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## Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 14 November 2024

**by H Smith BSc (Hons) MSc MA MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

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### **Appeal A Ref: APP/W2845/W/24/3343630**

#### **Home Farm, Slapton Hill, Slapton, West Northamptonshire NN12 8PE**

- 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 and Mrs Varnals against the decision of West Northamptonshire Council.
  - The application Ref is WNS/2023/0133/FUL.
  - The development proposed is new structural opening for new front door and fanlight together with the removal of internal staircase.
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### **Appeal B Ref: APP/W2845/Y/24/3343628**

#### **Home Farm, Slapton Hill, Slapton, West Northamptonshire NN12 8PE**

- 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 and Mrs Varnals against the decision of West Northamptonshire Council.
  - The application Ref is WNS/2023/0134/LBC.
  - The works proposed are new structural opening for new front door and fanlight together with the removal of internal staircase.
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### **Decisions**

1. **Appeal A** is dismissed.
2. **Appeal B** is dismissed.

### **Preliminary Matters**

3. As the proposal relates to a listed building which is within a Conservation Area, I have had special regard to sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act).
4. The two appeals concern the same scheme under different, complementary legislation. I have dealt with both appeals together in my reasoning.
5. The proposal would remove the 20<sup>th</sup> Century internal staircase. The Council found this aspect of the proposed development and works to be acceptable. In this regard I find that this element of the proposal would preserve the listed building, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses and would not harm its significance. Therefore, the focus of these appeals is on the proposed insertion of a front door to the elevation facing onto Slapton Hill. I have dealt with the appeals on that basis.
6. The appellant states that planning permission has already been achieved to remove the old conservatory and construct a replacement orangery. At my site visit I saw that some construction works were in progress. Nevertheless, as I

cannot be certain that what has been altered is fully in accordance with the plans before me, I have assessed the proposed development and works as shown on the submitted plans.

### **Main Issue**

7. The main issue is whether the proposal would i) preserve the Grade II listed building, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and ii) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Slapton Conservation Area.

### **Reasons**

#### *Special interest and significance*

8. The appeal site comprises a Grade II listed<sup>1</sup> building known as 'Home Farmhouse'. The former farmhouse is a large, detached dwelling that was built around the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. It is mainly constructed from coursed squared limestone, with a slate roof and brick end and ridge stacks on stone bases. It has an L-plan arrangement with single-storey additions. Its north-west elevation, which includes a projecting wing, is positioned close to and fronting the road. Its south-eastern elevation is the building's principal elevation, with traditional stonework, mostly 3-light casement windows, and a main door entrance.
9. The orientation of the principal elevation facing the open countryside emphasises the farmhouse's connection to its rural surroundings, which is a defining characteristic of such buildings. In contrast, the road facing elevation has a plainer appearance with mostly 2-light casement windows, some of which are blocked windows. It generally has a functional arrangement of fenestration to suit room uses. In this respect, the status differentiation between the polite principal elevation and the plain, relatively bland, and more utilitarian road facing elevation of the building is evident. Thus, overall, the historic form and agricultural function of the farmhouse is still apparent.
10. Given the above, I find that the special interest and significance of this heritage asset largely derives from its historic and architectural interests. These are drawn from its illustration of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century farmhouse of some social status, as well as the historic fabric and features that survive from the physical origins of the historic building. As part of this and pertinent to the appeals, the legibility of the historic architectural form and features of, and distinction between, the principal south-western elevation and the secondary road facing elevation is an important contributor.
11. The Council's Slapton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (adopted 2021) explains that Slapton is set in a shallow dip in gently undulating upland country, bounded by the River Tove to the south and is characterised by a loosely grouped collection of well-maintained vernacular limestone and ironstone buildings with a notable absence of modern housing along the main thoroughfare. Small parcels of open space are a particular feature of Slapton and help to create an intimate and yet rural character.
12. Given the above, the character and appearance and thus special interest and significance of the CA, insofar as it relates to these appeals, is primarily the

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<sup>1</sup> List Entry Number: 1371616 – Home Farmhouse, Grade II

way the buildings of varying ages and styles reflect the evolution of the village and its historical relationship with the rural area.

13. By virtue of its historic and architectural integrity and authenticity, Home Farmhouse adds considerably to Slapton's heritage merit. In doing so, it positively contributes to the character and appearance of the CA as a whole and thereby to its significance as a designated heritage asset.

#### *Proposal and effects*

14. The evidence indicates that the building's elevation which faces the road has been largely unchanged for some 300 years and has not historically featured a doorway. This reflects the farmhouse's historic agricultural function and internal arrangements, with the entrance positioned to the rear of the building for domestic and farm-related activities.
15. Traditional farmhouses were typically designed with their front doors facing functional or scenic elements, such as farmyards, fields, or open countryside, rather than roads. This reflected the building's agrarian historical use and purpose.
16. Adding a new door facing the road would change the orientation of the building, disconnecting it from its relationship with its rural surroundings and prioritising access by road, which would be inconsistent with its historical function. This would disrupt the historical context and would make the building appear more like a typical suburban house than a farmhouse, diminishing its authenticity.
17. Moreover, the insertion of a new door opening in the building's road facing elevation would remove a large section of stone walling from the building. This would be invasive and damaging to the historic fabric of the building.
18. The existing fenestration to the road facing elevation is asymmetrical, with the two ground floor windows positioned closely together and the first-floor window irregularly positioned above. Adding a front door between them would create a squeezed, forced appearance, resulting in a cramped and cluttered façade. Furthermore, the proposed front door with its modern panelled design and associated fanlight would have a suburban appearance that would not be consistent with the character of the building. It would appear as an incongruous feature, disrupting the architectural harmony of the building.
19. Whilst I accept that the building has not been used as a farmhouse for many years, it has still existed as a dwelling with a rear entrance point. Additionally, the property already has a road facing entrance point on the single-storey extension that is positioned next to the appellant's driveway. From the plans before me, this existing doorway leads into the boot room, which is connected to the kitchen. I have not been presented with any substantial evidence to indicate why this existing doorway is not suitable as a roadside entrance.
20. The appellant states that at present access is gained via the room located to the side of the building and then through a glazed rear link to be able to move between the two sections of the ground floor of the dwelling. However, based on the plans before me, the proposal would still require movement through the rear link to access the kitchen when entering the dwelling from the proposed new doorway.

21. Conservation areas often extend beyond individual buildings to encompass the relationship between structures and their surrounding landscape. Taking into account the building's prominence along Slapton Hill, it follows that the identified negative effects to the listed building would also harm the positive qualities of the CA. In these regards, the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA as a whole and thus would harm its significance as a designated heritage asset.
22. Drawing the above together, I find that the proposal would not i) preserve the Grade II listed building, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and ii) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Slapton Conservation Area. In doing so, it would harm the significance of these designated heritage assets.

*Public benefits and balance*

23. With reference to paragraphs 207 and 208 of the Framework, in finding harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the magnitude of that harm should be assessed. Given the extent and fairly localised nature of the proposal, I find that the harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets assessed above would, individually and cumulatively, be 'less than substantial' but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. Paragraph 208 of the Framework requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing the asset's optimum viable use.
24. In this case, economic benefits would be delivered through the manufacturing and construction phase and the general investment into the property. These outcomes would be moderated by the extent of the scheme, but still weigh in favour of the appeals. Nevertheless, the proposal to insert a new front door to the building's road elevation would primarily be a private benefit to the occupants of the property.
25. I am not persuaded that similar benefits could not be achieved by a proposal which would be less harmful to the significance of these designated heritage assets. Additionally, no compelling evidence is before me which confirms that the property would not be useable or viable as a dwelling or that its future would be at risk if the appeals were to fail and the development and works as proposed were not implemented. In these respects, the identified harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets has not been clearly and convincingly justified as required by Paragraph 206 of the Framework.
26. On balance, in giving considerable importance and weight to the harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets, I find that this would not be outweighed by the minor public benefits arising from the proposal.
27. I conclude that the proposal would not i) preserve the Grade II listed building, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses; and ii) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Slapton Conservation Area. It would therefore fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the provisions within the Framework which seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment.
28. It would also conflict with Policies BN5 and R1 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) (adopted 2014), and Policies SS2, HE1,

HE5 and HE6 of the South Northamptonshire Part 2 Local Plan 2011-2029 (adopted 2020). Collectively, these policies amongst other things, seek to ensure development conserves and enhances heritage assets, including their settings, and respects the distinctive local character of the area.

### **Other Matters**

29. There were no objections to the proposal and some letters of support were received, including a letter of support from Slapton Parish Council. Nonetheless, these are neutral considerations and therefore do not weigh in favour of the proposal.
30. Following a previous permission (S/2020/063/LBC), the appellant suggests that the Council should have considered the implications relating to the appeal building's future use and the possible alterations to ensure the dwelling could be used to its full potential. However, each proposal should be considered on its individual merits. Consequently, this does not alter my conclusions.

### **Conclusions**

31. **Appeal A:** The proposed development would conflict with the development plan when taken as a whole. There are no material considerations which indicate that the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that Appeal A should be dismissed.
32. **Appeal B:** For the reasons given, I conclude that Appeal B should be dismissed.

*H Smith*

INSPECTOR