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# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 December 2023

**by Mr R Walker BA HONS DIPTP MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 21 December 2023**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/M2840/D/23/3321871**

**The Woolbarn, Main Street, Upper Benefield, Peterborough PE8 5AN**

- 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 Jay Stephenson against the decision of North Northamptonshire Council.
  - The application Ref NE/23/00172/FUL, dated 13 February 2023, was refused by notice dated 5 April 2023.
  - The development proposed was originally described as proposals is to affix 14 solar panels to the south side of the barn roof. The fixing of the panels is fully reversible without damage to the roof.
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## Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

## Preliminary Matters

2. The appellant submitted both planning and listed building applications to the Council for the proposed solar panels. However, a valid appeal has only been made to the refused planning application. As such, my consideration and determination are solely related to the refused planning application. Nonetheless, as the proposal relates to a listed building, I have had special regard to section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

## Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building, known as Townsend Farmhouse, The Wool Barn approximately 10 metres north west of The Farmhouse, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

## Reasons

4. The Wool Barn is a former barn and cartshed dating to the early/mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is constructed of squared coursed limestone with an ashlar gable end and concrete roof tiles. The listing indicates that the building is thought to have been historically used, amongst other things, as a wool barn. It is now in residential use. It is positioned forward of the neighbouring buildings in this part of the street, and this positioning combined with its two-storey height, means it is highly visible in the street scene.
5. Although now converted, the former barn's height, lack of chimney stacks, fenestration pattern and more simple style of openings remain distinct from the domestic appearance of houses in this part of the street. The contrasting characteristics between the wool barn and the other houses, including

- Townsend Farmhouse, illustrate the historic functionality of the building as a barn and cartshed and the historic lifestyles of the associated farm household.
6. From the evidence available to me, the special interest/significance of the listed building, insofar as it relates to this appeal, is largely derived from the barn's simple vernacular and plan form and traditional construction techniques and materials, including the fenestration pattern. These make important contributions to its aesthetic and historical values.
  7. The proposal would introduce fourteen surface mounted solar panels located above and below the existing roof lights on the building's south-facing elevation. The size of the array, in combination with the existing rooflights, would leave little of the roof slope visible.
  8. The concrete tiles on the roof were in place at the time of the building's listing. Nonetheless, I accept that they are unlikely to be original features. Even so, they have a muted colour that does not clash overtly with the aesthetic or historical interest of the building. In contrast, the black solar panels would have a shinier finish than the surrounding roof tiles and would be read as a starkly modern intrusion and an atypical feature on the roof slope.
  9. From outside of the property the panels would not be visible from views taken from the north along the A427. However, they would be visible in some private views taken from the south, particularly so at shorter range. Moreover, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether public views of the building can be gained.
  10. Overall, the combination of their size, number, and their distinctly modern domestic appearance would diminish the traditional vernacular and simplicity of the converted barn by imparting a more overtly residential and domestic character. It would thus erode the aesthetical and historical interest of the former barn as a traditional farm building. While I note that the proposed development is potentially reversible, the panels (and resulting harm) would nevertheless be a feature of some considerable time.
  11. I therefore find that the proposal would not preserve the Grade II listed building, known as Townsend Farmhouse, The Wool Barn approximately 10 metres north west of The Farmhouse, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. As a result, the proposal would harm the significance of this designated heritage asset.
  12. Paragraph 205 of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) (2023) advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. Paragraph 206 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting and that this should have clear and convincing justification.
  13. Given the localised nature of the proposed development to the rear I find the harm is 'less than substantial' in this instance but, nevertheless, of great weight. Under such circumstances, paragraph 208 advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes securing the asset's optimum viable use.

14. The contribution of renewable energy in tackling the climate change crisis is not to be diminished, and the use of solar panels to help reduce carbon emissions would be both a private benefit to the appellant, and a public one carrying significant weight. I have, however, not been provided with specific evidence on the net carbon reduction that the proposal would realise. Nor that the technology, the location, or the number of panels proposed would be the least harmful approach to securing similar public benefits moderating the weight overall. There would be some small economic benefits associated with the installation of the panels, but in the very short term. The granting of planning permission would not be on a temporary basis. I therefore give very little weight to the potential reversibility of the panels.
15. The absence of harm in relation to public safety matters or absence of objections from several consultees are neutral matters that weigh neither for nor against the proposal. Moreover, the continued viable use of the appeal property as a residential dwelling is not dependent on the proposal as the building has an ongoing residential use that would not cease in its absence.
16. Overall, the weight that I ascribe to the public benefits that would result from the proposed development, would not be sufficient to outweigh the great weight that I attach to the harm I have identified. As such, the proposed development would not comply with paragraph 208 of the Framework.
17. The proposal would fail to preserve the Grade II listed building known as Townsend Farmhouse, The Wool Barn approximately 10 metres north west of The Farmhouse. This would be contrary to the requirements of section 66(1) of the Act and the provisions within the Framework, which seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment. It would also be contrary to the requirements of Policies 2 and 8 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031 (2016), which seek, amongst other things, to conserve and, where possible, enhance the heritage significance of a heritage asset.
18. The proposed development would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no material considerations which indicate that the decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Therefore, for the reasons given, the appeal is dismissed.

*Mr R Walker*

INSPECTOR