



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 September 2023

by Hannah Ellison BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 September 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/X3540/W/22/3306857

Red House Barn, The Street, Brandeston, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP13 7AB

- 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 M Ruffles against the decision of East Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref DC/22/1625/FUL, dated 21 April 2022, was refused by notice dated 15 June 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Proposed dwelling, involving construction of new vehicular access. Conversion of part retained former agricultural building currently approved to be used ancillary to existing dwelling'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on a) the character and appearance of the area and b) ecology.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. This appeal concerns a large agricultural barn located adjacent to and within the grounds of Red House Barn, a former barn which was converted to a residential property. The appeal barn is functional in appearance and set well back from the highway and the main dwelling. The appeal site is located outside but immediately adjacent to the settlement boundary of Brandeston.
4. There is extensive planning history to the appeal site, including the approvals for works to convert the barn to residential use ancillary to Red House Barn. I note that through these permissions various works to the barn itself, which include demolition and fenestration alterations along with associated alterations to the curtilage of Red House Barn to include the land around the appeal barn, have been considered acceptable.
5. With regards to this appeal however, the Council's main concern in respect of the proposal's effect on the character and appearance of the area relates to the proposed access to the appeal barn and its conversion to a self-contained dwelling with its own curtilage.
6. Policy SCLP5.5 of the East Suffolk Council: Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (September 2020) (the LP) sets out criteria which the conversion of buildings in the countryside for housing should meet. Of these, the Council considers the proposal to fail against criterion b, e, g and h which collectively seek to ensure

- that proposals do not have a harmful effect on the character of the landscape and setting of the area.
7. The supporting text to the policy also makes clear that the conversion should not result in the creation of residential curtilages or other features that would detract from the rural nature of the area and the building.
 8. The appeal site is located just outside of the Brandeston Conservation Area (the BCA) and thus is within its setting. The significance of the BCA is partly derived from the strong linear layout of the village, which is created by the close siting of the built form to the highway, and its overall rural characteristics created by the close relationship with open farmed fields which come right up to the village edge.
 9. By virtue of the large expanse of open land which forms part of the appeal site and the set back position of the appeal barn, this site is an important reminder of the historic links between the former farm complex at Red House Barn and the countryside beyond. Its open and rural characteristics mark a clear distinction to the edge of the village and thus it contributes positively towards the intrinsic characteristics of the BCA and the rural character of the wider, open countryside.
 10. The proposed driveway would cut through this open parcel of land and would be of a substantial length due to the barn's set back position. This extent and prominence of the driveway would be an incongruous feature in the locality, where built form tends to be only slightly set back from the road and of a single plot depth. The introduction of trees along the driveway would be intrusive and overly domestic, thus drawing the eye further.
 11. Along with the erosion of the expanse of openness, the proposed extensive residential curtilage, which would formalise this parcel of land and enclose the appeal barn, would alter the character of the site from rural to overly domestic. The proposal would jar drastically with the site's rural surrounds, which it currently contributes positively towards.
 12. I acknowledge that the residential curtilages of Red House Barn and its annexe are within close proximity. Nevertheless, the proposal would significantly disrupt and alter this open parcel of flat land which currently has a much closer affinity to the rural landscape than the adjacent built form, by virtue of its siting at the edge of the settlement.
 13. Whilst the appeal barn is of no particular architectural merit, I consider that it does not currently detract from the rural landscape or the setting of the BCA. It has a utilitarian appearance and is typical of this rural area. I appreciate that the proposed alterations seek to replicate that of the previous approvals and the works are reflective of traditional barns within this locality. That the proposal may represent acceptable design is, however, a neutral matter.
 14. Moreover, even if I were to conclude that the barn detracted from the immediate setting, that is not to say that any works to it and the land surrounding it would be a positive alteration. All in all, the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character of the landscape rather than making a positive contribution or enhancement to the setting.
 15. The proposal would also fail to be served by an appropriate existing access as permission for a new access point is being sought through this appeal. The

criteria of LP Policy SCLP5.5 are a closed list and it is clear that all must be fulfilled for a proposal to be acceptable under it.

16. The harm arising from the above on the setting of the BCA would be less than substantial. Paragraph 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) confirms that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
17. The proposed development would make a contribution to local housing supply. It would create temporary employment opportunities and there would be associated spending in the local area on subsequent occupation of the dwelling. However, given the small scale of the development, I afford limited weight to these benefits.
18. Any benefits arising from the proposed planting and any subsequent ecological and biodiversity improvements would also be limited given the scale of the development. As I have found above, the proposal would result in harm to the rural surrounds and thus the landscape alterations proposed are not considered a public benefit in visual terms. As there are existing permissions relating to the appeal barn, I am not convinced that the appeal proposal represents its optimum viable use.
19. Accordingly, the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area and the setting of the BCA, thus it would conflict with Policies SCLP5.5 and SCLP11.5 of the LP which together seek to ensure that developments are reflective of and make a positive contribution to the area.

Ecology

20. The appeal site falls within the Suffolk Coast RAMS Zone of Influence. I note the appellants intention to make the requisite payment to mitigate against the impacts of the development on this habitat site. Indeed, I have been provided with a receipt for payment. Regardless, as I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons there is no need for me, as the competent authority, to carry out an assessment on the likely significant effects of the proposal or explore the necessity for undertaking an Appropriate Assessment and secure mitigation where required. Even had I done so and found the proposal and payment made by the appellant to be acceptable in this regard, such a finding would not have affected my overall conclusion on this appeal.
21. In terms of the proposed loss of hedgerow, I cannot accurately ascertain whether there are similarities between previously approved developments at the appeal site. However, even if I were to consider that appropriately worded conditions could be applied to any approval which provided ecological enhancements, this would not have altered my overall conclusion on this appeal. Similarly, I note the concerns regarding the location of an owl box however there is also no need for me to consider this matter further.

Other Matter

22. Reference is made to paragraph 80 of the Framework. This states that planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside, unless it meets one or more of the specified criteria. Whilst the appeal site is located outside of the settlement, by virtue of its close

relationship to Brandeston and the adjacent dwellings, the proposal would not constitute an isolated home in the countryside. This is, however, a neutral matter.

Conclusion

23. The proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and thus it conflicts with the development plan when taken as a whole. The other considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

H Ellison

INSPECTOR