



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 January 2023

by K Winnard LL.B (Hons)

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/M2840/D/22/3303944

Lower Farm Barn Main Street Lower Benefield PE8 5AF

- 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 Mr and Mrs Adrian and Sian Fytche against the decision of North Northamptonshire Council.
 - The application Ref NE/21/01512/FUL, dated 11 October 2021, was refused by notice dated 17 May 2022.
 - The development proposed is to replace PVCU conservatory and construct new single storey extension. Replace existing PVCU windows and replace with Aluminium windows and doors.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The Council amended the description of the development and I note that the applicant's agent has also utilised this description on the appeal form. I have used the Council's description as this provides a more accurate description of the development.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host dwelling and the area having regard to its conservation area status.

Reasons

4. Lower Farm Barn (Lower Farm Barn) is a former agricultural barn which has been converted to residential use located within the Lower Benefield Conservation Area (CA) where there is a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the area. In addition, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that great weight should be attached to the conservation of heritage assets.
5. Lower Farm Barn is situated off the A427 and set back from the road with a substantial garden and paddock. Overall, it reflects its former functional use and character as an outbuilding to a farm, albeit that the addition of a PVCu

conservatory and windows add discordant features. On approaching Lower Benefield from the north along the A427, it is viewed as part of the range of predominantly rural and traditional buildings within Lower Benefield including historic farm buildings. No CA appraisal has been provided but based on my own observations and the information before me, the significance of the CA derives from a number of elements and is not solely confined to the historic core of the village and its fine 'chocolate box' buildings. The use of local materials, the traditional form of Lower Farm Barn reflecting the vernacular of farm buildings and its relationship to the open space surrounding the village, make a positive contribution to the character and appearance, and historic significance, of the CA.

6. The distinctive form and contemporary style of the proposed extension on the north elevation would distinguish it from the original building. The southern elevation of Lower Farm Barn and consequently its relationship with Messuage Farmhouse, a Listed Building, would not be altered by the proposal. Taken together with the replacement of the white PVCu doors and windows and the removal of the PVCu conservatory, these are positive aspects of the scheme.
7. However, the extensive use of full height glazing in the northern and eastern elevations of the extension, would compete with and distract from the simple form and character of the original building. Notwithstanding the assessment of the northern elevation as the rear elevation, it nonetheless retains features reflective of its heritage and is the elevation visible in views from the north. The significant increase in glazing on this elevation, with large bifold glass doors, would result in a building with a more domestic appearance. Increasing its domestic appearance, more visible in views from the A427 would, in my view, further undermine the simplicity of its origins as an agricultural building.
8. The low pitched roof and use of zinc as a roofing material would not in themselves be visually unacceptable. However, the wrapping of the roof around the front and side elevations of the extension, would introduce another roof angle, at odds with the pitch of the main building. Consequently, the building would be extended in a way that would not reflect its original traditional design. The proposal would also result in the loss of some ventilation slits reflecting the historic character of the building. Whilst I note the intention to reuse part of the stone to be removed in the original wall, the historic value of the farm building would be eroded. Consequently, and taken as a whole, the resultant extension would as a consequence be out of keeping with the character and appearance of the host dwelling and the contribution that it makes to the character and appearance of the CA.
9. I have considered all the points raised by both parties with regard to the advice contained within Historic England Advice Note 14 (the Advice Note)¹. The Advice Note seeks to inform sympathetic change in the adaptation of farm buildings. This would not be achieved in this instance for the reasons given above.
10. The agent for the appellant has drawn my attention to rear extensions to other buildings in the locality permitted by the Council. Whilst these extensions may have some factors in common with this scheme, I am not aware of the full circumstances of these schemes and so cannot be sure that they represent a

¹ Historic England Advice Note – Adapting Traditional Farm Buildings (2017) – Best Practice Guidelines for Adaptive Reuse

direct parallel to the case before me. Moreover, since the matters under consideration are specific to this site and its immediate surroundings, I have given them limited weight. In any event I am required to determine the appeal on its own merits.

11. The Council identifies Lower Farm Barn as a non-designated heritage asset. The agent has pointed out that the Council has no list of non-designated heritage assets despite a predecessor Council having agreed to create one. Nonetheless Lower Farm Barn has been identified as such through the application process. National Planning Policy Guidance² indicates that the local planning authorities may identify non designated heritage assets as part of the decision making process on planning applications. The formal identification of a non-designated heritage asset is not a necessary requirement for it to hold this status.
12. The agent for the appellant queries the lack of information regarding Lower Farm Barn as pertinent to its significance. Nevertheless, on the information before me Lower Farm Barn has heritage significance in terms of its history, form and architectural detailing. The Framework is clear that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset must be taken into account in determining the application, and that a balanced judgment will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
13. Lower Farm Barn is within a complex of farm buildings, including the Messuage Farmhouse, a Grade II Listed Building. However, the proposal is sited away and screened from the Listed Building and as such, I would agree that that there would be no material impact on the setting of the Listed Building. I note too that the Council raises no concern in this regard. Consequently, I find that the proposal would have a neutral effect on the significance of this designated heritage asset.
14. Overall, I conclude that the proposal would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of Lower Farm Barn and consequently have a detrimental effect on the contribution that the building makes to the CA. Accordingly, the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA, thereby conflicting with Policy 2(a and b) of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (Joint Strategy) which requires, amongst other matters, proposals to conserve or enhance the heritage significance of an asset commensurate to its setting, and to complement the surrounding historic environment through its form, scale and design. It would also conflict with Policy 8 of the Joint Strategy which requires development to respond to the site's immediate and wider context and local character.
15. Given the scale and the size of the proposal within the CA as a whole, the harm that would arise would be less than substantial within the meaning of Paragraph 199 of the Framework. Under such circumstances, paragraph 202 of the Framework requires that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
16. I take account of the fact that the setting of the Listed Building would not be impacted by the proposal. The replacement and removal of the PVCu doors, windows and conservatory would be positive in character and appearance terms. I note that the Council agree that these modern additions do not

² Planning Practice Guidance Paragraph 040 Reference ID:18a-040-20190723

provide any heritage benefit. However, I am not convinced that these public benefits could not be achieved in a less intrusive and harmful way. As such they would not be of sufficient weight to tip the overall planning balance in their favour when set against the great weight that has to be given to the conservation of the designated heritage asset, in this case the CA. Accordingly the appeal proposal would fail to comply with the Framework insofar as amongst other things, it requires heritage assets to be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Similarly, the Framework's approach to non-designated heritage assets is pertinent and in my assessment the scale of the harm would adversely affect the significance of this non-designated asset.

17. It follows that the proposal fails to comply with National Policy as outlined in the Framework and with Policies 2(a and b) of the Core Strategy which, taken together seek to protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment together with the more general design policy set out in Policy 8 of the Core Strategy.

Other Matter

18. I note the reference to the Council's handling of the application, but this is not a matter before me, nor is it one which alters my findings.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons set out and having regard to all other matters raised, I hereby dismiss the appeal.

K Winnard

INSPECTOR