



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 September 2023

by C Billings BA (Hons), DipTP, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24th October 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/23/3316316

The Old Barn, St Peters Street, Caxton, Cambridge CB23 3PX

- 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 Steve Daniels of S T Daniels T/A Target Construction against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 22/03549/FUL, dated 4 August 2022, was refused by notice dated 12 October 2022.
 - The development proposed is to repair, convert and extend existing barn to form dwelling house; construction of outbuilding to contain 2 car spaces plus bins and cycles store.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. There is an extant planning permission granted in May 2022 to convert the appeal building into a dwelling house. The appeal proposal is a revised scheme to that previously granted to include a wider extension, a glazed flat roof element, a dormer window, changes to fenestration and to enlarge the garden curtilage of the proposed dwelling. I have had regard to this extant consent in reaching my decision.
3. Since the appeal was submitted, a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been published in September 2023. The revisions to the Framework do not however relate to matters of concern raised in this appeal.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - The effect of the proposed dormer window and single storey glazed extension on the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding rural area; and,
 - the effect of the proposed garden area on the character and openness of the countryside, in respect of its size and location.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal property is a vacant traditional barn, constructed of timber boarding with brick plinth and tiled pitched roof. The barn is prominent from the street, due to its location on a bend in St Peters Street and because it is situated in a

fairly isolated location with open fields around it. On the opposite side of St Peters Street there are dwellings that appear to be either converted barns, or built to replicate converted barns, which are of similar character to the appeal proposal, with timber boarded walls, pitched tiled roof and openings that give the appearance of previous barn door openings. The appeal barn due to its location, design, and scale, shares its context and setting with these existing properties on the opposite side of St Peters Street.

6. There are approximately 8 notably large, detached dwellings of varying design and external materials located to the north of the private drive/Taylors Close at Firs Farm. These existing dwellings are visually prominent from the appeal site and surrounding area, due to their scale and design, although they are of a very different scale and character to the appeal building and proposal. Also, these nearby properties have a different context to the appeal proposal, in that they are large new build dwellings, as opposed to converted rural buildings and are located within a cluster, rather than isolated within an open field. These dwellings do not therefore influence the character and site context of the appeal building to a significant extent.
7. The proposed extension to the barn would be large, extending out to the rear into the field. The main part of the proposed rear extension would follow the general form and character of the original barn, with timber boarding and traditional pitched roof design. However, the proposed large dormer and glazed flat roof element to the south side roof slope and elevation would not follow the traditional, simple rural character and design of the host building, due to their domestic and modern design. As a result, these elements of the proposal would not be in keeping with the rural character of the surrounding area and would appear incongruous in this setting.
8. The use of matching materials and colour for the proposed dormer and glazed extension would not overcome these design concerns, as the dormer and glazed structures would still be of a modern design and furthermore are design features not traditionally found on barns.
9. The proposed glazed extension would be dissimilar to the south elevation of that granted as part of the extant consent, which also incorporates 6 panel bi-fold doors. In this regard, the proposed glazed extension would be almost the full length of the side elevation and would project out beyond the main side elevation of this new wing, with a flat roof. The proposed dormer due to its size and design would dominate the south roof slope of the extension. Both the dormer and glazed extension would not therefore appear subordinate nor in keeping with the rural character of the host barn.
10. The proposed dormer and single storey glazed extension would, due to their scale, design, and location, appear prominent across the field from the public footpath to the south of the appeal site. Whilst there is a hedgerow along the first part of the public footpath leading from St Peters Street, this does not continue along the field boundary beyond the initial footpath gate. Accordingly, further along the footpath, there are prominent views toward the appeal site and barn. The proposed dormer and glazed extension would appear overly dominant from this public viewpoint. The prominence of these discordant design features would be detrimental to the rural character of the surrounding area.

11. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposed dormer and single storey glazed extension would be harmful to the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding rural area. The development would therefore be contrary to Policies H/17, S/7, and HQ/1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (SCLP). These policies seek to ensure, amongst other things, that development is sensitive to the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding area and, responds to its context in the wider landscape.

Character and openness of the countryside

12. The existing character of the appeal site at the north/north-eastern end, between the barn and Taylors Close, where the proposed extended garden area would be, is currently open land with no hedgerow or trees. There is a slight rise of land levels on approach along St Peters Street towards the site from either direction, which increases the prominence of the area around the barn, particularly the part of the appeal site where the extended curtilage areas are proposed.
13. The proposed overall garden curtilage would be large, extending across the full width of a field, and wrapping around the rear and sides of the barn. The additional proposed garden areas would encompass parts of the existing field on either side of the proposed access driveway leading to the dwelling from Taylors Close. In contrast, the extant consent included only a small strip of land either side of the driveway. By including this increased area within the curtilage, it would reduce the openness of this part of the field, through the introduction of planting, means of enclosure, and general domestic use of the land.
14. Whilst it may be possible to limit, via condition, any permanent structures, or buildings within the proposed extended curtilage area to seek to protect its rural character, this could not limit the extent of landscape planting, nor restrict residential activities that could potentially take place. The introduction of such planting and domestic residential use, including, for example, temporary seating, play equipment or washing lines would change the character of the area and reduce its openness.
15. No substantial evidence has been provided to demonstrate why the additional curtilage area of land between the appeal access driveway and St Peters Street would not be functional due to its position and size. This piece of land would be viewed in conjunction with a strip of open land set between the appeal site and St Peters Street, which wraps round the corner of Taylors Close and therefore it would not be seen in isolation. The land therefore makes a positive contribution to the openness of the surrounding area due to its location and relationship with other adjacent land.
16. Due to the separation distance and the fact that the proposed development would have a different character and site context to the new self-build dwellings to the north, these nearby dwellings do not justify further encroachment of domestic curtilage into the open countryside. Limited encroachment into the field to provide only the access driveway from Taylors Close (as approved under the extant consent) would furthermore be important to maintain the distinctive separation to the nearby dwellings and the open setting of the proposed barn conversion.

17. The loss of openness would not be offset by the proposed introduction of new hedge and tree planting, as this would add features of enclosure and reduce the openness of the land, thereby increasing the prominence of the large domestic curtilage proposed around the barn, as opposed to the more open setting that currently exists or that would exist if the extant consent were to be implemented.
18. Having regard to the above, due to the size and location of the proposed garden area, the proposed development would result in the loss of openness and unacceptable encroachment into open countryside harmful to its character, in conflict with Policies HQ/1 and H/17 of the SCLP, which require development to respect the character of the local rural area.

Other Matters

19. Having regard to the context of the appeal site and its surroundings, including the relationship to other existing development, the current Village Framework Boundary is clearly and appropriately defined. Whilst my attention has been drawn to a recent development of self-build houses to the north, that development has not altered the development boundary, as this can only be done through the development plan process. The full details of that development proposal are also not before me, and the circumstances surrounding its approval are therefore unclear. Accordingly, I do not consider Policy S/7 to be out of date and the presumption of paragraph 11d of the Framework would not apply in this instance.
20. Policy S/11 of the SCLP identifies Caxton as an infill village, where residential development and redevelopment within the villages may be acceptable for schemes of not more than 2 dwellings, however, as the appeal site lies outside the village boundary this policy is not of relevance to the proposals.
21. The extant consent to convert and extend the appeal barn could be implemented, however, this does not include the elements of the appeal proposal which I have found would be harmful. The fallback position of the previous scheme would not therefore result in the harm I have identified above.
22. I have had regard to the Framework in making my decision, although I have found that the proposal would conflict with development plan policies, as identified above. Whilst the Framework and Policy H/17 of the SCLP allows the re-use of rural buildings in certain circumstances, the proposed development would not be appropriate due to the harm it would cause to the character and appearance of the host building and its surroundings.
23. The support of the Parish Council and 2 neighbours for the conversion of the barn, and that the proposal would bring back into use the vacant barn are noted, however the extant consent could be carried out without causing harm and would provide the same benefits in terms of renovating the barn.
24. No concerns have been raised about the proposal in relation to arboriculture, hedgerows, the living conditions of nearby or future occupiers, contamination, ecology, and highway matters. However, a lack of harm in relation to these matters is a neutral consideration and not a positive benefit.

Conclusion

25. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Billings
INSPECTOR