



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 December 2024

by **Andrew Dale BA (Hons) MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30th January 2025

Appeal Ref. APP/F2415/D/24/3350990

Church Farm Cottage, Hallaton Road, Blaston, Leicestershire LE16 8DD

- 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 Mrs Zoë Harrison against the decision of Harborough District Council.
- The application ref. is 24/00246/FUL.
- The development proposed is described on the application form as: *Proposed extensions/alterations and construction of timber hovel* and more fully on the decision notice and appeal form as: *Erection of a two storey side extension, a single storey side extension, and a part single part two storey rear extension, erection of a timber hovel, relocation of vehicular access on Classified Road.*

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the host building and the rural locality, bearing in mind the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Blaston Conservation Area (BCA) and, allied to that, whether it would have any implications for the setting of the Grade 2 Listed Building at the Church of St Giles or the Scheduled Monument at the manorial site west of the Church of St Giles (SM).

Reasons

3. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan includes the Harborough Local Plan 2011-2031 (HLP), April 2019. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is a material consideration in planning decisions. The revised version of the Framework published in December 2024 does not materially differ from the previous version, insofar as the planning policies around the main issue in this appeal are concerned.
4. Church Farm Cottage is a detached, 2-storey red brick cottage dating from 1892. The surroundings of the site are resolutely rural in character. The cottage occupies a prominent and sensitive location given its proximity to the roadside, the route of Public Right of Way B56 (PRW56) next to the site's western boundary, its inclusion within the western end of the BCA as a former agricultural cottage (along with 1 and 2 Box Cottages further to the west) and the presence of the meadow to the

east which links the cottages to the settlement and the Church of St Giles and contains the majority of the area of the SM.

5. Whilst the appeal dwelling follows the rural cottage vernacular for its Victorian period of construction in terms of its overall design and proportions and the initials G. C. F. that appear on the datestone are thought to relate to the lord of the manor in 1892, it is let down somewhat by the blockwork lean-to structure added to its eastern side, the detached sectional garage on its western side and the inclusion of UPVC windows. I have not seen or read anything exceptional about its heritage interest, when viewed in the round, that would merit its classification as one of the borough's non-designated heritage assets.
6. HLP Policy GD3 (Development in the countryside), in seeking to protect the countryside from unacceptable development which would harm its intrinsic value and rural character, defines the types of development which are acceptable in the countryside. This would include minor extensions to existing dwellings that are subordinate in scale and appearance to the existing building.
7. The front elevation would be sufficiently respected by the 2-storey side extension, given that it would be set back from the front wall and set lower than the main ridge. However, the wrap-around 2-storey extension to the western side and rear of the cottage, linked to a single-storey rear extension wider than the existing rear elevation, would, when combined together in the scale and form presented, add substantial volume, mass and bulk to the western side and rear elevations of the dwelling. These would be physical indicators of additions to the existing dwelling that would not be minor. The proposed increase in built form would be apparent in public views, particularly when approaching along PRW56 from the south.
8. Moreover, the design approach taken does not successfully break up the mass and bulk. Rather, the proposed development would result in a top-heavy and bulky profile that would engulf and overwhelm the rear of the original dwelling given the sprawling nature and excessive massing of the extensions and because the main parts of the 2-storey rear extension seem to rely on a flat roof, hipped at each end, set fractionally below the existing ridge line. Along with the sizeable expanse of flat roof overhanging the single storey rear extension, which would be sufficiently elevated over the boundary fencing to be prominent from PRW56, this would represent poor design as the extensions would fail to integrate well with and be harmful to the original form and appearance of the host dwelling.
9. The use of render would be historically inappropriate on this building even though the brickwork was painted white when the property was included in the BCA and render can be found on some properties within the BCA. The house is seen as being part of the group of 3 red brick former agricultural cottages. The brickwork may have been sandblasted but an exact match is rarely achievable. Given the set back from the front wall, any differences between the old and new brickwork would not be obvious. The use of render would make the building more conspicuous and highlight the unfortunate massing and design when approaching along PRW56.
10. I do not share the Council's view that the proposed extensions would be particularly noticeable from the eastern approach along Hallaton Road even with a broad driveway opening. A holly tree would be retained and no important trees would be removed. The carport would be positioned behind the line of the front porch and

due to the curve in the road the impression would be of a well-designed subsidiary outbuilding set further back from the highway than the main front elevation of the cottage. Moving the carport further back into the site would lead to a longer driveway, potentially more engineering operations around the building and the hardstanding in front of it to accommodate the change in levels inside the site and more direct encroachment into the indicative area of the SM.

11. That said, bearing in mind that the local highway authority requires a vehicular access with a minimum effective width of only 2.75m, the proposal to create an access 8.5m wide (and for 5.5m deep) would require the removal of an excessive amount of mature roadside hedgerow which would seriously detract from the landscape character of the countryside. This harm would not be fully compensated for by the removal of the sectional garage, the reduction in or the ending of the parking that takes place along the frontage, the reinstatement of a green verge or by additional landscaping elsewhere.
12. For all the above reasons, the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the host building and the rural locality and conflict with HLP Policies GD3, GD5 (Landscape character) and GD8 (Good design in development) and to a more limited extent GI1 (Green infrastructure networks), insofar as the integrity and value of PRW56 would be compromised.
13. HLP Policy HC1 (Built heritage) says that development affecting heritage assets and their settings will be appraised in accordance with national policy and that development within or affecting a Conservation Area will be permitted where it preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, including local design and materials.
14. When viewing the appeal site from the east in the grounds of the listed Church of St Giles, it appears quite enclosed and distinct from the intervening meadow that contains most of the SM. Given this context, the degree of separation between the church and the appeal site and the fact that no part of the extensions or carport proposed would protrude beyond the built form of 1 and 2 Box Cottages in the background, there would be a neutral impact on the setting of the listed building.
15. Similarly, I could identify no adverse implications for the setting of the SM. However, owing to the location of the site and in particular the proposed timber carport on the edge of the postulated extent of the SM, there is the potential to disturb, damage or destroy buried archaeological remains associated with the medieval and post-medieval occupation of the settlement at Blaston. I am satisfied that planning conditions could secure the proper investigation, recording, reporting and safeguarding of any important archaeological remains potentially present. This would be in line with the response from the Senior Planning Archaeologist at Leicestershire County Council.
16. The significance of the BCA, a designated heritage asset, is largely derived from the area of historic settlement and attractive open countryside of meadow and woodland that it encompasses. Church Farm Cottage complements the bucolic setting of the BCA. It is an attractive cottage occupying spacious grounds. It makes a positive contribution to the special interest and significance of the BCA.

17. In such a location there is an expectation that all new development should achieve a high quality of design and contribute to the distinctive character and amenity of the local area. Overall, I find, for the reasons already given, that there would be an insufficient degree of respect for the modest scale, form, setting, period, proportions and materials of the host building. The proposed development would be clearly visible when viewing from the approach along PRW56 from the south. The wide access and the removal of hedgerow would be detrimental and visible from the road. Having a moderate degree of prominence and a visually disruptive impact on the host building and its surroundings, the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the BCA. That harm would be less than substantial in this instance. In considering the impact of the proposed development upon the significance of the designated heritage asset (the BCA), great weight has to be given to the asset's conservation, even where there would be less than substantial harm to its significance.
18. Where a development proposal would 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.
19. No public benefits have been specifically outlined by the appellant. The investment allied to the current proposals would not be the only way to assist in the long-term conservation of the property. The continued viable use of Church Farm Cottage as a residential dwelling is not dependent on the proposal as the ongoing residential use would not cease in its absence. The requirements of contemporary family living to 21st century standards and the improvement to an unattractive side extension and the removal of the sectional garage should not obviate the need for high quality design in the main part of the proposal. There would be a boost to the economy given the use of labour and resources for construction but this would be limited.
20. In the absence of any significant public benefits which would outweigh the harm, the scheme would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the BCA and conflict with the aims of HLP Policy HC1 and the Framework in these respects.

Conclusion

21. The proposed development conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole and there are no other material considerations to outweigh that finding. I note that Historic England had no objection to the application on heritage grounds although their comments seem to have been confined to the SM. Therefore, for the reasons given and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that this appeal should not succeed.

Andrew Dale

INSPECTOR