



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 July 2024

by C McDonagh BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21st August 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/A1910/D/24/3338525

Little Brownlow Farm, Little Gaddesden House, Little Gaddesden, Berkhamsted HP4 1PL

- 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 Dalton against the decision of Dacorum Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/02158/FHA.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Construction of Extension'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. On 30 July 2024, the Government published a consultation draft of proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). However, the proposed changes do not relate to the main issues of this appeal and are in any event at an early stage. As such, I have not sought the views of the main parties in coming to my decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host building and the Little Gaddesden Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

4. The host building is a former barn in a rough 'U' shape which evidently dates from the mid-19th century and was converted into a dwelling in the late 1990's. The building is of brick construction with a clay tiled roof adjacent a larger property, Little Gaddesden House, two outbuildings and a large area of grassland. There is also an existing extension on the same elevation subject to the appeal proposal.
5. The host property is identified within the Little Gaddesden Conservation Area Character Appraisal as a locally listed building. I note that there is disagreement between the parties as to whether this constitutes a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). I have not been presented with a local list maintained by the Council which, as per the PPG¹, includes information on the criteria used to select non-designated heritage assets and information about the location of existing assets. However, the same paragraph of the PPG does indicate that conservation area appraisals are a means of identifying NDHA's.

¹ Planning Practice Guidance: Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 18a-040-20190723

6. Regardless of whether the host building is an NDHA or not, it is an attractive vernacular building of simple form and proportions, traditional materials, modest fenestration, vernacular character and fine detailing such as the arched brick lintels, all of which is indicative of its agrarian history. As such it makes a significantly positive contribution to the character and appearance of the local area, including the CA.
7. The existing extension has skewed that simple historic form of the building towards the grassed area, although much of the agrarian origin and evolution of the building is still legible. While the initial barn conversion may have been positive given the apparent state of the building in the 1990's, that is not to say that every subsequent proposed change will also be. The addition of an extension to that extension would further deviate from the pleasing simple form of the former barn, creating a wing like extension which would be comparable in length to historic main sections of the barn. While the roof would be stepped down, this would add substantial additional mass to the building and harm its historic form and proportions as a result.
8. I take on board that the proposal seeks to use high quality and matching materials. I would expect nothing less. The Council do not take issue with the use of matching materials to the host property either. However, the extension would include a large expanse of modern glazing to its northeast elevation with a considerable proportion of the facing wall composed of glass. Alongside the bi-folding doors to the southeast elevation, this extensive use of modern fenestration would appear incongruous set against the more traditional proportions of the existing openings of the property which help to preserve its agricultural heritage. This element of the scheme would therefore harm the building's character by introducing an overtly modern feature.
9. As the appeal site is located within a conservation area, I have also had regard to section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. The CA is described in the associated appraisal as having many strong characteristics of a well-preserved estate village that has largely developed in a ribbon fashion along Nettleden Road with generous spacing between plots. Furthermore, the high number of listed buildings is indicative of the high degree of preservation and quality of built form more generally in the CA.
10. The proposal would not be readily visible from public vantage points, such as Nettleden Road. I observed as much on my site visit. However, whether a proposal is visible from the street scene is not the only consideration of impacts arising from development, particularly when it concerns assets of heritage significance. To that end, although the proposed extension would not be visible from much of the CA, given the positive contribution that the high quality of well-preserved buildings and agricultural context make to the character and appearance of the CA, it follows that harm to the host building would harm the significance of the CA.
11. Given the scale of the works, the proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the CA. As per paragraph 208 of the Framework, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed

against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

12. I acknowledge there would be some benefits of the scheme. Those identified as increasing and improving the living space of the property would be largely private in nature and of benefit primarily to the appellant. Any improvements to the housing quality of the area in terms of living space would be minimal. There would be a minor financial benefit to a contractor to build the extension, although there is no guarantee that this work would be undertaken by a local company or that there would be knock on effects to local businesses. Similarly, while it is alluded that there would be an increase in Council tax revenue, I have nothing before me to indicate this would be the case.
13. I am informed of a potential fallback position whereby the appellant could build large outbuildings within the curtilage of the appeal building under Class E of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. It is also confirmed that as the site is within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AoNB), 'further than 20 metres from the property outbuildings could be constructed under permitted development provided they did not exceed 10 square metres in floorspace each'. Given the extension would constitute approximately 30 square metres, this would require 3 outbuildings to allow the same floor space, which I find extremely unlikely to be a practical fallback. Therefore, this is worthy of little weight in the balance.
14. There would be no harm to the living conditions of neighbouring residents, while the Council has confirmed the proposal would not harm the AoNB. A lack of harm in these respects, alongside other considerations, would be neutral in the heritage balance rather than weigh in favour of the scheme.
15. My attention is drawn to an approved development/works at a nearby property, Manor Cottage, which is evidently Grade II* listed. An extension was granted planning permission², although I do not have the listed building consent report before me. From the location plan and existing/proposed plans I have seen, this appears to involve a two-storey property with a single storey extension to the side. While it may lie in a smaller plot, the form and scale of that building are different to the appeal property and while it may be listed and the appeal building is not, the circumstances as far as I have been able to comprehend from the information before me are not the same. This example, and the photographs of ostensibly similar developments in the area shown in the photographs, do not convince me that the proposal is acceptable.
16. As such, in the absence of sufficient public benefits that would outweigh the harm identified, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the CA. The proposal would also harm the character of the host building. This would be contrary to policy CS27 of the Dacorum Borough Council Core Strategy 2006 – 2031 (adopted 25 September 2013). This seeks to ensure that the integrity, setting and distinctiveness of designated and undesignated heritage assets will be protected, conserved and if appropriate enhanced. The proposal would also be contrary to section 72(1) of the Act and the aims of the Framework.

² 23/01208/FHA

Conclusion

17. The proposal would harm the character and appearance of the host property and the CA. As such it would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no material considerations which indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C McDonagh

INSPECTOR