



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 February 2023

by R Hitchcock BSc(Hons) DipCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 08 March 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/W/22/3309529

Grove End Farm, Blossoms Lane, Woodford SK7 1RF

- 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 Susan and Eddie Thornton-Chan against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
 - The application Ref 21/6434/M, dated 29 October 2021, was refused by notice dated 29 June 2022.
 - The development proposed is 'Repair and conversion of existing building into a single dwellinghouse'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. On 14 December 2022 the Council adopted the Cheshire East Council Site Allocations and Development Plan Document (the SADPD). The policies within it supersede those of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan referred to in the Council's Decision Notice. The Council have subsequently directed me to the replacement policies as: RUR 14 Re-use of Rural Buildings for Residential Use, GEN 1 Design Principles, and HOU 11 Extensions and Alterations. I have had regard to them in coming to my decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether or not the existing building is capable of conversion without extensive alteration or rebuilding
 - the effect on the character and appearance of the locality.

Reasons

Conversion

4. The existing building is of a bespoke utilitarian design. It is formed of 3 bays and a lean-to constructed in rendered masonry elevations and cross-walls. Much of the main asymmetric roof and the lean-to roof have collapsed, including their supporting beams. Internally, there is a concrete floor.
5. A heritage statement submitted in support of the scheme identifies that a building in some form has existed on the site since the mid-1800s. The appellant's building assessments suggest that the structure has been significantly altered at various times. Despite the extent of alterations, the

- building has a high degree of permanence on account of the hard-wearing materials forming the floor and elevations.
6. However, the condition of the building is poor. The extent to which the building is of substantial construction - sufficient to enable its conversion without extensive rebuilding, is far less clear.
 7. Despite over-rendering of much of the masonry structure, I saw that some exposed elements showed bricks and jointing to be in a severely weathered state. In addition to considerable instances of cracking and brickwork displacement, there was evidence of significant deflection along much of the rear wall. Furthermore, little of the roof covering or supporting beams remain. Where roof collapses have occurred, this has caused some damage to the upper sections of the cross-walls, much of which are now exposed.
 8. Additionally, there were a number of established trees and plants growing off parts of the floor and building elevations. These are referenced in a building assessment dating from 2017. The report indicates that these could be removed and their re-growth prevented. A second report, based on a visual assessment only, also suggests that the vegetation be removed. It states that this and a replacement roof should be implemented as soon as possible to prevent further deterioration and collapses.
 9. The assessments are now several years old. They identify that areas of the over-rendering have fallen away or are delaminating from the brickwork to allow water ingress. This is stated to have potential for further mechanical water damage. Therefore, in addition to those parts of the building identified for remedial works, the presence of the rendering may obscure weaknesses or the extent of necessary re-building elsewhere, including any deterioration that may have occurred since the date of the reports.
 10. Despite the absence of any detailed assessment of the building's foundations, I have little doubt that some of the existing walls could be incorporated. However, the level of assessment and clarification is limited. In this context the identified works, which include: the removal of all render; a new internal skin and cross wall with new foundations; a complete over-cladding of the walls; a new roof and supporting structure; and, extensive structural remedial repairs and strengthening, are likely to be the very minimum.
 11. There is no prescriptive threshold as to the acceptable extent of alteration or rebuilding within the policies referred to me by the Council, nor would the proposed works be unusual individually. Nevertheless, the cumulative requirement in association with areas not fully appraised, indicate that the total extent of the works to accommodate the new use would be significant.
 12. I note the appellant's reference to the findings in *Hibbitt*¹ and the provisions in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 which reference building conversions. However, it is a matter of planning judgement for the decision-maker as to whether the building is capable of serving the intended purpose without requiring, in this case, extensive alteration, rebuilding or extension.
 13. Given the dilapidated state of the building and the age and limitations of the reports, I am not persuaded that they sufficiently qualify the full extent of the

¹ *Hibbitt v SSCLG* [2016] EWHC 2853

necessary rebuilding. Taken with the identified works, this leads me to conclude that the extent of alteration and rebuilding works necessary to allow the building to perform as a dwelling would be significant. On that basis, I find that the proposal would thereby conflict with Policy PG6 of the CELPS and RUR14 of the SADPD as they require buildings to be of a sufficiently substantial nature so as not to require extensive alteration or rebuilding to enable their re-use.

Character and appearance

14. The utilitarian form, limited architectural value and dilapidated appearance of the building cause it to be of little visual merit in its open rural setting. The shape, rendering and security shutters reflect the appearance of a row of workshop units. The building is not therefore typical of either modern or traditional agricultural (or other) rural buildings visible in the locality.
15. The proposal to reinstate an integrity to the appearance through the timber cladding of most of the external elevations and a new roof would provide an enhancement against the disused appearance of the existing building. The introduction of large, glazed openings and a rendered area would signal a residential use and appearance on one side. On the other, the regimented openings and absence of a doorway to the proposed curtilage would appear more office-like.
16. The external materials would be similar to those currently used on the site or close-by. I note the Council's concern in relation to the use of render. Notwithstanding that the existing building is rendered, if this was a concern, it was within the scope of Paragraph 55 of the Framework for the Council to seek an alternative elevational treatment to this part of the building through planning condition. Similarly, window details could equally be controlled in that way. As minor aspects of the proposal, I find those matters were not a strong basis for the refusal of planning permission.
17. For the above reasons, I find that proposal would provide an improvement to the visual quality of the building and its locality. It would thereby align with the aims of Policies SE1 and SD2 of the CELPS, Policy HOU11 of the SADPD, and the Framework as they require alterations to buildings to be in keeping with the scale, character and appearance of their surroundings and utilise appropriate materials.

Other Matters

18. In support of the proposal, the appellant highlights the building's heritage significance. This arises from the long-term presence of a building on the site and association with the historic farming heritage of the locality.
19. The appellant contends that the proposals would save historic remnants of the building. However, there is little to quantify or qualify where those are or if they could be meaningfully retained as part of the scheme. Moreover, if they do exist, they would merely be encased by an internal cavity wall and external cladding. The proposal would do little to better reveal any significance above maintaining a building in the location. If the development is essential for the conservation and enhancement of a heritage asset, I find this has not been duly demonstrated. Accordingly, on the basis of the evidence before me, it is a matter of limited weight in the appeal.

20. The proposal could provide an additional unit of housing on land accessible to services and facilities. It could make effective use of the site and provide economic benefits through construction works and its use. These are benefits of the proposal. There would also be potential for biodiversity and landscaping improvements on the site. However, as policy requirements, these are not matters in favour of the development.

Conclusion

21. Notwithstanding my finding in favour of the appellant with regard to the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the locality, the limited weight to heritage conservation, or the benefits of a single residential unit, I conclude that those matters would not outweigh the conflict with the Council's policies for directing new homes to settlement areas and restricting new residential development in the countryside.
22. The proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no material considerations that indicate the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should not be allowed.

R Hitchcock

INSPECTOR