
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 1 July 2022

by R Sabu BA(Hons) MA BArch PgDip ARB RIBA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th August 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/P0119/Y/22/3291612

Court Farm, The Pound, Almondsbury BS32 4EF

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Crabb Properties Ltd against the decision of South Gloucestershire Council.
 - The application Ref: P21/03880/LB, dated 24 May 2021, was refused by notice dated 30 July 2021.
 - The works proposed are conversion and extension of existing buildings to provide 1no. residential dwelling and ancillary development.
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Appeal Ref: APP/P0119/W/22/3291614

Court Farm, The Pound, Almondsbury BS32 4EF

- 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 Crabb Properties Ltd against the decision of South Gloucestershire Council.
 - The application Ref: P21/03882/F, dated 24 May 2021, was refused by notice dated 30 July 2021.
 - The development proposed is conversion and extension of existing buildings to provide 1no. residential dwelling and ancillary development.
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Decision

1. The appeals are dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I note the description of development as stated on the appeal form and decision notice. However, I have used the description as stated on the application form in the interests of certainty.
3. From the evidence, the appeal building benefits from listed building consent for internal and external works to include the partial demolition of lean to and erection of single storey side extension to existing stable and store. Furthermore, the site benefits from planning permission for the partial demolition of lean to, erection of single storey side extension to existing stable and store to form 1 no. dwelling (Class C3) with associated parking and works (Resubmission of P21/03882/F).
4. The primary differences in the appeal proposals compared with the consented scheme include the demolition of the building at the south of the site described in the evidence as 'outbuilding C' and the erection in its place of a stone-built

wing accommodating the entrance, toilet, utility room and kitchen. In addition, the proposal would introduce a glazed link between the side extension and the proposed building to the south. The proposed side extension would also have a greater depth and slightly narrower width than the consented scheme. The conversion of the stone barn and adjoining stable appears to be similar in both schemes and the overall layout of the site is otherwise largely as per the consented scheme.

5. Given the above, there is a greater than theoretical possibility that the consented scheme would take place should these appeals fail and I attribute significant weight to this fall-back position. On this basis I have focussed my assessment on the differences between the schemes.
6. As the proposal is in a conservation area and relates to listed buildings and their settings, I have had special regard to sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

Main Issues

7. The main issues are:

- Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the revised National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) and any relevant development plan policies.
- the effect on the openness of the Green Belt;
- whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building, Court Farmhouse (Ref: 1312881) and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses;
- the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the local area bearing in mind the special attention that should be paid to the desirability of preserving the setting of the nearby Grade II listed building, 'Barn About 15 Metres West of Court Farmhouse ' (Ref:1128874) (Barn);
- the extent to which the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Lower Almondsbury Conservation Area (CA); and
- would the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Inappropriateness

8. Paragraph 149 of the Framework states that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt subject to a number of exceptions. These include the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
9. Policy PSP7 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan Policies, Sites and Places Plan Adopted November 2017 (LP) states that additions and alterations to buildings in the Green Belt will be acceptable provided they do not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. It

goes on to say that as a general guide, an addition resulting in a volume increase up to 30% of the original building would be likely to be proportionate.

10. The Appellant considers that the proposal would result in a volume increase of 30% whereas the fall-back scheme would result in an increase of 22%. This is not disputed by the Council. The kitchen extension which would replace outbuilding C at the south of the site would be not only significantly greater in scale, massing and height compared with the existing building, but also in comparison to the proposed conversion subject of the consented scheme. Moreover, the dual pitched roof would have a ridge height greater than the proposed side extension as well as the timber framed stable building. The kitchen extension would also have a greater width than the stone barn.
11. Given the above, the kitchen extension would appear overly large compared with the stone barn and adjoining stable building as well as the side extension. Therefore, although the volume increase would be 30%, this is a general guide rather than a strict limit and for the foregoing reasons, the proposal would appear disproportionate to the existing building compared with the consented scheme.
12. Consequently, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Therefore, the proposal would conflict with LP Policy PSP7 which resists additions and alterations to buildings in the Green Belt that would result in disproportional additions over and above the size of the original building.

Openness

13. Given the significantly larger size of the proposed kitchen extension compared with the existing outbuilding C, it would have a greater impact on spatial openness than the consented scheme. In terms of visual openness, to the south of the site lies undeveloped land beyond which lies a school and a number of modest buildings and steeply sloping hill beyond. As such, the site can be seen from some distance to the south.
14. The greater massing and height of outbuilding C would restrict views through the site from the south as well views to the south from within the site. As such, the proposal would harm the visual and spatial openness of the Green Belt.

Court Farmhouse

15. Court Farmhouse is sited in the village of Almondsbury and was listed in 1984. The listing dates the building to the 16th century, while the Heritage Statement indicates that parts of the building were constructed in the 1450s. The two-storey building is largely of rubble construction with stone dressings and quoins, brick as well as pantile roof.
16. As set out in the Heritage Statement, the original use of the building was as the lightly fortified Manor of Almondsbury which belonged to St Augustine's Abbey in Bristol until the dissolution of the monasteries. The site was then sold to Thomas Chester whose heir, William Chester, built the family seat in Knole Park in the late 16th century. As Knole Park was since demolished in the twentieth century, Court Farmhouse is of considerable historic importance not only in its original use in connection to St Augustine's Abbey, but also in the surviving evidence of the patronage of the Chester family.

17. The building also benefits from 17th and 19th century additions which follow its conversion to a farmhouse and occupation by tenant farmers for a number of years. These additions attest to the success of the farm and the retained prominence of the building in the local area over a number of years. The primacy of the principle building in terms of height and massing is reinforced through the site where the buildings become smaller in height and massing and have a more dispersed layout to the south of the site where the site and wider settlement meets the countryside.
18. Given the above I find the special interest of Court Farmhouse, insofar as it relates to these appeals, to be the legibility and fabric of its medieval phase as well as its later phase as a historic farmstead.
19. The Heritage Statement dates outbuilding C to the mid to late twentieth century and it is not fixed to the stone barn such that it does not meet the criteria for curtilage listing. Given the relatively modern age of the outbuilding, it has limited historic value. Despite the age of this building, its modest size and siting is in keeping with the hierarchy of the buildings on the wider site and it does not consequently detract or erode the special interest of the Farmhouse.
20. The proposed building that would replace outbuilding C would have a greater height and massing. This would be not only compared with the existing structure, but also compared with the timber framed stable building to the north of the site as well as the proposed side extension. As such, the height, form and materials of the proposed building would visually compete with the stone barn. Accordingly, the proposal in this respect would not appear subservient to the stone barn. Therefore, this aspect of the proposal would harmfully detract from the hierarchy of the buildings that speak to the historic agricultural use and thus the special interest of Court Farmhouse.
21. Although the landscaping proposals indicated on drawing 284/P02 Rev B for the consented scheme may partially screen views of the proposal from Sundays Hill and Over Lane, the permanence and screening of the vegetation could not be guaranteed particularly given that the proposed kitchen extension would be significantly larger in height and massing compared with the existing outbuilding C. A condition requiring the long-term retention of landscaping would not provide certainty that the proposed kitchen extension would remain hidden from the long views to the south.
22. The glazed link would result in a 'U' shaped arrangement of buildings on the site. Although the historic aerial photographs show other agricultural buildings on the site, they do not appear joined. Rather they appear, as stated in the Heritage Statement, informally as a dispersed yard. Furthermore, while the use of glazing would result in a degree of visibility through the site, this element would nonetheless appear to be of permanent construction, resulting in the building appearing as a large 'U' shaped building rather than as dispersed buildings on the site.
23. Therefore, while I accept that a 'U' shaped arrangement is a recognised form of historic farmstead, the proposals would result in an increase in massing and less dispersed layout of the site that would detract from the building hierarchy and special interest of Court Farmhouse as a former farmstead. Consequently, this would fail to preserve the special interest of Court Farmhouse.

Barn

24. The Barn was also listed in 1984 and according to the list description dates from the 16th century. However, the Heritage Statement indicates that the origins of the building were as a medieval refectory associated with Court Farmhouse when it was in use as the Manor of Almondsbury. The building is of similar traditional materials as the Court Farmhouse comprising rubble walls with stone dressings. Additional features include ventilation slits and Tudor arched openings that reflect the historic phasing of the building including its conversion to a barn and then to residential dwellings. Its considerable height and massing along with its position in relation to street result in a prominent appearance that reflects its historic use and importance to the local community.
25. Therefore, the historic and evidential value of the Barn, insofar as it relates to these appeals, lies in its form and scale which reflect its historic use, including the evolution of the former farm buildings at Court Farmhouse.
26. The stone barn and the timber stable joining it appear to have been agricultural outbuildings connected with the use of the Barn as part of the wider farmstead. Therefore, given the scale, form, footprint and dispersed layout of the buildings on the site, they provide an important setting to the Barn and contribute directly to its special interest and the historic legibility of the wider farmstead.
27. The proposed building that would replace outbuilding C would have a greater height and massing as well as heavier stone construction. Together with the glazed link, the proposal would appear as a large 'U' shaped building rather than a dispersed yard. Moreover, the proposed building at the south of the site, given its height and massing, would visually compete with the stone barn. As such, the spacious agricultural character of the site would be diminished by the proposal thereby harming the historic legibility of the farmstead.
28. Consequently, the proposal would significantly erode the setting of the Barn thus causing harm to its special interest.

CA

29. The site is located in the historic core of the CA near the Church of St Mary, where the focus of the local agricultural community lay under the patronage of the manor house at Court Farmhouse and the Barn. The other buildings along The Pound, from which the site is accessed, as well as Church Road are of a modest scale and traditional materials and massing and are generally arranged in a linear fashion along the roads. This hierarchy and pattern of development reflect the historic primacy of Court Farmhouse and the Barn as well as the church in the local area. In addition, the dispersed layout of the buildings on the site reflects its later use as a farmstead and are indicative of the historic agricultural character of the CA.
30. Accordingly, the significance of the CA, insofar as it relates to these appeals, is associated with the prominence of Court Farmhouse and the Barn in the local agricultural community which is reflected in the hierarchy of development of the site and beyond.
31. The proposed glazed link and building at the south of the site would result in a massing and height greater than the existing buildings and consented scheme. As such, the spacious agricultural character of the site, from which the

significance of the CA is derived, would be harmed. The altered pattern of development would detract from the spacious rural character of the site.

32. Although this effect would be largely screened from views from the street, the increased massing and altered pattern of development would be visible from the wider CA in long views from the south, including from Almondsbury Hill and Over Lane. I accept that the use of landscaping may partially screen views of the proposal, however, the level of screening and permanence could not be guaranteed particularly during the winter months.
33. Consequently, the proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the CA thereby causing harm to its significance.

Heritage balance

34. Paragraph 199 of 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. Paragraph 200 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets or development within their setting and that any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification. Given the limited scale of development, I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight.
35. Under such circumstances, paragraph 202 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes the securing of optimal viable use of listed buildings. The appellant is of the opinion that the proposal would be beneficial because of the proposed works to the stone building including works to the north-eastern gable wall, replacement of dilapidated built form, reuse of disused buildings on previously developed land and the provision of a new family sized dwelling. However, these benefits would be secured by the consented scheme. In any event, the viable use of the appeal property as a residential dwelling is not dependent on the proposal given the fall-back position. In the absence of any substantiated evidence to the contrary neither would any public benefits accrue in relation to the CA.
36. Given the above and in the absence of any substantiated public benefit, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to preserve the special historic interest of a Grade II listed building, the setting of a Grade II listed building and the character or appearance of the Lower Almondsbury Conservation Area. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 199 of the Framework and conflict with Policy CS9 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan Core Strategy 2006 – 2027 adopted December 2013 (CS) and LP Policy PSP17 that seek, among other things, to ensure that developments serve to protect, enhance or better reveal the significance of heritage assets and their settings. As a result, the proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan.

Other considerations

37. The proposal would contribute a dwelling to the local housing supply and would be sited on previously development land. In addition, there would be economic benefits during the construction phase and future occupiers would be likely to contribute to the local community. However, given the limited scale of

development, these benefits would be limited. Moreover, the fall-back scheme would secure these benefits in any event. I therefore attribute limited weight to these benefits in favour of the scheme.

Conclusion

38. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Substantial weight should be given to the harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations. The substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm is not clearly outweighed by the other considerations sufficient to demonstrate very special circumstances given that those benefits are limited commensurate to the modest scale of the development proposed and considering the fall-back position.
39. Accordingly, the proposal would be inconsistent with the advice in the Framework and conflict with CS Policy CS9 and LP Policy PSP17 that seeks to ensure that permission is not granted for development in the Green Belt except under very special circumstances. It would also fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and paragraph 202 of the Framework in relation to the harm that would be caused to the listed buildings and CA.
40. As a result, the proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised I conclude that the appeals should be dismissed.

R Sabu

INSPECTOR