



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 March 2025

By Terrence Kemmann-Lane JP DipTP FRTPI MCMI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 March 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/D/24/3354355

Boxers Meadow, Low Road, Denham, Eye, IP21 5ET

- 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 K Johnson against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
 - The application Ref is DC/24/01047.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a two-storey extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. Although there are 3 refusal reasons given on the council's decision notice, the first 2 can be considered together. Thus the main issues in this case are: i) the effect of the proposal on the non-designated assets of the appeal building and the wider Horham Air Base, and its surroundings; and ii) the effect on the landscaping, including on dark skies.

Reasons

The site and surroundings

3. The existing dwelling includes a pair of single-storey buildings that were once two former WWII ablution blocks as part of an accommodation area for airmen and officers at RAF Horham. The two buildings are joined by a glazed link extension to form one residential unit, and have a simple, utilitarian look with larch boarding and render to the walls, zinc roofing and crittal-style metal windows. The site is in the countryside between Eye and Horham, accessed off the B1117. Although there is dense soft landscaping to the south, the site is visible from the north when looking across the open landscape from the B1117.

Background

4. In order to appreciate the first issue in this case, it is necessary to have an understanding of the background. Historically the current dwelling was part of the accommodation area for airmen and officers of one of the squadrons based at nearby RAF Horham. It was subsequently converted to a single dwelling following approval under application reference 2488/12. At that point, the buildings were considered to have some historic interest by the Heritage Team and the Archaeology Team and were therefore judged to be part of multiple non-designated heritage assets. The conversion appears to have been approved partly on the basis

that it would preserve buildings of historic interest, as well as to ensure preservation of the nearby air raid shelters.

5. At that time it was noted that residential conversion might not be the most sympathetic viable option for the building; and it would result in a degree of loss of historic character. With a utilitarian building of this nature, this would seem unavoidable. The officer's report notes that the conversion has not been constructed entirely in line with the approved plans, the most evident discrepancy being the decorative bargeboards. These do not match the plain bargeboards shown on the approved drawings, and do not fit the character of a utilitarian military building.

The effect of the proposal on the on the non-designated assets of the appeal building and the wider Horham Air Base, and its surroundings

6. From what I saw at my visit, it is clear that the air base was quite extensive: I noticed that there is a sign to an 'Airfield Museum' at the junction of the B1117 and the Horham Road, just a few metres before the access to the site, and a further sign on Horham Road to the '95th Red Feather Club'. The 2 sketch plans in the appellant's statement of case (page 10) provide a clear indication of the extent of the air base. By and large the landscape today gives little hint of this extensive area. Thus, for future generations, the remaining evidence is of some importance. I therefore consider that the appeal building should be considered part of a non-designated heritage asset.
7. The 2 ablution blocks that were converted to the present dwelling were set at an angle, the intervening distance separating them now being linked with a short glazed corridor. Apart from the criticised bargeboards, the conversion to a dwelling has maintained the original structures and their appearance as far as reasonably possible. I also saw that there remain the 3 air raid shelters in the immediate vicinity at the front of the dwelling. At present the dwelling continues to make possible an understanding of the origin of the 2 blocks to anyone with a knowledge of the historical background. This is of importance in the consideration of this issue.
8. The proposed 2-storey extension would be set at the intersection of the 2 'wings' of the house. It would be added to, and gain access from, the southwest wing, and would extend across to the southeast wing, leaving a small courtyard behind the joining glazed link. In contrast to the existing structure, the extension would be of 2-stories and stand high above the existing building with a gabled roof. The northwest elevation (facing out of the 'V') would be fully glazed, including the gable, as would the southeast elevation. The result is a structure that does not reflect the existing character of the building, and amounts to poor design in its context.
9. In the light of this judgement, I consider that the proposed extension would fail to meet the intentions of, in particular, Policy LP19 – 'The Historic Environment' of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan of November 2023.
10. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ is an important material consideration. Of particular note, having regard to this issue, are the following 3 paragraphs. Paragraph 135 includes the following statements: "*Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments: a) will function well and add to the*

¹ The NPPF paragraph numbers quoted are from the December 2024 version.

overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development; b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping; c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities); ...”

11. NPPF paragraph 215: “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”. Paragraph 216: “The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset”. These 2 paragraphs demonstrate the different approaches between a designated heritage asset and one that is non-designated.
 12. Drawing these matters to a conclusion, I regard the design of the proposed extension to be poor, in that it would lack a sympathetic relationship with the footprint of the existing structure, and would stand high above the existing single storey form. Its scale and bulk would be incongruous, together with its glazing to both the first floor elevations and gable to the northwest and southeast and the ‘veranda’ (balcony).
 13. Additionally, I consider that, with its attendant air raid shelters, it is part of the surviving WWII RAF Horham air base. As such its status is that of a non-designated asset. The detrimental effect that the proposal would have on the appearance and fundamental nature of the existing building, including the loss of a significant section of wall of the western former ablution block, means that the proposed extension would be contrary to the provisions of Policy LP19 of the Joint Local Plan and the paragraphs of the NPPF to which I have referred.
- The effect on the landscaping, including on dark skies.
14. The site is within the Plateau Claylands Landscape Character Type (LCT) as identified in the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment. The Key characteristics of this LCT include ancient organic pattern of fields with some co-axial fields, substantial hedges, predominant hedgerow trees, and dispersed settlement. The appellant’s documentation includes a Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment completed by a Chartered Landscape Architect. This provided a helpful account of the nature of the landscape, and viewpoints for me to take into account.
 15. Having considered this information, and from what I saw at my visit, the proposed extension would be a very minor feature in the landscape, such that its impact in daylight would not warrant refusal. However, the effect on dark skies might well be a concern, arising from the glazed northwest elevation in particular, but little or no detail is given in the officer’s report or the appellant’s response. In view of my conclusion on the first issue, I do not regard this as a matter that I need to consider further.

Overall conclusion

16. I note that the Heritage Team response includes comments about a possible alternative extension, but that is not a matter for me. However, the proposal, subject to this decision, is contrary to Policy LP19, does not meet the standard of good design required by paragraphs 131 and 135 of the NPPF, and would also be harmful to the non-designated assets. In light of these conclusions and as explained in paragraphs 12 and 13 above, the appeal will be dismissed.

Terrence Kemmann-Lane

INSPECTOR