



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 May 2023

by David Wyborn BSc(Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 June 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/22/3311694

3 Penscombe Barns, Lezant, Launceston, Cornwall PL15 9NN

- 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 D J Watkins against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA22/03585, dated 27 April 2022, was refused by notice dated 23 June 2022.
 - The development proposed is the extension to Unit 3, Penscombe Barns.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the host building and the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal building forms part of an attractive group of original farm buildings, known as Penscombe Barns, which are focused around a courtyard, and which comprised a historic early 19th Century farmstead. None of the buildings within the Penscombe Barns complex are statutory listed, but they are considered as a non-designated heritage asset by Cornwall Council.
4. The Council's statement explains some of the history of the site, including extracts from the Historic Environment Record and that the land formed part of a medieval settlement dating from 1327. Reference is also made to the historic use of the site and the existence of a post medieval wheel pit on the west side of the bank barn. The older buildings on the site are, therefore, significant including because of their historic use and form, their arrangement, use of traditional materials and group value. I agree that they should be considered a non-designated heritage asset.
5. Planning permission has been granted for the conversion of the buildings in this group to a series of dwellings. Various amendments and changes to the scheme have been granted, including some extensions to the buildings. The development also involves a series of new build garages. The conversion work is well advanced and some of the units are now occupied. The works have produced a sensitive conversion scheme that has maintained the integrity of the original barns in this rural area, which is largely surrounded by open countryside.

6. The main 'L' shaped barn has been converted into five units. Unit 3 is an end unit and the building subject of this appeal. This residential unit has a fairly sizeable side garden that stretches alongside the rear of some of the new garage blocks. There is, however, a space between the end of the garage block and the side wall of the barn that allows views through to the large tree and countryside beyond. This space is noticeable from some locations when entering the main site and in the vicinity of the barn frontages.
7. Unit 3 has two bedrooms, one with an en-suite, and a bathroom on the ground floor. On the first floor, a combined space provides a kitchen/dining/lounge area. The vaulted ceiling of the upper floor accommodation provides a distinctive and characteristic feature of the accommodation. I am not persuaded that the quality of the accommodation is materially compromised in any way, including by the size and position of the openings to the bedrooms. Neither do I consider that the means of access onto the garden, including the bridge from the first floor, would detract from the ability to access the garden especially as the ground floor side door opens directly to the fairly sizeable and largely private side garden. The floorspace may be reasonably modest in size, nevertheless, this residential unit would provide pleasant accommodation converted to a high standard.
8. The proposed extension to this unit would provide a quite sizeable third bedroom with an en-suite, attached to the main building by a hallway link. The design makes some reference to the form of an old roundhouse and a structure that may have been located in this position historically. I have taken into account all the appellant's justifications for the design and effect of the proposal and the circular footprint and conical shape of the roof is an interesting and thoughtful design in itself. The link-design may allow it to be read as a more modern addition and it would also not adversely affect the fabric of the original building. The scheme would add a further bedroom and, therefore, the density of units on the site would not be altered.
9. However, it is not an extension that would be a necessary addition to facilitate the conversion of this part of the building and, therefore, assist in its preservation as a non-designated heritage asset. The accommodation, that has been provided within the existing historic fabric, has maintained its character and appearance and it appears that the benefits of the appeal proposal would predominantly be to provide additional floorspace.
10. The extension would be quite a large addition in relation to the end of this section of the barn. The extension would, even with the design and bulk of the roof, erode to a harmful extent a meaningful part of the visual gap between the end of the barn and the adjoining garages, which is presently a positive aspect of the building group. In this respect, the proposal would be of a scale of addition that would harm the immediate setting and surroundings. From within sections of the garden space of Unit 3, the extension would obscure parts of the end wall of the barn, and it would not preserve the simple form and character of the barn when viewed from these private locations. Again, in this context, the extension would be of an adverse scale of addition in relation to this end section of the barn.
11. In relation to the barn as a whole, the development would, from some positions, be a noticeable, additional element which would be at odds with the simple angular form of the building and draw the eye away from the historic

and original form of the group. In this way, albeit that the volume and mass of the extension would be fairly modest compared to the barn as a whole, the scale and form of the addition in this location would not be able to be successfully absorbed into the site without harm to the character and appearance of this group. Consequently, by reason of the size, appearance, form and location of the addition to this end of the main barn, the development would detract from the significance of this non-designated heritage asset. Accordingly, the scheme would not add to the overall quality of the area and would not be sympathetic to local character thereby conflicting with requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

12. I appreciate that there have been other extensions granted to the barns in this group. However, they appear to be generally additions that link or facilitate the conversion of the buildings themselves and, therefore, have some justification to assist with the preservation of this non-designated heritage asset. The detached garages are quite a prominent feature throughout the site although they provide ancillary space to support the residential use within the barns. Their presence does not alter my view on the harm that would be caused by the extension.
13. I have also noted the conclusions of the Inspector who dismissed an appeal for alterations and extension to an approved barn conversion within the south east part of the site¹. That Inspector's findings were specific to that barn although there is some relevance as that barn was within the wider site and similar policies applied as in this case. Nevertheless, I have determined this appeal on its merits.
14. Policy Housing 1 of the Lezant Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan 2019-2030 (the Lezant NDP) states that support will be given for the redevelopment of brown field sites or redundant farm buildings where the original footprint is not exceeded. The original scheme, with the provision of Unit 3, would meet with this policy element. However, the proposed development would provide additional floorspace beyond the original footprint and would conflict with this policy requirement. I am not satisfied that there is a substantive reason or material planning benefit that would justify deviating from this policy requirement in the circumstances of this building.
15. Even if applicable, the proposal would not meet with Policy Housing 2 of the Lezant NDP, concerning the design of new houses and conversions, because of the harm I have identified. The justification for the policy, includes to ensure that new development is acceptable in its context and preserves or enhances its setting, which would not be met in the case of the appeal proposal.
16. Policy 7 of the Cornwall Local Plan Strategic Policies 2010-2030 (the Local Plan) sets out the approach when new housing may be allowed in the countryside. One of the allowances concerns the reuse of suitably constructed redundant, disused or historic buildings that are considered appropriate to retain and would lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting. Because of the adverse effect of the extension on the main building, I consider that the scheme would not provide the required enhancement and thereby would fail this element of the policy.

¹ APP/D0840/W/22/3295436 - Land South East of Penscombe Barns, Lezant, Launceston, Cornwall – dated 1 September 2022.

17. Paragraph 203 of the Framework advises that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application.
18. The scheme would provide an additional bedroom which would largely be a private benefit to the future occupants of this enlarged unit. There would be some social and economic benefits during construction and in the subsequent occupation of the larger unit of accommodation. However, these benefits are fairly minor and should only merit limited weight in favour of approval.
19. On the other hand, there would be harm to the character and appearance of the host building, a non-designated heritage asset, and to the area. I attach this harm and policy conflict moderate weight in the circumstances of this case. It follows that the harm and policy conflict would not be outweighed by the benefits of the scheme.
20. In the light of the above analysis, I conclude that the scale and form of the development would harm the character and appearance of the host building and the area. Accordingly, the scheme would conflict with Policy Housing 1 of the Lezant NDP, Policies 2, 7, 12 and 24 of the Local Plan and the Framework which, amongst other things, requires development must ensure Cornwall's enduring distinctiveness, and maintain and enhance its distinctive natural and historic character.

Other Matters

21. The effect of this extended unit of residential development on the Plymouth and Tamar Estuaries Special Area of Conservation is highlighted in the appeal papers. However, given my overall conclusion I have not needed to consider whether or not there is any need for mitigation to this habitat site as a result of the proposal.

Conclusion

22. The proposal would harm the character and appearance of the host building and the area, and would thereby conflict with the development plan when considered 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 be dismissed.

David Wyborn

INSPECTOR