
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 June 2024

by L Fleming BSc (Hons) MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 June 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/C1570/Y/24/3339950

15 Redgates Lane, Swards End, Saffron Walden CB10 2LW

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Paul Allington against the decision of Uttlesford District Council.
 - The application Ref is UTT/23/2933/LB.
 - The works proposed are addition of 20 solar panels on the south facing roof.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background and Main Issue

2. The appeal property is a former farm building which has been converted to a dwelling. It previously formed part of a farmstead associated with the grade II listed Swards End Farmhouse, Redgates Lane (the Farmhouse). It is not disputed that the appeal property is curtilage listed due to its relationship with the Farmhouse. There is no substantive evidence which leads me to any different conclusion, I have therefore determined the appeal on that basis.
3. The main issue is therefore whether the proposed development / works would preserve the grade II listed Farmhouse or its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

Significance of the Farmhouse

4. The Farmhouse is C17 with C19 and C20 additions and alterations and is within a complex of historical farm buildings on the edge of a small rural village. It is two storey with attics and cellars, red brick, timber framed and plastered. It has a peg-tiled roof, brick chimneys, casement windows of a variety of forms and a range of other high quality traditional architectural features. Insofar as is relevant to this appeal the significance of the grade II listed building derives from the traditional architectural detailing of the farmhouse and the associated buildings as part of a historical farmstead now encompassed within a village.

Effects on the Farmhouse

5. Some 20 solar panels would be attached to the south facing roof slope of the appeal property. They would be sensitively fixed and could also be easily removed without harm such that I find the installation of the scheme would not result in the loss of or damage to any historic fabric.

6. I accept the appeal building has been significantly altered and extended and is separated from the Farmhouse as a separate dwelling. I have considered the comment about energy infrastructure in the locality being at capacity such that power cuts are regularly experienced.
7. I note that alternative locations for solar arrays at the appeal property have been explored and discounted. I also acknowledge the comments that a property nearby was recently allowed to install solar panels on its outbuilding. However, the full details of those examples or alternatives and any detailed technical reasons for alternatives being discounted are not before me. I have also noted the attempt to adhere to Historic England guidelines¹ in developing the appeal scheme.
8. However, I have considered this appeal on its merits having regard to its impact on the designated heritage asset. The proposed group of 20 panels would cover the majority of the south facing roof slope forming a large continuous rectangular modern addition. The proposed solar panels would have a highly modern appearance and would be widely visible directly adjacent to Redgates Lane, where the wider farmstead can be appreciated.
9. The proposed panels would be prominent and through their scale and highly contemporary appearance would have a dominant and visually conflicting effect on the appeal building. This would erode the traditional agricultural character of the appeal property and would draw attention away from the traditional architectural detailing of the designated heritage asset. For these reasons, the proposed solar panels would harm the significance and fail to preserve the grade II listed Farmhouse.
10. The harm I have identified to the significance of the heritage asset would be less than substantial. In which case, paragraph 208 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires the harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals, including where appropriate, securing optimum viable use.
11. The proposed solar panels would have the environmental benefit of renewable energy generation and personal energy security. I have considered the Uttlesford Climate Crisis Strategy 2021-2030 and note the proposal would accord with and help to deliver the priorities it identifies. I also note paragraph 164 of the Framework says significant weight should be given to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings. However, the combined benefits of the scheme are modest. Even if I accepted them all as public benefits, they would be insufficient to outweigh the great weight I attach to the harm I have identified to the designated heritage asset in this case.
12. Overall, for the reasons given the appeal scheme would harm the setting and significance of the grade II listed Farmhouse and that harm is not outweighed by public benefits. Thus, the scheme is in conflict with paragraphs 205 and 208 of the Framework and fails to accord with Policy ENV2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (2005) which seeks to ensure that proposals preserve listed buildings and their architectural and historic characteristics.

¹ Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings Solar Electric (Photovoltaics), Historic England October 2018, revised November 2018

Conclusion

13. For the reasons given above and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

L Fleming

INSPECTOR