



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 April 2023

by Mr Kim Bennett BSc DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 20th April 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/U2235/D/23/3316896

River Farm, Chart Hill Road, Staplehurst, Kent TN12 0RW

- 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 & Mrs N Bardsley against the decision of Maidstone Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 22/503804/FULL, dated 1 August 2022, was refused by notice dated 9 January 2023.
 - The development proposed is a two storey side extension to timber framed barn.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for a two storey side extension to timber framed barn in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 22/503804/FULL, dated 1 August 2022, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 342(GA)001; 002; 010rev1; 011; 012; 015; 016; 018; 020rev2; 021; 022; 023; 025; 026; 027 and 028.
 - 3) The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building.
 - 4) The extension hereby approved shall not commence above slab level until details of a scheme for the enhancement of biodiversity on the site have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall consist of the enhancement of biodiversity through at least one integrated method into the design and appearance of the extension by means such as swift bricks, bat tubes or bee bricks, and through the provision within the site curtilage such as bird boxes, bat boxes, bug hotels, log piles, wildflower planting and hedgehog corridors. The development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to first use of the extension and all features shall be maintained thereafter.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are: the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the building; and the effect on the openness of the countryside.

Reasons

Character and appearance of the building

3. River Farm is located in open countryside on the north west side of Chart Hill Road and to the north of Staplehurst Road. It comprises a detached former barn which was converted to a dwelling by virtue of a permission granted in 1990. The conversion was a sensitive one, so that the barn exhibits all the features of a traditional Kentish barn such as a large cat slide and peg tiled roof, black weatherboarding, a former cart entrance and limited fenestration. Immediately in front on the right hand side, and at right angles to it, is an open 3 bay garage with accommodation above, also designed in a traditional and complimentary form.
4. Both buildings were part of a large farm complex which is still in operation so that on the south western side of the barn there are several large modern agricultural buildings. In front of those is an older detached property known as Fairwinds, whilst in front of the garage is a dwelling known as River Farm. There is a joint vehicular access to the barn as well as the working farm.
5. The proposal involves a two storey side extension to the north east side of the building in order to provide additional living space away from the proximity of farming activities. The Council acknowledges that the extension would be modest in scale and does not appear to raise any specific detailed design issues. However, it is concerned that the extension would change the building's symmetrical form in that the front entrance would no longer occupy a central position, which in turn would adversely affect its character.
6. Dealing first with the alteration to its symmetrical form, that would certainly be the case in that the former cart entrance would be off set. However, as the appellant points out, that in itself is not unusual in Kentish Barns and there are countless examples where this can be found. The more important point in my view is whether that change fundamentally damages its original form and character, which would be contrary to guidance in the Council's Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Document 2009 (SPD). In that respect, the extension would be well detailed in terms of a continuation of the catslide roof, limited fenestration on the important front elevation and matching traditional materials. Its essentially vernacular and traditional form would therefore be maintained and it would continue to be 'read' as a converted historic barn.
7. The Council is also concerned that the proximity of the extension to the open garage would result in a merging of the two buildings which would further undermine the original rectilinear form of the building. However, the two buildings are already in close proximity to one another, and whilst the extension would overlap the garage building by a short distance, they would clearly still appear as two distinct and separate buildings by virtue of their different ridge heights, eaves heights, pitch in roof slopes and different detailed design. Again, in a farmstead context, it is not unusual to find different farm buildings in close proximity, and indeed the historic maps shows that the barn has always been in a setting of buildings physically closely related to each other, which continues to be the case in the context of the modern farm and buildings close to River Barn itself.

Openness of countryside

8. The Council is also concerned that the perceived combined massing would detract from the open character of the countryside, which is important as it is adjacent to the western boundary of the Beult Valley Area of Local Landscape Value. At my site visit, I took the opportunity to walk at length in either direction along Chart Hill Road. Approaching from the south west, the building is hardly seen because it is screened by a combination of large modern agricultural buildings, open pallet storage, Fairwinds and high hedgerows. From the opposite direction, there are fleeting views only because of the orchards to the north east of the site, similarly high hedgerows, River Farm and the garage building. From distant views I note from the grounds of appeal that all public rights of way are some distance away and from which intervening vegetation would largely screen the site.
9. At best therefore, there are only glimpsed views of the actual building apart from directly in front of the site itself from the vehicular access. In that context, as explained above, it is seen as being grouped with other buildings, both historic and modern, rather than as an isolated structure. Having regard to these points and given the modest nature of the size of the extension, I find that there would be no adverse impact upon the openness of the countryside.

Conclusion

10. The extension would be modest in size, well designed and would not fundamentally detract from its original character as an historic barn where it would still be clearly perceived as such. Furthermore, there would be no adverse impact upon the openness of the countryside. For all these reasons it would comply with Policies SP17, DM1, DM30 and DM32 of the Maidstone Local Plan 2017 and the Council's SPD, in that amongst other criteria it would not have an unacceptable impact on the original form of the building, would be well designed respecting local building styles and materials, would respect the architectural and historic integrity of adjoining buildings and would not harm the character and appearance of the countryside.
11. Conditions for the development to be built in accordance with the approved plans and for matching materials, are necessary in the interests of certainty and to ensure the extension sympathetically relates to the existing building. A condition to include details of bio diversity measures is necessary to enhance the ecology and bio diversity of the site.
12. Accordingly, the appeal is allowed and planning permission granted.

Kim Bennett

INSPECTOR