



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 July 2023

By Terrence Kemmann-Lane JP DipTP FRTPI MCMI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4TH August 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/D/23/3320082

Beech Stables, 2 Ifield Farm, Shorne Ifield Road, Gravesend, DA12 3HE

- 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 Ben and Lorraine Fletcher against the decision of Gravesend Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20221210, dated 7 November 2022, was refused by notice dated 17 January 2023.
 - The development proposed is erection of single storey rear extensions to form new ensuite bathroom and kitchen; alterations to fenestration.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the erection of single storey rear extensions to form new ensuite bathroom and kitchen; alterations to fenestration at Beech Stables, 2 Ifield Farm, Shorne Ifield Road, Gravesend, DA12 3HE, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 20221210, dated 7 November 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: drawing Nos.1504 A.01 Location Plan; 1504 A.02 Proposed Block Plan; 1504 A.05 Proposed Floor Plans; 1504 A.06 Proposed Elevations; 1504 A.07 Cross sections and Perspectives.
 - 3) The external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing dwelling.
 - 4) Notwithstanding the provisions of Article 3, and Part 1 Classes A and G of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(England) Order 2015, as amended, or any provision equivalent to those Classes in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order, with or without modification, no window, door or other form of opening shall be formed in the south east, flank elevation of the southern extension hereby permitted.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this case are: i) the effect of the proposed development on the rural setting, form and appearance of the farmstead; ii) the effect of the development on the Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area.

Reasons

The effect of the proposed development on the rural setting, form and appearance of the farmstead

3. The appeal site is within an historic farm yard complex located on the northern side of Shorne Ifield Road that was converted and subdivided into 5 residential units. The site is approximately 1km from the village of Shorne. The appeal unit and its neighbour result from the conversion of stable buildings. It has 3 bedrooms and is within a building that has been divided into 2 dwellings. It and its attached neighbour occupy one of 2 linear ranges in an 'L' formation, facing onto a central courtyard. A third side of the courtyard has a modern garage block. The complex is not listed, including in any local list, nor is it in a conservation area. Nevertheless it is of heritage value: as Historic England makes clear in one of its publications, *"Traditional farmsteads are heritage assets which, through conservation and reuse, make a significant contribution to rural economies and communities."*
4. Policy CS20 of the Core Strategy 2014, recognises the importance of preserving the heritage and historic environment as a non-renewable resource. Paragraph 5.16.7 of the justification for the policy notes that the borough's key heritage assets include a significant number of non-listed buildings and features of local historic and/or architectural value. As the officer's report states *"The working buildings are traditionally low form, and simple in design, allowing the farmhouse, or in this case the oast house, to be the dominant and more complex feature."*
5. As I have already noted, the appeal dwelling fronts onto a courtyard, and has its main garden area situated on the non-attached side. At the rear of the dwelling runs a narrow open banked area, beyond which is the curtilage of Ifield Place. This banked boundary is defined by substantial planting of trees and shrubs. It is within this narrow open area, which currently contains a small attached storage outbuilding, that the 2 extensions are proposed to be built – one at each end of the rear elevation, the northern one taking in the footprint of the store. Between the 2 extensions would be an open courtyard.
6. The proposed extensions would be single storey and would have shallow mono-pitched roofs that would tie into the existing roof. The officer's report fairly notes: *"The proposed scale and size of the extensions in isolation, and being single storey would generally be subservient. The low-pitched roof form adds to the subservient appearance, and would generally be preferable to a flat roof addition. The creation of the two extensions rather than extending for the entire rear also limits bulk and visual dominance over the main dwellinghouse. As specified in the application form, the proposed external materials would match the existing dwellinghouse. Generally, the extensions would be subordinate to the main dwellinghouse in scale and appearance."*
7. It is at this point that I diverge from the officer's further assessment. From my visit to the site and its surroundings, I am satisfied that the extensions would not be visible from any public or private space, other than from the similar narrow open area behind the attached neighbour. Of course, when protecting heritage buildings, concern is not restricted to its visibility, but it is a consideration. It is probable that the stable use of the buildings was preceded by use for cattle/cart sheds, and it seems to me that small lean-to additions would not have been out of place with buildings in such uses. In making this

point, I recognise that the proposed extensions are not 'lean-to' as such, and that the roofs interrupt the simple form of the existing roofs.

8. It appears to me that the enclosed farmyard has had its previous character rather altered by the short range of garages that seem to have divided it almost in half from the 'L' shaped block to the north-west. This modest harm that is visible, is far more telling on the significance of the asset than the proposed extensions. I do not consider that the proposed subservient structures would impact on the traditional context of the farmstead.
9. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires great weight to be given to the conservation of heritage assets, which include non-designated heritage assets. It draws a distinction between substantial harm and less than substantial harm to such an asset. It would be less than substantial harm which would apply here, but I do not consider that the proposed development amounts to any meaningful level of harm to this non-designated heritage asset.

The effect of the development on the Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area

10. The appeal site, and the farmstead as a whole, is in the Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area. This Landscape Character Area consists of very gently undulating topography and open arable farmland. I am told that there is the original Saxon village of Lower Higham and more recent development to the south, with marsh side hamlets and settlements. Policy CS12 of Gravesham Core Strategy seeks to protect the Green infrastructure within the Borough and states at 5.7.26 that the overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced.
11. The proposed development would increase the size of the property, but the minor increase in scale would not be apparent from anywhere other than the rear of the host dwelling. It would not harm the landscape character since it would be invisible due to the enclosure provided by the existing dwelling and the raised and dense planting at the rear. It would not interrupt the traditional courtyard form of the historic farmstead or materially increase domestic features. Therefore, it would not be detrimental to the traditional rural landscape character of the surrounding area.

Conclusions

12. For the reasons that I have set out above, the proposed development would not adversely affect the rural setting, form and appearance of the farmstead, nor would it have any deleterious effect on the Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area. Therefore I will allow the appeal.

Conditions

13. The statutory condition that provides a time limit on the start of development must be imposed. In addition, the council has suggested a number of conditions in the event that the appeal is upheld. I have considered these in the light of Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). I consider that the conditions should be imposed for the following reasons: condition 2 is required for certainty and avoidance of doubt as to the development permitted; condition 3 is to ensure that the appearance of the development permitted integrates with

the existing in a visually satisfactory manner; condition 4 is to safeguard the amenity and privacy of the occupants of the neighbouring property.

Terrence Kemmann-Lane

INSPECTOR