



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 April 2024

by C Dillon BA (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23rd April 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/P2365/W/23/3329842

The Coaching House, Elmers Green Lane, Skelmersdale WN8 6SN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Sean Lynch against the decision of West Lancashire Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 2022/1177/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as “erection of a detached dwelling with integral garage following demolition of an existing extension to The Coaching House to form new access, and erection of a detached garage to The Coaching House”.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Since the appeal was lodged, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been published. Although I have made my determination against that updated national policy context, the relevant changes relate to formatting and do not raise any new matters which are determinative to the outcome of this appeal.
3. The emerging local plan has not yet reached a stage where it is capable of carrying any weight for the purposes of this decision.
4. The Coaching House is a building which originally fell within the curtilage of the early 18th century Stannanaught Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building. The Coaching House is not referred to in the listing description. However, from the evidence before me and my site observations, I am satisfied that it falls within the scope of a curtilage building which existed prior to 1948. It has an historical association with that designated heritage asset. As such, it has a group value and falls within the protection ascribed to that listed building for the purposes of my decision.
5. The appeal proposal would include the demolition of the existing single storey garage and hallway extension to the front of The Coaching House. A separate appeal relating to a Listed Building Consent application is not before me and from the planning history provided no such consent has been granted. The Council has not raised objection to those demolition proposals. Nonetheless, I can only deal with the planning merits of that part of the scheme before me in so far as it would facilitate access to a replacement detached garage and the erection of a new detached dormer bungalow within the existing grounds of the appellant’s property. In making my determination regarding the effect on the setting of this listed historic farm group, I have exercised my statutory duty

under section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are:

- whether or not the appeal proposal would preserve the setting or features of special architectural or historic interest of the grouping of Grade II listed buildings comprising Stannanaught Farmhouse; and
- the effect on the living conditions of occupants of a neighbouring dwelling known as Kantern, with particular regard to privacy.

Reasons

Heritage

7. This Grade II listed building group comprises a former farmhouse, a smaller detached stone building and another detached stone building currently known as The Coaching House. These are set out in a linear form. The latter has previously been converted into a separate residential unit. It enjoys its own separate gated driveway from Elmers Green Lane which runs past Stannanaught Farmhouse and its other outbuilding.
8. The Coaching House is set in generous grounds which are greater in area than Stannanaught Farmhouse. This 2 storey former outbuilding and its external areas enjoy a high level of seclusion from public vantage points. This is because its position within the building group is furthest away from the farmhouse and Elmers Green Lane and is recessed behind neighbouring Sherwood Farmhouse. The mature planting along most of its plot boundaries and high entrance gates reinforces this high level of seclusion.
9. Stannanaught Farmhouse was listed in 1973. The submitted evidence indicates that its special interests include its historical cultural and architectural significance as a Yeoman's farm. It is an early 18th century coursed stone rubble dwelling with a graduated stone slate roof. The submitted evidence indicates that it is probably the latest example of a fundamentally 17th century plan-form in this particular area.
10. The design, positioning and original use of the remaining buildings, including The Coaching House, which form part of this historic building group are valuable in their continued assistance in the appreciation and understanding of the special interests and significance of Stannanaught Farm as a once functioning collective group.
11. Although the external built form of Stannanaught Farmhouse is mainly intact, the plot within which it stood historically has greatly diminished in size. Furthermore, The Coaching House itself has undergone significant extension at ground floor level to its front and rear elevations. These works have changed its form and appearance and created a much larger developed footprint. These changes are reflective of the cessation of the original agricultural function of the building group and the development of the New Town.
12. Furthermore, the development of the New Town of Skelmersdale in the 20th century has greatly changed the setting of this listed building group. The appeal site is now reached through streets of mainly contemporary residential

development. Nonetheless, upon approach the limited width of Elmers Green Lane, the remaining hedgerow to one side of it and the agricultural character and appearance of Stannanaught Farmhouse and neighbouring Sherwood Farmhouse collectively convey a more mature, intimate, informal, verdant environment than the majority of this New Town.

13. This existing setting provides an important reminder of the past rural setting and agricultural purpose of this historic farming nucleus, including the original use of The Coaching House. Given the substantial changes that have occurred in the vicinity of the Stannanaught Farm grouping, the value of any remnants of the setting of this historic farm grouping are heightened.
14. Despite being manicured garden, the sense of space and seclusion currently provided within the existing plot serves as a reminder of the original undeveloped setting of this historic grouping.
15. The proposal would result in the creation of a standalone plot and would also intensify the amount of built development within the immediate vicinity of the listed grouping.
16. Both the existing and proposed properties would have a level of outdoor garden space and parking which would not be dissimilar to that of the surrounding dwellings. Furthermore, the positioning of the proposed dwelling within the plot relative to the highway would not be inconsistent with the placement of other contemporary dwellings within this part of Elmers Green Lane. Consequently, the proposed design, scale, form, external materials and positioning of the proposed scheme would not be jarring with the appearance and layout of the existing surrounding contemporary built context.
17. However, the proposed dwelling would reduce the sense of space, openness and seclusion that continues to be experienced within the existing grounds of The Coaching House. The demolition of the existing garage and hallway extension would open up views of the area within which the new dwelling would be located on approach up the driveway. The proposed dwelling would not interfere with any view of the Farmhouse itself. However, it would reduce the remaining immediate uninterrupted views towards The Coaching House that can still be experienced across the existing side garden. Overall, the proposed change would unduly erode the historic land parcel within which the building group can still currently be experienced, appreciated and understood.
18. Furthermore, the incorporation of dormer windows and the placement and high number of openings would result in elevations with a low solid to void ratio. These would heighten the domestic character and appearance of the proposed dwelling. In terms of its visual connection with the historic building grouping, the proposed dwelling would not be of a design that would be capable of being read as another agricultural outbuilding. Rather, the proposed intensification of the use of the existing plot coupled with the proposed design and shared drive arrangements would emphasise the fragmentation and erosion of the remaining land associated with the historic building group of Stannanaught Farmhouse.
19. Planning conditions seeking to ensure the proposed site boundaries were limited to an open plan layout and occupancy restricted to that of ancillary living accommodation would not adequately address my concerns.

20. This harm would undermine the historic pattern of development here. This is an attribute that is of importance to the understanding and appreciation of the historic and cultural significance of this former agricultural building group. It would therefore follow that the appeal proposal would not preserve the immediate setting of each of the components of this listed building group. That setting has value in its contribution to the appreciation and understanding of the features of special interest of these important buildings. The fact that the proposed change would only be discernible from within the appellant's existing land holding would neither mitigate nor excuse the adverse impact that would arise.
21. In concluding on this main issue, I find that the proposal would not preserve the setting or features of special architectural or historic interest of the grouping of Grade II listed buildings comprising Stannanaught Farmhouse but would harm it. Therefore, the proposal would fail to satisfy the requirements of section 66(1) of the Act in this regard. This finding carries considerable importance and weight.
22. In terms of the Framework, I find this identified harm would be less than substantial. In line with paragraph 205 of the Framework when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, I give great weight to the conservation of the Stannanaught Farmhouse, which includes The Coaching House.
23. Furthermore, paragraph 206 of the Framework recognises that the significance of heritage assets can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of the asset or from development within its setting. Any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 208 of the Framework requires that less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset is weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
24. In terms of public benefits that would be secured, the appeal proposal would make a limited contribution to the housing land supply for an area which does not have a shortfall. A single dwelling would provide a limited benefit to the local economy at both the construction and occupation phases. The replacement of the existing garage and hall extension would better reveal the significance of the Coaching House in terms of its architectural form, which carries moderate weight.
25. The effective and efficient use of land through the intensification of use of the plot, securing good design and accessibility are all expectations of national and local policy to secure sustainable development. Therefore, I attach no weight to those matters in the necessary heritage balance. Furthermore, the submitted evidence does not indicate that there would be any public benefits associated with securing the optimum viable use of Stannanaught Farmhouse.
26. In weighing the identified heritage harm against these public benefits, that harm would not be outweighed. This outcome is due to the considerable importance and weight that I attribute to the further erosion of the setting of this Grade II listed asset that would cause a loss of its significance. The identified heritage harm is therefore unjustified in terms of the approach to heritage set out in the Framework.

27. Consequently, in view of my findings the appeal proposal would conflict with Policy EN4 of the West Lancashire Local Plan (2012-2027) document (the WLLP).

Living conditions

28. The appeal proposal would be located within close proximity to a neighbouring bungalow known as Kantern. The existing common boundary between these plots is highly screened by mature vegetation and trees. This currently affords the occupants of both of these properties with a high level of seclusion.
29. The frontage of the proposed dwelling would face onto the side elevation of that property and run almost the full length of its rear garden. This would result in windows facing directly onto the side elevation and rear garden of Kantern. These windows would serve the proposed ground floor living room, and, at first floor level, the landing and 3 of the 4 proposed bedrooms. Particular concerns have been raised about the effect this will have on existing privacy levels for occupants of Kantern, with particular regard to a ground floor habitable room window in the existing facing side elevation and its rear garden.
30. The separation distances between Kantern and the proposed dwelling would be short. However both properties would be of a limited height with intervening mature landscaping and high boundary fencing. Furthermore, the proposed changes in floor levels within the new dwelling mean that the windows to bedroom No 2 and bedroom No 3 would sit at a lower height to the remainder of the first floor windows. Overall, I am satisfied that much of the existing boundary fence and planting would continue to provide effective screening. Any gaps arising could be supplemented and this could be secured through a landscaping planning condition.
31. For these reasons, the appeal proposal would not result in any significant increased overlooking or give rise to an undue sense of surveillance from either ground or first floor windows of the appeal proposal.
32. In conclusion to this main issue, subject to the imposition of a landscaping condition to bolster the planting along the common boundary, the appeal proposal would not cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of occupants of a neighbouring dwelling known as Kantern, with particular regard to privacy. Consequently, the appeal proposal would not conflict with Policy GN3 of the WLLP in this regard.

Other Matter

33. From my site inspection and the submitted evidence, I have no cause to disagree with the Council's assessment that the proposed garage would be an acceptable replacement to that which currently exists. However, that relies on the demolition works which would require the reinstatement of the existing exposed frontage. The merit of those works falls beyond the scope of this particular appeal and the details are not before me. Therefore, my decision is necessarily based on the proposed scheme as a whole.

Planning Balance

34. I have found that the appeal proposal would not conflict with Policy GN3 of the adopted development plan in terms of the living conditions of the occupants of

Kantern. There is nothing before me to cause me to disagree with the Council's assessment of the other relevant technical matters.

35. The proposal would not preserve the setting of the building group known as Grade II listed Stannanaught Farmhouse. The identified heritage harm would not be outweighed by the public benefits advanced so as to be justified. Therefore, the proposal would fail to satisfy both the approach of both the Act and the Framework to this designated heritage asset and its setting. This unjustified heritage harm conflicts with the Policy ENV4 which sets out the Council's approach to the historic environment. That policy is consistent with the Framework.
36. In view of the considerable importance and weight attributed to the identified harm, the great weight attributed to the conservation of this asset and the resulting policy conflict, the proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan for the area, when read as a whole. Furthermore, the matters weighing in favour of the proposal, including the potential reinstatement of the front elevation of The Coaching House, do not indicate that a decision should be taken contrary to the WLLP.

Conclusion

37. For the reasons given above and, having had regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Dillon

INSPECTOR