block a pleasant vista along the site entrance out over a meadow to the south of the appeal site. The proposal would therefore harmfully fail to conserve the landscape setting of the farmstead and would not reflect the local vernacular. Accordingly, it would harm the landscape character of the area. It would therefore fail to conserve and enhance it. The effect would be contained to a reasonably small part of the landscape, but for the reasons given I do not share the view in the appellant's Landscape Report that there would be a neutral landscape impact overall.
7. In coming to this view, I have factored in the scope for additional planting. The Landscape Report explains that the short term moderate adverse visual impact would become neutral when the planting matures. This would however take time with the impact enduring in the interim. Furthermore, whilst landscaping can be used to mitigate the impacts of a proposal, perhaps by softening and anchoring it in the landscape, it would nevertheless be unwise to seek to hide an otherwise unacceptable building in this way. This is because the landscaping could fail or be removed in the future. In this respect, the recommended landscaping condition would only safeguard the new planting for five-years. Moreover, I share the view of the National Park Authority that there would be limited space for effective tree planting immediately between the proposed barn and Linch Road due to the realigned access track.
8. The timber finish of the proposed building could be appropriate given the rural context, especially as it weathers, and the barn would include side hung timber doors, which would add a traditional feel and sense of quality. However, this would not mitigate the harm caused by the size, siting and form of the building. The appeal scheme would be sited in the position of the existing timber barn, but it would be around three times larger with a sprawling form and awkward bulky appearance. As a result, there would be no benefit in removing the existing building and replacing it with the proposal.
9. The proposal would adhere to many of the criteria in Policy SD39 of the South Downs Local Plan 2014-2033 (LP). In particular, the proposed barn would be well related physically and functionally to the farmstead. However, for reasons I go into this would harm the setting of a very well-preserved historic farmstead. As a result, there may be exceptional circumstances to justify a different location for a barn or barns, especially if the existing building is removed. Even if there is not², the design quality need not be as poor as that proposed with what would be a discordantly shallow roof and bulky form. Notwithstanding this, and crucially in this instance, the proposal would not be

² The appellant has considered alternative sittings with the Council

in keeping with local character. This criteria in Policy SD39 is a point of particular significance in a National Park given the statutory purposes.

10. In conclusion, the proposal would fail to conserve and enhance the landscape character of the South Downs National Park. This would be contrary to the first purpose of the National Park³ as well as Policies SD1 and SD4 and SD39 (when taken as a whole) of the LP. These policies seek to conserve and enhance the landscape character of the National Park and are therefore consistent with Paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework').

Whether the proposal would preserve the setting of listed buildings

11. Woodmansgreen Farmhouse probably dates from at least the 16th Century and the (hay) Barn at Woodmansgreen Farm from the early 1800s. These buildings are a repository of bygone ways of life and past building techniques and styles. Accordingly, they have considerable historic and evidential value and significance. Moreover, as fine examples of the local vernacular, the buildings have a high level of aesthetic and associative value. Moreover, the listed buildings form part of a unified group with other period barns, which are probably curtilage listed. This historic complex tells us much about agricultural practices in previous eras. The complex is inherently experienced as part of the agricultural landscape within which it sits. The setting of the listed buildings therefore adds to their value and significance.
12. I have already explained that the proposed building would have a very unattractive design due largely to the wide span and low roof pitch causing a bulky appearance. It would also lack adequate subservience. Thus, it would have an incongruous presence in views of the complex from several vantage points including the neighbouring field. This is not a public view but is nevertheless an important part of the setting of the historic farmstead. The ability to experience the complex from the adjoining field would be hampered by the presence of an awkward and unattractive barn in the foreground. It would also be possible to perceive the presence of the barn from Linch Road and in views along the access track.
13. Moreover, the appeal building would sit outside but very close to the historic complex and consequently there would be little breathing space around it. Being an inward facing courtyard, the very close presence of another large building outside it would appear discordant. The existing timber barn also sits outside the courtyard but is much smaller than the appeal scheme would be and is therefore a more subtle departure from the historic layout of the farmstead. The proposal would therefore visually and spatially jar with the historic farmstead complex. This would harm the way its historic and aesthetic value is experienced, understood, and experienced. In other words, the setting of listed buildings would be harmed. The harm would be serious but not extensive and therefore it would be less than substantial.
14. Policy SD13 of the LP explains that in such circumstances the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In so doing, the Framework explains that great weight should be given to an asset's conservation. This echoes the considerable importance and weight I must give to the desirability of preserving the setting of the listed buildings⁴. It does not

³ The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

⁴ See Section 66(1) of The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

amount to a direction to refuse proposals that harm the setting of listed buildings, but it provides a strong weighting in favour of preservation.

15. The appeal site is part of a farm that has grown significantly in size since 2015. It includes an extensive area generally to the west of the farmyard. The appellant is seeking to rationalise his operations by moving agricultural plant and machinery out of the hay barn and into a new structure (the proposed barn), which would be of the minimum size necessary. This would then create space to use the hay barn for the drying and storage of hay, which was its original (and optimal viable) use. As things apparently stand, the appellant submits that cropped hay must be sold immediately because the farm lacks space to store it alongside the farm equipment, which apparently includes the farm's biomass boiler/plant⁵. This could mean that hay is not sold in the winter months when prices would likely be higher. Moreover, additional space would allow woodchip to be produced from woodland on the farm and stored in the barn, saving money and transport movements and promoting a sustainable energy source.
16. Accordingly, there would be operational benefits to the business. These would be public benefits as farming the land is an important aspect of maintaining the landscape character of the area and the setting of the buildings on site. Moreover, the rural economy would benefit, and the farm could become more self-sufficient at a time of growing uncertainty in the industry. However, there is nothing of substance before me to demonstrate the agricultural business would fail without a new building or that its viability would be significantly hampered. Moreover, the appellant's submissions are contradictory, as they confirm that baled hay is stored elsewhere⁶. It is unclear where this hay is stored, for how long and why the arrangement cannot endure.
17. In any event, even if the building was essential to the ongoing operations at the farm and the appeal site was the optimal location for it, the design of the proposal would be seriously lacking in quality given the combined impacts of the siting, bulky form, and corrugated roof. Overall, the appeal scheme would appear as a building of poor architectural quality next to the listed farmstead.
18. Utilising the hay barn to dry and store hay would remove the risk of damage caused by the movement of stored vehicles into and out of the building. However, there is no evidence that damage has occurred, even with the current situation. Moreover, it is unclear whether vehicles would still need to enter the hay barn to deposit and retrieve hay bales. As a result, I am not convinced this is a meaningful benefit. As the hay barn is already in use and this use is generally unintrusive and agricultural in nature, there would only be a modest benefit in re-establishing its historic use as a hay store. The proposal also provides scope for some modest biodiversity enhancement measures.
19. When weighing these matters, I find that the benefits of the proposal, although notable, would be insufficient to outweigh the less than substantial harm identified to the setting of the listed buildings. Accordingly, there would be a conflict with Policies SD12 and SD13 of the LP, as harm to the setting of designated heritage assets would not have clear and convincing justification.

⁵ The NPA are of the view that the boiler may serve the farmhouse, and this appears to be supported by the comments of Mr Headley. If this is the case, then the boiler is taking up agricultural floor space for a non-agricultural use. The evidence is unclear on this point. I have nevertheless assumed that the boiler serves the farm as it has not altered my findings.

⁶ See Paragraph 75 of the Planning, Design and Heritage Statement

Other Matters

20. The National Park Authority have not overtly stated that the proposal would harm the setting of The Old Cottage, which is Grade II listed. As the proposal has failed, there would be no impact on the setting of this building and therefore I need not consider this matter further. I have carefully considered the representations submitted supporting the proposal, but have come to the conclusions I have for the reasons given.

Conclusion

21. The proposed development would harm the landscape and the setting of listed buildings and would therefore be contrary to the development plan as a whole. The other considerations, including the public benefits of the proposal, would not outweigh the harm to heritage. It therefore follows that they would not outweigh the totality of harm I have identified either. Accordingly, for the reasons given, the appeal has been dismissed.

Graham Chamberlain
INSPECTOR