

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 September 2024

by Hannah Ellison BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 03 October 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/W/24/3339385

The Grange Farmhouse, Wirswall Road, Wirswall SY13 4LA

- 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 N Edwards against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
- The application Ref is 23/3390N.
- The development proposed is the extension of garage/domestic outbuilding.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The description of development above is taken from the planning application form however a more accurate description is provided in the decision notice and appeal form as 'Extension of domestic curtilage to accommodate the extension of a garage/domestic outbuilding'. I have proceeded accordingly.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on a) the character and appearance of the countryside, and b) the setting of the listed building (The Grange Farmhouse).

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The Grange Farmhouse is a detached dwelling sited within a generous plot located in an area defined as open countryside. To the side and rear of the dwelling are ancillary outbuildings in the form of garages/carports. The site is bound to the west by a grazing field, with associated agricultural buildings of the neighbouring farm sited on higher ground to the north and north west.
5. In the open countryside Policy PG6 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2010-2030 (July 2017) (the CELPS) only permits development that is essential for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation, public infrastructure, or essential works by statutory undertakers or for other uses appropriate to a rural area. A number of exceptions are also allowed, including extensions to existing dwellings, where the extension is not disproportionate to the original building.

6. Despite the appeal proposal concerning the erection of an outbuilding, it may be appropriate to consider it under the extension to existing dwellings exception. Nevertheless, the proposal also involves the change of use of agricultural land to domestic curtilage. Furthermore, compliance with CELPS Policy PG6 is also subject to the development complying with all other relevant policies in the Local Plan, with particular attention paid to design and landscape character so the appearance and distinctiveness of the Cheshire East countryside is preserved and enhanced.
7. Leading on from this, policies RUR11 and RUR12 of the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (December 2022) (the SADPD) also seek to ensure that developments, including proposals for the extension of residential curtilages, do not cause unacceptable harm to the rural character of the countryside.
8. The proposed garage/domestic outbuilding (herein referred to as the 'garage') would be sited to the rear of the existing garage/carport which is located to the side of the farmhouse and would be of a design that is reflective of the rural locality and the existing outbuilding.
9. It would however be of a significant overall mass and would extend onto the adjacent field. This field visually and functionally forms part of the adjoining farm and it has a largely rectangular shape. The historic maps provided by the appellant indicate that the area of land on which the proposed garage would be sited has been part of the field and separated from The Grange Farmhouse by a clearly defined, linear boundary which has been established for a very considerable number of years.
10. The proposal would encroach significantly onto the adjacent agricultural land, beyond the side of the existing outbuilding which itself appears to have projected onto the adjacent field. This would result in an awkward, staggered boundary which would be in stark contrast to the field's uniform and organic boundaries. As such, it would interrupt the historic field pattern and erode the clear rural/domestic distinction in this locality through the domestication of this area of land.
11. By virtue of the large size and footprint of the garage and its positioning on land which is elevated higher than the public highway, the resultant incongruous field boundary, erosion of the rural character and consequential domestication would be readily apparent from public vantage points.
12. I note that the appeal site is located in the Local Landscape Designation (LLD) of Cholmondeley, Marbury and Combermere Estatelands. As noted in the appellants evidence, key characteristics of this LLD include undulating landscapes, narrow sunken lanes, a feeling of remoteness and tranquility, dispersed settlements and scattered farms. Despite the intrusion onto the adjacent field, the proposal would not have an adverse effect on the special qualities of the LLD by virtue of its constrained scale when considering the LLD as a whole. Nevertheless, this does not overcome the adverse impacts I have identified.
13. Taking all the above into consideration, the appeal proposal would result in unacceptable harm to the rural character and appearance of the countryside

and it would therefore conflict with Policy PG6 of the CELPS and Policies RUR11 and RUR12 of the SADPD, the aims of which are noted above.

14. The proposal would also fail to accord with the aim of ensuring that developments are sympathetic to local character, maintain a strong sense of place and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside as set out in paragraphs 135 and 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

Setting of The Grange Farmhouse

15. The Grange Farmhouse is a grade II listed building dated 1636. The official list entry identifies it as being of a timber frame construction with brick infill, rendered brick and a plain tile roof. Further description of its architectural features includes 19th and 20th century windows, chimney stacks, chamfered beams and exposed joists.
16. The significance of the building is not only derived from its age and appearance, but also its former association with a wider farmstead. Its status as the farmhouse is evident through its prominent positioning, with the expanse of open land, agricultural buildings and working context to the side and rear. This hierarchy remains apparent today by virtue of the clear visual and functional separation between the domestic farmhouse and the agricultural field.
17. The appeal site is located to the side of the farmhouse and forms part of the adjacent field. Its distinct agricultural association and use makes a positive contribution to the significance of The Grange Farmhouse as it influences how the listed building is appreciated.
18. The large adjacent farm buildings are not harmful to the setting of the building given their positioning to the rear of the farmhouse, thus reflecting the functional relationship. I note however that the existing garage/carport to the side of the farmhouse somewhat interrupts the clear distinction between the agricultural and domestic uses.
19. The proposal would result in the introduction of a large domestic feature to the side of the heritage asset within the existing agricultural context. The domestication of the site and presence of built form, in isolation and when read together with the existing garage/carport, would harmfully interfere with the farmhouse's association with the adjacent agricultural site. The further dilution of the important separation between uses would have a negative effect on the visual, functional and historic aspects of the contribution which the setting makes to the significance of the listed building.
20. Taking all of the above into consideration, the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the listed building. The Framework is clear that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, irrespective of the level of harm and, where a development proposal would lead to less than substantial harm, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
21. My attention has not been drawn to any particular public benefits which would arise from the appeal proposal. I nevertheless acknowledge that some economic benefits would result, particularly the creation of jobs during

construction. However, due to the small scale of the proposal, these benefits would be limited and would not therefore outweigh the identified harm to the significance of the listed building, which carries great weight.

22. Accordingly, the proposal would fail to preserve the setting of The Grange Farmhouse thus it conflicts with Policy SE7 of the CELPS and Policy HER4 of the SADPD. Along with chapter 16 of the Framework, these policies seek to ensure that developments do not cause harm to the significance of heritage assets.

Conclusion

23. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons given above, the appeal should be dismissed.

H Ellison

INSPECTOR