



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 October 2023

by Mr R Walker BA HONS DIPTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7 December 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/D/23/3325663

The Hott, Thorngraston, Hexham, Northumberland NE47 7AD

- 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 Christopher Linfoot against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 22/04675/FUL, dated 16 December 2022, was refused by notice dated 20 April 2023.
 - The development proposed is proposed 1.5 storey extension to the rear will provide a new staircase; two extensions onto the west gable will provide two storeys of additional living accommodation, plus a single storey link to the updated outbuilding to be clad in timber; the two storey and 1.5 storey extensions to have roof pitches; double garage with timber clad; the landscape and ground levels will be updated to provide access to the garage and accommodate the extensions.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Permission has previously been granted (the extant permission) for a new highway access, change of use of field to garden, two storey side/rear extension and detached garage at the site. At the time of my site visit, I saw that work to the rear cottage and garage was being undertaken. For clarity, I have assessed the proposals based on the plans submitted with the application.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area including the effect on the non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

4. The site includes, amongst other things, a two-storey farmhouse, and a cottage to its rear. The cottage's eastern wall incorporates the remains of a bastle and is recorded within the Historic Environment Record (HER). There is no dispute between the main parties that the appeal site contains a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). However, there is a dispute as to whether the eastern wall of the cottage is the extent of the NDHA or, in the Council's alternative, whether both buildings constitute the NDHA.
5. The glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) establishes that NDHAs are 'those identified by the local planning authority'. Moreover, advice is given in the Planning Practice Guidance¹ regarding the ways in which NDHAs could be identified. This says that in some cases, local

¹ Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 18a-040-20190723

planning authorities may also identify NDHAs as part of the decision-making process on planning applications, for example, following archaeological investigations. In this regard, even though only the bastle wall is recorded within the HER, it is still within the Council's remit to identify NDHAs as part of the decision-making process on planning applications.

6. I have also been referred to an appeal decision (Ref: 3266933) at a different property where the Inspector, in that case, concluded that that appeal building had limited heritage significance and did not constitute a NDHA. I have no reason to disagree with the approach taken by the Inspector in making an assessment and I have also made my own assessment having regard to the evidence before me.
7. The bastle remains date to the 16th/17th century and are a 1.4m thick wall built from stone rubble, it has a central opening, but its remains have now been subsumed and incorporated within the cottage. I have no firm evidence before me that accurately dates the cottage, but it is common ground that it was constructed prior to the larger farmhouse. It has a simple form of modest proportions with a high solid to void ratio and an informal opening arrangement to its front elevation.
8. The larger later farmhouse occupies a more prominent position in the foreground and is dated above the entrance door to 1884. It is two-storey, stone built, with a balanced frontage formed of sash windows with a central porch and two chimneys at either end of the gable. These elements result in an attractive and elegant building. The rear has a more rustic charm, resulting from its lean-to extension and more informal window pattern. This reflects the differentiation in status from its front elevation.
9. Taken together, the contrasting characteristics between the later farmhouse, the earlier cottage and the surviving remains of the bastle wall create a layered historical narrative of the site. Moreover, the age of the former cottage and later farmhouse, their traditional materials and construction techniques, the simple vernacular of the former cottage and attractive balanced frontage of the later farmhouse all have historical and architectural interest. Together, they hold a level of historical and architectural value that would be sufficient for these buildings collectively to be considered a NDHA.
10. The buildings sit prominently on a sloping rural landscape near a road and due to the architectural value of the vernacular buildings they make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the surrounding rural area.
11. The proposed two storey extension would be clearly identifiable as an extension to the later farmhouse due to its physical relationship to its gable. It would project out to the side by a large amount, such that although it would be subservient in height, and stepped back from the front, it would be a prominent eye-catching feature. Its front façade would have a striking mix of window sizes with each being different. Their contrasting shape, arrangement and position on the front elevation would, when combined with the contrasting material finish, result in an extension that would jar injuriously with the front façade of the farmhouse.
12. Contemporary design, can, in some circumstances, be an appropriate approach to an extension or alteration of a historic building. However, in this case, the

- proposal would overtly clash and contrast with the vernacular style of the existing house.
13. The proposal would also subsume much of the front façade of the earlier cottage with an awkward juxtaposition of roof slopes between the proposed lean-to extension to the rear of the farmhouse that overlaps the proposed side extension and connects with the flat roof link to the original cottage. This juxtaposition of elements would result in an overly complicated arrangement that would be at odds with the simpler but contrasting vernacular of the two buildings. As such, the proposal would not lead to an enhancement of the site in so far as it relates to this main issue.
 14. The Council raised concerns regarding the extent of rebuilding works needed to make the bastle wall elevation of the former cottage safe. The appellant has undertaken the structural works and advises that this included localised rebuilding and repairs in line with the extant permission and the Visual Structural Inspection Report submitted during the application. I have no reason to dispute this. The appellant also advised that the original doorway in the bastle wall was blocked up in the Victorian period, is partially blocked by the existing outbuildings and is intended to be maintained as such. Whilst there remains some ambiguity over how the existing historic opening in the bastle wall would be treated internally, rather than externally, in the context of the scheme as a whole these are not determinative matters. On balance, I am therefore satisfied that the historic and architectural values of the bastle wall would be preserved by the scheme.
 15. The proposals seek several alterations, and not all would result in harm, such as the proposed garage. Moreover, I accept the legibility of the farmhouse and earlier cottage would be clearly discernible as historic features due to the contrasting material finish of the proposed extension. Even so, cumulatively, the proposal would considerably erode the architectural and historical values of the two buildings, to the detriment of the overall appearance of the NDHA, and its contribution to the character and appearance of the surrounding rural area.
 16. I therefore find that the proposals would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including the effect on the NDHA. Paragraph 203 of the Framework states that the effect of an application on the significance of a NDHA should be taken into account in determining that application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect NDHAs, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
 17. The proposals would provide an improved level of accommodation, built to modern energy efficient standards, and would improve the living conditions associated with the dwelling, meeting the needs of the appellant. The energy efficiency of the proposal would have environmental benefits, as would the space for an office for home working, provision for vegetable growing and electric vehicle charging. There would also be some minor social and economic benefits from the construction works.
 18. Mindful that there is an extant consent and works are ongoing at the property, there is no substantive evidence before me that the resulting benefits, or similar benefits, are dependent on the design subject of this appeal. Nor is there any substantive evidence that the buildings would be at risk, or that the use of the former farmhouse as a dwelling would cease, were the appeal to fail.

This limits the weight I afford these benefits. Accordingly, the harm to the NDHA would, in my balanced judgement, be unacceptable.

19. As such, I find conflict with the requirements of Policies HOU9, QOP1, QOP2, ENV1 and ENV7 of the Northumberland Local Plan and the provisions of the Framework in so far as they relate to this main issue and when taken together. These say, amongst other things, that householder proposals for the extension and/or external adaptation of existing dwellings will only be supported where the enhancement respects, complements and does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the style and character of the existing dwelling and its setting in terms of its design and use of materials, or on the character of the surrounding area.

Other Matters

20. I am required to determine the appeal on its own merits and concerns regarding the processing of the application, including the merits of an alternative design, or what type of stonework and where might be appropriate are not matters for my consideration in this appeal.
21. My attention has been drawn to other properties in the area which have been extended with a contemporary design. However, my concerns are not the principle of a contemporary design but the details of the scheme before me in relation to the prominent front façade of this farmhouse and the way it connects with the earlier cottage. From the evidence before me, none of the examples provided are directly comparable in their combination of scale, materials, design, and relationships to the host buildings. In this regard, whilst I accept contemporary design can be found, and has been accepted elsewhere that does not justify the harm I have identified in this instance.
22. My attention has also been drawn to an appeal decision (Ref 3130844) which was allowed. From the evidence available to me, that case can be distinguished from the appeal proposal in that harm was identified but was outweighed by the public benefits of bringing a listed building back into use and thus preserving it. In this instance, there is no evidence before me that the NDHA is at risk were the appeal to fail. As such, the circumstances of the appeal decision are not the same as the scheme before me.

Conclusion

23. The proposals would not accord with the development plan when read as a whole and I find there to be no material considerations, that would indicate that the decision should be taken other than in accordance with it.
24. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Mr R Walker

INSPECTOR