
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 August 2022

by Louise Nurser BA (Hons) Dip UP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 September 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/W4325/Y/22/3292517

Hill Bark Farm, Hill Bark Road, WIRRAL, CH48 1NP

- 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 Mr Luke Sergeant against the decision of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref LBC/21/01213, dated 7 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 18 November 2021.
 - The works proposed are Ground & First Floor Extensions, First Floor Dormer Roof Extensions along with Internal Remodelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed, and listed building consent is refused for Ground & First Floor Extensions, First Floor Dormer Roof Extensions along with Internal Remodelling.

Preliminary Matters

2. A separate linked planning application was refused. However, this decision has not been the subject of an appeal. Consequently, my decision relates solely to the application for listed building consent and the evidence submitted with it.
3. I have been provided with a planning history of the site, including plans relating to the planning and listed building consent which has since expired, for a similar scheme to that before me.
4. The main issue is whether the proposed works would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building.

Reasons

5. The appeal property was originally constructed as an important element of a late nineteenth century model farm, which was part of the wider Hill Bark estate. The farm buildings associated with the model farm, have since been split into two units.
6. The buildings date from 1875 and were designed by the architect J. Douglas. He practiced in the Northwest and was particularly known for his application of vernacular forms within his designs, and his involvement in the Chester revival, which drew on the city's tradition of black and white timbered buildings.
7. Hill Bark Farm, which was listed in 1988 as a Grade II listed building, is primarily constructed of an attractive, rich, red sandstone, which is a common local building material, with areas of half-timber at first floor level. The roof, which has a carefully choreographed roofscape, is made of clay tiles. The

farmhouse, together with the rest of the former working farm sits around a courtyard.

8. There have been a number of changes which have impacted upon and diluted the initial concept of the model farm, and its physical fabric. Nonetheless, much of the original layout remains. This is historically significant as it would have been planned to showcase modern agricultural practices, as well as revealing the extent to which the well-being of farm workers was considered to be important. Not only are the spaces significant, and their interrelationship, including the way they are accessed, but the original detailing including the construction, materials, and typology of the windows and their associated ironmongery all provide a historic record of what would have been a precisely specified development.
9. Moreover, the aesthetic of the buildings, which make up the original concept, illustrate a stylised romantic concept of a farm and associated farmhouse, with a large two-storey porch, sneck sandstone walls, and half-timber detailing and pronounced wooden barge boards, carefully articulated fenestration, and tall, flamboyant, brick lateral chimneys, all set within open countryside.
10. Consequently, the significance of the building not only relates to aesthetic consideration of the external appearance, and the form and scale of the buildings, but how the historic fabric and layout is a significant historic record of model farming in Cheshire in the late nineteenth century.
11. Contrary to paragraph 194 of the Framework, I have been provided with very little detailed historic evidence relating to the existing buildings. Moreover, there are no detailed drawings at an appropriate scale of what is to be lost, nor of what is intended to be constructed. Nonetheless, I find that the special interest of the listed building, in so far as it relates to this appeal, is the internal layout of the buildings, including the farmhouse and the former outbuildings; how rooms are accessed; the original fabric, with particular reference to the original windows and walls; the size and scale of the original farmhouse; its relationship with other buildings within the farm complex; and its external appearance, including fenestration and its chimneys.
12. The appellant wishes to alter the existing property to provide what he considers to be a well-functioning family home. However, to achieve his vision it would require the demolition of a substantial element of the internal ground floor layout, and original fabric to make one large, open plan, living space and kitchen. This would be the antithesis of the original layout. Moreover, it would result in the loss of three original deep stone window openings, and ironmongery, the insertion of a new wooden window timber framed window to replicate that of the original sitting room, making it difficult to read the original form of the building, and would also introduce an incongruous timber framed French door on the eastern elevation, which previously formed a simple, plain elevation with small openings, consistent with its former use.
13. Similarly, the swapping over of the window and door on the southern elevation of the pantry, together with the replacement of hinged wooden shutter with a glass window on the more agrarian eastern elevation, all incrementally alter the fabric and character of the buildings.
14. The introduction of a corridor on the southern elevation of the property to act as a link between the kitchen, the main original house and the converted

outbuilding, would again result in the loss of original fabric, including walls and windows. It would also mask the relationship between the individual elements of the model farm, as it would not be possible to read how each element related to each other, and what, if any, significance this would have had in the day-to-day operation of the farm. When viewed from outside, the ground floor at the southern elevation would mask the subtleties and different building forms, including the modest scale of the farmhouse, and introduce an excess of glazing and a double opening glazed external door which is not compatible with the design of the original building.

15. The proposed hip roof above the existing pantry would further elongate the domestic appearance of the farm.
16. The loss of the modern staircase in the living room, within the west wing of the property would have no adverse impact on the significance of the listed building.
17. It is proposed that the whole of the upper floor of the western wing would be accessed via the existing central staircase and a new landing. This would require that a doorway puncture the northern wall to access the southern room. Again, no detail is provided of how this would be achieved or the design of any door, or how the opening would be dressed. In addition, to increase the amount of useable space, the existing storage space under the roof on the western side would be removed to include two large dormers. This would clearly alter the simple form of the space. Most importantly, when viewed from outside, it would interrupt the plane of the roof, and introduce yet more domestic characteristics to the former outbuildings, which when combined with the alterations which have already taken place, further blur the line between the residential and agricultural elements of the original design.
18. It is intended that the existing staircase which accesses the second bedroom is surrounded by a partition wall and that an ensuite is provided. In the absence of detailed plans, it can be assumed that these would obscure the existing impressive plain wall with three vertical ventilation slots which have been encased in glass. Consequently, this would significantly alter the appearance of the room and would reduce the sense of space characteristic of its former agricultural use, as a hayloft.
19. The first floor of the original farmhouse is proposed to be extended to the east to provide a large master bedroom and an ensuite and dressing room. This would be accessed by a corridor which would remove the dual aspect nature of the original bedroom, about the chimney breast, and alter the proportions of what would have been the principal bedroom in the farmhouse. This would unavoidably alter the hierarchy of the rooms.
20. It would also require steps up from the landing and the removal of part of the wall. The casement window which lights the landing and sits underneath the eaves, is proposed to be removed and replaced with a dormer window which would sit higher so that it is not truncated by the ridge line of the roof of the proposed ground floor corridor.
21. Four further dormer windows are proposed as part of the extension, including two on the front elevation, one on the eastern elevation and another on the southern elevation. The result of these changes would be that the legibility of the building would be significantly compromised. Moreover, the massing and

- scale of the original property would be unrecognisable as it would appear to have doubled at first floor. It would also result in the significant obscuring of much of the principal chimney to the east. This would remove an important element of the aesthetic of the original design of the farmhouse.
22. No details have been provided of how the services associated with the proposed three ensembles would be implemented and how this would impact on the fabric of the building.
23. In sum, the proposal would significantly alter and harm the internal layout of the listed building, as well as masking the relationship with the former outbuildings, which is of historic interest as evidence of the model farm movement; destroy original fabric such as walls and windows and alter the balance of the building and its visual appearance, including the primacy of the farmhouse. Cumulatively, these alterations would result in considerable harm both to the historic and architectural significance of the model farm.
24. This in turn would have an adverse impact on the other buildings, which I understand to be listed, and which made up the model farm and are now in separate ownership and which form part of the courtyard.
25. Paragraph 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (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 from development within their setting and that this should have a clear and convincing justification. Given the above, I find the harm to the significance of the heritage asset to be less than substantial in this instance but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight.
26. 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 the existing layout and configuration of the property is not compatible with twenty first century living. I have also been referred to the house only having two bedrooms. I note that the plans which were submitted with the application refer to five bedrooms, albeit one is shown on the ground floor and two are in the western wing which are accessed via separate staircases.
27. However, whilst the layout of the property is not that of a conventional home, the proposed works would result in considerable damage both to the physical fabric of the building through the loss of original walls, and fenestration, and to the original design and layout of the original modest farmhouse whose design, including scale had been carefully calibrated and articulated to reflect its role as part of a model farm.
28. Reference has been made to issues of damp and lack of light, and the advantages from the increase in head height within the pantry together with increased weather protection. However, there is no technical evidence before me to suggest that any problems are significant, and if so, whether alternative approaches have been exhausted. Consequently, I give this no weight in favour of the proposal.

29. Whilst works to the listed building may require the skills of craftspeople, that is not an argument to undertake works which in themselves, will damage the listed building itself.
30. Consequently, the technical arguments put forward to support the proposals are not evidenced, and in any case, alternative less invasive approaches do not appear to have been explored. The other benefits to the scheme which have been identified, are private benefits and are not sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified. In any event, the continued viable use of the appeal property as a residential dwelling is not dependent on the proposal as the building has an ongoing residential use that would not cease in its absence.
31. I am aware that a previous application for listed building consent for the bulk of the works had previously been granted permission, and a separate consent had been granted for the hip roof over the pantry. However, these have since lapsed, and therefore do not provide a fallback position. Moreover, whilst I note that the Council's in-house conservation officer had originally considered the proposed scheme to be appropriate, and am aware of the pre-application advice proffered, I have determined the appeal on its own merits and have been particularly aware of my responsibilities under Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
32. Given the harms I have identified above, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the special historic interest of the Grade II listed building, thus failing to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 189 of the Framework and Policy CH1 of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan adopted in 2000, which requires developments to pay particular attention to the protection of buildings of recognised architectural or historic importance, an approach which remains broadly consistent with the objectives of the Framework.

Conclusion

33. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should fail.

Louise Nurser

INSPECTOR