



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 April 2024

by Mr JP Sargent BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 April 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3425/W/23/3330725

5 Home Farm Court, Ingestre, Stafford, Staffordshire ST18 0PZ

- 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 Paul Sandland against the decision of Stafford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 22/36775/HOU.
 - The development proposed is the erection of an outbuilding.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the development on the setting of the adjacent Grade II listed building, whether it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Ingestre Conservation Area, and whether it would harm the significance of either of these designated heritage assets.

Reasons

3. The appeal property is part of a large, listed complex that was mainly constructed some 200 years ago as part of a planned farmstead. The complex includes an extensive range of agricultural buildings, which was converted to dwellings roughly 20 years ago. This conversion was undertaken with a high degree of sensitivity. As a result, and insofar as this appeal is concerned, the significance of the buildings appears to be primarily architectural and historic. This is because their detailing, materials, openings and arrangement display their origins as a prestigious and carefully designed farm complex.
4. It sits in the Ingestre Conservation Area. This runs from Ingestre Hall and associated buildings at one end, to beyond the cluster of estate cottages at the other, with Home Farm being in between. Its character, appearance and significance all very much lie in the way it retains the sense of a country estate, containing as it does an extensive range of buildings that still very much reflect their historic origins in form, arrangement and detail. The Home Farm complex is an important part of this, displaying the rural dimension to the estate.
5. A number of dwellings are now in the main eastern block of this farm complex, each of which has a large garden on the eastern side that is enclosed by the original wall around the farmstead. As No 5 is on the southern end of this block though, its garden is larger still than most. Whilst this garden is free of outbuildings, it is nonetheless strongly domestic in nature due to its lawns, patio, landscaping, play equipment, wheeled bins and so forth. I realise that

- much of this might not have required planning permission, but it is still present, and contributes to defining the garden's character.
6. The proposed outbuilding would not be large, and it is intended to be within a small area currently enclosed by evergreen trees. However, requiring trees to be retained around the building in perpetuity would not address the issue of their height, and would be unreasonable as, at some point, the trees will die. A condition stating they should be replaced at any time in the future if and when they are lost would again be unreasonable, and in any event there would be no screening during the period when the new planting was becoming established. As such, I cannot be certain they would always be present in their current form, and so in my assessment I cannot give significant weight to any screening effect they may have.
 7. Considering first the effect when assessed from the appellant's garden, the outbuilding would be to one side, against the southern boundary, and would be an appreciable distance from the dwelling. Therefore, it would not impact to any notable extent on views to or from the main building and would not have a particularly direct relationship with the house. Given this, and taking into account its size and the domestic activity already in the garden, when seen from within the curtilage its impact on the setting of the listed building would not harm the significance of that designated heritage asset.
 8. Although the Council has expressed a concern about the works being sited beyond the eastern elevation of the block, to my mind as it is so far to the south it would not impinge on an appreciation of that elevation from within the curtilage. The final section of Policy E2 in *The Plan for Stafford Borough* (the Local Plan) concerns the re-use of rural buildings. In bullet-point (h) it says they must be large enough to be converted without the need for additional buildings. The wording of this, to my mind, relates to the assessments necessary to determine whether the conversion should proceed, and does not prevent such outbuildings coming forward for consideration later on at converted properties. Indeed prohibiting such proposals through policy would not be realistic. Given how long it is since this dwelling was established, it is not questioned that it is currently of a size to be used as a house, albeit that the appellant now wishes more space.
 9. Turning to the effect from outside the appellant's curtilage, from the east the development would be set back far enough from the house and the eastern boundary to mean it would not be unacceptably dominant. However, when travelling along the road towards Ingestre Hall, the eastern block in general, and the southern end containing the appeal property in particular, can be readily appreciated over the 1.5m high boundary wall when coming round the sharp bend in the lane. From here, although the trees round the proposed siting of the outbuilding are visible and some satellite dishes can be seen, one has less of an awareness of the domestic nature of the gardens because the wall is tall enough to conceal those elements to a great degree. As a result, the significance of these former historic agricultural buildings is not so diluted by more recent paraphernalia.
 10. While it is the intention that the proposal would be screened from this direction by the existing trees, as stated above I have not given their presence significant weight in my assessment. As the outbuilding would be 1m taller than the wall, if the trees were to be removed, entirely or in part, it would be a

prominent, angular, modern intrusion when seen from this point, which would sit uncomfortably in the foreground of the historic farm range and its apparent yard area. As a result, to my mind it would erode an appreciation and understanding of the range containing the appellant's dwelling by appearing as a striking and discordant element, so causing harm, albeit less than substantial, to the significance of that listed building. Moreover, by harming the significance of a listed building in this way and eroding its agricultural farmstead setting at this prominent point in the conservation area, it would fail to preserve the conservation area's character and appearance, also causing harm, again less than substantial, to the significance of that designated heritage asset.

11. In coming to this finding, I recognise that the cluster of trees that would be around the building are already interrupting this view. However, by its nature such planting is not as striking and clinical in its form, blending better into the overall character of the area and constituting less of a modern, discordant element. As such, these trees do not form a similar level of harm to the scheme before me. I accept that the building could be readily removed, as it is to be placed on the hardstanding with no further works identified. However, I have no indication of when, if ever, it would be taken away, and even if that were to occur it could still be harmful in the meantime for the reasons stated. I also saw various structures built within the grounds of other properties in the complex. I was not told of any that had planning permission, and from the road I saw none that would have a comparable effect to what is before me.
12. The *National Planning Policy Framework* (the Framework) states that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, and any harm to their significance should require clear and convincing justification. Moreover, if less than substantial harm is caused to the significance of any such asset, that harm should be weighed against the public benefits. I recognise this building would facilitate home-working or other comparable uses, with associated social and environmental benefits. I accept too that the building is not large, while there would also be some economic benefit from employment during its construction and installation. I am not persuaded though that, even taken together, the benefits such matters bring are sufficient to outweigh the great weight that should be afforded to the conservation of heritage assets.
13. Accordingly, I conclude the impact of the development on the setting of this Grade II listed building would cause harm, albeit less than substantial, to its significance. Moreover, it would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the conservation area, again causing less than substantial harm to the significance of that designated heritage asset. In the absence of any public benefits that outweigh this harm, the proposal would be contrary to Local Plan Policies N8, N9 and E2(g) and the Framework, which all seek to safeguard and protect historic designations and the contribution they make to their context.

Conclusion

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

JP Sargent

INSPECTOR