



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 December 2024

by Alison Scott (BA Hons) Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 January 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/D/24/3344057

Old Farm, East Woodfoot, Hexham, Northumberland NE47 0DF

- 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 Tom Graham against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application reference is 23/04521/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as ‘a two-storey stone extension to the south creating a study and additional bedroom; two-storey timber-clad extension to the west to form additional living space and a master bedroom suite; and relocation of some existing windows and rooflights and addition of others.’
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been updated on 12 December 2024 and after the submission of this appeal. The parties have been informed and asked for comments on the updated version.
3. I have carried forward the address used by the Council and the appellant in their appeal form as this more succinctly identifies its location.
4. The appeal proposal relates to a former agricultural barn converted to residential use some twenty-five years ago¹ and now called Old Farm. The appeal building is located adjacent to the Grade II listed building (LB) known as East Woodfoot Farmhouse (Ref: 1045288) and was added to the statutory list on 17 June 1986. The building of Old Farm together with other farm ranges was functionally associated with the LB when the farmstead was in operation as a working farm in agricultural use. In addition, the site is situated within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt and within the open countryside.
5. As the parties disagree on the principal of whether or not Old Farm should be considered to be a curtilage listed building, as this is of material consideration, I have therefore elevated it to a main issue for assessment.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are:
 - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
 - The effect of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt;

¹ Reference T/990947 Change of use and conversion of barn to residential Approved 2000

- Whether or not Old Farm should be considered to be curtilage listed and if so whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses;
- The effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the local area;
- Whether or not there would be an adverse impact on ecology and biodiversity; and
- Whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development within the Green Belt

7. Paragraph 143 of the Framework states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
8. The Framework at paragraph 153 is explicit as it states that 'substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness.' Paragraph 154 of the Framework explains that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate. However, paragraph 154 c) makes exceptions for the 'extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building'. As this scheme entails a part single storey and part two storey extension with a number of additional fenestration changes, the Council have considered the proposal under the same paragraph of the Framework. In their view, the proposal would equate to around a 36% increase in volume to the original building. Given the evidence before me, I do not contest their reasoning behind this figure.
9. Nevertheless, when assessing the proposal under paragraph 154 c), consideration should not be solely restricted to its increased volume in order to ascertain whether or not the proposal amounts to 'disproportionate additions'. There are other considerations which depend on the circumstances of the case, and in this case, there would be significant change by virtue of the increase in scale and mass to the barn, largely by way of its two-storey element, and overall appearance. This therefore has the effect of fundamentally altering the character of the former agricultural barn.

Effect on openness of Green Belt

10. The Green Belt is multifaceted and as well as a visual aspect has a spatial dimension. The additional bulk would be concentrated to the south side of the barn where much of it would be visually exposed to its open environment. A sense of proportionality and subordination would not be conveyed as a consequence of the extensive massing, competing against and undermining the modest simple traditional aesthetics of the barn, made more acute by the irregular footprint and use of roof configuration with its combination of several peaked gable ends.
11. This would also extend to the materiality and its appearance, consisting of a discordant amalgamation of stone, vertical timber panel cladding, and coupled with

the roof design, the use of large-scale aluminium framed fenestration and contemporary glazed balustrading below the large overhanging eaves would also create a visual intrusion into the openness of the Green Belt with a domesticating and urbanising effect occurring in this rural context.

12. Old Farm is also experienced in an open setting of limited surrounding built development. As the barn sits in its own grounds and set away from the other ranges, the proposed mass of the extension and appearance would be made more severe as the proposal would not be spatially or visually subsumed amongst the presence of other built development, further reinforced as it would be situated against an open and verdant landscape. The visual and spatial gap between the barn and the adjacent landscape belt would be reduced. Therefore, all things considered, I find that both a spatial and visual reduction in openness, would arise.
13. Consequently, given the above, the proposal would be of a magnitude that would have an adverse permanent reducing effect upon the openness of the Green Belt. As such, it would conflict with the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy as stated in the Framework, to keep land permanently open.
14. As per paragraph 153 of the Framework, inappropriate development is by definition harmful and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. As part of my assessment, I am therefore required to take into account all other considerations explored below, before drawing to a final conclusion.

Whether or not Old Farm is a curtilage listed building and whether or not it would preserve a Grade II Listed Building

15. Old Farm is situated to the south of the LB. The statutory list description solely refers to the principal building of East Woodfoot Farmhouse, an elegant two-storey stone faced farmhouse. The special interest of this LB lies, in part, in its age, architectural execution, detailing, historic plan form and fabric. Although Old Farm is not listed in its own right, the Council considers it is within the curtilage of the LB and should be treated as part of the listed building. Prior to residential conversion, the evidence before me indicates that the barn originates from the early 19th century and this is not in dispute by the parties.
16. Section 1(5) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) defines what 'listed building' means and at subsection 1 (5)(b) it states that 'any object or structure within the curtilage of the building which, although not fixed to the building, forms part of the land and has done so since 1948, shall...be treated as part of the building'.
17. The courts have found that there are three factors to be taken into account with regards to curtilage. These are the physical layout of the listed building and the ancillary building, their ownership both historically and at the date of listing, and their use and function, also historically and at the date of listing.
18. At the time of its listing, the appellant's evidence informs me that the LB, the barn the subject of this appeal, along with other associated out buildings (including the converted Coach House and stables adjacent), were within one single ownership. Evidence presented to me dating from around the conversion period explains that the barn was understood to be in agricultural use at the time of listing and formed an ancillary function as part of the original farmstead.

19. Whilst the functioning connection of all the outbuildings to the LB has since ceased, and the ownership of the once integrated farmstead has inevitably changed over time. Nevertheless, I could see from my own inspection that the strength of the legibility of their historical association as a farmstead as a whole, still remains. This is because the LB and Old Farm share a close physical interrelationship with one another despite the fact it, and the adjacent Coach House and stables, are situated on the opposite side of a private unmade track leading from the main road.
20. The LB stands in its own gardens and visually and functionally ascendant to the various other ranges of differing appearance that are consistent with functionally ancillary outbuildings typical of a traditional agricultural farm steading of this period. Even though the historical openings faced away from the LB towards the agricultural land, I concur with the appellant that Old Farm is discernibly close enough in relationship to the LB to be considered to be within 'sight and sound' of it. It is visually obvious to me that there has been a clear historical and functional relationship between the LB and the barn.
21. Boundary treatments enclose all residential units. Old Farm is currently surrounded by a curved solid boundary wall to differentiate its private space, constructed from random stone with stone copings. Although at the time of listing, the boundary treatment for the barn was unknown, according to the evidence submitted, the perimeter boundary is a new feature, added when the barn was converted. I could see from this evidence that there was little in the way of substantial boundary treatments before conversion. This leads me to form the view that given the barn functioned in agricultural use until the conversion period around twenty five years ago, it stands to reason that there is a strong likelihood that the same limited boundary enclosures were in place when East Woodfoot Farmhouse was statutorily listed in 1986.
22. On the basis of what is before me and notwithstanding the arguments made by the appellant, I conclude that on balance, Old Farm should be considered to be curtilage listed. On this basis, I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (the Act).
23. I consider the significance and special interest of the LB derives in part from its 19th century origins as an integral part of a farmstead with its historic associations centred around the agriculture and farming industry of Slaley. The principal building itself, its materials, form and architectural detailing are all part of that significance. So too are the outbuildings and agricultural structures within its curtilage and wider rural surroundings that, to this day, are indicative of the former farmstead function.
24. Old farm is constructed from random stone with roof covered in natural slate with small window openings and low doors all positioned in a fairly ordered arrangement. The later brick additions when it was a functioning agricultural building were removed at conversion stage and a two-storey extension completed along with other modifications. Be that as it may, the historic linear L shaped plan form remains evident. Its simple rustic detailing along with the consistency and authenticity of natural finishing material treatment bestows a characterful charm to the barn. Despite alterations during more recent times, it retains significant historic fabric and is a sympathetic and honest conversion that remains redolent of its historic origins of an early 19th century rural agricultural barn. It still reads both physically and functionally as a traditional agricultural building, ancillary to the principal farmhouse. The barn adds positively to the interpretation of the historic

narrative of East Woodfoot Farm and its origins as a rural farmstead. Therefore, it contributes to its special interest.

25. The proposal before me with its unusual irregular layout would significantly distort the historic L shaped plan form, undermining this important, intrinsic and traditional characteristic. The additional bulk and massing in this position would diminish the barn's modest proportions. Furthermore, the mixed materiality using an overall contemporary style of vertical timber cladding together with the significant amount of wide and high glazing and modern balustrading, incongruous roof configuration would have a detrimental jarring, urbanising and domesticising effect upon the otherwise simple, traditional and rustic aesthetic value of the barn. Overall, the proposal would result in a discordant and harmful effect upon the barn.
26. I consider that the proposal would fail to preserve the special architectural or historic interest of the LB.

Public benefits and heritage balance

27. Paragraph 212 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 213 goes on to advise that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.
28. Given the scope of the development proposed, I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, paragraph 215 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing its optimal viable use.
29. I understand the extra space the proposal would bring to the appellant and their family with enhanced views of the countryside beyond. However, this would be a private benefit. The barn is currently occupied and in a good standard of condition. There is nothing before me to suggest that by not allowing the appeal would threaten the continued viable use of the Old Farm as a residential dwelling, or that this the only method to meet the personal needs and wants of the appellant.
30. Given the above and in the absence of public benefits that would outweigh the harm that would be caused, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the special architectural interest of the listed asset. To that end, the proposal would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, the heritage protection aims of the Framework and conflict with Policy ENV 7 of the Northumberland Local Plan that seeks to, amongst other things, preserve heritage assets.

Character and appearance

31. As well as being located within the Tyne and Wear Green Belt, Old Farm sits within the Northumberland countryside. The Framework at paragraph 187 informs of 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'. Local policy also advocates development to adhere to good design principles and to respect local character and distinctiveness.
32. In this rural context, the proposal would detrimentally juxtapose with the typical and traditional characteristics of this former agricultural barn using inappropriate scale and massing, materials and design, thus creating a visually intrusive form of

development, adversely weakening its connection to the distinctive rural character to which it is experienced. It would therefore result in a deleterious effect upon the character and appearance of the local area, and intrinsic beauty of the countryside.

33. Even if planning permission was approved in 2017² for a two-storey extension designed to a similar footprint, this permission has not been implemented and is not a fall-back position for the appellant to pursue as a realistic prospect. I therefore afford this minimal weight as part of my consideration.
34. Therefore, to conclude on this main issue, the proposal would not satisfy the requirements of the Framework to achieve well designed places or conserve and enhance the natural environment, or Policies QOP 1, QOP 2 and HOU 9 of the Northumberland Local Plan in their broad aims to secure good design and to safeguard local character and distinctiveness.

Ecology and biodiversity

35. There is debate between the parties surrounding whether or not an ecological impact assessment is required to support the proposal. The site may be located outside, but is in close quarters of an identified Habitat of Principal Importance Woodland and ancient woodland, to which this is not disputed by the appellant. In this rural location in an area sensitive to ecological and other nature constraints, given the nature of the development proposed, without the appropriate risk assessments being carried out in advance, I cannot be certain that regard to ecological and biodiversity as a whole would be given, and therefore acceptably preserved and safeguarded. Even if no risk assessment was submitted to the earlier planning application of 2017, that is not sufficient reason to negate the need for this material, made more significant in a climate of enhanced habitats and biodiversity considerations.
36. Therefore, to conclude, the proposal would not meet the natural environment protection aims of the Framework and the broad enhancement and safeguarding objectives of Policies ENV 1 and ENV 2 of the Northumberland Local Plan.

Whether or not very special circumstances exists

37. Bringing all considerations together, I have concluded that the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would harm its openness. This harm is given substantial weight in the words of the Framework. Only where very special circumstances exist should this harm to the openness of the Green Belt be clearly outweighed by other considerations. As part of my assessment, I have concluded the proposal would fail to preserve the asset's special interest and this too requires clear and convincing justification; it would result in harm arising to the character and appearance of the local area and the intrinsic beauty of the countryside; it would not safeguard ecological importance. These considerations all weigh against the proposal. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist, and therefore the proposal runs contrary to both local and national policy.

Conclusion

38. The appeal is dismissed.

² Reference 17/0292/FUL Proposed two storey extension.

Alison Scott

INSPECTOR