
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 June 2022

by Michael Boniface MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13 September 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/Y/21/3289860

Keyston Barns, The Hatchery, Loop Road, Keyston, PE28 0RE

- 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 Jonathan Ware against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref: 21/01406/LBC, dated 17 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 23 September 2021.
 - The works proposed are described as "10 black solar panels on the west facing roof, and 16 black solar panels and a conservation roof light on the eastern facing roof".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Notwithstanding the description of the proposed works given by the appellant and contained in the Council's decision, both parties make reference to a reduced scheme involving fewer solar panels, 16 rather than 26. It is unclear whether this reduced scheme was before the Council at the time it made its decision, but a plan showing the revised proposals accompanies the appeal and has been addressed in the appeal submissions. As such, I have considered the appeal on this basis.
3. The Hatchery is classified as a curtilage listed building under Section 1(5) (b) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act), and as such is treated as part of the Grade II listed Manor Farmhouse. The buildings also lie in a conservation area. I have therefore had special regard to sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Act.

Main Issue

4. The main issues are whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building, Manor Farmhouse (and its curtilage structures), and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses; and the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Keyston Conservation Area.

Reasons

Listed buildings

5. Manor Farmhouse is a key, focal property in the village and has significant historic and architectural interest due to its size, good state of preservation, its

architectural details with its large bay windows and neo-classical doorcase, plus its history as a model farm. Along with the associated barns, which have now been converted into residential properties, the buildings form a typical group of traditional farm buildings arranged around a courtyard. The barns, including the Hatchery, are a fine example of rural agricultural buildings with rich architectural detailing and high-quality materials. Whilst there have been some modern interventions to facilitate a residential use, their traditional layout, form and materials are readily apparent and there is significant group value in their relatively well-preserved appearance.

6. The introduction of solar panels, with their inherently modern design and materials, would be at odds with the barns largely clear roof slopes covered with traditional slate. This is notwithstanding the black colour chosen and the presence of some small roof lights. The solar panels would be a clear and prominent modern intervention that would detract from the historic character of the barns, their architectural detailing and traditional materials. They would draw the eye, as an unwelcome anomaly.
7. It is suggested that the proposal would not harm the listed building because it would not be widely visible. However, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether or not public views of the building or any of their curtilage structures can be gained. I have also had regard to the presence of other solar panels in the vicinity of the site but I do not know the circumstances under which these were allowed or the status of the buildings in question. I have considered this appeal on its own merits. In this case, the panels would harm the special architectural and historic interest of the Hatchery and the setting of Manor Farmhouse itself, given the group importance of the buildings and their association.
8. The harm arising would be less than substantial in the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) but is nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. I acknowledge that there would be a public benefit in the generation of renewable electricity but that would not outweigh the harm that I have identified to the listed building.
9. Given the above, the proposal would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building, thus failing to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 197 of the Framework and development plan policies insofar as relevant.

Conservation area

10. The village has developed from strong agricultural origins, with several impressive farmsteads. It has an open, distinctly rural character and this is an important characteristic of the conservation area, contributing to its significance.
11. Manor Farmhouse and its associated buildings are a prominent and important collection of historic agricultural buildings in the village. They are a focal point, highlighting the agricultural origins of the site and its role within the settlement. The group of buildings, their architectural detailing and good state of preservation are key components of the character and appearance of this rural settlement. The Hatchery is one of several converted barns that form the distinctive rectilinear courtyard arrangement.

12. The Hatchery is visible from Loop Road and from public rights of way close to the property. Whilst the proposed solar panels would not be prominent from the public realm, they would be visible in glimpsed views and such visibility would be increased dependent on light conditions, given their reflective surface and associated glare. Again, the solar panels would be an alien feature in their historic context, at odds with the traditional design and materials predominant in the conservation area, notably the slate and clay tile roofs.
13. For the same reasons that I have set out above, the public benefits arising from the proposal would not outweigh the less than substantial harm that I have identified.
14. Given the above, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the Keyston Conservation Area, thus failing to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 197 of the Framework and development plan policies insofar as relevant.

Conclusion

15. In light of the above, the appeal is dismissed.

Michael Boniface

INSPECTOR