



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 July 2022

by Patrick Whelan BA(Hons) Dip Arch MA MSc ARB RIBA RTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 September 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/C1570/W/21/3267151

Swan Farm, School Lane, Molehill Green, Bishops Stortford CM22 6PS

- 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 Miss Elaine Sharon Weston against the decision of Uttlesford District Council.
 - The application Ref UTT/20/2074/HHF, dated 14 August 2020, was refused by notice dated 2 November 2020.
 - The development is to replace roof, windows and doors in an outbuilding at Swan Farm. Only part of the corrugated roof remained and was rusted and part asbestos. The window and door frames were in place but had no glass. The outbuilding needed to be made waterproof. As you face Swan Farm from the road the outbuilding is to the left of Swan Farm.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for alterations to an outbuilding at Swan Farm, School Lane, Molehill Green, Bishops Stortford CM22 6PS, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref UTT/20/2074/HHF, dated 14 August 2020, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following condition:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved drawings: Location Plan 1:1250, produced 21 August 2020; Block Plan 1:500, produced 21 August 2020; Dimensioned elevations before development; Dimensioned elevations after development.

Preliminary Matters

2. Though the appeal was made against the refusal of listed building consent, for determination under the Hearing procedure, the appellant confirmed that the appeal should instead have been made against the refusal of planning permission, and requested that the appeal be determined by written representations. To help me to understand the significance of the heritage asset and in accordance with paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), I requested a heritage statement and a set of drawings from the appellant.
 3. To avoid any risk of prejudice, interested parties and the Council were given the opportunity to comment on these changes and the additional evidence.
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4. As the development, which has already been implemented, concerns an outbuilding within the curtilage of a listed building, I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
5. The description of development in the formal decision above has been adjusted to omit superfluous text.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is the effect of the development on the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II listed building, whose statutory address is Swan Farmhouse, School Lane.

Reasons

The significance of the listed building

7. The outbuilding the subject of this appeal is one of four which form a loose, almost informal enclosure behind the C18, timber-framed farmhouse, on its field side. It has a simple form, modest footprint, low eaves, and a short-span, low-pitched roof. Its character is more of a general purpose shed or store associated with farming, rather than a building directly connected with a particular, agricultural function.
8. As a small, general purpose, agricultural shed, it has little, special architectural interest in its own right. From what I saw at my site visit and in historical photos, its lightweight structure of short-section, steel angles, bearing onto a sleeper wall, and it's almost delicate, close-centred elbowed trusses, together with the corrugated metal roof and mineral board walls suggest that the design of this outbuilding was a common, economically driven form of construction. It has the characteristics of a utilitarian building common around the middle and second half of the C20. This inference is reflected in the historical maps, which show a building in this location with a quite different shape and footprint, in 1916 and 1970.
9. There is no detailed information on the previous, high-level, ribbon openings set between what appear were mineral boards bearing on raised, steel mid-rails. However, the historical photographs indicate that they were not architecturally distinctive, incorporating false transoms and mullions at some point.
10. In relation to the group of buildings, and in terms of building form, detailing and materials, save for the corrugated metal roof finish, there appears to have been little architectural compatibility between this outbuilding and the other outbuildings which have variously masonry walls, and timber, dual and single pitched roofs. In relation to the large, timber-framed, C18 farmhouse, with its rendered walls and tiled roof, this outbuilding, which postdates the house by around two centuries, had even less architectural affinity. This limits its contribution to the architectural significance of the farmhouse.
11. Notwithstanding this, its position and orientation in relation to the farmhouse, and the affinity of its size and siting with the other outbuildings, suggests how, spatially, the farmstead may once have developed around the principal building.

It also reveals, very broadly, the historical scale of the holding, its nature, and the importance of the lane in relation to its operation. Thus the outbuilding, despite being a relatively modern construction, alongside the other outbuildings, makes some contribution to the special historic interest of the farmhouse; it provides part of its historic, spatial setting.

The effect of the development on the significance of the listed building

12. The development has not changed the footprint, shape or form of the outbuilding. The Council's objections are focused on the effect of the size, cohesiveness, and arrangement of the openings within the outbuilding, particularly in the gable ends, and their compatibility with the historic and architectural character of the other buildings at Swan Farm, including the C18 farmhouse.
13. The corrugated metal roof and wall on the blind, long side of the outbuilding is similar to previous wall finishes on the outbuilding as shown on the historical photographs. It is also similar to finishes I saw on outbuildings in the area. The black-painted, horizontal, timber boarding on the wall of the other long side of the outbuilding reflects a common wall finish that I also noticed on outbuildings in the area. These two finishes are part of the rural vernacular here.
14. The historical photographs indicate that one gable may have had a rough, timber framework, partially clad in corrugated metal at some time. The other gable appears in the historical photographs to have retained its steel, mid-rail, and its sleeper wall, and it had some kind of opening in the apex of its end truss. Notwithstanding this, there is no substantive or complete evidence of the historic arrangement of openings in the gables. What the photographs do reveal is that where windows were included their heights were almost half a bay and they spanned a full bay-width, with a crude, mass-produced, economic form of detailing.
15. On the evidence before me, and from my own inspection, the size of the openings today, their arrangement, and the resulting solid: void ratios in the walls of the building, when considered as a whole, are not so different from the architectural character of the previous arrangement. Given that the site is no longer used for farming, but as a dwelling, I find no harm to the architectural significance of the farmhouse from the size of the new openings, their positions, or arrangement.
16. I appreciate that the new openings are formed partly with timber, and partly with uPVC. I am mindful of the proximity of the C18 farmhouse. However, given the architectural character of this relatively modern outbuilding, as a small, general purpose, lightweight store or shed, and the evidence of the materials of the previous openings, I see no harm from the appearance of the uPVC materials, nor the mixture of timber and uPVC across the openings.
17. Insofar as the outbuilding now has a domestic appearance, given that the farmhouse no longer serves a farm, and having regard to the likely or evidenced arrangement of openings, I cannot find its new, more domestic identity incompatible with the farmhouse, neither with the other outbuildings, nor with

their individual or collective settings. The changes have retained the essential historic character of the outbuilding, albeit it now with a domestic rather than a utilitarian nuance.

18. I conclude that the development preserves the historic and architectural special interest of the listed building as well as its setting. It satisfies the requirements of the Act, and paragraph 197 of the Framework where it requires account to be taken of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities. Nor does it conflict with policies ENV2 and GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan 2005 (LP) which require development to be in keeping with the scale, character and surroundings of listed buildings, which protect their settings, and which require development to be compatible with the scale, form, layout, appearance and materials of surrounding buildings.

Other Matters

19. I have had regard to the representations of the occupiers of Roseleigh and I understand their concern about the appearance of corrugated metal sheeting. However, the corrugated metal, which has been used on the roof of the outbuilding and on the wall facing Roseleigh, is not an uncommon material on buildings in the countryside. Indeed, historical photographs show a similar material on the walls of the outbuilding. Black-painted, horizontal boarding is, I saw, a common finish in the area, but not to the exclusion of other materials, including corrugated metal.
20. I note that the wall of the outbuilding is on, or is very close to the boundary between the neighbours. However, the house at Roseleigh is a substantial distance from the outbuilding, set in a large plot, and it stands in a rural area where the materials in this development are not untypical. Moreover, though the wall of the outbuilding beside Roseleigh is long, its eaves and ridge are relatively low. In these circumstances, I cannot find that the development intrudes in the outlook of the occupiers of Roseleigh or otherwise harms their living conditions. Nor, for the reasons above, does it detract from the character or appearance of the area. There is no conflict from the development with LP policy GEN2 which protects the living conditions of surrounding occupiers and the appearance of the area.

Conclusion

21. As the development has been implemented there is no necessity for the statutory time condition. However, for certainty over the size and the arrangement of the openings in the outbuilding, a condition requiring that the development be carried out in accordance with the approved plans is necessary. For the reasons above, and having considered all other matters raised, the appeal is allowed.

Patrick Whelan

INSPECTOR