



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 23 January 2024

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1 February 2024

Appeal A Ref: APP/U1430/W/23/3327679

Little Swailes Green Farm (Farmhouse), Compasses Lane, Cripps Corner, Sedlescombe TN32 5QU

- 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 Ms T Kennard against the decision of Rother District Council.
- The application Ref RR/2023/520/P, dated 9 March 2023, was refused by notice dated 21 July 2023.

The development proposed is 'construction of a single storey extension connected via a glazed link, together with renovation works to the farmhouse including new timber weatherboarding.'

Appeal B Ref: APP/U1430/Y/23/3327680

Little Swailes Green Farm (Farmhouse), Compasses Lane, Cripps Corner, Sedlescombe TN32 5QU

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Ms T Kennard against Rother District Council.
 - The application Ref RR/2023/521/L, dated 9 March 2023, was refused by notice dated 21 July 2023.
 - The works proposed are 'construction of a single storey extension connected via a glazed link, together with renovation works to the farmhouse including new timber weatherboarding.'
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Decisions

Appeal A

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal B

2. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

3. As the proposal relates to a listed building I have had special regard to sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act').
4. In November 2023, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty ('AONBs') were renamed 'National Landscapes', and the High Weald AONB within which the appeal site is located became known as the High Weald National Landscape. The legal and policy status of AONBs is unchanged, but I have therefore referred to the National Landscapes and the High Weald National Landscape ('the HWNL') in my decision.

5. In December 2023, the Government published a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework'). There have been changes to paragraph numbers but the parts of the Framework most relevant in this case have not significantly changed and I am satisfied that the revision does not raise new considerations necessitating further submissions from the parties.
6. The descriptions of the development and works in the banner headings above are taken from the Council's decision notices. They more accurately describe the proposal than the description entered on the application form which referred to elements such as a new enclosed porch and insertion of rooflights that are not shown on the submitted plans. They have also been entered by the appellant on the appeal forms and given that they have been used by both main parties, I am satisfied that no injustice would be caused by basing my assessment on these descriptions. The appellant has also confirmed in their appeal submissions that no underfloor heating is proposed, and I have considered the appeals accordingly.

Main Issues

7. The main issues are:
 - i) the effect of the proposal on the special interest of the Grade II listed building 'Little Swailes Green Farmhouse' (Ref: 1274778) and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses; and
 - ii) the effect of the proposal on the landscape character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Listed Building

8. The appellant's Heritage Statement and Statement of Significance ('HSSS') outlines that Little Swailes Green Farmhouse is thought to date to around 1625, but that it incorporates timbers from an earlier medieval hall house. It is a three-bay building with a rectangular plan form set within a former farmstead complex which also includes a former byre and oast house in a loose courtyard arrangement. The main two-storey part of the building is timber framed with daub panels at first-floor level and includes mullioned windows and a large, offset axial stack projecting through a tiled roof with a gablet ridge. A lean-to outshut with a catslide roof extends from the rear of the building. The HSSS indicates that the outshut was added before the end of the 17th century, and rebuilt prior to underbuilding of the ground-floor section of the timber frame with brick which occurred in the late 18th or early 19th century when weatherboarding was also added to the upper floor.
9. The main parties indicate that the weatherboarding was removed from the upper floor in the 1990s. However, other modern interventions appear to have been relatively limited and the building retains much of its historic form, fabric and character. The traditional materials and retained features and detailing of the building including the catslide roof and large brick stack are typical of the local Wealden vernacular and its age, quality and historic function as a farmhouse remain readily identifiable.
10. Given the above, I find the special interest of the listed building, insofar as it relates to these appeals, to be primarily associated with the integrity of its

fabric and the form, composition and appearance of the building which reflect its historic status and function and inform its legibility as a former farmhouse.

11. The proposal includes an extension connected to the side of the building by a glazed link. The main part of the extension would have a pitched roof with eaves that would sit above the level of the brickwork to the ground floor level of the dwelling, and notably above the height of the eaves to the catslide roof. The ridge would also be of similar height to the closest eaves of the main roof of the dwelling and significantly taller than the rear section of the catslide roof. Although single-storey, the extension would therefore appear fairly tall against the dwelling and the pitched roof design would add bulk. Moreover, the extension would be close to around half the width of the dwelling and of comparable depth to the whole building including the outshut projection. Given its depth and position aligned with the dwelling, the pitched roof would extend some way beyond the slope of the lower catslide to the outshut where I consider the projection of the roof's height and bulk relative to this feature would be particularly conspicuous.
12. In my assessment, the combined height, width and depth of the extension together with its pitched roof design would result in a large structure of significant bulk and mass against the dwelling. I appreciate that the extension would be on a different orientation to the dwelling. The glazed link would also provide for some separation. However, this separation would be modest, and I find that the large scale of the extension in such proximity would lack sufficient subservience. Instead, it would be an imposing and over-dominant feature when viewed against the modest proportions and form of the dwelling, upsetting the balance and composition of the listed building and drawing undue focus and attention away from it.
13. In addition, the appellant indicates that the extension would be a contemporary take on a traditional garage or outbuilding which are common to large houses across the HWNL. However, the full-height glazing to the rear and side of the extension would give it a clearly domestic appearance and noting its close proximity and attachment, albeit by a glazed link, I consider that it would be appreciated as part of the dwelling rather than as an ancillary garage or outbuilding. I acknowledge that the windows to the extension would not be readily visible from Compasses Lane, but listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of any public views. In this context, the contrasting materials of vertical timber cladding to the extension would stand out against the host building. The large expanses of glazing would also be striking against the existing modest windows. This would exacerbate the visual impact of the extension and the impression of it competing with the building and I find that it would appear somewhat awkward and incongruous against the traditional vernacular of the farmhouse, detracting from its architectural integrity and legibility.
14. The proposal also includes the reinstatement of weatherboarding to the first-floor of the dwelling. Subject to further details of the weatherboarding which could be sought by condition, I see no reason to disagree with the Council that this element of the proposal would be acceptable. I also note that the Council has not raised objections to internal alterations indicated to the building, although conditions are recommended to seek further details.

15. Nevertheless, I find for the above reasons that the extension would be an over-large and unsympathetic addition that would detract from the architectural character and quality of the listed building and harm the appreciation of it. The proposal as a whole would fail to preserve the features of special architectural and historic interest that the listed building possesses and would cause harm to its special interest.
16. The Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. It goes on to advise that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification. Having regard to the nature and scope of the proposal, I consider that the harm to the listed building would be less than substantial, but this harm nevertheless carries considerable importance and weight.
17. Where a proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the Framework sets out that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
18. The appellant highlights that the appeal building has virtually no thermal insulation and poor ventilation, and I saw signs of damp and mould at ground floor level as well as dry rot to the staircase and damage to ceilings. The HSSS refers to repairs to the building which would be a benefit of the proposal. In addition, the dwelling was not occupied at the time of my visit, and based on my observations, I do not doubt that renovation would be necessary in order to provide a suitable, modern standard of living accommodation and restore active residential use of the building. The appellant also advises that the building has the lowest possible energy performance rating currently and that this would need to be increased to allow rental of the dwelling.
19. The proposal would enable improvements to the insulation and energy efficiency of the dwelling and the Framework sets out that significant weight should be given to the need to support energy efficiency improvements to existing buildings. However, while the appellant refers to potential for the building to become net zero carbon, an air source heat pump which is suggested to achieve this is not clearly shown on the plans as forming part of the proposal. The improvements in energy consumption, carbon emissions and energy performance predicted in the appellant's Energy Strategy without the air source heat pump are more modest which limits the extent of the benefit.
20. Furthermore, the weight that I can afford to the appellant's assertion that it would not be financially viable to undertake refurbishment works without the proposed extension is limited in the absence of details of the likely costs of refurbishment or values of the property to substantiate the claim.
21. The existing building is fairly large, but it has just two bedrooms and the only bathroom is an ensuite. I accept that this may limit the range of potential occupiers for the building and the market for the property. Ground floor ceiling heights are also fairly low. However, they are not so low as to preclude use of these spaces and I note that the alterations proposed to the existing building would seem to offer scope for some improvement to practical living arrangements within the building. For example, the provision of a bathroom at ground-floor level in what is currently labelled as a living room while a large living room would also be maintained to the centre of the dwelling.

22. The extension would provide for a third bedroom with an ensuite and a further living space. However, even if I were satisfied that provision of additional space would be necessary to support occupation of the dwelling and investment towards refurbishment works, there is no compelling evidence to show that these outcomes would be dependent on an extension of the actual scale and design proposed and could not be achieved by a potential less harmful alternative.
23. Overall, I therefore find that the information before me does not provide sufficiently clear and convincing justification that the extension, as it is proposed, would be necessary to enable refurbishment and secure the building's optimum viable use or its long-term conservation.
24. Even taken together, I find in this context that the public benefits of the proposal would be insufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified would be caused to the listed building.
25. I therefore conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the Grade II listed building Little Swailes Green Farmhouse. It would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the Framework. There would also be conflict with Policies RA4, EN2 and EN3 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 ('the CS') and Policy DHG9 of the Development and Site Allocations Local Plan 2019 ('the DASA') insofar as they are relevant and include requirements broadly for high quality design and proposals that respect the character, qualities, legibility and form of historic buildings.

Landscape Character and Appearance

26. The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 ('the HWMP') outlines that the outstanding beauty of the HWNL stems in part from its essentially rural and human scale character with a high proportion of natural surfaces and the story of its past visible throughout. Groups of traditional farm buildings with distinctive steep clay tile and hipped roofs are common and historic farmsteads and vernacular architecture are noted as contributing to the character, appearance and distinctiveness of the area.
27. The appeal site includes a historic farmhouse of traditional, vernacular style which is part of a historic farmstead set within an attractive rolling landscape of typically open fields and woodlands with some scattered buildings. The farmstead is no longer in agricultural use, with buildings now in (or with permitted) domestic and commercial uses but it is still recognisable as a typical form within the landscape. The appeal site and its surroundings reflect many of the characteristics highlighted in the HWMP as important and I find that it contributes positively to the distinctive rural quality of this part of the countryside and to the landscape and scenic beauty of the HWNL.
28. I have already found that the proposed extension would be an over-large and unsympathetic addition that would harm the architectural character and quality of the appeal building and its legibility. As a consequence, the contribution that the building currently makes to the distinctive rural character and appearance of the area and to the landscape and scenic beauty of the HWNL would be harmfully eroded.
29. The effect would be limited and localised but I therefore conclude that there would be harm to the landscape character and appearance of the area including

the landscape and scenic beauty of the HWNL. The proposal would accordingly conflict with Policies EN1, OSS4 and RA3 of the CS and Policies DEN1 and DEN2 of the DASA. Amongst other things, these policies include requirements which broadly seek development that respects and contributes positively to local character and appearance and the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and scenic beauty of the HWNL. It would also be contrary to the Framework insofar as it indicates that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of National Landscapes.

Other Matters

30. My attention has been drawn to an extension approved to the oast house to the rear of the appeal dwelling which is within the curtilage of the listed building. However, the oast house is a more recent building of different form and character to the appeal dwelling which is the principal listed building. The contribution that it makes to the special interest of the listed building is not directly comparable. Furthermore, the submitted elevations suggest that the extension would have a similar form, appearance and materials to the oast house.
31. The appellant also refers to consent granted for an extension to Partridge, a Grade II listed building in Iden which is also in the HWNL, commenting that this is of greater scale, bulk and mass relative to the host dwelling than the proposal before me. However, it appears from the information before me that Partridge is two-storey with further accommodation in the roof. In contrast, the appeal building has no further accommodation in the roof and the section beneath the catslide to the rear is single-storey. The Council's report on the proposal at Partridge also refers to an existing garden room and garage that would be removed and states that the extension would follow a similar volume to the existing garage but with improved geometry.
32. While I acknowledge the scale of these extensions and that there may be some similarities, the full circumstances of these examples are not therefore directly comparable to the appeal scheme which I have considered on its own merits.

Conclusion

33. The proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building, Little Swailes Green Farmhouse. In relation to Appeal A, it would additionally cause harm to the landscape character and appearance of the area including the landscape and scenic beauty of the HWNL. The Appeal A proposal would conflict with the development plan when it is read as a whole, and material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached.
34. I therefore conclude that the appeals should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR